

OPINION and ANALYSIS

Vol 1, Number 25: 12 October 2012

**A selection of some of the more challenging and thought-provoking
local and international writings on the Middle East**

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In the name of Allah Israel is to be annihilated and the Jewish people exterminated. And from this world come demands that we amend our values to accommodate a religion which accommodates not a Jew on the planet.

Arab Spring and the Israeli Enemy

Abdulateef Al-Mulhim, Arab News, 6 October 2012

<http://www.arabnews.com/arab-spring-and-israeli-enemy>

Thirty-nine years ago, on Oct. 6, 1973, the third major war between the Arabs and Israel broke out. The war lasted only 20 days. The two sides were engaged in two other major wars, in 1948 and 1967.

The 1967 War lasted only six days. But, these three wars were not the only Arab-Israeli confrontations. From the period of 1948 and to this day many confrontations have taken place. Some of them were small clashes and many of them were full-scale battles, but there were no major wars apart from the ones mentioned above. The Arab-Israeli conflict is the most complicated conflict the world ever experienced. On the anniversary of the 1973 War between the Arab and the Israelis, many people in the Arab world are beginning to ask many questions about the past, present and the future with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The questions now are: What was the real cost of these wars to the Arab world and its people. And the harder question that no Arab national wants to ask is: What was the real cost for not recognizing Israel in 1948 and why didn't the Arab states spend their assets on education, health care and the infrastructures instead of wars? But, the hardest question that no Arab national wants to hear is whether Israel is the real enemy of the Arab world and the Arab people.

I decided to write this article after I saw photos and reports about a starving child in Yemen, a burned ancient Aleppo souk in Syria, the under developed Sinai in Egypt, car bombs in Iraq and the destroyed buildings in Libya. The photos and the reports were shown on the Al-Arabiya network, which is the most watched and respected news outlet in the Middle East.

The common thing among all what I saw is that the destruction and the atrocities are not done by an outside enemy. The starvation, the killings and the destruction in these Arab countries are done by the same hands that are supposed to protect and build the unity of these countries and safeguard the people of these countries. So, the question now is that who is the real enemy of the Arab world?

The Arab world wasted hundreds of billions of dollars and lost tens of thousands of innocent lives fighting Israel, which they considered is their sworn enemy, an enemy whose existence they never recognized. The Arab world has many enemies and Israel should have been at the bottom of the list. The real enemies of the Arab world are corruption, lack of good education, lack of good health care, lack of freedom, lack of respect for the human lives and finally, the Arab world had many dictators who used the Arab-Israeli conflict to suppress their own people.

These dictators' atrocities against their own people are far worse than all the full-scale Arab-Israeli wars.

In the past, we have talked about why some Israeli soldiers attack and mistreat Palestinians. Also, we saw Israeli planes and tanks attack various Arab countries. But, do these attacks match the current atrocities being committed by some Arab states against their own people.

In Syria, the atrocities are beyond anybody's imaginations? And, isn't the Iraqis are the

ones who are destroying their own country? Wasn't it Tunisia's dictator who was able to steal 13 billion dollars from the poor Tunisians? And how can a child starve in Yemen if their land is the most fertile land in the world? Why would Iraqi brains leave Iraq in a country that makes 110 billion dollars from oil export? Why do the Lebanese fail to govern one of the tiniest countries in the world? And what made the Arab states start sinking into chaos?

On May 14, 1948 the state of Israel was declared. And just one day after that, on May 15, 1948 the Arabs declared war on Israel to get back Palestine. The war ended on March 10, 1949. It lasted for nine months, three weeks and two days. The Arabs lost the war and called this war Nakbah (catastrophic war). The Arabs gained nothing and thousands of Palestinians became refugees.

And on 1967, the Arabs led by Egypt under the rule of Gamal Abdul Nasser, went in war with Israel and lost more Palestinian land and made more Palestinian refugees who are now on the mercy of the countries that host them. The Arabs called this war Naksah (upset). The Arabs never admitted defeat in both wars and the Palestinian cause got more complicated. And now, with the never ending Arab Spring, the Arab world has no time for the Palestinians refugees or Palestinian cause, because many Arabs are refugees themselves and under constant attacks from their own forces. Syrians are leaving their own country, not because of the Israeli planes dropping bombs on them. It is the Syrian Air Force which is dropping the bombs. And now, Iraqi Arab Muslims, most intelligent brains, are leaving Iraq for the west. In Yemen, the world's saddest human tragedy play is being written by the Yemenis. In Egypt, the people in Sinai are forgotten.

