

MERIA

THE PALESTINIAN MEDIA AND ANTI-AMERICANISM: A CASE STUDY

By Hillel Frisch*

This article examines a case study of Palestinian media attitudes toward the United States by analyzing one typical week's coverage by al-Hayat al-Jadida, the most "official" Palestinian daily. The author's analysis shows that while articles relating to the U.S. overwhelmingly condemn its regional policies and usually only reprint foreign writers critical of U.S. policy, the newspaper's anti-Americanism tends to be somewhat veiled and pales in comparison to treatment of Israel.

Broadly speaking, there are two basic reasons for growing anti-Americanism amongst Arab Palestinians. The first is that Arab Palestinians had little affinity to the democratic and liberal values the United States represents; the second is that they often had divergent interests.

Arguably the most popular Arab Palestinian leader of all times, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, had much to say on pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism and local nationalism in his writings. By contrast, he said virtually nothing on democracy and liberalism, allying with Nazi Germany.(1) Yasir Arafat, founder of resurgent Palestinian nationalism, also never indicated any views that drew him to the American vision of civilization.(2) In recent decades, the main new development in Palestinian political thought has been the rise of a radical Islamist movement. The proportion favoring liberal standpoints has remained minute, as shown by surveys conducted by Palestinian research centers.

In such a normative and ideological setting, there are no shock absorbers that can in any way soften the effects of substantial differences between the policies of the United States and the Palestinians' worldview, despite the Palestinian realization that only the United States can deliver for them the prospect of the state.

Through such a normative prism, it is difficult for Palestinians to acknowledge that the United States forced Israel to vacate the Sinai in 1956; refrained all these years from moving its embassy to Jerusalem; consistently regarded the territories beyond the 1967 armistice lines as "occupied territories" and the settlements there as illegal; and has since the Madrid peace process, pressured Israel to "roll back," as well as engineered two major offers of a Palestinian state on good terms in 2000 at the Camp David talks and in the Clinton Plan. Most recently, the United States has repeatedly saved Arafat from a more severe siege or expulsion by Israel and pressed Israel on several occasions into returning to the pre-September 2000 lines.

Divergence over interests and ideology between Palestinians and the United States, of course, extends far beyond the Palestinian-Israeli arena. Both Palestinian officials and the media take a radical pan-Arab stance on almost all issues related to the Arab world. The basic view that Western imperialists are bent today, as they have been in the past, on dividing and subordinating the Arab world, and that the United States leads this campaign is as prevalent in Fatah as it is in the more radical factions. This is

why Arafat and the PLO backed Saddam Hussein in the 1990-1 Gulf War.

Almost nothing the United States does in the Middle East is regarded as above suspicion. In this sense the Palestinian press is little different from its Syrian and (former) Iraqi counterparts. Adherence to the pan-Arab formula became clear in the course of al-Hayat al-Jadida's coverage during the first week of February, which is subsequently analyzed in this paper.

ASSESSING PALESTINIAN ANTI-AMERICANISM: A METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

It is not surprising that under these ideological and political conditions, groups such as MEMRI or Palestinian Media Watch find numerous and rabid displays of anti-Americanism in the official and officially supported Palestinian media to translate and disseminate.

For example, a feeling that the United States' involvement in Palestinian politics reflects an historic and bitter clash of civilizations may be found in a sermon broadcast on the Palestinian Authority (PA) television station on September 5, 2003 by Ibrahim Madiras:

If we go back 1400 years in time, we find that history is repeating itself, worshipers of Allah. The Prophet Mohammed... was besieged by two powers, Persia in the east and Rome in the west. These represent the Soviet Union and America of today.... Persia fell first in the east, just as Russia fell first in the east, and America will fall, may it be Allah's will, just as Rome fell in the west. However [the fall of] Rome necessitated further challenges, closing of ranks and Muslim sacrifices. The battle with Rome, in which its power ceased, necessitated challenges and resistance from the Muslims, just

as America today, her allies and protégés, the Zionists and others, necessitate further sacrifices from our side and closing ranks, oh Muslims, and we will be victorious.... By closing ranks the prophet succeeded in overcoming Rome, the strongest state, which is equivalent to America today, without the fall of even one Muslim *shahid* [Martyr]... The Prophet succeeded, through Muslim unity and arousing faith, in overcoming the America of then, just as we will defeat America, as long as it supports our enemy, as long as it adheres to its positions against our people, our issue and our holy places, and against our people and its leadership, as long as it adheres to these wicked positions. We will defeat her, may it be the will of Allah. We see America as the number one enemy, as long as it supports our enemy. Aren't we killed by American planes? Are our homes not being destroyed by American tanks? Are we not being bombed by American missiles...(3)

