

US rapidly losing Arab hearts and minds over Gaza War

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Contributors to Fikra Forum

OPINION Throughout the fifteen years that following the 2011 withdrawal from Iraq, each American presidential administration has experienced domestic calls to leave the Middle East. However, each time these voices grew louder, a new regional variable emerged that compelled the American administration to return to its traditional role dictated by urgent strategic security and economic interests. After the withdrawal from Iraq, a strategic vacuum led to the emergence of and fight against ISIS, with the deaths of thousands both locally and internationally, and millions from the region displaced. The US military was forced to return to the region to contribute to the efforts to eliminate ISIS. When this goal was declared completed, new regional threats emerged. The war in Gaza has emerged to confirm once again the error of US assessments that contend that this region is no longer important to America's strategic interests.

Iran's positive influence

Moreover, it seems that Iran has been a major beneficiary of this war. On average, percentage of those who say that it had a positive impact in the war is 40%, compared to 21% those who say that it has a negative impact. In countries such as Egypt and Syria, the percentage who say that Iran has a positive influence in Gaza is even higher, reaching 50% and 52% respectively. Such views are underpinned by a near total lack of trust in the US and its intentions. Only 3% of Jordanian respondents say

they trust America, compared to 24-25% who say the same for Russia and China. In Iraq, only 7% of respondents say they trust America, compared to 33% for Iran and China, and 36% for Russia. And as for Egypt, trust in America amounts to only 9%, compared to 51% for Russia and Iran, along with 47% for China. These numbers are the lowest favorability ratings for America in the more than twenty years that we have spent researching public opinion in the region. According to a study by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in 2020, even at

