



# RECLAMATION

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A CULTURAL POLICY  
FOR ARAB-ISRAELI  
PARTNERSHIP

JOSEPH BRAUDE



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# CONTENTS

*Acknowledgments* □ v

*Introduction: A Call for Reclamation* □ vii

## PART I □ A FRAUGHT LEGACY

1. The Story of a Cultural Tragedy □ 3
2. The Moroccan Anomaly □ 32

## PART II □ A NEW HOPE

3. Arab Origins of the Present Opportunity □ 45
4. Communication from the Outside In: Israel & the United States □ 70

## PART III □ AN UNFAIR FIGHT

5. Obstacles to a Cultural Campaign □ 109

## PART IV □ CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

6. A Plan for Reclamation □ 137

*About the Author* □ Back cover



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—JOSEPH BRAUDE  
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# INTRODUCTION

## *A Call for Reclamation*

A RANGE OF ARAB LEADERS and institutions have recently signaled greater openness toward the state of Israel and Jews generally. The sultan of Oman has welcomed Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu and his government to Muscat and shown footage of the gathering on state television.<sup>1</sup> Saudi Arabia's crown prince has affirmed that "Palestinians and Israelis have the right to their own land."<sup>2</sup> Bahrain's king has denounced the Arab boycott of Israel, and the country's foreign minister has tweeted that Israel has the right to defend itself from Iranian aggression.<sup>3</sup> On Sudanese television, the country's minister of investment has praised Israel's "moral values" and called for civil partnership.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, Arab media voices have made the case for relations. "Why shouldn't we live in peaceful coexistence with Israel and cooperate with it?" asked Kuwaiti writer Abdullah al-Hadlaq in an interview on the Kuwaiti television channel al-Rai, citing the Jewish state's technological achievements and ancient roots.<sup>5</sup> "Whom do you stand with, Iran or Israel?" asked journalist Abdulrahman al-Rashed in the Saudi-owned daily *Asharq al-Awsat*—a rhetorical question for an audience dead-set against Iranian interventionism in Arab lands.<sup>6</sup> Among the region's largest educational and religious institutions, a few have begun to introduce a corrective to generations of incitement against Jews. Egypt's leadership, for example, has won acknowledgment for the beginnings of an effort to purge antisemitic textbook content.<sup>7</sup> The chief of Saudi Arabia's Muslim World League—the preeminent exporter of Islamic teachings globally—has repeatedly denounced the scourge of Holocaust denial as part of his broader outreach to Jewish communities in the West.<sup>8</sup>

This shift is generally understood to correlate with the convergence of interests between Israel and several Sunni Arab powers.<sup>9</sup> Iran, Shia militias, and Sunni Islamists threaten the Jewish state and Arab autocrats alike. Israeli and U.S. officials say that Israel's security sector now works with several Gulf states to counter common foes.<sup>10</sup> Israeli-Egyptian security ties have reportedly reached new heights.<sup>11</sup> In Washington and other foreign capitals, advocates for Sunni Arab powers openly engage Israel's supporters.<sup>12</sup> These partnerships clearly connect in some way to the wave of conciliatory messaging. Yet the nature of the connection is difficult to divine: is the new discourse more a reflection of political change or the result of a top-down information campaign to encourage it? If the latter is the case, then does the campaign aim to prepare Arab publics for a deeper relationship with Israel or to curry favor with foreign elites? What impact, in any event, has it had within the region—and will the activity grow, fade, net a backlash, or stir a breakthrough?

Whatever the answers, the new discourse amounts to an opportunity to challenge a destructive cultural legacy. For decades, Arab media, schools, and spiritual leaders have instilled the belief that Israel and “international Jewry” are a malignant force bent on destroying the region and must be eradicated. The climate of rejectionism has arguably claimed the life of an Egyptian president and constrained other Arab leaders inclined, like him, toward peace with Israel. It has blocked a “peace between peoples”—and the potential benefits of such ties—for the two Arab countries that maintain a treaty with the Jewish state. It has normalized a culture of scapegoating that went on to target other denominations. As a tool of blame deflection in every Arab country, it has obscured a sober discussion of homegrown problems and potential homegrown solutions. It has inspired sympathy for rogue states and terrorist groups that don the mantle of “resistance to Israel” and now wreak havoc across the Arab world and beyond. Each of these outcomes, in its own way, has also impeded prospects for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. Thus, an alternative to the rejectionist climate is urgently needed, both in Israel's immediate periphery and for the region as a whole. Should the warming trend in Arab public discussions deepen and take hold, it could meaningfully contribute to such a change. The trend therefore merits attention in its own right, with an eye to what policies outside actors could potentially adopt to strengthen it.

Trace hundreds of recent Arabic statements in favor of detente back to their authors, platforms, and context, and one finds more at play than the new posture of Arab leaderships. There is indeed a top-down pattern in Sunni autocracies: a statement of conciliation from a senior figure triggers accolades from some pro-government voices, primarily in news publications and social media, leading other writers with a reputation for floating trial balloons to suggest a further thaw. But these expressions also encounter bottom-up support: a growing strand in Arab youth culture regards Israelis and Jews generally as a legitimate and constructive force in the region and urges a peace between peoples. Similar views are manifest in countries that autocrats do not entirely control—principally Iraq, but also war-torn Libya, Syria, and Yemen, as well as democratic Tunisia. On social media, thousands have called for Israeli embassies in their respective capitals, expressed curiosity about their own countries' indigenous Jewish history, voiced support for civil cooperation with the Jewish state, and attempted to connect with Israeli citizens personally. A third cluster of action emanates from outside the Arab region: Israeli and American Jewish actors have developed their own capacity to engage Arab public discussions, breaching historical barriers of communication and movement. The U.S. and Israeli governments have assisted them. These three streams—top-down, bottom-up, and outside-in—interrelate and reinforce each other, creating a sense of momentum.

The public warming, however, is less than half the story. The culture of hostility toward Israel remains entrenched in the largest institutions of influence belonging to Sunni autocrats. It is manifest in teachers' and preachers' pushback against any high-level signal of change. It prompts a powerful reaction in Arabic media to any detentist content. It spurs the accusation of "Zionism" against dissidents and opposition forces of every stripe. Meanwhile, powerful rejectionist trends outside the Sunni establishments draw oxygen from the same regional shifts that have otherwise proved advantageous to Israeli-Arab ties. Consider rising animosity from Sunni populations toward Shia Muslims, stoked by the same threat of Iran and its proxies: Sunni jihadists are riding this wave. Sunni autocrats not only tolerate this; they lend the ideas a public space to muster their populations' fighting spirit. A prominent theme in the Sunni sectarian narrative links Iran and Shiism to Israel and Judaism—falsely alleging, for example, that Jerusalem and Tehran are secret allies, or that Shiism is a Jewish invention. In another trend, Iran's Arabic media and religious educational institu-

tions propagate a mirror image of the Sunni allegations—namely, that Sunni powers are aligned with Israel and Jews and therefore illegitimate. Sunni Islamists opposed to their countries' rulers do the same. Both seize on evidence of Sunni autocrats' accommodation with Jews to tar them as stooges.

In the shadow of this dynamic, the Arab peace camp faces a low glass ceiling. In most Arab countries, the only spaces where it can express itself regularly and systematically are some elite publications, read by a smidgeon of the population; television and other mass media remain primarily in the hands of their detractors. Even calls for rapprochement by Arab leaders are often omitted, deemphasized, or explained away by the very pan-Arab TV channels they own. As to the war-torn lands, their peace advocates face an assault by extremist militias and do not enjoy public support from their wobbly governments.

These countervailing trends raise the concern that positive changes now underway will amount to little more than a refinement of the “cold peace” paradigm. That is, amid shifting alliances in an interconnected world, autocrats do what they must to signal progress to foreign allies, thereby securing needed support, but avoid serious domestic cultural reform on Israel- and Jewish-related matters. They maintain the claim that a pan-Arab sea change is impossible without an Israeli-Palestinian settlement, while their Western allies maintain the hope that a settlement is possible without the sea change. The United States, in particular, tries hard to validate this hope, but does comparatively little to test the Arab claim.



**THIS MONOGRAPH ARGUES** that the United States and Israel enjoy an unprecedented opportunity to work with Arab partners to challenge the cold peace paradigm—by fostering a culture supportive of Arab-Israeli relations across the Middle East and North Africa. It calls for reaching terms and arrangements with several Arab states whereby their major tools of inculcation serve to promote a mindset of rapprochement. It counsels staunch support for Arab nongovernment actors wishing to confront the demonization of Jews and advocate partnership with Israel. It outlines steps to develop and scale those “outside-in” Arabic communications initiatives that have shown promise. It also envisions a drive to erode public sympathy for the rejectionist forces. It holds that these prescriptions, while not easy to implement, are both feasible and necessary—

for the sake of civil society in Arab lands, Israel's integration in the region, and Palestinian aspirations for a state. As the largest youth population in Arab history prepares to assume leadership in every sector of society and across many countries, new tools for mass engagement can enable knowledge to spread, ideas to evolve, and peoples to connect at unprecedented speeds. Ceding the infosphere to toxic teaching would bring further disaster, whereas nurturing salubrious trends can pave the way to peace.

Chapter 1, "The Story of a Cultural Tragedy," will show that while anti-semitism in the region dates back millennia, the past century's depths of animosity toward Israel and Jews reflects an aberrant strain, fueled in part by Western antisemitic impositions. It will also show that the more recent turn toward rapprochement enjoys its own indigenous pedigree. In this respect, the term "normalization," often used to mean fostering Arab-Israeli relations, has always been a misnomer. It more accurately describes the process by which modern Arab ideologues built on premodern prejudice to instill new and worse antisemitic norms. Thus, the current project is at heart a "reclamation" of the region's finer traditions. Paradoxically, moreover, the means by which Arab rejectionism spread offer lessons for a potential reclamation campaign. This chapter also notes that since the mid-twentieth century, when Washington emerged as a power broker in the Middle East, Israel's American supporters as well as opponents have been heard by Arab publics, spawning their own mixed informational legacy. Arab leaders, in striving to make sense of U.S. policies toward them, came to regard Israel's American supporters as part of a transnational force operationally intertwined with the Jewish state. A smart policy to warm relations must take this perception into account.

Chapter 2, "The Moroccan Anomaly," will show that even as the cold peace paradigm congealed across the region, one Arab country opted not to join in, but rather to pursue an increasingly public give-and-take with Israel and its diaspora Jewish supporters. Though short of a formal pact, Moroccan-Israeli ties exceeded diplomatic and security cooperation to include civil partnerships in culture, trade, investment, and myriad industries. In growing the relationship, the monarchy waged a proactive effort to build consent for it domestically through media, schools, and religious leadership, and weathered a backlash from "anti-normalization" activists. The approach, mutually benefiting Moroccans and Israelis and paying dividends to the Palestinians, drew vital assistance from the U.S. government and civil sector. Though constrained, problematic, and hard to replicate,

the “Moroccan model” nonetheless opened a door for other Arab countries to consider walking through. Over the past year, some establishment elites in other Arab countries have explicitly referred to the “Moroccan experience” of relations with Israel and called for drawing lessons from it.

Chapter 3, “Arab Origins of the Present Opportunity,” will trace the drivers of the new stance toward Israel taken by several Arab autocrats (“top-down”) as well as social trends, particularly among youth, that reinforce the shift (“bottom-up”). With respect to the former, it will show that Arab states’ accommodation of Israel and Jews derives from long-term, multi-sector needs and aspirations well beyond the war on Iran and Islamists. Their new approach, which has been building gradually, may amount to the beginnings of an adaptation of the “Moroccan model.” Next, a treatment of the bottom-up phenomenon will show that, notwithstanding widely held assumptions to the contrary, millions of Arabs welcome a relationship with Israel without delay. They wish to befriend, host, and visit Israelis, as well as enlist them in repairing the region. Their views appear to stem from broader cultural changes arising from the globalization of media, the failure of rejectionist politics, and a youthful impulse to rebel against authority. They also appear to have drawn inspiration from a class of reform-minded Arab movers who have been working subtly to nudge the discussion of Israel and Jews in a more positive direction. This grassroots constituency for peace presents its own set of opportunities, independent of those posed by Arab governments.

Chapter 4, “Communication from the Outside In: Israel and the United States,” will show, first, that Israelis have developed creative methods of public outreach to begin overcoming their history of isolation from Arab societies. A loose, sometimes fractious assembly of Israeli voices looms large in Arabic media. Other Israelis have waged campaigns of citizen diplomacy in Arab lands, registering further progress in the public discussion. Among them, several Jewish refugees from Arab lands, who together with their co-ethnics and offspring constitute a majority of Israel’s Jewish population, have played a special role in accessing the countries from which they fled. The section will then show how the United States has markedly contributed to the same regional conversation—as a government, a community of policymakers, and a global exporter of culture. U.S. government broadcasts more robustly advance an honest discussion of Israel and Jews. Government and nongovernment actors have forged direct partnerships with indigenous Arab media outlets, aiming

more generally to counter extremism and advance a culture of civil society and tolerance. American Jewish community organizations have also become a voice in Arab public discussions, through interfaith and other outreach efforts as well as their own nascent Arabic-language media. All these ventures offer channels through which American expertise in peace education, religious dialogue, and development media can find its way to Arab societies.

In sum, against tough odds, a critical mass in favor of reclamation has emerged. These findings challenge Arab establishment claims that a sea change is impossible without an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. They suggest, to the contrary, that further cultural progress—a necessary condition for such a settlement—should be pursued as an interim priority.

But chapter 5, “Obstacles to a Cultural Campaign,” will show that despite the growing promise, Arab supporters of reclamation are severely constrained. They face pressure within their societies, censure in their institutions, and intimidation by violent actors. U.S.-allied Arab governments have not granted them the support they need to overcome these obstacles, nor have outside powers developed a holistic strategy to assist them. Chapter 6, “A Plan for Reclamation,” will therefore lay out a vision to rectify this problem. It will outline roles for the United States, Israel, and their Arab allies as well as NGOs. It will suggest how to empower the Arab peace camp, grow outside efforts to engage it, and degrade rejectionist forces.

## PREMISES AND DEFINITIONS

Culture, in the pages to follow, refers to ideas, beliefs, and social traits that are widespread among people in a particular community at a given time. An intangible force, culture affects thinking and behavior. This study adopts the crucial premise that culture is not static but fluid, and proactive efforts to improve it have the potential, over time, to succeed.

### *Prioritizing Cultural Change*

Many factors influence culture. Ongoing attempts to foster partnership between Arabs and Israelis rightly include plans for economic cooperation and trade relations, human and infrastructure development, and safeguarding the region’s essential resources. Such work, when effectively implemented, carries the potential to foster a culture supportive of Arab-Israeli relations organically. The focus of this monograph, however, is the role

of information and communications in affecting culture by way of Arab schools, religious leadership, and media. As noted earlier, these are the primary realms through which a demonizing view of Israel and Jews has been instilled. Engaging these sectors is also necessary to ensure that the other forms of cooperation play their own positive roles. For example, an Arab-Israeli water desalination project does not influence public attitudes as long as news media ignore it and preachers persuade their flocks that “Zionists” are poisoning the drinking water. And without building public consent for the idea of such a project, implementing it proves difficult or unfeasible in much of the region to begin with.

Some discount the importance of public sentiment in autocratic environments as long as the public does not share in political power. But in light of the history of violent backlash to rapprochement noted earlier, a hawkish public can check a ruler inclined toward peace. All strata of society, moreover, are products of their culture, including the ruler and the state institutions he relies on to implement his policies. In this respect, culture is particularly important as some Sunni autocrats adopt a more conciliatory posture toward Israel: in order to act on their inclination, they need the support of their own workforce. Additionally, as suggested earlier, the choice to foster Arab-Israeli partnership is not governments’ alone to make. Indeed, a voluble minority of Arabs believe they should not have to wait for an official treaty before connecting with their Israeli neighbors. This trend requires its own public support in order to grow—an essential part of the larger sociopolitical equation.

Some view the goal of an Arab cultural sea change as unrealistic. They can be forgiven for doubting prospects to end Arab antisemitism in our time. But the “sea change” intended here is more discrete: it means supplanting the present imbalance, by which rejectionists intimidate and overwhelm the Arab peace camp in most institutions of society and state, with a more advantageous competitive environment—in which rejectionists have lost the standing to coerce, while the peace camp has won the sympathy and space to act.

The choice to focus on Arab cultural attitudes toward Israelis and Jews is not meant to imply that Israeli or Jewish cultural settings are free of anti-Arab or anti-Muslim prejudice. It simply reflects the depth and expanse of the former problem, attempting to treat it on its own terms.

## *Defining Key Vocabulary*

Reforming discourse is at heart in the craft of language. Thus, a definition of key vocabulary is in order, beginning with the word “antisemitism.” It refers in this study to certain cultural tropes with respect to Jews generally and others with respect to Israel and Israelis in particular.

With respect to Jews generally, antisemitism manifests as one or several of the following qualities: It holds that Jews should be not appraised as individuals but rather reviled as a community. It posits that wherever Jews reside, they are alien or aberrant to the society around them. It alleges that Jews conspire to corrupt, destroy, or enslave their “host societies” or the broader world. It features a “blood libel”—typically, the claim that Jews kidnap and murder the children of gentiles to use their blood in Jewish religious rituals. Finally, it denies or diminishes Jewish persecution by gentiles, or alleges that these tragedies were self-made. The most famous example of denial is the claim that the Holocaust did not happen. An Arab manifestation of the myth of self-created tragedy is the charge that Baghdadi Jewish activists bombed their own synagogues to scare their fellow Jews into fleeing en masse to Israel.<sup>13</sup>

With respect to Israel and Israelis in particular, antisemitism is distinct from reasoned criticism of Israeli government policies. It includes one or more of three qualities: It posits that the conflict with Israel is not political but rather existential, and can therefore only be resolved through total war and total defeat. It blurs the distinction between Israeli civilians on the one hand and Israeli nationals in their capacity as soldiers on the other. In doing so, it supports the case for terrorism. Finally, it infuses the critique of Israel with antisemitic tropes—as in those described above—or alleges an inherent Israeli evil rooted in Judaism, Jewish “genes,” or both.

Somewhere between the demonization of Jews and the critique of Israel lies a view called anti-Zionism, the demarcations of which are complicated by uncertainty about the meaning of Zionism. The word is used here to denote the baseline conviction that Jews identifying as a collective have the right to a national homeland on a piece of historical Palestine. As noted earlier, the same view was essentially espoused in 2018 by Saudi crown prince Muhammad bin Salman. Asked by an interviewer whether he believes “the Jewish people have a right to a nation-state in at least part of their ancestral homeland,” he replied, “I believe that each people, anywhere, has a right to live in their peaceful nation. I believe the Palestinians and the Israelis have the right to their own land.” Whereas criticism of Israeli policies is neither

anti-Zionist nor antisemitic, objection to the crown prince's statement—that is, denying Jews alone the right to a communal homeland—can amount to both. In the Arab world, hundreds of millions have been falsely taught that Zionism means coveting a stretch of land from the Nile to the Euphrates, or a plot to subjugate gentiles the world over.<sup>14</sup> They accordingly identify as anti-Zionists. But when exposed to the word's actual meaning, some discover that they are Zionists themselves. As this study will also show, the region's discourse features voices that strive to counter antisemitism in their midst, yet assert that they oppose Zionism. They do so for differing reasons, ranging from self-preservation to a principled rejection of *all* ideologies rooted in ethnicity or faith.<sup>15</sup> They too have a role to play in the larger campaign of reclamation.

As to “Arab rejectionism,” it is more a reflex than an ideology, informed by the cultural sensibilities examined here and encapsulated by the “three no’s” articulated during the Arab League’s 1967 summit in Khartoum: “no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it.”<sup>16</sup>

Finally, use of the word “Israeli” in this study bears clarifying. When not otherwise specified, it refers to any Israeli citizen, whether Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Druze, or Bahai.

### *Disentangling Palestinian and Pan-Arab Rejectionism*

This study primarily addresses Arab societies outside Palestine, while acknowledging the deep connection between the two with respect to feelings about Israel. A major driver of the pan-Arab rejectionist mindset is Israel’s military authority over millions of Palestinian civilians. Another is the culture of opposition to Israel among Palestinians, stoked by the conflict’s tragedies and exported to the region through teaching, preaching, broadcasting, and ordinary people traffic. The choice to focus here on pan-Arab rejectionism is not intended to diminish the importance of seeking a just resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, both for its own sake and to facilitate a regional settlement. But it reflects the belief that a Palestinian resolution will not on its own achieve the comprehensive peace to which Israelis and many Arabs aspire: in addition to the profound impact of the Palestinian issue on Arab attitudes toward Israel, a multigenerational, pan-Arab legacy of rejectionist inculcation, together with powerful institutions that continue to promulgate it, militates against a positive shift.

From a cultural standpoint, the needed remedies for the Palestinian dynamic overlap with but also differ from the challenge of countering rejec-

tionism in the broader region. That is, approaches that apply to one do not necessarily apply to the other. Thus, key areas of divergence between Palestinian and pan-Arab rejectionism bear noting as a point of departure.

To begin with, Palestinian attitudes toward Israelis and Jews are both inflamed and moderated by factors absent from most other Arab countries: inflamed by the grief of personal tragedy at the hands of Israeli force; moderated by the practical needs of coexistence. Arabs outside Palestine can more easily afford a maximalist attitude, as it is easier to despise Israelis one does not know and invite consequences one need not live with. But they can also afford to be more charitable, inasmuch as they do not bear the same scars: most Arab countries have never fought a war with Israel, and the major Arab-Israeli wars date back two generations or more.

Non-Palestinian Arab attitudes, meanwhile, are inflamed as well as moderated by their own distinctive features. On the one hand, as chapter 1 will show, the lens through which these Arabs view Israel and Jews is tainted by an antisemitic narrative that is neither a mere function of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict nor a mere echo of Palestinian rejectionism. It also served autocrats to justify their policies and Islamists to explain their aspirations. The lens must be cleaned in order to reveal Israel as it actually is. On the other hand, as indicated earlier, a growing number of Arab youth have grafted a kind of nostalgia onto their view of Israelis. On the eve of World War II, 900,000 Arabic-speaking Jews indigenous to the region lived in cities and villages from Casablanca to Kuwait City. They have all but vanished from the landscape. But their historical presence lives on in grandparents' memories and countless physical and cultural markers, from houses they left behind to enduring songs they wrote. In a trend to be described in chapter 3, Arab youth have been rediscovering and grappling with these vestiges—and with the fact that their living legacy resides, for the most part, in Israel.

Between the two divergent patterns, at some key moments in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, Palestinians largely supported a settlement while other Arab societies effectively pressured them to reject it.<sup>17</sup> At other junctures, Palestinians proved more hawkish than their Arab neighbors—a trend that appears to prevail today.<sup>18</sup> Opinion surveys within Israel, meanwhile, indicate that more Israelis support concessions to the Palestinians when Arabs outside Palestine agree to join the envisioned solution. The need to ensure that Arab publics consistently encourage Palestinians as well as Israelis to resolve their differences gives further cause to addressing the regional dynamic as a distinctive one.

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Part I

*A Fraught Legacy*



# THE STORY OF A CULTURAL TRAGEDY

SAMUEL TADROS and Amr Bargisi describe Arab antisemitism today as “a well-established social belief” that serves as “the glue binding an otherwise incoherent ideological blend, the common denominator among disparate parties.”<sup>1</sup> This condition is frequently attributed to a historically inevitable clash between modern Zionism and ancient antisemitic drivers. Negative ideas about Jews do appear in canonical Islamic teachings and classical Arabic literary tradition. These include derogatory stereotypes, memories and prophecies of war on Jews, and the legal principle that Jews and other minorities should receive only second-class “protected” status under Muslim rule. This last precept, applied continually though unevenly over centuries, invites the conviction that Jews in the region should never exercise sovereignty.<sup>2</sup>

Rewind to a time just beyond living memory, however, and one finds, to the contrary, a distinctly philosemitic trend, in which even Zionism enjoyed a space for public expression and a measure of prominent Arab Muslim support.

## ARAB PHILOSEMITISM, ARAB ZIONISM: GLIMPSES OF THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Witness celebrations in Egypt in May–June 1920, following news that the principles of the Balfour Declaration, calling for a “national homeland for the Jewish people” in Palestine, would be incorporated into the new British mandatory government. At an interfaith rally in Cairo’s Jewish quarter, Muslim participants shouted, “Long live the Jewish nation!” and Jews replied, “Long

live Free Egypt!”<sup>3</sup> In December 1922, more than five thousand Egyptians turned out to welcome Zionist Organization president Chaim Weizmann on an official visit. Subsequent rallies saw Jewish and Muslim notables appear under a photograph of Theodor Herzl, flanked by the flags of Egypt and the future state of Israel.<sup>4</sup> Zionism was espoused not only by some Anglophile Egyptians but also by some nationalists opposed to British rule: the intellectual Ahmad Zaki, remembered today as the “Sheikh of Arabism,” wrote, “The victory of Zionism is also the victory of my ideal.”<sup>5</sup> A Jewish private secretary to Saad Zaghloul, founder of Egypt’s liberal nationalist Wafd Party, also served as head of the country’s leading Zionist organization.<sup>6</sup> Anti-colonial activist Ahmed Lutfi el-Sayed, the first director of Cairo University, traveled to Jerusalem in 1918 to attend the opening of Hebrew University.<sup>7</sup>

A recurring formulation in the period’s Egyptian Zionist writings was that Jews are an indigenous people in the Middle East whose European brethren share their ancient connection to Palestine. This is evident in the December 1917 eulogy of two British soldiers of Jewish stock—Evelyn de Rothschild and Neil Primrose—published in the Cairo daily newspaper *al-Lataif al-Musawwara* after they died in General Allenby’s Jerusalem campaign: “They fell in battle in a land that is the homeland of their ancestors—one in which the children of Israel have always fought their enemies and the invaders of their land.”<sup>8</sup> Such was the cultural sensibility that enabled Egyptian Jews throughout the 1920s to launch public fund drives in support of European Jewish immigration to Palestine, as Egypt’s non-Jewish Zionists hailed the potential of this immigrant wave to help the economic development of the area.<sup>9</sup>

Similar ideals manifested themselves within the politics of Iraq. Consider the 1919 Faisal-Weizmann Agreement, cosigned by Chaim Weizmann and Prince Faisal bin Husayn of the short-lived Hashemite Kingdom of Hejaz, who would go on to reign in Iraq. They pledged cooperation in encouraging Jewish immigration to Palestine as well as helping the Arab residents of Palestine develop their own economy and resources.<sup>10</sup> “We will wish the Jews a most hearty welcome home,” the prince wrote.<sup>11</sup> Faisal signed the agreement at the request of his British patron, T. E. Lawrence (“of Arabia”), ahead of the 1919 Paris Peace Conference. Having done so did not compromise his subsequent sovereignty in Iraq: the governing base he found in Baghdad featured Muslims who also accepted the agreement, socially intermingled with an Iraqi Jewish population numbering 40 percent of the city.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the spirit of the accord found active expression in the Iraqi capital under

Faisal's rule. Local Zionists enjoyed the freedom to publish their own newspaper in Arabic and import teachers from Palestine to instruct their children in modern Hebrew.<sup>13</sup> They and their Muslim friends traveled to Palestine as students, professionals, and religious pilgrims.<sup>14</sup> While only a small proportion of Iraqi Jews immigrated to Palestine at the time, a larger number adopted Zionism as a philanthropic cause, even as other Jews rejected the ideology. In Baghdad as in Cairo, the majority culture did not force them to choose between sympathy for Zionism and loyalty to their native country: the most prominent Jewish supporter of the Faisal-Weizmann Agreement, Sassoon Heshel, was also the kingdom's first minister of finance and a member of Iraq's parliament until his death in 1932.<sup>15</sup>

To recall this largely forgotten history is not to diminish the opposing trend of Arab hostility to Jewish nationalism in the Middle East, which arose at the same time. It is rather to ask why one grew strong and the other weak. As Israel's adversaries in the region today use traditional Arabic and Islamic texts to make their arguments, Arab supporters of early Zionism could cite other portions of the same canon in making theirs. After all, Islam recognizes Judaism and its prophets as spiritual antecedents. Several traditions of the Prophet Muhammad testify to relationships with Jews based on trust and mutual respect.<sup>16</sup> Some classical Arabic literature features Jewish role models and heroes.<sup>17</sup> As to the region's indigenous antisemitism, moreover, scholars of the phenomenon generally agree that before modern times, it was "unquestionably...less malicious than traditional Christian anti-Judaism, in which Jews are represented as the murderers of God and the spawn of the devil."<sup>18</sup>

It took a series of aggressive cultural campaigns—alongside war and bloodshed yet to come—before "the latency of [Islamic] scriptural antisemitism would be activated into an operational state."<sup>19</sup>

## MODERN ARAB ANTISEMITISM: THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW NORMAL

In operational terms, modern Arab antisemitism congealed into a "well-established social belief...the glue binding an otherwise incoherent ideological blend" in three stages. First, as European colonialism gave way to Arab nationalism and the eventual rise of Arab nation-states, disparate antisemitic ideologues and parties reached a critical mass and hobbled their liberal rivals. Second, as dueling Arab governments and Islamist movements worked to homogenize the region in their image, both opted to institutionalize anti-

semitism in all of their communications platforms. Third, the “cold peace paradigm” evolved: Arab governments striving to moderate their policies toward Israel faced blowback from the rejectionist forces they had shaped or enabled, and acceded to those forces as a cultural driver in their own right.

### *Stage 1: The Rise of a Critical Mass (1840–1952)*

Between the mid-nineteenth century and the Second World War, Western antisemitic tropes and fascist politics were imported to the region by locals who admired them. The colonization of Arab Muslim lands by European empires had spurred, among the subject peoples, a feeling of defeat and a hunger for explanations and remedies. The Western Christian image of the cunning, diabolical Jew proved useful in this discussion: It resonated with the “conspicuous overachievement of [indigenous] Jews under colonialism.”<sup>20</sup> It also enabled numerous Arab Christian graduates of European schools, who helped import European antisemitism, to climb the ranks of Arab nationalist movements alongside Muslims at the expense of their Jewish neighbors.<sup>21</sup> In the 1920s, the relationship between Zionism and British colonialism spawned a further popular reaction, lending appeal to Nazism and Italian fascism “as powerful alternative models to the democratic liberalism of [the] British and French colonial powers.”<sup>22</sup> Arab nationalists ultimately discovered a material interest as well in tarring all the area’s indigenous Jews as “Zionists,” regardless of their actual political beliefs: the chance to confiscate their formidable assets, which has been estimated at 62,000 square miles of land and more than \$364 billion in 2018-adjusted dollars.<sup>23</sup> This impulse would find formal expression in a decree by the Arab League’s Political Committee in May 1948—following the declaration of Israel’s statehood—aiming “to govern the legal status of Jewish residents of Arab League countries.” It called for freezing their assets to finance “resistance to Zionist ambitions in Palestine.”<sup>24</sup> (The mass dispossession and exodus of nearly all Jews from these countries occurred in waves, mostly over the twenty-five-year period between 1949 and 1974.<sup>25</sup>)

A partner in these developments was *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the notorious Russian forgery of a purported Jewish plot to enslave the world. A Syrian Christian nationalist published the first known Arabic edition of the book in Cairo in 1927 or 1928.<sup>26</sup> Its early enthusiasts included fascist parties in Egypt and the Levant, such as the Young Egypt Party, established in 1933.<sup>27</sup> The book’s most prolific devotee during the period was the Mufti of Jerusalem, Palestinian nationalist leader Hajj

Amin al-Husseini, who committed it to memory. In his speeches and writings, Husseini interwove *Protocols* excerpts with traditional Islamic texts—fusing, for example, the *Protocols*' allegations of Jewish bloodlust with the Islamic prophecy of slaying Jews at the end of days.<sup>28</sup> Over the years between the Hebron massacre of 1929 and the Arab revolt of 1936–39, he narrated his local conflict with Zionists as the decisive battle in a larger war that Jews had started centuries earlier to destroy Islam. He proceeded to export this message beyond Palestine. In May–June 1941, residing in Baghdad and aligned with the short-lived pro-Nazi government of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani, he used a local radio station to directly incite the Farhud, a pogrom claiming over 180 Jewish lives. The incident, in pressing the case for Jews to flee, has been described as the beginning of the end of 2,600 years of Jewish history in Iraq. From November 1941 to the end of the Second World War, residing primarily in Berlin, the Mufti served as the Arabic voice of the Axis powers on Nazi radio, which aired across the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>29</sup>

What this new brand of antisemitism imperiled most was not Zionism, which drew strength from the inflow of Arabic-speaking Jews to Israel, but rather liberalism and civil society in Arab lands. At a time of sweeping upheaval and transition, the Islamized *Protocols* taught Arabs that problems large and small were beyond their ability to solve because a vastly more powerful force—global Jewry—lay behind them.<sup>30</sup> It disparaged public deliberation as futile and stigmatized nascent civil institutions as suspect. It equipped conservative elements opposed to women's empowerment, labor organizing, and other progressive causes with a bludgeoning device: allege the “elders of Zion” had created them.<sup>31</sup> Jews had indeed been a force for social progress in those Arab countries that let them participate in urban life, and so their vanishing dealt a further blow to Arab liberalism. Local fascists meanwhile served as a pressure group targeting liberal parties. Witness the Young Egypt Party's “Green Shirts,” armed with bricks and bats as well as the *Protocols*, who strove to intimidate the liberal Wafd Party in the 1930s.<sup>32</sup>

Though the Mufti lost Palestine, Gaylani lost Iraq, and fascism did not ascend in Arab lands by name, the essential project to which they all contributed—the weaponization of Arab antisemitism—found a legion of heirs, while liberals found few allies. The Wafd Party's fate in the early twentieth century reflects this turn. Wafdists led Egypt's struggle for independence from Britain and committed themselves to governing under a

constitutional monarchy. But the Egyptian king, in consort with a lingering “British Residency,” deprived them of powers to which they were entitled, while the public blamed them for the failings of a government they did not truly control. Their weakness only enhanced the rising appeal of the Islamism of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Arabism of Gamal Abdul Nasser’s Free Officers Movement, both of which embraced the Mufti’s brand of antisemitism.<sup>33</sup> The 1952 army coup in Egypt set in motion a seismic parting: pan-Arabists took Cairo in all its glory, Islamists fled to new patrons in oil-rich Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, and liberals, orphaned by the West, went home and locked their doors.

### *Stage 2: Institutionalization (1953–81)*

The second stage in antisemitism’s regional ascent saw Arab governments and Islamists demonize Israel and Jews systematically via broadcast transmitters, textbooks, and pulpits. As young nation-states launched information operations to mold popular culture, a new distinction emerged between the monopolistic top-down messaging of autocrats, bottom-up campaigns by rival social movements, and Israeli attempts to convey a Jewish voice in Arabic from the “outside in.” A further factor of consequence, as the assessment to follow will also show, was the role of Western governments, particularly the United States, in tolerating and at times abetting the institutional spread of antisemitism—both the pan-Arabist and Islamist varieties—driven in part by Cold War realpolitik.

