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"Egypt is an Ally- It Must Act Like One"

By Kenneth W. Stein

The war against terrorism will not end if we neutralize savage killers, their training facilities and handlers, elusively clandestine bank accounts, and regimes that support them. This is also a battle of definitions, words, and marketing; it is about the contents of malice poured out against the U.S. by Arab newspapers and other Arab media outlets.

With dozens of Arab writers and commentators spewing out venom toward the U.S., we need our Arab coalition partners and those who seek our support to reduce their hateful attacks on the U.S. Credit the Jordanian government for reducing anti-American media attacks.

Origins for anti-American feeling can be found more or less regularly in the Palestinian, Saudi, Syrian, Iraqi, and London Arab press. But the U.S. has a special and necessary relationship with Egypt; it is in Cairo where the first effort to tone down anti-American anger must start.

No, I do not suggest telling others what to write or what to think. But from allies, more should be expected and demanded. Twenty years after President Sadat's assassination, sustaining American foreign aid to Egypt remains central to our national interest. It should not stop. However, if we do not lean on Egypt, a long-time friend and leader of public Arab opinion, no remote chances exist for anti-American feeling to subside in the Middle East. Egypt's influence on Palestinian attitudes is greater than any other Arab state.

If Prime Minister Sharon's remarks [about the U.S. allegedly appeasing certain Arab countries to gain their support in our coalition building] warranted a reply from the Bush White House as "unacceptable," the repeated abuse of America in the Egyptian press is indisputably unacceptable.

In this realm of words and marketing, we have an uphill battle in dealing with autocratic regimes that do not permit open criticism of their own governments. Most Arab citizens live under pervasive government scrutiny (see Edward Said's June 2001 article in Cairo's al-Ahram Weekly, <http://www.ahram.org.eg/weekly/2001/539/op10/htm>), making the press in much of the Arab world the only release mechanism for anger and frustration built up from other sources. In Egypt and other Arab

states, the core culprit is Israel and its leaders. But plenty of abusive language is reserved for the U.S.

It is sheer nonsense to believe that if the U.S. administration or Congress altered its pro-Israeli positions in any small or drastic fashion, the Arab press would stop vilifying America and its leaders. Dislike for the U.S. is broader and deeper. It cuts to American-led encirclement of Iraq, the century-long intrusion of Western values, Washington's alliances with moderate Arab leaders, almost exclusive U.S. focus on domestic issues, and the absence of a reliable superpower patron for the Arab world in the post-Cold War period. Said the extraordinary articulate Hani Shukrallah, in al-Ahram Weekly, 4-10 October 2001, "Bin Laden and his cohorts are not a function of an inherent hatred of democracy by 'Islamic civilization' but of its increasing obliteration at the hands of 'Western'-driven capitalist globalization."

All year the Egyptian press has regularly attacked American policy and Bush, Chaney, and Powell by name. After the terrorist attack, an Egyptian writer wrote in the prestigious Egyptian weekly al-Ahram, 13-19 September 2001, "Peoples around the world once felt for the U.S. as a champion of liberty, democracy and self-determination, [now there is] universal suspicion and mistrust, a transformation [due to] Washington's misuse of power and abuse of the moral foundations upon which it built its civilization. ...Anger and frustration at Washington's foreign policies [is] not confined to the Middle East or, more accurately, to Arab and Islamic peoples." Said the editor of Cairo's Akhbar al-Yawm, two days after the 11 September 2001 attack, "The United States is the object of hatred in scores of countries..." Cairo's Al-Akhbar, 20 September 2001, the most consistently virulent anti-American and government supported paper, implied that U.S. leaders themselves were responsible for the death of 6,000 American citizens.

We cannot alter what religious leaders rule about suicide attacks, hoe jihad is defined, what is written in Arab textbooks, or what private television stations say about us. But we can and must ask our friends to turn down the decibels of anti-American rancor. Notice how the Egyptian government numbed initial anti-American public response to the 7 October 2001 bombing in Afghanistan. Proof: if the Egyptian leadership has the will and the courage, slanderous attacks against America can be significantly diminished.

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