

THE ARAB MEDIA AND THE ARAB PUBLIC CONFRONT THE GAZA CRISIS

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How are the Arab media dealing with the crisis in Gaza? To what extent is the Arab general public following the lead of its intellectuals? **ESISC has a department specialised in monitoring, translating and analysing Arab-speaking newspapers and internet websites**, and it seemed to us that it would be particularly interesting to look closely into this question. You will discover in the pages which follow the degree to which **the press most often lacks detachment and an objective analytical approach, instead mixing up commentary with its exposition of facts**. And how for many weeks now, **it has become the vector of the language of hate directed not only against Israel but also against its own leaders, against the ‘West’ – above all, the United States and France – and even against certain minorities in the ‘Arab world,’ for example the Amazighs and the Kabyles or Christians suspected of not displaying sufficient ‘solidarity’ with the population of Gaza.**

Spending time on these matters is not anecdotal, because the Arab press, despite its very low level of penetration (a constant factor given the illiteracy of the masses in many countries covered by our study³) nonetheless exerts **influence on educated young people and on intellectuals**. The fact that it promotes hatred and violence therefore cannot remain without effect. **From the political and security standpoints, the crisis, and above all its handling by the Arab media, could thus have grave consequences in the medium term.**

We also find that this crisis is an indicator of things. It exposes the frustrations of the people and the bitterness they often harbour for their rulers. It reveals the tensions between Sunnis and Shiites. It reveals the complex feeling and even the love/hatred relationship that the *Arab general public* has for the Western world.

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³ By way of example, illiteracy is 20.9% for men in Algeria and 39.9% for women ; 32.8% and 56.9% respectively in Egypt; 12.9% and 30.7% in Saudi Arabia; 24.3% and 19.3% in the United Arab Emirates; and 30.5% and 71.5% in Yémen...

But we also find that despite everything and without regard to the risks they incur some free and independent voices try to go against the current, to explain and sometimes to run up against the dominant feelings.

1) By way of introduction

With respect to methodology, we have worked in an empirical manner, selecting several dozen articles that appeared in the media and expressed different opinions in various Arab countries during the period from 5 January and 13 January, when the Gaza crisis was fully under way. The criterion guiding our choices was to reveal various themes which appeared to be constant all across the countries studied.

You will find few citations taken from the Moroccan press, because with the notable exception of the Islamist daily *Attajdid* it remained relatively factual and did not give way to the rush of opinion that characterised, for example, the Algerian press. The same is true of the Tunisian press, which also was very factual. **Tunisia** and **Morocco** have longstanding and complex ties with their Jewish communities and with Israel and this is seen in the way that they contented themselves with reprinting the dispatches of international agencies without much comment: **the media of these two countries have wanted to avoid adding tensions gratuitously to those that have already manifested themselves.**

We have not dealt with **any Syrian or Libyan media** because these two have appeared to us to be absolutely uninteresting, since they only relay in a servile manner the directives of the powers that be.

Finally, though it is self-evident, we were only interested in the Arab-speaking media and not in newspapers published in French or English: our objective was to try to decipher the editorial lines intended for the local populations in their language.

2) Attacks on moderate Arab heads of state and threats of domestic disturbances

As viewed through the prism of the Arab media, **the crisis in Gaza often seems to crystallise the bitterness and frustrations that the general Arab public too often harbours with respect to its rulers.** For some of the governments which draw their legitimacy from a war of independence or from a revolution (as in the case of Algeria), it is also **an occasion for raising questions about the major moderate rivals, like Egypt, which stands at the head of the Arab world.** Many media outlets and all the Islamist websites regularly attack the heads of state and the moderate Arab regimes.

Thus, on 5 January, the Algerian daily *Ennahar* ('very close' to the security services) quotes at length **Sheikh Abderrahman Chiban**, President of the Association of Algerian Ulemas, who describes the Arab heads of state as **'traitors and allies of the United States and of the racist and barbarian regime of Israel.'**⁴

Also on 5 January, another Algerian daily, *Echorouk*, warns the Arab regimes of revolts and acts of violence due to their *'passivity in the face of the Israeli war machine'*: **'The Arab public is angry with leaders who kowtow to Israel and to the United States.'**⁵

On the same day, in Egypt, the Opposition daily *Dostor* asked: **'Where are the Arab armies?'** and criticised the silence of Arab leaders in the face of *'the genocide perpetrated in*

⁴ <http://www.ennaharonline.com/ar/pdf/2009/01/05012009.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.echoroukonline.com/pdf/2009/01/edition-05012009-2498-69874.pdf>

Gaza by Israel. In the view of **Dostor**, the Egyptian regime wants to ‘put an end to Hamas’ by closing its eyes.⁶

Due to its historic status in the Arab world and also because it was the first Arab country to make peace with Israel, Egypt is certainly the least spared of the Arab regimes.