In dating this stage from the start of Egyptian one-party rule in 1953 to the assassination of President Anwar Sadat twenty-eight years later, one encounters three Arab-Israeli wars and a debate over the extent to which antisemitism fueled them, grew out of them, or both.<sup>34</sup> But viewed from an Arab presidential palace at the time, both the wars and their polemics played into a larger game of statecraft—in which inter-Arab conflict tended to take precedence over other struggles and Israel often served as a wedge issue among rival factions. This statecraft, in turn, guided Arab leaders’ top-down cultural policies.

Take Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser, whose brand of socialist revolutionary pan-Arabism held sway in the 1950s and 1960s. He aimed to build on anti-colonialist and anti-Western sentiment to foment military coups yielding republican client-states, if not a pan-Arab superstate, on the ashes of his opponents across the Middle East and North Africa. Targets included pro-Western monarchs in Iraq, Libya, Jordan, Yemen, and, for a

time, Saudi Arabia; and the French North African colonies of Algeria and Tunisia.<sup>35</sup> Success hinged on whether enough locals in each country proved willing to fight their ruler, and therefore entailed a campaign of mass persuasion. In his outreach to the region, Nasser appealed to the same impulse that had drawn Arab followers to Nazism and Italian fascism “as powerful alternative models to the democratic liberalism of [the] British and French colonial powers.”<sup>36</sup> He imported Johann von Leers, a former deputy to Nazi Reich minister of propaganda Joseph Goebbels, to advise on information operations.<sup>37</sup> The advice apparently called for appropriating the narrative of total war on Jews that the Mufti had transmitted from Berlin on Nazi radio, *Protocols* and all. Voice of the Arabs, a station airing region-wide from Cairo, featured Nasser as the hero, “Jewish bloodsuckers” as the arch-enemy, and a rotation of Western and Arab foils. Its cocktail of incitement, entertainment, and Egypt-centric patriotic music proved compelling: in every Arab republic that arose in those years, or saw successive military coups—Algeria, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen—supporters of the new regime credited Voice of the Arabs with galvanizing their struggle.<sup>38</sup> “It has to be heard to be believed,” wrote Middle East historian Charles Issawi of the channel during its heyday. “For sheer venom, vulgarity, and indifference to truth it has few equals in the world.”<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps more surprising than the presence of von Leers in an Egyptian studio was that the broadcasting equipment had been a gift from the U.S. government. A senior Central Intelligence Agency officer, to boot, asserted in his memoirs that he had helped produce Voice of the Arabs shows.<sup>40</sup> In the 1950s, Washington had been taking pains to befriend nascent post-colonial states, in part for fear of losing them to the Soviet Union. Beyond providing Egypt with weapons and communications technology, President Dwight Eisenhower intervened on Nasser’s behalf against Britain, France, and Israel in the 1956 Suez war, forcing a withdrawal that enabled Nasser to claim victory. Nasser joined the Soviets nonetheless, and Eisenhower came to regret his support for Egypt.<sup>41</sup> The CIA officer, Miles Copeland, lamented in retrospect that the broadcast he helped establish had joined the chorus of pro-Soviet propaganda that vilified the United States regularly. Yet for an Arabic speaker, Copeland manifested remarkable indifference to the broader cultural legacy for which he had claimed some responsibility.<sup>42</sup> (To be sure, whatever role he played in stoking Arab antisemitism was marginal compared to the systemic Jew-baiting of Soviet information operations in the region over decades.)

The lasting impact of Nasser's outreach lay as much in the depth of his information operations as in the expanse. Consider Egypt's interior, where *Voice of the Arabs* was joined on air by Egypt-only broadcasts—some designed for villagers and rural migrants, others for the urban elite.<sup>43</sup> By 1960, the government had shut down or nationalized the last of the private newspapers and deployed a radio and loudspeaker to every army base and shantytown. Religious broadcasting, heard via loudspeaker in villages, featured superior Quranic chanting from Cairo, which served to draw listeners away from village clerics and into the fold of Nasserist radio preachers.<sup>44</sup> A new public school system was fashioned as a factory of Nasserist rote learning.<sup>45</sup> The country's leading artists worked to retell the same narrative on stage and screen. The state, in sum, built a national information monopoly—a “single voice,” in Arab political parlance—proving it was possible to impose the hardware as well as the software of modern dictatorship on a traditional Arab society. Nasser's Arab client-states went on to build single-voice machines of their own, and a large swath of each society assimilated the same Manichaean worldview. This single-voice mindset, stunted by the denial of critical thinking skills at school, would prove vulnerable to manipulation by rival actors that later played to the same themes.

The second major institutionalizers of Arab antisemitism—Islamist forces, embodied initially by the Muslim Brotherhood—began to hone their capacities outside government in opposition to Nasserism. But several of the states Nasser sought to depose, notably Saudi Arabia, offered the movement a haven and a role in their schools, mosques, and media. After Israel defeated an Egypt-led coalition of armies in the 1967 war, Nasserist bombast lost its luster and *Voice of the Arabs* its credibility. Arab republics meanwhile failed to deliver on the promise of social justice for their populations. The Brotherhood won an opening to claim that its reading of Islam, and not socialism, offered the only path to pan-Arab victory at home and abroad.<sup>46</sup> The movement's narrative of Muslim good and Jewish evil, though distinct from Nasserism in its emphasis on religion, drew lifeblood from the same early twentieth-century sources. Arabs who had internalized modern antisemitism through single-voice machines now welcomed an ideology that assailed the same enemy while playing to the religiosity of their ancestors.<sup>47</sup>

Again, the Cold War gave a lift to the indoctrination, as new powers adopted the same logic that had led Arab kingdoms to support Islamists against socialism. Egyptian president Sadat permitted the Muslim Brother-

hood to return to public life in Egypt through charitable work and political activity, intending for the group to serve as a counterweight to his leftist opposition. As before, in the country of its birth, the Brotherhood freely promulgated its ideas through teaching, preaching, and publishing.<sup>48</sup> In 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan brought Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the United States together to fund, train, and arm Islamists against the Soviet occupation. While the United States focused on military dimensions of the plan, it acquiesced to Saudi steering of the ideological component. In a well-known turn, Saudis launched a massive campaign to attract Arab and other Muslims to fight alongside Afghans. They enlisted the *Protocols* as well, as attested by video sermons from Afghanistan by the Palestinian Brotherhood preacher Abdullah Azzam, dubbed and distributed in most Arab countries. He portrayed Soviet atheism as a cloak for the “elders of Zion,” linked the occupation of Afghanistan to an Israeli expansionist agenda, and called for using the Afghan jihad as a springboard to attack Jews anywhere—as well as Western countries and their Arab allies.<sup>49</sup>

Azzam, himself a beneficiary of Saudi asylum and largesse, spread his message through the institutions of the “Sahwa” (Islamic awakening), the Saudi-backed movement that reconciled Brotherhood teachings with indigenous Saudi Salafi strands. Supported by the Mecca-based Muslim World League and Jeddah-based World Assembly of Muslim Youth, Saudi-backed mosques and schools around the world purveyed print, cassette, and video learning and employed the clerics to riff on it.<sup>50</sup> The Sahwa meanwhile served to counter a new Shia Islamist enemy—after Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution produced a further oil-rich machinery of propagation. Not only did the two feuding forces rely on antisemitism to sell themselves; they also used it to incriminate each other. Saudis, according to Iran-backed preachers, ran “yeshivot” (Jewish religious schools), not madrasas;<sup>51</sup> the Tehran regime, said Saudi clerics, represented a Shia-Jewish alliance.<sup>52</sup>

That, in short, is the story of three decades of mechanized slander. Saudi intellectual Abd al-Hamid Hakim, a present-day advocate of relations with Israel, summed it up in 2017 as “the joint legacy of Nasserism and political Islam in its Sunni and Shia varieties, which implanted—for pure political reasons—the culture of hatred of the Jews and denial of their historical rights in the region.”<sup>53</sup> As noted earlier, the period also saw the dispossession and mass exodus of most of the region’s Arabic-speaking Jewish population. Their departure, in effect, severed millions of neighborly bonds that had helped mitigate antisemitism in the more distant past.<sup>54</sup> Those Jews

who strove to remain in Arab countries lowered their heads—resigned to their exclusion from teaching, publishing, or any of the roles they used to play in the Arab infosphere.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the immense pressure of Arab rejectionism as a cultural force, the old strand in Arab politics that had favored accommodation with Israel still found some expression during this period. Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba's 1965 speech in Jericho provides the boldest example to emerge from the Arab republics before Egyptian president Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem in 1978. Bourguiba called on Palestinian refugees to abandon "chimerical hopes and sterile hatreds" in favor of a two-state settlement based on the United Nations partition plan of 1947.<sup>56</sup> He framed the prescription as an interim strategic choice—a step on the road to the eventual defeat of Israel. Yet the mere suggestion of a treaty sparked demonstrations across the region, undoubtedly sanctioned by their host governments, in which protestors burned Bourguiba in effigy. It also spawned a diplomatic crisis, leading the Tunisian leader to temporarily break off ties with the Arab League as well as Nasser's Egypt.<sup>57</sup> The incident provided an early indication of the cost of bucking the culture of rejectionism. The fact that even Tunisians marched against the speech—including government workers—more specifically highlighted the difficulty an Arab leader would face in enlisting his own people and institutions in any move toward peace.<sup>58</sup> The same problem later manifested itself in a bitter irony of Sadat's Jerusalem visit: touring the World Holocaust Remembrance Center (Yad Vashem), he would rely, for supportive coverage at home, on a state media establishment that had been schooled by a Nazi. (Egyptian state media referred to the Yad Vashem visit only in passing, without explaining what the site was.<sup>59</sup>)

The only Middle East media institution that lent steadfast support to the Arab peace camp was the one that broadcast to Arab countries from the "outside in": the Voice of Israel's Arabic service. Its ramshackle origins predate Israel's founding by a decade, when Zionist paramilitaries used low-band transmitters to send short advisory messages to Palestinian Arab civilians in harm's way. These efforts were manned primarily by Arabic-speaking Sephardic Jews native to Jerusalem—a circle that included Yitzhak Navon, a future president of Israel. They became the foundations of Israel's first official Arabic broadcasts in 1949. The content initially did not exceed brief local news dispatches, scarcely heard beyond Ramallah. But the 1950s brought new professional and technical capacities: in 1951, a group of seasoned Iraqi Jewish political journalists arrived with the mass

airlifts from Baghdad. So did nearly all members of the Iraqi National Radio Orchestra, which had for years been the most popular ensemble on Arab airwaves. In 1957, most of Egypt's best-known Jewish actors and dramatists, as well as Egyptian Jewish musicians, joined the exodus to Israel that followed the Suez war. In 1958, the gift of a powerful radio transmitter arrived from Washington—compliments of the Eisenhower administration, newly chastened for having equipped Nasser with similar machinery. At 1,600 kilohertz, it enabled the Voice of Israel to reach shortwave receivers from Morocco in the west to Pakistan in the east, from Armenia in the north to Ethiopia in the south. Thus boosted and equipped, the broadcast served as the Arabic voice for Israel's public debate with Nasserism, as well as the country's only tool of public diplomacy in the region.<sup>60</sup>

With respect to the public diplomacy function, weekly performances by the Voice of Israel Arabic Orchestra, made up of the exiled Iraqi and Egyptian players, sent a poignant reminder of the depth of connection between citizens of Israel and the region's creative soul.<sup>61</sup> Hourly news broadcasts, committed to honest and accurate reporting, offered an antidote to Nasser's Voice of the Arabs. (They ran every hour on the half-hour, so as to rebut the top-of-the-hour claims on Nasser's station.) The contrast in credibility grew especially stark after June 1967, when Voice of the Arabs anchor Ahmed Said pretended that Israel was losing the war against Nasser and his allies. Avid listeners to the Voice of Israel included Palestinian refugees in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. They tuned in especially to hear their relatives in Israel proper—and later the West Bank and Gaza—send out personal greetings. The station lent them this platform, both as a humanitarian gesture and in a bid for ratings, until the advent of telephones in the camps in 1975.<sup>62</sup>

This suite of content built Israel's audience, in turn, for stinging barbs at Nasser and his ideology, lodged through political commentary and laced into radio plays. Iraqi emigre Shaul Menashe, who led this charge as anchor, countered the trademark bombast of Voice of the Arabs announcer Ahmed Said in a wry tone tinged with dark humor. A case in point was a memorable exchange between the two over six days of historic war in June 1967. Said had declared that Umm Kulthum, Cairo's queen of Arab song, had "an appointment in Tel Aviv to sing for Egyptian soldiers." After Egypt's defeat, Menashe replied that Umm Kulthum "is warmly invited to Tel Aviv to sing to her country's prisoners of war."<sup>63</sup> Menashe also took pains to show that while Israel opposed Nasserist pan-Arabism, it extended

a hand in friendship to the peoples of the region and any leaders inclined toward peace. Two years before President Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem, Menashe had already begun to characterize him on air as a man who sought peace. Nasserist anchor Ahmed Said had meanwhile relocated to Libya, where strongman Muammar Qadhafi granted him the use of his own pan-Arab broadcast to incite against Sadat.<sup>64</sup> Menashe proved to be the Egyptian president's biggest booster away from home.<sup>65</sup>

In hindsight, Voice of Israel broadcasts invite questions of strategic judgment. Did the station's support for Sadat help coax him toward peace and build his support base, or did it amount to a "kiss of death"—that is, enable Sadat's enemies to tar him through "guilt by association"? Did the biting style with which Shaul Menashe disparaged Nasser actually weaken the Egyptian leader in the public eye, as Menashe would have intended, or did it inspire even greater solidarity with him? In the latter event, did the hard-hitting political commentary on Voice of Israel compromise the more convivial outreach of its public diplomacy, such as the musical programming? The Israeli government worked to test such questions with the means at its disposal—gaining insight, for example, from public statements in the region reacting to the broadcasts and a few discreet opinion surveys in some countries.<sup>66</sup> But the available evidence did not suffice to reach definitive answers.

The larger picture, however, is easy enough to trace. Between the rise of Nasserist one-party rule and the assassination of Sadat, toxic messaging via media, schools, and pulpits had grown so pervasive that no single curative broadcast, whatever its merits, could expect to stem the tide. What success the Voice of Israel did enjoy, moreover, was due to a qualitative edge that could not be sustained: its staff of first-rate journalists, musicians, and dramatists schooled in the cultural capitals of the Arab world would not be replenished by a new stream of Jewish refugees from Arab lands. Nor could its powerful transmitter, capable of going head-to-head with rivals as long as the region's dominant medium remained radio, compete in the realm of terrestrial television, for which local transmitters within Arab countries were necessary.



IN CAPPING this treatment of "stage two" in rejectionism's ascent, a brief departure is warranted from the physical territory of the Middle East to the informational environment of the United States, which began to play its own role in Arabic discourse as it emerged as a regional power broker in the mid-twentieth century.

In 1950s Washington, when deliberation over foreign policy was more narrow and centralized than it is today, Arab leaders seeking allies within the U.S. government found friends among Arabists, a tightly knit community largely rooted in the historical waves of American Protestant missionary work in the Levant.<sup>67</sup> Bilingual, bicultural, and mostly opposed to Zionism, they proved adept as communicators in American as well as Arab public discussions—and prescient in recognizing a relationship between the two. One group that served as a connecting point, American Friends of the Middle East (AFME), was a CIA-funded information operation run by Arabists that launched in 1951. On U.S. soil, AFME speakers and publications countered Israel’s American supporters—aiming, they said, to “break the back of Zionism in the United States.”<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, in Arab countries and Iran, the organization participated in anti-Zionist student activism and told Arab publics that a large swath of Americans shared their views about Israel.<sup>69</sup> They also convened Christian-Muslim dialogue events in Arab countries, sponsored exchange programs, and, in the tradition of nineteenth-century American missionaries to the Near East, helped construct or rebuild institutions of learning and development in the region. They hoped through this spread of projects to bridge a gap in U.S.-Arab relations.<sup>70</sup>

Though most American Arabists took pains to distinguish their anti-Zionist stance from antisemitism, they also manifested a degree of comfort with cultural spaces in the region where antisemitism prevailed. (CIA officer Miles Copeland’s involvement with Nasser’s broadcast *Voice of the Arabs* provides an obvious example.) Nor did they work particularly hard to dissuade their Arab partners from perceiving U.S. foreign policy camps as divided along ethno-religious lines—not an altogether faulty perception at the time, to be sure. Arab establishments projected their enmity toward Israel onto Jews in the United States, while a crude divide in Washington placed Arabists and American supporters of Israel in opposing camps.

Over the three decades that followed, U.S. foreign policy deliberation decentralized and dispersed over a larger community of think tanks, commercial interests, advocacy groups, and lobbyists. Yet the same essential contest remained in place. It influenced the staffing of nascent institutions and overshadowed a range of Middle East and North Africa policy issues unrelated to the Arab-Israeli conflict *per se*.<sup>71</sup> This polarization would persist even as the interests of numerous Arab states and Israel began to converge within the region. Anti-Zionists in Washington maintained the human network and expeditionary skills to engage Arab institutions on

their native soil. They also maintained the friendship of Arab establishments that found them politically useful. Pro-Israel Americans, by contrast, lacked an equivalent expeditionary capacity, and faced continuing demonization by the region's single-voice machines. This imbalance only added to the sharpening climate.

### *Stage 3: The Wages of Cold Peace (1983–2014)*

A telling moment in the third stage of Arab rejectionism's ascent occurred in 1994, upon the Kingdom of Jordan's signing of a peace accord with Israel. An Israeli television crew paid a visit to Jordan and produced a news segment highlighting the contrast between the welcome its members received in the palace and their visit to a working-class neighborhood in Amman. It showed that when a cameraman tried to approach locals near a mosque, they shrank back, and one called out from a distance: "Go talk to the government. Between you and us there is only the language of weapons."<sup>72</sup> Insight as to the kinds of conversations that might have been taking place off-camera could be gleaned, later that year, from a sermon by Bassam al-Amoush, a prominent Jordanian Islamist preacher who would eventually serve as a cabinet minister: "A guy in the mosque asked me, 'If I see a Jew in the street in Amman, shall I kill him?' I told him, 'Why do you even ask? After you kill him, come back and tell me. What do you want—that I should give you a fatwa? Good deeds do not require one.'"<sup>73</sup>

The term "cold peace" commonly refers to frozen human relations between citizens of Israel and the Arab countries that formally recognize it. The term also suits a broader dynamic. President Sadat's 1978 visit to Jerusalem presaged a larger migration of Arab powers to the U.S. orbit after the fall of Soviet communism, and reflected Arab states' growing resignation to Israeli military superiority. These factors on their own militated in favor of diplomatic settlements. But the slaying of Sadat in 1981—motivated, the assassin said, by the president's pact with Israel<sup>74</sup>—confirmed what Arab leaders could easily intuit: that an Arab society could punish its leadership for conciliation. Decades of anti-American discourse had meanwhile led Arab publics to superimpose their views of European colonial powers and Israel onto the United States, making Arab government alliances with Washington domestically unpopular.<sup>75</sup> Thus, Arab leaders accommodating Israel or partnering with its U.S. ally strove to balance the satisfaction of their foreign partners with the appeasement of their own populations. Within their borders, they

opened a space for a range of social movements—including civic actors in Egypt and Jordan and violent actors or their benefactors in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf—to operate against Israel unilaterally. On the international stage, rulers vowed to continue their own struggle against Israel “by other means,” meaning various forms of political pressure.<sup>76</sup> Their ability to project this stance while maintaining the advantages they sought from Washington or Jerusalem depended on the extent to which their foreign partners found the arrangement understandable and tolerable. Arab leaders apparently convinced themselves, meanwhile, that this balancing act was tenable domestically. That is, they adopted the view that however much the culture of rejectionism metastasized and took aim at them, they could still deflect the blowback and survive. In hindsight, given the Arab Spring’s toll in autocrats, one may argue that they had deluded themselves.<sup>77</sup>

Egyptian nongovernment actors—mainly Islamists and their erstwhile rivals on the Nasserist left—came together to develop the cultural tools to block civil engagement with Israelis. The Camp David Accords’ stipulation that Egypt join Israel in establishing “relations normal to states at peace with one another”—including “cultural and economic relations”<sup>78</sup>—triggered a public information campaign against the concept of “normalization.” Rejectionists argued that ties with Israel and other Jews were inherently abnormal. For example, when supporters of the accords tried initially to promote economic partnership as a potential boon to Egyptians, the Muslim Brotherhood responded with books like *Normalization: The Zionist Strategy to Penetrate Arab and Islamic Lands*—alleging that Israel aimed to subjugate the region economically.<sup>79</sup> After proponents of the treaty conveyed the hope that Egypt’s exiled Jewish population or their descendants would now return to invest in the country, the Nasserist strand in Egypt’s entertainment industry worked hard to refute them. Witness the TV serial *al-Mal wal-Banoun* (Money and Children), in which an Egyptian Jew arrives in Cairo with his savings after the Camp David Accords. He acquires property—but only to wreak vengeance on Egypt by evicting tenants, building brothels, and flooding the city with drugs.<sup>80</sup> Hundreds of such Islamist and Nasserist cultural impositions effectively stigmatized the idea of normalization. The same activists also worked to punish Egyptian “normalizers”—those who deigned to engage Israelis—by targeting them in the media and ousting them from the syndicates of their respective professions, where rejectionists held sway.<sup>81</sup>

Some Egyptians who lived through the early years of peace with Israel recall an initial strain of hope in Egypt that the Camp David Accords would indeed pay dividends to the population. Despite generations of antisemitic indoctrination, they observe, the taboo on normalization had not been a foregone conclusion: instilling it required both an aggressive informational campaign and government acquiescence to the effort.<sup>82</sup> President Hosni Mubarak did more than acquiesce: he permitted government institutions to abet the “anti-normalizers” and enacted further cultural policies that strengthened them—all while deflecting any responsibility for popular hostilities toward Israel. Egyptian schools and seminaries developed new textbooks that denigrated normalization as early as elementary school.<sup>83</sup> The security sector continued to cite *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in educational programs for soldiers and police, even as Egyptian-Israeli security cooperation became routine and mutually beneficial.<sup>84</sup> For that matter, the Egyptian government and its media surrogates used the charge of “normalization” to sully Western democratic development NGOs active in Egypt as part of an effort to weaken them. Mubarak also welcomed the inflow of Salafi ideological capital from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf—a further driver of antisemitism, together with other forms of chauvinism<sup>85</sup>—and granted some Islamists a platform on state television. In 2002, state TV debuted the thirty-episode drama *Horseman Without a Horse*, a pseudo-history based on the *Protocols*. The show alleged a “peaceful Zionist invasion of all the countries of the world, with a malicious serpent as its symbol...includ[ing] an economic invasion which weakens these countries and uses all methods of violence and depletion.”<sup>86</sup>

Yet in Mubarak’s public communication with Israel, he insisted that Egyptian rejectionism was solely a function of Israeli rhetoric or behavior, or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For example, in an Israeli television interview with Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich in 1998, Mubarak said, “*You* have created a climate of distrust...[On the Egyptian side] there is no problem. Our only problem is that we want peace and stability in the region and cooperation among the peoples of the region...*You* are deepening the hostility between the Egyptian and Israeli peoples [emphasis added].”<sup>87</sup>

As with prior Egyptian political innovations, Egypt’s anti-normalization activism and discourse inspired others across the region. After Jordan signed its own pact with Israel, the political tools pioneered by Egyptian Islamists and Nasserists spread to their Jordanian counterparts. The Egyptian government’s doublespeak found an echo as well in Arab governments

that adopted more modest arrangements with the Jewish state—notably Qatar, which for a time after the 1993 Oslo Accords permitted an Israeli “commercial interest section” in Doha.<sup>88</sup> Even in countries where no stride toward an open peace was in the offing, such as Algeria, local actors adopted Egyptian-style rhetoric to wage a preemptive strike against normalization. Such efforts were typically provoked by heightened government ties with the United States, rumors of government contact with Israel, or evidence of a gesture by officialdom toward Jews in general.<sup>89</sup> For example, in an interview with the Algerian daily *al-Fadjr*, Khaled bin Ismail, head of the Coordinating Council Against Normalization in Algeria, warned that if the government opened long-dormant local synagogues to visitors, it could enable the “Zionist penetration of Algeria.”<sup>90</sup>

The use of these tactics mushroomed at a time when all Arab states were facing a new kind of pressure to reaffirm their fidelity to rejectionist ideals. The advent of satellite television in the 1990s breached autocrats’ control over their domestic infospheres, and the mass appeal of new pan-Arab channels led to the withering of states’ “single-voice machines.”<sup>91</sup> Political elites across the region felt pricked in particular by Qatar’s Al Jazeera, which projected loyalty to the struggle against Israel and accused Arab states of betraying it. The channel lent a pervasive pan-Arab megaphone to the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots, as well as to giants of Nasserism—such as Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, Nasser’s longtime political advisor, who hosted a weekly talk show. Iran-backed channels, led by Shia Hezbollah’s al-Manar, took aim at nearly all Sunni Arab leaders—either explicitly, by dubbing them cowards or stooges, or implicitly, by portraying Hezbollah to Sunni populations as a lone torchbearer of “resistance.”<sup>92</sup>

As more autocrats joined the fray with pan-Arab satellite channels of their own, they strove to outdo one another and occasionally partner together in striking the same antisemitic chords—a phenomenon that made for unlikely bedfellows. Consider Saudi-owned MBC, a network of news, entertainment, religious, and sports channels with the largest collective audience in the region. In 2010, it debuted a thirty-episode historical epic called *Suqut al-Khilafa* (Fall of the Caliphate), about a series of purported Jewish conspiracies to bring down the Ottoman Empire.<sup>93</sup> MBC paid Qatar’s Echo Media to produce it.<sup>94</sup> The network granted Hezbollah’s al-Manar the rights to re-air it.<sup>95</sup> The network meanwhile dismissed the concern, expressed by some entertainment critics in the region, that the show promoted the Islamism of Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan. (The

script, lionizing the Ottoman sultans, signaled repeatedly that the empire should be revived.<sup>96</sup>) Only seven years later, the Saudi government had imposed a blockade on Qatar, designated Hezbollah a terrorist organization, and threatened sanctions on Turkey, accusing Ankara of adopting a neo-Ottoman “expansionist policy.”<sup>97</sup> Yet it had effectively provided material support to the information operations of all three.

While the Arab infosphere grew ever more saturated with demonic portrayals of Israel and Jews, the Jewish state’s capacity to respond effectively from the “outside in” atrophied. The Voice of Israel Arabic Service still aired, now on television as well as radio. But staffing underwent a qualitative change as emigres from Arab lands grew older and retired. Younger voices who had spent little time beyond Israel and the Palestinian areas—a combination of Israeli Arabs, Druze, and second-generation Israeli Jews—strained to build a relationship with a pan-Arab audience.<sup>98</sup> Nor could the remaining old-timers at the Voice of Israel Arabic orchestra as easily electrify young listeners. The performing style of most players, honed before their departure from Iraq in 1951 and Egypt in 1957, fell behind the quickening tempo of Arab pop.<sup>99</sup> In 1991, determined staffers appealed to the government to develop a technological answer to the problem of reaching Arab audiences via the growing medium of satellite television, considering that neither of the two pan-Arab satellite carriers, Nilesat and Arabsat, would agree to carry an Israeli broadcast.<sup>100</sup> They did not find a receptive ear. The 1990s saw a reduction in Israeli government spending on public diplomacy in general, partly on faith that the Oslo Accords, in bringing peace, would win affection for Israel on its own. As the harsh cultural realities of the cold peace set in, the public diplomacy function of an Israeli broadcast in Arabic appeared particularly quixotic. Nor did the Israeli government at the time adopt the view that its Jewish citizens of Middle East origin should be tapped to serve as cultural ambassadors. Their heritage, to the contrary, had been marginalized and stigmatized over the early decades of state formation.<sup>101</sup> Less well integrated than their Ashkenazi conationals, they were underrepresented in the foreign service, political class, and fields of professional inquiry into the Middle East.<sup>102</sup>

A different kind of response to the pan-Arab demonization did emerge, nonetheless, out of the geopolitical logic of the cold peace paradigm. Beginning in the 1990s, new Israeli and American NGOs worked to raise Westerners’ awareness of how Arabic-language hate speech stoked hostility toward Israel, Jews, and other peoples and powers including the United

States. They made an inestimable contribution to U.S. and other public discussions of these problems. In so doing, they also effectively raised the political price to Arab governments vis à vis their Western allies for propagating or enabling such content. First and foremost, the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), established in 1998 “to inform the debate over U.S. policy in the Middle East,” provided a mechanism to monitor Arabic media, translate incendiary material as well as calls for peace and tolerance, and relay both to U.S. and other journalists, policy institutions, and government cadres.<sup>103</sup> A smaller effort established the same year, the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se), acquired textbooks from Arab school systems and published reports on “whether young people are being educated to accept others—be it their neighbors, minorities and even their nation’s enemies, and to solve conflicts through negotiation and compromise while rejecting hatred and violence.”<sup>104</sup> After the September 11, 2001, attacks, heightened U.S. concern about the role of Arabic religious and political discourse in fueling terrorism led to greater interest in these groups’ findings. Drawing insight from MEMRI translations and analysis in particular, policymakers began to ask what forms of American leverage could potentially persuade Arab governments to end incitement, or how U.S. broadcasting in Arabic could help offer a corrective.<sup>105</sup>

American Arabists of generations past might have recognized something faintly familiar in the practices, though not the goals, of a group like MEMRI. Like the anti-Zionist American Friends of the Middle East, MEMRI sought in a sense to bridge U.S. and Arab discourse. But a glaring contrast between the two lay in the differing political communities from which they arose—and reflected an inherent disadvantage for MEMRI. As noted earlier, Arabists and their intellectual offspring, stemming from a distinguished missionary tradition, had maintained the human network and expeditionary skills to engage Arab institutions on their native soil. They also enjoyed the friendship of Arab establishments that found them politically useful. MEMRI, on the other hand, stemmed from a people whose historical ties to Arab countries had been severed, and whom present-day Arab establishments still considered hostile. Thus, the prospect for such groups to build their own human network and expeditionary capacity in the region, in the event they might aspire to do so, would have been a non-starter. Blocked from building relations with the media outlets and school systems they studied, they could not even entertain a strategy of cultivating

potential thought partners within these institutions, let alone collaborating to develop alternative broadcasts or curricula. Barring such opportunities, the success they achieved in attuning a distant superpower to the region's cultural problems would have only limited effects on the discourse itself.

This disadvantage indeed precluded numerous potentially promising human partnerships. As the monitoring groups' reporting also showed, even in the chill of cold peace, Arabs who favored a range of cultural reforms, a warming toward Israel, or both were returning to the public discussion—for reasons that included the weakening of single-voice machines, the proliferation of satellite television, and the eventual mass adoption of the Internet. For example, following the September 11 tragedy, Abd al-Hamid al-Ansari, a former dean of Islamic law at Qatar University, said that Arab media, education systems, and clerical endowments bore “most of the responsibility for terrorism,”<sup>106</sup> faulted Gulf states for engaging in messaging civility abroad but “racism” at home,<sup>107</sup> and held up Israel as a positive model.<sup>108</sup> Civic actors from Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere took to television and the Internet to denounce the taboo on normalization as abnormal itself, as well as call for reclaiming the spirit of a more convivial past. Most of these voices faced marginalization in their society and found little comfort in the state, yet insisted that they spoke for a critical mass of people who expressed the same views privately. Who were these actors? What moved them to speak out? What strategies did they envision to build support for their ideas, and what forms of international cooperation might benefit them? Israelis could not easily explore such questions on Arab soil. Their potential Arab partners, meanwhile, lacked an international network of their own. While their governments declined to help them, the vast petro-endowments of the Gulf staunchly backed their adversaries.<sup>109</sup>

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## THE MOROCCAN ANOMALY

AS THE COLD peace paradigm congealed across the region, an anomaly emerged as well. The Kingdom of Morocco opted not to join the pan-Arab freeze, but rather to pursue an increasingly public give-and-take with Israel and its diaspora Jewish supporters. Though short of a formal pact with the Jewish state, ties exceeded diplomatic and security cooperation to include civil partnerships in culture, trade, investment, and myriad industries. In growing the relationship, the monarchy waged a proactive effort to build consent for it domestically through media, schools, and religious leadership, and weathered a backlash from “anti-normalization” activists. It bears recalling that Egyptian president Mubarak had advised Israelis that any hope to warm Arab attitudes should be placed on hold pending an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. The Moroccan experience showed, to the contrary, that by fostering a culture of conciliation as an *interim* measure, multiple parties could benefit: Morocco received multilateral assistance to defend itself militarily, develop its economy, and construct civil institutions. The Israeli government received quiet diplomatic support from an Arab power. Israeli civilians and other Jews won a foothold from which to begin rebuilding their lost network of ties to the region. And a new kind of public discussion arose in an Arab capital about what it means to support the Palestinians—to which Israelis, in turn, manifested openness. Meanwhile, U.S. soft power emerged as a trusted force in advancing all of these agendas. Though constrained, problematic, and hard to replicate, the “Moroccan model” nonetheless opened a door for other Arab countries to consider walking through. Eventually, some Arab establishments would see its merits, and consciously seek to draw lessons from it.

By way of context, the Moroccan-Israeli relationship stemmed from a tradition of Jewish-Muslim friendship within the territory of Morocco as well as two generations of political reciprocity between the two modern states. On the eve of World War II, Morocco's ancient Jewish population numbered roughly a third of all 900,000 Jews indigenous to Arabic-speaking countries.<sup>1</sup> Under Islamic rule, this community had faced institutionalized discrimination and organized violence, but also known periods of enfranchisement and civil peace—as well as some of the more consequential acts of decency toward Jews in their collective history.<sup>2</sup> In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a Moroccan Muslim dynasty accepted Jewish refugees en masse from the fires of inquisitionist Spain.<sup>3</sup> During the Second World War, Moroccan sultan Mohammed V, weakened under pro-Nazi Vichy occupation, worked to safeguard the rights of his Jewish subjects and other Jews fleeing Nazi-occupied Europe.<sup>4</sup>

The Arab-Israeli wars did trigger spontaneous lethal riots in Morocco and a public attitude of collective blame toward the country's Jews.<sup>5</sup> Many Muslim citizens were swayed by Nasserism, moreover, and later by a range of Islamist ideologies.<sup>6</sup> These trends caused more and more Moroccan Jews to feel that their future lay elsewhere. But the country's transition to independence from France, smoothed by an amicable parting, did not see the construction of an equivalent to the Nasserist "single-voice machine." That is, no Moroccan head of state saw fit to modernize and institutionalize the country's medieval antisemitic traditions as a weapon of statecraft. The monarchy saw value, to the contrary, in clandestine security cooperation with Israel as a bulwark against attempts to topple it by Nasser's Moroccan supporters and Soviet patron. Israel meanwhile turned to Morocco as an intermediary with other Arab powers—a connection that would eventually pave the way toward peace with Egypt.<sup>7</sup> As 265,000 Moroccan Jews gradually departed their native soil, they left with something their brethren fleeing the rest of the region had lost: the feeling that a living Muslim king still loved them. The late king Hassan II strove to nurture this feeling from afar. "When a Jew departs Morocco," he is remembered to have said, "we do not lose a citizen; we gain an ambassador."<sup>8</sup> Nearly one million Israelis today have roots in the country.

