

Egyptian Newspapers: On Jews and Israel

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Articles & Testimony

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Following a number of nationalist, independent and partisan Egyptian newspapers, including: Al-Ahram, Al Gomhuria, Al Akhbar, Al Youm Al Sabeh, Al-Masry Al-Youm, Al Wafd, Sawt al-Ummah and Al Shorouk in the past weeks reveals a surprising lack of discrepancy in their rhetoric towards events related to the State and people of Israel. These newspapers consistently publish news, reports, and articles that fail to distinguish between, on one hand, the politics and interests of governments and, on the other hand, the relation between peoples who have peacefully coexisted through many generations.

Egyptian newspapers present the topic of Israel and Jews in several distinct ways. Most notably, these newspapers use terms and statements that portray Jews as ambitious expansionists in the Arab world in the pursuit of the ultimate dream that is the “Promised Land.” These newspapers believe that Jews seek to control the world by steering the policies of major countries to align with Israel’s interests. Their articles expand the true lobbying activities of Israel in the United States, hardly unique among Middle Eastern countries, into de facto control of the United States government.

The independent newspaper Al Youm Al Sabeh published a report titled “The Zionist Lobby Selects U.S. Presidents,” which purports to shed light on the mechanisms Jews use to influence nations’ decisions and policies to ultimately bring the world under Jewish control. According to the newspaper, U.S. presidential candidates are exploring all means available to satisfy the Zionist lobby because they select who will run the United States (Al Youm Al Sabeh, March 20, 2016). Similarly, Al Gomhuria claims that a colonial U.S.-Zionist alliance is actively exploiting the Arab Spring to destabilize the Arab world. The same newspaper also accused Jews of insulting Prophets by claiming that Jews have disobeyed Moses, mocked King Solomon, and accused Jacob of adultery (Al Gomhuria, March 15, 2016).

Despite the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel and its requirement of normalization between the two countries, many Egyptian newspapers have recently launched a fierce campaign against those who advocate or promote the normalization policy. Following Israeli ambassador to Egypt Haim Koren’s visit with MP Tawfik Okasha, official, independent, and partisan newspapers launched a campaign calling for Okasha to be punished. And in an unprecedented move, MPs have voted to remove Okasha from parliament. Paradoxically, Egypt’s Speaker of Parliament Dr. Ali Abdel Aal issued a statement after Okasha’s ousting, declaring Egypt’s commitment to all

international treaties signed with all countries, including the peace treaty with Israel (Al-Ahram, March 3, 2016). Through this message, the Speaker apparently attempted to inform Israel that the status quo will remain: normalization will continue to be restricted to the confines of official circles (Al Youm Al Sabeh, March 5, 2016).

Some journalists are exploiting this issue of normalization to attack political rivals. For example, Egyptian pro-regime media figure Ahmed Moussa called on the Egyptian government in an Al-Ahram article reopen the cases of all those who have normalized relations with Israel to hold them accountable. Such figures include intellectuals, writers, and politicians who identify as part of the Egyptian revolution. Moussa has also stated that the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel will not make Egyptians “forget the crimes perpetrated by the Zionist entity against the Palestinian people” (Al-Ahram, March 6, 2016).

Articles promoting anti-normalization also encompass the fields of art, culture and sports. The Egyptian media often accuses Israel of stealing and laying claim to the Egyptian heritage. In this regard, Al Bawaba has published a summary of Coptic Music and Jewish Music in the arms of the Nile, a book by researcher Ahmed Al Tawil maintaining that Jews have stolen authentic Coptic melodies and claimed them as their own. The author asserted that Jews, lacking a musical scale as is the case with other people, borrowed theirs from the Egyptians, Assyrians, and Greeks (Al Bawaba, March 13, 2016).

Accusations of cultural appropriation also included popular dishes; the Egyptian media has accused Israel of appropriating the recipes of popular Egyptian dishes, such as Falafel, Koshari and the Egyptian salad as Israeli (Al Youm Al Sabeh, February 19, 2016).

Refusal to normalize also extends to sports. When the Israeli embassy in Cairo proposed holding a soccer match between the Egyptian and Israeli teams, the Egyptian Football Association's spokesman Azmi Mogahed rejected the offer on the grounds that “any faithful Egyptian will not accept such a proposal.” Ironically, Mogahed had also announced in a prior TV appearance that it was necessary to distinguish between politics and sports, and had called for a match between the Egyptian and Israeli teams (Al-Masry Al-Youm, February 28, 2016).

These reports reveal the failure of the Egyptian media to distinguish between Judaism as a religion and Israel as a State. The Egyptian media has long mixed the political—the State of Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict—with religious Judaism and the Jewish ethnicity. Accordingly, in the eyes of the media Arab-Jewish citizens must pay the price for any behavior adopted by the State of Israel. The Egyptian media has often questioned the loyalty of Jewish Arab minorities in all Arab countries and incited others against them. For example, the independent Sawt al-Ummah published an article “Surprise... Houthis Resort to Jewish Soldiers to Fight the Arab Coalition.” It claimed that Jewish Yemeni troops are fighting alongside Houthis against the Arab coalition in Yemen, and that some have recently arrived in Israel and were warmly welcome by Tel Aviv. The newspaper also indicated that some Yemeni Jews have launched The Faithful Jews Against Al Saud and Their Crimes in Yemen, a blog which aims to document and expose the crimes and violations of Al Saud against the Yemeni people (Sawt al-Ummah, March 28, 2016). This claim seems particularly counterintuitive, since Yemeni Jews have themselves reported that the Houthi-backed government has demanded that the few remaining Jews of Yemen convert or leave the country.

This is the latest in a decades-long trend of Egyptian media's inflammatory rhetoric against the Jewish minorities of Arab countries for have lived in the region for millennia. Similar incitement may cause strife and violence against Jewish communities in the Arab world and lead to their displacement to Israel or beyond, as has been the case in the past. The wave of media incitement in the aftermath of the Six-Day War led to violence and anger against Arab Jews, including their persecution and the torching of synagogues in Egypt, Yemen, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Morocco.

The Egyptian media must cease its policy of incitement and defamation. In the three decades following the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, the inflammatory tone adopted by many Egyptian newspapers, whether public,

independent or partisan, has widened the gap and fed distrust between the Egyptian and Israeli peoples, which does not help Egypt's often important role as a third party in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations or the already precarious situation of the Arab world's remaining Jews.

Communication and tolerance is the only path towards peace. If it so desires, the Egyptian media has an opportunity to promote mutual understanding and change prevailing stereotypes to reinforce peaceful coexistence among people.

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