The Egyptian authorities have prohibited many demonstrations of solidarity with Gaza which were being organised by the **Muslim Brotherhood**, among others. From the very start of the crisis, several hundred members of the Brotherhood who tried to demonstrate were arrested and now will be tried on charges of ‘**terrorism, organising a demonstration without authorisation and possession of arms.**’⁷ Still worse in the view of the opposition (including the Islamists): **the authorities are allowing the mosques to open just 10 minutes before the call to prayers and to stay open 15 minutes after their conclusion** in order to prevent any use of these premises for prohibited demonstrations of solidarity with Gaza, and the preachers have been called upon by the Ministry of Religious Affairs not to comment on the official position of the government with respect to the war nor on the war itself.

However, as **Almasry-Alyoum** emphasises: ‘**100% of the 80 million Egyptians oppose the war being conducted by Israel against Hamas.**’⁸ And it concludes that the *Muslim Brotherhood* is making use of the daily news to recruit followers and to heighten ‘**the popular anger against the Egyptian regime.**’⁹

For **Dostor**, the Israeli offensive has widened somewhat the already existing gap between the rulers of the Arab countries and their citizens, since most of the leaders of the Arab countries want to be done with Hamas, while their peoples reproach them for this attitude.¹⁰

For its part, at the start of January the **Front of the Ulemas of Al-Azhar**¹¹ defied the government by summoning ‘Muslims’ to the Jihad against Israel and against Jews everywhere in the world. **The 40 signatories of this appeal also called upon Muslims to practice civil disobedience and to rebel.**¹²

The website **Ikhwan**, unofficial organ of the *Muslim Brotherhood* was not deceived: the war being carried out by Israel against Hamas is in reality a war against the fraternal orders of the *Muslim Brotherhood* and against all the groups of Islamic Jihad in the countries of the region. By attacking Gaza, **Israel is ‘doing the dirty work’ that the Arab countries are incapable of doing...**¹³

Ikhwan and **Alshaab** (close to Hamas) even went so far as to say, one of them, that a ‘**green light was given to Israel to attack Hamas**’¹⁴ (**Alshaab** even demands the

⁶http://dostor.org/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=11564&Itemid=31

⁷<http://www.almasry-alyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=193461&IssueID=1276>

⁸ Idem.

⁹<http://www.almesryoon.com/ShowDetails.asp?NewID=58396&Page=1>

¹⁰http://dostor.org/ar/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=11725&Itemid=30, 6 January 2009.

¹¹ Founded in 969 AD (year 358 of the Hegira), the University of **al-Azhar** in Cairo is the principal centre of Islamic studies in the world. As the cradle of the Muslim Brotherhood, a stormy place, it has kept a great measure of independence from the authorities.

¹²<http://www.almesryoon.com/ShowDetails.asp?NewID=58387&Page=6>

¹³<http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=43762&SecID=341>

¹⁴<http://www.alshaab.com/news.php?i=15320>, 6 January 2009.

resignation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs) and **the other directly accuses Cairo of having ‘asked Israel to crush Hamas and not let it enjoy the slightest victory.’**¹⁵ On 9 January, *Almasry-Alyoum* stressed that President Hosni Mubarak had **‘refused to receive a delegation from the Union of Muslim Ulemas presided over by Yussef Al-Qaradaoui’**,^{16 17} and, three days later, on 12 January, *Ikhwan* went one step further by announcing ‘as an exclusive’ story that **Egypt was training members of Fatah to prepare for stabilising Gaza after the retreat of the Israeli Army.**¹⁸

But the press knows its limits. In Qatar, *Al-Arab* believes that the claims of the demonstrators [solidarity with Gaza] do not reach the ears of the ‘Arab dictators’ who do not feel threatened by the cries and the tears of the demonstrators. They even encourage their citizens to go out on the streets to allow them to **‘let off steam against Israel and the United States and forget their daily misery.’** The heads of the Arab states are aware that their peoples just a ‘sound phenomenon’: *‘the Arabs have thus become experts in screaming and burning Israeli and American flags. They come home exhausted but pleased that they have done their national duty.’* **‘The Arab peoples are just flocks of sheep watched over by old dinosaurs who are only thinking of their own interests,’** concludes *Al-Arab*.¹⁹

However, *Al-Arab* harbours a secret hope: *‘resistance is the only path to liberation of the Arab peoples.’* It adds that the ‘Arab general public’ takes inspiration from *‘the mythic resistance of Gaza’* and will certainly bring down the republics and the kingdoms in *‘the Arab region.’* The resistance shown by Hamas has made the Arabs understand that they can defeat Israel and the Arab regimes linked to it only by force of arms.’²⁰

In the meantime, on 13 January a Salafist deputy in Kuwait asked the spouses – supreme insult! – of the Arab heads of state to replace their husbands and arrange a congress of the League to decide upon a common position.²¹

3) Rift between Shiites and Sunnis

The spectre of the ancestral rivalry between Sunnis and Shiites is never very distant when the Arab world experiences a grave crisis. It should come as no surprise that the conflict now under way has provided an occasion for the Sunni Jihadists to violently attack their Shiite rivals (essentially **Hezbollah**). Many traditional media do not hesitate to follow their lead and to directly go after the ‘godfather’ of the Lebanese organisation, Iran.