In 1979, the oil-poor kingdom found itself four years deep into a war against a separatist guerrilla movement, the Polisario Front. Backed by oil-rich Algeria, the group laid claim to all of Western Sahara, territory that Morocco regards as its southern half. The king, who had already been

receiving Israeli military advice and support on the frontlines, now sought F-5 fighter planes from the United States. Here was an Arab country that lacked a history of friendship with Arabists in Washington, referenced earlier, who had championed Arab governments to Morocco's east. In a novel move, the monarchy turned instead to Israel's supporters in Washington, now for a kind of assistance that was inherently public in nature: the mobilization of American Jewish support for the Moroccan war effort. World Jewish Congress president Philip Klutznick, in asking his constituents to help an Arab government that did not formally recognize Israel, made his case based on solidarity with the roughly 40,000 Jews who still lived there. "The Jewish community that lives in the country is facing severe challenges," he wrote. "We have to be especially attentive in order to maintain the safety of our brothers and sisters in Morocco. We should do everything we can to secure the safety of the state in which these Jews live."<sup>9</sup>

The lobbying effort succeeded. From a Moroccan political perspective, it spoke to the benefits of public support from Israel's friends, but also to the challenge of maintaining such support. As Klutznick's case for assisting Morocco showed, pro-Israel actors needed a reason consistent with their values to help an Arab government. Moroccan antisemitism or hostility toward Israel risked alienating them. But conversely, the kingdom could grow pro-Israel support by moving to warm cultural attitudes toward Jews and Israel within its borders. Doing so, for that matter, could also potentially attract new investment capital and tourist revenue. The same logic applied beyond the narrow agenda of enlisting Israel's organized supporters in Washington, in that a generally supportive view of Israel is shared by most Americans. Thus, the case for Morocco to foster ties with Israelis and Jews only grew as the monarchy expanded its aspirations vis à vis the United States, seeking to court diverse U.S. industries and sectors ranging from the film industry to commerce to private philanthropy. "The monarchy began to think of culture within its borders in geopolitical terms," writes Tunisian journalist Aziz Boujelbane. "For the first time in our region, an Arab government saw virtue in pushing back on rejectionism, opening up to Israelis and Jews, and nurturing a climate conducive to peace. This is not to suggest that in doing so, the Moroccan leadership was acting out of cynicism or purely for expediency's sake. It is rather to credit the Moroccan establishment for aligning its strategic interests with its finest principles."<sup>10</sup>

Among Moroccan policies that drove the cultural warming, some addressed Moroccan-Jewish and Moroccan-Israeli relations specifically.

Others grew out of a larger effort to promote tolerance in general, or engage global institutions of which Israel is a part. Progress of the more specific variety occurred systemically over the seven years following the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. Moroccan schools adopted a new emphasis on the country's indigenous Jewish history. Moroccan news media covered Jewish shrine pilgrimages within the country and celebrated prominent Jews of Moroccan origin residing in Europe, the United States, and Israel.<sup>11</sup> In 1997, the royal family lent its patronage to the founding of a Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca and began to support movies featuring sympathetic Moroccan Jewish characters. In 1998, the country welcomed Israeli citizens of Moroccan origin to visit the country using their Israeli passports. A partial lifting of a fifty-year ban, it eventually expanded to allow Israeli citizens of all backgrounds to visit.<sup>12</sup>

Over the same period, a formal Israeli diplomatic presence in Morocco came and went. It had proved politically unsustainable by the year 2000, when the al-Aqsa intifada—during which approximately three thousand Palestinians and one thousand Israelis were killed—gave occasion for rejectionists to pressure all Arab governments to downgrade or disavow relations with Israel.<sup>13</sup> Morocco's cultural policies, by contrast, continued to gain ground in the new century. The licensing of new commercial radio broadcasts in 2008 saw Israeli and Jewish voices in Arabic return to Moroccan airwaves at the invitation of the outlets' owners.<sup>14</sup> Bylines from Israeli nationals appeared in Moroccan print and online venues, and continuing visits by Israeli political figures, now a matter of routine, drew some favorable coverage.<sup>15</sup> In 2011, after Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made Holocaust denial his country's official policy, Moroccan king Mohammed VI delivered an address describing the Holocaust as “a wound to the collective memory, which we know is engraved in one of the most painful chapters of the collective history of mankind”—and called on Moroccans to observe Holocaust Remembrance Day.<sup>16</sup>

All these initiatives were enhanced, in turn, by Morocco's broader efforts to promote tolerance toward all peoples and faiths. After triple suicide bombings rocked Casablanca in 2003, a kingdom-wide crackdown on mosques and Islamic centers saw the removal or censure of hundreds of clerics, typically backed by Saudi and Gulf wealth, who had trafficked in chauvinist ideologies including antisemitism.<sup>17</sup> Proactive efforts to undo their cultural legacy included new Moroccan Islamic radio and television broadcasts, launched by the monarchy in 2005, that promoted apprecia-

tion of Judaism and Christianity as authoritative monotheistic traditions.<sup>18</sup> A related push to reinvigorate Morocco's indigenous Sufi mystical strand, itself a force for tolerance, saw this battered community of spiritual leaders reemerge as a voice for interfaith harmony and brotherhood.<sup>19</sup> Beyond the pulpit, the same message found artistic expression. Witness the World Festival of Sacred Music, held annually in the Moroccan religious capital of Fez: in addition to songs of Sufism, Christianity, and Buddhism, Hebrew liturgy set to Andalusian song became a mainstay, sometimes performed by Israeli nationals. Like all such ventures in Morocco, it incurred a backlash—in this case, walkouts by some prominent Moroccans when the Jewish hymns were played. The walkouts won accolades from the country's rejectionist media outlets. Yet the larger arc of cultural change continued to bend toward tolerance. In July 2011, Moroccans approved a new constitution enshrining tolerance as a guiding principle for “a nation whose unity is based on the fully endorsed diversity of its constituents: Arabic, Amazigh, Hassani, sub-Saharan, African, Andalusian, Jewish, and Mediterranean components.”<sup>20</sup>

This continuing progress meanwhile eased the Moroccan government's path to joining global institutions of finance, security, governance, academia, and sports in which Israel also held membership. Consider one high-water mark in the last effort, reached in March 2018, when Morocco hosted Israel's national judo women's team—among many other national teams—at a Grand Prix event in the city of Agadir. In keeping with the spirit of sportsmanship to which Morocco had committed as a member of the International Judo Federation, the hosts honored Israeli athlete Timna Nelson-Levy, who won a gold medal, by raising an Israeli flag and playing her country's national anthem. This too sparked outrage in some quarters of the country, to say nothing of the broader region. But it also set a further cultural precedent—a first for any Arab country—promising to make future Israeli sports encounters in Morocco and perhaps elsewhere more banal.<sup>21</sup>

Thanks to the cultural impact of all these efforts, the level of open civil engagement in Morocco among locals, Israelis, and Jews generally, while still constrained, now exceeds that of the two Arab countries with which the Jewish state is formally at peace. Modern Hebrew is no longer whispered on the streets of Casablanca; it is spoken by 30,000 Israeli visitors to Morocco each year, some wearing yarmulkes in public.<sup>22</sup> They are praying at Jewish holy sites, celebrating weddings, trading, investing, and conducting freelance diplomacy. The remnants of Morocco's indigenous Jewish

community have dwindled below four thousand, and the many more who departed decades ago have not moved back.<sup>23</sup> But the emigres' children and grandchildren, in reconnecting with Morocco, have begun to reimagine the meaning of "return." For example, one young French-Israeli telecommunications entrepreneur with roots in Morocco has established call centers in Casablanca, employing dozens of locals, and now shuttles among the three countries. Several Israeli writers of Moroccan origin have spent extended periods in Morocco—to draw inspiration, explore their roots, and engage their Muslim peers.<sup>24</sup> American Jews of diverse backgrounds, for their part, have helped forge partnerships between the Moroccan film industry and Hollywood, invested in infrastructure development, donated to Moroccan charities, and worked for local NGOs. Young American Jewish students of Arabic in Morocco have overcome an ingrained fear of the Arab world, built warm personal relationships, and established a springboard from which to engage other Arab societies. Meanwhile, on U.S. territory, the kind of political cooperation between Moroccans and Jews that Philip Klutznick called for in 1979 has been institutionalized, in that organized Moroccan advocacy efforts are commonly staffed by figures with ties to the pro-Israel community. This transatlantic political symbiosis only enhances further engagement on Moroccan soil.

In assimilating these trends, the monarchy has honed an approach to supporting the Palestinians that eschews the notion of a zero-sum game between them and their Israeli neighbors. The present king, Mohammed VI, joins in denouncing Israeli settlement construction and human rights violations, but avoids paying lip service to the maximalist tropes so often parroted by his peers to the east. As chairman of the Arab League's al-Quds Committee, his support for the preservation of Jerusalem's Muslim holy sites includes acknowledgment of the city's importance to "all three Abrahamic faiths."<sup>25</sup> Moroccan direct aid to the Palestinians, focused on health, relief, and civil society, carries its own implicit message, says Moroccan media mogul Ahmed Charai: "In endowing Palestinian schools and providing medical and humanitarian assistance, the king is signaling that the Palestinian people's future lies not in the triumphs or failings of a given political leadership but in developing human capacities and building viable institutions."<sup>26</sup> Having calibrated its support like this, Morocco has developed "a way to be pro-Palestinian that a broad base of Israelis can also get behind," says Koby Huberman, founder of the Israel Regional Initiative, a Jerusalem-based NGO.<sup>27</sup>

Moroccan strides toward rapprochement are challenged, to be sure, by a powerful rejectionist counterculture, rooted in the same Islamist and pan-Arabist currents that have kept relations with Israel on ice throughout the region. In November 2013, a Moroccan parliamentary majority proposed a bill called “Criminalizing Normalization with the Israeli Entity.” It would have made even private or indirect contact with Israelis punishable by two to five years in prison, a large fine, and possible loss of Moroccan citizenship. In addition to the socialist bloc in parliament, the bill enjoyed the support of the Islamist Justice and Development Party, which then governed on a plurality of seats won in elections two years earlier.<sup>28</sup> Moroccan civic actors supportive of ties with Israel did emerge to voice opposition to the bill. A local human rights organization, for example, said the proposal violated the “letter and spirit of the new Constitution of 2011, which recognizes the pluralism and openness of Moroccan society and the state,” and denounced the bill as rooted in “an inhuman approach influenced by Nazi tendencies.”<sup>29</sup> The bill failed to become law—mainly due to a quiet intervention by the monarchy, which deferred its passage indefinitely.<sup>30</sup> This episode showed, in one sense, that even in Morocco, where generations of history augured in favor of boosting ties with Israel, the constituency for doing so still relied on an autocrat to survive. Yet it also reflected the fact that public support for Moroccan-Israeli relations had reached a critical mass, large enough to alarm rejectionists into wielding their parliamentary muscle to destroy it. (They understood that in doing so they risked a confrontation with the monarchy.) The king’s quashing of their effort, in turn, showed autocrats region-wide that an Arab ruler, having fostered cultural conditions favorable to relations with Israel, could weather a rejectionist backlash and continue to pursue his policies.

So try to imagine how political elites in other Arab capitals might perceive the Moroccan approach overall. Morocco is the first Arab country ever to sign a free trade agreement with the United States. Its film industry is the number one Arab partner for the production of Hollywood movies set in North Africa or the Middle East. In its enduring proxy conflict with an oil-rich neighbor—Algeria—it enjoys reliable support and defense appropriations from the U.S. Congress. In the face of criticism over human rights abuses and demands by the Polisario for an independent Saharan state, it maintains a robust American cadre of defenders. How did an oil-poor kingdom, exporting mainly phosphates, textiles, and fish, achieve these advantages? In a region where the public discussion features gross exag-

generations of Jewish power, some Arab elites, themselves immersed in that discussion, reduce Morocco's successes to a function of its friendship with Israel. They are not wrong in perceiving a connection. But they are prone to misconstrue it as well as minimize the broader Moroccan policies of which it is a part—and, in so doing, draw faulty conclusions. A reflection of this mentality comes across in remarks by the late Libyan strongman Muammar Qadhafi to Libyan Jewish diaspora leader Raphael Luzon, during the 2011 revolution that led to the former's brutal death. Luzon, based in London, recalls that Qadhafi contacted him twice asking for help "to rescue him and his government, in exchange for giving the Jews their rights back and agreeing to full relations with Israel."<sup>31</sup> Qadhafi apparently failed to understand that neither pro-Israel Jews nor any other community had the power to give him the lifeline he wanted. More crucially, he failed to recognize the roots of his own predicament: his unwillingness, dating back decades, to foster an inclusive, tolerant Libya that enfranchised every local denomination, including even Jews, and extended a hand to all peoples, including even Israelis. Peace, in other words, was not a chip in his pocket that he could cash in to save himself; it was a goal he needed to work toward all along—for the sake of every Libyan, especially himself.



WHO WILL roll back the tragic legacy of mass inculcation which Qadhafi, the last architect of a Nasserist single-voice machine, helped bequeath to the region? The "Moroccan anomaly" demonstrates that an Arab leadership committed to growing a culture of rapprochement can draw inspiration from local history, enlist the public through informational campaigns, and prove the value of engaging Israel and its Jewish supporters by doing so openly. But the anomaly's distinctive features also highlight why, over past generations, other Arab leaderships did not hurry to draw lessons from it. Though Morocco's tradition of Muslim-Jewish friendship and ties with Israel have parallels elsewhere, the country offers a rare case of political continuity—that is, uninterrupted dynastic succession—between the present ruler and his remarkable forbears. Though the two Arab governments formally at peace with Israel have, like Morocco, maintained a partnership with the Israeli government and the United States, the venom of their domestic informational environments shows that they have managed to enjoy the former without repairing the latter. Morocco crafted its unique

posture, in part, out of necessities not all its neighbors shared: an oil-poor economy that might collapse without diversifying; an ongoing territorial conflict the kingdom might lose without winning international sympathy and support. Meanwhile, with all its advantages, Moroccan progress toward full relations remains constrained, forestalled, and imperiled.

But the region as a whole now faces change so rapid and choices so stark that even recent assumptions about its future do not hold. Arab governments have new, urgent needs. Their peoples have unprecedented demands. Their territories have been fractured by civil strife or breached by foreign adversaries. Their traditional remedies have proved inadequate. Nor are decisions as to whether and how to engage Israel these governments' alone to make. As the chapter to come will show, new peace-oriented subcultures within their borders have gained the will and capacity to act on their own. Nor can Arab governments rest assured that their allies in the West will continue to tolerate the tradeoffs of the cold peace paradigm. The more information that comes to light about the present opportunities for change, the less justifiable or tolerable the status quo appears.

“For numerous Arab powers today,” writes Tunisia’s Aziz Boujelbane, “Morocco looks less like an anomaly for derision and more like a model for self-preservation.”<sup>32</sup>

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Part II

*A New Hope*



## ARAB ORIGINS OF THE PRESENT OPPORTUNITY

WHAT DRIVES ARABIC DISCOURSE in today's diffuse informational environment, and what causes it to change? The answers lie in large part with the teachers, preachers, and media voices that shape it. In the major Arab institutions they work for, most still controlled directly or indirectly by an autocrat, these figures tend to choose their words based on four often-contradictory considerations. The first is what they believe the leader of the country wants them to say. The second is their own convictions, informed by their upbringing and life experience. A third is their concern about the judgment of colleagues and superiors, who bear convictions and constraints of their own. The fourth is their need to build trust with the audience, whose loyalties vacillate between the establishment, its opponents, and popular sensibilities that many influence but no one controls. Though these factors can also apply in a democratic society, the media, schools, and religious endowments of an autocracy are different in that employees must ultimately find a way to accommodate the ruler. This defining quality happens to make the content they create useful to foreign researchers looking for insight into the ruler's thoughts amid an opaque system of government. When the content appears to diverge from official policy, it can also betray conflicts within the establishment, tensions between state and society, or change on the horizon.

The present goal is not only to analyze the content but also to formulate policies that help improve it. Accordingly, all factors driving it require attention—and the top-down, bottom-up, and outside-in distinctions that informed the history in chapter 1 also provide a framework for tracing

the current state of opportunity. The picture that emerges, while fraught with enduring negatives, shows a new critical mass of state- and non-state elements that favor a more positive stance toward Israel, Jews generally, or both. To be sure, rejectionism remains the prevalent attitude inside all major Arab autocratic institutions, but in some Arab countries, the minority of voices that advocate rapprochement are laboring under the belief that the ruler wants them to succeed. They have drawn this impression from a mix of senior-level statements and new policies that have indeed given proponents of Arab-Israeli partnership slightly more breathing room to do their work. They also feel buoyed by the small but growing audience that cheers them: a grassroots constituency for peace, influenced by the culture of the global village and the failure of rejectionist politics. Meanwhile, Israelis, diaspora Jews, and the United States have found new ways to access the same audience from afar, as well as connect with Arab thought partners on the ground. Viewed optimistically, this patchwork of voices and trends looks like a photo negative of that critical mass of actors, themselves once disparate and diffuse, who modernized Arab antisemitism a century ago. The question facing the new crop is how they, like their toxic predecessors, can institutionalize their agenda on a grand scale. The question facing outsiders is how to support them.

## CHANGE FROM THE TOP DOWN: URGENT CAUSES FOR REFORM

In no Arab country does one find recent evidence of an explicit instruction from a leader to his communications apparatus to advocate rapprochement with Israel. Support for such a course has nonetheless emerged over time as the cumulative side effect of various top-down reforms. Arab leaders change their policies when a serious threat to the status quo makes doing so unavoidable, or a coveted reward from an outside power makes doing so desirable. Since the dawn of the new century, Arab states have faced myriad threats to domestic security, economic stability, and social cohesion, and sought forbearance or assistance from the international community. Among new policies they enacted, some served to weaken enemies of the state espousing “resistance to Israel” among their goals. Others served to elevate supporters of the state who championed tolerance and egalitarianism among their values. More recent steps served to build a modicum of Arab public consent for enlisting Israel and its allies to meet pressing chal-

lenges. Due to rulers' need for such consent, Arab supporters of rapprochement gained an opportunity to speak up, while some rejectionists within the establishment saw expediency in quieting down.

An early threat that sparked such reforms dates from the period in which the wave of jihadist mass killing that toppled the World Trade Center began to redound on the region. In 2002, al-Qaeda bombed a synagogue in Tunisia. In 2003, as noted earlier, Casablanca suffered triple suicide attacks. Riyadh saw multiple bombings of residential compounds the same year. Similar atrocities followed in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula in 2004 and Amman in 2005. No Arab government, in response, made an effort on par with Morocco's to promote an alternative to the extremist voices that had inspired al-Qaeda. But several did recognize that alongside a security crackdown on jihadists, an ideological struggle needed to be waged. They opened a media space for critics of jihadism to speak out and moved to streamline what teachers and preachers messaged. Their approach, concerned mainly with mitigating local violence, tried to address the fissures in sect, ethnicity, and ideology that jihadists exploited. Some of their efforts assailed jihadism in the name of religious pluralism and tolerance. Others assailed jihadists' trans-state aspirations by promoting a more inclusive form of nationalism. Both served to introduce themes about how to relate to the "other" that could potentially make a new discussion about Jews and Israel easier.

An example of the push for pluralism and tolerance was the 2004 "Amman Message," a document laying down the Jordanian monarchy's official reading of Islam for clerics to follow. It called for ending the jihadist practice of declaring others infidels (*takfir*) and upheld the legitimacy of diverse Islamic sects and other religions. The document did not name the religions to be tolerated but clearly implied Judaism and Christianity.<sup>1</sup> The Tunisian government referred explicitly to both in its own concurrent effort to teach tolerance in public schools.<sup>2</sup> It also introduced coursework in comparative religion to the state-run Islamic university that licensed clerics.<sup>3</sup> These projects, followed by interfaith dialogue conferences in Egypt and the Gulf, had little influence on the larger public discussion of Jews or Israel initially. They nonetheless lent the seal of the state to interfaith tenets that proponents of Arab-Israeli partnership could later reference in making their arguments.

A different set of positive themes emerged from the top-down ventures advocating a more inclusive national ethos. Witness the Riyadh-based King Abdul Aziz Center for National Dialogue. Launched in 2003, it gath-

ered Saudi Salafi clerics together with other Saudis whom they had long denigrated—Shia, Sufis, liberals, and women—and called on everyone to embrace an egalitarian Saudi identity. Such efforts were greeted skeptically at first, both within the region and overseas. A decade would pass in Saudi Arabia, moreover, before the monarchy took serious action against Salafi clerical domination of the public space. But to their credit, the Center for National Dialogue and similar projects elsewhere articulated a constructive form of nationalism, free of the false unity of militarism. They also promoted a vision of national development that entailed growing civil society, seeking foreign assistance and investment, and, along the way, decoupling the national agenda from any foreign expansionist ideology.<sup>4</sup> Hardline anti-Israel factions correctly perceived this vision as a potential threat to their hold on public sympathies. Supporters of Hamas, for example, bristled at “Jordan First,” a short-lived public information campaign launched by the monarchy in 2002.<sup>5</sup> It called for a “unified national identity, with its variations in its social fabric, to form a strong country.”<sup>6</sup>

A further move with cultural bearing was the Arab Peace Initiative, a ten-sentence proposal for a resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict presented by Saudi Arabia and endorsed by the Arab League in 2002. While opinions differ as to the underlying motivation, Saudi Arabia’s choice to present the plan may be partly understood in the context of international pressure on Sunni Arab powers following the September 11 attacks. Offered as a non-negotiable proposition, the statement appeared to call for a return of Palestinian refugees to Israel proper en masse, virtually guaranteeing that no Israeli government would accept it. But the language of the document, offering “normal relations with Israel” in exchange for “full Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied since June 1967,” provided a valuable rhetorical tool to Arab advocates of relations with Israel. It was now possible to assert that Saudi Arabia, in all its power and influence, unequivocally accepted the principle of a two-state solution to the conflict. Though most Israelis initially dismissed the all-or-nothing proposal as a nonstarter, neither its Saudi initiators nor the Arab League rescinded it.

Meanwhile, as the jihadist threat spurred new cultural shifts, it also led to further changes indirectly—by stirring outside powers to demand that Arab states govern less opaquely and stop deflecting blame for their failings onto foreigners. For example, after the September 11 attacks, the United States and its Western allies pressed all the region’s governments to open their banking systems to new measures against terrorism financing and their

security sectors to greater international cooperation.<sup>7</sup> Arab leaders were in no position to stipulate the exclusion of Israel from these efforts. They gradually discovered, in any case, that the ideal of a seamless global security paradigm in which even Israel participated served their interests too. For a glimpse into how Arab establishment views evolved, consider a 2010 interview on Al Jazeera with Dahi Khalfan Tamim, Dubai's long-serving chief of police. "Rest assured," he said, "if I know that a bomb is going to go off on a street in Israel, I'll take the same security measures to protect the safety of a Jewish person that I would for somebody anywhere in the lands of Islam." Challenged by the interviewer to justify saving Jewish lives given that Israel occupies Palestinian territory, he said: "That's something else. That's a separate matter...Among [the world's] security sectors, there should never be any hostility whatsoever." In saying as much on pan-Arab television, Tamim gave tens of millions of viewers food for thought.<sup>8</sup> (He later regressed, however, in tweeting the fiction that the Muslim Brotherhood was a Jewish tool.<sup>9</sup>)

Tamim's televised statement reflected a principle that had already played out visibly in Morocco: steps by an Arab government toward global integration also foster Israel's regional integration. The same applied to moves toward joining the global economy, which a growing number of Arab states pursued urgently. When Bahrain signed its free trade accord with the United States in 2004, it publicly agreed to lift its ban on importing Israeli goods. In doing so, it placed Bahraini proponents of the boycott on the defensive in arguing against a national economic priority.<sup>10</sup> Similar concessions arose more subtly out of policy advice and technical assistance that global lenders, principally the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, gave to Arab countries that were at risk financially. In agreeing to simplify customs procedures, for example, most Arab states effectively relaxed their formal restriction on Israeli products, to varying degrees.<sup>11</sup> As the same states moved to attract multinational corporations, they also worked to foster an appealing business environment. Big companies would want to move their employees in and out regardless of where in the world they were born, which other countries had stamped their passport, and where else they worked—among other logistical needs potentially obstructed by the ban on Israel. One country that proved deft at accommodating citizens of Israel despite its official nonrecognition of the Jewish state was Tunisia under the reign of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. Among other partnerships during the first decade of the twenty-first century, Israeli agribusiness consul-

tants played a leading role in boosting the yield of Tunisia's southern farmlands.<sup>12</sup> In Tunisia as elsewhere, word of such activity rarely reached a mass audience: the elites who profited from it suppressed the information, fearing a backlash. This inherent danger made its own further case for softening the culture that had spawned it.

The economic dilemmas of poorer Arab countries visited the wealthier ones a few years later. In 2014, as oil prices tanked without the promise of a full rebound, Saudi Arabia and its oil-rich neighbors mulled the potential demise of the generous social welfare system that had bound citizens to their rulers for decades.<sup>13</sup> The pressing need to diversify Gulf economies and create new jobs called for action. One result was Saudi Vision 2030, a plan launched in 2016 by Muhammad bin Salman, known as MbS, then the country's deputy crown prince, to wean the country off its oil dependency. The plan's success required that the kingdom win substantial foreign partnership and investment in numerous sectors, which effectively meant opening Saudi society to the sensibilities of the global village.<sup>14</sup> In April 2018, when MbS toured the United States for three weeks, he visited titans of American industry from Hollywood to New York City—including at least two Israeli-Americans—with whom he hoped to ink deals.<sup>15</sup> These gatherings afforded his would-be partners an opportunity to explore their own comfort level with Saudi Arabia. When an American Jewish or Israeli-American investor walks by a mosque in Riyadh on a given Friday, what does the preacher's sermon have to say about his people? If a Hollywood firm partners with a Saudi media company, will it produce more of the kind of movies and TV shows that demonized Israelis and Jews for generations? Twenty years earlier, in a less interconnected world, just the opportunity to place a phone call to Israel from Saudi Arabia might have been seen as a breakthrough.<sup>16</sup> But in the age of WhatsApp, the barriers to communication as well as trade had atrophied and the kingdom's circumstances had changed. The prince's statement of recognition of Israel's legitimacy, made during his U.S. tour to the consternation of rejectionists back home, was widely interpreted as a gesture to the American political and economic elites he sought to satisfy.<sup>17</sup>

The posture of several Sunni Arab establishments toward Israel had meanwhile evolved as common regional threats led to a new, unofficial alignment. One cause, as noted earlier, was the rising threat of Iran and its Arab proxies. Another, in the wake of the Arab Spring, was the combination of political and security challenges posed by Muslim Brotherhood

offshoots across the region. As parts of Syria and Iraq fell under Islamic State occupation and an array of jihadists menaced areas of weak central authority in Libya, Yemen, and the Sinai, the strategic threat perceptions of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, and Israel came to overlap more than ever before.<sup>18</sup> Within these countries' media, a new focus on threats posed by Iran and Islamism drew considerable airtime and column inches away from the traditional fixation on Israel.

The same Arab establishments' view of Israel's U.S. supporters grew more favorable as well. In addition to the new sense of alignment among regional players, further grounds to forge ties with these actors stemmed from a worry autocrats shared about the staying power of American support. Consider the streak of U.S. political and public pressure on Arab elites between the September 11 attacks and the signing of the Iran nuclear deal in 2015. It began with a surge in blame of their systems for oppressing, plundering, and indoctrinating Arab publics into extremism. It developed, with the invasion of Iraq, into a demand for rapid strides toward democracy. The Obama administration took office on a popular mandate to withdraw the U.S. military commitment to stabilize Iraq, a choice with unnerving implications for that country and its neighbors. Then, with the Arab Spring, the White House messaged what autocrats interpreted as an alarming degree of comfort with the Islamists who won elections.<sup>19</sup> In building the case for an Iran nuclear deal to boot, President Barack Obama called for a new "strategic equilibrium" whereby Iran on the one hand and Sunni Arab powers on the other would learn to "share" the region—a comment that received widespread attention in Arab lands.<sup>20</sup> Praising these shifts in policy, meanwhile, were new U.S. organizations, policy actors, and media that appeared, from an Arab authoritarian perspective, to advocate for Islamist groups, sometimes promoting prominent members of those groups as voices of conscience.<sup>21</sup> Human rights activists, for their part, organized political campaigns to withhold military aid to America's traditional Arab allies pending substantial changes to their treatment of dissidents.<sup>22</sup> Given the universal tendency to project one's own reality onto a distant other, autocratic elites initially perceived these disparate forms of pressure as somehow connected and centrally coordinated. Arab establishment media worked to smear the range of players as "Zionists." But eventually, some movers in the region began to recognize and acknowledge that most American supporters of Israel had reached views about U.S. Middle East policy that were, on the whole, simpatico.

This epiphany set the stage for an unprecedented shift in Washington: crossover among lobbying groups, elected officials, media voices, and think tanks that had long been divided along Arab-Israeli lines.<sup>23</sup> Recall that in the 1950s, Israeli-Arab hostilities found an echo in the United States in the political conflict between Arabists and Zionists, an essential divide that would endure as Washington policy deliberation grew more layered and diffuse. Five decades later, U.S. advocates for the alliance with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf came to appreciate that signals of Gulf-Israeli rapprochement could help make those countries' case. Supporters of the Israeli-U.S. alliance, cognizant of the common front against Iran and Islamists and well disposed to signs of an Arab-Israeli thaw, came to embrace the opportunity to enable such steps. Both sides knew that any expression of rapprochement was more credible and meaningful when it appeared in Arab and U.S. public discussions alike; twenty years since the launch of MEMRI, American elites had grown especially wary of the politics of doublespeak.

Such was the political context in 2018 when Mohammad Al-Issa, head of the Saudi-based Muslim World League, made his remarks about Holocaust denial referenced earlier: "We consider any denial of the Holocaust[,] or minimizing its effect, a crime to distort history, and an insult to the dignity of those innocent souls who have perished. It is also an affront to us all, since we share the same human soul and spiritual bonds."<sup>24</sup> The weight of the statement lay not only in who had made it, but also in the fact that some Saudi media in Arabic, backed by the state, had carried it.<sup>25</sup> Of further significance, Al-Issa made the statement at the invitation of Robert Satloff, executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (the publisher of this volume), who had met with the Saudi cleric in Riyadh and later cohosted him at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington.<sup>26</sup> In eliciting a positive response from Al-Issa, Satloff showed how the new political current in Washington not only reflected changes in Middle East capitals; it also had the potential to enhance them.

These developments, it should be added, came none too soon for Saudi Arabia, which was about to face the most serious crisis in its relations with the United States since the September 11 attacks. The crisis arose from the October 2018 murder in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul of *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi critic of Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman. International outrage grew as the monarchy acknowledged the involvement of senior officials in the killing. In the United States, prominent voices on both sides of the political aisle, together with media

and the human rights community, called for staunch punitive measures, including sanctions against the kingdom, a downgrading of Saudi-U.S. military relations, and the removal of MbS as crown prince. But the major Israel advocacy organizations refrained from echoing these demands. Some, to the contrary, issued communications seen as helpful to the kingdom and its heir apparent.<sup>27</sup> One of the rare statements along these lines by a head of state, moreover, came from Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu: “What happened in the Istanbul consulate was horrendous and it should be duly dealt with,” he told reporters in Bulgaria on November 2. “Yet at the same time...it is very important for the stability of the world, for the region and for the world, that Saudi Arabia remains stable.” Such pronouncements, which would not have been expected a generation earlier, spoke to a willingness by Israel and its supporters to extend themselves on behalf of Sunni autocrats with whom they sought to make common cause.



IN LIGHT OF all these steps toward high-level accommodation, recall the conflicted mindset of Arab preachers, teachers, and media workers, caught between the impositions of the ruler, their own conscience, the judgment of their peers, and the tastes of their audience. How would they process the new alignment, and how would they explain it to the public? In choosing their words, they would need to consider that the signals of rapprochement from on high were anathema to many of their colleagues and followers. But they also knew, as the coming segment will show, that a small group of their peers had long awaited such a shift—and that a portion of the public, outnumbered but growing, wanted relations with Israel without delay. Might this minority constituency turn out to be the way of the future?

