



Arab Media Watch
for objective British coverage of Arab issues

Monitoring Study:

British Media Portrayals of Egypt

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Table of contents:

Egypt & the Middle East

- Regional Importance
- Israel
- Camp David Accords
- The Gulf
- Sudan
- Horn of Africa

Diplomacy towards Palestine

- Before Gaza Conflict 2009
- Gaza 2009 Diplomacy

The Palestine Border

- Tunnel Economy
- Crossing Closures

Domestic Egypt

- Food
- Religion in Society
- State Ideology
- Economy
- Miscellaneous

Domestic Threats

- Emergency Rule & Internal Security
- Terrorism

Egypt & the West

- Egypt as an Ally
- 'War on Terror'
- Suez

Ancient Egypt

- Influence of Egyptian Art
- Other Legacies

Tourism

Egypt & the Middle East

Regional Importance

Various other Middle Eastern countries are sometimes mentioned in connection with Egypt's regional influence, though very rarely those from North Africa.

In terms of Egypt's standing in the Middle East as viewed by the US, a meeting in Cairo, as well as Saudi Arabia and Israel, are "necessary step[s] in the careful path Mr Obama is laying out," notes Times chief foreign affairs commentator Bronwen Maddox (29 May 2009). A "solid" Arab-Israeli peace deal "must include President Mubarak of Egypt," says Michael Levy in the same newspaper (14 May 2009).

Regarding a divided Lebanon, the Arab League is "tainted by the commitment of the Saudis and Egyptians to one side rather than the other," according to an Independent editorial (13 May 2008).

Egypt appointing an ambassador to Iraq generates interest "not only because it is the most populous Arab country but also because its chargé d'affaires in Baghdad was kidnapped and killed in 2005," writes Guardian Middle East editor Ian Black (2 July 2008).

Egypt will "resist" a total US pull-out from Iraq, saying that "a US retreat hands victory to a resurgent Iran and Shias everywhere," according to Guardian columnist and correspondent Jonathan Steele (6 November 2008). The Egyptian president "has been trying to draw Syria away from its alliance with Iran in recent months," says Adel Darwish in the Daily Telegraph (31 March 2009).

Israel is conducting serious talks with Syria "to prise [it] away from its axis with Iran, shifting Damascus towards pro-western relations with Egypt, Jordan and the Gulf states," according to a Financial Times editorial (23 May 2008).

Israel

A historical look at Egypt in the latter half of the 20th century is sometimes taken in the British press. This chiefly throws up its relationship with Israel. Fighting between the two countries in 1948 "was the bloodiest in Israel's history...both sides were guilty of atrocities, and some Israeli historians suggest the Jewish record was worse," says Max Hastings in the Daily Mail (8 May 2008).

In 1967, "the Israeli army proved itself one of the greatest fighting forces the world has ever seen, destroying successively the armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan, seizing East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Golan Heights and Sinai," he adds. Hastings recalls watching "the Israeli people striving for survival" during the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

A private screening of an Israeli film in Cairo to an audience of 100 cultural and diplomatic figures, including 30 Egyptians, in July 2008 "showed how tricky the problem of 'normalising' Egypt's relations with Israel is," writes Gihan Shahine in the Guardian (15 August 2008). Nonetheless, the film - about the visit of an Egyptian band to Israel - was a success.

Camp David Accords

Occasionally, reference is made to the Egypt-Israel peace accords, signed in 1979, although differences in opinion exist about its import.

Independent Middle East correspondent Donald Macintyre cites ex-Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami, who highlights "Anwar Sadat's insistence that Jimmy Carter broker an Egyptian peace agreement," and that "historic moves towards peace had actually been as a result of Arab actions rather than Israeli ones" (8 May 2008).

To the Daily Telegraph, it was "that rarest of events: a genuinely hopeful moment in the Middle East's history" (26 March 2009), and to the Guardian's Washington DC bureau chief Ewen MacAskill, it is the last time the US achieved "any major peace agreement in the Middle East" (22 April 2009).

"No progress can be achieved without the full weight of the White House and the commitment of a strong Israeli government prepared to make painful territorial concessions," writes Times foreign editor Richard Beeston (19 June 2008). "This was true at Camp David, when Jimmy Carter, Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat penned the first land-for-peace deal."

Carter's "greatest success" was the Camp David agreement, says Penny Wark in the Times (27 May 2008).

Camp David allowed Carter to show "his commitment to Israel by giving it more aid than anywhere else and brokering the only peace deal with an Arab regime the country has ever enjoyed," writes Independent columnist Johann Hari (8 May 2008).

The accord was "an abject failure in relation to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, [but] brought lasting peace between Israel and Egypt," notes Middle East correspondent Donald Macintyre in the same newspaper (28 April 2009).

Sadat was "assassinated when [he] attempted to come to some kind of sane accommodation with a country that most sane people now accept is not going away," says Daily Express columnist Andrew Roberts (8 May 2008).

