

The Language Laundromat at Work: Troubled Ally or Troubling Ally?

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By Robbie Friedmann

On the ABC News (May 13) Peter Jennings anchored reports about the horrific bombings in Saudi Arabia stating - prior to a commercial break - that "we will have more about our *troubled ally* coming up." Given the previous acts by Saudi terrorists against the U.S. - on Saudi soil and outside - and the lack of support the Saudis have offered the FBI in investigating previous incidents or in securing the foreign residential compounds at the explicit request from the U.S., one is more than hard-pressed to understand the ABC framing of the Saudis as *troubled ally*. Perhaps *troubling ally* would have been far more appropriate.

Later in the week Saudi PR point-person Abdul Jubeir provided a few spins of his own suggesting that Saudi Arabia is declaring war on itself. Sort of. After all, he said they have started a relentless war against the terrorists and their supporters and they are going to *crush them*. Of course he only meant the terrorists who oppose the House of Saud; those who act against Israel are not considered terrorists in the Saudi book. Perhaps belatedly, the Saudis have had an epiphany that supporting terror is a boomerang that was thrown at the Israelis but is now back to haunt the Saudis. Given that the Saudis are major backers of terrorism and incitement to radicalism ("Wahhabi Horse," Clifford D. May, Scripps Howard News Service, 15 May 2003) it appears the Saudis are going to lose - whatever the outcome. Because if they are successful in vanquishing terrorism they can do it only by crushing themselves. If they are not successful, terrorism will crush the House of Saud. The latter is more likely. Stay-tuned.

The terrorist acts perpetrated last week in Saudi Arabia (mostly against *foreigners* or *infidels*) and in Morocco, seemingly also against *foreign* targets ("[Suicide Bombs Kill at Least 14 in Casablanca](#)," Douglas Jehl, *The New York Times*, 17 May 2003) illustrate how premature were the declarations that Al-Qaida and its ilk are on the run and that their operational capability has been seriously damaged and limited. A well coordinated attack with a dozen suicide bombers was defined as *proving* that it is *more convenient* to do it in Saudi Arabia ("House of Terror: There's a reason those bombings took place in Saudi Arabia," Editorial, *The Wall Street Journal*, 14 May 2003) than, say, in Europe or the U.S., and then came a similarly well-coordinated attack in Morocco with a similar number of suicide bombers whose death is more wishful thinking than reality.

Of course, that does not make Saudi Arabia less of a problem as a source of origin and support of radical extremism that uses terrorism to achieve its goals. The Saudi reaction to the bombings was one of crocodile tears. On one hand there was clear condemnation of terrorism that is directed at Saudis with a perfunctory lip service deploring American victims, yet there was no condemnation of terrorism directed at Israelis, on the other ("[Saudi Press: Initial Reactions to the Riyadh Bombings](#)," MEMRI, Special Dispatch - Saudi Arabia/Jihad & Terrorism Studies, 15 May 2003, No. 505).

Indeed, recent reports from Saudi Arabia prove that they are true to their colors speaking out of both sides of their mouths. Condemning terrorism on one hand yet feeling sympathy and understanding for the *plight* of their *brothers* in other parts of the world and hence justifying terrorism when it happens to others ("[Suicide Bombings Are Condemned in Saudi Mosques](#)," Steven R. Weisman, *The New York Times*, 17 May 2003): "Taken together, these comments seem to suggest that while the bombings may have stirred a new resolve among Saudis to fight terrorism, there is a wide gulf between Riyadh and Washington on policy issues like postwar Iraq and the Middle East peace talks."

The gap lies not only in differential policy interpretations but also in the American refusal to overtly treat the Saudis as anything but allies. The French, for example, receive a far more demeaning and critical view from U.S. administration officials as well as the American public, and they have not yet killed any Americans. They *merely* refused to support U.S. policies (or some could say they *objected* to them). Yet despite looking the other way, persistent claims point out that the problem lies in the Saudis themselves ("Stop tip-toeing around Saudi reality," Stephen Schwartz, *National Post*, 16 May 2003, originally published in *The Wall Street Journal*): "Saudi rulers have always depended on foreign troops -- the Christian bayonets of the U.S., Britain and France -- to keep them in power. And they have always fostered the extremist Wahhabi ideology that calls for American heads. They use Wahhabi terrorism as a weapon to pressure the United States into supporting them. The time has come for the duplicity to end. U.S. President George W. Bush and U.S. Secretary of State Powell must issue non-negotiable demands that the Saudi authorities finally -- a year-and-a-half late -- provide a full accounting of their subjects' involvement in the Sept. 11 attacks. As Ronald Reagan demanded that the Soviet Union cease its funding of leftist terrorism, U.S. leaders must demand that Saudi Arabia stop funding the global expansion of Wahhabism. Nothing less is acceptable."