Where official Palestinian sentiment lies in the context of post-war Iraq is equally clear. In his piece entitled "*Shaa'hid* and the *Shahid*" [The Witness and the Martyr--a play on words], one writer in the Palestinian daily al-Ayyam condemned Iraq's Shi'a religious leaders for standing on the sidelines when morally they should join the ranks of the martyrs in killing American soldiers to fight against Iraq's occupation:

There is consensus in Iraq that American and British forces symbolize military occupation of Iraqi territories... Recent activities against [American] forces including helicopter interception,

bombing of command centers and convoys and attacking political targets undoubtedly prove that the resistance is getting stronger. And that there are many reasons, foremost among them the occupation's fascism and cruelty, which helps the flow of many to the Iraqi resistance... The *Khawza* [Shiite religious institutions] admit publicly--and cannot do otherwise--that the U.S. forces are invading forces, but they [the *Khawza* institutions] offer unclear and unconvincing ways for the long run concerning the attitude towards them [the U.S. forces]. The *Khawza* Shiite institutions try to achieve historic benefit from the presence of these forces... even if this involves participation in the Ruling Council, which is appointed by the American Governor!!!

Are the [institutions of the] *Khawza* capable of maintaining this dangerous balance?! Are they capable of reaping substantial achievements... in this way; after all, the people of the Shiite Congregation historically have been Martyrs [*Shahids*] and view the Martyrdom [Shahada]--since their first Martyr [*Shahid*], Ali, as a sacred obligation. Can the *Khawza* convince the Shiites to [merely] witness [*Shaa'hid*] the increasingly fierce armed resistance due to the increased American repression and humiliation of the entire Iraqi people... Will the *Khawza* keep silent and [merely] witness [*Shaa'hid*], leaning toward the American occupier in the middle of a sea of Martyrs [*Shahids*]?(4)

Palestinian anti-Americanism is also reflected in cartoons. Particularly striking are a series using the image of the Twin

Towers to portray Iraqis and Palestinians as the victims of United States policies and actions, in an obvious and deliberate twist of history.

The cartoon of two smoldering towers of "Iraq" and "Palestine" for example, appearing in late 2003, was so well received after it was printed in *al-Quds*, that it was reprinted two days later in *al-Hayat al-Jadida*, the semi-official daily. Other cartoons were copied from other Arab dailies. For instance, in one a fearful Uncle Sam runs away in terror being chased by the date "September 11."(5) In another, the U.S. response to 9-11 is said to be immoral and imperialistic: the Twin Towers are depicted over a mass of dead bodies, victims of American "imperialism."(6) Another variation of these included the twin towers that form a hammer which attacks the Muslim-Arab world in a cartoon marking the second anniversary of the attack, with the text reading: "September 11--the day of the greatest conspiracy against the Arabs and Muslims."(7)

Though such media items might be numerous and emanate from the official and semi-official media, they do not necessarily indicate the intensity of anti-American sentiments and their propagation. The method of random choice still leaves the possibility (weak as it is given the absence of democratic and liberal practices in the PA) of different and competing views of the United States being expressed as well.

Methodologically, and more important normatively, the appearance of specific items may indicate intention but not overall impact of these articles, news items and cartoons. The effect of an anti-American article once a week is different than such an article on a daily basis; different weights must be given according to where it appears in the newspaper. What must be done then is to engage in content analysis of the media over time. The sample for the following

analysis is the first seven days of February 2003 of al-Hayat al-Jadida, which is the most "official" newspaper of the three Palestinian dailies that also include al-Quds and al-Ayyam.

