

Abu Nidal: Chameleon of Change, A.K.A. Terrorism's Free Agent

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Abstract

The Abu Nidal Organization or Fatah Revolutionary Council was the most prolific transnational terrorist group in recorded history. These terrorists introduced fledgling terrorist groups and the widespread use of transnational terrorism to the world. Abu Nidal appeared as an organization with a single ideology; however, the facts point to a terrorist organization that conducted political violence not in support of its own ideology but the ideology of the highest bidder. Transnational terrorism and al-Qaeda have become media buzzwords of the world at large, spoken by many as if the tactics used have suddenly become a new phenomenon. This idea is certainly a mischaracterization of the history of terrorism in this respect. Abu Nidal and his organization began as a terrorist group, bent on destroying Israel and returning Palestinian lands to their rightful owners. They metamorphosed into a group focused on destroying the PLO where money directed its actions. Finally, it is questionable whether Abu Nidal in his later years had become mentally deranged. In the final analysis, Abu Nidal and his organization are a psychologically complex entity that has left behind mystery and mayhem whose thorough study can potentially lead to understanding the al-Qaeda of today.

Key Words: Abu Nidal, Terrorist Group, Palestinian Terrorist Group, and International Terrorism

Introduction

The concept of terrorism requires the use of political violence to coerce a change in some aspect of a political community. This coercion infers that the violence is driven by a leader's ideology as presented to the members joining the group to support these beliefs. It thus becomes the foundation from which all terrorist acts arise. In reviewing the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO), scholars acknowledge that this terrorist group appears to espouse a predetermined ideology; however, it changed course over the lifetime of ANO's existence. Sabri's ability to be a chameleon with his ideological changes was extremely effective as he was able to hold the terrorist organization together for an extended length of time under one idea yet accomplish terrorist acts in support of a personal agenda. Sabri al Banna operated in a clandestine fashion, incessantly controlling the flow of information that became a hallmark of the ANO events. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) eventually became his arch enemy even though it continued to strive verbally for the return of a Palestinian state. The PLO adopted new tactics as the situation warranted, ceasing its use of terrorism and opting for political negotiation. Known also as Abu Nidal, Sabri al Banna's approach to terrorism was unique and remains applicable to today's counterterrorism strategies. He became a free agent, willing to subvert his own apparent ideology with the one imposed by the state sponsor. Abu Nidal provided plausible deniability to

his patrons but in the end, money did the talking. Seale (1992) highlights the fact that he was known to leverage his global terrorist image in order to extort payment from countries to allow him to protect them from his brand of terrorism by agreeing not to conduct attacks in their homelands.

In May of 1937, Sabri al Banna was born in Jaffa, Palestine, now a suburb of Tel Aviv, Israel. Seale, in his book entitled *Abu Nidal: A Gun for Hire* records Abu Nidal's early childhood. Sabri was the twelfth child of Khalil al Banna, a wealthy Palestinian orange-grove owner and the only child of a sixteen-year-old Syrian servant girl belonging to the Alawite sect of Shia Islam. The challenges in Sabri's life began at an early age as Curtis (2002) outlines in the following passage: "When Sabri's father died in 1945, his mother was sent back to her home in Syria. Sabri was left behind with his 11 half-brothers and -sisters. [Clearly,] he was left largely to his own devices" (p. 49). Following the dismissal of his mother, Sabri became a "bastard child" in a family that neglected his upbringing, and, therefore, it is "unclear how much schooling he received after the third grade" (Curtis, 2002, p. 49). The watershed event toward which experts gravitate shaped the mind of this eleven-year-old child as Curtis (2002) states so aptly in the following excerpt: "The family had to flee [in 1948] as a result of the Palestinian 'Nakba' or 'catastrophe.' After a wretched year in a refugee camp in Gaza, the family moved to Nablus" (p. 49), which is located on the West Bank, at the time, under Jordanian rule. Furthermore, "the 1948 war" saw Israel born and most of Palestine lost" (*The Economist*, 2002, p. 65). The global community was soon to experience a new phenomenon scholars now refer to as transnational terrorism, and Abu Nidal was the first to exploit this concept genuinely by becoming a hired gun as Patrick Seale presents in his informative book.