## THE REEMERGENCE OF GRASSROOTS PHILOSEMITISM

Few in any society have the gumption to fight alone against the wave. Until his death in 2015, Egyptian playwright Ali Salem suffered a professional boycott for visiting Israel in 1994, publishing a book about the experience, and calling repeatedly for a peace between peoples.<sup>28</sup> He is remembered outside the Arab world for his courage but regarded within his society as a cautionary tale. In case any of his colleagues needed confirmation, he proved that the price for promoting friendship with Israelis was, at a mini-

mum, one's career.<sup>29</sup> Having done so, he also effectively invited outsiders to make an observation. Since advocating relations brought ostracism while demonizing Israelis brought no repercussions, Arabic discourse as a whole might not reflect a cross section of its participants' true beliefs. That is, any peer of Salem's who harbored views like his, acting out of rational self-interest, would need to avoid addressing the topic head-on. Salem commented on this dynamic two years before his death in a conversation with an editor at London-based, Saudi-owned *al-Majalla*, the only magazine that granted him a monthly column. "If you lift the taboo and level the playing field," he said, "you will find people crawling out of the woodwork to say what I say, and they will find an audience to cheer them on."<sup>30</sup>

Was Salem guilty of wishful thinking? Cairo University media studies professor Muna Abd al-Aziz, in an October 2018 article, seconded Salem's appraisal of the media profession:

For decades, journalists and entertainers in most Arab countries have been all but monolithic in their public hostility to Israel and its people. But let's be honest: in every newsroom, drama guild, and writers' salon, there have always been voices more curious about that country's shades of gray, more skeptical of the wisdom of the "boycott," and more open to direct engagement. They know that when the Jews of Arab lands fled to Israel, we lost a piece of our collective soul. And they know that if we can somehow reclaim that connection—accepting our Jewish brethren for who they are, where they live, and what they believe—then we can gain something vital for our future. Arabic media professionals who harbor these views never vanished from the landscape. But to our detriment, they rarely made themselves heard.<sup>31</sup>

As to the views of the audience, opinion polling in most Arab autocracies began relatively recently, and remains inherently problematic with respect to politically sensitive questions. But a 2017 survey in Kuwait provides one example of several lending credence to Salem's optimism. Whereas rejectionists still prevail in Kuwait's public discussion, the survey found that 60 percent of the country's citizens agreed with the statement that "Arab states should play a new role in Palestinian-Israeli peace talks, offering both sides incentives to take more moderate positions." Of these, 16 percent said the region should not wait for a Palestinian settlement before engaging Israel directly.<sup>32</sup> The latter view also finds expression in social media across a spread of Arab countries. Consider public comments on the Arabic-

language Facebook page of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with 1.7 million followers as of January 2019. According to an internal review, of the average 2,700 daily reactions to the Israeli posts, 33 percent convey a positive sentiment about Israel or Jews. (Another 17 percent are categorized as "neutral.") The positive comments include calls for an Israeli embassy in Iraq, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and various Gulf states; requests for information about how to obtain a tourist visa to Israel; requests to correspond with Israeli citizens; expressions of regret about the departure of Jewish populations from Arab lands; and, during recent violent exchanges between Israel and Hamas, statements of solidarity with the Israeli government.<sup>33</sup>

To be sure, Israel's Arabic Facebook following is a self-selecting group. Yet how many of the region's 380 million Arabic speakers share the enthusiasm conveyed in the comments section? Rejectionists fear that the number is substantial. "Normalization with Israel' is a term that has lost its meaning lately for a young generation, some of whom seem not to know the bloody history of that occupation state," writes Muhammad al-Laythi in the Egyptian daily *al-Watan*. He laments that Egyptian students of Hebrew have been using social media to engage Israelis "on the pretext of practicing the language."<sup>34</sup> Journalist Ahmed Hidji, writing in *Al-Monitor*, cites three Egyptian professors as noting with disapproval that many of their students, like the late Ali Salem, seek to befriend their neighbors across the border.<sup>35</sup>

These shards of evidence and others to follow suggest that millions of Arabs would welcome a relationship with Israel and its citizens. For them, something about the bellicose indoctrination they grew up with does not ring true. Stated differently, it appears that the longstanding skew toward rejectionism in public discourse was not only artificial, as Salem believed, but also somewhat ineffectual. To be clear, supporters of Arab-Israeli engagement are a minority: considerable survey data indicates that the lion's share of audiences region-wide have found rejectionist or antisemitic rhetoric compelling.<sup>36</sup> It is the majority who stand to be influenced most by improvements to the discourse, on the assumption that they will begin to revise their views as a more honest public discussion becomes mainstream. But the outliers—a grassroots quorum for Arab-Israeli relations, available for engagement presently—merit scrutiny for who they are, how they came to their beliefs, and what role they might play in encouraging others. One can learn about them by following their activity on social media, watching them post comments to broadcasts, and of course meeting or working

with them personally. Their views appear to stem from broader cultural changes, which arose in turn from the globalization of media, the region's shifting politics, growing awareness of local Jewish history, and the youthful impulse to rebel against authority. These figures also appear to have drawn some assurance from a class of reform-minded movers who worked subtly to nudge the discussion of Israel and Jews in a more positive direction.

The first factor—the globalization of media—was flagged in 1992 by David Pollock in a monograph on Arab public opinion. He suggested that the advent of CNN in the region had brought a “routinization of Israel.” During the 1990–91 Gulf War, he wrote, the network “show[ed] Israeli officials, academics, and ordinary citizens talking about Scuds, and even about how some Israeli-designed weapons were in use against Saddam.”<sup>37</sup> This programming resembled nothing Arab viewers had seen on state television. With the mass adoption of the Internet a decade after Pollock published his volume, it became possible to gauge young people's reaction to such novelty via online chat forums. Their comments, largely concerned with Hollywood movies, reflected a fascination with any content depicting Israel or Jews. Take responses to the American comedy *Keeping the Faith*, starring Ben Stiller as a likable rabbi and Edward Norton as a likable priest. “By God, the film is awesome and most unusual,” wrote a fan on the Lebanese forum *Trables*, “and anyone who watches it is going to enjoy it immensely.” On dvd4arab.com, a Bahraini enthusiast typed out a complete Arabic translation of the screenplay—as a service to others, he wrote, because only unsubtitled DVD bootlegs of the film were available in his country. On tarab.com, “cat\_2,” identifying herself as a woman in Damascus, posted eight photos of Stiller, two showing him in a yarmulke and prayer shawl, with the Arabic caption “I love him!”<sup>38</sup>

As these movie lovers ate their popcorn, others, surfing the Internet to nourish their intellectual curiosity, acquired a new appreciation for Jewish contributions to a range of fields. For example, Jordanian national Amjad Qasem, an amateur science and technology blogger with a following in Jordan and the Gulf, wrote an entry about the origins of the theory of “survivor bias”—the tendency to focus on people or things that made it past a selection process while overlooking those that did not. Qasem correctly attributed the concept to Abraham Wald, “an Austrian [*sic*] Jewish mathematician who had fled Vienna because of the [Second World] War, having lost much of his family to the Nazis.” He credited Wald with providing advice to the Allied powers as to how to better protect their fighter planes from German attack,

thereby “raising the proportion of planes that were saved.”<sup>39</sup> It was not a stretch for readers to see value in having someone like Wald on their side.

Opponents of Israel expressed concern that this strand in Arab youth culture could be swayed by Zionism. Ahead of the 2005 Steven Spielberg production *Munich*, for example, Egyptian journalist Diya Bakhit warned, “Spielberg’s films are extremely popular in the Arab world, especially among the merry youth who imitate everything Western. They do not even know that Spielberg—who will reenact the attack by a group of Palestinians on an [Israeli] Olympic team during the 1972 Munich Olympics—has a specific personal agenda because of his religious and ideological connection to Israel.”<sup>40</sup> The film indeed received a positive review on Saudi-run cinemac.net, then the most popular amateur movie blog site in Arabic.<sup>41</sup> The blog’s founder, Abdullah al-Ayyaf, at the time a civil engineer in his late twenties, has since become a film producer and prominent voice in the kingdom’s nascent entertainment industry.<sup>42</sup>

With respect to global news media, the so-called routinization effect observed by Pollock also forced Arab rejectionists to compete with the likes of CNN in making their arguments. Al Jazeera, leading the new wave of pan-Arab satellite channels in the 1990s, established the precedent of hosting Israeli government spokespeople in some discussions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Doing so was necessary, explained anchor Jamal Rayan, in order to win credibility for the case against Israel: “When we have an Israeli guest on our program, I consider him prey for me, because when he presents his narrative I can demolish it....Without the other side, you become a ‘single voice’ and therefore unconvincing.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, Rayan regarded the Israelis he interviewed as more a foil for his message than a potential source of information. The fawning coverage of Hamas that meanwhile dominated the network ensured that the Israeli content did not exceed a sprinkling of variety to an otherwise steady ideological diet. But Rayan’s approach, while apparently compelling to most of the audience, spawned some disenchantment, as evidenced by viewer demands for a truly evenhanded style. A case in point occurred during the Israel-Hamas conflict of summer 2014, when Al Jazeera host Ghada Owais interviewed Ofir Gendelman, spokesman for the Israeli prime minister, in Arabic. Abandoning the conventions of journalism altogether, Owais asked a series of insulting questions and answered most of them herself, granting the guest little air-time. Numerous viewers registered their disapproval, both on social media and in the comments section of the clip on YouTube. Bandar Alharbi wrote,

“She is biased and she represents only the other side...Al Jazeera is copying the style of Voice of the Arabs in 1967...in an attempt to stir the emotions of the Arab viewer.”<sup>44</sup> Ali Sagan added, “I think the broadcaster has denied viewers the opportunity to know the other’s ideas and justifications for what he is doing.” It bears noting that these reactions came amid a larger public turn against the Muslim Brotherhood, Al Jazeera, and their Qatari backers following the counterrevolutionary coup in Egypt. But the comments about Owais were not so much an assault on the Brotherhood or Qatar as a criticism of a propaganda style that had apparently lost some luster.

Meanwhile, the tenets of antisemitism, anti-Zionism, and the “centrality of the Palestinian cause” lost a measure of popular appeal as the states, militias, and power cliques that championed them lost support. In Saudi Arabia, the growing number of globally engaged urban youth came to associate rejectionism with its local champions: religious police who harassed them on the street and clerics who berated them in school.<sup>45</sup> In Libya under Muammar Qadhafi, much of the population felt similarly resentful of the secular ideologues of the Revolutionary Committees who imposed thought policing on Libyans at home and abroad.<sup>46</sup> Nasserist pan-Arabism rang hollow for more and more Algerians due to the corruption of the aging military oligarchy that espoused it—and evoked great angst in Iraq, Syria, and Sudan among the large communities that had been persecuted by its pretenders. Before the Arab Spring, Iran, Hezbollah, and Syria’s Assad regime had enjoyed considerable support in the region for donning the mantle of “resistance to Israel.” But as they and affiliated militias in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen turned their weapons on Sunni Arabs, they enraged their former fans. Hamas, for its part, provoked the hostility of supporters of Egyptian president Abdul Fattah al-Sisi and his Saudi and Emirati allies for having backed the Islamist government Sisi ousted.

In each of these cases, the most widespread public response was not to abandon rejectionism but rather to fault the offending governments, militias, or factions for having “exploited the Palestinian cause.” A smaller contingent, however, blamed the Palestinian factions themselves for abetting the range of bad actors, or compared Israel favorably with the lot of them. Saudis of this mindset proved particularly outspoken: “The Palestinian cause is not our cause,” wrote journalist Muhammad al-Sheikh in 2017, “so if a so-called Muslim comes to you calling for jihad, spit in his face.”<sup>47</sup> “I’m not Israel’s lawyer,” tweeted Saudi writer Saud al-Fawzan, “but find me a single Israeli who killed a Saudi and I’ll find you a thousand Saudis

who killed their own countrymen with explosive belts from ISIS and al-Qaeda.”<sup>48</sup> In saying as much, these young establishment figures were not reading from a government script so much as channeling a popular sensibility: hope that the royals were moving closer to Israel, combined with catharsis as the kingdom rolled back clerics’ domination of the public space. At the same time, they were reflecting a trend that had bubbled up in other Arab countries too, including countries where the leadership showed no sign of warming to Israel. Iraq, for example, accounted for roughly one-third of all followers—half a million out of 1.7 million—to the Israeli Foreign Ministry’s Facebook page, as well as the largest number of positive responses to the daily postings.<sup>49</sup> Scrutiny of the positive respondents indicated that they spanned the country’s ethnic and sectarian map.<sup>50</sup> In Algeria, a comparatively closed society, hundreds took to social media in 2017 to applaud Hajer Hamadi, an Algerian opinion writer residing in London, when she advocated Algerian-Israeli engagement and urged decoupling her country’s nationalist rhetoric from Palestinian militancy.<sup>51</sup> Libyan social media and news sites featured expressions of longing for the country’s exiled Jews.<sup>52</sup> Similar comments in Tunisia stressed that as most Jews of Tunisian origin were now Israeli nationals, they should have the right to visit Tunisia on their Israeli passports.<sup>53</sup>

Such grassroots communication, though widespread and robust, did not bespeak a social movement with a leadership structure or the capacity to act politically. Nor did a new Ali Salem emerge, in that no voice with notoriety and credentials launched a sustained public conversation about the meaning of a peace between peoples, or challenged Arabs who wanted such a peace to lay the groundwork for it themselves. This lack of leadership reflected the well-known weakness of Arab liberal capacities in general, as well as the severe consequences such activity risked.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, alongside the mostly spontaneous clamoring for a relationship with Israel, a small group of mainstream public intellectuals, media elites, and even religious figures did act within the confines of convention to loosen hardened views about Jews, Israel, or both. Some made utilitarian arguments for Arab-Israeli cooperation without forswearing the ultimate goal of defeating the Jewish state. Others advocated a worldview of anti-Zionist philosemitism: the belief in rejecting Israel while extending a hand to Jews anywhere else. In making their case, they essentially built on the themes Arab rulers had introduced during the jihadist wave of 2002–2005: a pragmatic and inclusive nationalism prioritizing domestic interests over transnational struggles;

a culture of tolerance and pluralism that welcomed every faith, though not every nation. While falling short of the principles Ali Salem stood for, these actors did help soften the culture, opening space for new figures in the Ali Salem mold to potentially emerge. They also contributed, whether intentionally or not, to a blurring of the lines between Jews in general and Jewish citizens of Israel.

For a sense of how these figures operated and why they mattered, consider the effort in some quarters of Arabic news and entertainment media to restore public awareness of the region's indigenous Jewish history. In 2010, Iraqi intellectual Rashid al-Khayoun joined Saudi talk show host Turki al-Dakhil for an interview on the Saudi-owned, pan-Arab news channel Al-Arabiya. He described the causes and consequences of the slaughter of Baghdadi Jews in 1941, during the Farhud: "The so-called Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini, together with German Nazism, played a major role in baiting the Jews to leave...[by] inciting the mob to attack them for two days straight." Khayoun, representing an anti-Zionist viewpoint, blamed the Mufti for "political stupidity" in "kicking out a community of Iraqi patriots, among whom were doctors, writers, novelists, poets, and blacksmiths...from which Israel gained 150,000 Iraqi Jews."<sup>55</sup> A few months later, the same host invited the author of this monograph, an American of Iraqi Jewish origin, to revisit the story of the Farhud from his family's perspective. "Jews began to feel that they had no future in Iraq, and so they left," I said. "We hope of course to see a revival of that spirit of tolerance and brotherhood that was present in Iraq over the centuries."<sup>56</sup> The appearance won a favorable response on social media—including more contact requests to my Facebook page than I could respond to, mostly from young Iraqis. They typically asked for help in contacting Israelis of Iraqi origin, whether original refugees from the 1950s or their offspring. Like Khayoun, I had not proposed on air that Iraqis try to breach their decades-old barrier with the Jewish state. But some viewers had apparently taken the comment about tolerance and brotherhood to its logical conclusion. Through follow-up correspondence, I learned that our two successive TV discussions of the Farhud, which reran on Al-Arabiya and spread further online, had been experienced in Iraq as a kind of educational intervention: we pried open a forbidden history that some viewers had only heard about in rumor.

A much bigger splash came five years later, in 2015, with the debut of *Harat al-Yahud* (The Jewish Alley), a thirty-episode Egyptian TV drama about multid denominational Cairo in the years surrounding the 1948 Arab-

Israeli war. It was the first Egyptian entertainment program in six decades to feature sympathetic Jewish protagonists. Created by Cairo's El-Adl Group, a private production company close to the military establishment, the story follows Leila Haroun, the daughter of a Jewish textile merchant, who has fallen in love with an Egyptian Muslim soldier.<sup>57</sup> Leila and her family are portrayed as upstanding citizens and patriots, with a welcoming home and friends from every religious background. All of them oppose the creation of the state of Israel—except for the black sheep of the family, Musa, who angers his relatives by immigrating to the country. In the opening scene, the sound of warplanes over Cairo leads Egyptian Jews, Christians, and Muslims to take refuge in a local synagogue. As the Haroun family patriarch and his wife run inside, she explains that what Hitler only recently did to the Jews of Europe, Israelis are now doing to the Palestinians.<sup>58</sup> The story goes on to pin local blame for social deterioration in Egypt mainly on the Muslim Brotherhood—whitewashing pan-Arabism—while leaving no question as to the ultimate culprit. In a scene in which the heroine, Leila, has come to Palestine to visit her brother, now an Israeli citizen, she upsets him by dancing joyfully with Palestinians at a wedding. Her brother's Israeli girlfriend shoots the Palestinian groom in the heart.<sup>59</sup>

So in contrast to our smaller Iraqi effort on Al-Arabiya, *The Jewish Alley* twisted modern Arab history, drew a false moral equivalency between the Holocaust and the Palestinian refugee crisis, and vilified Israelis personally. It also subjected the Egyptian Jewish characters to an absolute moral judgment on the basis of their attitude toward Zionism. But these are not the reasons rejectionists in many Arab countries went on to deplore the show upon its release. They took exception, to the contrary, that in the course of thirty episodes packed with caring Jewish mothers, appealing Jewish rituals, a beautiful Jewish heroine, and love and intimacy between Jews and Muslims, millions of viewers gained the chance to identify emotionally with a people they were supposed to hate. They also fumed that viewers had tasted the depth of Jews' historical connection to the Middle East, a fact generations of brainwashing was supposed to expunge.<sup>60</sup> It did not comfort these critics to know that from a polemical standpoint, the script was impeccably anti-Zionist—because they knew as well that its larger message of inclusion and acceptance could open viewers' hearts to Jews regardless of their politics or nationality.<sup>61</sup>

In these critics' dismay lay the reasons establishment movers like the El-Adl Group, creators of *The Jewish Alley*, had their own role in nudging the

discussion forward. At a time of rising civil strife in Egypt and deepening security partnership between Egypt and Israel, they had made the case to censors for a story about loving one's neighbor—a concept that was at once politically expedient and culturally revolutionary. Their program debuted on nine Arab satellite channels, won viewers in every Arab country, and effectively raised the bar for future ventures of its kind.<sup>62</sup> These creatives, themselves complicit in the twenty-two-year boycott of Egyptian playwright Ali Salem, neither intended nor qualified to lead the emerging grassroots constituency for Arab-Israeli partnership. As stalwarts of an authoritarian system, duty bound to its evolving needs, they could not reliably represent any social stream. But as nonstate actors, they could try to bridge the government's agenda with a popular trend they found worthwhile. They could reframe the public discussion, infuse it with healthier emotions, protect the voices that toed their line, and clear a space for others to push further. *The Jewish Alley*, in serving these functions, meaningfully contributed to the reemergence of grassroots philosemitism.

Scan the region's raucous public square and one finds humbler analogues to El-Adl in other fields. As Sisi's Egypt saw the expression of anti-Zionist philosemitism in a TV show, Sisi's patrons in the Gulf enabled young religious leaders to send an equivalent message from the pulpit. Witness Sheikh Habib Ali al-Jifri, a young Sufi cleric with Yemeni roots, Saudi citizenship, UAE backing, and a mandate to counter the Muslim Brotherhood globally. (He heads the counterextremist Tabah Foundation in Abu Dhabi.) "I love the Jews," he told a televised gathering in Khartoum in spring 2016. "But maybe they'll take a clip from what I'm saying out of context...I love the Jews, only I hate the Zionist occupier over there who thinks he can take away my land and my honor."<sup>63</sup> As with *The Jewish Alley*, Jifri's comment conformed to the polemics of anti-Zionism, yet provoked a backlash and charges that Jifri was himself a Zionist. In emphasis and tone, he had diluted the rallying cry of total war on Israel and global Jewry that enjoyed a kind of sacred status—particularly in Sudan, which was then transitioning from the Iranian orbit to a restored alliance with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. Jifri, whose Twitter following of 5.6 million appears to include some of the same young people who follow the Israeli Foreign Ministry,<sup>64</sup> has consistently evaded discussion of which territories he considered "occupied," or the question of Israel's inherent legitimacy. But in working to foster a spirit of religious philosemitism, he has won support from Arab youth who think Israel mostly belongs where it is, and has at least complicated the issue for the many more who do not.

These examples also show that Arab movers inclined to lend their voice to grassroots philosemitism, whether sympathetic or opposed to Israel, found opportunities to do so where the effort gelled with a larger policy. One need only compare the situation of Saudis who favor accommodating Israel with that of their Lebanese counterparts. Between Lebanon's 2005 Cedar Revolution and the war between Hezbollah and Israel the following year, the presence of an international coalition to drive back Iranian and Syrian influence made it easier for local actors to argue for a new relationship with Jews and Israel. During that brief period, Hazim al-Saghiya, a supporter of peace with the Jewish state, published "The Story of a False Book"—a helpful deconstruction of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, calling for an end to its use as a political tool—in the Lebanese daily *al-Ghad*.<sup>65</sup> Human rights lawyer Chibli Mallat, then a protest candidate for the Lebanese presidency, articulated his vision of a new "White Arabism," an egalitarian social movement that would welcome Jews and come to terms with Israel in some unspecified way.<sup>66</sup> With the July 2006 onset of war, Mallat joined numerous other Lebanese figures in excoriating a Hezbollah spokesman on live TV for dragging the country into a senseless conflict against the national interest.<sup>67</sup> But present-day Lebanon, under Hezbollah domination, has ceased to allow for the development of such ideas. Mallat has relocated to the United States. Saghiya has become more guarded in his writing. At the behest of Hezbollah, Lebanon's law criminalizing any form of contact with Israelis, on penalty of imprisonment, is enforced. Thus, Lebanese filmmaker Ziad Doueiri, for example, faced arrest and accusations of treason by a military court upon visiting the country in 2017—for the "crime" of having shot a movie in Israel five years earlier.<sup>68</sup> To make these observations is not to count out Lebanese supporters of Arab-Israeli partnership: Iran may someday lose its grip on the country, and in the meantime, geographic distance does not pose the same logistical problems it used to for a public voice. Nor is this to suggest that in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, or any U.S.-allied Arab state, local advocates of partnership with Israel have found adequate space to express themselves, let alone act on their aspirations. To the contrary, as chapter 5 will show, they remain severely constrained. It is rather simply to point to a new momentum, in those Arab countries aligned with Israel, whereby top-down policies and bottom-up sentiments are at last beginning to foment a more constructive conversation.

The limits of that conversation, however, point to the inadequacy of local discourse for those who want a peace between peoples—a constituency

that, if bundled together, would likely exceed the total population of Lebanon. For them, the anti-Zionist philosemitism of *The Jewish Alley* and Habib Ali al-Jifri may be provisionally useful: it can thin the poison of the larger public discussion and thereby soften opposition to their dream of a real peace. But they also crave a truthful telling of the Jewish exodus from Arab lands, honesty about Israel, a balanced discussion of the Palestinian issue, and direct communication with Israelis about potential areas for engagement. This pent-up demand helps explain the volume of Arab followers on Israel's Foreign Ministry Facebook page in Arabic, as well as the requests I received for contact with Israeli nationals of Iraqi origin.<sup>69</sup>

A generation ago, as described in chapter 1, the Israeli government faced technological impediments to broadcasting its message to Arab audiences. Present-day opportunities to breach such barriers have grown so abundant, and demands for connectivity so numerous, that the new problem is what to do with them.

## NOTES

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# COMMUNICATION FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

## *Israel and the United States*

TRENDS TOWARD REFORM of Arabic discourse regarding Jews and Israel now bear recapping with an eye to the opportunities they provide Israelis and Americans to join the conversation. First, from a top-down perspective, most Arab autocrats no longer project the theme of fighting Israel as the central tenet of their public posture. Several, to the contrary, view Israel and its friends as potential allies and see expediency in signaling as much—mostly abroad in order to garner maximal assistance, and to a lesser extent at home in order to gain a modicum of acquiescence. Second, among Arab populations, a combination of global cultural influence and dissatisfaction with rejectionist forces has spawned a growing subculture favoring a peace between peoples. Some younger Arabs in particular want to clear the fog of slander and distortion and gain an understanding of Israel and Jews as they are. They share a particular interest in the legacy of Jews indigenous to their own countries. They also want to make friends—and accordingly have tried to use social media to connect with Israelis and diaspora Jews personally. This grassroots phenomenon manifests itself not only in those Arab autocracies most closely aligned with the United States, but also in the broader region, including areas of weak government or contested political authority. Third, in the space between senior Arab leaderships and society at large, some establishment movers have been using their influence to soften cultural attitudes regarding Jewish-related matters. A few try to promote a favorable or utilitarian view of Arab-Israeli partnership, though most promulgate “anti-Zionist philosemitism.” The latter push, while provisionally helpful in curbing antisemitism, is also problematic: it has fos-

tered distortions of history, as in *The Jewish Alley*'s misrepresentation of Egyptian Jews and the circumstances surrounding their flight to Israel; and problematic polemics, as in preacher Habib Ali al-Jifri's vagueness about whether Israeli sovereign territory is in his view "occupied."

So there is an opening as well as a need to newly engage Arab publics, both as an audience and as individuals. As an audience hungry for honest information about Israeli and Jewish issues, many are open to outside communication through media and educational platforms. As individuals, the volume of Arabs seeking personal relationships with Israelis and Jews via social media suggests an opportunity for effective citizen diplomacy. That is, a segment of Israeli society and Jewish communities elsewhere should be encouraged and enlisted to respond to the outreach and actually practice the kind of civil engagement so many welcome in theory. Additionally, as the worldview of anti-Zionist philosemitism enjoys growing mainstream acceptance in the region, there is value in a more indirect form of engagement. It would involve a public conversation between Arabs whose understanding of Jews has improved and outsiders who believe in peace between Israel and its neighbors. For the latter effort in particular, the United States may have a special role to play. Success in these complex endeavors would not yield a comprehensive peace settlement. It would, however, foster cultural conditions necessary for such a settlement to occur and endure. The wherewithal of Israel and its chief ally to meet these challenges is well worth exploring.

## OVERCOMING A LEGACY OF ISRAELI ISOLATION

Recall from chapter 1 that Israel came to the twenty-first century at a disadvantage with respect to Arabic communications. In terms of broadcasting, its talent pool of Jewish emigres who fled Arab lands in the 1950s had retired. Its technological capacity to transmit a message region-wide had languished. The political will to address these problems was not forthcoming. There were innovations, to be sure: NGOs such as MEMRI and IMPACT-se had found a way to raise awareness in the West about incitement by Arabic media, clerics, and schools, and, in so doing, bring some foreign pressure to bear on their backers and enablers. But as long as such initiatives remained cut off from Arab territory, they could not forge a working relationship with indigenous reformists who shared their concerns. In other words, they were artificially constrained from engaging the discourse directly.

As to readiness for citizen diplomacy, considerable work lay ahead. In light of the cold peace with Egypt and Jordan and continued rejection of Israel by most Arab states, Israelis generally had come to assume that people-to-people engagement with their neighbors was a nonstarter. This belief perpetuated a widespread disinterest in studying Arabic. The major exceptions—Israelis headed for government, security, or academic careers—underwent a style of language training more useful for observing a society than interacting with it.<sup>1</sup> A small community of civilians became active in the Palestinian areas through NGO work and other forms of outreach—yet did so, for the most part, without engaging the language in depth.<sup>2</sup> Jewish citizens of Israel with roots in Arab lands were meanwhile underrepresented in all these fields, as noted earlier, with the significant exception of security. Nor had the generation of Jewish refugees who fled the Arab world bequeathed their dialects and memories to their children to an extent that would seem natural in another place. They felt impeded from doing so by the bitter experience of their departure, the marginalization of their culture in Israel, and the broader Israeli state-building ethic of a clean break with diaspora baggage. Eventually, a political interest did develop in revisiting the story of these refugees' mass dispossession: Israel and its supporters organized to raise awareness about their losses as a matter of fairness, given the preponderant focus on Palestinian refugees' material claims in international discussions of the conflict.<sup>3</sup> But such efforts, primarily addressing Westerners, saw no equivalent outreach to Arab countries for the sake of forging connectivity. Doing so would have required a more holistic, creative effort that balanced an honest discussion of Jews' historical treatment and mistreatment with a resurrection of positive memories on both sides.

Israelis nonetheless came to recognize that an opportunity had arisen. Much of the response revolved around traditional state-to-state diplomacy in pursuit of a regional settlement with Arab governments. But separate ventures also surfaced with a communications focus. These efforts did not amount to a redux of the Voice of Israel Arabic Service in its heyday: the broadcast itself did not recoup its pan-Arab reach, nor did an alternative clearinghouse or unifying strategy for Israeli communications in Arabic emerge. Instead, a spread of Israeli government and nongovernment initiatives and outreach developed into a loose, sometimes fractious assembly of voices. The military and civil service dispatched their spokespeople to whatever Arab broadcast outlets would host them, and launched their own media platforms online. A few Arabic speakers in academia, journalism,

and the rabbinate strove in their private capacity to challenge distortions of Israel or Judaism, by appearing on the same Arab stations or launching additional online ventures. A handful of nongovernment online magazines in Arabic, in addition to a private television broadcast, provided reporting from inside Israel. Meanwhile, both in Israel and abroad, a small but assertive community of Jews originating in Arab lands belatedly organized to spread knowledge of their heritage, first in Israel and the West and later in the countries they hailed from. They also waged their own campaigns of citizen diplomacy in Arab lands.

### *Israeli Policymakers: Piloting a New Regional Posture*

By way of context, between 2015 and 2017, a theory about next steps in peacemaking gained considerable traction in Israel. It was framed in conventional diplomatic terms: a new “regional approach” would enhance the more narrow focus on brokering a settlement with the Palestinians. In a version of the concept commonly expressed in Israeli media, Saudi Arabia and several Gulf states would join Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and their Western allies to break the Palestinian-Israeli impasse by fostering compromise on both sides, through incentives or pressure on the Palestinians and the promise of a pan-Arab settlement for Israelis.<sup>4</sup> The vision drew a sense of realism from the new security alignment between Israel and Sunni Arab powers. It drew validation from the fact that the stalled Saudi-led Arab Peace Initiative remained officially on the table. It drew electricity, under the new U.S. administration, from statements by President Donald Trump, Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, and Egyptian president Abdul Fattah al-Sisi indicating that all three embraced it in some form.<sup>5</sup> It also drew optimism from the hope that Middle East envoy and Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner could encourage a regional settlement through relationships he had cultivated with Saudi crown prince Muhammad bin Salman and other senior Gulf officials.<sup>6</sup>

But for the regional approach to deliver the genuine peace it intended, Arab populations would need to join their governments in building a relationship with Israel and its people. The fact that a minority of Arabs demonstrably supported such a process gave cause for hope. Was there also cause for confidence that their rulers would boost popular support through the informational and cultural tools at their disposal? What plans might they devise to mitigate antisemitism and rejectionism? Given the region’s borderless infosphere, what forms of cooperation among states or commu-

nications outlets were warranted? What roles did Israelis and Americans need to play in the effort? Who would oversee the work, and how did it figure into the larger negotiated process?

Israeli policy advocates for the regional approach initially focused less on these questions than on persuading their own constituents that a diplomatic settlement was feasible. The Israeli Regional Initiative (IRI), an NGO endorsed by movers on Israel's left, right, and center, led public events in Israel and abroad to present the idea to ideologically mixed crowds.<sup>7</sup> It polled Israelis and Palestinians to gauge what conditions would motivate them to support a settlement.<sup>8</sup> It published a hopeful vision of the economic benefits the pact would deliver, from tourism to agribusiness.<sup>9</sup> An overlapping sphere of policymakers, including former senior Defense and Foreign Ministry officials, brought a few Saudi nationals, as well as a Bahraini delegation, to visit Israel openly and spread a goodwill message.<sup>10</sup> Outside the Jewish state, three prominent Israelis appeared alongside Saudis at distinguished U.S. and European forums to discuss prospects for peace in general terms.<sup>11</sup> One of the Saudis was a well-known figure: Prince Turki al-Faisal, a retired Saudi intelligence chief and diplomat and the son of a former king. His appearance at a well-publicized Washington Institute conference alongside retired Maj. Gen. Yaakov Amidror added symbolic power to the effort.<sup>12</sup> Over time, the procession of visits and exchanges, high-level statements, and media reports of under-the-table security cooperation made an impression on Israelis. Polling data from the IRI and a separate, private survey concurred that Israeli hopes for a settlement had grown. So had the population's esteem for the envisioned partners and comfort level with compromise for the sake of a regional pact.<sup>13</sup> For Riyadh and its Gulf allies, meanwhile, the activity delivered tangible political benefit, regardless of the future of Arab-Israeli relations: it encouraged supporters of Israel in the West to perceive these countries in a new light and, by extension, view a range of Saudi and Gulf aspirations more favorably.

The vision of a regional settlement went on to face greater scrutiny in Israel, however, as policymakers debated whether the country was doing everything it could to broker one. At a May 2018 conference of Jerusalem's Mitvim Institute—"The Unfulfilled Potential of Israel's Relations with Arab Countries"—scholars, journalists, and opposition figures weighed in on how the government and its citizens should adapt to engage the neighborhood.<sup>14</sup> Most advised that Israel's regional integration hinged on serious progress in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and some faulted the Netanyahu

government for fostering impressions to the contrary.<sup>15</sup> Others, adopting an economic focus, expressed the fear that insufficient cross-border trade and investment had spelled missed opportunity to build goodwill.<sup>16</sup> But these familiar concerns were joined by something new. Several speakers, bearing fresh evidence from the field, argued that Arab movement toward relations with Israel could also arise from cultural trends that traditional diplomacy did not spark, economic policy did not drive, and the Palestinian stalemate did not arrest. Without disputing their colleagues' prescriptions, they held that opportunities for cultural and civil engagement needed to be pursued on their own terms—and that doing so was itself a prerequisite for achieving the outcome Israelis across the political spectrum wanted.<sup>17</sup>

Jacky Hugi, Arab affairs analyst at Israel's Army Radio, advanced this perspective by drawing a series of contrasts between the cold peace with Egypt and Jordan and Israelis' unofficial ties in Morocco and Iraq. He asked, in substance, what does it mean that Israeli citizens have forged more and deeper human connections in Morocco, with which no treaty has been signed, than in the two Arab countries where Israel keeps embassies? And what does it mean that more Iraqi citizens follow the Israeli government on Facebook than Israeli citizens living in Tel Aviv—even though the Iraqi government, unlike Morocco, remains hostile to the state of Israel? Hugi warned that the singular focus on attaining a handful of new treaties risked obscuring the opportunity to forge countless bonds with Arab peoples. He also suggested that a serious Israeli effort to establish civil ties would require Arab government cooperation, which may not be forthcoming unless Israel presses for it:

Israel emphasizes security matters and does not invest sufficiently in advancing civil connections... The government echelon must decide that civil relations with the country's neighbors constitute an essential element of Israel's national security. Israel must also demand that Arab leaders move forward in this regard. Even Israeli security experts are beginning to understand that it is impossible to separate security and civil cooperation.<sup>18</sup>

The social media venture Hugi used to bolster his case—the Foreign Ministry's Arabic Facebook page, referenced earlier—spoke to the promise he saw as well as the problems he raised. At the time of the conference, the ministry's Arabic “digital outreach team,” managing its 1.7 million Facebook followers and 200,000 Twitter followers, consisted of five full-time staff-

ers and a few part-time consultants. Yet in addition to their daily work of explaining Israeli policy and correcting false claims about Israel and Jews, they had found a way to transcend the conflict and represent the totality of Israel—through creative videos, infographics, archival images, and prose. Many of the clips showed ordinary life in Israeli cities and towns. In one, a young Israeli, speaking Arabic earnestly with a perceptible Hebrew accent, leads a tour of the place where she does her grocery shopping: Jerusalem’s open-air Mahane Yehuda market. Among 467 comments generated in the first twenty-four hours after posting, many wished her safety and happiness, even as others cursed her and several warned Arab viewers that the whole enterprise was a “trick.” Other videos spotlighted Israel’s academic institutions or start-up ventures, or profiled a figure of importance to Jewish history. Twelfth-century world traveler Benjamin of Tudela stars in one of them: he stops en route from Tangier to China to visit the Jews of the Arabian Peninsula. Egyptian Muslim doctor Muhammad Hilmi appears in another: he has been honored posthumously at Yad Vashem’s Avenue of the Righteous Among the Nations for risking his life to save a Jewish teen in Nazi Germany. Arab citizens of Israel, a robust presence on the page, told their own life stories, guided viewers through the country as they saw it, and helped explain the mentality of their Jewish neighbors. Other content provided a service, such as a health tip, an educational resource, or a work-life-balance technique. Jewish refugees to Israel from Arab lands, now mostly grandparents, appeared on the page to share recipes from the old country, recall their bittersweet childhoods, and send out wishes for peace. Rare photographs from these emigres’ youth underscored their historical presence in a cosmopolitan Arab society that has now all but vanished. Picture Yusuf Zarur, for example—a leading Iraqi Jewish qanun player—jamming in Baghdad in 1933 with Egyptian diva Umm Kulthum and crooner Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab. The post accompanying the photo explains that Zarur fled to Israel in 1951 along with most other Iraqi Jews, and that his grandson is now a musician in Israel. In May 2018, in response to popular demand, the Foreign Ministry opened a dedicated Iraqi Facebook page as well.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the venture’s demonstrable appeal, it faced impediments indicating that the government had neither invested in it adequately nor grappled with the implications of its success. To begin with, due to the limited staffing, the digital outreach team could only respond to a fraction of followers’ comments. Nor did it enjoy the mandate to satisfy Arabs seeking deeper forms of engagement. For example, the team was discouraged from

keeping up private correspondence with fans owing to worries that they or their governments would deem the page a front for intelligence recruitment. Nor could the team assist followers inquiring about a tourist visa, as the government had not developed an answer to the problem of vetting tens of thousands of such requests.<sup>20</sup> There was a valid concern that some petitioners for entry to Israel aimed to commit espionage or acts of terrorism, especially given that most lived in countries harboring Iran-backed militias or jihadist enclaves. But Israel incurred a cost in effectively snubbing the rest: the loss of a legion of potential goodwill emissaries.<sup>21</sup> The volume of requests for entry also gave cause to question prevalent theories about the role of tourism in Arab-Israeli peacemaking. Perhaps the tourist bounty long envisioned as one of the *outcomes* of a future settlement was actually an immediate opportunity—to advance a more informed and charitable view of Israel in Arab lands, making a future settlement more likely.