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak "has taken great risks in maintaining his country's peace with the Israeli state," writes Independent Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk (18 March 2009).

A Guardian editorial notes that the accord has held to this day, although a comprehensive peace deal is elusive (22 May 2008).

The deal was bolstered by public diplomacy and "Sadat's breakthrough visit to Israel, proving the sincerity of his desire for peace," an equivalent of which is missing from today's efforts, writes Guardian columnist Jonathan Freedland (17 December 2008).

The accord is cited by an editorial in the Independent, recalling that "some maintain that the Israeli right has in practice delivered more solid concessions to Israel's Arab neighbours than the left" (9 February 2009).

The Gulf

In the pecking order, "Arabs - Lebanese and Palestinians, Egyptians and Syrians" come below the pampered Gulf Arabs and Western expats, writes Ghaith Abdul-Ahad in the Guardian (8 October 2008).

Egypt has its own media zone similar to twofour54, the new media city recently established in Abu Dhabi, reports Oliver Luft in the Guardian (20 October 2008).

There is a creeping change in Egyptian society due to "oil-rich gulf Arabs...buying up swaths of the Egyptian entertainment sector," resulting in the "spread [of] the strict form of Wahhabi Islam prevalent in the Gulf," countering the "more moderate brand of Sunni Islam that has allowed institutions such as hotel bars to flourish in Cairo," writes Jack Shenker in the same newspaper (21 July 2008).

Sudan

Egypt contributed two battalions to the peacekeeping effort in Darfur, and "is seen as a strong ally of the Khartoum government," says the Independent's former Africa correspondent Steve Bloomfield (11 June 2008). "When one of the Darfur rebel groups, the Justice and Equality Movement, launched an attack on the capital last month, Egypt sent planes and offered troops to support the government."

Egypt "is a neighbour and close ally of Sudan, and has been one of the most vocal opponents" of the International Criminal Court's indictment of President Omar al-Bashir, writes the Guardian's Africa correspondent Xan Rice (26 March 2009).

Horn of Africa

"Cairo sees a powerful Somalia as a bulwark against Ethiopia in any future conflict over the vital resources of the Nile, and still nurtures those who dream of a greater Somalia," writes Independent Africa correspondent Daniel Howden (6 May 2009).

Peter Lehr in the Guardian also notes Egyptian interests to its south, reporting concerns about Somali piracy, and adding that Cairo "recently called upon the Red Sea states to inaugurate a combined effort in the Gulf of Aden" (19 November 2008).

Diplomacy towards Palestine

Before Gaza Conflict 2009

Egyptian diplomacy is frequently noted in relation to Palestine. The Gaza ceasefire of June 2008 is "a considerable diplomatic achievement for Egypt, which brokered the deal," according to an Independent editorial (19 June 2008). This is also acknowledged by Times correspondent James Hider (11 June 2008).

However, Guardian Middle East editor Ian Black wrote that "only a foolhardy observer would predict that peace is about to break out in the Middle East because of the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas" (19 June 2008). Nonetheless, he stated that Mahmoud Abbas, Palestinian president and Fatah leader, "is backed by an influential Arab coalition of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates."

Guardian Middle East correspondent Rory McCarthy reported that "the Gaza rocket attacks have largely stopped since Egypt brokered the fragile ceasefire last month" (24 July 2008).

The ceasefire was "a period of relative calm," tempered by "near daily violations in the form of rockets and mortars fired from Gaza into Israel," wrote Ron Prosor, Israeli ambassador to the UK, in the Guardian (28 August 2008). Egypt, which he describes as moderate, is being threatened by "Iran and its extremist friends."

Evidence of further Egyptian diplomacy regarding Gaza came from Times correspondent Sheera Frenkel, writing that "Egypt has invited Hamas and Fatah to meet in Cairo on November 9 for talks to restore Palestinian unity, creating a new spirit of nationalism" (28 October 2008).

McCarthy says of it: "Egyptian officials have prepared an outline deal that would include a 'national reconciliation government', but it is short on details and could take weeks of negotiation" (7 November 2008). However, a fortnight later "the Palestinians remain divided in spite of the best efforts of Egyptian mediation," reports Philip Stephens in the Financial Times (14 November 2008).

Although that particular initiative may have had limited success, Azzam Tamimi says in the Guardian that the Egypt-mediated Israel-Hamas ceasefire brought "unprecedented peace" to "the Gaza Strip and its neighbouring Israeli towns to the north and the east" (21 November 2008).

George Bush, however, claimed in the Independent that the ceasefire brokered by Egypt was "routinely violated" by Hamas "by launching rockets into Israel" (5 January 2009). By contrast, Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh asks in the same newspaper: "Did Israel honour the terms of the ceasefire mediated by Egypt in June? It did not" (15 January 2009).

Times correspondent James Hider notes the continued detention of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, "despite protracted talks mediated by Cairo to secure his release" (6 November 2008).