On 6 January, one could read on the website of Egypt’s *Gamaa Islamiya* a **severe attack on Hezbollah**, whom they accused of being content with providing **‘mere moral support’** for Hamas. Hezbollah sent no aid to the inhabitants of Gaza for the simple reason that they are Sunnis: **‘Sunnis should not expect anything from the Shiite murderers. The victims of the Shiites and their allies have been more numerous than those of Israel during all of its bloody history.’**²²

¹⁵ <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=43936&SecID=230> , 6 January 2009.

¹⁶ Presently one of the most widely watched Muslim preachers, especially due to his daily broadcast on *al-Jazeera*, **Sheikh al-Qaradaoui** is also President of the *European Council of the Fatwa*, an especially conservative body based in London. He is above all one of the principal leaders of the *Muslim Brotherhood*.

¹⁷ <http://www.almasry-alyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=194043>

¹⁸ <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=44144&SecID=450>

¹⁹ <http://www.alarab.com.qa/details.php?docId=68398&issueNo=379&secId=15>

²⁰ <http://www.alarab.com.qa/details.php?docId=69156&issueNo=386&secId=15>

²¹ <http://albawaba.com/ar/news/292589>

²² http://www.egypt.com/Public/articles/recent_issues/6/31040925.shtml

Two days later, *al-Gumhouria*, a pro-government Egyptian daily and organ of the **National Democratic Party** (NDP) attacked the secretary general of **Hezbollah** in an article entitled '**The gravedigger criticizes us**': *'the Mouthpiece of Hassan Nasrallah has become more famous than his arsenal. His cowardice is shown on the screen when we see the chief of Hezbollah addressing his gathering, which failed to occupy Lebanon in May last spring and proclaim there a Shiite state, a satellite of Iran.'* The daily reminds its readers that after having failed *'to destroy Lebanon twice, Nasrallah dares to criticise 'Egypt': 'It seems that Nasrallah is only watching Iranian and Syrian television and has been brainwashed. Hassan Nasrallah's only pleasure is to watch the bloodbath of the victims. What also makes him jubilant is to see the dead, just like the gravedigger who watches his business prosper.'* And it concludes: *'I remind you, Sheikh Hassan, that great states do not listen to the wild imaginings of those under the influence of drugs and gravediggers like you. Great states adopt strategies to preserve and save their peoples. You should take some lessons from great leaders. But you cannot, because you don't have the true mettle of great revolutionary leaders. You are just a pathetic gravedigger.'*²³

In Kuwait, *Dar-al-Seyassah* believes that **the defeat of Hamas will signify the destruction of the Iranian project in this region of the world** and he accuses the Iranians of *'pushing Hamas into the Israeli booby trap the way that they pushed Hezbollah into a destructive war against Israel during the summer of 2006.'*²⁴

4) Accusations against the United States and the European Union

Though the United States is, unsurprisingly, strongly and broadly attacked in most of the Arab media, the European Union is not spared as well. **Washington and many European capitals are accused not only of giving diplomatic support to Israel but also arming the Jewish state.**

On 5 January, the Algerian daily *Ennahar* mentioned a *fatwa* of **Sheikh Abderrahman Chiban**, president of the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulemas, which considers the establishment of diplomatic relations with the United States to be *'illegal'* and explains **that the American regime is 'heathen' and should be fought.**²⁵

In the view of the website *Djazairnews*, **Israel has used banned American arms in its offensive against Hamas.** It reminds its viewers that the United States has given Israel very advanced military materiel worth 108 billion dollars to ensure its military superiority over all the Arab countries of the region.²⁶

The daily *Akhbar Elyoum* goes still further when it says – after accusing the Israeli Army of using *'bacteriological and even nuclear weapons during its offensive* – **that some American soldiers are taking part in the Israeli offensive.**²⁷

This is an accusation that surfaces in another form in the Egyptian daily *Almasry Alyoum* which intimated on 6 January that **'some officers from the American Army are monitoring the border between Egypt and Israel to prevent the Egyptians from transferring arms to Hamas. These officers have been charged with the task of**

²³ <http://www.algomhuria.net.eg/algomhuria/today/fpage/detailoo.asp>

²⁴ http://www.dar-al-seyassah.com/news_details.asp?nid=42190&snapt=%C7%E1%CF%E6%E1%ED%C9

²⁵ <http://www.ennaharonline.com/ar/pdf/2009/01/05012009.pdf>

²⁶ <http://www.djazairnews.info/pdf.pdf>

²⁷ <http://www.akhbarelyoum-dz.com/aeypdf/531.pdf>

searching for and destroying the tunnels that serve to deliver weapons to Hamas from Egypt.²⁸

