

by Gary Keenan, published in the Vancouver Sun, Tuesday, September 23, 2003  
in reply to: Forget about peace until Arafat and Sharon are out of the way, Norman Spector Sept. 19.

Arafat's fate should rest in Palestinian hands

Columnist Norman Spector neglected to mention the extremely important fact that Yasser Arafat is the democratically elected leader of Palestinians in the occupied territories.

U.S. President George W. Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon have no right whatsoever to insist that Mr. Arafat be removed from power, especially when it is obvious he enjoys the overwhelming support of Palestinians.

The real reason Messrs. Bush and Sharon want Mr. Arafat replaced is his refusal, as demonstrated at Camp David in 2000, to betray his people by accepting a deal that does not meet the minimum requirements of international law. Nor will Mr. Arafat precipitate a civil war in the occupied territories by ordering the disarmament of Hamas and other militant groups.

The only solution is Israel's full withdrawal from all lands it occupied in 1967. The vast majority of Palestinians are willing to sign a peace treaty in exchange for a viable state comprising a mere 22 percent of their original homeland. With plummeting immigration and increasing emigration of Jews, Israel should accept this generous offer before it is too late. Time and demographics favour the Palestinians.