

ADVERTISE with us

JANUARY 08

- Local
- Northern California
- National
- World
- Features
- Kids' Corner
- Arts and Media
- Books
- Food
- Travel
- Money
- Legal
- Commentary
- Staff
- Profile
- Islam
- Health
- Editorial
- Word on the Street
- Letters



SYNDICATE

RSS 0.91
RSS 1.0
RSS 2.0
ATOM 0.3
OPML SHARE IT!

MEMRI is 'propaganda machine,' expert says

By Lawrence Swaim, Staff Writer

The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) provides daily English translations of film and print media stories originating in Arabic, Iranian and Turkish media.

It also furnishes original analysis of cultural, political and religious trends in the Middle East.

It sends its daily postings to every news outlet in the United States and Europe, in addition to politicians and cultural leaders.

And it's free, which makes it a Godsend for journalists, editors and policy analysts.

But according to its critics, it is also a dangerous, highly sophisticated propaganda operation, disseminating hate and disinformation on an unprecedented worldwide basis.

"They use the same sort of propaganda techniques as the Nazis," Professor Norman G. Finkelstein, a well-known scholar on Israel/Palestine, told InFocus. "They take things out of context in order to do personal and political harm to people they don't like."

Take the case of Professor Halim Barakat, a novelist and scholar associated with the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown University.

In 2002, he published an article on Zionism in London's Al-Hayat Daily, but says that in certain instances, MEMRI selectively edited what he wrote.

"I know how to make a distinction between Judaism and Zionism, but they distorted the article," Barakat told InFocus. "They left out certain things and tried to make it look anti-Semitic."

Shortly afterward, Campus Watch, the brainchild of notorious Islamophobe Daniel Pipes, used the allegedly doctored translation in an effort to smear Georgetown University.

Finkelstein, an outspoken critic of Israeli policies and the U.S. pro-Israel lobby, also had a run-in with MEMRI.

In 2006, he gave a TV interview in Lebanon on the way the Nazi Holocaust is used to silence critics of Israel.

Finkelstein later wrote on his Web site: "MEMRI recently posted what it alleged was an interview I did with Lebanese television on the Nazi Holocaust. The MEMRI posting was designed to prove that I was a Holocaust denier."

Far from being a Holocaust denier, Finkelstein's own parents were Holocaust survivors, a fact he has often spoken about.

But MEMRI was able to create the opposite impression, as Finkelstein demonstrated on his Web site, by editing out large chunks of the actual interview.

When some comments by the moderator were included, it appeared that Finkelstein's interview was about nitpicking the number of Jews who died in the Holocaust rather than about Israel/Palestine.

MEMRI's obsessive interest in protecting Israel derives from the people and interests that founded, fund and manage the institute's international operations.

It was founded in 1998 by Yigal Carmon, a former colonel in the Israel Defense Forces (Intelligence Branch) from 1968 until 1988, acting head of civil administration in the West Bank from 1977 to 1982; and Israeli-born Meyrav Wurmser, an extreme rightwing neoconservative now affiliated with the Hudson Institute.

Meyrav is married to David Wurmser, at one time an American Enterprise Institute "scholar" and then a State Department apparatchik under John Bolton.

search... Search

SUBSCRIBE today

subscribe

600 articles & books
Live Broadcast 100% Dawa
Qur'an Radio It is time
No to Islamophobia
MuslimBridges.org

www.MuslimReviewOnline.net
Covering all publications related to Islam and Muslims
Log in and share your educated opinion
Create an account instantly — no fees!

POLLS

How often do you volunteer your time for good causes?

- Rarely, I don't have time
- 1-3 hours a week
- Up to 5 hours a week
- Up to 10 hours a week
- Over 10 hours a week

Vote

Results

SUBSCRIBE TO NEWSLETTER

E-mail

E-mail

- Subscribe
- Unsubscribe

Go!

Both participated in the collective writing of "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm," a seminal 1996 neocon document that advocated an end to negotiations with the Palestinians and permanent war against the Arab world.

They also worked with Douglas Feith, Elliot Abrams, Richard Perle and other rightwing ideologues who promoted and embellished the fiction that Saddam Hussein was behind 9/11.

MEMRI has offices in Jerusalem, Berlin, London, Washington and Tokyo, and in a 2006 Jerusalem Post interview, Carmon claimed to have one in Iraq.

It translates film and print into English, German, Hebrew, Italian, French, Spanish and Japanese.

Tax returns for 2004 indicate American funding of between two to three million dollars, much of it from conservative donors and foundations - but those who have followed its far-flung operations suspect much higher expenditures.

Besides Carmon, several MEMRI staffers are former Israeli intelligence specialists. Especially troubling are suspected links between MEMRI and the current Israeli intelligence establishment.