The daily *Echorouk*, for its part, accuses ‘the West’ of hypocrisy. In an article entitled ‘**Tasleema Nasrine is worth more than five hundred Palestinian victims,**’ a columnist from this newspaper said on 5 January that the attack being conducted by Israel against Gaza ‘**has exposed the absurd logic of the West, which became so falsely indignant when statues of Buddha were demolished or when a pseudo-writer who became famous by denigrating Islam was threatened by extremists yet remained shamefully silent when hundreds of Palestinian civilians were massacred without pity by the Zionist horde...** [For the Western intelligentsia] **a single woman, Tasleema Nasrine, is worth more than five hundred innocent Palestinian victims.** Where are Bernard Henri Lévy, André Gluksman, Alain Finkielkraut, Max Gallo, Simone Veil and the other right minded intellectuals who have accustomed us to interminable litanies on violations of human rights going on most everywhere in the world using the platforms of television channels?’

For *Echorouk*, ‘**the humorist Dieudonné knows something about it ; he who dared to attack this current unanimity reigning among the intelligentsia on the prohibition of criticizing Israel whatever it does, by pricking the abscess once and for all! But men of Dieudonné’s mettle are thin on the ground and do not appear on the platforms of Western television stations.**’²⁹

Also in Algeria, **Louiza Hanoun**, secretary general of the **Workers Party** (Communist Party) called upon the government to cut all ties with the European Union and especially with the Union for the Mediterranean (UPM).³⁰

It is no accident that a project dear to the heart of President Sarkozy has been attacked in this way. Alongside the United States, **France** is the country most regularly attacked or called into question. Thus, on **7 January a demonstration was organised by the students union in front of the French consulate at Annaba to protest against the Israeli offensive.**³¹ In **Jordan**, the local brethren of the *Muslim Brotherhood* criticised the position of Paris and urged ‘**all Muslims’ to boycott French products.**³² The Egyptian *Muslim Brotherhood*, for their part, believe that the French peace initiatives aim at ‘*weakening Hamas and depriving it of its weapons.*’³³

And **Paris aggravated its case further by deciding to ban from the French air waves al-Aqsa, the television channel of Hamas.** On 12 January, an Islamist website, *Mufakkirat-al-Islam* denounced this decision taken ‘*under the pressure of Jewish and Zionist organisations*’ and said it was due to the ‘**Jewish origins of President Sarkozy.**’³⁴ For *Ennahar*, this decision proves that France is ‘*Zionist.*’³⁵

The **calls for a boycott** of ‘Israeli,’ ‘Jewish,’ ‘American’ and ‘European’ products did not take long to spread. On 9 January, on *Ikhwan*, the Egyptian *Muslim Brotherhood* were demanding a halt on purchase of Israeli and American products: ‘**Don’t drink the blood of your brothers. God Alone is the witness,**’ proclaims a red poster issued by the

²⁸ <http://www.almesryoon.com/ShowDetails.asp?NewID=58447&Page=1>

²⁹ <http://www.echoroukonline.com/pdf/2009/01/edition-05012009-2498-69874.pdf>

³⁰ <http://www.djazairnews.info/pdf.pdf>, le 8 janvier 2009.

³¹ <http://www.echoroukonline.com/pdf/2009/01/edition-08012009-2501-336541.pdf>

³² http://www.raya.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=409583&version=1&template_id=22&parent_id=21

³³ <http://islamtoday.net/albasheer/artshow-12-106499.htm>

³⁴ www.islammemo.cc

³⁵ <http://www.ennaharonline.com/ar/pdf/2009/01/13012009.pdf>

brotherhood in support of the boycott campaign.³⁶ The same site calls for an **‘economic Jihad’ against the West**. The investments of Arab countries in the United States and in Europe are on the order of 14 trillion dollars. It asks the Arab countries to withdraw this money from Western banks and to invest it in the Arab and Muslim countries. The website also calls upon Arab countries to initially reduce their production of oil by 25% and to set a final date for the work of all Western companies operating in the domain of prospecting for oil, including **Total, Exxon Mobile and Shell**, and to replace them by Arab companies. Furthermore it calls for a halt to all ties with Western insurance companies and banks.³⁷

On 12 January, the German retailer **Lidl** was accused by the Moroccan daily **Attajdid** (close to the ‘moderate’ Islamist current of the PJD) of financing projects in Israel. **Attajdid** pressured Muslims in Europe to boycott this store chain.³⁸

In Morocco, **McDonald’s** has been especially targeted and on 13 January the company had to issue a press release in which it stated that the SMS and emails circulating during the past few days and claiming that the company was devoting part of its revenues to support Israel were ‘devoid of all reality.’ *‘McDonald’s is a Moroccan national company 100% run by Moroccans’ and it is ‘sickened by the death of innocents in the events going on in Gaza.’*³⁹