In his life, Sabri al Banna would become the most notorious free agent of terrorism ever! Unleashing death and destruction on the world "in a grisly campaign" [stretching] over two decades and three continents, his Fatah Revolutionary Council (FRC) was responsible for "perhaps 1,000 [casualties] in 20 countries, usually at the behest and in the pay of this or that Middle East regime" (*The Economist*, 2002, p. 65). In his pursuit of rebuking Israel for the torment he had suffered, Sabri al Banna would eventually seek to join an organization aligning itself with his deep-seated hatred of Israel. The question remains, though, was his heart in destroying Israel or making money? This paper will draw conclusions supporting both premises and ultimately leave it to readers to discern the evidence themselves.

The Path to Terrorism: Joining the Ba'ath Party

The Ba'ath party, which had an office in Amman, Jordan, was the beginning of Abu Nidal's radicalization to political violence. Curtis (2002) qualifies the start to Abu Nidal's fledgling career in the following statement: "By the time he was 18[,] he joined the Ba'ath Party" (p. 49). This membership occurred by mere happenstance as Seale (1992) relates in the following words: "Attempting to read on his own, he came upon a semi-clandestine news sheet, *al-Yaqzah* (*The Awakening*) published occasionally on the West Bank" (p. 63). The significance of this news sheet planted the first seeds of an ideology that would evolve over time to become more radical. Melman (1986) presents the following Ba'ath-party ideology: "The first founding principles of the [Ba'ath-party] constitution state that Arabs are a single nation. This nation has the natural right to exist in a single state [that is,] to be free and to determine its

own fateö (p. 67). Furthermore, one of the political-party founders expressed the meaning of the constitution's principles in the following excerpt: "The nationalism which we are calling for is first and foremost love. This is the feeling of [that is, the binding of] an individual to his family" (p. 67). With family as important, Sabri al Banna took notice. Expounding further on the meaning of the Ba'ath-party principles, Melman (1986) writes as follows: "And the family is but an extended family. Nationalism, as any other type of love...fills the heart with joy and spreads hope in the soul" (p. 67). Abu Nidal was seeking that love, or so people today might have thought, in trying to find a way to replace that which he knew growing up, or that which he had always wanted growing up but had been taken away so abruptly.

Becoming Part of the PLO

Once the Ba'ath party came under severe repercussions by the Hashemite Kingdom, for being an outspoken, illegal political entity; Abu Nidal simply moved on to other activities. He was seeking a more active role in defining his return to Palestine; departing for Saudi Arabia in 1958 to find employment, he began to develop an understanding of activism. Soon after arriving, Abu Nidal found many of his former countrymen had done the same. Discovering his new skill as a leader, Abu Nidal began his own radical Palestinian faction as part of a greater Palestinian resistance that Seale (1992) identifies as the "Palestine Secret Organization" (p. 65). Seale (1992) further explores this start-up group and the burgeoning ideology by remarking as follows: "The prime inspiration was the trauma of exile, the suffering of their families, the need to break free from the shackles of Arab host countries" that burning desire to hit back at Israel" (p. 65). Abu Nidal's fledgling Palestinian faction, however, had remained sedentary as a guerilla group, plotting, planning, and talking, but not much substantive acting or doing.

Yasser Arafat's Fatah "emerged in Kuwait in 1958-59" and thus Abu Nidal became an early member of the Fatah cell in Saudi Arabia. He took his newly found activism to the next level (Seale, 1992, p. 66). Soon After joining Fatah, Abu Nidal was forced to find a new outlet for his Palestinian activism. By the 1967 war, Abu Nidal had begun actively protesting and Seale (1992) comments on the following result of these actions: "Demonstrating against the war and its disastrous outcomes, Abu Nidal and his friends were rounded up by the Saudis and expelled as dangerous subversives" (p. 66). The Israeli war of 1967 was the second significant turning point in many Palestinian Arabs' minds. Abu Nidal was no different, and his psyche became more fanatical as Seale (1992) points out in the following quotation: "He [now] wanted to go and fight" (p. 67). His ideological mindset had metamorphosed to an even greater degree according to Seale (1992) in the following words: "There was no way to recover Palestine except by shedding blood. The gun was [now Abu Nidal's] ideology and his ideology was the gun. The gun, only the gun!" (p. 67). Abu Nidal had transformed from strictly a businessman with activism as a sideline to a fanatic, focusing all his energy on fighting Israel. He wanted Israel to suffer for the destruction wreaked on his homeland, not once but twice. Now even Gaza and The West Bank were occupied territories, which meant that Palestine no longer existed. It had been completely subsumed by Israel.

