

# SURVEY OF ARAB AFFAIRS

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## THE JORDANIAN COMEBACK IN THE TERRITORIES

Hillel Frisch

Beleaguered pro-Jordanians in the territories breathed a sigh of relief as Yasir Arafat spoke of confederacy with the Jordanian kingdom during his meeting with King Hussein in the Jordanian port and resort town of Aqaba. It was the first such meeting since King Hussein terminated cooperation with Arafat in February 1986. The pro-Jordanians were content on three counts. Arafat agreed to meet the king at Aqaba and not in the Hashemite capital of Amman, a diplomatic affront for any political personality on a visit involving rapprochement. More importantly, by talking of confederacy with Jordan, he acknowledged that the PLO could not assume sole responsibility for the fate of the territories. Above all, the meeting and the acknowledgement could

only exacerbate tensions between the factions that comprise the PLO, most of whom bitterly oppose any joint action with Jordan. A strife-torn PLO is the only hope pro-Jordanians have in restoring Jordanian influence in the territories.

So far the meeting has indeed promoted these tensions. The bitter words of George Habash, leader of the radical Popular Front, complemented those of staunch PLO supporter Zia Abu Ziad, editor of a small Hebrew weekly in the territories financed by the PLO. Asked for his comment on the idea of confederacy, he answered, "I don't know what made him go back to Jordan again." In Arab subtlety, this is tantamount to accusing Arafat of selling out the people who made the intifada (Arab

uprising). They want independence and not the tutelage of the Jordanian king.

Pro-Jordanians in the territories feel that they have helped in this small victory, chiefly through their newspaper Al-Nahar, launched in 1986 after the major daily in the territories, Al-Quds, began adopting a pro-PLO line. Though its launching was met with derision, it rapidly set good journalistic standards and soon surpassed the combined readership of Al-Shaab and Al-Fajr, the Fatah "party" newspapers in East Jerusalem. However, it still trails far behind Al-Quds.

When the intifada broke out, Al-Nahar practically went underground in the face of threats leveled at its editors and distributors. The newspaper ostensibly adopted a pro-PLO line to protect itself. However this was in form only, not in substance. Employing subtle techniques, it became in the course of time an effective weapon against the PLO.

How can a newspaper formally adopt a PLO position and at the same time undermine it? The answer begins with the headlines. The continuous postponements of the Palestine National Council meeting to decide such crucial issues as a declaration of independence or a government in exile provided the headlines. There were two techniques -- either printing a headline announcing another postponement, ending with a question mark and exclamation point, or quoting two unnamed PLO spokesmen giving two different dates. The message became clear: the PLO is an organization of indecision and confusion. Jordan might have opted out, but there is no one to really replace it.

Printing selections from the Arab press designed to portray the PLO in a bad light has also been used by the newspaper. After the king's announcement cutting ties with the West Bank, there were daily articles by prominent Egyptian journalists who voiced their regrets at the king's move and expressed doubts as to the PLO's ability to translate the success of the intifada into meaningful political gains.

The paper employs the same technique

to adopt a position embarrassing the PLO. Articles culled mainly from the Jordanian press questioned the right of the PLO to revise its covenant, disregarding the fact that the original covenant of 1964 was already revised four years later, though in no way in the direction of peace. The covenant is an important document. Without its revision, the PLO will probably not win the public support in the West that it needs to make any future unilateral announcement of independence in the territories effective.

Al-Nahar's subtle attacks on the PLO are small matters, but they add up in the face of PLO inaction on the diplomatic and military fronts. Statistics for the mid-year on terrorist incursions into Israel from abroad reveal the same ineffectiveness as in years past. There have been twenty incursions and only one "success," the takeover of a civilian bus and the killing of three Israelis near Dimona. This is a remarkably poor showing given the successes of the intifada and the toll of Palestinians it has taken to ensure its persistence. It also plays into the hands of the Communists who always preached the effectiveness of popular political violence and the fundamentalist Islamic organization Hamas which first instigated the intifada. Twenty years ago the Communists in the administered territories were disparaged by Fatah for not engaging in terrorist activity. Today they are disparaging Fatah for being latecomers to their techniques and for being failures at terrorism.