In **Saudi Arabia**, SMS messages also were circulating. They called for a boycott against **Starbucks, Pepsi Cola, Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken** and **Philip Morris**. In Algeria, **Marlboro** and the French company **Danone** were added to the list appearing on flyers distributed in the capital.⁴⁰

Once again, **France was especially targeted**. **Ennahar** stated on 13 January that six Algerians and one Egyptian resigned from a company run by a Frenchman who is a practicing Jew in Lyon after their boss expressed his support for the Israeli offensive against Gaza. According to this newspaper, the seven who resigned held high positions in the company and *‘received salaries that would make Europeans jealous.’* The newspaper mentioned a campaign launched in France calling upon Muslims to withdraw their money from Jewish banks including the **Société Générale** and **Crédit Lyonnais**.⁴¹

But calls for a boycott were not always sufficient for some. On 12 January, the **Algerian Sheikh Chamseddine Bourouba** published a fatwa authorising young Muslims to go and fight against the Israeli Army in Gaza, but: *‘if the borders inherited from the times of colonialism prevent these young people from getting to Palestine, then they can target Israeli and Western interests in their own country, so that the whole land is turned into a battlefield against the Zionists.’*⁴²

In **al-Arab**, a reporter went so far as to say that **Muslims, notably the most radical of them, might carry out terrorist attacks in Europe, particularly in the United Kingdom, in reaction to the silence of these countries** following the Israel offensive against Hamas. It added that Arab and Muslim countries which express their support for Israel might also be targeted⁴³

³⁶ <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=44051&SecID=230>

³⁷ <http://www.ikhwanonline.com/Article.asp?ArtID=43999&SecID=452>

³⁸ http://www.attajdid.info/def.asp?codelangue=6&infoun=47010&date_ar=2009/1/12

³⁹ <http://www.assabah.press.ma>

⁴⁰ <http://www.ennaharonline.com/ar/pdf/2009/01/13012009.pdf>

⁴¹ <http://www.ennaharonline.com/ar/pdf/2009/01/13012009.pdf>

⁴² <http://www.ennaharonline.com/ar/pdf/2009/01/11012009.pdf>

⁴³ <http://www.alarab.com.qa/details.php?docId=69021&issueNo=385&secId=15>

⁴⁴ <http://www.alanbat.net/News/ViewMainNews.asp?NID=224231&SID=10>

⁴⁵ <http://albawaba.com/ar/news/292589>

Happily, the part taken by the West was counterbalanced by the courage of a **Hugo Chavez**, sacred '**symbol of Arab-ness**' (sic!) for having chased the Israeli ambassador out of his country.⁴⁴ A Kuwaiti deputy even offered to transfer to Caracas the ... headquarters of the Arab League.⁴⁵

5) Antisemitic 'faux pas'

It is clearly impossible in the framework of this article to remain silent about the antisemitic 'faux pas' that were made by too many of the Arab media. To tell the truth, they are so serious, massive and widespread that it is hard to believe that these are just 'excesses.' There is reason to fear that these statements – always violent and hateful, sometimes murderous – reflect a major trend in the general Arab public.

On 6 January, the Egyptian newspaper **Alshaab**, which is close to Hamas, called for '**slitting the throats of Jews and displaying their heads in public places**' and '**erasing the existence of Israel.**' Muslims have '**betrayed the prophet**' this newspaper concludes, by rejecting Jihad and by '**weaving relations with the Jews.**'⁴⁶

For the Algerian daily **Echorouk**, Israel is a '**cancer that has to be stamped out.**'⁴⁷ This is an image that has been widely used in the Arab media for many years. On 11 January, **Echorouk** came back to this question: '**Israel will disappear sooner or later. Even the Earth refuses to take the Jews**': '**God revealed in the Quran that Muslims will end by killing all the Jews.**'⁴⁸

In Algeria, beginning on 5 January, the Imam **Chamseddine Bourouba** published a fatwa authorising Muslims wherever they may be to '**kill Jews**': '**every Jew is a legitimate target whom the Muslims should kill.**'⁴⁹ This is the third fatwa circulating in North Africa and in the North African community in France and in Europe calling for Jews to be killed.

Certain Arab dailies show distrust for ... books. Thus, in the United Arab Emirates, **Emarat Alyoum** called upon the authorities to inspect the academic manuals used in the schools and the foreign institutes⁵⁰ operating in the country. It revealed that some manuals from the British missions contain texts '*favourable to the Jews*' and '**insulting religions**,' and called for pressure to be applied on these institutes to withdraw them. The offending texts deal with the histories of Jewish families persecuted by the Nazi regime. According to this daily, students in these schools have torn out the pages making reference to everything Jewish.⁵¹

In Egypt, the **Gamaa islamiya** reminded readers that '**the Jews have been detested by all peoples since the beginning of time. Even the greatest playwright of all time, William Shakespeare, showed the true face of the Jews in his play 'The Merchant of Venice': the Jews are the 'most pathetic and the dirtiest race on Earth.**'⁵²

⁴⁶ <http://www.alshaab.com/news.php?i=15190>

⁴⁷ <http://www.echoroukonline.com/pdf/2009/01/edition-06012009-2499-254867.pdf>

⁴⁸ <http://www.echoroukonline.com/pdf/2009/01/edition-11012009-2503-365874.pdf>

⁴⁹ http://www.aafaq.org/news.aspx?id_news=7774

⁵⁰ Given the importance of the foreign presence in the Emirates, there are numerous schools directed mainly to the children of expatriates.