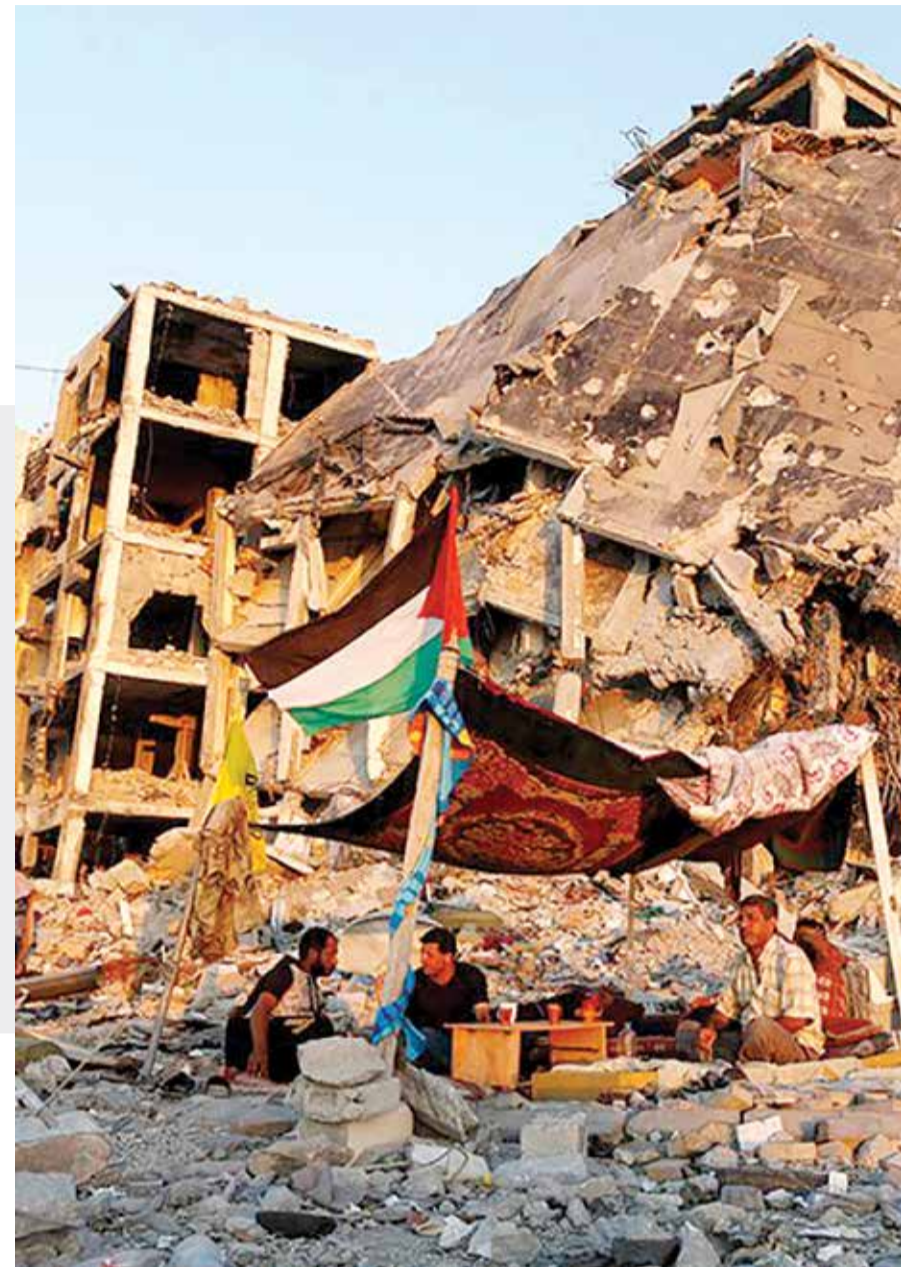
The data from a recent public opinion poll conducted by the independent research group IIACSS and its partners in the region—polling nationally representative samples in Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine during the period October 17-29, 2023—indicate that right now, America is losing ground in ways that can impact all priorities identified in the National Security Strategy document. Because of US support for Israel, America's trust and influence among Arabs in the region has reached its lowest point historically, while support for its competitors and strategic opponents—China, Russia, and Iran—has increased. In short, among these six key Arab publics, America is losing compared to its opponents because of the war in Gaza. The percentage of Arabs who believe America has a positive role in the war amounts only to 7%, with figures as low as 2% in countries like Jordan. By contrast, the percentage of Arabs who say that China has a positive role in the conflict included 46% in Egypt, 34% in Iraq, and 27% in Jordan. Positive views of Russia are even higher; the percentage of those who believe that Russia has a positive influence neared half—averaging 47% among the publics surveyed (except in Palestine).

the lowest ebb of American favorability in the region, the negative evaluation of America's policies towards Palestine did not drop below 19%.

It is clear that the way the US has handled the war in Gaza has cost it what remained of a perception of credibility and neutrality among a proportion of these Arab publics. Those who follow what is published in the Arab media and social media platforms that likewise realize how great America's loss of soft power has been in the region over the past month. The US, which has invested trillions of dollars in the Mid-

dle East over the course of a century and expended significant blood and sweat in the region, is in danger of the return on that investment being significantly diminished because of this conflict.

In our recent survey, when asked about the reasons for America and the West's support of Israel, just an average of 8% answered that the reason was to defend civilians who were captive by Hamas on October 7. Half—the significant plurality choice out of three options—said that the reason the West supports Israel is because they hate Islam and Muslims. About



30% answered that the reason was the strength of the Israeli lobby. The majority of Arabs see the West's support for Israel's war against Hamas as support for a war against them.

Losing soft power

One of the most important secrets of American soft power in the face of its competitors is the American model based on human rights, rejection of racism, and repudiation of the "law of the jungle" in international relations. Currently, this public opinion polling emphasizes that the overwhelming majority of respondents do not believe that these principles are being applied in the official American stance on the war in Gaza.