Gaza 2009 Diplomacy

Egypt frequently cropped up in coverage of the Gaza conflict in late December 2008 - early January 2009. Although it took a lead role in mediating an end to the conflict, it also came under criticism.

"Protesters throughout the Arab world have been criticising Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian President, and other Arab governments for failing to take a stronger stand against Israel," writes Hadeel Al-Shalchi in the Independent (6 January 2009). The newspaper's correspondent Patrick Cockburn takes this further, writing that Gaza is under economic siege by both Israel *and* Egypt (20 January 2009).

Egypt is noted during the conflict for its diplomatic efforts, which Guardian assistant editor and foreign affairs commentator Simon Tisdall describes as "dogged" (24 February 2009). Egypt was aided in such efforts by Gordon Brown and France, notes Daily Telegraph assistant editor and columnist Mary Riddell (8 January 2009).

Cairo is "ideally placed to mediate" because Israel and Egypt loath Hamas, "an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood," writes Telegraph foreign affairs correspondent Damien McElroy (7 January 2009). Guardian Middle East editor Ian Black says Egypt is "concerned not to give Hamas legitimacy" (16 January 2009).

Ben Lynfield notes in the Independent that Hamas is viewed with suspicion, this time by Fatah, "as a usurper and agent of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan" (9 January 2009). When an aid conference on Gaza opened in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, an editorial in the same newspaper suggested that avoiding giving "Hamas the legitimacy it seeks in the process" was still a primary concern (2 March 2009).

The chances of success in the mediation "depend heavily on Cairo's ability to overcome the residual reservations of the Hamas leadership and a clear division between Israel's premier and his defence minister over when to end [the] war," writes Independent Middle East correspondent Donald Macintyre (15 January 2009).

Efforts to defuse the crisis "appear to be nearing success," wrote the Telegraph's diplomatic editor David Blair (9 February 2009).

"Egypt says that it is close to brokering a deal to end Hamas rocket fire, open most of the border crossings and secure the release of Gilad Schalit - an Israeli soldier captured 2½ years ago - in exchange for more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners," reported Times Middle East correspondent James Hider (12 February 2009).

However, despite Cairo's best efforts, "effectively, Israel tore up the Egyptian ceasefire proposals and its investment in mediation, leaving a sidelined President Mubarak on Saturday angrily disavowing the agreement between Israel and the US for ending the flow of weapons via Egypt to Hamas," reports Alastair Crooke in the Guardian (19 January 2009).

Noting other diplomatic efforts, Crooke observes: "All of these separate initiatives - Israeli, American and Egyptian - have as a primary aim an agreement from which one

of the main protagonists, Hamas, is excluded. None of this bodes well. It resembles the choreography for a further round of conflict."

Black also reports the diplomacy of other nations, adding that Egypt "is angry that Syria failed to bring pressure to bear on Hamas" (30 March 2009).

Crooke, writing in the Independent, also notes the difficulties arising from the mediations and the frustrations of different parties (9 January 2009): "Now everyone is angry. But this is only the half of it: there are two EU delegations, the EU foreign policy chief, Tony Blair, and others all 'engaged' too. What a mess!"

The regional implications of the Gaza conflict, according to Crooke, were "an unparalleled, overt challenge to Saudi Arabia and Egypt in the formal structures of Arab political power," that he says is manifest in "a bitter struggle of the Doha-Syria axis versus the Saudi-Egyptian alliance for control over the future of the region."

Independent diplomatic editor Anne Penketh also notes the conflict of interests in Gaza mediation: "Egypt and Saudi Arabia are fighting off proposals from Qatar - which supports Hamas - for an emergency summit on Gaza which would further expose Arab divisions" (14 January 2009).

However, she does think that Egypt holds the key position: "Egypt has emerged as the power most likely to hold the key to a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas, thanks to the Egyptians' privileged role as a go-between in the past" (8 January 2009).

The Palestine Border

Tunnel Economy

Towards the end of 2008, the smuggling tunnels between Egypt and Gaza began to feature in the news.

Guardian correspondent Toni O'Loughlin notes that Hamas receives a steady revenue from the tunnels, which "are importing fuel and other items from Egypt to meet shortages created by Israel's blockade of the Palestinian territory" (22 October 2008). "Hamas has used its superior force to control arms smuggling through the massive network of tunnels to Egypt," she reported (15 December 2008).

Once conflict broke out in Gaza, the border between it and Egypt was much more frequently mentioned. The border needs securing "to prevent the re-supply of Hamas with rockets channelled from Syria and Iran," writes Evening Standard executive editor Anne McElvoy (7 January 2009).

The smuggling tunnels are pivotal. Independent correspondent Patrick Cockburn reports "one estimate [suggesting] there are 1,100 of them," but takes care to point out that "the tunnel economy has been the way in which food, fuel and everything else has reached Gaza since Israel and Egypt sealed off the strip 18 months ago" (20 January 2009).