⁵¹ http://emaratallyoum.com/articles/2009/1/pages/01062009_228bf10f85c34223aa7d6d2be0c9585b.aspx

⁵² http://www.egyig.com/Public/articles/recent_issues/11/31585284.shtml

In **Kuwait**, on 9 January a columnist for *al-Watan* relied on some suras from the Quran to characterise the Jews as ‘*cowards driven by fear.*’ He reminded readers that the Quran explains that Jews ‘*always act in the dark because they are cowards who cannot go up against their enemies head on.*’⁵³

The Quran was also used on 13 January in Algeria by *Al-Fadjr*, which urged Muslims to ‘read and re-read’ the book to understand why the Jews are ‘*the worst race.*’⁵⁴

These messages of hate and these calls for murder are unfortunately sometimes followed by consequences. **In Yémen on 4 January some Jews⁵⁵ were attacked in Sanaa following a demonstration of solidarity with Gaza.** Reacting to this attack, the government decided to gather all the Jews in a district of the capital placed under high security.⁵⁶

6) Attacks against Moroccan and Algerian Berbers

Ever since the start of the Israeli offensive, some Amazigh and Kabyle organisations have kept their distance from Arab opinion. This has exposed them to virulent attacks.

On 5 January, an Algerian daily criticised the organisation of a conference in a district of Tizi Ouzou by **an association of Kabyle Christians supporting Israel in its war against Hamas. It emphasised that more than 600 persons were present at this event.** It characterised the Christians as ‘*sub-human*’ and indicated that they considered Hamas to be a terrorist organisation and extended their full support to Israel in its war.⁵⁷

Later another daily criticised the silence of the *Assembly for Culture and Democracy* (RCD)⁵⁸ led by Doctor **Said Saâdi** concerning the events in Gaza. It stressed that this party never launched any call for solidarity with Gaza and never published any communiqué along these lines.⁵⁹

On 5 January, a Moroccan daily, the independent and populist *Almassae*, attacked a Berber association which supported the right of Israel to defend itself against the attacks of Hamas in a press release and called upon the authorities to intern its president in an ‘*insane asylum.*’⁶⁰

Three days later, it was the turn of the Islamist organ *Attajdid* to attack the *Amazigh League of Human Rights* (LADH), which had announced in a press release its support for Israel in its offensive against the Hamas terrorist movement. It also attacked **Ahmed Adghirni**, head of the *Amazigh Moroccan Democratic Party* (PDAM/banned), who had refused to take part in a demonstration organised on Sunday in Rabat. He stated to the Moroccan press that ‘*what is happening in Gaza is an Arab matter that does not concern the Amazighs.*’ The website reminds viewers that Adghirni had gone to Israel many times to incite Israelis of Berber origin to reestablish contact with their country and to promote their Berber culture in Israel.⁶¹

⁵³ http://www.alwatan.com.kw/Default.aspx?tabid=164&article_id=475592&AuthorID=925

⁵⁴ <http://www.al-fadjr.com/ressources/pdf/edition.pdf>

⁵⁵ Out of a population of many tens of thousands of Jews before 1949, there remain less than a thousand in Yemen today.

⁵⁶ http://www.news-yemen.net/view_news.asp?sub_no=1_2009_01_04_24572

⁵⁷ <http://www.echoroukonline.com/ara/national/31040.html>

⁵⁸ The base of the RCD is essentially Kabyle and secular.

⁵⁹ http://www.elhiwar-dz.com/h_pdf/hiwar_a.pdf

⁶⁰ <http://www.almassae.press.ma>

⁶¹ <http://www.hespress.com/>

7) The Algerian press goes wild

The Algerian press is one of those that went farthest in the ‘war of words.’ For the daily *Elkhabar*, for example, the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict goes back to its source: in an (unsigned) article entitled **‘Israel will end up disappearing!’** this newspaper stated that *‘every barbaric and cruel force ends up disappearing and Israel will certainly not be the exception that proves the rule.’* It indicated that the Israeli people must now face a choice: to melt away into the masses and become Arab or to disappear. The newspaper explained that **‘every Jew residing in Palestine is a Palestinian citizen. There is no difference between him and any other Palestinian. On the contrary, the Jews who have come from Russia, America, Poland, Yemen or any other country to set themselves up in this land are just simple colonists and their presence in Palestine is simply counter to nature.’**⁶²

