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The Mind of Yasser Arafat

The hope for peace in the Middle East rests heavily on an Arab leader who, like a desert mirage, is more apparition than substance. He is the ubiquitous Yasser Arafat, a leader with few followers, a spokesman without answers, who can't even control the Palestine Liberation Organization that he purports to head.

Intelligence analysts have examined the man behind the scraggly beard and have come up with a disturbing psychological profile. He is described as a "moderate, not steeped in one particular ideology," whose voice is drowned out by the obstreperous voices in the PLO's high council.

Unsurpassed at subterranean diplomacy, he resorts to subversion and terrorism when he thinks it is necessary to maintain his leadership. "He will seek ways in which others can do his dirty work . . ." the analysis says, "and, although moderate in his own views and behavior, cannot or will not control dissenters in his own ranks . . ."

"There is more to Arafat than the general summary statement used by most western writers, but there is less than some of his comrades see. He is not really a productive thinker, man of action or incisive decision-maker.

"He is intrinsically an inadequate personality who has received and seized opportunities to reach a political power level that would not be gained had there been a contest of competence . . ."

"He is a vacillator, a compromiser . . . He is confused with the multiplicity of information. He must maintain the themes with which he is acquainted and depend on others for unique and innovative ideas . . ."

"He does, at times, behave without consultation and by feel and can be dangerous to any plan. Anyone who must concentrate on himself so much is insecure psychologically and must be watched and guided while holding so much public attention."

We have visited with Arafat and can attest to his ability to beg embarrassing questions while seeming to answer them. He lives a spartan existence, which may be merely making a virtue of necessity. He has to keep on the move, living out of a duffel bag and staying in different locations almost every night, to prevent his myriad enemies from blowing him away.

If he has no apparent personal wealth, the profile cites "rumors" that "PLO funds are in Arafat's personal bank account in Switzerland." Possibly as a result of his nomadic life style, he has some minor but persistent health problems, such as hemorrhoids and kidney stones. But at age 56, Arafat's health is endangered more by external violence than internal disorders.

Fuddle Factory: The frustration that soon overtakes anyone trying to make the Pentagon bureaucrats more efficient is illustrated poignantly in a recent internal memorandum from Army Undersecretary James R. Ambrose to his top aides. "It is surprising to me to find . . . continued discussion of 'how to organize' and 'who is to be in charge of what.' I thought that had all been settled. I think it is much more important to get on with the much needed work . . ." he wrote. Ambrose evidently knows too well how easy it is for any program to be "organized" to death in Washington.