One may ask what Jordan has to gain by promoting Al-Nahar. After all, the Jordanians can hardly replace the PLO in the territories. A population so youthful with a leadership so young can hardly be expected to harbor warm feelings toward a king who ruled the area twenty-one years ago. But just as the techniques employed by Al-Nahar against the PLO are subtle, so is the political design behind them. The design is to narrow the power base of Fatah and the mainstream PLO which is effectively the political center in the

territories. Grinding down Fatah means opening the arena to a conflict between the two blocs -- the Communists on the left, and the Hamas and the Islamic Jihad on the right. For only internecine conflict can bring about a reappraisal of Jordan

which, despite the trials it has faced, has been stable for nearly a generation. That stability would be highly valued were a Lebanese-type situation to emerge in the territories.

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### LANDMARK AGREEMENT REACHED ON AGRICULTURAL EXPORTS

Although it was not the type of news that makes headlines, the agricultural export agreement reached by the Agricultural Cooperative Union in Judea and Samaria and the Sons of Gaza Benevolent Council with the Israeli Ministry of Agriculture on October 10th is an important document. For the first time since Israel began administering the territories, the Arabs there have entered into an official agreement with the Israeli government. They did so on an equal footing and on an important issue -- the export of agricultural produce to EEC countries. From now on, local Arab producers through these two organs will export their produce using local brand names and they will do so independently of Agrexco, Israel's official agricultural export agency, but in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture on technical matters.

Since agriculture is the main economic sector in Judea and Samaria and holds a place of importance in the Gazan economy as well, the agreement is of considerable economic importance. The fact that the agreement is so far the only tangible success wrought by the intifada on behalf of the residents of the territories renders it critical. They have now demonstrated, mainly to themselves, just how capable they are of fending for themselves in one critical economic area. Success will lend credence to their claims for the territories' economic viability. On the other

hand, their inability to capitalize on this opportunity might bring into question the call for independence raised by the intifada.

Ironically, the institutions responsible for this agreement are both pro-Jordanian, as are the individuals who signed on their behalf. It is important to note that these organs signed an accord which, among other matters, stressed technical coordination with a ministerial council of the Israeli government which is not part of the military government in the territories. Until now, Palestinian Arabs never willingly acknowledged any other organ but the military government.

Does this accord then signify a radically new approach? No doubt many Palestinian Arabs would see this as a first step toward some kind of political devolution. But judging from the past twenty years, where any moves made by local Palestinians to take their fate into their own hands were crushed by political centers outside the territories, so too will these organs succumb to outside control. The PLO has already announced that it is trying to persuade Egypt to allow the flow of such produce through one of Egypt's ports under the PLO's aegis. And so an agreement which could be a small contribution to peace will become one more arena of conflict between Israel and the PLO with the inhabitants of the territories paying the usual price.

FROM MOBILIZATION FOR VIOLENCE TO POLITICAL MOBILIZATION:  
THE MUHARIRUN AND THE ARAB PRESS IN JERUSALEM

The move away from a strategy emphasizing terrorism to a strategy emphasizing political institution-building and mass protest in the administered territories marks one of the most profound changes in the Palestinian movement. In the late 1960s most Palestinian activity involved terrorist acts perpetrated principally by Palestinians from outside the territories. In the early 1970s this pattern changed. Terrorist cells were formed within the territories as a result of the increasing inability of terrorists to infiltrate the borders. In either case, many were apprehended before they committed crimes, which meant that they received relatively short sentences. Many serving longer sentences were freed in the 1985 prisoner exchange in which 600 out of 1,150 terrorists were permitted to remain in the territories.

Once freed, they could not for the most part return to their former terrorist pursuits since they were kept under surveillance by the authorities. The PLO factions were soon faced with the problem of providing suitable activities for their former terrorists. The creation of Palestinian institutions which wedded political mobilization with the provision of needed social services provided career outlets for many of these muharirun, the term in Arabic which literally means "the liberators." The muharirun became a privileged social class, but also remained dedicated, professional, political activists.

The Palestinian Arab press centered in East Jerusalem has long provided employment opportunities for the muharirun. The more lenient legal environment of Jerusalem where Israeli, not Jordanian, law prevails, and the sensitivity involved in curtailing the movements of professionals associated with the press rendered it an attractive haven and cover for the muharirun involved in political mobilization on behalf of the factions in the PLO to which

they belonged. Fear of these former terrorists also facilitated PLO domination of the local Arabic press.