Questions also arose from the political implication of certain comments. For example, after hundreds or even thousands in a given Arab country have demanded an Israeli embassy in their capital, what advice or effort should be extended to help them further their case? Was there a more realistic interim goal for them to pursue for which some vested party could provide assistance? When Shia clerics in Iraq wrote to express disenchantment with Iran and curiosity about Jews and the rabbinate, who should enter the conversation to connect them with the kinds of Jewish or Israeli figures they wanted to meet? Viewed through a narrow security and intelligence lens, these supportive Facebook comments may look simply like leads to potential assets. But through a wide-angle lens, they highlight the potential for future directions in Arabic broadcast media as well as Israeli-Arab cultural diplomacy, civil engagement, and political action. For example, the popularity of and favorable response to short clips about Jewish history and life in present-day Israel indicated that longer programming on such topics could find a viewership on Arabic satellite channels, should the channels agree to air them. The requests for personal contact, in turn, showed how programming for a general audience could forge an opening for new relationships off-camera. Where such relationships developed, they could later reemerge publicly in the form of a new coalition of voices—whether in media, religious leadership, education, or, for that matter, any civil sector.

Hugi's remarks at the Jerusalem conference indicated that ideas along these lines had found expression in Israel, but that their advocates did not feel they had adequate support to experiment with them.

### *Differing Styles of Hasbara*

The most common rubric through which Israelis view communications in any language is “*hasbara*”—that plucky, largely frontal form of advocacy for the state.<sup>22</sup> Over the past five years, while some Israelis debated policies for pan-Arab engagement, others honed their skills as talking heads in Arabic media, either as government spokespeople or private citizens. They courted tens of millions of viewers by appearing as guests on Arab satellite television, and in some cases used their notoriety to launch spinoff projects online. They formed differing schools of thought as to the best style of argumentation, ranging from gentle to provocative; from political and issue-oriented to cultural or religious. Some also challenged each other—both in Hebrew and Arabic media—with regard to whose approach worked best. Mainly by virtue of the Arab satellite channels that hosted them, they became the best-known Arabic-speaking faces of Israel and Judaism in the region. They accordingly bear assessing as a cultural force in their own right.

On the more vigorous side of the spectrum stood Mordechai Kedar, a professor at Bar-Ilan University. In a memorable 2017 debate about President Trump’s decision to relocate the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, he faced a Syrian firebrand who told him Jews had no history in the city, no right to any part of it, and no alternative but submission to Islamic rule. Kedar replied:

We are nobody’s dhimmis, and we are not the offspring of apes and swine as you believe!...We were in Jerusalem more than three thousand years ago when the forefathers of Islam were drinking wine and booze!...We were worshipping the one and only God while you were worshipping idols in the Arabian Desert!...When was Islam introduced to the world? Only in the seventh century, with the purpose of taking over the world and imposing Bedouin culture over civilization!<sup>23</sup>

Asked by the host whether he feared the embassy move would harm peace prospects, Kedar said:

We in Israel do not feel we are interested in making peace with the Arab world. Why? Because those who do not have cannot give. The Arab world doesn’t know the meaning of peace....Look at what is happening between Sunnis and Shia, between Kurds and Arabs....[The Arab world] has neither domestic peace nor foreign peace. We’d be happy to join an Arab peace, but first make peace among yourselves,

then we'll join the Arab peace. The Arab world today is a swamp of fire, tears, and blood. Who wants to get close to you anyway? Who even wants to talk to you? The Arab world is a failure! The Islamic *umma* is a failure! Who wants you?<sup>24</sup>

The broadcast stands among the most widely viewed, posted, and tweeted appearances of an Israeli national in Arabic media. In a subsequent interview on Israeli television, Kedar referred to a study indicating that 100 million people had watched it. On social media, millions viewed the excerpts quoted above as standalone clips.<sup>25</sup>

Asked by the Israeli television interviewer to explain his style of advocacy, Kedar said, “When the situation calls for it, you have to say the truth and hold their face up to the mirror.” He observed that among viewer comments on social media, some, typically from women, said, “Look, the man is right.” Asked about the takeaways from his appearance for the country’s broader “battle of *hasbara*,” Kedar said he hoped the Israeli government would adopt his style. It was better, he opined, than softer forms of outreach that the government now practices—perhaps an allusion to the Foreign Ministry’s digital outreach team: “The official message is a message of subservience...to relax [Arabs] and appease them.” Concerning his comment about peace between Israel and its neighbors, Kedar added, “The minute you say you want peace, the price goes up, because you want it...So I say, guys, how much will you pay *me* that *I* should give you peace? That’s how you’ve got to be. It’s a marketplace.”<sup>26</sup>

Kedar put his theory of *hasbara* into practice, over numerous TV appearances, with the precision of a learned scholar and impeccable Arabic speaker. There were tradeoffs to his approach, however. Take the assessment of Kedar by Al Jazeera anchorman Jamal Rayan, referenced earlier with respect to the channel’s motivation in hosting Israelis. In recalling his own experience of interviewing Kedar, Rayan paid compliments to Kedar’s skills as a polemicist and acknowledged having been outmatched by the latter in quoting Quran. But he also implied that Kedar validates the channel’s policy of hosting Israelis because he makes Al Jazeera’s case that Israelis do not want peace. Rayan would be heartened, in other words, to observe that countless viewers raged at Kedar on social media after each of his appearances. Perhaps many had made up their minds about him before he began to speak. But were some others, uncertain about their view of Israelis, alienated by his confrontational style? A constructive critique of Kedar’s approach would suggest that in

conveying his ideas, he could find a way to project strength without making statements that could be used against him or misconstrued.

On the gentle side of the spectrum, consider Elhanan Miller, a 39-year-old rabbinical student and former journalist born in Israel to Canadian Jewish parents. Beginning in 2012, Miller developed his Arabic broadcasting skills by providing guest commentary on Sky News Arabia, the BBC Arabic service, and Al Jazeera. In an affable style, he channeled a left-of-center critique of the Netanyahu government. Miller later branched off into peace activism, and developed a new media venture that would skirt politics and even the topic of Israel altogether. It arose from his work teaching Muslims about Judaism on behalf of the Shorashim project, a nonprofit initiative through which Jews from the West Bank settlement of Gush Etzion encountered their Palestinian neighbors.<sup>27</sup> In mid-2017, Miller launched *People of the Book*, a series of YouTube videos explaining Judaism to an Arab audience. Produced on a shoestring budget, they featured narration by Miller and an Arab-Israeli peer named Suha, alongside cartoon animation in a humorous style reminiscent of *The Simpsons*. For example, during a clip about Jewish prayer stressing the need for stillness and concentration, a worshipper reads from his prayer book even as a snake curls around his feet, Godzilla and a dancing hippopotamus pass by, and finally an alien in a flying saucer eviscerates the snake with a laser beam.<sup>28</sup> For Muslim viewers interested in delving deeper, Miller hosted a live weekly half-hour Facebook videocast about his faith in which viewers could send in questions. “My aim is not to do Israeli *hasbara*,” he told the *Jewish Chronicle*. “I speak in these videos as a Jew more than an Israeli, because Israel is a contentious issue and I’m trying to build credibility and even sympathy with my followers.”<sup>29</sup> With promotional assistance from the Israeli Foreign Ministry’s Facebook page, Miller won close to two million views for his clips on YouTube in one year, and a subscriber base approaching 50,000.<sup>30</sup>

By avoiding the subject of Israel, Miller could swim within the cultural current of anti-Zionist philosemitism without paying lip service to its rejection of his country. Inasmuch as viewers could easily establish his Israeli nationality and support for a two-state solution through a Google search, the mostly supportive responses showed that his approach could find a receptive ear. His weekly videocast, moreover, provided an answer to the vast asymmetry between the tiny number of Israeli Arabic speakers seeking to engage Arab publics on the one hand and the multitudes who wanted to speak with them on the other. Though the highbrow nature of his call-

in show would not bring him a mass audience, his success at sustaining a relationship with several thousand people made a different kind of contribution. Unconstrained by the limits facing the Foreign Ministry's digital outreach team, he also enjoyed the freedom to befriend his fans.

The government itself meanwhile dispatched a handful of official spokespeople to make its case on regional TV outlets, as well as participate in social media. The most ubiquitous of them, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) spokesman Avichay Adraee, became a household name in Arab countries. Young, uniformed, bespectacled, and speaking fluent Arabic at nearly two hundred words per minute, he exuded the personality of the "happy warrior." In addition to explaining and defending Israel's military actions, he sometimes went toe-to-toe with Hezbollah, Hamas, and other adversaries in a war of words. Hezbollah picked one such fight in summer 2017, when two of its combatants in Syria addressed Adraee directly through posters they tweeted. "We are practicing on the Nusra Front [aka Jabhat al-Nusra, an al-Qaeda-linked group] in preparation to occupy the Galilee," one said. "When we finish with the *takfiris* [used here by Shia to describe their Sunni jihadist opponents], we'll come for you," said the other. To formulate a response, Adraee acquired photographs from IDF intelligence showing undercover Hezbollah agents along the Syrian-Israeli border. In promulgating the photos, he addressed his Syrian audience in particular: "These are Hezbollah men endangering you." As the exchange escalated, a debate ensued in Hezbollah-controlled media over the wisdom of engaging Adraee. It betrayed a sense of lapsed self-confidence from Hezbollah leadership with respect to information operations, given Adraee's large audience as well as the larger anti-Hezbollah onslaught by Saudi- and Gulf-controlled media.<sup>31</sup>

Adraee, whose Facebook page trailed just behind the Foreign Ministry's at 1.3 million followers, enjoyed a mandate from the IDF to experiment with his polemics.<sup>32</sup> In June 2018, he played to Sunni-Shia sectarian animosity in an apparent attempt to drive a wedge between Hamas and Sunni Arabs generally. Citing an oral tradition of the Prophet Muhammad—"He who imitates a people is one of them"—he argued that Sunni Hamas, in celebrating Iranian Ayatollah Khomeini's innovation of Quds Day, had effectively embraced Shiism. He proceeded to cite anti-Shia teachings by Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, the progenitor of Saudi Arabia's official religious ideology, whom he dubbed "the renewer of the call to Salafism."<sup>33</sup> In a conversation about his choices, Adraee said they were driven

by a sense of urgency: “We’re fighting for our lives, so we have to use every approach that works.”<sup>34</sup> But whatever benefit his tactic may have achieved, he had added fuel to the fire of a destructive sectarian feud—in which anti-semitism, as noted earlier, was a mainstay of both sides. He had lent credence, moreover, to the Saudi Salafi corpus, itself a powerful engine for the demonization of Israel and Jews—and at a time when Saudi nationals and their establishment were beginning to distance themselves from its legacy.

In sum, between the IDF and Kedar on one side and the Foreign Ministry and Miller on the other, the absence of a unifying Israeli communications policy in Arabic spawned starkly contrasting messages—and viewer uncertainty, at times, as to what values Israel stood for. Furthermore, regardless of what the talking heads chose to say, the ultimate decider of who received the most attention remained the largest outlet that granted them a platform: Al Jazeera. (As of autumn 2018, Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya, Al Jazeera’s chief rival, maintained a policy of declining to host Israeli nationals.<sup>35</sup>) The channel elevated these and a handful of other voices, and hosts kept them focused on either the conflagrations that brought Israel to battle or the political disputes that angered audiences the most. Their appearances did enable them to affirm their hostility to Iran and its proxies, which played well with viewers, as well as refute false claims about Israeli government policy, albeit not easily. But they were denied space to highlight Israeli-Arab commonalities or advocate cooperation beyond the realm of war.

### *Jews from Arab Lands Rejoin the Conversation*

As noted earlier, a growing proportion of Arab publics in recent years have manifested a new hunger for information about the indigenous Jewish history of their countries, as well as a desire to connect with the Jews who fled them. The discourse of anti-Zionist philosemitism among Iraqis like Rashid al-Khayoun, for example, spread regret that the region lost something invaluable when Jews fled, as well as regret that Israel had acquired them. Warmer discussions, from Iraq to Tunisia, held that Jews with roots in the region should have the right to visit and engage their ancestral homelands—whatever their citizenship and wherever they live. A mainstay of the latter discussions was the view that Arabs could also derive benefit from reestablishing a connection. For example, in a September 2018 report in *Al-Majalla* on evolving Libyan attitudes toward that country’s Jewish exiles, journalist Abdul Sattar Hatita wrote, “Now, after the death of Qadhafi, sev-

eral political streams in this fractured country are trying to extend a hand in friendship to the leadership of Libyan Jewish communities throughout the world, including in Israel—particularly those with connections to centers of economic and political influence.”<sup>36</sup>

In other words, some Libyans and other Arabs had come to adopt the same attitude toward Jews indigenous to Arabs lands that Moroccan elites had. And to recall from chapter 2, the so-called Moroccan anomaly shows that when an Arab country enacts a policy of openness to its emigres in Israel, the relationship can develop into a broader civil cooperation that ceases to be ethnically exclusive. This process in Morocco was crucially facilitated by a public information campaign to foster a more honest understanding of Moroccan Jewish history as well as Israel: Moroccan Muslims learned from their king that a Moroccan Jew who moves to Israel is not a traitor but, to the contrary, an “ambassador.” They also learned that most Moroccan Israelis intended to remain in Israel yet welcomed the opportunity to reconnect with Morocco in other ways if encouraged to do so.

But the possibility of fostering such a public dialogue in the broader region was severely impeded. To begin with, productions like Egypt’s *The Jewish Alley*, though positive in some ways, reinforced distortions of Middle East Jewish history and demonization of Israel, while the generation of Jewish refugees who had lived that history were approaching the sunset of their lives. Though the refugees and their offspring made up a majority of Israel’s Jewish population, most lacked the linguistic and organizational capacities to communicate their true stories to Arab societies. Nor had Israeli institutions preserved their heritage to an extent remotely comparable to their documentation of the history and destruction of European Jewry, let alone worked to promulgate such material in Arabic. It was symbolically meaningful that IDF Arabic spokesman Avichay Adraee, known to countless Arab television viewers, hailed from an Iraqi Jewish family that fled with the Baghdad airlifts of 1951.<sup>37</sup> The nature of his TV appearances, however, did not invite a conversation about roots, except on highly disadvantageous terms. For example, in a February 2018 Al Jazeera debate between Adraee and Salah Qayrata, a Syrian advocate for the Assad regime, the latter accused Adraee of “betraying the Iraqi nation” by having become an Israeli spokesman. (Adraee simply smiled and moved on.<sup>38</sup>) The style of communication Adraee employed, moreover—Modern Standard Arabic, uninflected with any living dialect—did not kindle a feeling of ethnic connection with the audience. Several Egyptian viewers reflected as much through a dark

spoof of Adraee that they created and distributed on YouTube. It shows the spokesman sending verbose holiday greetings to the world's Muslims until a terrorist abducts and tortures him. Adraee narrates his own demise using the same stilted vocabulary.<sup>39</sup>

Despite these challenges, a small community of Israeli Jewish natives of Arab lands eventually organized to promulgate their living heritage, at first for the sake of future generations in Israel and later in experimental outreach to their countries of origin. Their efforts combined self-funded initiatives, nascent Israeli government partnerships, and coordination with Middle Eastern Jewish communities in Europe and the United States. In addition to accessing Arab countries to raise awareness of their past, they joined these countries' domestic conversations about the future. They also attempted to lay the groundwork for future bilateral ties with Israel by cultivating friendships with Arab political and cultural elites. Viewed as a collective, they amounted to a trans-state actor with rare capacities. Though waning in number, they also sought to impart their networks and skills to younger people.

The process stemmed from the resurgence of Middle Eastern Jewish ethnic pride in Israel surrounding the election of Prime Minister Menachem Begin in 1977. (Most Jewish voters originating in Arab lands supported him, in part for his promise to end their marginalization.<sup>40</sup>) In the spirit of the times, several prominent Iraqi Israelis whose service to the state specifically related to their Iraqi origins—notably, Mordechai Ben-Porat, an architect of the Iraqi airlifts; and Shaul Menashe, the anchor at Voice of Israel Arabic Service—built new institutions to memorialize them. The Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center in Israel consisted of a historical exhibition, an archive of communal records and literature, and a global outreach project, initially targeting Jewish diaspora communities.<sup>41</sup> The Association of Jewish Academics from Iraq published memoirs, scholarship, fiction, and poetry by Iraqi Israelis in Arabic and Hebrew.<sup>42</sup> These ventures received a boost in participation in the 1990s, after the smaller wave of emigres who fled Iraq between 1969 and 1974 had had the opportunity to reestablish themselves, primarily in Israel and Britain. Several of them offered something the 1950–51 emigres lacked: a network of enduring relationships with the Iraqi interior, now more easily maintained by way of telephone contact and people traffic through London.<sup>43</sup> The Iraqi efforts, in turn, inspired similar projects by Libyan and Yemeni emigres in Israel, as well as non-Israeli ventures by Jews from other Arab countries.<sup>44</sup> Among the latter, as noted earlier, Moroccan Jews managed to establish a museum in Casablanca in 1998.

Decades later, a new wave of activity by some of the same figures shows how, amid sweeping change in the region, Jews from several Arab countries have sought to reclaim a more equitable relationship with their places of origin. Consider Linda Menuhin Abdul Aziz, who fled Baghdad in 1971. As a freelance contributor to the Saudi-owned online magazine *Elaph*,<sup>45</sup> London-based *al-Hewar al-Mutamaddin*,<sup>46</sup> and numerous Iraqi publications, she has worked to reclaim the narrative of her own community, and become a voice in the discussion of how to foster civil society in Arab lands. As a consultant to Israel's Foreign Ministry, she has served as a principal advisor to the digital outreach team and managed the spinoff Iraqi Facebook page, gaining a platform to lead a public conversation with half a million Iraqi followers. Meanwhile, Israel's Association of Jewish Academics from Iraq has forged ties to Iraqi publishers to distribute Israeli literature in Arabic translation in Baghdad. The publishing in Iraq has attracted supportive local media coverage. This emerging human network has also found a virtual home: a discrete social media application now serves to link several civil elites in Baghdad with Israeli and non-Israeli Jews via their smartphones. Having joined the group, the author observed exchanges often in excess of twenty-five postings per day. Public figures in the two countries pooled information, coordinated plans, and organized periodic meetings—in Berlin, Istanbul, Tel Aviv, and Baghdad. As people traffic began to develop anew, the Babylonian Jewish Heritage Museum at last received a trickle of visitors from Iraq.<sup>47</sup>

Taking stock of these activities, Ronen Zeidel, an Iraq specialist at Tel Aviv University's Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, assessed their significance as follows:

In its attempts to establish relations with Arab states, Israel tends to focus on forging contacts with the political elite, and sometimes only with one specific leader. The educated middle class was neglected.... Iraq offers the opportunity for a different process which may begin with the educated class and will prepare the ground within wide and influential circles before the formal diplomatic rapprochement between the two countries begins. This different process will lay a firm foundation for future relationships.

But a separate venture by Middle East emigres spoke to the challenge of harmonizing such civilian outreach with Israel's official diplomatic endeavors—as well as uncertainty over how to approach a politically divided Arab

country.<sup>48</sup> The initiative was the brainchild of Raphael Luzon—referenced earlier—a Libyan Jewish diaspora figure who had fled Tripoli in July 1967 and lived in Israel and London; and Baghdad-born Edwin Shuker, a businessman, activist, and current vice president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. In contrast to traditional Track II diplomacy, they envisioned an open event that would aim as much to shake up Libya’s public discussion as to jump-start diplomatic ties. And in contrast to the Saudi-Israeli meetings that had been convened in U.S. and European public forums, they intended to skirt divisive regional issues, keep the focus on Libya’s internal challenges, and create the feeling of a family reunion.<sup>49</sup> Luzon understood that in doing so the gathering would provoke outrage in Libya. But he saw the inevitable backlash as an opportunity to argue publicly with opponents of peace. He knew that they would overpower him in Libyan media, but believed that he could nonetheless spark a measure of public support and thus establish the principle that rejectionists no longer owned the floor.<sup>50</sup>

The Convention for Dialogue and Reconciliation with Libya and the Arab World assembled on the island of Rhodes in July 2017, on the fiftieth anniversary of the slaughter of Libyan Jews in Tripoli following the 1967 war. With encouragement from the Israeli prime minister’s office, several current and former officials attended who shared a special feeling for Libya: Minister of Social Equality Gila Gamliel, an Israeli native born to Libyan and Yemeni parents; Finance Minister Moshe Kahlon, born to Libyan parents; and retired Brig. Gen. Yom Tov Samia, another Libyan-Israeli and a former head of IDF Southern Command. Among several dozen attendees whom the Israelis encountered were official representatives of the government in Tripoli, an official from the rival government of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, leadership figures from the country’s Amazigh (Berber) and Tabu communities, and several prominent Libyan intellectuals and writers. They also met politicians from Iraq, a nephew of the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, and senior European officials.<sup>51</sup> Over several days, with TV crews present, speakers conveyed a shared desire to overcome the sorrows of the past. Israelis and Libyans were filmed dining together, embracing each other, and dancing to live performances of Libyan and Iraqi music. As a two-and-a-half-hour video of the proceedings posted to YouTube shows, the event looked less like a diplomatic summit than an Arab wedding.<sup>52</sup>

True to form, the ranking imam of the eastern Libyan city of Cyrenaica urged all the country’s clerics to pray for the failure of the Rhodes con-

ference. At a meeting of the city's Council of Imams, he referred to Jews as criminals and grandchildren of monkeys and pigs. "These Jews want to come back to Libya and get money," he said. "Libyan secularist traitors are helping them because the Jews gave them money to do so."<sup>53</sup> Al Jazeera, one of the channels covering the event, portrayed it in nefarious terms, as did several Libyan media outlets. The government in Tripoli faced pressure to disavow the conference. Some officials denied having dispatched representatives, while others who had been involved with the planning pretended they had not known Israelis would attend.<sup>54</sup> In parliament, Islamists and Nasserists joined in condemning the government for its participation. Nonetheless, as Luzon had hoped, some elites pushed back: Omar al-Quwayri, a former culture minister under Haftar's breakaway regime, told Libyan media: "Our meetings were public. Our statements were clear. Our sessions were photographed and filmed...We have no goal or aspiration but to extricate Libya from its predicament and its misery, and we shall do the impossible for the sake of that."<sup>55</sup> Tripoli's Abdulrahman Swehli, chairman of the High State Council, expressed support for the conference, and noted that his grandfather, Libyan resistance leader Ramadan Swehli, had fought alongside Luzon's father in the struggle against Italian colonization. The chairman of Libya's Amazigh Supreme Council stated bluntly that his community welcomes the establishment of full relations with Israel.

Several Libyan TV channels and publications granted Luzon a platform to speak for himself. Most asked hardball questions, but he found his way through them. He managed to describe the impact of Nasserist indoctrination on relations between Jews and Muslims in the country in the 1960s, as well as recount the 1967 massacre that prompted him to flee. One journalist, showing sympathy for Luzon, asked the kinds of softball questions Arab media sometimes pose to establish a bond between viewers and their subject. For example, "What does Libya mean to Raphael Luzon?" In down-home dialect, Luzon described his longing for the country since he fled, as well as his joy, more than four decades later, at returning to visit the old neighborhoods and swim along the Tripoli coast. He went on to stress the difference between Jewish refugees like himself and their children and grandchildren: "None of the second or third generation, whether in Israel or other countries, wants to move to Libya. It's been fifty years and that story is over. But I can also say that I don't know a single one of them who doesn't dream of visiting the country to see where their families came from. And

if they could start to do commerce or investment or other work in Libya, I have no doubt that they would.”<sup>56</sup> In lengthier interviews, the discussion of Luzon’s Jewishness and Israeli connection gradually receded, giving way to questions about Libyan domestic politics, which Luzon proved well suited to engage. He shared ideas about national reconciliation and parsed the merits of various mediation initiatives.<sup>57</sup> Subsequent coverage of Luzon referred to him as a “Libyan patriot.”<sup>58</sup>

In conversations about the Rhodes conference with Israeli establishment figures, conflicting appraisals arose, reflecting uncertainty about citizen diplomacy of the style Luzon had practiced. Questions revolved around the value of engaging feuding factions in a war-torn country to begin with, and whether it was wise to do so openly given the public storm the conference stirred in Libya. The latter concern highlights a difference in mentality between Luzon and the Israeli political mainstream. Luzon felt that well before any closed-door diplomatic process could yield a Libya-Israel treaty, the Libyan public would need to come to terms with the legacy and consequences of its own rejectionism. He believed that if Israelis or their Jewish supporters did not engage that discussion, no one would do so for them—whereas, having resolved to take part, they could tell their truth and catalyze a measure of local support.<sup>59</sup> During his Libyan TV appearances, Luzon did not argue polemically with his hosts so much as negotiate emotionally with the audience—a practice unlike conventional diplomacy or *hasbara*.

Luzon’s success at doing so—like that of Iraqi Israelis in building goodwill for the Jewish state in Baghdad—employed a native’s expertise at navigating culture in an Arab society. If one adopts the view that such an approach should be integrated into a larger policy of Israeli-Arab engagement, then the question of how to assimilate these emigres’ capacities becomes urgent as they grow older and fewer.

## AMERICA’S VOICE IN THE REGION

Earlier sections showed how the United States played its own role in Arab public discussions of Israel and Jews—as a government, a community of policymakers, and a global exporter of culture. Examples from 1950s Washington spoke to the mixed legacy of information operations arising, on the one hand, from CIA support for Nasser’s Voice of the Arabs and the anti-Zionist American Friends of the Middle East; and on the other, from the

Eisenhower administration's gift of a transmitter to the Voice of Israel Arabic Service. Six decades later, amid a strategic realignment in the region, events at a Washington think tank provided an example of how the venue of the U.S. capital could serve as a communications platform in itself—for Saudi and Israeli figures to model an encounter, and for a senior Muslim cleric to model empathy for Jews. Other examples reflected how American values with bearing on Arab-Israeli relations could spread powerfully but indirectly: When movie lovers in Syria and Bahrain watched Ben Stiller play a rabbi in *Keeping the Faith*, they saw Jews through the eyes of a society that welcomed them. When Moroccan royals came to the United States to court its major industries, they courted the tolerant and egalitarian sensibilities of the American people.

Three recent trends in U.S. strategic communications have created the possibility of a more consistent and focused effort to counter the culture of rejectionism in Arab lands. First, the U.S. government's own broadcasting in Arabic has begun to advocate more robustly for American values and priorities, including the goals of fighting antisemitism and promoting Arab-Israeli accord. Second, through a combination of government and nongovernment initiatives, Americans have forged direct partnerships with indigenous Arab media, as well as educational and religious institutions, aiming to counter extremism more generally and advance a culture of civil society and tolerance. Third, American Jewish community actors have become a voice in Arab public discussions—through citizen diplomacy, interfaith initiatives, their own nascent media in Arabic, and support for Israeli efforts in the same realms. All these ventures offer channels through which U.S. expertise in peace education, religious dialogue, and development media can find its way to Arab societies.

It will fall on the concluding chapter (“A Plan for Reclamation”) to explain how U.S. leadership can strengthen the range of indigenous actors working toward a culture conducive to Arab-Israeli partnership. The more narrow purpose here is to note the growing U.S. role as a voice among them. As suggested previously, alongside the need to counter Arab antisemitism, the rise of anti-Zionist philosemitism presents the opportunity for a new conversation—between Arabs whose understanding of Jews has improved and outsiders who believe in partnership between Israel and its neighbors. The United States has developed the capacity to crucially enrich both efforts.

### *U.S. Broadcasting in Arabic Finds Its Groove*

Sixteen of the world's twenty wealthiest nations, of which only one is Arab, maintain government-funded broadcasts in Arabic. Among them, the U.S.-backed Middle East Broadcasting Networks (MBN), consisting of Radio Sawa and the TV channels Alhurra and Alhurra Iraq, does not lead the pack. A latecomer to the field, it developed over the five years following the September 11 attacks as part of the U.S. government's response to anti-American disinformation and incitement on pan-Arab television, in particular Al Jazeera. Over MBN's first decade, successive leaderships vacillated between the overlapping but distinct functions of surrogate journalism and public diplomacy—by most accounts, without excelling at either of them. But a more decisive figure took the reins in 2017: Ambassador Alberto Fernandez, an Arabic speaker who had held diplomatic posts in five Arab and Muslim countries. He explained his vision for reforming the network in response to its prior faults:

The old Alhurra played it safe and played it dull. It didn't want to make waves. It didn't want to be controversial or edgy. It was boring. There was no reason to watch it. There was nothing unique or unusual. It was a weaker version of the pap and pablum of what you have on the pan-Arab networks. I want the opposite: I want us to make waves, be controversial, and be edgy. And I want it not just for the sake of being controversial, but also because it makes good journalistic sense.<sup>60</sup>

Fernandez built a new lineup to confront each of the region's ideological legacies explicitly. The talk show *Sam and Ammar*, for example, starred a reformed pan-Arabist (Egyptian American Samuel Tadros) and a lapsed Islamist (Syrian American Ammar Abdulhamid). In a format reminiscent of an old-time Arab intellectual salon, they deconstructed the ideas they had grown up with and advocated liberalism. A show about religion that launched in October 2018 featured Egyptian Islamic reformist Islam al-Beheiry; he took on hardline readings of Islam as promulgated by some of the region's largest seminaries. A new online opinion section, *Min Zawiyah Ukhra* (From Another Angle), featured liberal columnists from across the region.

The channel also engaged the discussion of Israel and Jews. Several episodes of *Sam and Ammar*, for example, examined the causes and realities of the Holocaust, the influence of Nazism on Arab ideologies and statecraft, stories of the Arab "Righteous Among the Nations," and the lessons of this

history for Arabs today. Periodic coverage of the remnants of Jewry in Arab lands touched on the causes of the Jews' forced migration, its consequences for the region, and responses by refugees' offspring to their families' past. A 2017 article on the 120th anniversary of the First Zionist Congress in Basel, also by Tadros, grapples with Zionism's success as an ideology of state-building and challenges readers to draw inspiration from it. If these ideas sound familiar, it is because the broadcasters expressing them identify as torchbearers for those Arab liberals who were booted so powerfully by their rivals in the 1930s, as discussed in chapter 1.

Mid-2018 estimates indicated that Alhurra had a viewership of approximately 12 million, along with 11 million followers on Facebook—a much smaller audience than any of the major indigenous channels.<sup>61</sup> But it was the most widely viewed among the few outlets that forthrightly advocated Arab-Israeli partnership. The inherent controversy of such programming, moreover, ensured a reaction by the larger broadcasts. A case in point from June 2018 involved the service Alhurra provided the Arab peace camp. Abd al-Hamid Hakim, a Saudi researcher based in Jeddah who had joined a public delegation to Israel the prior year, received no platform on any Saudi-owned channel. Hosted by Alhurra's Saudi anchor Sukina Meshekhis, he shared an idea about the conflicting claims over Jerusalem:

We as Arabs need to understand the other side as it is, and know what its demands are, so that we can succeed in what the peace negotiations are striving for—so that the peace negotiations will not be futile. We need to recognize and understand that Jerusalem is a religious symbol for the Jews, as holy as Mecca and Medina are to Muslims. And the Arab mindset needs to liberate itself from the joint legacy of Nasserism and political Islam in its Sunni and Shia varieties, which implanted, for pure political reasons, the culture of hatred of the Jews and denial of their historical rights in the region.<sup>62</sup>

Several indigenous channels replayed the clip, albeit as purported evidence that the Saudi monarchy intended to betray the Palestinian people. The attention earned Hakim an invitation to say more on the BBC Arabic service, a broadcast with a less favorably disposed team of journalists but higher ratings than Alhurra. Recalling his visit to Israel, Hakim asked viewers to imagine a normal country, flawed and diverse, with a majority population that wanted to make peace with its neighbors and contribute to the welfare of the region. He also proposed that the warmer the relationship

between Israelis and Arabs became, the more prospects would grow for a mutually satisfactory compromise in the Palestinian arena.<sup>63</sup>

Though the “new Alhurra” was not the only pan-Arab outlet offering a platform for such a perspective, it was the only one to support the Arab liberals who espoused it as staunchly as Al Jazeera advocated for the Muslim Brotherhood.

### *The Partnership Approach*

The post–September 11 drive to counter toxic messaging that spawned Alhurra also inspired an alternative U.S. approach to strategic communications in the region. Though it did not confront the demonization of Israel and Jews head-on, it presented the possibility of doing so more gradually—and accordingly bears assessing.

The “partnership approach” began with a theory that crystallized in a landmark 2003 report on U.S. public diplomacy from a bipartisan group of policymakers led by Ambassador Edward Djerejian. At a fraction of the cost of maintaining a regional satellite channel, the report found, the United States could reach a larger Arab audience by collaborating with more popular, indigenous media outlets.<sup>64</sup> That is, where local broadcasters wanted to make common cause in spreading a positive social message, Americans could help them by imparting expertise, coproducing shows, and investing in their capacities. Such work would likely differ from the assistance that groups like the National Endowment for Democracy gave to nascent democratic media ventures. In order to reach the largest possible audience, it would be necessary to engage outlets owned or dominated by authoritarian establishments. Doing so became feasible after Arab states set out to enact positive cultural reforms to ensure their own stability. As noted earlier, in the wake of al-Qaeda attacks in Arab countries between 2002 and 2005, some autocrats allied with the United States began to gradually introduce the ideals of tolerance, civil society, and a more constructive form of nationalism via media, schools, and mosques. A decade later, in the age of the Islamic State, several of these countries intensified such efforts. Thus, from a U.S. standpoint, there appeared to be enough overlap between the autocrats’ drive for change and the principles Americans championed so as to justify cooperation. And what began as a strategy for partnership in media later developed into a call for cooperation with religious and educational institutions as well.

