

# UNITY FROM HOSTILITY : A CRITIQUE OF THE PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE MIDDLE EAST

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Many accounts have been written which probe the sources of the Arab-Israeli conflict. An important segment of this literature shares a common perspective — one which has been termed a “psychosocial” perspective (Beit-Hallahmi, 1972). This perspective is unusual in that it combines three distinct levels of analysis. Individual personality characteristics are linked to cultural traits which together explain the foreign policy behavior of states. Thus, the unusually hostile foreign policy behavior of the Arab states is viewed as an expression of basic cultural characteristics which derive from the personalities of individual Arabs.

In much of the psychosocial literature, the individual Arab is portrayed in an unflattering light. He is said to possess a divisive personality which fluctuates between extreme aggressiveness and extreme submissiveness, between uncontrolled emotion and strict self-control (Patai, 1973). Suspicion and paranoia color his relationships with others. Singularly lacking in scruples, the Arab is said to readily resort to lying and deception to achieve his objectives (Hamady, 1960). Confined by a rigid family structure, restrained by an austere religion and authoritarian government, the Arab is pictured as the victim of repressed passions constantly in search of scapegoats upon which to vent his bottled-up hostility. An Arab proverb is said to illustrate this indiscriminate externalization of hostility: I against my brother, my brother and I against my cousin, my cousin and I against the stranger (Prothro, 1961).

Arab society is thought to reflect the volatile temperament of its members. The cohesiveness of Arab communities is said to depend upon the presence of an outside enemy (Badeau, 1968; Cohen, 1970; Herkabi, 1972; Liff, 1971; Kerr, cited in Beling, 1973). The displacement of hostility

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onto external scapegoats is considered the principal function of Arab social institutions. The frequent use of verbal threats by Arab civil and religious leaders to intimidate a foreign enemy is deemed essential to prevent the Hobbesian war "of every man against every man" inside the Arab community (Patai, 1973).

Thus, it is concluded that Arab society is the major obstacle to the resolution of the Arab-Israel issue (Glidden, 1972; Sanua, 1971). The Arabs — out of cultural necessity — must adopt a stance of extreme truculence towards the Israelis. Only through the displacement of hostility can the leaders of the Arab states maintain even a modicum of unity both within and between Arab states. The Zionist is simply the latest Arab *bete noire* — following the European Imperialist and the Christian Infidel.

At all three levels — the individual, societal, and foreign policy — hostility towards the outsider is seen as the central unifying force. The theory of the unifying effects of hostility is an old one and has fascinated students of politics for centuries. Bodin asserted that "the best way of preserving a state, and guaranteeing it against sedition, rebellion, and civil war is to keep the subjects in amity one with another, and to this end, to find an enemy against whom they can make common cause". (Bodin, cited in Waltz, 1954). More recently, the theory has played a role in many analyses of international relations (Deutsch, 1966; Waltz, 1954; Wright, 1942). From the perspective of the psychosocial theorists, the theory of the unifying effects of hostility describes the central dynamic of Arab behavior toward Israel.

Perhaps the attractiveness of the unifying effects theory in explaining Arab foreign policy stems from the fact that it can have it both ways — it can be used to explain both positive and negative relationships between intra-Arab hostility and Arab hostility toward Israel.

**H 1. Positive relationship.** It can be argued that the displacement of hostility onto the Israeli scapegoat is greatest during periods of high intra-Arab hostility. Thus, the Zionism issue is used as an escape valve which is activated when intra-Arab tension reaches a breaking point. When intra-Arab hostility is low, the need to utilize the unifying issue of Zionism is also low. **Illustration:** Commenting upon the claim of Lebanese Premier Rashid Karami that Israel was preparing to invade Lebanon in order to rescue the small Jewish community in Beirrt, an Associated Press

dispatch suggested that Karami could have been "using the charges against Israel as a toll to draw together Lebanon's feuding Christians and Moslems against their common Israeli enemy." (Associated Press, 1975)

**H 2. Negative relationship.** When Arab hostility toward Israel is high, it is argued that intra-Arab hostility will be low. The displacement of pent-up hostility upon Israel is thought to enable the Arab states to temporarily put aside their fratricidal quarrels and to join in common cause against the Zionist enemy. But when the Arab-Israel front is quiescent, the Arabs resume their intramural squabbling. **Illustration:** In an interview with the **National Observer**, Monsignor John M. Oesterreicher, director of Judeo-Christian Studies at Seton Hall University, asked: "You don't think these Arab states could get along with each other if they didn't have Israel to hit?" (Mosher, 1976)

The apparent success of the theory in explaining both positive and negative relationships is a result of the close interconnection between H and H 2. The connecting link is time. It can be supposed that a period of high intra-Arab hostility will lead to high Arab-Israeli hostility (H 1). However, once this occurs, intra-Arab hostility would be expected to decrease over a period of time producing the condition described in H 2. Hence, H and H are simply different views of the same process from opposite ends of the time line. H 1 describes the initial condition of the process when intra-Arab hostilities intensify to such a level that the condition described in H 2 produces a decline in intra-Arab hostilities as they are displaced onto Israel.