Kevin Toolis gives a bit of background in the Daily Express, suggesting that "these unique smuggling tunnels in Rafah can be traced back to 1982 when Israel withdrew from the neighbouring Sinai Peninsula...Like a lot of things in the Middle East the incentive for the tunnels was a combination of politics and profit" (29 January 2009).

Independent columnist Deborah Orr notes that "90 per cent of all goods entering the area" come from the tunnels (7 January 2009). However, Fares Akram notes in the same newspaper one use of the tunnels in the other direction: "we've heard that six Hamas leaders have fled to Egypt by tunnel" (12 January 2009).

Daily Telegraph executive foreign editor Con Coughlin suggests a broader conspiracy culminating in smuggling at the Rafah crossing, hinting at Egyptian complicity: "long before Israel launched its invasion, Iran's Revolutionary Guards were smuggling missiles and combat equipment through a well-established smuggling route that begins in Sudan and makes its way to the Egyptian-controlled Rafah crossing point, by way of Port Said" (16 January 2009).

Calls were made for an agreement to monitor the smuggling of arms, about which Independent correspondent Robert Fisk writes: "Cairo shrugged off the deal because no one was going to set up electronic surveillance equipment on Egyptian soil" (19 January 2009).

There have been suggestions of a peacekeeping force to monitor the border, but "it is Egypt that is bristling at suggestions that international peacekeepers should police the

Egypt-Gaza border to stop rockets being smuggled via tunnels," writes James Bone in the Times (5 January 2009).

Guardian Middle East correspondent Rory McCarthy also testifies to the varied use of the tunnels "that have brought goods in from Egypt for several years" (22 January 2009).

He adds that "most of what arrived was food, cigarettes, fuel, even farm animals - all intended to break Israel's tough economic blockade - but some of the tunnels were used to bring in cash and weaponry for armed groups, including the Islamism movement Hamas."

Independent Middle East correspondent Donald Macintyre notes the importance of the tunnels in the Gaza conflict, writing that their bombing by Israel "has dramatised Israel's central war aim of persuading Egypt - with international help - to call a halt to arms smuggling under the Rafah border" (22 January 2009).

Telegraph diplomatic editor David Blair echoes their importance, opining that "if effective action is now taken to stop the smuggling of weapons across Gaza's border with Egypt, Hamas may be prevented from rearming" (20 January 2009).

However, McCarthy wondered after the conflict "why the air strikes, artillery shells, tank fire, bulldozing and detonations that caused such devastation and loss of life across the territory did so little damage to the hundreds of smuggling tunnels under Gaza's southern border with Egypt" (10 February 2009).

He also notes that "some senior Israelis have spoken publicly in recent years of their desire to hand over responsibility for Gaza to Egypt."

Daily Mail city editor Alex Brummer notes in the Guardian a few points omitted by other commentators: that "from 1948 to 1967 it [Gaza] had been controlled by Egypt," and that "Gaza also happens to have a border with Egypt through which medical supplies and refugees could pass - were Cairo to allow it" (12 January 2009).

Independent diplomatic editor Anne Penketh offers a reason for the continued border closure: "Egypt has long suspected that Israel wants it to take over responsibility for the Palestinians from Gaza, which is why the authorities resisted opening the border" (8 January 2009).

A Guardian editorial notes the necessity of a quid pro quo: "If the US, Nato, Egypt, Britain and France take on the role of preventing Hamas from re-arming with missiles, they must also ensure that Israel lifts its siege of Gaza" (19 January 2009).

Crossing Closures

Egypt is noted numerous times for its closure of the crossing between itself and Gaza, with Guardian correspondent Toni O'Loughlin noting that "Palestinians in the besieged territory [are obliged] to increasingly seek help in Israel" (4 August 2008).

This is echoed by an editorial in the same newspaper, which states that "there have been some transfers of the sick to Israeli hospitals, but none to Egypt," and that "conditions in Gaza are daily news in the Arab media and Egypt is coming under pressure to open its border with Gaza" (12 December 2008).

This is again highlighted in the Guardian, by columnist Jonathan Freedland - "But Egypt is blamed too, for failing to open its border, thereby bringing respite to those in desperate need" (17 December 2008) - and by Middle East correspondent Rory McCarthy, who notes Egypt's "reluctance" to open the crossing (2 December 2008).

However, Ben Lynfield in the Independent describes the Palestinian national football training in Egypt "because the team was split between the West Bank and Gaza, and Israeli travel restrictions made it difficult to gather in either part of their fragmented homeland" (27 October 2008).

Domestic Egypt

Food

Food riots were an issue in Egypt during 2008, after the government attempted reform of food subsidies. The population have previously rioted over the price of subsidised bread, most notably in 1977. As such, it continues to be a sensitive issue.

Guardian correspondent Chris McGreal notes that "there is a saying in Cairo: nobody dies of hunger in Egypt," but adds that "half of the population...lives on less than £1 a day" (27 May 2008). He continues that "attempts to translate the evident anger into popular protest have flopped amid fear of the government and the alternatives to it," although he does note a "growing defiance."