A leader in this approach with regard to broadcasting, Washington-based America Abroad Media (AAM), aimed to “empower and support

local voices that convey universal values through creative content and media programming.”<sup>65</sup> (Disclosure: The author serves as AAM’s strategic advisor on programming and projects in the Middle East and North Africa.) With support from the U.S. government and private donors, the group coproduced “town hall” programs, documentaries, and reportage with leading broadcast outlets in several Arab and Muslim-majority countries. Airing on indigenous radio and television, some served to demystify the United States, while others broached local issues including corruption, the subjugation of women, and the need for a culture of tolerance.<sup>66</sup> A portion of the content also helped foster in effect a more honest discussion of Jews or Israel. For example, a 2008 episode of the Al-Arabiya talk show *Panorama*, produced with assistance from AAM, hosted Ziad Asali, president of the American Task Force on Palestine, and Israeli diplomat Jeremy Issacharoff, then deputy chief of mission at the Israeli embassy in Washington, for a friendly discussion about the status of peace efforts. A 2012 town hall in Tunisia, coproduced by AAM and the local TV channel al-Tunisia, enabled Jacob Lellouche, a member of the country’s small Jewish community, to join representatives from each of Tunisia’s ethnic and religious denominations for a talk about minority rights.<sup>67</sup> As with the finer TV productions covered in the prior segment on “bottom-up” efforts, these programs worked within the constraints laid down by a given outlet to move the conversation forward.

AAM later sought to expand its approach to include entertainment programming. In 2017, the organization’s president, Aaron Lobel, joined Paula Dobriansky, a former undersecretary of state, in calling on the U.S. government to “provide catalytic funding to help compensate for the limitations of the Middle East television market...[by assisting] visionaries who understand that the best response to extremism is programming that inspires and empowers their predominantly young audiences.”<sup>68</sup> The case for doing so at the time stemmed from a desire in Washington to see Arab allies use their media to more forcefully denigrate and marginalize the Islamic State (IS). Lobel convened a series of educational workshops in Arab countries in which seasoned Hollywood screenwriters and producers provided mentorship to their Arab counterparts and considered stories to potentially adapt and coproduce. He built a substantial network of entertainment industry movers spanning Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, North Africa, and the Levant.<sup>69</sup>

Powerful Arab media outlets responded favorably to Lobel’s style of outreach—including those outlets with a history of producing antisemitic

content. For example, one of the networks that welcomed partnership with Hollywood to counter IS was Saudi-owned MBC. In March 2017, Ali Jaber, the network's director of programming, came to the U.S. Department of State to deliver the keynote address at the Ministerial Plenary for the Global Coalition Working to Defeat ISIS (another acronym for the jihadist group). "We look at ISIS as an idea, a narrative—a dangerous one. We believe that the only way to beat that idea is to create another one that is better, more appealing, and progressive." Jaber said he welcomed investment and assistance from the United States, but also conveyed a reservation: "What we look to Hollywood for is to teach us the craft of storytelling, not to produce for us ideas of their own."<sup>70</sup> To its credit, MBC had already produced programs that served to assail IS, expose and remediate the culture of Sunni-Shia animosity in Saudi Arabia, and inspire solidarity with women struggling for their rights. But, as noted earlier, MBC had also created brazenly antisemitic programs such as *Fall of the Caliphate*, the thirty-episode drama about a series of purported Jewish conspiracies to bring down the Ottoman Empire. Nor had it undergone a purge of staff since relatively recent shows of this nature were produced. Jaber's instinct to limit Americans' role to "teach[ing] us the craft of storytelling" suggested that a hypothetical attempt to confront rejectionism within the institution would face limits.

On the one hand, the problem raised here amounted to a miniature version of the dilemmas surrounding foreign aid to Arab countries in general. In providing support to Arab media companies against a common enemy such as IS, the United States may unintentionally enable further demonization of Israel and Jews. On the other hand, perhaps in adding value to a media company, U.S. players could become a factor in how it evolves. As broadcasters in the Arab world far outnumber U.S.-aligned governments, Americans can more easily withdraw from a given company that violates their values. From the company's perspective, the opportunity to build inroads to Hollywood, coupled with concern about losing the benefits of U.S. support to a competitor, may create a disincentive to produce further belligerent programming. Moreover, a working relationship between Arab and U.S. creatives may help empower peace-minded staffers within the company. Recall the observation by Cairo University media studies professor Muna Abd al-Aziz that "in every newsroom, drama guild, and writers' salon, there have always been voices more curious about [Israel's] shades of gray, more skeptical of the wisdom of the 'boycott,' and more open to direct

engagement...but to our detriment, they rarely made themselves heard.”<sup>71</sup> The partnership approach could potentially help encourage and strengthen these voices—particularly in an enterprise controlled by an autocrat who has grown more favorably disposed to Israel. It bears noting in this context that during the 2018 Ramadan TV season, Saudi-owned MBC, now a beneficiary of U.S. assistance, did not release a new series trafficking in anti-semitic themes—though older antisemitic content remained available on demand and reran on various channels.

Similar questions applied beyond the realm of media as Americans weighed employing the partnership approach with religious and educational institutions as well. For example, in May 2018, among numerous efforts to coordinate counterextremist messaging with Arab allies, the U.S. State Department reported having “engaged with [UAE] government-supported organizations whose official stated purpose was to promote what the government believed were moderate interpretations of Islam, such as the Tabah Foundation.”<sup>72</sup> This was the institution headed by Habib Ali al-Jifri, the preacher who had espoused philosemitic anti-Zionism at a gathering in Khartoum. As assessed earlier, Jifri’s line represented a step forward in the discourse of Gulf-backed clerics in its time. But from a U.S. perspective, should Jifri’s stance be regarded as an acceptable plateau or a half-measure? Israelis could not easily pursue this question with Jifri, whereas his U.S. partners, having engaged him directly, had the opportunity to do so. The Tabah Foundation is dwarfed, in any case, by Egypt’s venerated Al-Azhar Islamic seminary, which former secretary of state John Kerry invoked in 2014 as a force for moderation in the struggle against the Islamic State.<sup>73</sup> Some voices in Washington saw Al-Azhar as a bulwark against the Muslim Brotherhood as well, particularly after Egyptian president Sisi worked with its Grand Imam to purge Islamists from its ranks. Advocates for a U.S.-Azharite partnership have called on the U.S. government to provide it with cutting-edge communications technology and other assistance, seeing it as a “natural partner in the struggle against extremism.”<sup>74</sup> Yet in January 2018, the seminary’s Grand Imam, Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, told a television audience that Israel was a “dagger into the body of the Arab world”; blamed it for the civil wars in Syria, Libya, and Yemen; and warned that Arabs would not know peace or prosperity as long as Israel existed. “[Israeli expansionism] will not end with the al-Aqsa Mosque,” he said. “They will march on the Kaaba [in Mecca] and the Prophet’s Mosque [in Medina].”<sup>75</sup>

Thus, the partnership approach brought promise as well as problems.

### *American Jewish Organizations*

As noted earlier, since the 1950s, Arab political narrations of Israel have emphasized the purported role of American Jewish organizations in a seamless Jewish internationale, operationally intertwined with the Israeli government and powerful throughout the world. In 1979, the king of Morocco introduced a refinement to this narration when he publicly courted American Jewish leaders in Washington. He showed that on the basis of reciprocity, their capacities could be tapped to benefit an Arab state. Since then, numerous American Jewish groups have sought to make inroads in Arab establishments by offering to intercede between a given Arab power and the United States, Israel, or both. They have hosted Arab officials and led delegations to Arab capitals, sometimes attracting Arabic media attention. In 2017–18, the Qatari government showed the value it placed on such encounters by attempting to intercede with the intercessors. Amid the political standoff between Qatar on the one hand and Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt on the other, it paid a lobbyist to court the sympathy of American Jewish organizations.<sup>76</sup>

What bearing do such relationships have on the effort to warm Arab attitudes toward Israel and Jews? In the Moroccan case, as the earlier assessment found, Jewish community actors in the United States did help grow the symbiosis among Moroccans, Israelis, and Americans from a series of political and security accommodations to a layered multisector partnership. As these ties proved their value, Moroccan authorities built public support within the country's borders for the virtue of Moroccan-Jewish relations, both for their own sake and as part of the larger cultural agenda of promoting tolerance and international cooperation. But as the more expansive "cold peace paradigm" showed, even Arab powers nominally at peace with Israel could resist years of urging from American Jewish groups to widen their cooperation with Israel into civil realms or end incendiary messaging. This observation does not diminish the groups' role as enhancers of whatever government-to-government arrangements developed. But it suggests that their private intercessions with Arab officialdom did not on their own bring positive effects to the cultural fiber of Arab societies.

Thus, the organizations' value in the cultural arena was less a function of the closed-door meetings than of any efforts they waged to connect with Arabs beyond government. In recent years, amid the openings described in chapter 3, some American Jewish organizations developed new capacities

and platforms for public engagement. Several connected with Arab Muslim religious figures within the framework of interfaith dialogue. Others won favorable media coverage in Arab outlets, or launched small Arabic media ventures of their own. American Jews with roots in Arab lands meanwhile organized for a new public conversation with their countries of origin. Some of these efforts occurred independently of Israel while others developed in consort with Israelis. All advanced the general endeavor to counter antisemitism and thaw Arab-Israeli relations, amounting to a further lever of U.S. soft power in the region.

With respect to interfaith efforts, some American Jewish groups adapted the expertise they had honed in other dialogue ventures dating back decades. Consider the American Jewish Committee (AJC), which through substantial outreach to the Catholic Church had helped facilitate the latter's renunciation of antisemitism at the Second Vatican Council in 1965.<sup>77</sup> In 2011, Rabbi David Rosen, the group's director of interfaith relations, joined the Vienna-based, Saudi-backed King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID) as a member of its board of directors. From a Saudi perspective, KAICIID served more as a projection of tolerance onto the international stage than a force for reform within the kingdom's borders. It nonetheless gave Rosen and the AJC a context in which to encounter clerics from Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Iraq—as well as several non-Arab Muslim countries—who served on the same board. Another figure on the Saudi group's board was U.S. rabbi Marc Schneier, founder of the New York-based Foundation for Ethnic Understanding. Drawing from twenty years of work as a bridge-builder between the African American and Jewish communities, Schneier proceeded to frequent Arab countries. He established personal relationships with heads of state in Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf, and convened Jewish and Muslim clerics and worshippers in Arab and other Muslim countries as well as the United States and Europe.<sup>78</sup> The Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center has also pursued an Arab interfaith agenda. In September 2017, a forty-member delegation from Bahrain visited the center to unveil the Bahrain Declaration on Religious Tolerance, bearing the king's name and pledging peace and dignity for all religious communities.<sup>79</sup>

A handful of American Jewish groups meanwhile launched modest media projects in Arabic. The first, *Asl al-Yahud* (Origins of the Jews), was an informational website about Judaism and Jewish history that operated from 2008 to 2016.<sup>80</sup> It achieved a monthly Arab audience in excess of

50,000. Ephraim Gabbai, the young rabbi who ran the site, corresponded with browsers who emailed him. They included journalists in several Arab countries who proceeded to use the information to more accurately explain Judaism to their audiences.<sup>81</sup> Other connectivity via Arabic media arose from American Jewish groups' Israel advocacy. The Israel Project, a Washington-based nonprofit concerned with countering media distortions of the Jewish state and its citizens, formed an Arabic division in 2011. In addition to attempts to engage indigenous Arab outlets, the project launched its own Arabic content online. Through a Facebook page called "Isra'il Bidun Raqaba" (Israel Uncensored) and an online magazine, *al-Masdar* (The Source), a team of Israeli Jewish and Arab journalists financed by Americans strove to provide balanced reporting about the country.<sup>82</sup> Asked how the team covered the issue of racism in Israeli society, for example, *al-Masdar* editor-in-chief Shimrit Meir said: "We don't go easy on them. Because, once more, if we ignore it and don't report about it, we will lose relevancy and defeat our goal. So we deal with it extensively, but we present the whole picture—that alongside the racism, there are many Israelis who wash their hands of such behavior."<sup>83</sup> The publications achieved a combined social media following in excess of two million. In 2015, they spun off from The Israel Project to become a purely Israeli outlet. The progression showed how an American Jewish initiative in Arabic could nurture an Israeli presence that took on a life of its own.<sup>84</sup>

A different project, not initially intended to join Arab public discussions, did so in response to Arab demand. Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa (JIMENA) was established in San Francisco in 2001 by Jewish refugees from the region. (Disclosure: The author became JIMENA's director of Arab outreach earlier this year.) The founders believed that U.S. debates about the Middle East too often ignored the forced flight and dispossession of 900,000 Jews from Arab lands, and that even American Jews sometimes conflated European Jewish culture with the fullness of Jewish history and heritage.<sup>85</sup> Aiming "to ensure that the accurate history of Mizrahi and Sephardic Jews is incorporated into mainstream Jewish and Middle Eastern narratives," the group launched educational curricula, campus outreach projects, and a speakers' bureau. It built an oral history program for surviving refugees, and supported campaigns for their redress by documenting the confiscation of their property and assets.<sup>86</sup> As related efforts developed in Europe and Israel, JIMENA joined hands with them. For example, it contributed to the Israeli Knesset's 2016 Biton Committee

report on “strengthening the heritage of Sephardi and Mizrahi Jewry in the [Israeli] education system.”<sup>87</sup> It also worked with Israel’s Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services to internationalize a smartphone app enabling third-generation refugees to collect oral history from their grandparents and upload it to the central repository of Beit Hatfutsot, Israel’s Museum of the Jewish People, in Tel Aviv.<sup>88</sup>

In 2010, JIMENA staffers noticed that the group’s English-only website was drawing substantial traffic from browsers in Arab countries even though they had made no attempt to promote it in the region. A steady stream of emails from Arabs featured expressions of sympathy and support. In a recurring phenomenon, a young person would write requesting help in tracking down distant relatives of a great-grandparent who had been born Jewish and converted to Islam.<sup>89</sup> JIMENA cofounder Gina Bublil-Waldman experienced Arab interest in her work more personally as well. While lecturing at Bay Area college campuses about her childhood in Tripoli, she encountered intense curiosity from visiting Arab students. They often confronted her with distortions of indigenous Jewish history to which they had been exposed as children. As Bublil-Waldman recalls, such exchanges often inspired an epiphany on the student’s part, followed by an embrace. In response to Arab interest, JIMENA translated much of its Web-based content into Arabic. By September 2018, the following for its Arabic-language Facebook page—31,000—had reached twice that of its equivalent in English, and some content from the site had found its way into small Egyptian, Tunisian, and Saudi online magazines.<sup>90</sup> Though only a small organization, JIMENA showed that an American Jewish group could help respond to widespread Arab interest in the region’s Jewish heritage.

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Part III

*An Unfair Fight*



## OBSTACLES TO A CULTURAL CAMPAIGN

THE CHAPTERS IN PART II highlighted a range of improvements in Arab public discourse on Israel and Jews that suggest more is possible. The thrust was that a grassroots Arab constituency for Arab-Israeli partnership has emerged to state its case. It is youthful, globally minded, and locally grounded in memories of a more tolerant Arab society. It breaches national borders. It transcends the politics of host governments. Though diffuse, it is millions strong. Though outnumbered, its ranks include some Arab elites. In several Arab countries, moreover, the yearnings of this voluble minority also comport with an establishment policy of accommodating Israel and its U.S. supporters. As a result, the constituency has won slightly more public space in which to express itself. It is also joined by pilgrims to the Arab infosphere: Israeli and U.S. broadcasters, citizen diplomats, and others who have sought to amplify and engage their Arab thought partners from the outside in. Considered as a whole, the noise they make can be heard from Morocco's Atlantic shores to the Strait of Hormuz.

What would it take for these actors, still only a subculture in the region, to effect a more substantial shift in Arab attitudes? The history of cultural deterioration recounted in chapter 1 showed that Nasserists and Islamists pursued their respective agendas by institutionalizing their ideas in media, mosques, and schools while working to erode the communications capacity of their rivals. The cultural improvements in Morocco described in chapter 2 showed that even after the region's informational environment grew more competitive and diffuse, it was still possible to repair some of the damage Nasserists and Islamists had caused by applying similar methods in

a corrective campaign. More recently, to Morocco's east, Arab supporters of rapprochement with Israel have made new inroads in mainstream communications platforms as part of an attempt to organize their own cultural project. Their success will depend on how the larger community of media workers, preachers, and educators responds—caught, as noted earlier, between pressure from peers, audience tastes, their own conscience, and, above all, the impositions of the ruler. As each of these factors evolves, so will the choices these voices make.

For a sense of the playing field, visit Maspero, the brutalist office complex on the Nile in Cairo from which Nasserist announcer Ahmed Said broadcast *Voice of the Arabs* to the region. It is still home to the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU), now a bureaucracy of 46,000 people.<sup>1</sup> Its broadcasts reach tens of millions in Egypt and beyond, and serve to launch new talent bound for even more popular, privately owned channels. Elsewhere in the complex, ERTU runs educational facilities where aspiring media workers from Algeria to Yemen come to learn the skills and values of their profession.<sup>2</sup> Maspero, in short, is a cultural ground zero for the region—and there are indications of unrest within its offices.

By outward appearances, the ghost of Nasserism still looms large. In October 2015, *Voice of the Arabs* anchor Ahmed Said returned to Maspero for a celebration of his ninetieth birthday. In a report on the event on Egypt's Channel One, Nadia Mabrouk, ERTU's director of broadcasting, said that all of her colleagues "bow down to this seminal media figure" who mentored "the generations that followed...even if we did not work with him face-to-face." Journalist Nagwa Abul-Naga, whose tenure began in the early Sadat years, said that ERTU's many employees were "the grandchildren of Ahmed Said...It is he who taught us the meaning of the word 'media.' It is he who taught us what to say, and the value of the words we were using... Ahmed Said is the school in which we studied." A sound crew played a clip of Said's booming voice on air, circa 1958, and attendees applauded. Then the honoree himself took the microphone and urged Arabs everywhere to "pay the price in blood" for the sake of pan-Arabism.<sup>3</sup> (Said died three years later, on June 5, 2018—fifty-one years to the day after the start of the Arab-Israeli war that ended his career at ERTU.<sup>4</sup>)

Now look closer at the TV clips of the celebration. The audience cheering Said does not appear to exceed fifty people. Some of the chairs are empty. Though attendees include five or so young people, most of the crowd, like the figures who praised the honoree, appear to be age sixty

or older.<sup>5</sup> If everyone at Maspero truly “bowed down” to Said as Nadia Mabrouk claimed, how many would miss the chance to toast him? “I, for one, do not look up to Ahmed Said,” said Ahmad Salim, in his mid-forties, formerly an employee of ERTU and currently news editor at the private channel Sada al-Balad. “He was a demagogue, and we need to make a clean break with his methodology...If you want to know the legacy of Ahmed Said, look at the civil wars in Syria and Yemen or the torture chambers of Algiers.”<sup>6</sup>

It would be difficult to manage a substantial opinion survey of ERTU employees for their views of Ahmed Said or Israel. But according to Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab, a senior advisor for programming at the network, the veterans who claimed Said enjoys overwhelming admiration were either indulging him out of respect or simply fantasizing. Asked to appraise attitudes about Israel-related messaging among Maspero staff, Abd al-Wahhab estimated that 30 percent of employees would support, out of conviction, a proactive effort to counter the demonization of Israel and Jews. He said that another 60 percent are agnostic. They pay lip service to rejectionism, or accept it passively, because it prevails in the building, but would go along with whatever new agenda a future leadership sets. The last 10 percent, in his view, truly cherish Said’s legacy, and remain determined to block any warming toward Israel or its supporters. This minority, Abd al-Wahhab said, holds most of the senior positions, intimidates dissenters into submission, and would fight any top-level decision to change the tenor of the broadcasts. Perhaps half of this “rejectionist elite” are fifty-five or older, he added, while the other half—young protégés—are on a fast track to succeed their mentors.<sup>7</sup> Two additional Egyptian media figures with extensive knowledge of ERTU shared a strikingly similar view of politics in the building.<sup>8</sup>

In eight additional Arab capitals—Algiers,<sup>9</sup> Baghdad,<sup>10</sup> Amman,<sup>11</sup> Beirut,<sup>12</sup> Tripoli,<sup>13</sup> Tunis,<sup>14</sup> Manama,<sup>15</sup> and Sana<sup>16</sup>—well-known media figures conjectured over the equivalent breakdown of their respective working environments. With the exception of the figure in Amman, where most of the population shares a Palestinian ethnic background, each likewise described an “agnostic majority,” a disproportionately powerful rejectionist elite, and a young, peace-seeking minority that either equaled or exceeded the hard-core rejectionists in number. These informed appraisals are of course speculative. But in pointing to a critical mass that favors Arab-Israeli partnership, they comport with the cultural and political changes in the region described thus

far, as well as opinion polls, noted earlier, that show growing support for relations with the Jewish state. And in suggesting that the peace constituency is cowed by a rejectionist elite, they comport with an aspect of human nature: the consequences of dissent are exceptionally high in Arab media outlets, which are typically managed in a more authoritarian style than their Western equivalents.

So it appears that media workers aspiring to wage a robust information campaign for Arab-Israeli partnership are not merely voices in the wilderness. But they apparently need something that lies beyond their power to foment: a decision from the highest levels of political authority to reshuffle senior management in their country's major communications platforms. To hope for such a decision is not unreasonable. Some Arab autocrats have conducted sweeps of their information operations relatively recently—not to erode rejectionism per se, but rather to target specific ideological factions. Consider the UAE, which made a series of personnel adjustments to weaken the Muslim Brotherhood over the decade preceding its 2013 crackdown on the movement. In 2003, according to local newspaper reports, authorities moved 170 Brotherhood figures employed by the Ministry of Education, including 83 who held managerial roles, to various local divisions of government where they would have no public platform.<sup>17</sup> Similar adjustments followed in media and Islamic affairs between 2005 and 2010.<sup>18</sup> The difficulty of enacting such measures varies, to be sure, from one Arab country to the next and from one communications sector to another. Among sectors, for example, compare the monophony of a broadcast to the cacophony of a school system, in which every classroom is its own platform for an ideologue to indoctrinate a captive audience. Or compare the media workers at ERTU with the clerics of Egypt's Al-Azhar, where there may not be an "agnostic majority" to begin with. Potential remedies for schools and pulpits will be approached later. For now, it suffices to first stipulate that for serious, short-term progress in the discussion of Israel and Jews, media presents the lowest-hanging fruit, and to then gauge whether Arab establishments are reaching for it.

By way of context, the four Arab powers capable of achieving the greatest impact through a reorientation of their media happen to be U.S. allies: Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar. Egypt, the most populous Arab country, remains the region's capital of entertainment, producing the lion's share of Arabic TV serials and films. The Saudi royal family controls the largest media empire, which publishes and broadcasts region-wide in every genre. The UAE has become the Arab world's central media hub. In addi-

tion to maintaining its own outlets, some with a pan-Arab footprint, it hosts hundreds of pan-Arab publications, broadcasts, and production facilities in specially designated zones, and underwrites several of the biggest. Qatar's Al Jazeera remains one of the most popular news networks in the region. The fact that Washington is aligned with all the titans of Arabic discourse at once is historically unprecedented. Even after Egypt joined the U.S. orbit in the 1970s, a hostile Syria and its Lebanese assets remained a leading force in pan-Arab journalism and entertainment for three decades. (Since the Arab Spring, Syria's media footprint has diminished, along with public demand for its content.) So in theory, Washington is extraordinarily well suited to urge the relevant parties to institute changes awaited by the Arab peace camp.

For the most part, such changes do not appear to be happening on their own. Despite the signs of warming toward Israel by these four and other U.S.-aligned Arab leaderships—as well as modest media gains for proponents of a “peace between peoples”—no substantive purge of rejectionist elites has yet transpired. To the contrary, at this writing, they remain largely in control, and their antisemitism has mutated to serve new establishment purposes. Although media coverage has shifted focus to Iran, its proxies, and other Islamists, Jews and the Jewish state remain the underlying, all-powerful villains. Thus, ISIS, according to Egyptian TV host Kamal Izz al-Din, is in fact an acronym for Israeli Secret Intelligence Service, and Islamic State chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi is in truth a Jew named Simon Elliot.<sup>19</sup> Iran, says Kuwaiti commentator Aisha Rshed, is a “tool of Zionist freemasonry” and Hamas a “Mossad creation.”<sup>20</sup> A July 2018 article in the Saudi daily *al-Watan* likewise warns that Iran “serves the Israeli project in the region and the Jewish project in the world, which is why it wants to spread chaos in moderate Sunni Arab states to help destroy them and establish control over them.”<sup>21</sup> To be sure, *al-Watan* is also one of the newspapers referenced previously that published an article acknowledging true conflict between Iran and Israel and favoring the latter to win.<sup>22</sup> The authors of such columns were primarily royalist elites, close to Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman, who enjoyed a prerogative to publish their views without editorial interference. But the novel content was considerably rarer than the familiar canards—such as this February 2018 headline: “Lebanese MP: Israel Funded Hezbollah.”<sup>23</sup>

A similar attitude manifested in Saudi broadcast media, while voices for rapprochement that occasionally appeared in print received no Saudi airtime at all. Recall Abd al-Hamid Hakim, the young Saudi visitor to

Israel who urged Arab peoples to overcome the “culture of hatred of the Jews.” It has already been noted that he made his case on foreign broadcasts only: U.S.-backed Alhurra and the BBC Arabic service. It has been said that in addition to not appearing on Saudi broadcasts since his June 2017 statements, Hakim has had employment problems.<sup>24</sup> In a sense, Hakim was in good company. After the crown prince told *The Atlantic* that Jews have the right to a national homeland in Palestine, Saudi broadcast outlets did not report the statement; the same held for the kingdom’s domestic newspapers. (In a partial exception, a complete translation of the *Atlantic* interview appeared in *al-Riyadh*, the kingdom’s semiofficial newspaper of record. The accompanying analysis of the interview, like that of the other papers, ignored the Israel remark.)

It is particularly instructive to follow the behavior of mainstream Gulf media since June 2017, when the crisis erupted pitting Qatar against Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain. As shown earlier, the period saw new openings between the Gulf and Israel, including cooperation against Iran and public gestures to the Jewish state and its supporters by all parties to the intra-Gulf dispute. The same Gulf actors also worked hard to court the White House—offering, inter alia, to help the Middle East negotiating team reach its intended “Deal of the Century” among Israel, the Palestinians, and possibly other Arab countries including their own. Yet the dominant message in their media has been an assault on the deal as the “Great Betrayal of the Century”—to quote the Saudi daily *al-Riyadh*<sup>25</sup>—together with claims by each side that the other had committed the “crime” of normalization with Israel. A typical Qatari example—from Al Jazeera, headlined “The UAE and Bahrain: Normalization with Israel as Fast as Possible”—disparages Abu Dhabi, Manama, and Riyadh for allying with the United States and Israel against Iran and pursuing a peace deal in consort with them.<sup>26</sup> A typical Saudi rejoinder in *al-Riyadh*, from July 2018, says that Doha’s latest “malignancies and betrayals” have included its promise to U.S. Middle East envoy Jason Greenblatt to “negotiate with Hamas and force it to accept the ‘Deal of the Century.’” The same month, the UAE daily *Emarat al-Youm* used a new Israeli book about Qatar-Israel relations to portray the two countries as conspirators to destabilize the region. The article praises the Saudi government for exerting pressure on Qatar to shut down the Israeli trade office in Doha in 2000.<sup>27</sup> *Al-Riyadh* meanwhile used the same information to one-up

the Qatari assault on the “Deal of the Century” with “the story of the most dangerous conspiracy in the history of the region.” The alleged plot to “spark the Arab destruction...known as the ‘Arab Spring’” was first hatched “during the secret visit of former Qatari prime minister Hamad bin Jassim to Tel Aviv, followed by the visit of then Israeli prime minister Shimon Peres to Doha, so that they could draw up their map of sabotage in the Arab world.”<sup>28</sup>

So the Gulf States media delivered a new onslaught of antisemitism in order to denigrate each other’s leadership. Yet these outlets, while nominally at loggerheads, were in a sense united against their own establishments. All stoked opposition to a diplomatic process that their leaders had promised Washington to facilitate. All pronounced Gulf-Israeli accommodation to be treachery while the same leaders were engaging in it themselves—more openly than ever before. This seeming act of self-sabotage would traditionally be explained as a symptom of the cold peace paradigm: an autocrat lets his media vent popular rejectionist sentiment—or exacerbate it—while portraying himself to foreign allies as the cure. Such an explanation remained apt with respect to Qatar, still a host to Muslim Brotherhood information operations. It remained apt, as well, with respect to Egyptian president Sisi. In an October 2018 speech, he returned to trafficking in antisemitic themes, even as he continued to speak the language of tolerance to Western patrons.<sup>29</sup> But Qatar’s rivals in the Gulf—in particular, Saudi Arabia and the UAE—had acknowledged the damaging ideological legacy of their forbears and said they wanted to make a clean break with the past. They had enlisted help from supporters of Israel to defeat Sunni Islamists and Iran alike. Why did their mouthpieces now spread a further rash of bigotry? What kept rejectionist media elites at their posts when proponents of Arab-Israeli partnership were apparently available, within the same institutions, to replace them?

Arab officials, when queried along these lines by foreign allies in the past, typically said that they needed to appease rejectionist forces within their borders and ward off a massive backlash to their policies.<sup>30</sup> But such claims appeared less plausible in 2017–18 as Gulf members of the anti-Qatar coalition boldly confronted domestic factions they opposed—even within their establishments—while public opinion surveys, as noted earlier, portrayed growing popular support for peace. Though rejectionism undoubtedly endured, it was again feeding off establishment messaging.

## THE PRESSURES OF SECTARIAN MEDIA

A further source of antisemitic mass communication for which Sunni Arab establishments bore only partial responsibility was the cycle of Shia-Sunni sectarian incitement, which has escalated amid civil strife in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and the Gulf. Iran-backed Shia clerics and media, abetted by their Russian ally, seized on evidence of Sunni autocrats' accommodation with Israel and Jews to tar them as stooges. Sunni jihadist forces, hitting back at Iran and Shia, furthered the line that Iran and Israel were secret allies and Shiism and Judaism were theologically linked. Regarding the portion of this sectarian cycle that emanated from Iran, Sunni autocrats shared a genuine desire to fight it. Their attempt to do so eventually included blocking some channels online and removing them from the major satellite carriers. But it also involved supporting Sunni jihadist channels to rebut the Shia polemics and muster their populations' fighting spirit. The United States and its Western allies meanwhile possessed a range of tools that could be employed to weaken the incendiary programming's reach, but they did not adequately employ them.

The Iranian component of the cycle relied on a trans-state infrastructure of schools and pulpits born of decades, combined with a powerful network of satellite channels that has multiplied in recent years. Most aired from Iranian territory or Arab enclaves protected by Iran's allies and proxies: Damascus, Hezbollah-dominated portions of Beirut, and parts of Baghdad controlled by Shia Islamist militias.<sup>31</sup> Other projects kept headquarters in the West, enjoying lawful status and free speech rights.<sup>32</sup> These ventures were unlike Arab establishment media described thus far, which featured ideological diversity among staff and manifested a small amount of positive change in their content. The Iran-backed activity, by contrast, was monolithic. It largely operated under a strict hierarchy of command and control that originated in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. This is not to suggest that the Arab Shia populations these institutions presumed to champion shared the same ideology uniformly. Recall that the many Iraqi enthusiasts for the Israeli Foreign Ministry's Arabic Facebook page spanned the country's sectarian and ethnic map—including Shia, among them clerics. Slogans chanted by protestors in Iran, moreover, during both the 2009 post-election demonstrations and the mass protests of 2017–18, indicated that many Iranians opposed their government's spending on Arab proxy militias altogether.<sup>33</sup> Thus, for example, opponents of an Iraqi Shia Islamic channel

in Baghdad could be found on both sides of the Iran-Iraq border. But given the cultural and linguistic chasm separating Iranian and Arab societies and the Tehran government's suppression of dissent, they did not come together to make common cause. Meanwhile, Shia Arab militiamen and their Iranian patrons moved freely back and forth, pooling their fighting capacities and coordinating their communication.

Consider the Iraqi channel al-Ahd (The Covenant), launched in 2008 as the voice of the militia Asaib Ahl al-Haq (League of the Righteous), a member of the Popular Mobilization Forces coalition that joined the war on the Islamic State.<sup>34</sup> (Asaib Ahl al-Haq had also perpetrated more than six thousand attacks on U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq, as well as lethal campaigns of ethnic cleansing in Sunni neighborhoods of Baghdad.<sup>35</sup>) In a December 2016 news report typifying its gloss on rapprochement between Sunni powers and Jews, the channel alleged that a "Jewish terrorist group" had met with Bahrain's king, Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa. The montage accompanying the narration consisted of meetings between the Sunni monarch and Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding in New York; Jason Isaacson, director of government and international affairs at the AJC; and Israel's Shimon Peres—as well as Hasidic youth engaged in circle dancing.<sup>36</sup> The announcer claimed that all these figures shared a connection to Chabad,

an extremist Zionist organization, especially extremist in its expansionism and racism...It aims to rebuild the supposed "Temple" on the rubble of the al-Aqsa Mosque, and holds that Arabs deserve only to be killed—men, women, children, and livestock...[But] this does not constitute terrorism from the perspective of the ruling al-Khalifa family in Bahrain. Terrorism, in their view, is any demand for the rights of the people.<sup>37</sup>

Two Shia Islamist channels relaying the same narrative broadcast from Britain: the Bahraini opposition al-Lulua (The Pearl), headquartered in London, and Buckinghamshire-based Fadak, consisting of sermons and talk shows hosted by Iraqi cleric Yasir al-Habib.<sup>38</sup> An al-Lulua segment in October 2017 made equivalent use of footage of Rabbis Marc Schneier and Marvin Hier, associate director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, from the September event in Los Angeles that inaugurated the Bahrain Declaration on Religious Tolerance. The report made no mention of tolerance or the declaration, but cited evidence of security cooperation between Israel and Bahrain as well as a statement by King Hamad that Bahraini citizens were

free to visit the Jewish state.<sup>39</sup> On Fadak, claims about “Jewish terrorists” in Bahrain aired repeatedly, along with assertions that the Saudi ruling family was Jewish.<sup>40</sup> The Iraq- and Britain-based channels were joined in propagating these themes by the largest Iranian media enterprises—Tehran-based al-Alam, the government’s official satellite broadcast to the Arab world; and Hezbollah’s al-Manar—as well as dozens of smaller channels in multiple languages, from Yemen to Nigeria.