GENERAL FINDINGS

Counting articles versus engaging in a subtle content analysis of the paper's coverage of the United States yields slightly different pictures. A quantitative account clearly demonstrates a strong anti-American bias. Over three-quarters of the forty-nine news items and articles regarding U.S. policy and actions printed in al-Hayat al-Jadida during that week were anti-American. Only 10 percent either objectively represented the incumbent U.S. administration's perspective on Iraqi affairs--the issue most of these news items addressed during that week--or related positively to American considerations or actions.

Arab and Palestinian articles and news items tended to reflect the more hostile civilization perspective. Most neutral were short new items usually reported by foreign new wire services. Considerations of space (measured by square inch) or placement in the newspaper (headlines, front versus back pages etc.) did not have any impact on the general findings.

Nor is anti-American sentiment, prevalent as it may be, the major theme of the Palestinian media. The reason is simple: hatred of Israel is by far its all-consuming focus. Of the approximately 150 articles and news items that appear daily in al-Hayat al-Jadida (minus culture, sports and business items) over one-third are devoted to hatred of Israel. By contrast, there were a total of only 49 news items and articles relating to the United States over one week--which equals one day's coverage of Israel.

The difference is also qualitative. On

Position	Foreign	Arab	Palestinian	Israel	Total
PRO	5				5
ANTI	21	6	10		37
NEUTRAL	4	2		1	7

However, taking into consideration the type of criticism that was aired in these articles yields a slightly different picture. Overall anti-American sentiment may be divided into two types. The first is civilizational--a perspective that assumes an innate enmity between the United States and its objectives with those of the Palestinians in particular and Arabs in general. The second type is instrumental--those criticisms related to specific policies of specific administrations. During the period under consideration, the newspaper mostly aired articles of the latter, milder variety.

Generally speaking, the articles from foreign sources, most of which were translations of articles from the United States and Western press, were mild in tone and substance.(9) By contrast, the

Israel, almost all the coverage is vociferously anti-Israeli. By contrast; coverage on the United States is more variegated even though it is overwhelmingly negative as well. The contrast is highlighted best in comparing the two headlines, which appeared on February 1, the first issue analyzed. The headline regarding Israel was entitled "The Leadership Emphasizes its Adherence to the Choice of Peace Despite Israeli Arrogance (*Ghatrasa*) and Barbarism." The headline concerning United States policy was more veiled: "The President [Arafat] criticizes the Silence of the International Community Regarding the Israeli Government's Infringement of the Accords." In the body of the news item it becomes clear that what was meant was an alleged U.S.

criticism of Israel: "The President asked, 'How could...Israel be allowed to violate agreements signed at the White House?'"

Even when the headlines later in the week regarding Iraq clearly expressed a position opposing moves by the United States, they were still mild in comparison to coverage of Israel. On February 5, a main headline read: "The War Plan: The Occupation of Iraq and Its Division into Three States." It is extremely doubtful whether United States officials ever expressed such a desire, let alone construed it as a policy objective of the U.S. government. Casting aspersions that the United States was eager to divide Iraq into three "*duwaylat*" (the pejorative term for a balkanized state in pan-Arab rhetoric) fits well into the "Sykes-Picot" prism through which so many American moves in the Middle East are construed. The main headline appearing on February 6 was entitled "Most of the States in the Security Council are Not Convinced by 'Proof' of Powell against Iraq." Quotation marks in Arabic as well as in other languages, is a means of casting doubt on the word within them. In this case doubt was being expressed regarding the quality of the evidence Powell presented.

Anti-Americanism is also less blatant because the top Palestinian leadership, Arafat and the personalities involved in international negotiations such as Abu Ala'a, Abu Mazen, Sa'ib Ariqat, Nabil Abu Rudayna, and Yasir Abd al-Rabbu refrain as a general rule from disparaging or condemning the United States. For the media, this effectively means that the considerable criticism of the United States does not often appear as a leading headline or on the front page.