Felipe Fernandez-Armesto notes the importance of global food shortages in the Times: "The political convulsions have begun. The world's hunger victims are biting rubber bullets. In Haiti, the starvelings have rebelled. In West Africa, Egypt, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Madagascar they are rioting" (3 June 2008).

Religion in Society

El-Hatef el-Islami, "one of the world's most popular Islamic hotlines," recently introduced in Britain, is Egyptian in origin, notes Guardian religious affairs editor Riazat Butt (11 May 2009).

She writes that "it will draw on the expertise of scholars from Cairo's al-Azhar University to provide perplexed believers with help and religious rulings (fatwas) on everyday dilemmas." She adds that "Al-Azhar, founded in 975, is a renowned Islamic institution and its alumni have gone on to become grand muftis and sheikhs in prominent positions around the world."

Independent columnist Johann Hari is very critical of the practice of Islam in Egypt, where he reports that "a 27-year-old Muslim blogger Abdel Rahman was seized, jailed and tortured for arguing for a reformed Islam that does not enforce Shariah" (28 January 2009).

Hari notes an increasing taste for heavy metal music across the Middle East, but says that "in Egypt, the dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak - funded by the US and EU - has ordered mass arrests of metalheads for 'undermining the faith of Muslims'" (8 September 2008).

Egyptian fencer Shaimaa El Gammal competed in the 2008 Olympics wearing the hijab, combining "religious beliefs with...athletic ambitions," for which "I have nothing but respect," writes Naomi Alderman in the Guardian, despite her seeing the hijab "as a symbol of patriarchal oppression" (14 August 2008).

State Ideology

In Egypt, "the nationalism of [Gamal Abdel] Nasser was discredited by humiliating defeat in the 1967 war with Israel," writes Independent correspondent Patrick Cockburn (8 April 2009). As such, in contrast to Turkey, which fought off foreign attacks, "secularism and nationalism [lacked] a credibility and a popularity" in Egypt.

The film industry "has been an important tool in securing Egypt's cultural dominance in the Arabic-speaking world since the 1920s," notes Adel Darwish in the same newspaper (29 July 2008).

However, he continued, "Nasser's control of the film-making industry was a mixed blessing; lavish subsidies came at the price of heavy censorship and artistic interference so that directors and script-writers were made to conform to revolutionary themes that pushed Nasser's socialist and anti-western agenda."

Economy

The Egyptian economy is very rarely touched upon. However, one example is comparative: Daily Mail political columnist Peter Osborne notes that "only Egypt, Pakistan and Hungary among significant world economies had more profligate government spending than Britain" (20 September 2008).

Miscellaneous

"Mahmoud Darwish was the Arab world's best-selling poet," writes Said Ghazali in the Independent (11 August 2008). "His words have been shouted by anti-occupation demonstrators in the streets of Ramallah, Damascus and Cairo."

Felix Lloyd states in the Evening Standard that "British cockroaches are petite, casual, debonair; Egyptian roaches are the size of bull terriers, more in your face, often literally" (26 November 2008).

The recent outbreak of swine flu became a major issue in Egypt without any incidences of the illness in the country itself, with the cull of all pigs there. Brian Whitaker, editor of the Guardian's Comment is Free section, writes that "even if it was not intentional, the over-dramatic and obviously ill-planning decision to cull all pigs is likely to be interpreted by Christians as yet another assault on their community" (1 May 2009).

Whitaker describes the decision to cull as hasty, adding that "the Mubarak regime's record in matters of public health and safety is a dismal one: more than 1,000 dead in a ferry disaster, more than 370 dead in a train fire, 50 dead in a theatre fire, plus treacherous roads, and buildings that fall down regularly on top of their occupants."

Sarah El-Deeb echoes this in the same newspaper, noting that "Egypt has a history of serious bus and car crashes because of speeding, careless driving and poor road conditions...A series of fatal accidents and fires have led to anger against the Egyptian government because of a belief that many of the incidents have been due to official negligence and poor infrastructure" (15 December 2008).

Domestic Threats

Emergency Rule & Internal Security

A few commentators note the continued fact of emergency rule in Egypt, in place since the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981. Jack Shenker writes in the Guardian that "it enables police to detain citizens indefinitely without charge, block demonstrations and censor media" (24 February 2009).

Individual freedom within society is consequently an issue. Democracy and human rights are "in scant supply" in Egypt, notes Michael Tomasky, editor of Guardian America (1 June 2009). He wonders whether Barack Obama "will have the bad manners, but laudable courage, to direct any words about freedom to President Hosni Mubarak."

Internal security is a prominent issue, with Guardian senior reporter Ian Cobain summing up what is frequently mentioned by the press: "The torture of detainees in Egypt has been well-documented over many years by human rights groups and the US state department" (16 March 2009).