Such a demand should not be limited to Saudi Arabia alone. The Arab League (which embraces 22 countries) does not act much differently than the Saudis and only partly because of generous funding from the Saudi member. The antisemitic and anti-American sentiments are well documented and even in their *think-tank* the hopes of finding some *independent thoughts* is crushed against a reality of constant venom and fabrication of facts ("[The Think Tank of the Arab League: The Zayed Centre for Coordination and Follow-Up \(ZCCF\)](#)," Steven Stalinsky, MEMRI, Special Report, 16 May 2003, No. 16), which is then used for an opprobrious defense against those who criticize it as Stalinsky reports:

"The Zayed Centre responded in a May 13th press release on its website by stating: "It has become clear now that the successes of [the] Zayed Centre, on both Arab and international levels, have turned to be an obsession for those who are afraid of an Arab intellectual revival using scientific knowledge as its tool. Therefore, we have been witnessing these days writings and accusations, motivated by arrogant racism and coupled with Zionist fabrications and claims regarding the Centre's trends and policies, which they consider as hostile to the West but without any testimony. This is, really, no more than turning facts upside down. One lucid example of these false accusations has appeared recently in [the] *Boston Globe* newspaper, which claims without any foundation that Zayed Centre calls for Arab unity and shows anti-West and antisemitic sensations in an attempt to obstruct its illuminating message."

Indeed, Arab propagandists have managed to elevate lies to a level of art resulting in fabrications that have turned into a *reality* such as the reported killing of a Palestinian boy by Israeli soldiers. It may not matter at all (to some) that the boy may not have been killed by Israelis, may not have been killed at all, or may have been purposefully killed by Palestinians. Once the boy became an icon, it cannot be taken away from those worshipping it and using it to enhance their beliefs and attitudes ("[Who Shot Mohammed al-Dura?](#)," James Fallows, *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 2003).

This is the *Al Sahaf Syndrome*, named after the former notorious Iraqi *Information Minister* who lied without flinching an eye, encouraging those who continued to believe in and support Saddam's regime and reaffirming to the West that Iraqi claims had no foundation. So as long as this syndrome is utilized it has the dual impact of serving to reaffirm convictions on both sides.

After the operation in Iraq the U.S. has increasingly acknowledged in public what it knew for a long time, namely, that the Hizbullah (*Party of God*) is a menace not to only to Israel (and the U.S.) but to stability anywhere. Moreover, it is recognized that this organization is an instrument carrying out Iranian orders to an extent that while the group is based in Lebanon, its activities are international, the impact is global, and the beneficiary is Iran. A recent thorough study on this group reveals its linkages, funding bases, array of activities, and operating methods ("Hizbullah," Yehudit Barsky, Director, Division on Middle East and International Terrorism, American Jewish Committee, May 2003): "As the result of Hizbullah's international expansion, its fund-raising activities, and recruitment of operatives throughout the United States, Europe, South America, and West Africa, Hizbullah has demonstrated long-term capabilities to carry out attacks worldwide, and the only deterrent will be increased international cooperation to counter Iran's offensive in the name of Hizbullah."

At the same time some Western countries seem to prefer to adopt an ostrich mentality that emanates out of political correctness when it comes to handling those who are fighting this group and seeking asylum from it, as in the case of Canada which denies asylum to a Lebanese applicant who helped Israel with information concerning Hizbullah ("Coddling Hezbollah - again," Editorial, *National Post*, 16 May 2003). While Canada may be pondering the case, Hizbullah and Hamas and probably their handlers from Iran are seeking greater cooperation and coordination in light of U.S. pressure on Iran and Syria, which might put these groups at risk ("Hamas, Hizbullah in terror summit as U.S. turns up the Heat," *World Tribune.com*, 13 May 2003).

Even Israel which focused its fight against terrorism on the *West Bank* and the *Gaza Strip* is bitterly acknowledging the emergence and strength of the Islamic Movement in Israel itself where radical Arab Israeli citizens seditiously operate against Israel by actively and financially aiding and abetting terrorism ("[Israel Arrests Arab Citizens Said to Back Terrorist Acts](#)," Greg Myre, *The New York Times*, 14 May 2003).

This activity, apparently no longer so clandestine, has tested the patience of Israelis ("Reject Radicalism," Editorial, *The Jerusalem Post*, 14 May 2003): "No Israeli Arab leader can take it for granted that democracy will endlessly let its trust be breached. In (Justice Minister) Lapid's own words: "We won't damage Israel's liberal foundations, but neither will we be the fools who

allow assaults against our existence under the presumption that all is permissible."

This is an apt statement considering the institutionalized culture of violence that glorifies terrorism and mass killings is now expressed in the illustration of the *meaning of heaven* for those who commit these vile acts under the misnomer of martyrdom ("Palestinian students recreate paradise to show what awaits 'martyrs'," Mohammed Daraghmeh, SFGate.com 9 May 2003).