THE USE OF THE FOREIGN PRESS

Al-Hayat al-Jadida relies mainly on foreign and Arab sources in its coverage on non-Palestinian affairs. The overriding issue during the week surveyed was Iraq, particularly United States preparations for war and Powell's attempt to curry support

for such a policy within the United Nations. One could safely assume that had a time period in which the United States was involved in mediation between Israel and the Palestinians been chosen, more Palestinian commentators would have written on the United States as well.

Most of the articles on the subject were taken from the foreign press. As a general rule, they reflected a list of distinguished analysts writing in equally prominent newspapers. Four articles by John Alterman, head of the Middle East program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, David Francis in the *Christian Science Monitor*, Nicholas Kristoff culled from the *International Herald Tribune* and Patrick Seale's "The American Empire on the Eve of a Strike," appeared on the same page in the February 1 edition. All were critical of U.S. policies in Iraq. On February 2, it was the turn of Paul Kennedy, a well-known professor of history from Yale University, to argue on the basis of historical precedent against getting involved in Iraq. Three other articles, which appeared in the middle section of the newspaper, two by Americans, one by a Spanish analyst, concurred. Geoffrey Kemp, another prominent American policy analyst, took a mildly anti-administration approach the following day. On February 4, the paper translated six articles authored by Americans and European analysts and thinkers. The piece by Michael Walzer, a well-known political philosopher, could be considered mild, even bordering on neutral. Walzer, though opposed to direct United States intervention, called upon the international community to acknowledge the threat Iraq posed and called for a strong international authority to impose all sanctions short of war, including military means, against Saddam. James Zoghby, the veteran Arab lobbyist in Washington, authored one of the more militant articles.

The two pro-administration news items aired in the newspaper were both connected to senior administrative officials. On February 6, a half-page interview with Condoleezza Rice was culled from the Egyptian al-Ahram. A lengthy article written by Colin Powell stating the administration's position appeared the next day.

All in all, the newspaper's choice of articles in the international press, though biased against the administration, was probably little different from the fare presented in the average European newspaper. However skewed, it was nevertheless impressive in quality and even slightly variegated. At least two of the other types of coverage under review, articles authored by Arabs and the news items, presented a less benevolent perspective regarding the United States and its interests in the area.

THE ARAB AND PALESTINIAN NEWS SOURCES

To be exact, the only Palestinian commentators who wrote on United States policy in Iraq dealt with it solely through the prism of Palestinian interests. Nabil Amer, the former Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and a former confidante of Yasir Arafat argued that the war was likely to increase the Palestinian predicament in the face of an even greater imbalance of power between a state supported by an even more powerful superpower and a national movement. He argued that only reform and real institution-building will address this increasing imbalance--an obvious jab to his former mentor, Arafat. He warned that the Israelis were likely to try to use the time they gained by the focus on Iraq to create facts on the ground inimical to Palestinian interests. Amer argued that only putting an end to the armed conflict would serve Palestinian interests during this difficult experience. Hasan al-Kashif presented a similar argument.

These almost neutral perceptions contrasted sharply with a long, bitterly critical article written by Muhammad Hasanin Heikal, a prominent journalist and confidant of former Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel-Nasser, which appeared in the newspaper on February 1, 2003. Identifying the United States' wars as imperial and wasteful, he claims that the Arabs can react to such imperialism and hegemony in three of four ways, all with dubious effectiveness. The first is by extending the arm of friendship, a strategy which has become impossible since 1948. Equally implausible is reacting by outright confrontation. The third is slowly sliding into a confrontation and the fourth, the most plausible, is sweating it out.

Even the latter alternative he argued was difficult to achieve since the United States is so intermeshed in the affairs of the Arab world. In short, the Arabs are in a difficult predicament. Heikal's analysis of the United States is unflattering, to say the least. The United States, he claimed, runs its affairs like a business, bereft of soul and dignity and driven exclusively by the calculation of costs and benefits. He offers as proof its treatment of the late shah of Iran. Heikal claimed that the United States drains the Third World of its finest brains without investing a cent and exploits its immigrants to death as slaves. Politically, the U.S. does not recognize borders and is forever engaged in conducting wars.