Finally, if many of the Arab states are in such disarray, then what happened to the Arabs' sworn enemy (Israel)? Israel now has the most advanced research facilities, top universities and advanced infrastructure. Many Arabs don't know that the life expectancy of the Palestinians living in Israel is far longer than many Arab states and they enjoy far better political and social freedom than many of their Arab brothers. Even the Palestinians living under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip enjoy more political and social rights than some places in the Arab World. Wasn't one of the judges who sent a former Israeli president to jail is an Israeli-Palestinian?

The Arab Spring showed the world that the Palestinians are happier and in better situation than their Arab brothers who fought to liberate them from the Israelis. Now, it is time to stop the hatred and wars and start to create better living conditions for the future Arab generations.

Wishful thinking: Mitt Romney's foreign policy

Lexington, The Economist, 9 October 2012

<http://www.economist.com/blogs/lexington/2012/10/mitt-romneys-foreign-policy>

IF MITT ROMNEY'S latest foreign-policy speech, delivered to the Virginia Military Institute on October 8th amid much build-up from campaign aides, was a barnburner, it would have to be a small and highly flammable barn.

Moderate Massachusetts Mitt Romney, the self-assured centrist who made such a splash at the first presidential debate last week, put in another appearance in Virginia, delivering a more-cautious-than-expected attack on Barack Obama's foreign-policy record—one that carefully avoided blaming the president or his diplomacy for the murderous attacks in Benghazi that left America's ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens, and three colleagues, dead.

True, in its main signposts and landmarks, it was a traditional conservative speech, with references to Churchill, the cold war, America holding a lamp of freedom aloft for the world to see, and Reaganesque talk of achieving "peace through strength".

But in its main line of attack—an opportunistic claim that the incumbent president had foolishly failed to see a magic strategy that would vastly increase American influence in the world and defang the nation's foes—the speech reminded Lexington curiously of another presidential candidate closer to the present day, Barack Obama in 2008.

Four years ago, Mr Obama's pitch was to point to a violent, angry and chaotic world order, and, in effect, to say the following:

Look at this mess. Now consider something demonstrably true—that lots of foreigners think that George W. Bush is a bully and a cowboy who started divisive wars of choice dressed up as wars of necessity, undermined the principle of multilateralism with self-serving talk of coalitions of the willing, and lost the moral high ground occupied after the September 11th attacks by conducting a response that flouted international law. There is a logical link between that mess and that conduct. If I turn away from Bush-like conduct, America's standing will be restored, divisions healed and the world will be in magically better shape.

That pitch worked for lots of foreigners, the most impressionable of whom (tsk, Scandinavians) awarded the incoming President Obama the Nobel peace prize on the strength of it.

The problem was that foreign policy is easier to critique than to fix. To give a name check to Robert Cooper, a British and European Union diplomat, former Blair adviser and all-round sage whom I quoted in a piece last week anonymously, the trouble with foreign policy is that it involves foreigners, and they do not always do that you want.

Carping opposition politicians, laying into an incumbent for failing to right the world's wrongs, have a right to criticise, but then must offer a credible answer to the counter-question: well, what are you going to do about it, then?

Mr Romney's speech failed that test several times. Thus, though he is right to point to foreign-policy setbacks that make the Barack Obama of 2008 look naïve and opportunistic, his own analysis is not any less opportunistic, and no less cheap.

In essence, he said this morning in Virginia:

Look, the world is a mess. Now ponder something incontrovertible: that my opponent made an unusually explicit bet that America's diplomatic hand would be magically strengthened if he were seen listening to other governments, swaggering less, paying

careful heed to grievances in the Muslim world and paying more respect to multilateral bodies. That has not made the world less messy, so I, Mitt Romney, will reverse that course and my change will have magical consequences.

Yet take Mr Romney's detailed case, and it is full of wishful thinking, unsupported assertions and omissions.

For example, Mr Romney said:

The attacks against us in Libya were not an isolated incident. They were accompanied by anti-American riots in nearly two dozen other countries, mostly in the Middle East, but also in Africa and Asia. Our embassies have been attacked. Our flag has been burned. Many of our citizens have been threatened and driven from their overseas homes by vicious mobs, shouting "Death to America." These mobs hoisted the black banner of Islamic extremism over American embassies on the anniversary of the September 11th attacks. As the dust settles, as the murdered are buried, Americans are asking how this happened, how the threats we face have grown so much worse, and what this calls on America to do. These are the right questions.