Daily Telegraph diplomatic editor David Blair notes Egypt's success regarding its grip on internal security, writing that General Omar Suleiman, director of Egypt's intelligence service, is "one of the world's most powerful spy chiefs - and an expert in solving intractable problems" (25 February 2009).

Blair tips him for possible leader of Egypt, noting that President Mubarak "trusts hardly anyone and relies on a tiny circle of loyalists." Suleiman is "a wily old bird" to Independent diplomatic editor Anne Penketh (8 January 2009).

Bobbie Johnson echoes security and media freedom concerns in the Guardian, adding that "in recent years, a number of bloggers have been arrested and imprisoned because of what they have written, many of them charged with illegally criticising the president or inciting religious hatred" (9 December 2008).

A Times editorial on Iraqi shoe-thrower Munthader al-Zaidi asks Arabs "what would happen in their own countries if a local journalist tried to hurl insults at President Mubarak of Egypt? Twenty-two Egyptians were jailed yesterday for taking part in food protests earlier this year" (16 December 2008).

Such is Egypt's reputation in relation to countering extremist Islamism that Michael Burleigh suggests in the Daily Mail that "the CIA wanted to fly Bin Laden to Egypt where he would conveniently 'disappear' after interrogation" (13 September 2008).

Terrorism

One of the major preoccupations facing Egypt's internal security forces is the domestic terrorist threat. "Islamists are a threat to Islam and Muslims," notes Ed Husain in the *Evening Standard* (7 July 2008). "Before they started bombing Western cities, they started their campaign of terror by killing fellow Muslims in Egypt, inspired by the repression practised by most Arab governments."

Overall, "Egypt's security forces had been able to claim some success against the terrorist threat," and since the 1990s "terrorist attacks have been far less frequent," writes Dina Kraft in the *Daily Telegraph* (23 February 2009).

She spells the stakes out clearly: "Tourism is the central pillar of the country's economy and so many livelihoods depend on the presence of foreign visitors." Kraft adds that "popular support for violent extremism is low."

Nonetheless, "in Egypt the attacks have continued," writes *Daily Express* reporter Simon Edge (28 November 2008). "In general, however, such incidents have remarkably little effect on tourist behaviour."

However, some suggest there is popular support for Islam to take a leading role in government, with John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge opining in the *Times* that in Egypt, "Islamists may well be the government in waiting" (14 May 2009). Soumaya Ghannoushi confirms in the *Guardian* that the Muslim Brotherhood is "the largest opposition in the Egyptian parliament" (11 July 2008).

Simon Scott Plummer in the *Telegraph* offers a thought as to why this may be so, saying that "they have won popular support by providing welfare denied by an incompetent state," (26 September 2008). "Bin Laden may be able to boast of spectacular assaults on his enemies, but he can hardly claim to have contributed to long-term social and economic development."

Nonetheless, Kraft reports that "Egypt has a special connection with the brand of Sunni fundamentalism championed by al-Qaeda. Many of the intellectual fathers of this movement were Egyptians, including Ayman al-Zawahiri, the unofficial deputy to Osama bin Laden. Others, notably Sayyid Imam al-Sharif, now a prisoner in Cairo's Tora prison and better known as Dr Fadl, have recanted their support for terrorism."

Blair provides some background to this state of affairs: "The thinkers who gave birth to the modern strain of fundamentalism, notably Sayid Qutb, were Egyptian, and the key political force behind this ideology, the Muslim Brotherhood, emerged in Cairo's tea houses" (25 February 2009). However, he adds: "Egypt's experience in the 1990s is one of the few recent cases when an Islamist insurgency was crushed."

John Pilger in the *Guardian* also mentions the origins of Islamist extremism, recalling the "historic role as midwife to violent extremism in modern Islam, [including] the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the 1950s" (1 December 2008).

This ideology has "convulsed" large countries such as Egypt, writes *Guardian* columnist Simon Jenkins (3 December 2008). However, he adds that "it has given

unprecedented potency to sects, militias and gangs, yet has failed to create peace - let alone the caliphate."

Tony Dawe in the Times reports evidence of a success against the domestic terrorist threat: "From this week, tour groups are permitted to travel between cities in Egypt in daylight hours without a police escort, after the Egyptian Government's decision to relax the 'convoy' system that has operated for security reasons for 11 years" (3 December 2008).

The "spectre of Islamist attacks" has "returned to haunt Egypt's security services last night after a French tourist was killed when a bomb ripped through the Khan el-Khalili bazaar in Cairo," writes Independent foreign editor Katherine Butler (23 February 2009).

She adds that "President Hosni Mubarak has been mediating between Israel and the Palestinian factions but provoked fury among Israel's critics by keeping the Rafah crossing, which links Egypt with Gaza, sealed off."

Butler continues that "activists, dissidents and bloggers critical of the government have been jailed or harassed. The government took critics by surprise last week, however, by releasing Ayman Nour, a charismatic opposition politician who stood against Mr Mubarak for the presidency in 2005 and was subsequently jailed."