Departure from the PLO

During Fatah's third congress, held in 1971, a group of outspoken members led by Abu Nidal were inspired by the claim Seale (1992) refers to as "the Palestinian's catastrophic defeat in Jordan and subsequent dirty war with Israel" (p. 85) and rehashed all that went wrong in the clash with Jordan. Seale (1992) speaks to the position of this group in the following passage: "The radicals were united on two issues: first, they demanded more democracy within Fatah, an issue on which they had majority support; second, they pressed for violent action against King Hussein's policy that, after the disaster in Jordan, was rejected as 'adventurist' [by Arafat]" (p. 87). Couple this outcome with Yasser Arafat's perceived softening to political negotiations with Israel and this leniency became the final straw for Abu Nidal as outlined in words from the following article in *The Economist* (2002): "[In 1974,] the PLO had decided to try to establish a 'fighting national authority' in any part of the liberated homeland as a 'stage' to the recovery of Palestine as a whole. Abu Nidal viewed this [idea] accurately as the PLO's first move away from the ideology of 'total liberation' and towards some sort of accommodation with Israel" (p. 65). This reverse movement was the end of Abu Nidal's participation in Fatah. Sensing Yasser Arafat was becoming indifferent to the Palestinian plight, Abu Nidal had already begun conspiring against the PLO leadership.

Establishment of the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO)

In late 1960s, Jordan was the place where Fatah was organizing Palestinians and striking out at Israel. Abu Nidal became a firebrand within the PLO's Fatah, speaking publicly at every opportunity to continue the terrorist attacks against Israel. As Israel is prone to do when attacked, it would reach out and punish the Arab nations who were hosting the Palestinian guerrillas, and Jordan was no exception. These actions quickly resulted in King Hussein of Jordan turning against the PLO and taking control of his country through armed clashes with the Palestinians whom he had originally supported as refugees in the West Bank. This failure of the Palestinian resistance was difficult for Abu Nidal to accept, as it appeared to him to be a losing cause; he still remained intent on finding a medium in which to lash out at Israel. During the Jordanian civil war, as these armed clashes are often referred, where was Abu Nidal? He often stayed inside his office when these clashes were waged as Seale (1992) writes in the following words: "Abu Nidal carried a pistol but was never known to have fired it" (p. 70). Convinced of Abu Nidal's penchant for building international relationships solely by himself and knowing from his actions that he had no desire to confront conflict head-on, Fatah's intelligence chief, Abu Iyad, sent Abu Nidal to Khartoum as the PLO's representative. Seale (1992) highlights a further degradation to Abu Nidal's ego in the following comment: "[This] move later earned him the charge of cowardice" (p. 71). The burden was heavy and Abu Nidal was seething with desire to be part of striking back at Israel; however, when expected to stand and fight, Abu Nidal used his cunning and street smarts to negotiate concealment from the "real" clashes.

Watching from a distance, Abu Nidal did not like any of the infighting now occurring between Yasser Arafat's PLO and the various factions vying for control of Palestine's "armed struggle." This infighting became more acute once Jordan prevailed in regaining its country. Abu Nidal had studied the strategies of the Jewish right-wing groups of the 1930s and knew that an incoherent effort among the Palestinian groups would mean the potential collapse of the

Palestinian resistance. Seale (1992) confirms this collapse in the following manner: "None of this was to Abu Nidal's liking. Early in 1970, foreseeing the coming showdown with King Hussein, he started to pester Abu Iyad to send him once more to represent Fatah abroad" this time in Baghdad (p. 77). The culminating event of Abu Nidal's second career as a member of the Palestinian uprising ended when the clash with King Hussein's military in Jordan was so horrific that it split the PLO into disparate, uncoordinated factions having only one option, namely, to run and hide with hopes of returning some day to fight again. Thus, Abu Nidal was convinced, in his own mind, that he would stand and fight, not abandon the cause.