On 6 January, a journalist from the Algerian daily *Ennahar* let himself engage in interesting fantasies when he explained to us that he had **‘interviewed an officer of Mossad based in Bucharest.’** Having thus **‘infiltrated Mossad,’** this extraordinary reporter was able to obtain first hand information about Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs **Tzipi Livni**. The journalist says that **Mossad is ‘weak’ and ‘very fragile,’** all of which seems a bit out of keeping with the implacable Israeli war machine that is usually depicted by many Arab media. In a word, officer Zohra C., who was in a drunken state in a Bucharest hotel, explained to the Algerian journalist that **Tzipi Livni is a Lesbian and had been raped by three young Palestinians when she was just 14 year old. Understandably, she immediately ‘detested the Arabs and the Palestinians’ and has not hesitated ‘to murder Arab politicians and scholars in the course of her assignments’** [when she was a Mossad officer]. Nevertheless – you must spare Arab pride – she was also *‘impressed by Colonel Qaddafi, Gamal Abdennaser and Houari Boumediene,’* despite their positions hostile to Israel. Mossad also *‘infiltrated Al-Qaeda’* and recruited members of this terrorist organisation to target Western interests in Arab and Muslim countries in order to *‘tarnish the image of Muslims and Arabs.’* The Israeli intelligence service also *‘recruited former members of the FIS [Islamic Salvation Front] in France and in Germany in order to obtain detailed reports on the security situation in Algeria.’*⁶³ Aside from the fact that it is hard to see why Israel would be especially interested in the military capabilities of Algeria which, if we are not mistaken, has no common border with the Jewish state and is far from being the most important of the Arab states, we note that these last two assertions slightly contradict the thesis of a ‘weak and fragile’ Mossad, but we may let that pass.

8) Some (rare) attempts at objective analysis

We do not want to end on too negative a note. Some dailies do try to clarify the events unfolding in Gaza by directing an objective light and making an effort at analysis. The tenor of these all too rare articles is essentially pro-Palestinian, all of which is obviously legitimate for Arab media which cannot remain neutral in the face of the suffering of their ‘brothers,’ but at least there is no room for insults and an attempt is made to set things in their complex context.

Thus, in *Yemen* on 6 January *Al Watan* reported that **more and more Israelis are anxious and have the impression that a vice is closing on their country. This development finds its roots in the refusal of the Arab countries and of the Muslim world to consider Israel to be a ‘legitimate state.’** For their part, Western governments are less and less disposed to Israeli policy. **Hezbollah** has rebuilt the arsenal that was destroyed in the summer of 2006 and **Hamas**, for its part has been inspired by the

62 <http://www.elkhabar.com/quotidienFrEn/?ida=137957&idc=175>

63 <http://www.ennaharonline.com/ar/specialpages/international/24226.html>

experience of the Shiite militia and is showering Israel with thousands of missiles, causing essentially civilian casualties. **These two threats have in common a non-conventional nature**; these two organisations are rising in power and defy the borders and rules of war, all of which **presents Israel with an existential challenge.**⁶⁴

On 6 January, the Kuwaiti daily *Dar-al-Seyassah* directly attacked Hamas, whose fighters were accused of 'hiding' and of '**leaving children and women to the mercy of the Israeli war machine.**' It called the heads of this organisation '**liars**' who have misappropriated aid provided by the Arab countries for building Gaza, adding that the war they have led against Israel is '*an adventure*' whose consequences will be terrible both for the terrorist group and for Gaza. It reminded readers that one of the most radical leaders of the group, Mahmoud Alzahar, '*who is hiding out in a rat hole*' had said, in a televised speech, that Hamas had scored decisive points against Tsahal, without giving any other explanation. The columnist accused the terrorist leader of having adopted the communications strategy of Saddam Hussein and of his Minister of Information Mohammed Said Al-Sahhaf, who was saying right up to the last moment that he had '*exterminated the Americans at the gates of Baghdad.*'⁶⁵

On 9 January, in Qatar, *al-Arab*, which otherwise, as we have seen, was remarkable for the worst excesses, gave us a good surprise by publishing a columnist's call for negotiations between Israel, Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to find a way out on the Palestinian question. **It also emphasised that Hamas must stop all use of force against the Jewish state**, in particular the launching of missiles on its territories if the Islamist organisation truly wanted 'to save the Palestinian people: ***It is a necessity to negotiate with Israel. Declaring war on it is a grave error.***'⁶⁶

On 13 January, another columnist writing in the *Dar-al-Seyassah* expressed the belief that the Arabs must analyse what is going on in Gaza with objectivity. **He explained that Hamas is solely responsible for all the misfortunes descending on the Gaza Strip.** He called upon Khalid Michael, who had taken refuge in Syria, to go to Gaza to fight the Israeli Army or to send there his children, who are now studying at American universities. '***The Arab heads of state are not traitors. The real traitors are the leaders of Hamas,***' he concluded.⁶⁷