This is sobering information for Western and particularly American policymakers when they consider how the landscape of Arab public opinion has turned so decidedly against them. In essence, the majority of Arabs likely see the current conflict as akin to a new Crusade. Whereas Western governments and publics tend to view Operation Al-Aqsa Storm as either designed to stop regional normalization with Israel, serve Iran's goals in the region, or solidify its control in Gaza, only 13% of Arab respondents listed any of these theories as Hamas' main intention. More than 60% instead chose liberating Palestine, stopping Israeli violations at Al-Aqsa Mosque, or halting settlements.

Only time will tell if these shifts in Arab public opinion toward the US and the rest of the West are a tem-

porary spike in anger at a time when this has become the most pressing popular issue in the region, or whether these attitudes will harden and represent a more permanent shift. Two factors will likely play important roles in the future trajectory of Arab public opinion toward the Gaza War and the West.

The first factor is the duration of the war. Images of dead and wounded Palestinian men, women, and children are now ubiquitous in Arab traditional and social media. In the case of a protracted war, it is possible some Arabs will grow weary of the conflict and turn to other issues, but a significant shift away from the conflict is difficult to imagine given the intensity of media coverage in the Arab world. The longer the conflict lasts and the longer these images flood Arab popular consciousness, the more likely it is that Arab anger will persist or even grow far past the duration of the current conflict.

The second factor that will help shape Arab attitudes about the war and the West is the trajectory that the conflict takes. In other words, the actions of the Israeli government and its Western backers will be critical in how this war is framed in the Arab world after its conclusion. If Israel attempts to shift portions of the Palestinian population out of Gaza or creates a long-term occupation in Gaza, it will further inflame Arab opinion on the conflict and deepen resentment toward the West.

It seems likely that future Arab attitudes towards Iran, China, and Russia will

largely follow the same logic. Rather than being driven by any particular actions or state messaging from these actors, this bump is probably being shaped by the perception that these countries are "enemies of my enemy" as outspoken opponents of the West, each in their own way. How lasting this favorability bonus will be likewise depends on the duration and course of the conflict.

Finally, it is important to assess what the prevailing negative Arab attitudes toward the US means for the relations between the US and these populations' respective governments, and whether Arab opinion "on the street" could pressure Arab governments to curtail relations and cooperation with Washington. While it is unlikely that there will be any profound breaks in relations between the US and friendly Arab governments over this conflict, it will be increasingly uncomfortable over time for Arab governments to publicly engage with US officials if the conflict persists or takes a more deleterious turn for the population in Gaza. It will be important to assess the depth of Arab anger toward the West and understand if and when there is a point in time where Arab attitudes toward the US have soured so badly that the US is no longer viewed as a necessary evil in the region but is instead no longer welcome by most.

The above is a lightly edited version of part of an opinion originally appeared on washingtoninstitute.org.

First Announcement

Tender invitation

Invitation to public tender for BUTYL CHLORIDE // 25,400kg

Tabriz petrochemical company intends to procure its required quantity of BUTYL CHLORIDE for polyethylene production plant from reputable & reliable producer and supplier of said product. Interested suppliers should submit their request to below email in order to get tender documents until December 28, 2023.

Deadline for submission of offers for tender is: January 09, 2024.

Email: l.aalafkari@tpco.ir Phone No.: +98-41-34282921

Tender	No	Quantity
BUTYL CHLORIDE	PVS-0241050	25,400 kg

Public Relations of Tabriz Petrochemical Company (Public Stock)

First turn published: December 14, 2023 Second turn published: December 20, 2023

First Announcement

Tender invitation

Invitation to public tender for Diatomite// 22000 kg

Tabriz petrochemical company intends to procure its required quantity of Diatomite for ABS production plant. Interested suppliers should submit their request to below email in order to get tender documents until January 04, 2024.

Deadline for submission of offers for tender is: January 20, 2024.

Email: me.rahimi@tpco.ir Phone No.: +98-21-88737355#109

Tender	No	Quantity
Diatomite	PVS-0241020	22000 kg

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