



Diplomacy, Yes – “Normalization”, No



The relationship between Israel and Egypt has always been characterized by contradictions. The Egyptian population and media accept (albeit reluctantly) normal diplomatic exchanges and periodic meetings between the two governments. At the same time, a multitude of personalities and institutions in the media, eager to show their vehement opposition to Israel, denounce any sign of cultural, political or scientific rapprochement between the countries, either at an organizational or individual level.



The press labels such rapprochement “normalization” of the relationship, a concept generally condemned by the masses and most of the media. A case in point is the storm that erupted this past week over the invitation by the editor in chief of the *Democratic Review* magazine, Dr. *Hala Mustapha*, to the Israeli ambassador for a visit with her. The meeting took place in her office in *Al-Ahram*, the semi-governmental institution that is considered to be one of the most prestigious media enterprise in the Arab world and publishes the *Democratic Review*. It is unclear whether the firestorm was a genuine protest by the media over Dr. *Mustapha's* action or, as the Islamist *Fahmy Huwaidi* suggested in a column this week,¹ simply a way to settle the score between a rising star at a relatively obscure magazine and jealous members of intelligentsia. For his part, *Huwaidi* rejects “normalization” under the banner of nationalism and laments the lack of public action against the concept.

The Egyptian government also sends mixed signals on the issue of normalization. On one hand, the authorities have encouraged some institutions and publications to call for a better relationship between the two countries. For example, the “*October*” magazine, under the leadership of its editor *Anis Mansour*, and the “*Center of Strategic Studies*” at *Al-Ahram*, headed by Dr. *Abdel-Moneim Said*, have cautiously encouraged more engagement between the two countries. On the other hand, some government officials like the Minister of Culture, *Farouk Hosni*, have gone as far as advocating the burning of any Israeli books in Egyptian libraries. While the minister later apologized for the remark, it is believed that his statement recently cost him a tightly contested election to head *UNESCO*.

It remains to be seen whether the efforts of Dr. Mustapha and others will take hold or be squashed by militant nationalists.

R. Ebeid, Editor

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Follow-up:



The Syndicate of Egyptian Journalists reported today (November 10th, 2009) that Dr. Hala Mustapha has been referred to the disciplinary board of the syndicate. Dr. Mustapha is being investigated by the Syndicate for violating a decision which was ironically taken as far back as 1980 stating that no syndicate member shall engage in any activity leading to “normalization” of relationship with Israel.

¹ http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1252188356453&pagename=Zone-Arabic-News/NWALayout or <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/E264ED33-E39B-48E0-979E-D52C621CCBE3.htm>

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