Ideological Goals

Abu Nidal began his life in the world of political violence and subterfuge, believing in the revolutionary ideals of the Ba'ath party that he first encountered in Jordan. He initially surmised that this organization would help him regain his homeland. He discovered the Ba'ath party espousing a soft approach that encompassed the entire Arab community. It stood for nationalism. However, Abu Nidal was much more focused on the plight of Palestine itself, and the perpetrator of this destruction, namely, Israel. Hence, it can be surmised that he joined the PLO's Fatah, whose ideology at the time is best described as armed resistance against Israel ultimately removing the Jews from all of Palestine. The Abu Nidal Organization's ideological objective began as one and the same, and appears to have been fairly consistent throughout the life of his group, in word only, as reported by the Center for Defense Information in the following passage: "At least until Nidal's death, the ANO's ideological objective was to liberate Palestine via a pan-Arab revolution aimed at destroying Israel" (Katagiri, 2002, cdi.org website). This perception seems to be the one Abu Nidal wanted the world to believe and maybe he genuinely did have faith that this goal was possible.

In reality, Abu Nidal, as the leader demonstrated the ease with which he could change ideological colors to suit the paying patron of his services. Schweitzer (1998) comments on the following Nidal issues: "Abu Nidal was for many years the symbol of international terrorism. His organization [was] built in his own image [and] operated under his sole control and authority" (ict.org.il website). The terrorist activities conducted by the ANO became disconnected from the group's, namely Abu Nidal's, ideology that had united them initially. The fact that "it carried out indiscriminate attacks against targets of opportunity, as dictated by political or economic gain, or by order of Abu Nidal's patrons of the moment" painted a picture that some other ideology had replaced the original one, possibly greed (Schweitzer, 1998, ict.org.il website). This argument takes yet another turn when Abu Nidal massacred more than 150 of his best fighters while in Libya; he was developing extreme paranoia. *The Economist* (2002) presents the reality of this massacre in the following words: "[In] 1988[,] Abu Nidal feared an attempt to oust him. In a purge of the [Fatah Revolutionary Council] FRC, 156 of its members were murdered" a bloodletting from which Abu Nidal and his [O]rganisation never recovered" (p. 65). Therefore, destroying one's own organization from the inside demonstrated that the complete destruction of Israel had been supplanted by a greater hate. The effects the Palestinian Liberation Organization had on Abu Nidal's Organization during the time they fought in Lebanon played strongly into the changes afoot. Was he possibly working for Israel, given the destruction of the PLO leaders, the evidence might suggest as such or was he simply a deranged paranoid when it came to human suffering? Many questions are to be pondered

regarding the creed in which the ANO really believed as it conducted terrorist attacks around the world. The evidence presented would lead one to believe that the ideology at face value, of the ANO, was something to keep the members united, whereas the ideology for selecting the targets reflected a hidden agenda of someone else's political goals.