According to a 2005 article in Israel's Ha'aretz, the Israeli Defense Forces plants fake stories in the Arab media, which it then translates and tries to retail to Israeli journalists. How much of MEMRI is simply an extension of such IDF operations?

The questions raised by the Ha'aretz story caused Professor Juan Cole to write, "How much of what we 'know' from 'Arab sources' about 'Hizbullah terrorism' was simply made up by this fantasy factory in Tel Aviv?"

British journalist Brian Whitaker, Middle East editor of the Guardian, dismisses MEMRI as "basically a propaganda machine."

Ken Livingstone, mayor of London, accuses them of "outright distortion," and former CIA case officer Vince Cannistraro has written that "they (MEMRI) are selective and act as propagandists for their political point of view, which is the extreme-right of Likud."

With characteristic bluntness, Norman Finkelstein has written: "MEMRI is a main arm of Israeli propaganda. Although widely used in the mainstream media as a source of information on the Arab world, it is as trustworthy as Julius Streicher's Der Sturmer was on the Jewish world." (Der Sturmer was a rabidly anti-Semitic newspaper, and Streicher a notoriously cruel Nazi.)

In an e-mail to InFocus, Cole characterized MEMRI as "a Right-Zionist propaganda organ, which usually does its propaganda unobtrusively, by being very selective in what it translates."

Indeed, MEMRI appears to view the Arab world as a malevolent, mind-numbing monsters' ball, populated almost exclusively by fanatics, freaks and fundamentalists.

Every story that could possibly make Middle Eastern people look deranged, hateful or diabolical gets translated; anything that could make them look informed, talented or admirable is ignored.

MEMRI says it covers reformers in the Arabic-speaking world, but longtime observers point out that people who make Islam or Arab culture look attractive rarely get translated, regardless of their position.

Nor does MEMRI feature stories about Palestinian suffering, Israeli dissenters, moderate Islamists, Christians in Arab governments or the growing nonviolent movement against the apartheid wall in the Occupied Territories, especially around Bal'in.

Instead, it promotes highly-edited footage featuring people like Wafa Sultan.

It was MEMRI that translated the sound bites from her famous al-Jazeera debate with Dr. Ibrahim al-Kouly that ended up on YouTube, making her an instant rock star to those who promote an international clash of cultures.

It is said by TV viewers who watched the entire debate that al-Kouly was rather patient with Sultan despite her extreme

opinions.

(Among other things, Sultan has declared herself an atheist.) But MEMRI never bothered to translate and promote the whole debate.

MEMRI President Yigal Carmon was contacted to ask why the entire Sultan debate wasn't translated and circulated, at least in a print version.

"MEMRI couldn't do the whole interview because of the limitations of our resources," Carmon told InFocus. "And it was just our best judgment of what was fit to translate." He said he thought there was an "almost" complete version in the archives.

InFocus asked Carmon why MEMRI didn't post more stories about domestic events in Israel and the OTC.

"Eighty percent of such stories are already in English," Carmon said.

Then why not buy a few every week and send them out in order to give a more balanced picture of the Middle East, InFocus asked, "It probably wouldn't be legal," he responded.

That brought up the thorny issue of copyright, ownership and power.

Why, Carmon was asked, does MEMRI copyright all the stories it translates, when most stories are written by Arab authors?

"Of course we copyright," Carmon told InFocus. "Once we translate a story into another language, it becomes ours, because it's our work."

To test this theory in an American context, InFocus contacted The New York Times.

"If you translate copy from the Times, it would still belong to us, because we originated it," said an employee of the Rights and Royalties Department who did not wish to be named.

When war and peace hangs on the translation of a single word or phrase, nuance is everything.

But can we trust the translator?

According its critics, until MEMRI starts translating Hebrew stories about the rightward drift of Israeli society, torture of Palestinians in Israeli jails, the forced exile of Ilan Pappé and Azmi Bishara, and the elevation of the neo-fascist Avigdor Lieberman to deputy prime minister of Israel, they aren't really covering all Middle Eastern media.

"I think it's a reliable assumption that anything MEMRI translates from the Middle East is going to be unreliable," Finkelstein said.

LOCAL

Muslims integral to U.S. society, Dean says at MPAC conference

Young Muslims perform HAJJ

Muslim woman sues for being forced to remove headscarf in San Bernardino jail

BOOKS

In the Country of Men

COMMENTARY

The battle for AM radio

What comes after Annapolis?

A letter on Christmas

NATIONAL

With latkes and learning, Muslim and Jewish teens build bonds

U.S. Jewish friends hail Muslim savior

Obama brushes off rumors he is a secret Muslim

WORLD

Chavez offers oil for food

SOMALIA: A nation in ruins

King pardons Saudi gang-rape victim

WORD ON THE STREET

Word on the street — What would you like to see improved at your masjid?

[Current Issue](#)

[Archives](#)

[Contact](#)

[About](#)

[Subscribe](#)

[Internship](#)