

Middle Eastern Reactions to the Kosovo Crisis and NATO Airstrikes

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Brief Analysis

The flight of refugees from the predominantly Muslim ethnic Albanian community in Kosovo, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) continuing airstrikes against Serbia, have produced varied reactions in the Middle East. The following is a sample of responses.

Support for NATO in the Arab World

"We must encourage the Americans and their allies in NATO to stay the course. We say to them: Continue fighting the current injustice and do not allow the Serbian leader to come out of this battle a winner . . . If Washington had not taken the initiative in leading the NATO attempt to stop the Serb atrocities, all humanity would have been put to shame . . . We must remember the situation eight years ago when air strikes against Iraqi troops forced them [Iraqis] to withdraw. A land attack was necessary to finish the job." ---Remarks by Prince Khaled bin Sultan, Saudi Air Force commander during Operation Desert Storm, and son of Saudi Arabia's Minister of Defense and Aviation, Prince Sultan ibn Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, as quoted by the daily Saudi Gazette (Reuters, 4/7/99)

"The government of Jordan . . . condemns the intransigence of the Serb government and its unresponsiveness to the international efforts aiming to find a just and peaceful solution to the problem of Kosovo." ---Statement by the Jordanian government as transmitted by Jordan's official news agency (Petra, 4/5/99)

Israeli Reactions

"Israel condemns the massacres being perpetrated by the Serbs, and condemns all mass murder--both because of our history and because of our moral perception. We are shocked by what we see there and our heart is torn . . . A nation that is unable to enlist its own self-defense force won't be saved by anyone. We live in the Middle East, and we'd better internalize that message. No one will protect us if we don't protect ourselves, and may we never reach such a situation." ---Statement by Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu (Yediot Aharonot, 3/31/99)

"Israel views with severity any act of killing, attack, or expulsion of innocent civilians . . . As loyal friends of the United States, we expect that U.S. and NATO forces will do everything possible to stop the suffering of innocent people and renew the negotiations between the two sides as soon as possible. Israel is always ready to provide humanitarian aid to innocent refugees. It is the moral responsibility of Israel and the Jewish people to do so." ---Statement by Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon (Ha'aretz, 4/4/99)

"The free world must look forward and see dangers in the future if a large bloc of Islamic states should develop what it's possible to call a Greater Albania. In my opinion this can lead to unrest in Europe . . . lasting many years. If you think for a moment of the possibility that Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia and who-knows-who-else could join this game, we can certainly see here a focus of activity that would cause unrest in Europe for a very long time." ---Sharon in an interview with Israel Radio (Reuters, 4/6/99)

"The Jewish people and the State of Israel cannot even hesitate one day in the face of such atrocities. From the very first day that the crisis broke out, I called on the government to stand behind NATO and Clinton, and I am glad that

the prime minister, at last, came to his senses, after stuttering for a long time, and is backing them." ---Israeli Labor Party and 'One Israel' leader Ehud Barak in an interview with Voice of Israel Radio, 4/8/99 (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 4/10/99)

Drawing Parallels between Kosovars and Palestinians

"There is no difference in reality between what Serbian butcher Milosevic is doing and the practices of Netanyahu, the enemy of peace in the region. It would be fair for the United States to handle the Palestinian problem and the problem of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo with the same approach, determination, and willpower and come up with a solution that serves world stability." ---From an editorial in a state-owned Egyptian daily (al-Jumhuriyah, 3/30/99)

"While the waves of punishing strikes against Yugoslavia continue and no-fly zones are imposed on [Iraq], can the Arabs dream of a day when NATO forces carry out punishing operations against Israel?" ---From a column entitled "On the Margin of Politics" in Egypt's state-owned al-Ahram (3/27/99)

"While one can rightly point out that that the air strikes . . . have been greeted with a sigh of relief in many parts of the world, it is equally right to note that there are other communities elsewhere in the world that are being denied their most basic human rights and are having to endure repression and deprivation. For instance, there is the case of the Palestinian people." ---Editorial in a pro-Palestinian Authority (PA) newspaper (al-Quds, internet version, 3/26/99)

"The justifications given by NATO leaders for attacking the Serbs also apply to Israel. Among the accusations leveled at the Serbs is that they practice ethnic cleansing, deport citizens, and destroy Albanian civilian records and property deeds. These are the essence of the Zionist colonialist plan that was implemented in 1948 and 1967 and continues to be applied today in Hebron and occupied Jerusalem." ---From "Netansevich," by Hafiz al-Barghuti in a PA newspaper (al-Hayat al-Jadidah, 4/1/99)

Critics of NATO Policy

"We are not about to buy the story line that the aim of this third world war, mounted unilaterally by the Atlantic Alliance, is to afford protection for the Muslims of Kosovo . . . a more far-reaching goal appears to be to put a definitive end to the nuclear and military capabilities of Russia after it has been subjugated economically." ---From an article by Dr. Fayiz al-Sayigh in the Syrian government-owned al-Thawrah (3/31/99)

"The NATO airstrikes, contrary to Western propaganda, have not only failed to bring tranquility to Muslims but have worsened their situation . . . The process will continue until Muslims are driven out [of Europe], Islam is wiped out and the Islamic community is destroyed. Why? Because they view the presence of Muslims in that area as contrary to their selfish and despotic aims." ---Iran's religious leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i addressing Iranian officials (Iran Times, 4/9/99)

"We confirm to the world's Muslims that this war which the United States launches in the Balkans does not aim at protecting Albanian Muslims . . . It is a war designed to preserve American interests, and the strongest proof of this is the ongoing killing of Albanians in Kosovo by the Serbs." ---Statement issued by Hizballah (Dallas Morning News, 4/3/99)

"Neither the United States nor Europe is concerned about the Albanians of Kosovo. The[ir] humanitarian slogans . . . are no more than disguises concealing other objectives. In brief, these objectives are represented by the persistence in weakening and fragmenting Yugoslavia as a Slav state that is closely associated with Russia; [and] continuing to implement the plans designed to contain and encircle Russia by weakening its "ally," Yugoslavia . . . The United States targeted Belgrade this time, so the Cruise missiles will echo in Moscow itself and in other capitals. O states of the East, be united!" ---From the "A Viewpoint" column in the Iraqi Ba'th party newspaper (al-Thawrah, 3/26/99)

"Iraq strongly condemns this tyrannical aggression, which is a flagrant violation of international law and order as well as the UN Charter. The United States and NATO have no excuse to interfere so blatantly and aggressively in the domestic affairs of a sovereign state, regardless of any pretexts used to justify this interference." ---Commentary by 'Ali al-Badri on the official Republic of Iraq Radio Network (3/28/99)

Compiled by Assaf Moghadam.

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