That struck me as both an unknowable assertion and politically risky. Certainly these images of anti-American protest are fresh in voters' minds. But have the threats faced by America "grown so much worse" in four years? Do American voters feel that? Some dangerous situations have grown more perilous, notably Iran's pursuit of a nuclear bomb. Pakistan remains a scary mess, and so does the Middle East. But many Americans are more focussed on the fact that Mr Obama has ended the war in Iraq and is bringing troops home from Afghanistan soon. Compared to the drum beat of alarm that sounded throughout the 2004 election campaign, for instance, with its terror alerts rising to red, the country feels pretty calm.

What Mr Romney was really trying to do was to sound calm and bipartisan while conveying some of the flavour of more partisan attacks by his supporters, when they claim that trouble in Benghazi is a result of American weakness. For example, Paul Ryan, the Republican vice-presidential nominee, told voters in Ohio to draw a direct link between what they see on television and the Republican charge that Mr Obama is an apologist-in-chief. In his words:

If you go home after this and turn on your TV, you will likely see the failures of the Obama foreign policy unfolding before our eyes. You see, if you look around the world, what we are witnessing is the unraveling of the Obama foreign policy. Four Americans were murdered in a terrorist attack in Benghazi. The point is in a Romney administration, when we know that we are clearly attacked by terrorists, we won't be afraid to say what it is. If terrorists attack us, we will say we had a terrorist attack, and more importantly, we will do what is necessary to prevent that from happening by having a strong military, by making sure that our adversaries do not test us, do not think that we are weak and in retreat. This was not simply an isolated incident but indicative of a broader failure. Iran is closer to a nuclear weapon. The Middle East is in turmoil. Nearly two dozen nations we witness on our television screens were burning our flags in protest in riots. You see, if we project weakness abroad, our adversaries are that much more willing to test us, to question our resolve, and our allies are more hesitant to trust us.

Is Mr Ryan really saying that the rage of flag-burning mobs is triggered by American weakness? Is he even saying that terrorism is triggered by American weakness? What about flag-burning protests and terror attacks on America during the Bush years? Were they triggered by American strength? What about protests in Pakistan against drone strikes that kill Islamic militants? Are those protests against a weak or an assertive America?

Mr Ryan must know, deep down, that in contrast with the full-scale wars between states of earlier times, globalised protests and terror attacks are asymmetric responses. Their whole point is that they are not calibrated to the strength of an adversary. Surely the bigger, painful lesson of recent decades is that anti-American hatred among Islamic extremists is triggered by bipartisan policies that America cannot and should not change, starting with strong support for Israel, and some that are not going to change any time soon, such as close co-operation with the petro-monarchies of the Gulf.

Mr Romney, for his part, added this careful caveat, arguing that:

The blame for the murder of our people in Libya, and the attacks on our embassies in so many other countries, lies solely with those who carried them out—no one else.

However he went on:

But it is the responsibility of our President to use America's great power to shape history—not to lead from behind, leaving our destiny at the mercy of events. Unfortunately, that is exactly where we find ourselves in the Middle East under President Obama.

Then came his magical claim:

The greater tragedy of it all is that we are missing an historic opportunity to win new friends who share our values in the Middle East—friends who are fighting for their own futures against the very same violent extremists, and evil tyrants, and angry mobs who seek to harm us. Unfortunately, so many of these people who could be our friends feel that our President is indifferent to their quest for freedom and dignity.

Mr Romney pointed to Syria, quoting a woman from that blood-soaked country and saying: "We will not forget that you forgot about us." He cited pro-American demonstrators in Libya, and the abortive Green revolution on Iran, during which, he said, Mr Obama was silent. His message was clear: America is foolishly betraying its would-be friends.

In truth, his speech, though grave and stern in its delivery, was pretty short on policies that differ greatly from Mr Obama's.

And in the areas where it did propose substantial policy shifts, the sad truth is that they would probably clash with his plans for magical transformation. He suggests that he would treat Israel with more consideration than Mr Obama has, for instance. That may be his best judgment of how to handle the Middle East, and is certainly good American politics for a Republican. But it would not win America friends with those reformists he praised in Libya or Syria.

Mr Romney offered language on Iran that was a smidgeon tougher than Mr Obama's, talking of not tolerating the development of an Iranian nuclear *capability*, a lower threshold than denouncing an Iranian *bomb*. But even assuming it is clear what Mr Romney means by vowing not to tolerate such a thing, if he were to endorse, say, Israeli strikes on Iran, it is entirely possible that would damn America for a long while in the eyes of those same Iranian reformists that he faults Mr Obama for abandoning.