As in the teachings of Iran-backed seminaries and clerics, antisemitism on these outlets was only one of numerous themes used to incite violence against Sunni states, militias, and civilians.<sup>41</sup> A BBC Arabic documentary on the problem of sectarian television held Britain-based Fadak, for example, “responsible for spilling blood in Iraq,” while the al-Ahd channel repeatedly directed followers to carry out specific acts of violence.<sup>42</sup> But in addition to these more immediate lethal effects, the content stifled Sunni-Israeli rapprochement and effectively helped Arab rejectionists block any media efforts by the Sunni establishment to advocate Arab-Israeli peace.

A memorable example occurred in Bahrain, the Gulf monarchy that had gone furthest toward fostering a public discussion supportive of ties with Israel and its Jewish supporters. Between May and December 2017—a period that saw multiple visits by Rabbi Schneier, the Wiesenthal Center event in Los Angeles, and, most dramatically, the visit of a Bahraini delegation to Israel—the kingdom’s flagship daily newspaper, *al-Ayyam*, published no antisemitic content. Nor did it indulge the trend of mutual recrimination for alleged normalization that became prevalent among Saudi, Emirati, and Qatari media. To the contrary, it ran several articles supportive of the kingdom’s accommodation with Jews, as well as a 2,300-word feature about Bahraini Jewish history that did not employ the tropes of “anti-Zionist philosemitism” so common elsewhere.<sup>43</sup> A media figure familiar with the newspaper said that although no purge of rejectionist staffers occurred, the editor-in-chief declined to publish numerous articles of the traditional variety concerning Israel-related matters.<sup>44</sup> When on December 6, President Trump announced his decision to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, *al-Ayyam* reported the news accurately and expressed reasoned criticism of the move on its editorial page. When on December 10, the Bahraini delegation reached Israel, representing themselves as officially green-lighted by the king, dozens of Iran-backed satellite channels, together with Al Jazeera, heaped calumny on the royal family in their trademark fashion. *Al-Ayyam* did not respond with counterclaims of an Iranian-Israeli alli-

ance. To the contrary, it eventually gave space in its opinion section for the delegation's members to defend their "mission of tolerance."<sup>45</sup>

This remarkable run spawned discontent among rejectionists in Bahrain's official news agency—largely staffed, like most official news agencies in the Gulf, by Sunni nationals from other Arab countries and the Indian subcontinent. Over the eight-month period, agency management repeatedly urged the Ministry of Information Affairs and royal court to put a stop to *al-Ayyam's* new editorial policy. On December 11, during a meeting at the Ministry of Information Affairs, a senior agency staffer presented a dossier on Iran-backed broadcasts attacking the delegation's visit. He argued that the king should distance himself from the delegation, as well as end establishment media support for warming relations with Israel, in order to ward off a wave of Shia violence in the country. (In fact, Bahraini opposition elements staged one nonviolent protest in reaction to the visit, issued condemnations through civil organizations, and criticized it stridently on social media.) The press agency proceeded to falsely report that the delegation "represented no official party, and had paid the visit as an independent initiative," then attack the group repeatedly.<sup>46</sup> As to *al-Ayyam*, its streak of support for outreach to Israelis and Jews ended December 14 with an article titled "Are the Arabs Implementing the Project of Greater Israel?"<sup>47</sup> It used antisemitic themes to allege an Israeli expansionist project. Without referencing the king or his steps toward rapprochement, it amounted to a thinly veiled attack on Arab authorities that failed to reject the "beastly entity," meaning Israel.<sup>48</sup> The newspaper's coverage of the Jewish state returned to the status quo ante. It remained so as of this writing—though in autumn 2018, liberally minded staffers said that they anticipated a new opportunity to win back the editorial pages.<sup>49</sup>

*Al-Ayyam's* eight months of advocacy for rapprochement demonstrated that in a U.S.-allied Gulf state, a media outlet, with apparent support from the ruler, could muster the staff to deliver such content consistently, as well as quarantine incendiary material. As to the pressure campaign that ended the endeavor, it showed how Sunni Arab rejectionists within the establishment could make use of sectarian media—at that, Shia outlets—to weaken their peace-minded rivals. The dynamic resembled the pattern whereby opposing sides in the Qatar dispute effectively fed off each other in imposing public pressure on their leaderships to rein in outreach to Israel. Notably, the Bahraini figure most outspoken in trying to raise international awareness about the problem of sectarian media was, on the spectrum of Bahraini

establishment politics, not a Sunni ideologue but a liberal: Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad. In a 2015 op-ed in London's *Telegraph*, he warned of "satellite channels unseen by Western audiences...with far greater impact than the internet, [airing] an almost continuous message of intolerance and venom to the ignorant and the susceptible."<sup>50</sup> The article characterized Sunni and Shia extremist discourse as two sides of the same coin.

In 2016, Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies took steps to expel some Iran-backed channels from their infospheres. In addition to more aggressively blocking various outlets' live streams online, they saw to the removal of Hezbollah's al-Manar from Arabsat and Nilesat, the region's two largest satellite carriers. In response, the Russian Satellite Communications Company stepped in to host al-Manar on its orbital satellite Express-AM.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, dozens of other Iran-backed channels, including the aforementioned Fadak, al-Ahd, and al-Lulua, remained available on Nilesat—and, for that matter, on European-owned satellites and a range of U.S. Web-based platforms, including YouTube and dedicated apps on Apple and Android phones.

Arab establishments in the Gulf and Egypt meanwhile provided substantial material support for an equivalent number of Sunni sectarian channels with an even larger audience. Witness Safa, a Saudi Salafi outlet headquartered in Cairo's Media Production City, near the Movenpick Hotel, which stoked anger at Iran and violent attacks on Shia generally.<sup>52</sup> Former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak had shut down the channel late in his reign, but President Mohamed Morsi permitted it to reopen, and President Sisi did not interfere with its operations. The channel drew Western attention in December 2016 after a host called for the assassination of ambassadors posted to Muslim countries from all P5+1 signatory nations to the Iran nuclear deal.<sup>53</sup> A central theme of the content was the belief in an unbreakable Iranian-Israeli, Shia-Jewish bond. Weekly programming on Shia history and theology repeated the centuries-old myth that Shiism was invented by a Yemeni Jew in order to sow intra-Muslim strife. It alleged Jewish involvement in Shia assassinations of revered Sunni figures dating back to the third Islamic caliph. Entire programs were devoted to highlighting parallels between Jewish and Shia rituals as a means to indict the latter.<sup>54</sup> Daily discussions of current affairs found new and creative ways to tie Iran and Israel together, and dismiss evidence of conflict between the two as a show for public consumption. Consider a special segment in May 2018, following the press conference in Jerusalem in which Prime Minister Netanyahu presented findings from an Israeli heist of Iranian nuclear project files in Teh-

ran. Host Muhammad Sabir asked, “How do you have Mossad agents entering military sites that might be the most heavily fortified in Iran?” Egyptian Salafi cleric Hamid al-Tahir replied that the Iranian nuclear program had always been managed by Jewish companies. As to the heist,

This is just another one of those shenanigans that shows the relationship between the Jews and the Iranians...It is a relationship of destiny, documented throughout history. This incident should surprise no one. It’s a result of the love between the Jews and the Shia. Because the Shia are protectors of Israel...The Shia entity is the flip side of the Zionist entity. The “Shia Crescent project” is the same as the “Greater Israel” project.<sup>55</sup>

Ask Cairo youth what they think of Safa, and many will say they spurn its content while lamenting that friends and neighbors watch it constantly. One meets the channel’s credulous fans as well—some religiously devout, others more secular. This mixed picture manifests itself in upscale Zamalek and poor neighborhoods like Shubra and Imbaba alike, suggesting that the division is less a matter of religiosity versus secularism, or economic class, than a cultural-political divide. The channel’s detractors share a vision of a more civil Egyptian public space and, in many cases, friendship with their Israeli neighbors. The channel’s fans adopt a chauvinist outlook that grafts a sectarian supremacist view of their own society onto a more general attitude of xenophobia.<sup>56</sup> Between the two, proponents of tolerance are constrained from growing their numbers because the public discussion is so sharply skewed against them. “Rejectionist elites,” as described in the case of ERTU, maintain their grip on most mainstream media. Their legacy of conspiratorial narration and incitement dovetails with the ideas introduced by strident clerics—some of whom enjoy airtime as guests on the mainstream outlets, in addition to controlling their own channels. Their collective power of public censure keeps conversations about an alternative view of the world artificially limited—and, with respect to Israel, largely confined to elite publications and private conversations. The rare exceptions in broadcasting do not exceed the anti-Zionist philosemitism of *The Jewish Alley*.

One driver of this multifaceted problem is therefore clearly the sectarian channels. Steps to address this include shutting these outlets down where possible, limiting the broadcast reach of those that remain, and supporting efforts by civic actors within Arab societies to stigmatize the people who run them. Westerners have developed tools to pursue all three goals, and

have begun to chip away at the edifice. In the United States, the Coalition Against Terrorist Media, an initiative by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, has applied legal, political, and public pressure to effect the removal of official mouthpieces of designated terrorist entities from non-Arab satellite carriers in North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa.<sup>57</sup> The U.S. Congress has helped systematize such efforts, and clamped down on U.S. satellite companies that carried Hamas and Hezbollah broadcasts.<sup>58</sup> The State Department's Office of International Media Engagement, mandated to counter the Islamic State, has conferred with Arab partners about the damage certain broadcasts have caused. In 2016, after the Gulf Cooperation Council designated Hezbollah a terrorist organization, the U.S. embassy in Riyadh joined Arab voices in calling on the Saudi government to press for the removal of Hezbollah's al-Manar from Arabsat and Nile-sat. More subtle interventions were meanwhile waged in Iraq by the U.S. Institute of Peace and the Denmark-based NGO International Media Support. Both partnered with local liberals to raise awareness about the dangers of incitement. An outcome of this work—an NGO called the Iraqi Media House—served as a watchdog group, monitoring domestic broadcasts for hate speech. In introducing a new vocabulary to explain and diagnose the problem, it urged young Iraqi journalists to promote civil discourse through their own writing and broadcasting. The organization also tried to build public support for new government policies against on-air incitement by either sect.<sup>59</sup>

But the larger edifice remained intact—in Arab countries and around the world. To begin with, though non-Arab satellite carriers removed some sectarian channels, they continued to carry most of them for three principal reasons: First, laws sanctioning the mouthpieces of a terrorist group could not be applied to channels owned by a militia that had not yet been designated as such. Second, most channels responded to the clampdowns by obscuring their ties to the fighting forces that controlled them, making it more difficult to legislate their removal.<sup>60</sup> Third, though in some European countries hate speech laws could be applied to block a channel regardless of its ownership, the Western institutions that pursued such measures did not compile the requisite evidence to prove most channels' infractions. This shortcoming apparently owed to a combination of limited staffing and resources and insufficient pooling of information among the range of media monitoring groups. Furthermore, as noted earlier, most of the channels operated with impunity on new U.S.-based global media platforms, princi-

pally YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and dedicated smartphone apps. Some clerics, for that matter, reached a mass audience via these platforms only, skipping entirely over the medium of television. As to the transmission of sectarian broadcasts via Arabsat and Nilesat—by far the largest source of transmission to Arab audiences—Westerners only minimally engaged the problem. Nor did the indigenous actors who sought to organize against the channels through civil initiatives, such as the Iraqi Media House, manage to effect substantial change on their own.<sup>61</sup>

Underneath these shortcomings lay a simple, obdurate problem: the existence of the channels themselves, due to sponsorship by Iran, Sunni Arab states, and wealthy elites with a hardline ideological disposition. As long as these elements continued to grant the outlets financing and a home, most of the content would ultimately find its way—to quote Bahrain’s crown prince—to “the ignorant and the susceptible.”

## GRAPPLING WITH A LARGER PATHOLOGY

The deeper problem, of course, was the machinery beyond media that made these audiences “ignorant and susceptible” to begin with—namely, the education and spiritual instruction Arab populations received as children in authoritarian schools and mosques. For decades, as described in chapter 1, school systems and clerical endowments instilled an essentially Manichaean view of the world and denied young people the critical thinking skills they would need to deconstruct it. Such molding rendered learners vulnerable to emotional manipulation by autocrats and insurgents, reactionaries and radicals alike, and prepared generations of future parents to reinforce the same teachings at home. In light of this pervasive legacy, it is all the more remarkable that a youthful subset of Arab populations have delinked themselves from the communal rejectionist tradition. And given these young people’s aspiration to grow their numbers, it is all the more urgent to end continuing instruction in the mentality they strive to overcome.

Prior discussion has referred to modest positive reforms in seminaries and schools since around 2002. After Morocco, the government that went farthest in reforming religious and educational discourse was that of Tunisia’s last authoritarian president, Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, in the years following the 2002 al-Qaeda attack on a Tunisian synagogue. The Jordanian monarchy’s 2004 “Amman Message” made improvements as well, in calling for teaching tolerance in Islamic education and sermons and in attempt-

ing, through workshops for clerics, to ensure follow-through. More than a decade later, an Egyptian-government-led purge of Azharite religious textbooks and suspect preachers appeared to net a reduction in students' exposure to antisemitic as well as anti-Christian themes.<sup>62</sup> A concurrent reform effort in Egypt's public education system with more specific bearing on Israel yielded a new high school textbook noting that peace with the Jewish state had enabled "the promotion of economic and social development and the repair of [Egypt's] infrastructure." Though the book maintained that the 1956 and 1967 wars stemmed from an Israeli aspiration to expand "from the Nile to the Euphrates," it added the iconic photo of President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin clasping hands together with President Jimmy Carter.<sup>63</sup> Meanwhile, comments about the Holocaust by the chief of Saudi Arabia's Muslim World League—and, for that matter, the league's subsequent condemnation of the October 2018 Pittsburgh synagogue massacre<sup>64</sup>—reflected a positive turn at the highest levels of that country's religious leadership. (The shift coincided with the government's arrest of dozens of Saudi clerics, associated with the *Sahwa* [awakening] movement, who opposed a range of goals that Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman had introduced, including the warming toward Jews.<sup>65</sup>)

But each of these reform efforts spoke to the difficulty of building and maintaining a cadre of people to transmit whatever new ideas a textbook or document contained. The fall of Ben Ali's government in Tunisia saw an Islamist-led purge of Ben Ali-era preachers and the forced closure of the reformist Islamic university project that had trained them.<sup>66</sup> Jordan's Amman Message, according to a prominent pro-government preacher, met significant opposition among his peers, who "either spoke out against it or tried not to mention it."<sup>67</sup> In Saudi Arabia, the arrest of dozens of clerics raised the question of what community of religious leaders would replace them to advance the same message locally that the new chief of the Muslim World League had communicated overseas. As to Egypt, recall the 2018 televised remarks by Al-Azhar's Grand Imam, quoted in chapter 4, which described Israel as a "dagger into the body of the Arab world." In addition to reaching millions of viewers, the comment served to assure those clerics who had survived the Sisi-led purge that the world's oldest standing Islamic seminary stood with those who defied the idea of "peace between peoples." And while it is premature to judge President Sisi's attempt to reform the public school system, a look back at a prior effort gives a sense of the challenges he would face. During the 1990s jihadist insurgency in Egypt,

President Mubarak's Education Ministry also retired some textbooks and introduced new ones with redactions. But rather than retrain teachers, the ministry enacted a half-measure that proved disastrous: it transferred thousands of suspected radical teachers from big-city schools to those of outlying and southern governorates—thereby compounding the radicalization of the provinces—while providing little direction to the young urban teachers who replaced them.<sup>68</sup> “Informal learning”—the osmosis of ideas between teachers and pupils over hundreds of classroom hours—usually trumps the amendment of text. That is why in Saudi Arabia, after successive disappointing attempts to improve religious instruction in government schools, some voices advocated limiting the schools' purview to only the essential precepts of Islam, and leaving parents to teach the details to their children.<sup>69</sup> Yet it appears unlikely that the Education Ministry will opt to do so.<sup>70</sup>

In 2012, during the brief period of heady optimism that followed the onset of the Arab Spring, a group of young Egyptians showed that the region harbors young educational reformists with a vision and a plan for promoting change from the bottom up. The limits of their success, however, spoke to the glass ceiling on such efforts barring steadfast support from the top. Egyptian Internet activist Wael Ghonim, a prime mover in the country's 2011 revolution, donated revenues from his bestselling memoir to create an NGO in Cairo for the production of online learning videos. “Tahrir Academy” aimed to combat “the deteriorating state of Egyptian culture [caused by a] mind-numbing educational system based on rote memorization.”<sup>71</sup> Its six hundred YouTube clips garnered over 21 million views.<sup>72</sup> In one example of Tahrir's attempt to promote the alternative to rote learning, an eleven-part lecture series explained the meaning of critical thinking and, ever so gently, its social and political implications. People who lack critical-thinking skills “think only they are right” and “find conspiracies in everything in life,” explained host Islam Hussein. Embrace critical thinking, he said, and “your mind will be yours alone...No one will be able to easily control you, or manipulate you to serve his goals...It will affect every aspect of your life: personal, social, political...[Critical thinking] will also be your defense against any distorted news spread by the media.” The process of adopting critical thinking begins with self-criticism, he added. “Look into the mirror. Set aside your racial, political, and social identities and try to view things in an unbiased way.”<sup>73</sup>

Tahrir's staff appreciated the difficulty of bringing such lessons to government schools, where most teachers were themselves the products of

rote learning. But the video series offered a burst of public exposure to the concept, and some teachers, having discovered it spontaneously, shared it with their students. The NGO meanwhile sought to make inroads in the government education system. In April 2014, Tahrir Academy welcomed acclaimed scientist Farouq El-Baz to its board of directors. As brother of the late Osama El-Baz, longtime senior advisor to former president Mubarak, he offered the possibility of access to stalwarts of the military-led government. The organization hoped El-Baz could win establishment buy-in for Tahrir to begin to help reform school curricula and retrain teachers. At a media event in Cairo, he heartily endorsed Tahrir Academy, dubbing it “an ambitious, patriotic project...The energy and zeal of the Academy’s young volunteers is enough to show that a better future lies ahead for Egypt.” He predicted that the group would become “influential within a short few years.” This all-Egyptian effort did not attempt to enlist foreign allies as advocates, for fear of drawing suspicions or triggering pushback. But critics of the project within the educational establishment tarred it as a “Zionist plot” anyway, and the bottom-up lobbying did not garner high-level political support. After funding dried up, Tahrir Academy scaled back its efforts. It has not posted a new video since 2015.<sup>74</sup>

The range of woes just described—sclerotic schools and intransigent clerics, demonization by rote and manipulation by fallacy—rank high among the challenges of Arab human development overall.<sup>75</sup> Some argue that Arab rejectionism and scapegoating of Israel are merely symptoms of these larger ills. But in light of the central historical role of modern anti-semitism in Arab political identity formation, as described in chapter 1, it is more accurate to say that the hatred of the Jew and denial of liberal education have always been partners in crime. Yet myriad, ongoing attempts by UNESCO and other international organizations to promote schools reform in Arab lands, which likewise aim to foster critical thinking skills, have been shy in confronting the promulgation of antisemitic themes. Given the primacy of these themes in traditional Arab authoritarian pedagogy, a dedicated effort to challenge them could crucially address the larger educational predicament. It is reasonable to infer that Arab education systems, like the media sector, feature a substantial number of teachers who are “agnostic” about Israel-related matters, in that they would basically cooperate to the extent that their knowledge and capacities allow. But this process of reform, under the best of circumstances, would move at

least as slowly as cultural change in any school system, and ultimately rest on the long-term challenge of raising a generation of young teachers with a new set of values and skills. And if change in schools is gradual, then the transformation of Islamic seminary education with respect to Jews and Israel is glacial.

In the meantime, the platform most fluid, dynamic, and responsive to a reform effort—in Arab countries as in any society—is broadcast media. It is the field in which the fewest people communicate to the largest possible audience, and therefore the one in which the least amount of change can yield the greatest impact. This section has indicated, moreover, that in most Arab countries, given a hypothetical purge of rejectionists from media management positions, a “reformist minority” is available to manage the “agnostic majority.” Added to these factors is the notion that certain types of media can play their own educational role, as well as magnify the impact of reform-minded clerics by granting them airtime. Thus, while pursuing the generational challenge of reforming seminaries and schools, proponents of Arab-Israeli partnership can work through media, both to reach audiences en masse and to support the reorientation of teachers and clerics.



ESSENTIAL TO ALL these complex efforts is a push by Arab autocrats for change within the institutions of public communication they control. Although some of Washington’s Arab allies have begun to take positive steps, none has shown a steadfast commitment, and some steps forward have been followed by reversals. As a result, proponents of a new direction within these institutions find themselves in the midst of an unfair fight.

This study has highlighted the presence of an Arab constituency for partnership with Israel and Jews that promises to validate Arab rulers who show courage. It has shown that Americans and Israelis harbor new capacities to engage and assist Arab civic actors, as well as their leaders, in advancing cultural change. Based on the assessment of autocrats’ own calculations, their recent signals of desire for rapprochement with Israel stem from long-term, multisector needs and aspirations—well beyond winning the war against Iran and Islamists—that will remain their priority for years to come. Thus, Israel and its U.S. ally enjoy even greater standing to raise their expectations for cultural progress.

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Part IV

## *Conclusion & Recommendations*



## A PLAN FOR RECLAMATION

THE FINDINGS in this monograph suggest that a new policy of “reclamation”—a sustained campaign to take back the region’s cultural space for supporters of Arab-Israeli partnership—is feasible and warranted. It is feasible because a critical mass of locals in nearly every Arab country say they support it, several Sunni Arab establishments appear to share an interest in it, and a range of outside actors stand ready to assist them. It is warranted because a climate conducive to Arab-Israeli partnership is a necessary condition for a future peace settlement as well as a lodestar for civil society in Arab lands.

While culture is intangible, institutional measures to reform culture through public messaging are concrete, scalable, and familiar to Arab establishments. Thus, terms can be negotiated to mandate an agenda of reclamation in Arab communications platforms. Teams can be built to implement the agenda. A monitoring and accountability unit can rate compliance, assess outcomes, and recommend adjustments. The U.S. and Israeli governments can inaugurate this process by adopting reclamation as a strategic priority. They can pursue it systematically with Arab allies as a core aspect of their work together. They can meanwhile assist and connect nonstate actors who are working in the field already.

The sketch of a plan for reclamation is here submitted with due humility as far as its potential to find a receptive ear. The United States and Israel would need to jointly commit to pursuing this agenda, meaning that they would agree to expend political capital with Arab allies that might otherwise be used for different purposes. But President Trump did not win the White House on

a platform of advocating cultural change in Arab countries. Nor did previous administrations prioritize the need to overcome rejectionists' cultural dominance in their efforts to broker Arab-Israeli peace. Meanwhile, in Israel, as noted in chapter 4, proponents of civil engagement in Arab lands have conveyed frustration about the low level of support their work receives from government. Beneath these realities, both in Israel and the United States, lies a mindset of detachment from culture as a space to be addressed strategically through foreign policy—a mentality with its own historical roots, not easily overcome. Nonetheless, some policymakers from both countries now share a belief that in retrospect, prior peace efforts were less successful for lack of serious work in the cultural realm. “We had talked about the importance of mutually reinforcing public messages,” recalls veteran Middle East peace envoy Dennis Ross, “but there was not a lot that was systematically done to make this a component part of peace-building. I think it was one of our biggest mistakes. We should have integrated this into a strategy.”<sup>1</sup>

Although the hope may be modest that U.S. and Israeli movers will pursue a “cultural approach,” prospects for its success are grounded in realism over the workings of Arab government and the dynamics of change in Arab societies. As people who study the region know, cultural work is a bedrock functionality of Arab states. In addition to the role of Arab ministries of information, education, and Islamic affairs in seeking to align culture with the state’s agenda, Arab armies, security cadres, and intelligence divisions operate their own powerful machineries of inculcation—for better or for worse. Indeed, much of the historical activity described in chapter 1 was overseen by these state actors. Thus, America’s Arab allies are in no way detached from the formulations in this monograph; to the contrary, cultural work is for them a matter of daily practice. They may be unaccustomed to discussing it granularly with their foreign partners, but they would hardly be surprised to see such a discussion begin.

Before laying out the plan, it is appropriate to acknowledge and respond to the two most common Western objections to proactive cultural engagement in the region. The first holds that “if change ever happens, it needs to happen from within; outside intervention never works.” As findings here have shown, this truism contains a false assumption, a false dichotomy, and a faulty conclusion. Positive change is happening already. It is happening through a combination of change from within—both state and nonstate Arab actors—and outside-in initiatives. Locals and outsiders

crucially reinforce each other in pursuing a shared goal. The distinction between them is blurry, moreover. As this study has shown, the two sides tend to share a deep connection to the region and, in many cases, a common ethnicity, whatever their differences in nationality or faith. They have encountered constraints, however, that are difficult to overcome. Perhaps in the distant future, they will overcome them nonetheless—or perhaps countervailing forces will overpower them indefinitely. Through an international effort to strengthen their hand and weaken their rejectionist opponents, it may be possible to ward off their setbacks, magnify their impact, and accelerate their success, causing work that would otherwise take several generations to be accomplished in one. Cultural engagement of the sort proposed here is not cheap, though it costs a fraction of the price of military interventions. In addition to resources, it requires political capital and sustained effort. Yet the price of ceding the cultural field to hostile actors is unacceptably high.

The second, related objection, referenced briefly in chapter 1, stems from concerns about the so-called kiss of death. That is the belief that foreign assistance to Arab actors discredits them and their ideas in the eyes of fellow citizens. In the author's experience, while this consideration is worth weighing in specific instances, rarely in practice does one achieve a better outcome by refraining from engagement than by engaging. Arab voices for rapprochement are routinely denigrated as "foreign agents" whether they truly have a relationship with an outside party or not. To shun them for fear of giving a kiss of death is to leave them to suffer the stigma without gaining needed help, effectively inhibiting them. Meanwhile, no such inhibition prevents their opponents from receiving assistance themselves—whether from a rogue state, their own government, or even a Western power. Fears of the kiss of death stem in part from various U.S.-allied Arab officials who have cited it privately to Westerners as a reason against a more open peace with Israel. Such claims should not be taken at face value. As noted previously, several of the same powers are among the instigators of the problem, inasmuch as their media have routinely tarred opponents—including some of their own citizens—as Israeli or American stooges. Among the purposes of reaching new understandings for cultural work with Arab allies is to end their own institutions' practice of stigmatizing relations with Israel, thereby ameliorating the conditions that lead to concern about the kiss of death to begin with.

## CONCRETIZING A VISION

The first steps in charting a course for reclamation are to define the envisioned outcome and break down the challenge of pursuing it. The following goals provide a working description of the reclamation agenda:

- **End institutionalized demonization.** Cease the vilification of Israel, its citizens, Judaism, and Jews generally in Arab establishment media, schools, and mosques. Repel equivalent information operations waged by Iran, its proxies, and Sunni Islamists.
- **Revive historical memory.** Through the same establishment communications platforms, grant Arab publics knowledge they were long denied—of the historical presence of Jews indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa; their substantial contribution to the development of the region; their dispossession and forced flight; and their living legacy in Israel and elsewhere. Through this narration as well as exposure to Jews' broader historical experience in Europe and beyond, provide due context to Jews' concerns about security in the face of antisemitism, and show the benefits their neighbors have gained through equitable mutual engagement.
- **Repair spiritual bonds.** Restore public awareness of the organic connection among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rekindle Arab affinity for the Jewish faith by highlighting the commonality of sacred texts, rituals, and values.
- **Elucidate Israel.** Provide a duly corrective, multilayered representation of the Jewish state, its history, its people, and their natural place in regional affairs.
- **Desegregate the public discussion.** Ensure the regular participation of Israelis—not as foils but as contributors—in broadcast media conversations about politics and defense, education and development, health and fitness, science and technology, trade and investment, arts and ideas, and the range of human aspirations and concerns shared by peoples of the region.
- **Catalyze civil partnership.** Expose Arab audiences and learners to the more immediate benefits of joint effort with Israelis and other Jews in a range of civil sectors. Draw attention to specific opportunities for cooperation. Spotlight positive outcomes as new partnerships develop.

Promote Arab-Israeli friendship as a value. Foster civil communication and exchange.

- **Expose rejectionism.** Narrate and commemorate the century of damage wreaked by pan-Arabist and Islamist forces through their use of anti-semitism as a political tool. Enlist this history in exposing the rhetoric and tactics of rejectionist forces today.

Developing this vision into action is feasible thanks to five strategic advantages. Though described previously, they bear reviewing. First, although the Arab infosphere is vast, it remains mostly authoritarian in structure and primarily dominated by U.S.-allied Arab states. Second, several of the most influential among these states harbor, within their establishments, supporters of reclamation. Third, a range of nascent projects have already been developed by Americans, Israelis, and others to connect with these actors—as well as engage grassroots supporters of reclamation who are unaffiliated with any autocrat. Fourth, with respect to the largest communications outlets controlled by enemies of reclamation—Iran, its proxies, and Islamist groups—they are on the whole a powerful but secondary influence. Fifth, methods have been devised by the United States and its Arab allies to shrink the belligerent outlets’ reach on air and online.

In view of these advantages, the overall architecture of reclamation, though expansive, is at least not overly complex. It involves securing new commitments from America’s Arab allies, empowering state and nonstate actors in favor of the effort, boosting available tools to weaken the information operations of their adversaries, and scaling or professionalizing the “outside-in” efforts. Some parts of the process involve work that only governments can do. For other aspects, governments need to catalyze the work but the nonprofit and private sectors are better suited to perform it.

The facets of the plan are detailed in the following sections.

### *1. Negotiate Frameworks for Reclamation*

For a sense of how Arab establishments reach terms with outsiders for cultural change, consider that earlier in this century, several Far East powers literally negotiated with Arab states over their public discussions. Driven by mutual political and material interests, the parties agreed to build popular support for stronger ties. Witness the Sino-Arab Cooperation Forum, signed into existence at Arab League headquarters in 2004. Calling for partnership in a range of sectors, the founding document

includes a clause about “media and cultural exchange” to foster a climate of “mutual respect, equitable treatment, and sincere cooperation.” This stipulation proved to be more than a diplomatic nicety: it gave Chinese specialists in Arabic and Islamic culture a framework and a mandate to partner with Arab media professionals and educators in numerous countries, through government as well as nongovernment channels. Together, they developed content that stimulated a desire for civil relations and fostered people-to-people exchanges and the development of human networks. Output included new educational curricula and special broadcasts about ancient and modern China, the history of Sino-Arab relations, Chinese popular culture today, and opportunities for renewed partnership. A thirty-episode Chinese TV drama, dubbed into Arabic and aired nationally in Egypt, helped audiences establish an emotional bond with China by showing how the two societies shared similar values, family structures, and an old-fashioned sense of humor. Through special university programs, thousands of Arab students learned to communicate in Chinese, and hundreds visited the country to build personal and professional connections. In doing so, they acquired the knowledge and capacity to serve as bridges. This generational endeavor correlated with substantial growth in Sino-Arab trade, investment, and other forms of cooperation. In a kind of testimony to its success, China’s democratic rivals South Korea and Japan proceeded to forge similar arrangements with Arab powers, followed by equivalent soft power projects.

The Asian ventures, while not without their challenges, are obviously less fraught than a hypothetical Judeo-Arab equivalent. Attempts to negotiate a framework for reclamation would face strident opposition from numerous Arab cultural gatekeepers (“rejectionist elites”). The case for going forward anyway hinges on the evidence, described in chapter 3, that at the highest levels of Arab leadership, outlooks and interests are increasingly aligned with those of Israel and its supporters. As a result of this shift, autocrats are more likely to respond pragmatically to an overture of reclamation. Given the right combination of incentives and disincentives, they may prove willing to commit to marginalize rejectionist elites, promote members of the Arab peace camp, and provide new guidance to “agnostic majorities” who work for them. As this messy process plays out on the back end of Arab communications machinery, young audiences, worshippers, and learners would experience the new message that emerges on the front end, coming of age in a healthier informational environment. The public discussion that

evolves as a result would foster a popular sensibility that makes the continuing effort gradually less onerous.

To be sure, as shown in the earlier discussion “The Wages of Cold Peace,” Arab states are accustomed to perpetuating toxic informational conditions with impunity, even as they profitably engage the same Israeli and other actors whom their cultural doyens demonize. But the more information that comes to light about present opportunities for change, the less justifiable or tolerable the status quo appears. The United States and Israel enjoy standing and leverage to call for an improvement. In offering an incentive structure for reclamation and prompting Arab parties to recalculate their interests, they can lay the foundation for joint cultural work.

Government frameworks for reclamation can be negotiated bilaterally or multilaterally, via two key realms:

- **Security sectors.** U.S. and Israeli cooperation with Arab defense, intelligence, and domestic security cadres has historically focused on kinetic operations and intelligence sharing. But as stated earlier, a further function of these institutions is to align media, schools, and religious leadership with state interests. In Egypt, for example, the army owns or dominates some of the largest TV networks. It participated in the purge of Islamists and their teachings from Al-Azhar Islamic seminary. It maintains educational programs for nearly half a million troops. Other security forces oversee the Egyptian Radio and Television Union—as described in chapter 5, a powerful broadcaster in its own right as well as an incubator for the next generation of media talent. Though it may seem improbable that Arab security sectors would engage foreign allies regarding these functions, the U.S. defense establishment has in fact already begun to explore cooperation in strategic communications with several Arab armies—albeit to a limited extent, and on subjects unrelated to Israel. Given deeper involvement and a mandate for reclamation, security sectors could contribute vitally to the effort.
- **Diplomatic engagement.** As noted previously, peace envoys have traditionally adopted a view, reinforced by Arab autocrats, that an Arab cultural warming will naturally follow a diplomatic settlement. The cold peace with Egypt and Jordan shows otherwise—whereas the positive outcomes of the Moroccan experience, together with encouraging signs in Iraq and elsewhere, support the case for reclamation as an interim agenda. So wherever diplomats seek to negotiate a path to peace,

it behooves them to pursue reclamation as an early step, not an end result. Beyond the field of peace negotiation, other forms of diplomatic work provide further openings. For example, the Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs allocates resources for educational and media activity in the region, including direct funding for indigenous Arab television productions and U.S.-Arab media partnerships. These resources—coveted by Arab actors—should not be disbursed without the clear stipulation that the recipients stop inciting against Israel and Jews and begin to make amends for that legacy. In a separate realm, in September 2018, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation upgrading the State Department’s Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism to ambassador level. As primary advisor to the U.S. government on this issue, the envoy should enjoy staffing and resources to explore creative approaches to countering anti-semitism wherever it persists.<sup>2</sup>

Even partial success at negotiating framework agreements with any of the region’s four largest communications juggernauts—U.S. allies Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar—can address a substantial portion of pan-Arab media, religious, and educational discourse.<sup>3</sup> Outreach to other Arab allies that do not export culture to the same degree—Bahrain, for example—is warranted as well. Though their reach is smaller, they can offer depth of impact within their borders.