The story of Rajub Jibril, a Fatah terrorist and author of a well-known book on persevering in Israeli jails, is a prime example. Upon his release as part of the 1985 prisoner exchange, Jibril became a major Shabiba activist and an employee of the Arab Studies Society, a Fatah-supported research institute in East Jerusalem. He was also instructed to take over Abir, a magazine for women which appeared for over a year and then ceased publication for financial reasons as well as criticism of its lack of nationalist ardor. The magazine, which was formerly concerned almost solely with fashion, health care, and education and was written on a reasonably high level, suddenly became politically radical. Rajub Jibril's appointment as its financial manager may explain the change. Jibril has since been deported for being a key Fatah figure in the intifada, and Abir is once again looking for financial backing.

Many of the reporters for Al-Fajr and Al-Shaab have backgrounds similar to Jibril. The two dailies are both Fatah organs. Mahmud Ribhi, the former Al-Fajr reporter in the Hebron area, is now serving a seven-year sentence for leading a terrorist cell. Al-Fajr's Nubhan Harisha, a reporter from Tulkarem, was a former Shabiba activist at Bir-Zeit University who has spent most of his years as a journalist confined to his hometown. Another resident of Tulkarem, Hani 'Issawi, heads a news agency which serves the two Arab dailies. 'Issawi served seventeen years in prison for terrorist activity. Talal Abu Afifa, one of Al-Fajr's editors, was accused of throwing a Molotov cocktail in 1980. Abdul Latif Raith, the newspaper's sports editor, is a former Fatah terrorist.

The employment of former terrorists who transformed themselves into effective political activists through the Palestinian

Arab press has invited increased surveillance and arrests among the ranks of Palestinians working as journalists. In the long run, however, the strategy has been remarkably effective. Terrorists know that there are employment opportunities after their release, the press becomes a vehicle not only for expressing Palestinian nationalism but for organizing the violence in

the streets, and Israel is embarrassed for trying to curtail the activities of journalists and stands accused of infringing civil rights. In the former period, Israel benefitted from world public opinion which condemned the terrorist attacks. Today its efforts to curtail Palestinian political mobilization through the local Arab press are diminishing its world standing.

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## IMAGES OF THE ARAB-ISRAEL CONFLICT: MIND OVER MATTER

David Newman

Conflicts between nations are not only about hard facts. They are just as much about the images that one group has of the other. In order to reach a fuller understanding of group behavior in any given situation, it is important to analyze the cognitive and perceptual environments within which they live. The images which people form result from societal influences, as they are presented in schools, in the media and in literature. The use of semantics (language), graphics (pictures and maps) and semiotics (signs) are all part of this process.

The Arab-Israel conflict is no different in this respect. Numerous influences are brought to bear on both Palestinians and Israelis, resulting in the formation of images about the conflict in general, and the opposing sides in particular.(1) A major influence in the formation of these images is the mass media, devoting much of its attention to the conflict. But the media, while reaching the widest possible audience, is not the sole disseminator of information. Popular literature portrays the conflict within highly emotive settings, making use of images and terminologies in its favoring of one side over the other. Even scientific research, supposedly neutral and objective, may often reflect the particular bias (even subconsciously) of its author.

### The Semantics of Territory

One of the more intriguing sets of images held by both Israelis and Palestinians concerns the territory under dispute. A number of alternative names are used to describe the area, Palestinian and Israeli usages differing from each other. To Palestinians, the conflict centers around "Palestine" while to Israelis it is a question of "Israel." At a more localized level, while Palestinians and most neutral outsiders refer to the "West Bank," many Israelis only make use of the ancient Hebrew geographical terminology of "Judea and Samaria." One of the first indications of the changed political climate in Israel following the Likud victory in 1977 was the formal adoption of the term "Judea and Samaria" in all official documents to describe what had hitherto always been referred to as the "West Bank." In a similar vein, Prime Minister Peres' political advisor, Dr. Yossi Beilin, suggested (in 1986) the reuse of the term "West Bank" in brackets following any official usage of the "Judea and Samaria" terminology.