The world is maddeningly complicated, even for American politicians keen to assert simple truths about strength and moral courage. Mr Romney seems to know that, deep down. Thus while criticising Mr Obama for doing nothing to stop massacres in Syria, he offered a hedged plan of his own, saying:

In Syria, I will work with our partners to identify and organize those members of the opposition who share our values and ensure they obtain the arms they need to defeat Assad's tanks, helicopters, and fighter jets. Iran is sending arms to Assad because they know his downfall would be a strategic defeat for them. We should be working no less vigorously with our international partners to support the many Syrians who would deliver that defeat to Iran—rather than sitting on the sidelines. It is essential that we develop influence with those forces in Syria that will one day lead a country that sits at the heart of the Middle East.

Well, yes. But what if those reassuring Syrian rebels, who share American values, are not large enough in number or great enough in strength to defeat the Assad regime, arms or no arms? What if the Assad regime can be toppled only by Islamists driven by sectarian hate rather than dreams of Jeffersonian democracy? Mr Romney knows that these are the messy, unsatisfying questions that face presidents, and which currently face Mr Obama.

Yet he concludes with platitudes about a world crying out for more American leadership, not less, and embracing his duty to make the 21st century an "American one".

Mr Romney chides Mr Obama for putting his faith in empty, though ringing oratory. Today's foreign-policy address was no more than that, alas.

India can learn from Israel's start-up culture

Josh Daniel, the Times of India, 9 October 2012

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/nri/contributors/contributions/josh-daniel/India-can-learn-from-Israelis-start-up-culture/articleshow/16735832.cms>

Friends and colleagues from India often ask me about the hi-tech industry in Israel. Specifically, how does such a small country with a population of just over 7 million generate so many start-ups? What is the impact on the local economy and society? What is the extent of cooperation with India? India and Israel are technological leaders, each one in its own right, so the interest is appropriate. One could easily write a book on these topics, nevertheless let me try and briefly put things in perspective.

Israel's start-up culture has its roots in the defense establishment and the setup of a

civilian army in the early years of the state. Over the years the nation's technological ingenuity has become a fait accompli world over in the realm of military and homeland security. The ability to improvise and deliver 'quickly and effectively' has made Israel one of the leading countries in the field of defense systems and weapons technology. This incredible ability to 'improvise' paved the way to success not only in technology but also in other fields like agriculture and medicine. For a tiny nation established in a difficult and hostile environment in 1948, its founding leaders invested heavily in science and technology. Rising initially from pure national security concerns, ability to 'improvise' has been a guiding principle for Israel's hi-tech industry over the years, which is evident in the numerous start-ups sprouting at a dizzying rate - second only to that of Silicon Valley.

But the start-up nation (as described by Dan Senor and Saul Singer in their 2009 bestselling book by the same name) is not without its social concerns. The advent of the dotcom boom in the mid-90s saw the emergence of an 'exit culture'. Technology companies founded by young 20 or 30 somethings, most of them having served in elite military technological units would raise money, develop the product and few years down the road get acquired by an American giant. The foremost instance was that of Mirabilis, founders of the popular Instant Messaging software ICQ, which was sold to America Online (AOL) for over 400 million dollars in 1998. Numerous Israeli start-ups have been acquired in the same manner ever since, and continue to get acquired every year by international giants mainly from the US for ten to hundreds of millions of dollars. Having been part of the start-up environment, we debated among friends and colleagues that the exit culture would at some point prove detrimental to the economy if exits became the primary objective. While there was nothing fundamentally wrong with individuals pursuing their ambitions and dreams of becoming millionaires overnight, the problem was that the country would most certainly not benefit from it in the long run. In the majority of acquisitions, the acquiring company would in all probability shut down the acquired company with most of the workers being laid off. Those to benefit would essentially be a small group consisting of the venture funders and founders of the company resulting in an unequal distribution of wealth in an otherwise egalitarian and equal society.

This issue is hotly debated in Israel today. With a limited industrial base and no natural resources, the hi-tech industry is seen as driving the economy. But there seem to be just a handful of established companies who are in the game for the long term, and with an overwhelming majority falling in the start-up category looking for a quick exit. Others argue that Israel's start-up culture prowess is technology focused, and not in managing the operations of a big organization. Nevertheless, there is increasing debate to build homegrown companies, generate more employment and contribute to the economy.