The “negotiated framework” approach is not a blanket solution. Examples from Libya and Iraq in chapters 3 and 4 showed that meaningful steps toward reclamation could arise outside authoritarian communications, through a public debate in a country of contested political authority. This study also showed that voices for reclamation have been silenced in countries gripped by a belligerent actor—notably Hezbollah-dominated Lebanon—where a negotiated framework is a nonstarter. Overreliance on authoritarian platforms is problematic, moreover, in that it may entail too much deference to an inherently undemocratic political agenda. Some independent actors, having voiced criticism of a given ruler, have lost access to his outlets, and therefore may not be able to participate in the communications work a framework agreement brings. At the same time, other independents have demonstrated the benefits of advancing reclamation in certain authoritarian settings. Recall contributions to Saudi media by the late Ali Salem of Egypt, who was boycotted in his home country; Israel’s Linda Menuhin Abdul

Aziz, a Jewish refugee from Iraq; and this author. Such output shows that where a ruler opens his platforms to reclamation—even to a limited extent—he can be an asset to voices outside his sphere of control.

So the framework approach can reach a vast audience through autocratic machinery as well as elevate some figures who are not ensconced in an Arab establishment. But an alternative approach is needed to engage a larger spectrum of independent actors. Accordingly, to borrow a concept from another turning point in the region’s history, the United States and Israel should “pursue framework agreements as if there were no independent actors, and support independent actors as if there were no framework agreements.”

## *2. Assist Agents of Reclamation in an Authoritarian Setting*

An autocrat’s buy-in is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a framework agreement to work. Special efforts must also be expended to support the Arab parties who bear the brunt of implementing an agreement. To recall a working premise, in most Arab establishment media and educational institutions, “rejectionist elites” have promulgated their values by silencing members of the Arab peace camp and dominating an “agnostic majority.” A high-level decision to shift this dynamic would see rejectionists retired from management positions. In their place, a new, reform-minded management would reorient the same agnostic workers around the vision of reclamation described earlier, as well as induct a new generation of talent to join them. But to do so, they must surmount the inherent difficulties of organizational change in any institution. They must also meet the following specific challenges, for which outside help is necessary:

- **Form a community of Arab and Israeli thought partners.** Most Arabs in communications fields who support reclamation have learned what they could about Israel and Jews without visiting the former or encountering the latter. They sought knowledge of both from an Arab infosphere loaded with false information—a problem that the positive outside-in communications efforts described in chapter 4 have only begun to rectify. In addition to their isolation from Israelis, these figures have been largely isolated from each other, due to the stigma associated with discussing their views openly. So for those Arab voices tapped to lead the reclamation effort within their institutions, special efforts are needed to enrich their knowledge, as well as establish bonds of trust and collaboration with Israelis and, for that matter, like-minded Arab actors.

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS ■

An exchange program is called for, whereby they and their new Israeli thought partners would spend time learning and working together in each other's countries. As the program's alumni community grows, they would convene periodically to gather lessons learned and adjust.

- **Build the intellectual foundation for compelling content in Arabic.** The exchange program would provide a context, in turn, to address an urgent informational need. Recall that much of the agenda for reclamation described earlier entails spreading a remedial understanding of Israel, Jews, and Judaism to Arab audiences. Not a simple matter of translation, this process requires Arabic-language content thoughtfully designed to reach a mindset schooled in antisemitism and deprived of critical-thinking skills. A joint Arab-Israeli effort can yield a corpus of foundational material that becomes the basis for new schools curricula, religious instruction, and education for media professionals.
- **Reorient a larger staff.** The “agnostic majority” of staffers within autocratic institutions must be attuned to reclamation and guided on how to advance it. Through special workshops based on the “foundational material” just mentioned, employees can learn to relate to Jewish and Israeli history empathically and recognize fallacious and incendiary rhetoric. They can also discover their own role and responsibility to advance a corrective message. Standard pedagogical techniques can be used to evaluate how their understanding of the subject matter changes—or does not change—between the onset and conclusion of a workshop. Participants can be called upon to accept a new code of professional ethics and accountability.
- **Retire a toxic corpus.** The need to discontinue religious and secular textbooks that teach antisemitism and militarism is matched by a similar but more complicated challenge in media. To begin with, Arab entertainment outlets still air a large corpus of reruns, some dating back to Nasser's rule, that advance the same antisemitic and rejectionist themes. Like the American silent film *The Birth of a Nation* and now-redacted scenes from the Disney movie *Song of the South*, some of these Arab productions would usefully belong in a future public educational effort to trace the stereotypes and canards of an unjust past. In the meantime, they should not be aired for entertainment purposes. A related project should be created whereby the content is identified and pulled from the region's TV networks, rights are withdrawn from third-party channels

on YouTube, and copyright strike notices are issued against violators. Doing so is feasible because a small number of Arab media companies claim ownership of most of the content. Though intellectual property enforcement in the region is at a nascent stage of development, these companies have proven remarkably effective at pulling material from the airwaves and Internet when doing so suited their political or financial interests. An equivalent effort is called for with respect to other genres and platforms. While *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and *Mein Kampf* may never be retired, authorities in the region can easily make it more difficult to acquire them on street corners, at bookstores and bookfairs, and in the media outlets they control. The same applies to the massive body of propaganda masked as journalism, opinion writing, and Islamic discourse that adopts the *Protocols* as its center of gravity.

- **Restore old vestiges of tolerance.** A separate corpus long shunned by Arab outlets should be exhumed from the vaults, digitally restored, and showcased anew: media in every genre that reflects the best of the region's multiconfessional past. For example, among dozens of movies from Egypt's golden age of cinema that featured Jewish characters is a series of five comedies by Egyptian Jewish director Togo Mizrahi about a lovable working-class local named Shalom. In each story, as he navigates the challenges of big-city life, Shalom embodies the hospitality, generosity, humor, and ferocious love of sports that typified Egypt's urban majorities. Most such films vanished from public view even before the age of television.<sup>4</sup> In recent years, Arab youth hunting for vestiges of tolerance from their region's past have searched for Shalom online. What they typically found instead on some of the region's highest-traffic websites—entertainment outlets owned by America's Arab allies—were articles containing bogus claims that Egyptian Jewish actors and filmmakers assassinated Arab scientists or spied for the Mossad.<sup>5</sup> In an infosphere reformed by a policy of reclamation, Shalom and his kin would find their way back onto Arab airwaves.
- **Boost the “partnership approach.”** As noted in chapter 4, U.S. actors in education, religious affairs, and especially media have begun to establish their own working relationships with Arab institutions for the sake of values promotion, resulting in TV coproductions and various forms of coordinated messaging. The partnership approach, expanded to include Israelis, would be a natural complement to the exchange program called

for before: it could serve a socializing function for the participants while accelerating the creation of a new, alternative reservoir of content across the gamut of platforms. Thus, the small network of U.S. companies and nonprofits that have been pursuing collaboration with Arab institutions, often with U.S. government support, should be integrated into the reclamation process.

- **Establish a monitoring and accountability unit.** The recent wave of antisemitism arising from the standoff over Qatar, described in chapter 5, offers an important lesson. Recall that while Americans and Israelis were marveling at modest evidence of a cultural warming with Gulf powers, the larger trend of hostile messaging in Arabic by the same powers largely escaped attention. In any future framework agreement, a research team is needed to track implementation—in the spirit of the principle “trust but verify.” In addition to ensuring that Arab establishments meet their commitments, a monitoring and accountability unit can gauge how the public responds to new content—by tracking social media and running focus groups and opinion surveys—with the aim of ongoing improvement. Though the field of content to be scrutinized is large, new technologies make it easier to process substantial data with reduced staff. And the presence of a grassroots Arab constituency for reclamation, described in chapter 3, suggests that the public can help. Through crowdsourcing applications, Arabs everywhere can contribute to the media monitoring as well as provide testimony about realms less easily observed from a distance, such as informal learning in classrooms.

### 3. *Assist Autonomous Actors*

Arab supporters of reclamation beyond establishment circles can do considerably more than contribute to a crowdsourcing app. They can challenge antisemitism and champion Arab-Israeli partnership with audiences that look beyond establishment outlets for their information. They can jumpstart conversations about civil engagement that autocrats prove slow to green-light. They can call on Arab states that benefit from Israeli and Jewish assistance to stop maligning opponents as “normalizers” and start preparing the population for an open, broad-based peace. In Arab countries torn by civil war and strife, they can help the public draw a connection between decades of incitement against Israel and Jews and the canards now in use against a rival sect or clan. In doing so, they can show how national

reconciliation and Israeli-Arab rapprochement are twin virtues in the face of a single pathology.

But as this study has demonstrated, autonomous actors face their own constraints. Powerful rejectionist elements in the society work to ostracize them from mainstream public life. In U.S.-allied Arab states, the government either abets these rejectionists or stands on the sidelines, meanwhile denying autonomous actors a platform in establishment media. In countries gripped by a hostile force, such as Hezbollah-dominated Lebanon, the social ostracism is augmented by state retribution, including imprisonment. In countries of weak government or contested political authority, where some of the bravest voices for reclamation reside, feuding militias weaponize the same stigma to intimidate government and turn the population against their rivals. In some cases, the roots of these problems include not only hostility to Israel but indeed a desire by certain Arab governments and factions to monopolize relations with it. That is, having discovered the benefits of partnership, they fear a broader peace that could benefit an opponent at their expense, and would sooner deny the population its right to befriend Israelis altogether. So the needed strategy to assist autonomous actors calls as much for mitigating rejectionist pressure as preventing Arab allies from “hoarding peace”:

- **Ensure that framework agreements grant space to autonomous actors.** In negotiating a plan for reclamation with an Arab autocrat, outside powers can work to ensure that it serves not only to promote the vision but also to advocate for the people who embrace it. For example, the young Saudi proponent of peace with Israel referenced in chapter 3 should no longer need to rely on foreign TV channels to address his fellow citizens. Nor, having made his case, should he have to stand alone in the face of social backlash. While an overall shift in establishment messaging will provide its own reinforcement to individuals who call for Arab-Israeli partnership, the state can meanwhile signal its commitment to defending them. Autonomous actors should also have the opportunity to partake of the Israeli exchange program called for earlier—both to forge their own relations with Israelis and to integrate into the community of Arab reformist elites.
- **Boost access to foreign outlets.** Whereas the U.S.-backed Alhurra channel has done its part to showcase autonomous actors who favor reclamation, a range of privately owned Western outlets in Arabic have not. Consider CNN Arabic, CNBC Arabia, and Sky News Arabia—

three UAE-based outlets that arose from partnerships between a Western media company and the Emirati establishment. In the aggregate, they reach a substantial audience. They have not done enough to push beyond convention in their content about Israel-related matters. In some cases, to the contrary, their staff has echoed rejectionist tropes. It behooves their Western co-ownerships to follow the content of these channels more closely and ensure that it comports with the parent companies' values. Opening a space to advocates for reclamation would follow naturally from such reforms.

- **Support incremental civic approaches.** Chapters 3 and 4 showed that in countries of Iranian proxy domination or contested political authority, autonomous actors have built campaigns for reclamation around more subtle, gradualist goals. For example, recall that Libyans and Iraqis, in consort with Jews originating from those countries, have initiated public discussion of the latter's right to visit and reconnect—including those who now hold Israeli citizenship. In Lebanon, where the law criminalizing contact with Israelis is enforced, supporters of reclamation have made a public case against the law. Actors in these and other polarized environments have also challenged local antisemitism without engaging the debate about Israel, or called for a warming toward Jews in general as part of a domestic agenda of resurrecting diversity and tolerance. All such efforts can serve, as Israeli scholar Ronen Zeidel observed, to “prepare the ground within wide and influential circles before the formal diplomatic rapprochement...begins.” It is instructive to observe that outside support has proved helpful to these efforts. For example, proponents of the Iraqi Jewish re-enfranchisement agenda have worked through the forum of the British Council in Baghdad to advance their case publicly. A European foundation funded the face-to-face meetings in Berlin and Istanbul, referenced earlier, between the Iraqis and Iraqi Israelis who connect daily via a virtual platform.<sup>6</sup> The 2017 Libyan-Israeli peace conference in Rhodes was funded principally by Jewish diaspora figures of Middle East origin.<sup>7</sup> Some policy researchers see a further realm in which direct outside support can prove helpful: bold independent media ventures. For example, Washington Institute fellow Hanin Ghaddar believes that the United States should support journalists in her native Lebanon who oppose Hezbollah hegemony. In addition to challenging Iran, she suggests, such support would foster informational conditions that prove advantageous to reclamation.<sup>8</sup>

- **Engage power factions on contested territory.** The gathering in Rhodes was remarkable as much for having convened Libyans and Israelis publicly as for having brought representatives of the two rival Libyan governments onto one dance floor. But it was neither the first nor the last encounter between Israeli and Libyan officials since the Arab Spring.<sup>9</sup> The U.S. government and likely Israel have also had occasion to engage power factions in contested Arab territory to support counterterrorism efforts. Such cooperation, focused on kinetic operations, presents the opportunity for a discussion of information operations—much like the relationships among the security sectors of Arab autocracies, Israel, and the United States noted earlier. The urgent need by Arab factions for assistance makes them more open to promoting a constructive public discussion about Israel and Jews by way of the platforms they dominate. The opportunity to insist upon such accommodation should not be squandered.

#### 4. *Degrade Communications by Hostile Actors*

Most of the measures prescribed thus far relate to Arab communications institutions where an alliance with the leadership allows for collaborative reform. The envisioned efforts promise to do double duty, in that development and deployment of content supportive of Arab-Israeli partnership can also serve to displace rejectionist content and the people who propagate it. The same approach does not apply, however, to the religious extremist broadcasts described in chapter 5 that use antisemitism principally to incite against a rival Muslim sect or power. These outlets are better understood not as part of the machinery of cold peace, but rather as the information units of a hot war. (In Lebanon, in fact, the term “war media” [*ilam harbi*] is sometimes used by Hezbollah to describe them.) They simply need to be removed from the battlefield.

The complexity of doing so begins with the fact that the parties to these conflicts include friends as well as enemies of the United States and Israel. Recall that on the one hand, scores of sectarian outlets are managed by Iran or its Arab proxies. They strive to divide Arabs against their rulers, demoralize Sunni populations, and embolden Shia to attack Sunnis. On the other hand, hardline elements affiliated with Sunni Arab powers maintain their own, equivalent communications, and enjoy a special blessing to operate for the sake of mustering Sunnis’ fighting spirit against Iran. As a result,

Sunni extremist channels receive financial support, freedom of operation, or both in several Gulf states and Egypt. Among the technologies that transmit these broadcasts, Egypt's Nilesat stands out for its prolific hosting of Shia and Sunni sectarian channels alike, while Arabsat has proved only marginally more scrupulous in blocking out more of the channels backed by Iran. A Russian government satellite has provided an assist to Hezbollah broadcasting. Most channels spread online via YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, and some maintain dedicated smartphone apps as well. Turkey provides technology, financing, and a home to some Sunni Arab Islamist channels, while extremists of both sects partake of the freedom to broadcast from the soil of the democratic West.

In setting out to thwart these global operations, where does one begin? Chapter 5 noted that Western governments, legislators, and policymakers have used sanctions provisions in the United States, hate speech laws in Europe, and international public pressure to weaken a small number of channels, primarily by removing them from non-Arab satellite carriers and eroding their legal status in the West. It also bears noting that in 2015, when the Obama White House and European allies moved to degrade the social media capacities of one enemy—the Islamic State—they enlisted Arab governments and Western technology companies in a clampdown. Though the anti-IS campaign did not address TV channels per se, it established a precedent for the coordinated filtration of the same online platforms used by the channels. So a range of endeavors has netted techniques potentially applicable to the gamut of extremist sectarian broadcasts. But they promise only to limit a given channel's reach, without addressing the essential problem of its continuing operation. A strategy is also needed to stop Muslim powers—allies and adversaries alike—from granting the outlets money and a home.

A possible approach would see the United States boost its action against Iran-backed media, and parlay the effort to prompt Arab powers to shut down the Sunni extremist media they harbor and enable. Recall that while the Iranian government has shown no sign of ambivalence about maintaining its "war media," Sunni establishments feature a debate as to whether they should continue to host theirs. Figures such as Bahraini crown prince Salman bin Hamad, for example, have described both sects' extremist communications as opposite sides of the same coin. His view reflects a larger turn against Sunni extremism that has also seen crackdowns on clerical elites in Saudi Arabia and new homegrown efforts to counter social media incitement and recruitment, in the Saudi kingdom and elsewhere. Within

Sunni establishment debates about extremist discourse, the only mainstream argument for maintaining Sunni extremist channels is that they provide a needed rejoinder to the Shia ones. If the United States offers to lead a concerted push against Iran's channels, it might find Sunni establishment support for reciprocal action on the Sunni side.

U.S. efforts have in fact already begun to erode Iran's Arabic-language media. In her research on media in Lebanon, Hanin Ghaddar found evidence that some pro-Hezbollah broadcasts and publications were scaling down their operations slightly due to the financial effect of renewed U.S. sanctions on Iran. Ghaddar saw a possibility that the more substantial sanctions against Iran's petroleum industry, which commenced November 5, 2018, would eventually force even starker choices. "Military operations are the top priority," she said. "If they need to shut down some satellite channels, they will probably do that."<sup>10</sup> There are several ways Washington can press on this vulnerability:

- **Explicitly sanction as many Iran-backed channels as possible.** As indicated in the description of prior U.S.-led action against a handful of Iran-backed channels, more than a hundred others may be vulnerable to the same measures. It is a matter of research and documentation to prove some of these channels' connection to Iran or a designated Iranian proxy and thereby sanction them. In other cases, channels belong to an Iran-backed militia that has not itself been designated but should be. The United States should designate the spectrum of Iranian proxies, their channels, and the personnel who run them. Though such an effort would not by itself force shutdowns, it would make the channels' operations more cumbersome and costly at a time of heightened financial weakness, potentially leading to the closure of at least some under budgetary strain.
- **Engage Iraqi supporters of a clampdown on Iran-backed channels in their country.** While Iran maintains a firm grip over Lebanon, it faces a more serious ideological contest in striving to dominate Iraq. Iraqi nationalist strains are growing, together with a backlash against Tehran and its militias. Indirect pressure on the Iraqi economy caused by anti-Iran sanctions has fueled these trends. If Washington calls on the Baghdad government to act against Iran-backed broadcasts in the country—such as the Shia militia mouthpiece *al-Ahd*, described in chapter 5—it will encounter Iraqi public support. The aforementioned Iraqi Media

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS ■

House and other NGO efforts backed by the United States have created a framework for the public to demand an end to Iran-sponsored incitement. All Iraqi broadcasts are theoretically governed by a nonpartisan Communications and Media Commission, which is mandated by the state to revoke the license of any outlet that promulgates hate speech. While it has closed down several pan-Arab and Sunni Islamist channels already, the commission has left all Shia channels to operate freely. Further U.S. engagement on the issue would help amplify demands that the Iraqi government apply the same standard to Shia incitement as to the Sunni equivalent.

- **Engage Nilesat and Arabsat in a discussion about Iran sanctions compliance.** In 2008, the U.S. Congress introduced a bill to sanction the region's two major satellite carriers in response to their transmission of al-Manar and other Iran-affiliated channels. The bill did not pass, in part because of concern that these carriers might retaliate by removing the U.S. station Alhurra. Both Nilesat and Arabsat have since dropped al-Manar, but, as noted previously, continue to carry numerous Iranian sister channels. As the U.S. sanctions regime against Iran intensifies again, the satellite companies' exposure to charges of material support for Iran and its proxies grows along with it. In this delicate matter, a discussion is in order about decisions Nilesat and Arabsat can make to avoid a legal confrontation with the United States. These companies are, after all, tied to Arab states that have asked Washington to stand with them against Iranian aggression. Between the potential material penalty of sanctions violations and the strategic imperative to stop assisting Iranian information operations, Nilesat and Arabsat would likely consent to removing more channels.

Having developed this package of potential measures, the United States can initiate talks with its Arab allies about a holistic solution to the problem of incitement by both sects. The plan would necessarily include voluntary action by Arab states against Sunni extremist channels in their midst.

The following are several examples of reciprocal measures Arab governments can take:

- **Evict extremist channels and their staff from Arab "media cities."** Recall, by way of example, that Safa—the Salafi channel that told viewers to kill U.S. and other ambassadors and routinely alleges a Shia-

Jewish conspiracy to wreck the region—maintains its headquarters in Cairo’s Media Production City, a stone’s throw from the Mövenpick Hotel. It does not belong there, or anywhere on the territory of a U.S.-allied Arab state. Nor do the clerics and lay hosts who staff it. In the specially zoned media cities maintained by Egypt and several Gulf states, channels and publications operate autonomously with the stipulation that they avoid inciting against the host government. In addition to channels like Safa, which make no secret of their location, other war media broadcasts are sometimes based nearby in secret.<sup>11</sup> As the United States applies economic pressure against channels operating from Hezbollah’s media city in Beirut, Egypt and the Gulf states should agree to clean out their equivalents. Where extremist tele-clerics attempt to regroup and broadcast via YouTube and other online platforms, the host government should pursue and block them.

- **Hold all platforms of religious exhortation to a code of conduct concerning incitement against Israel and Jews.** In addition to war media, Arab governments host other religious broadcasts that they regard as mainstream. In practice, however, most of them traffic in the same antisemitic themes, and some voices that are fixtures of war media find their way onto the mainstream channels as guests. Some Arab states have introduced guidelines against “hate speech” that would improve the broadcasts if fully applied. In the UAE, for example, a law passed in 2015 criminalizes expressions of bias against any and all creeds and ethnicities, in media ranging from television to books to tweets.<sup>12</sup> It is in the nature of such measures that a small amount of enforcement serves to deter a large number of public voices.

## 5. *Develop the Outside-In Activity*

The four overall efforts just proposed require not only concerted work by Arab state and nonstate actors but also substantial participation by their U.S. and Israeli allies. The highly specialized nature of the activity, however, raises questions as to whether the needed personnel and capacities are presently available in the United States, Israel, or elsewhere—and, if not, what it would take to develop them. An obvious place to look is the field of outside-in initiatives, described in chapter 4, through which numerous parties have already engaged the Arab infosphere for the sake of reclamation—using cultural outreach, citizen diplomacy, partnership projects, and state

and nonstate communications. Their successes provide models to build on. Their failures provide lessons to learn from. And the gaps between what help they can offer and what help is needed speak to the preparations that will be necessary for a reclamation campaign to work.

- **Reboot media monitoring.** Consider, to begin with, the formidable research tasks that go into the plans just described. In order for U.S. or Israeli officials to intelligently negotiate a framework agreement with their Arab partners, they would need to bring substantial knowledge of the school systems, religious leaderships, and media industries under discussion, concerning both the content these institutions promulgate and the people who create it. To ensure, in turn, that a framework agreement achieves its goals, a monitoring and accountability unit would need to sift through the Arab infosphere continually—both to establish that Arab authorities are honoring their commitments and to gauge whether the efforts are succeeding and how they can be improved. The goal of degrading communications by hostile actors, meanwhile, would entail the preparation of dossiers on each targeted channel, including not only a representation of its content but also an investigation into its ownership, management structure, and personnel.

Are available Arabic research cadres up to the task? This study has noted the vital, ongoing contribution of monitoring groups such as MEMRI and IMPACT-se in raising global awareness of Arabic sermons, media, and textbook content. But it also pointed to the monitoring groups' isolation—born of the multigenerational Arab boycott of Israel—from the Arab institutions and people who create the content they scrutinize. Thus, a report on a given textbook, for example, is not accompanied by an appraisal of the informal education by teachers that surrounds the book's use in classrooms. A translation of a given TV interview is not necessarily accompanied by insight into the decisionmakers behind the camera or the relative weight of interviewees in their society. Even tools that do not require direct access to Arab countries are not adequately in use. Social media, for example, now provides a window into how Arab youth actually feel about the content they consume, and how their feelings change over time—yet most public monitoring organizations have not adapted their research practices to follow social media interactions systematically.

These gaps suggest that a new, integrated research cadre must be developed to serve a policy of reclamation. It would build on the gen-

eration of monitoring groups that were established in the late 1990s, including MEMRI and IMPACT-se. It would incorporate new data analysis technologies and crowdsourcing methods. Its staff would spend time on Arab soil studying the fields of media, education, and religious leadership, in addition to scrutinizing their content. The cadre would also partner with nascent Arab research projects that aim to tackle some of the same issues—the anti-extremist Iraqi Media House described in chapter 5 provides one example—and help these local ventures grow their own capacities.

- **Build a living map of reclamation’s Arab champions.** As noted previously, reclamation also entails engaging its own constituency of Arab supporters, who are often themselves isolated—from the majority culture, from one another, and from the Jews and Israelis whom they aspire to befriend. In authoritarian settings, these actors would bear the brunt of leading the institutional reforms mandated by framework agreements. In areas of contested political authority and Arab societies writ large, they are the linchpin of bottom-up change. To help these figures, Israelis and Americans need to know more about them. Who, where, and how many are they? What do they have in common? What patterns of life experience and learning led them to their beliefs? What emboldens them to speak out? What policies and public communications prove helpful to them? As the reclamation effort commences, how does it affect their position in society, and what policy adjustments does their evolving status call for? The answers to these questions lie in a combination of field research, social media scrutiny, and demographic study. One can envision a multidimensional “living map” on which to lay out the information, refresh it continually, and interact with it conceptually. The map would serve both as a database of allies and an actionable, real time study of cultural change.

Patches of the needed information are available now—in scattered realms, underutilized and rarely woven together. One example of a source is the Israeli Foreign Ministry’s Arabic Facebook page of 1.7 million followers, containing tens of thousands of discussion participants, a third of whom convey warmth toward Israel. Another source is the public statements and action of courageous Arab civil figures—though the “survivor bias,” referenced earlier, suggests that this vivacious subset of the public does not represent a cross section of like-minded people. A

third source is the many human networks of Arab actors whom Israelis and their supporters have encountered and at times teamed up with—through citizen diplomacy, media collaborations, joint economic ventures, and interfaith dialogue. These and other shards of knowledge need to be pooled in order to be understood and fully used.

- **Develop outside-in communications.** Another requirement is an Israeli-U.S. cadre of Arabic-speaking, cross-cultural communicators, capable of appealing to a popular audience as well as navigating sensitive private discussions with Arab interlocutors. They would be among the voices that appear on Arabic television to discuss the spectrum of human concerns, from peacemaking and war to dieting and exercise. They would be among the educators who travel from one Arab media company or school department to the next, steering workshops for “agnostic majorities” of staff and training others to do the same. They would be among the negotiators too—working alongside diplomats to structure the minutiae of a given framework agreement with Arab partners.

Where can such figures be found? Had today’s politically auspicious circumstances arrived fifty years ago, Voice of Israel Arabic broadcaster Shaul Menashe—one of the refugees who fled Baghdad in 1951—would have been impeccable at leading a workshop with Arab journalists. Had the same circumstances arrived a decade ago, New York ophthalmologist Heskel Haddad—a Jewish community leader who fled Iraq at the same time—might have become the Sanjay Gupta of pan-Arab television. But as the remaining Jews who came of age in Arab lands now approach their final years, a mechanism must be built to carry their skills into the next generation.

Chapter 4 pointed to a number of outside-in activities that have approached various aspects of this challenge. Young Israeli spokespeople in Arabic, ranging from IDF spokesman Avichay Adraee to rabbi-in-training Elhanan Miller, have used their TV appearances and social media work to experiment with differing styles of advocacy. Members of the post-1967 wave of Jewish refugees from Arab lands, such as Libya’s Raphael Luzon and Iraq’s Linda Menuhin Abdul Aziz, have reconnected with the more specific discourse of their places of birth. Through writing, film production, TV interviews, and gatherings, they have engaged Arab publics in a discussion about the potential role of Israeli and Jewish partnership in their countries’ future. Some in the American

Jewish community, mostly communicating in English, have also become public faces in Arab countries—through TV appearances of their own, or by participating in interfaith dialogue activity. A tiny subset of American Jewish groups has itself developed Arabic-language outreach capacities. One might add to the category of “communicators” those U.S. social entrepreneurs who have used the “partnership approach” to negotiate and manage joint productions with Arab media. Viewed optimistically, their efforts look like a series of dry runs for the negotiation of a future framework agreement.

Yet each of these efforts has shown its limitations. To begin with, while the work of Jewish and Israel spokespeople in Arabic has indeed evolved, the lion’s share of it still amounts to the same traditional “*hasbara*”—frontal advocacy for the state and its policies—practiced by Israelis in any linguistic or cultural environment. The seven goals of reclamation outlined earlier (“Concretizing a Vision”) show that while *hasbara* is a vital function, it is only part of the larger communications challenge. Further aspects of the reclamation agenda have been advanced by others, to be sure. The efforts by Luzon, Abdul Aziz, and others have helped revive historical memory and catalyzed direct civil relations. But their efforts have not adequately informed the mainstream Israeli policy discussion of how an overall communications strategy in Arabic can and should develop. As to the U.S. social entrepreneurs who practice the partnership approach, the language of give-and-take that they have honed with media companies and other Arab institutions is a potential asset to reclamation: they have found a way to forge joint ventures to promote tolerance in general or assail a given jihadist group in particular. But they have not yet, on the same communications platforms, applied their approach toward improving the treatment of Israel and Jews. In light of the inevitable pushback they would face if they tried to do so, these actors would need to garner a degree of political support from their U.S. backers that has not been forthcoming. Nor have American Jewish organizations allocated resources to their modest Arabic-language outreach capacities on a scale that befits their importance.

An effort to address these limitations would hinge on a meeting of the minds among disparate voices and the elements that back them. This would entail a sober assessment of strengths and weaknesses, seeking to extract the practices most worthy of developing. A training facility would serve to improve the communications skills of those already active

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS ■

in the field, while teaching the same skills to others as they join the reclamation effort. A recruitment campaign would enlist Arabic speakers in Israel, the United States, and perhaps elsewhere, integrate them into the process, and prepare them for their roles.

- **Tap expertise from other realms.** Reclamation also calls for knowledge that does not necessarily reside within the field of Arab-Israeli affairs. Consider, for example, the creative challenge that would lie in store if a framework agreement allows for genuine reform of Arab schools. Arab textbook monitoring groups, while well versed in antisemitic pedagogy, are not well integrated into the field of post-conflict curriculum development. But an organization like Massachusetts-based Facing History and Ourselves, while green to Arab environments, has helped young learners in Northern Ireland, South Africa, and across the United States learn about antisemitism, intolerance, and the Holocaust, and then “make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives.”<sup>13</sup> A multidisciplinary project is required to create programs in education, religious instruction, and development media that build on exemplary models from outside the Arab sphere.
- **Create a central hub.** Finally, the interrelated nature of the many projects prescribed in this chapter suggests that they need a dedicated institutional home—whether a division of an existing organization or a separate “action tank.” This hub would serve to develop the research projects, host the living map, and devise and provide the needed training. It would lobby and educate decisionmakers in Israel and the United States about how to build on the opportunities described in this study. It would coordinate with Arab actors supportive of the effort, and help inform outreach by the United States and Israel to their Arab partners.



IN THE ANCIENT TOWN of Yavneh, now a part of central Israel, the first-century sage Rabbi Tarfon contributed the following immortal words to Judaism’s earliest compendium of oral law: “You are not obliged to complete the task [of perfecting the world], but neither are you free to desist from it.”

The plans described herein are intended as a preliminary sketch of the kind of cultural policy that supporters of Arab-Israeli partnership, what-

ever their nationality or faith, should be pursuing together. Pieces of such an effort can be pursued by themselves for the sake of an initial foray or pilot project. The plan as a whole can be revised or repackaged for the sake of practicality or prudence, or whittled down given limited resources. But whatever the allotted investment, whatever the merits of a particular tactic, and whatever the quibbles over the best means to the same end, no power seeking a better future for Israelis and Arabs can afford to desist from the cultural pursuit of peacemaking.

## NOTES

1. Ambassador Dennis Ross (counselor and senior fellow, The Washington Institute), discussion with author, Aug. 28, 2018.
2. “U.S. Congress Passes Bill Grading Antisemitism Envoy,” *Jerusalem Post*, Sept. 14, 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/American-Politics/US-Congress-passes-bill-upgrading-antisemitism-envoy-567211> (accessed 9/25/18).
3. The nature and extent of the challenges in striving to do so differ from one U.S.-allied Arab power to the next. The details fall beyond the scope of this monograph.
4. Viola Shafik, *Popular Egyptian Cinema: Gender, Class, and Nation* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 29.
5. “Aghrab Ashar Hikayat lil-Fannanin al-Yahud fi Misr [The strangest 10 stories of Jewish artists in Egypt],” Gololy, Dec. 27, 2012, <https://bit.ly/2Kg9Me4> (accessed 11/19/18).
6. Eetta Prince-Gibson, “A Group of Young Iraqis Risk Imprisonment to Reconnect With Their Country’s Jewish Past,” *Haaretz*, Sept. 23, 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-a-group-of-young-iraqis-risk-imprisonment-to-reconnect-with-their-country-s-jewish-past-1.6491140> (accessed 9/25/18).
7. Edwin Shuker, Iraqi-Jewish community activist in London, in discussion with author on Aug. 8, 2018.
8. Hanin Ghaddar, senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, in discussion with author, Sept. 28, 2018.
9. Roi Qays, “Tofer Khalifah. Hakiru et Ha-General Me-Ha-Mizrah She-Rotzeh Laasot Seder Be-Luv [Tofer Khalifah. Meet the general from the East who wants to create order in Libya],” *Yediot Ahronot*, July 31, 2017, <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4996669,00.html> (accessed 9/25/18); Richard Silverstein, “Haftar: Israeli Secret Aid to Libya’s Strongman Reveals a New Friend in Africa,” *Middle East Eye*, Aug. 8, 2017, <https://www.middleeast-eye.net/columns/haftar-israeli-military-aid-strongman-reveals-new-friend-libya-1638239413> (accessed 9/25/18).
10. Hanin Ghaddar, senior fellow at The Washington Institute, in discussion with author, Sept. 28, 2018.

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS ■

11. By way of example, at a Hudson Institute panel discussion, Ambassador Alberto Fernandez asserted that the Sunni jihadist channel Wesal, previously booted from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, has since relocated to Cairo. “Broadcasting Change: Arabic Media as a Catalyst for Liberalism,” YouTube video, 1:26:25, posted by “Hudson Institute,” Jan. 30, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iShNNF-Nqho> (accessed 9/25/18).
12. “Anti-Discrimination Law Enacted Across UAE,” *The National*, July 20, 2015, <https://www.thenational.ae/uae/government/anti-discrimination-law-enacted-across-uae-1.74101> (accessed 9/25/18).
13. “About Us,” Facing History and Ourselves, <https://www.facinghistory.org/about-us> (accessed 10/8/18).





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This publication marks Braude's first step in establishing the Center for Peace Communications.