Further on, this daily wondered what Hamas had brought to the Palestinians since taking control of Gaza 'apart from destruction and misfortune' and it invited the organisation to turn over the Gaza Strip to the legitimate government of the Palestinian Authority.⁶⁸

For *Alqabas* in Kuwait on 13 January, the statements of Khalid Michael reporting the failure of the Israeli offensive were 'pathetic': '*How can Michael claim this when a thousand persons have died, thousands of homes and infrastructure have been destroyed and thousands of persons are living in the cold, with fear and hunger? It would appear that*

⁶⁴ <http://www.al-watan.com/data/20090105/pdf/alwatan.pdf>

⁶⁵ http://www.dar-al-seyassah.com/editor_details.asp?aid=3988&aname=%E3%CD%E3%CF%20%D2%ED%E4%20%C7%E1%DA%ED%CF%D1%E6%D3

⁶⁶ <http://www.alarab.com.qa/details.php?docId=68709&issueNo=382&secId=15>

⁶⁷ http://www.dar-al-seyassah.com/editor_details.asp?aid=4084&aname=%E4%E6%D1%20%E3%CD%E3%CF%20%C7%E1%CD%C8%D4%ED

⁶⁸ http://www.dar-al-seyassah.com/editor_details.asp?aid=4001&aname=%C3%CD%E3%CF%20%C7%E1%CC%C7%D1%C7%E1%E1%E5

*Hamas is not interested in these victims insofar as its own leaders are in hiding and have food when they are hungry. To say that Hamas will defeat Israel is a 'big lie.'*⁶⁹

9) And some dissident voices...

Finally, some columnists, analysts and 'opinion leaders' won renown by taking original positions and breaking totally with the surrounding climate.

Thus, the president of the Union of Egyptian Journalists characterised Arabs who call for the opening of the terminal at Rafah to allow Palestinians to flee Gaza **'a bunch of dwarfs'** and appealed to the government to close this terminal once and for all to avoid a Palestinian 'invasion' of Egypt.⁷⁰

On 13 January, **Abdelmonaim Said**, president of the Al-Ahram Centre of Political and Strategic Studies, accused Egypt of being responsible for the traffic in arms to Gaza and called upon Cairo to take steps to close all the tunnels serving this traffic. Abdelmunaim Said is one of those advocating strengthening diplomatic and political relations with Israel.⁷¹

But it is on the website **Aafaq** that one of the freest voices of the Muslim Arab world, the psychiatrist and sociologist of Syrian origin **Wafa Sultan** delivered a charge against... Islam which, she said, was the source of all the misfortune hitting Palestinians and Arabs. In her view, *' Hamas is none other than a terrorist secretion whose irresponsible behaviour prevents it from rising to the level of a government.'* She explains that throughout the history of Islam *'a band of Islamist criminals has never respected those whom it administers.'* ***'If the Jews ask my advice, I would counsel them to burn their holy books and to leave the region to save their skins. Because the Muslims constitute a rigid nation devoid of brains. And it is contagious. Everyone who spends time with them loses his brains,'*** she goes on to say: ***'It is impossible for a nation that trains its children in death and martyrdom to please its Creator to educate them at the same time in the love of life.'***

For Wafa Sultan, **those who condemn 'the massacre of Gaza for humanitarian reasons' should remember that more than 200,000 Algerians were massacred by other Algerian Muslims without any Muslims getting upset.** More than 20,000 Muslim Syrian citizens were killed during the 1980s without any Muslim reacting. **Muslims blow themselves up in hotels in Jordan, killing other innocent Muslims who are celebrating their weddings, symbols of life, without any demonstration whatsoever being organised across the world.** In Egypt, some Islamists recently attacked a Coptic village and massacred 21 peasants without a single Muslim denouncing this crime. Saddam Hussein buried alive more than 300,000 Shiites and Kurds, and gassed many more without a single Muslim daring to react and denounce these crimes. Why then do we weep over the inhabitants of Gaza when no one raised his little finger for the Iraqis, Algerians, Egyptians or Syrians who were also Muslims?

She explained that ***'life has no value for a Muslim. Otherwise he would criticise every attack on life, whoever the victim,'*** The Palestinians and their supporters **criticise the massacres in Gaza not out of any love for life but because of the 'identity of the killers.'** If the killer were Muslim, belonging to Hamas or to

⁶⁹ <http://www.alqabas.com.kw/Article.aspx?id=464325&date=13012009>

⁷⁰ <http://www.almesryoon.com/ShowDetails.asp?NewID=58443&Page=1>

⁷¹ http://www.almesryoon.com/ShowDetails.asp?NewID=58748&Page=1***

Fatah, no demonstration would take place, she said in her criticism. *‘Muslims should begin to change themselves to change their way of life. They must reject a culture of death that is taught and transmitted by their books. Only when they achieve this will they no longer have any enemies. Because whoever learns to love his son more than to hate his enemy will appreciate life better.’*⁷²

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⁷² http://www.aafaq.org/masahas.aspx?id_mas=2939