Egypt & the West

Egypt as an Ally

It is sometimes made clear in Middle East reporting that Egypt is an ally of the US. In the words of Independent correspondent Robert Fisk, President Hosni Mubarak "can be a soft touch for the Americans" (18 March 2009), and is "America's man in Egypt" (20 January 2009).

Regionally, "the reduction of Egypt to a client state of the US deprived it of its natural leadership," writes Independent comments editor Adrian Hamilton (9 April 2009).

"Egypt - one of the few Arab powers that is not endowed with vast oil wealth - has been a key western ally in the region since it signed the Camp David peace treaty with Israel in 1979, and is consequently the recipient of billions of dollars of American military aid," notes Daily Telegraph executive foreign editor Con Coughlin (23 May 2008).

However, he points out that Israel is "America's favoured regional proxy." Coughlin mentions the need for Washington's influence on Cairo, writing that "Egypt is the country whose revived interest in nuclear energy is causing the most concern and which could cause a radical shift in the regional balance of power."

Egypt has yet to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which is aimed at reducing the nuclear threat, notes an article in the Times by Douglas Hurd, Malcolm Rifkind, David Owen, and George Robertson (30 June 2008).

The newspaper's foreign editor Richard Beeston is critical of the US record over Egypt, noting that George Bush presided over a "failed experiment in democracy" there (21 November 2008).

Hamilton asks whether Israel should now be treated as any other ally of the West, such as Egypt, as it is "a Middle East state with its own interest, its particular level of corruption, its internal divisions, its own agenda and with its own threats to regional stability" (15 May 2008).

'War on Terror'

Egypt crops up relatively frequently in connection with the 'War on Terror,' primary because a number of Egyptians have become designated in the popular media as globally renowned terrorists or terrorist sympathisers.

For example, Ayman al-Zawahiri is very commonly identified in the British press as Egyptian, who Amir Taheri in the Daily Telegraph reports has "been calling on militants to refocus their efforts on winning power in Muslim countries such as India, which is home to 150 million Muslims, and thus the largest 'Muslim' country in the world, ahead of Indonesia" (28 November 2008).

According to Victoria Clark in the Independent, al-Zawahiri is "often billed as the real brains" (18 December 2008)

Another such figure is Abu Hamza al-Masri, who lived in Britain and Egypt after fighting in Afghanistan during the 1980s, reports Independent defence correspondent Kim Sengupta (25 February 2009). Some like him returned to ordinary lives, but others "went on to raise the banner of fundamentalism and some of them have returned to Afghanistan to fight the latest batch of infidels."

Tony Blair would not extradite Abu Hamza to Egypt (a country which carries "an Amnesty International health warning") because of its "enthusiasm for torture," writes Daily Mail columnist Richard Littlejohn (11 July 2008).

Sun columnist Jon Gaunt identifies another such figure: "Hany Youssef is on a UN list of suspected al-Qaeda terrorists but our government has allowed him to stay here. You pay the bills" (17 October 2008).

Guardian home affairs editor Alan Travis mentions Yusuf al-Qaradawi as one of the "foreign-born 'preachers of hate'" (28 October 2008), as part of a growing list to which the Mail adds Yasser Al-Sirri (3 September 2008).

However, not all prominent 'Islamic' figures are mistrusted or despised; Guardian columnist and associate editor Seumas Milne notes that the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Ali Gomaa, has support in Britain, before adding that this is because he is "appointed by the pro-western Mubarak dictatorship" (17 July 2008).

Bombings and kidnappings in Iraq "are blamed on stray Saudis or Egyptians, not indigenous Iraqis," which is a "convenient delusion," writes Guardian columnist Peter Preston (23 June 2008).

Suez

Many commentators remember the 1956 Suez crisis, often in connection with British involvement in the Iraq invasion, which Andrew Pierce in the Daily Telegraph notes was "the most disastrous British foreign policy foray since Suez" (20 February 2009), as does a Daily Mail editorial (19 November 2008). Guardian security editor Richard Norton-Taylor refers to Iraq as Britain's "most controversial operation" since Suez (17 April 2009).

Tony Benn merely notes in the Daily Mirror that "in 1956, Britain and France in collusion with Israel launched an attack upon Egypt" (1 January 2009), while Daily Express columnist David Robson says that like Tony Blair, "Anthony Eden...led us into a misguided Middle East war" (17 May 2008).

However, according to Andrew Roberts in the Express: "Most Britons supported the retaking of the Suez Canal and therefore there was no need for Eden's collusion plot to justify it" (2 June 2008). Guardian columnist Simon Jenkins reiterates this point, saying "Eden was never so popular as during the Suez debacle" (21 November 2008).

Financial Times columnist Philip Stephens notes that "it was the US opposition, of course, that turned Suez into a humiliation for Britain and France" (25 January 2008).

Ancient Egypt

From time to time, ancient Egypt is mentioned in the British press, most frequently in revered terms. Egypt has "historical intrigue," writes Sathnam Sanghera in the Times (2 December 2008). "Luxor - or Thebes - was the capital of the Egyptian empire for almost 1,000 years, and a place of incredible riches," says Carol Davies in the Sun (25 October 2008).

