



A Spectrum of Light in the Middle East

Volume 1, Issue 4

May, 2003

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Integrity of the Press

Freedom and integrity of the press are luxuries taken for granted in the Western world, but are sometimes rare commodities in the Middle East.

The recent war in Iraq gave an insight into the way one Middle Eastern regime practiced extensive censorship and rarely, if ever, could be trusted to accurately tell the world, or their own people, what was happening. The Prism Group volunteers surveyed the situation in surrounding countries, and were dismayed to confirm that many of the countries of the Middle East control the media and information it makes available.

Revelations by CNN executive Eason Jordan that his news group deliberately did not report human rights violations in order to maintain a presence in and access to Hussein's Iraq raise questions about the integrity of reporting by internationally respected news carriers. ([*The News We Kept to Ourselves.*](#))

Media watchdog groups, such as [BBC Watch](#), claim that detailed studies of the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reveal that the impartiality of even the most respected of news sources is at best suspect.

There is ample evidence to suggest that domestic journalists are hampered in their freedom and ability to report the truth wherever governments are autocratic. Revelations by journalists operating in the Palestinian territories have provided occasional suspicions that much of what is reported is colored and controlled by the local politicians and militias.

For example, questions have been raised about journalistic standards, which led the famous photograph of Mohamed al-Dura (a 12-year-old boy allegedly killed by Israeli soldiers at the beginning of the latest outbreak of violence) as reported by the media in Gaza, to be adopted by the international press and Arab world as a symbol and proof of Israeli aggression against innocent civilians. Several studies have contended that the whole event may have been staged – or that the boy was, in fact, killed by a Palestinian bullet. James Fallows presents the evidence in his recent article [Who Shot Mohammed al-Dura](#).

Read the results of our volunteers' research in the latest [Prism Group fact sheet](#) on our website at www.theprismgroup.org.

The Roadmap

A significant element of the [Roadmap](#) peace plan for solving the Israeli-Palestinian dispute is its emphasis on action rather than words. The international Quartet of the US, UN, EU and Russia which prepared the plan apparently has

learned a lesson from previous attempts at internationally brokered agreements. In its own words, the roadmap is 'performance-based and goal-driven.' The message is that we should be much less concerned about what the parties are **saying**, and much more focused on what they are **doing**.

A key requirement is an immediate cessation of terrorism and specifically incitement. The PLO Negotiations Affairs Department, in the name of the Palestinian Authority, has accepted the roadmap, but says that this requirement cannot be implemented until the term 'incitement' is defined. Nevertheless, the Palestinian Authority condemned the latest terror attacks against Israelis.

The Israelis have moved to prevent official sources speaking against the Palestinian Authority. For example, criticism of new Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, including quotations of statements he made in March 2003 supporting continued armed struggle against Israelis, were removed from the [Israeli army's website](#). This website has also discontinued its practice of translating and publishing anti-Israel incitement by the various Palestinian security arms and groups.

The effects of incitement on children are sadly reflected in a recent survey reported by [Islam On-line.net](#) late last month.

Dr. Samir Kutha of the Gaza Program for Psychotherapy showed 1,000 children a picture of a Palestinian girl 'Fatima' gazing at the palm of her hand, and asked questions about what they saw. When asked how Fatima's and her society's problems could be solved, **68% answered: "by suicide bombings." 25% of the children thought that the girl in the photograph was actually contemplating carrying out a suicide attack.** This frightening statistic shows that the Palestinian society has successfully created an environment where, without radical changes to the fabric of the society and its education mechanisms, the hope for peace in the Middle East may be lost for at least another generation.

Action to cease incitement throughout Palestinian society and educating the coming generation to peace are critical to the chances for peace in this turbulent area of the Middle East. The Prism Group urges you, at every opportunity, to emphasize this issue. Refer to our [fact sheet](#) for information, and write to your local newspapers, political and church leaders and human rights organizations. Write directly to Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas, care of pnaweb@gov.ps.

The Prism Group Website

The Prism Group's website is updated regularly to focus on new points of interest. If you haven't had a chance to see our site recently, why not take a moment now and surf to: www.theprismgroup.org.

We also hope that you will alert others to the important issues discussed on our site. Download the fact sheets and send them to friends and colleagues. Write us at info@theprismgroup.org with other ideas that you think should be explored and exposed. Share this newsletter with your friends, and encourage them to subscribe by sending an email to newsletter@theprismgroup.org.

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