On the following day, former Egyptian Field Marshal Halim Abu-Ghazzaleh claimed that the U.S. goal was not the mere removal of Saddam but to create a state that will be under its own control. In another article entitled "The State of the Union...or the State of Iraq," Ahmed Umrabi tried verifying who was the real aggressor: "You would think that Saddam had encircled the United States by land, air and sea! Is Iraq really threatening?" Obviously, he concluded, hidden agendas such as Iraqi oil, Israel,

and the resolve to maintain the present state of Arab weakness were the determining factors behind the U.S. drive against Iraq and Saddam Hussein.

On a slightly different issue, a professor from Qatar in an article published on February 3 reacted to Colin Powell's statement regarding American plans of democratization in the region by asking how the United States was only willing to spend \$29 million to democratize the Arab world compared to the billions it expended on Israel. Powell's initiative also placed the Arab intellectual in a catch-22 situation, the author maintained. He ought to support democratization but how can he support it when it is seen as a directive from outside, especially when it is part of a larger American imperial plan in the Arab region to force the Arabs to abandon the rights of the Palestinian people? Look, he argued, what happened to the Palestinian leadership which placed its trust in the Americans. Only deep reform of individual Arab regimes and Arab collective action could counter imperialism in general and American imperialism in specific.

There were also Arab analysts who wrote milder articles. A Saudi Arabian political scientist could not understand how Uncle Sam could stop the *zakat* (charity) from flowing to groups accused of terrorism and also claimed the United States had accused Islam of terrorism. Khairi Mansur in his "America... and the Forty Noble Souls" praises the forty Nobel Prize winners who had decided "to stand up against the madness in the White House since 9-11." They are warning "of the follies of going into war without assessing its ramifications. Why should the United States citizen think that the generals are any smarter in strategy than these men of such intellectual stature?" Buhan Salih, joint prime minister in the regional Kurdish government in Iraq wrote the only article in support of war

authored by a resident in the area. He, however, is not Arab.

THE OFFICIALLY ORCHESTRATED ANTI- AMERICAN CAMPAIGN

One can safely assume that only a small, though perhaps influential, elite read the long articles by Western, Arab or local Palestinian commentators, which account for most of the news items surveyed. This is perhaps why it is so important to take into account the nature of the short news items, particularly those focusing on Palestinian involvement in developments related to Iraq. These suggest not only the prevalence of anti-Americanism in Palestinian political circles, but its propagation by the official leadership. In fact, it was the Palestinian Authority and the PLO who, in organizing "the street" or "the masses," caused anti-Americanism to take on a rabidly radical coloration.

On February 4, secondary students organized what was described as a "massive" procession in northern Gaza in solidarity of the Iraqi people. An accompanying photograph showed demonstrators with posters of Saddam Hussein. A similar news item covered a demonstration in Qalqilya organized by the Popular Committee of Support for Iraq. In the context of Palestinian media behavior, the very fact that the newspaper covered these events reflected official approval. After the capture of Saddam Hussein, for example, al-Hayat al-Jadida did not cover much larger demonstrations that occurred in Gaza. On February 5, the same day in which the headline "The War Plan: The Occupation of Iraq and Its Division into Three States" appeared, a lengthy news item reported that Interior Minister Hani al-Hasan warned that preparations must be made to confront the difficulties that Palestinians will face "in the wake of the aggression on Iraq." He was addressing the graduation ceremony of a military training program

in Ramallah. The affair was organized by the Commission of Political and National Guidance for the PA's security forces.

On the same day, the National Center for Research and Documentation, an official PA body, organized, in conjunction with a private research group a roundtable to discuss events in Iraq. The newspaper reported that "political speakers and jurists emphasized that Iraq and Palestine face the same enemy and that their resolve and steadfastness in the face of aggression is the common denominator in bringing about the defeat of the enemies of the Arab nation, renewing their call to strengthening the spirit of steadfastness and resistance and [the obligation] of the Arab masses in bearing their historical responsibility in blocking the aggression on sisterly Iraq."

On the following day, it was the turn of the National and Islamic Forces, the loose coalition between Fatah, the Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, which called for a procession in Ramallah in support of Iraq and against the aggression. They condemned the vicious campaign of preparations for aggression against Iraq. When the procession did take place, Sakhar Habash, a veteran member of the Fatah Central Committee, the keynote speaker, described the U.S. president as "no more than an oil merchant and a trader in the blood of peoples." "The Iraqis were able to win through steadfastness 12 years ago and they will do so now," he promised.