Scapegoating is the weapon of the weak, helpless manipulator. The weapon in the hands of those who do not bother with facts or attempt to cope with unpleasant realities. In their hands antisemitism has been the classic scapegoating throughout centuries and it is rearing its ugly head again. Whether from the mouth of Pat Buchanan and his ilk on this side of the Atlantic or from the output of European public figures from Le-Pen in France to the elders of the British parliament ("An Old Demon Anew on the Prowl," Stephen Pollard, *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 May 2003): "Few admit to antisemitism, but their words too often give them away. All right-thinking people claim to despise it, but as the non-reaction to Dalyell's rantings shows, antisemitism has become the hatred that dares to speak its name anew."

Yet it is encouraging to note that while antisemitism is rampant even in countries without Jews - such as Japan ("[On Ignorance, Respect and Suspicion: Current Japanese Attitudes toward Jews](#)," Rotem Kowner, Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism, 1997, acta no. 11, The Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism), there is also a strong show of support for Jews and Israel, which in the U.S. is translated from religious belief to political influence. Without this support both Israel and Jews would have been in a far worse predicament than currently experienced ("Israel's Unshakable Allies," Jeff Jacoby, *The Boston Globe*, 15 May 2003).

While terrorists blew themselves up in Saudi Arabia and Morocco this week (oh, another Hamas terrorist just blew himself up killing a young Israeli couple in Hebron), the diplomatic efforts under the *Roadmap* continue. Some American opinion writers found the solution to the problem and it is the Jews again ("Middle East peace calls for bold steps," Martha Ezzard, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*: 13 May 2003): "If the president now decides to push through his Middle East *Roadmap* to peace, he might accomplish something far more significant to our national security. If he is to succeed, though, he will have to take two steps he hasn't been willing to take: He must deal firmly with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to demand that Israel retreat from recent settlements in Palestinian territories; and he must tell the Defense Department to butt out of diplomacy in the Middle East." One remains hard-pressed to understand why this columnist is not concerned at all about terrorism, and on what basis she argues that Defense is intervening in State affairs. Obviously, the paper and pen would tolerate anything even if reasoning were short on understanding and logic. After all, it was the Labor Party in Israel that started with the settlements, not Sharon's Likud; and terror and war preceded settlements and *occupation*. Ezzard could not be disturbed by such *irrelevant* facts.

By no means is this columnist an exception. A media watchdog group has consistently documented media bias against Israel in popular and reputable outlets such as the publicly-funded National Public Radio ("National Public Radio Off the Map," Andrea Levin, *The*

Jerusalem Post, 13 May 2003). CAMERA rightfully argues, "The marginalization of mainstream Israeli voices and their concerns is one mark of NPR's biased reporting. Likewise reflecting the network's protectiveness of the Palestinians and hostility to Israel, is its refusal to air the many Palestinian and other Arab voices that openly insist they will not be appeased by anything short of Israel's annihilation."

Years of sanctimonious writing on the part of Thomas Friedman, of the now credibility-challenged *New York Times*, are starting to wear on readers who have been relatively patient, limiting their negative responses to the paper's *Letters* section. But increasingly Friedman has been perceived as crossing red lines by having his facts wrong and by framing his opinions in terms that are verging on antisemitism ("Thomas L. Friedman, Jew-baiter," Reuven Koret, *israelinsider*. 11 May 2003).

Others are directly blaming him for playing into the hands of the Saudis and questioning whether he is operating under their influence ("Scorpions and Snakes in the Sewage System," Uri Dan, *The Jerusalem Post*, 14 May 2003): "Reading this distinguished columnist, it sometimes seems if only Israel were to give in, withdraw, and make concessions, not only would peace with the Palestinians follow, global terror would fade away. I still remember how last year Friedman praised the *Saudi Arabian peace plan* he concocted during a royal banquet given by Crown Prince Abdullah. The joint Abdullah-Friedman plan was intended solely to weaken Israel and appease the Arabs."

Out of the horrifying attacks of this week (and the previous weeks, months, and years, as well as those yet to come) come the obvious conclusions. Terrorism must be unconditionally opposed. Regrettably it was tolerated when it happened against Israelis inside and outside the country. Now when it happens to others the world is starting to take notice although it may still be in a snooze mode. If democracy is to be preserved then terrorism should not be tolerated anywhere and its outcome should not be rewarded. Otherwise democracy is doomed and terrorism will flourish. Terrorism is now also directed against vile and corrupt regimes such as in Saudi Arabia, and the Saudis are feeling the boomerang effect of supporting terrorism against others. As in the Sorcerer's Apprentice they find that terrorist violence they have been supporting all along is not directed against *those infidels* but is now aimed at the House of Saud, itself being under the risk of not only losing power but being replaced by a more extreme regime than their very own.