Maybe for that reason almost every prestigious MBA program in Israel has a study module dedicated to India. Many see common similarities between the Indian and Israeli business culture, friendliness and informality being the cornerstone. So each year, management students from the leading universities come to India to visit the likes of Infosys, Tata and Wipro to get a feel of the software industry in India and learn how these companies hire and manage thousands of employees across India. A few Israeli companies, the well-established ones like billing giant Amdocs for instance have already setup base in India and employ thousands of people in both countries for some time now. While Israel can learn how to build, manage and sustain large organizations from an emerging economy such as India in addition to tapping the huge local market, India

can also learn from the entrepreneurial approach of Israelis and inspire the vast talent in India. It would be interesting to note that countries such as South Korea and Singapore are completely fascinated with the start-up culture in Israel and send teams to research the subject more closely.

To sum up, the hi-tech industry in Israel is a dynamic success but not without its social and economic implications. The debate will continue as Israel strives to maintain economic growth and most importantly equality. The relatively young relationship between India and Israel is defined by collaboration as well as competition. But competition is always good, even among friends. There is close cooperation between the two countries, and at the same time there is still a lot to learn on both sides in order to create the right synergy and realize the true potential of the partnership. There is most certainly a lot more to come.

Jewish and Muslim: A tale of two treatments

Steve Apfel, The Times of Israel blog, 30 September 2012

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/jewish-and-muslim-a-tale-of-two-treatments/>

The serial mayhem and murder visited upon American facilities and staff is meant to coerce the free world into censorship out of respect, perversely for a religion that respects and tolerates no other.

From the time the riots broke out on the anniversary of 9/11, Muslim leaders took no pains to hide that coercive goal. The Turkish president called for any criticism of Islam to be made a crime against humanity. Muslim Brotherhood chief, Qaradawi, insisted that America follow Europe's example and outlaw criticism of Islam. Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah warned Americans to "understand that they will face very dangerous repercussions around the world." And to be quite certain that everyone got the intended message, Iranian leaders upped the bounty to \$3.3 million for the head of Mohammed—bashing novelist Salman Rushdie.

Meanwhile calumnies about a nation with no right to exist have poured without interruption from the Muslim world. In the name of Allah Israel is to be annihilated and the Jewish people exterminated. And from this world come demands that we amend our values to accommodate a religion which accommodates not a Jew on the planet.

The free world's media by and large have not waited to be told to fall in line. For many a year they have delivered news in deliberately Muslim-neutral and inoffensive terms, even more when it's news out of Israel. "*Police described the explosion as a 'terrorist attack' — Israel's term for a Palestinian strike.*" How grotesquely Reuters conveys a story of a bomb targeted by Muslims at Jews waiting to catch a bus. But this is the whole point, or one of several. No Muslim could possibly be offended by news in such wrung out shape and form.

Opinion editors have done their own bit. Article submissions in any way critical of Muslims are routinely rejected, more so if religion comes into them. And TV

documentaries are summarily shelved. Ask Tom Holland, who had his '*Islam: The Untold Story*,' pulled after the BBC was threatened.

Falling in line is one thing, but emulating and platforming the Muslim world's antagonism is a different case. Even the most venerable media titles treat Jews as fair game. They repeat calumnies of the worst kind, or quote sources from heavily vested interests.

For media stakeholders the commercial case for Jew-bashing is compelling. There really is no business like one that offers high return at no risk. A hoax killing of a Palestinian boy is a guaranteed seller; rumours of organ harvesting pull in readers and advertisers; claims of Israeli war crimes are the stuff to glue audiences to any channel. Without a daily feed of Israel demonisation media stakeholders would be much the poorer.

And so to a case in real time. At this moment the Human Rights Commission of South Africa is handling a complaint over a Cape Town daily and the author of an article. It allowed the article to describe Jewish behaviour (the standard codeword was 'Zionist') as abusive and thuggish. The complaint is not over the expressions in themselves. The principle of free speech cannot bow even to bias and prejudice. The complaint is over the application of different and discriminatory standards.

Would the newspaper run an article that referred to "*Murderous Islamists*" or, for that matter, to "*Muslim terrorists*?" Even less, would it publish an article that was no more than mildly critical of Muslims? The answer to that is no of course. For Muslims different rules come into play. The paper would never allow anything on its pages remotely insulting to them. Yet it allowed Jews to be called something thoroughly nasty. A thug, remember, is a tough and violent individual, especially a criminal.

Now if an editor will not allow 'murderous' or 'terrorist,' or 'violent' or 'racist' to be attributed to Muslim acts, but will allow Jews to be called thugs, is he not guilty of discrimination, pure and simple? Is the editor not singling out Jews for special bad treatment? Is he not employing different editorial standards depending on the religion of people on the receiving end?

Two religions, two forms of media treatment. If Jews can be fair game while Muslims have to be trod around on tiptoe, what is that but naked discrimination?

NOTE: The views expressed in certain articles are not necessarily those of the SAZF

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