Modus Operandi

Abu Nidal lived his adult life in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, three countries known to be sponsors of terrorism. His attacks were focused on Israeli targets abroad but could not be considered significant in moving toward the political objective of destroying Israel, never once conducting an attack within the borders of that country. His organization used armed assaults, hijackings, bombings, and assassinations worldwide to create an image of having a powerful global reach. The Center for Defense Information indicates inconsistency in the target selection for one of the tactics employed by Abu Nidal by reporting the following actions: "Assassination targets were numerous but inconsistent in selection, ranging from American, British, French, Israeli and Jordanian citizens, to moderate Palestinians and various Arab nationals" (Katagiri, 2002, cdi.org website). One single event emerges as the most contradictory evidence to whether or not he hated Israel more than his utter disdain for the PLO. Yasser Arafat had disappointed a young man full of drive and determination by abandoning terrorist attacks on Israel. This change caused Abu Nidal no longer to believe the PLO stood for the return of his homeland. His terrorist attack against the Israeli ambassador to London ignited an Israeli invasion of Lebanon that eventually routed the PLO and caused untold tragedy for the Palestinian refugees in the Lebanese camps of Sabra and Shatila. The following words in *The Economist* (2002) confirm this supposition: "The act [with] the most significant consequences [for both Israelis and Palestinians] was the FRC's attempted assassination in June 1982 of Israel's ambassador to London. This [attempted murder] gave Israel's Likud government the pretext to strike at Yasser Arafat's PLO through the invasion of Lebanon" (p. 65). Abu Nidal's vehemence toward the PLO was obvious. The actions of the ANO demonstrated that he harbored vengeful intent. Although states sponsored Abu Nidal's terror, he was left to decide which targets were to be attacked. This choice alone might explain the inconsistency in selecting the wide variety of targets. Apparently one single ideology was not the driving force.

State Sponsors

Baghdad, Iraq

Iraq attempted to lure the PLO into working for it, promising support as well as refuge and used Abu Nidal, the Fatah representative to Baghdad, to secure this move. Yasser Arafat rejected this offer and sought relocation of the PLO to Lebanon. This rejection was taken as a personal affront to Abu Nidal. His increasing vehemence for the way the PLO was conducting business finally caused him to speak publicly one too many times. The PLO determined that enough was enough and sent Abu Mazin personally to deliver the news about his expulsion from the Palestinian resistance. Given the lecture Abu Nidal received from Abu Mazin upon his removal from the PLO, he vowed personal revenge. Failing in this assassination attempt and sentenced to death in absentia by Yasser Arafat could be considered the defining moment, that is, Abu Nidal's hate for Israel, in general, was supplanted by this new greater hate for the PLO and

Yasser Arafat, in particular. Abu Nidal began developing his new organization and that which it would represent, namely, providing Iraqi terrorist services as Nidal believed Iraq held the same political objective.

The break from the PLO was final. Abu Nidal's death sentence, in absentia by Arafat, was the last straw. He was determined to now build his own organization and take-up the ideological mantle of Fatah as originally espoused. As Seale (1992) presents in the following quotation, that which caused Abu Nidal to become more severe in his criticisms: "Abu Nidal's reaction to the death sentence was to denounce Arafat as a heretic whose willingness to accept a peaceful solution of the Palestinian question was a betrayal of Fatah's original ideals" (p. 99). The obvious issue at play here is the tumultuous environment in which Abu Nidal now found himself. As an extremely methodical and meticulous person, he had to find this chaos a bit unnerving, exacerbating his drinking and further straining his logical thinking. Seale (1992) confirms the potential for the erratic impact of the death sentence in the following passage: "The psychological impact on Abu Nidal was considerable. It [drove] him out of Fatah making him cling ever more closely to Iraq. As an acquaintance put it, 'for Abu Nidal, self is everything. When he feels personally threatened [,] he goes berserk' (p. 99). Seale (1992) writes that Iraq was concerned about the settlement of the PLO in Lebanon and the development of Syria's al-Sa'iqa as its own wholly controlled Palestinian organization" (p. 97). Iraq thus encouraged Abu Nidal to introduce his own Palestinian Faction and it would provide all that he needed. This encouragement appears to be the logical point at which Abu Nidal discovered he could earn considerable money doing a surrogate's bidding.

Abu Nidal conducted his first terrorist attack on behalf of Iraq in 1973. *The Economist* (2002) outlines the following way this event unfolded into Abu Nidal's Organization, namely, the birth of the Fatah-Revolutionary Council (FRC): "In 1974, egged on by Saddam Hussein, then Iraq's vice-president, he founded the FRC as a rival to Mr. Arafat's movement" (p. 65). This birth is the starting point of his global preeminence; enraged with the fumbling of the PLO and Yasser Arafat with respect to the Palestinian resistance, Abu Nidal now ventured down a path that would gain him notoriety at the end of his life as having been the deadliest terrorist the world has ever known.