### **Method**

In order to test the foreign policy ramifications of the unifying effects theory and to explore the possible psychosocial underpinnings of the theory, the public statements of nine Arab governments (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, N. Yemen, and Libya) and of the Israeli government were collected and content analyzed for the five years between 1967 and 1971. Three newspapers were examined: the **New York Times**, the **Beirut Daily Star**, and the **Jerusalem Post**. Numeric scale values for a hostility-friendship variable were assigned to the statements reported in the newspapers according to a coding system developed from Q-methodology scaling exercises conducted by the authors. (Block, 1961; Stephenson, 1953) The Q technique is a "sophisticated form

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of rank-ordering objects and then assigning numerals to the subsets of the objects for statistical purposes". (Kerlinger, 1964) Using the perceptions of several panels of judges, a rough but demonstrably reliable measuring scale can be developed. Using a Kendall's  $\tau$  rank-order coefficient to measure the level of agreement between judges, an agreement of .80 was obtained. (For details of the scaling and coding system see Farley, 1973.)

FIGURE 1: Data Summary

|      | Total<br>Statements | Intra-Arab<br>Statements | Arab-Israel<br>Statements | Arab Statements<br>Toward Israel | Israel Statements<br>Toward Arabs |
|------|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1967 | 359                 | 158                      | 201                       | 111                              | 90                                |
| 1968 | 226                 | 63                       | 163                       | 75                               | 88                                |
| 1969 | 334                 | 107                      | 227                       | 102                              | 125                               |
| 1970 | 429                 | 217                      | 212                       | 82                               | 130                               |
| 1971 | 365                 | 189                      | 176                       | 86                               | 90                                |
|      | 1713                | 734                      | 979                       | 456                              | 523                               |

A total of 1713 statements were collected from the three sources. Only official statements attributed to governmental spokesmen were examined and scaled. Monthly hostility averages for intra-Arab and Arab-to-Israel events were computed.

### Findings

No support for the unifying effects theory was found. No apparent relationship was found between the level of verbal hostility occurring between the Arab states and the amount of verbal hostility the Arab states displayed toward Israel. Because the data produced by the Q-sort procedure fall between the ordinal and interval levels of measurement — it is sometimes referred to as "ordinal-interval" data — both Spearman  $\rho$  and Pearson  $r$  correlation statistics were used. A Spearman's  $\rho$  coefficient of .29 and a Pearson's  $r$  coefficient of .004 indicated that no correlation exists between the two variables.

FIGURE 3 : Correlation Coefficients

|                               |              | Arab Hostility Towards Israel |                   |                   |                   |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                               |              | Same Month                    | 1st Mo. following | 2nd Mo. following | 3rd Mo. following |
| Intra-Arab Hostility          | Spearman rho | .029                          | -.104             | -.006             | -.076             |
|                               | Significance | .41                           | .21               | .48               | .28               |
|                               | Pearson r    | .004                          | -.172             | -.127             | -.168             |
|                               | Significance | .48                           | .09               | .16               | .09               |
| Intra-Arab Hostility          |              |                               |                   |                   |                   |
|                               |              | Same Month                    | 1st Mo. following | 2nd Mo. following | 3rd Mo. following |
| Arab Hostility Towards Israel | Spearman rho | .029                          | .053              | -.045             | .087              |
|                               | Significance | .41                           | .34               | .36               | .25               |
|                               | Pearson r    | .004                          | -.087             | -.132             | -.096             |
|                               | Significance | .48                           | .25               | .15               | .23               |

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In the normal course of foreign policy interaction between states there is often a time lag between action and reaction. It could be hypothesized, for instance, that one or more months could transpire before high intra-Arab hostility could be displayed onto Israel by one or more Arab foreign ministries. To explore the possibility of time lags, the variables were correlated for the current month and for each of three successive months. Again, however, no significant relationships emerged.

### Discussion

The absence of any significant relationship between intra-Arab hostility and Arab-hostility calls into question the credibility of the psychosocial model that underlies the unifying effects theory. The model appears to suffer from several fundamental defects. It represents a conceptual framework which, despite the scholarly jargon of psychology and sociology, is largely based upon impressionistic and anecdotal evidence.