Robert Hardman notes in the Daily Mail that "for thousands of years, the title [of world's tallest building] belonged to the Great Pyramid of Giza (481ft or 147m)", but in "1311AD, when it was overtaken by Lincoln Cathedral" (3 September 2008).

Ancient Egypt's other great monument, the Sphinx - "the most famous sculpture in Africa" - "seems to be slowly melting back into the desert out of which it was carved," reports Jonathan Jones in the Guardian (27 October 2008). "Africa and Europe meet between the paws of the Sphinx," he adds.

Influence of Egyptian Art

Neil Norman notes in the Daily Express that "the iconography of ancient Egypt has had an extraordinary influence on art," adding that "design, architecture, painting, films and literature can all boast their Egyptian periods" (4 August 2008).

He continues that "the Egyptian gods like Osiris, Isis and the jackal-headed Anubis occur frequently in books and films...Even opera buffs are catered for with Verdi's Aida or Philip Glass's Akhnaten, inspired by the hermaphrodite Pharaoh of Egypt."

The Greeks "developed skills the Egyptians never explored - but they did this entirely on the back of the Egyptian achievement," writes Jonathan Jones in the Guardian (27 October 2008). "It is in Egyptian art that proportion, geometry and the idea of beauty first appear."

Joanna Pitman notes in the Times that "Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, Lebanon, Syria and Algeria...have had long and rich visual arts traditions going back several centuries, but in the last hundred years, governments and rulers have [attempted] to bring back Western and Far Eastern aesthetics" (27 January 2009).

Other Legacies

Gastronomic tips can be gleaned from ancient Egyptian texts for the economically tough times, says Independent columnist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (20 November 2008). "I speak of pulses - dependable, nourishing, still amazingly cheap, resistant, long lasting and not boring, not if you know them as well as many of us do."

Dominic Sandbrook in the Evening Standard reports practices that are supposedly good for baldness, noting that "the Egyptians rubbed a strange variety of substances into their scalps, from rancid crocodile, snake and lion fat to powdered dogs' toes and asses' hooves" (4 June 2008).

Tourism

Holidays in Egypt are a popular subject in the British press, particularly the tabloids, which rarely mention political aspects of the country alongside any tourist prospects there. There is rarely a bad word to be said about holidaying in Egypt.

Paula Hawkins in the Times notes the significant link between security and tourism, but notes that "tourism numbers to Egypt climbed more than 20 per cent in 2006, rising to 11 million in 2007, more than a million of whom came from the UK" (20 March 2009).

Nonetheless, Daily Mirror columnist Kevin Maguire sounds a note of caution for British holidaymakers in Bali or Egypt about al-Qaeda strikes, about which he predicts that "there will be a next time" (6 May 2009).

Egypt's government "relies on foreign tourism for revenue and has tried to protect visitors after a series of deadly al-Qaeda hotel bombings in Sinai in the past five years," reports Times Middle East correspondent James Hider.

"Arab jihadists have long sought to ruin tourism in Egypt," states Michael Burleigh in the Daily Mail, citing 1997 when "they killed 63 people in Luxor, one of Egypt's most important tourist sites" (28 November 2008).

Egypt, particularly the Red Sea coast, "is a place with guaranteed sunshine without having to fly for ever," writes Tim Vincent in the Mail (28 January 2009). He adds that "my favourite moments were sitting outside at dusk, glass of wine in hand, staring at the gorgeous vista as the sun vanished and 'Red Sea' became a near-literal description."

Hannah Grant writes in the Daily Express: "For the more adventurous, Sharm El Sheikh has so much to offer. Every form of water sport is available, not to mention horse and camel riding and fascinating desert safaris. There are even two PGA Championship golf courses. But there is one activity that visitors simply can't afford to miss: diving" (9 August 2008).

"The strong euro has put holidaymakers off European breaks and Turkey and Egypt have become the new hotspots, replacing Spain and Greece as the fastest growing destinations," writes Julia Kollewe in the Guardian (14 August 2008).

Bob Watson in the Express focuses on golf as a star attraction: "In truth, golfing is becoming a serious business in Egypt. The country already offers 15 courses, and a further 18 are in the hands of earth-movers and architects" (4 October 2008).

Watson adds that "the emphasis is still on all-round family fun, with thermal spas and beauty treatments for golfing widows, plus swimming with dolphins, snorkelling over coral reefs, quad-biking and camel-riding for the golfing orphans."

Hurghada "isn't the prettiest place [but] if it's cheap booze and smokes you're after, look no further," says Irvine Hunter in the Daily Star (13 December 2008). Some visitors remind readers that not all holidaying in Egypt is based on the coast. Emily Bamber notes in the Express that "there's no better way to get to grips with ancient Egypt than on a Nile cruise" (1 November 2008).