Damascus, Syria

As the Abu Nidal Organization entered its prime, *The Economist* (2002) points to the conflict in ideologies presented earlier, that is, the focus of Abu Nidal's attention is now on Yasser Arafat and the PLO and not Israel as noted in the following: "In 1982 Abu Nidal moved to Syria and set up home in Damascus. The FRC launched spectacular acts of terrorism whose sole purpose appeared to be to discredit Mr. Arafat's attempted rapprochement with Jordan" (p. 65). In addition to the vehemence Abu Nidal directed at Jordan's mistreatment of the Palestinians in 1970, Seale (1992) also points to "other acts of diplomacy [by Yasser Arafat] whose direction was clearly towards creating a Palestinian state alongside Israel" (p. 65). Abu Nidal's ideology shifted to become more personal; it now focused on the treatment he received from the PLO and not about the original Fatah ideals, that is, the destruction of Israel. His stay in Syria ended abruptly in 1987 when Syria deported Abu Nidal in the wake of the Hindawi Affair. Seale (1992) discusses the case in depth regarding the attempt to detonate an explosion

in an El Al airliner bound for Tel Aviv. In the end, the bomb was discovered and the plot foiled. Abu Nidal was named the mastermind behind the plot which created significant embarrassment for the Syrian regime since the global community knew the ANO was receiving direct support from Syria's Hafez al Assad regime. The attempted terrorist attack was believed to be the brainchild of the Syrian intelligence directorate as revenge for a previous incident when Israel forced an airliner carrying numerous Syrian diplomats to land in Tel Aviv. Seale (1992) points to the following possible outcome as significant had this attack been successful: "Given [Hafez al Assad's] anxiousness to avoid war with Israel [and] had the destruction of an Israeli civilian aircraft been traced to Syria, Assad's country and regime would have been at immense and immediate risk" (p. 248). Hence, the Abu Nidal Organization gave Hafez al Assad plausible deniability. The ANO also provided an opportunity for Syria to placate the global community by deporting Abu Nidal, demonstrating that Syria was serious about countering terrorism. This action by Syria was attributed greatly to avoiding a massive retaliation by Israeli forces. Abu Nidal's reign of terror in support of Syrian objectives ended at this time.

Tripoli, Libya

Abu Nidal found another patron for his services, Libya and Muammar Qaddafi, a ruthless dictator and global braggart who often seemed defiant to the worldwide community. Seale (1992) confirms that Abu Nidal and Muammar Qaddafi were like "hand and glove" in their relationship by stating the following similarity: "In Libya in the late 1980s, Abu Nidal's twisted soul seemed at last fulfilled. His wealth gave him a sense of omnipotence; he found in Qaddafi a congenial sponsor who shared his own pleasure in violence" (p. 258). Coming back from Poland after a respite, possibly due to illness, Abu Nidal returned to the scene because his forces in Lebanon were becoming defiant as Seale (1992) points out in the following excerpt: "In Lebanon, he seemed in danger of losing control as new cadres, in revolt against his policies, tried to rejoin the mainstream Palestinians and give up terror" (p. 228). Was it possible that his members became wise to Abu Nidal's hidden ideology? That recognition would appear to be the case. Back in control of his organization and subverting a mass exodus of his membership to the PLO, he took a novel, ruthless turn in the restrictive policies he had implemented. Many of his members were killed, both innocent and guilty, but he did not seem to care in the slightest.

Further analysis demonstrates his continued desire to maintain power. This desire is best indicated by Seale (1992) in the following comment: "Libya brought out the worst in him. He had always been dictatorial; now he was a tyrant. He would not allow his members to socialize with each other, not even to make contact outside their official duties" (p. 258). In addition, Abu Nidal resorted to extremes, and "he was not above suppressing letters and rewriting minutes of meetings to ensure that one wing of the organization was kept in ignorance of the other" (p. 259). These acts demonstrated his need to wield complete control. His worst acts of violence confirmed that as a human being, Abu Nidal was deteriorating mentally. Seale (1992) encapsulates the sheer brutality of Abu Nidal's organization in the following excerpt: "In a little over a year, it is estimated that Abu Nidal murdered some six hundred of his own people, between a third and half of his total membership, mostly young men in their early twenties" (p. 288). To put this calamity into perspective, this number equated to "almost as many Palestinians as Israel killed in the first three years of the Intifada" (Seale, 1992, p. 288). To most people, his time in Libya had changed him radically; he had become deranged, falling into a big black hole

of abnormality. Under pressure from the United States to halt the sponsorship of terrorism, Muammar Qaddafi decided to deport Abu Nidal and his organization. With only one place to go after a short stint in Egypt for possible medical reasons, Abu Nidal moved that which remained of his leadership to Baghdad once again.