A number of alternative functional terminologies are also used for the territory in question. How often is the reader aware of the connotations in the term "occupied territories" as opposed to "administered territories" or simply the "territories." Each usage indicates a specific

slant and is part of the process by which the region is perceived according to the user. The term "occupied territories" has become the most common international usage despite its obvious bias in favor of those opposed to Israel's control of the West Bank and other areas conquered in 1967. The more neutral term "administered territories" or simply "territories" tends to be used in official Israeli documents and statistical publications. A third term, "liberated territories," is used by those nationalist groups within Israel who perceive the region as having rightfully been returned to its previous owners of 2000 years ago.

Another pointer in this direction is the alternative names given by Arabs and Jews to specific places. Jerusalem to Jews is al-Kuds to the Arabs. This may appear legitimate for a city in which both peoples reside. But other places in the West Bank are referred to by their ancient biblical names by many Israelis, even where Jews do not live at present, or have not lived for hundreds of years. The towns of "Hebron" and "Shechem" are used to the exclusion of the Arabic names "al Khalil" and "Nablus." How many schoolchildren or even adults from both sides are aware that these places have alternative names and that they are referred to differently by the "other" national group? The West Bank Jewish settlements are nearly all named after the ancient biblical (and later) sites in the region. While this process is quite logical in itself, there is a tendency to emphasize these names as a means by which the Jewish-only history and presence in the region is brought to the fore. One group's symbolism is emphasized to the total exclusion of the other group.

### Maps in the Mind

In the same way that the name given to the particular region is important in the formation of an image, so too are the pictures or graphics used as a means to promote support for a particular viewpoint. Schools in Israel no longer use maps of Israel which include a boundary line

between pre-1967 Israel and the West Bank. The former "green line" boundary (in existence between 1948 and 1967) has been consciously removed from the atlases. While only some of the generation which has grown up since 1967 are aware that there was such a border separating Israel from the West Bank only twenty years ago, even they are hard put to locate it on a map of the country.

A similar situation exists within Palestinian institutions. Look closely the next time you see a Palestinian representative argue his case on television or in any other forum. No border exists dividing the West Bank from Israel. Palestinian aspirations for a state do not differentiate between one part of the territory and another. It is all Palestine, just as in the Israeli case it is all Israel. In this respect, the two sides demonstrate remarkable similarities. Children, at their most impressionable ages, form images of a single territory which lies at the heart of the conflict. All of that territory is perceived as belonging to them. Thus, in the future, the argument will no longer be over the appropriate redivision of the country, but an all-out battle for control over the whole, to the ultimate benefit of the victor and the final defeat of the vanquished.

### Spatial Awareness

To what extent are Arabs and Jews informed and knowledgeable about the other side? Two recently conducted research projects point to the lack of basic awareness of one side for the other. In his study of schoolchildren in Jerusalem, M. Romann examined the degree to which Arab and Jewish pupils were informed about those parts of Jerusalem lived in by the other group.(2) The results indicated an amazing lack of knowledge, even in terms of simply being able to correctly locate major sites and thoroughfares in East or West Jerusalem respectively. This was further reflected in the relative lack of visits made by Jewish and Arab students to the "territory" of the other due to feelings of "discomfort" or even alienation. Visits, when

made, were usually for the purpose of mutual need. Arabs would visit West Jerusalem in order to find employment or to obtain documents from governmental institutions (all of which are located in the Jewish sector). Jews, on the other hand, less frequently visited East Jerusalem, and only then in order to find certain services offered more cheaply in the Arab sector, and particularly on a Saturday when all shops were closed in the Jewish sector. In terms of meaningful interaction, the physically united city remains largely divided..

In another study, J. Portugali and D. Newman examined interaction patterns between Jewish settlers in the West Bank and their Arab neighbors.(3) From a survey carried out in July 1985, it emerges that each population group tends to function almost entirely within its own "ethnic section." When asked to name the ten nearest settlements to their own village, both Arabs and Jews pointed to the ten nearest Jewish or Arab settlements respectively, blatantly ignoring the closer proximity of settlements belonging to the other sector. The satisfaction of most consumption functions, such as shopping, banking and medical services, only took place within settlements of a similar ethnic composition, regardless of whether similar services were offered at a nearer location. The physical space may be shared, but the neighbors show no signs of neighborliness.