In Qalqilya at a conference held under the slogan "In steadfastness and resistance we will defeat the plot of American and Zionist aggression against Palestine and Iraq," the governor of the province, Mustafa al-Maliki, condemned the American attack on Iraq and the double standard concerning weapons of mass destruction and Israel. He produced a long list of America's "true" motives behind the aggression against Iraq. They included: stealing Iraqi oil, protecting Israel, dividing Iraq into three

confessional and weak states as a preparatory move in doing much the same in other Arab states (the Sykes-Picot paradigm), drawing away scientists and controlling the world, and finally, finishing off the Palestinian problem according to Zionist desires. The mayor of the town spoke as well. Needless to say, both officials would have never attended without Arafat's approval. After all, they are beholden to him for their positions.

CONCLUSION

The Palestinian leadership, based on analysis of the semi-official al-Hayat al-Jadida, is clearly anti-American. Probably the most striking finding is the difference in the intensity of the expression of anti-Americanism between the PLO and the PA on the one hand, and the newspaper itself on the other. The newspaper tries to present a variety of viewpoints although they are hardly balanced. This is reflected in its extensive use of articles appearing in the foreign press. Unfortunately, the small airing of opinions expressing a deviation from the common anti-American content of most of these articles appears in the most "elitist" type of journalistic writing--the long analytical articles that are probably the least read. Even so, the overall message of the newspaper remains anti-American. Suffice to note that throughout its coverage, the term used to describe the approaching United States campaign against Iraq was the "American aggression (*'udwan*)."

Palestinian anti-Americanism was far more prominent in institutions related to the PA, especially those with a mass base or deep reach into Palestinian society such as Fatah or the security forces. Not only do these organs reflect anti-Americanism, they propagate it. That these institutions are related to the PA, which enjoys direct and indirect U. S. aid--and, in the case of the Palestinian security forces, have even been the

beneficiaries of U.S. professional training--has had no bearing on their actions or positions.

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NOTES

1. For an analysis of Husayni's writings see the author's "Territorializing a Universal Religion: The Evolution of Nationalist Symbols in Palestinian Fundamentalism," Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism, vol. 21, nos. 1-2 (1994), pp. 45-50.
2. See the chapter on Fatah in Ziyad Abu 'Amer's Usul al-Harakat al-Siyasiya Fi Quta' Ghazza 1948-1967 [The Origins of the Political Movements in the Gaza Strip 1948-1967], (Acco: Dar al-Aswar, 1947). Abu Amer is a member of the Palestinian Legislative Assembly.
3. Itamar Marcus, "Palestinian Authority Hatred of USA Continues," Palestinian Media Watch Bulletin, September 11, 2003.
4. Al-Ayyam October 27, 2003. Quoted in Itamar Marcus, "Palestinian Incitement to Kill and Hate Americans," Palestinian Media Watch Bulletin, November 5, 2003.
5. Quoted in Itamar Marcus, "PA Uses Twin Tower Image to Mock USA," Palestinian Media Watch Bulletin, September 16, 2003.
6. PA official daily al-Hayat al-Jadida, September 11, 2002, reprinted from the UAE's al-Khalij. Also see Al-Hayat al-Jadida, September 11, 2002, reprinted from Kuwait's al-Watan. Both quoted in Itamar Marcus, "PA Uses Twin Tower Image to Mock USA."
7. Al-Hayat al-Jadida, September 13, 2002. Another cartoon of this variation can be found in Al-Quds, September 11, 2002 and al-Hayat al-Jadida, September 13, 2002. All quoted in Itamar Marcus, "PA Uses Twin Tower Image to Mock USA."
8. Author's analysis of Al-Hayat al-Jadida, February 1-7, 2003.
9. In distinguishing between the foreign and Arab press, I am merely following common practice in states in the Middle East of distinguishing between "foreigner" (*ajnabi*) and either Muslim or Arab. Such categorization is found even on the sports pages to describe the origins of the player of the team.