Baghdad, Iraq

Abu Nidal's life had seemed to come full circle. Back in the country where it all began, Katagiri (2002) writes that "by the late 1990s, years of financial problems and internal disorganization had severely reduced the ANO's capabilities" (cdi.org website). All indications point to the fact that Abu Nidal did not conduct one terrorist attack while in Egypt or anywhere else once he arrived in Baghdad. He had decimated his organization while in Libya and it never fully recovered. *The Economist* (2002) presents the following statement of Abu Nidal's change of location: "He reportedly arrived in Baghdad in 2000: here, at least, he was still owed favours" (p. 65). Saddam Hussein was on his way out; the handwriting was clearly written on the wall and the trail of Abu Nidal ended two years later. Ironically Sabri al Banna, also known as Abu Nidal, would find his violent death in Iraq in the same way he had conducted his life. Furthermore, it ended at the place where it had all begun and lends truth to the saying "everything comes full circle." Abu Nidal left behind a wife and three children, a son Nidal and two daughters (Seale, 1992, p. 65). The whereabouts of his family and fortune are unknown. In the final analysis of all that occurred during approximately thirty years of terror wrought by Abu Nidal, he had very little to show for his efforts. The PLO has been decimated and is currently ineffective, Israel continues to remain in control of its destiny, and Palestine remains weaker than the time when Abu Nidal was forced to immigrate to the West Bank. The world, however, will remember him in the same category as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Genghis Khan, and so many other mentally unstable dictatorial rulers.

Mysteries Remain

The Mossad Connection

With the Israeli cabinet decision having been enacted after the 1972 Munich Games massacre of Israeli athletes, the question is raised concerning the reason why the Israeli counter-terrorism forces did not go after Abu Nidal with their special Kidon Unit. They knew he was living in Baghdad and served as an outspoken entity of the PLO's Fatah, espousing the continuation of terror against Israel. Black September was a Splinter group of the Fatah found responsible for the Munich massacre. Yaffe (2008) confirms the Mossad's increased efforts to root out Palestinian terrorists in the following passage: "Still, the greatest influence on the defeat of international Palestinian terror was a cabinet decision under PM Golda Meir, to act against international Palestinian terror, utilizing special secret agents of the Mossad" (ict.org.il website). In addition, "following the murder of Israeli athletes at the Olympic Games in Munich, the Mossad had started to operate the Kidon (Spear) unit. [Its] mission [focused on] search[ing] for terrorist leaders and commanders" (ict.org.il website). This one example illustrates a disparity in the evidence with no logical explanation for the reason why obvious events did not occur. Proof can be ascertained through the Mossad files some day; however, until the Palestinian-Israeli

conflict is resolved, the world may never know the extent to which Israel had actually controlled the activities of the Abu Nidal Organization.

Lockerbie 103 Bombing

New information is being raised about the potential implication of Abu Nidal in one of the most recognized terrorist attacks in history. Schweitzer (1998) shares the current understanding of justice brought to the perpetrator by the international community in the following passage: "The sanctions imposed on Libya by the UN Security Council in 1992, as a result of the Pan Am flight 103 investigation forced Libya to act to prevent any international activity from being launched by the terrorist organizations under its auspices--primarily the ANO" (ict.org.il website). Furthermore, the new information is refocusing the world's attention on the actual potential perpetrator of this heinous act. Karmon (2002) presents the following comment for consideration: "Abu Nidal's former spokesman, Atef Abu Baker...claimed in an interview with al-Hayat that Nidal informed ANO leaders of his responsibility for the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland (Nidal was living in Libya at the time)" (p. 1). The fact that he was in the service of the Libyan leader at this time lends credibility to this new third-party information. Karmon (2002) expounds on the caused conflict by the following revelation: "This statement, which contradicts the Lockerbie trial's verdict, has received some publicity in Europe, but nevertheless appears to be a cheap attempt to dismiss Libyan involvement in the bombing" (p. 1). It may simply be that Abu Nidal refused to be used as a scapegoat, this time by Qaddafi. Once again, the world may never know as the individual who would have sanctioned the attack has met his end, Muammar Qaddafi.