### Science and Politics

It would be supposed that at least in the scientific literature, the reader is able to obtain a relatively objective view of the conflict. However, in a comprehensive literature survey carried out by D. Newman and J. Portugali, it was clear that many scientists are unable to separate object from subject in their analysis of various aspects of the conflict.(4) It was clear that Israelis, Palestinians and "outsiders" all present different slants in their analyses. As in the case of the media, the use of specific terminologies goes a long way to influencing the formation of images by the general public.

There are two aspects to this lack of scientific neutrality. In the first place, scientists, like other members of society, are influenced by the environment in which they grow up and within which they receive their education. Their use of specific terminologies is affected by this "environmental learning" process, and the apparent bias may therefore be attributed to the subconscious, rather than the conscious desire to disseminate a false image. There are cases where, working with the same source material and data, alternative interpretations have been offered, cases which are directly attributable to the almost automatic way in which the conflict is perceived.

But the second aspect is more severe. In recent years there have been cases of open and direct confrontation within the scientific literature concerning the presentation of the Arab-Israel conflict. Two examples taken from this writers' discipline, geography, will clarify this point.(5) On the pages of the prestigious journal, the Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, an Israeli geographer, Zvi Ron, published his research concerning ancient water systems in the Holy Land. He was vigorously attacked by a British scientist, Glyn Rowley, on the grounds that he had blatantly ignored the issue of water exploitation in the West Bank and the detrimental effect that this had on the local Palestinian population. Rowley's previous book, Israel into Palestine, had contained a distinct anti-Israel bias and had not received favorable reviews regarding its objective discussion of the conflict. Zvi Ron himself published a response to Rowley's critique, pointing to a number of factual mistakes made by the latter and arguing that this stemmed from his lack of detailed knowledge of the region in question. What had begun as a seemingly innocuous treatise concerning ancient water systems was transformed into a heated political pseudo-scientific debate.

A second example concerns a number of scientific papers to have recently been published in the pages of Geoforum. The

Israeli Bedouin-born geographer, Ghazi Falah, published a paper in which he claimed that all Israeli treatments of the Bedouin sedentarization process until the present had consciously ignored the "forced" aspects and the harsh treatment meted out by the Israeli authorities. It was not, he argued, sufficient to simply attribute the increased sedentarization to socio-economic change. In two heated responses, a number of Israeli geographers from the University of Haifa refuted these claims, arguing that Falah's analysis was extremely biased and that he manipulated information as a means by which to make political statements. In his own response, Falah in turn attributes these responses to an Israeli bias which consciously ignores the political realities of the situation.

#### Conclusion

It is clear that the formation of both individual and group images occupies a central part in any understanding of the Israel-Arab conflict. A mutual lack of knowledge and awareness by one side for the other does not enhance the possibilities of dialogue between the two. Moreover, the use of specific terminologies and connotations, be they verbal or graphic, tend to exaggerate the political bias rather than present any form of neutrality. Their specific form of territorial indoctrination has the effect of propaganda rather than a balanced presentation of alternative viewpoints. Even supposedly objective scientific literature plays a part in this process. Solutions to the conflict, if and when they ever arrive, will have to come to grips with this deep perceptual and cognitive antagonism if peace is to be transformed into a meaningful reality.

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#### Notes

1. This article is part of a larger study being carried out by the author concerning images of the Arab-Israel conflict. The author welcomes any responses and suggestions from readers.
2. M. Romann (1986), "Arab and Jewish Students' Images of Jerusalem: Divided Consciousness in a United City," Horizons: Studies in Geography, no. 17/18, 77-104, (Hebrew).
3. J. Portugali and D. Newman (1987), Spatial Interaction between Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Report of Research Findings, Ford Foundation.
4. The full analysis appears in D. Newman and J. Portugali (1987), "Israel-Palestinian Relations as Reflected in the Scientific Literature," Progress in Human Geography, 11 (3), 315-332.
5. The two examples discussed here appear respectively in Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, vol. 10 (1985); vol. 11 (1986) and Geoforum, vol. 14 (1983); vol. 16 (1985).

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