

The Washington Post
May 19, 2016

Clovis Maksoud, 89 Envoy to the West for Arab League



Clovis Maksoud in 1997. He advocated on behalf of Arab nations and Palestinian rights as a scholar, a journalist and, for more than a decade, a prominent representative of the Arab League. (Gerald Martineau/The Washington Post)

by [Emily Langer](#)

Clovis Maksoud, who advocated on behalf of Arab nations and Palestinian rights as a scholar, a journalist and, for more than a decade, a prominent representative of the Arab League, died May 15 at a hospital in Washington. He was 89.

The cause was a cerebral hemorrhage, said his daughter, Lisette Mondello.

A Lebanese American, Mr. Maksoud spent much of his life as an envoy of the Arab world to the West, representing Arab concerns at the United Nations and in Washington, as well as in

commentary that regularly appeared in publications including The Washington Post and the New York Times.

He played his most high-profile role as an ambassador of the Arab League, an organization of Arab nations founded in Cairo in 1945 that represents 22 countries across the Middle East and North Africa.

After a stint as the group's representative in India from 1961 to 1966, he served in the dual role of observer at the United Nations and chief representative in Washington from 1979 until 1990, when he resigned his post after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

The aggression by Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein — and the ensuing debate over the proper international response to what some Arab countries regarded as a regional problem — divided the Arab world. “The Arab house has fallen on itself,” Mr. Maksoud said in a statement at the time. “Unable to rationalize or analyze these developments, I am no longer able to cope with them.”

“On the one hand,” he said, “I cannot accept the violation of an established reality — the invasion of Kuwait. On the other, I cannot accept the rush towards the internationalization of the crisis. The original action was wrong and the ensuing reaction is wrong. I find myself intellectually paralyzed and politically incapacitated.”

A coalition of forces led by the United States ultimately pushed the Iraqi military from Kuwait in the Persian Gulf War of the early 1990s.

More than a decade later, when Hussein was toppled after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, Mr. Maksoud observed a “deep sense of shame in the Arab world.”

“Most people are very pleased that he is out,” Mr. Maksoud said of Hussein in an interview with the syndicated columnist Georgie Anne Geyer, “but they are embarrassed that they didn't do it and that, rather, it was done ‘for them.’ ”

Mr. Maksoud often spoke before Western leaders, policymakers and journalists, presenting the Arab perspective on matters of international importance.

After the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, he told the Times that Arab concerns had been “blacked out for a long time in the United States.” He decried U.S. politicians who fell “all over each other” to demonstrate their commitment to Israel, with few or no questions asked.

“We in the Arab world are genuinely sick and tired of being the whipping boy and the target of cheap shots at our national aspirations, internationally recognized rights and legitimate interests,” he said in 1984.

Clovis Maksoud was born in Bristow, Okla., on Dec. 17, 1926. His mother was an Orthodox Christian, and his father, a Maronite Catholic, had settled in Oklahoma for petroleum exploration.

The family moved to Beirut when Mr. Maksoud was in high school. He studied political science at the American University of Beirut, where he graduated in 1948 before receiving a law degree from George Washington University in 1951 and pursuing graduate studies at the University of Oxford.

In between his ambassadorial appointments with the Arab League, Mr. Maksoud was the editor of the Egyptian daily newspaper Al-Ahram and the Lebanese weekly An-Nahar. A Washington resident, he retired in 2013 after more than two decades as a professor of international relations at American University, where he was the director of the Center for the Global South. He also taught at Georgetown University.

An English edition of his memoir, “From the Confines of Memory: My Journey With Arab Nationalism,” is forthcoming.

His marriage to the former Rosemary Curry ended in divorce. His second wife, [Hala Salaam Maksoud](#), a founder of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, died in 2002 after nearly three decades of marriage. Survivors include a daughter from his first marriage, Lisette Mondello of Arlington, Va.; and a grandson.

Throughout his career, Mr. Maksoud sought to combat anti-Arab prejudice. After the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, he proposed an international anti-terrorism agency to be led by Muslims and Arabs.

“We cannot judge Christianity by [the] Ku Klux Klan and we cannot judge Islam by the Taliban,” he told the Toronto Star. That imperative, he said, needed to “be rubbed into our consciousness.”

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