His Death

The controversy over the way Abu Nidal died will live in perpetuity as well; the individual who knew of the approved actions also met his demise, namely, Saddam Hussein. The world will always wonder whether or not this free agent of terrorism met his end by his own hand or because of dirty politics from the very state that helped start and foster his career as a terrorist. *The Economist* (2002) confirmed the death in the following obituary: "Abu Nidal, terrorist, died on August 17th, aged 65 [in the year 2002]" (p. 65). The obituary went on to say that "it is unclear whether [or not] Abu Nidal was murdered by a gunman in Baghdad or took his own life because he had cancer" (p. 65). The Center for Defense Information provides greater detail into the controversy by relating the following information: "On Aug. 14, 2002, Nidal's house in Baghdad was raided by Iraqi forces and on [Aug.] 16, he was announced dead at the age of 65. Iraq claims that he shot himself. The fact that he died from four gunshot wounds to the head" (Katagiri, 2002, cdi.org website) makes the assertion of suicide suspect. This method of suicide is nearly impossible. Furthermore, the controversy "has led to some speculation that the Iraqis were responsible, the threat of regime change from Washington possibly convincing Hussein to eradicate domestic instabilities to protect his position and deter other prospective internal enemies" (Katagiri, 2002, cdi.org website). It is rather apropos that the world's most notorious terrorist, operating in an extremely clandestine way, would leave the world with mysteries that may never be understood completely.

Conclusion

All that remains to confirm Abu Nidal's real ideology are a number of associates, who through their personal agendas can now paint a picture of the man they feared. Did Abu Nidal genuinely believe in the destruction of Israel as his childhood trauma would suggest? Was it all about the wealth he accumulated over his lifetime? Was he deranged, as massacring his own organization's membership would indicate? The world can piece together the many events and activities throughout his life and make its own suppositions. Seale (1992) reviewed eighty terrorist incidents involving Middle Eastern actors from 1982-1986. During this review, Seale (1992) identifies a significant factor and makes the following assessment: "Abu Nidal was hardly the only or most dangerous terrorist at large during the 1980s. What distinguished him from most of the others was that none of his attacks seemed to be in the Palestinian cause" (p. 243). This fact alone gives the world pause. What could then have motivated Abu Nidal to action more than Israel's destruction of his homeland? Seale (1992) clarifies these conflicting ideologies in the following way: "His motives [were] either self-serving or mercenary, and to be so reckless as to guarantee a hostile backlash. Abu Nidal had come a long way from his early commitment to the Palestine cause. He had become a gun for hire" (p. 242). In the final analysis, Abu Nidal was a free agent of terrorism; his actions tell the world that which he sought most was money.

This analysis would support the early childhood development issues of his having been born to a wealthy Palestinian family and having it all taken away, spending his teen years in extreme poverty, seeking odd jobs because his education had suffered greatly. *The Economist* (2002) included the following comments in Abu Nidal's obituary: "[Clearly] his death is unmourned by Palestinians, whether in the occupied territories or beyond. Some believe he was in the pay of Israel, so routinely did his useless violence appear to besmirch Palestinian signs of moderation, particularly during the 1970s" (p. 65). Furthermore, "Others are aware that no one else did quite so much to tarnish their struggle for freedom with the blight of terrorism. 'He defamed our cause,' said Abbas Zaki, a veteran Palestinian leader" (p. 65). In his demise, Abu Nidal leaves a trail of death, destruction, and unanswered questions that the world is resigned to accept. The global community, however, is a safer place, and maybe now progress can be made toward peace.

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