The Western concept of the Arab "national character" was probably well developed long before the Arab-Israeli struggle of this century. The observations of travellers, diplomats, explorers, soldiers-of-fortune, and novelists over the centuries have created a stereotypic Arab: violent, colorful, emotional, authoritarian, fanatical. It should come as no surprise that the Arab "character" has been a popular topic for research. (Arams, 1957; Feldmann, 1958; Gillespie and Allport, 1955; McLeod, 1959; Berger, 1964; Khatchdorian, 1961). The findings of this research are frequently generalized to encompass the whole of Arab-Israeli relations. For example, Glidden, speculating on the role of Arab culture in the Arab-Israeli conflict, asserts:

It is difficult to describe the depth of the Arabs' emotional need for revenge, but suffice it to say that Islam itself found it necessary to sanction revenge. The felt need for revenge is as strong today as it was in pre-Islamic times, as witnessed by the continued proliferation of vengeance-related feuds, murders, and so forth, for both private and political reasons, in the Arab Near East. For example, in Egypt in 1969, in 1,070 cases of murder where the perpetrators were apprehended, it was found that 20 percent of the murders were based on a desire to "wipe out shame" (**mahw al-'ar**), 30 percent on a desire to satisfy real or imaginary wrongs (**intiqam**), and 41 percent on a desire for blood revenge (**akhdh al-tha'r**). (Glidden, 1972).

How, it should be asked, did Glidden ascertain the "felt need for revenge" in pre-Islamic times? By reading pre-Islamic poetry? And are the percentages for murder motives in Egypt different from those elsewhere? Can the behavior of 1,070 Egyptians (approximately .03 percent of the Egyptian population) be said to demonstrate a general Arab cultural trait?

Sanua argues that "the limitations of the Arab character have brought them (i.e., the Arabs) to their present predicament". But was it Arab character or European and American political and economic power and the technological prowess of the European founders of Israel that brought the Arabs to their current disadvantage?

A small amount of systematic empirical work has focused upon the concept of authoritarianism (Prothro and Melikian, 1952). Compared to Americans, Arabs usually display higher levels of authoritarianism. However, broad generalizations about the nature of Arab culture cannot be made from these studies.

Perhaps the hallmark of the psychosocial perspective is the ease with which levels of analysis are scaled. The free-floating hostility of the individual Arab can be neatly linked to societal scapegoating or to a bellicose foreign policy without logical qualms. Ignored is the fact that the individual "hostility" of an individual Arab is not the same phenomenon as societal "hostility" which, in turn, is not the same phenomenon as foreign policy "hostility" expressed by governmental leaders. The mechanisms at each level are of a fundamentally different nature. Societal "attitudes" are not simply additive composites of the individual attitudes of the members. Foreign policy "attitudes" such as hostility are verbal constructs used by foreign ministries as tactical instruments and bear no operational kinship to individual "attitudes" or social "attitudes".

The theory of unifying effects gains credence at one level by being said to operate at another. For instance, the individual Arab — in order to escape the alienation of his rigidly structured society — can achieve release of his frustrations by venting his pent-up hostility upon societally approved common enemies. Because this is supposed to be so, it can easily be believed that Arab states can maintain their solidarity with one another by the timely designation of external scapegoats, e.g., Israel. Yet is there any reason to think that the operational dynamics of the theory

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at one level have any commonality with the dynamics at another level? There have been no empirical studies to show so much as a statistical relationship between the incidence of hostility at one level and at another.

What appears to be needed is a serious rethinking of the entire psychosocial approach to the Arab world. Until sufficient empirical work has been completed to validate or invalidate the psychosocial model, the unifying effects theory should be viewed with measured scepticism.

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## الوحدة بعد العداء :

### نقد للنظرة النفسية الاجتماعية حول نزاع الشرق الاوسط

ت. فيرلي

د. كيفجين

يعتبر هذا البحث خطوة جديدة لدراسة الصراع العربي - الاسرائيلي ،  
وحيثياته . وهو جديد لانه يعني بنقد وجهة النظر النفسية الاجتماعية ودورها  
في نزاع الشرق الاوسط .

ويتطرق البحث الى عوامل التراث العربي وفي المقابل العداءات  
الصهيونية التي زادت وتزيد من حدة الصراع في المنطقة .

ويركز البحث على أن النظرة النفسية الاجتماعية والتي يقول بها البعض  
للظهور على النزاع في الشرق الاوسط تعاني من صعاب وعقبات تحول دون  
تنفيذها . خاصة وأن تاريخ الصراع طويل شاركت فيه عوامل لم تكن مقتصرة  
على العوامل النفسية والاجتماعية .

وحتى اذا ما اريد لهذه النظرة أن تنجح فان الاسس النفسية الاجتماعية  
في العالم العربي تحتاج لكثير من القلب . . وهذه هي الصعوبة .