

Nov 04, 2016 by *Gordon Robison*

... in the year of election ^[1]

Amman, Jordan

Last week in London everyone, and I really do mean everyone, asked me if I'd voted. I don't just mean my friends, I'm including taxi drivers, the woman next to me at the theater, the old colleague I bumped into at the airport and the new acquaintances at a dinner party. It seemed that for Brits hearing an American accent it was the first question to surface, usually accompanied by a remark like 'and I hope you ticked the right box,' there being utterly no doubt about which one that would be.

Here in Amman it is completely different. President Bush has no popular base of support in either Britain or Jordan, but while the British apparently feel it something near a duty to let American visitors know how they feel about him Jordanians seem to believe that not bringing up the subject at all is the politest thing to do.

Another thing that has differed greatly over the last few days is the reaction to the Bin Laden tape aired by Al-Jazeera over the weekend. CNN went with wall-to-wall coverage of the tape for close to three hours and gave it huge chunks of airtime for about six hours thereafter. BBC World did about 40 minutes of breaking news on the tape. Al-Hurra, meanwhile, was showing a documentary and Al-Arabiya had only a brief mention of it buried deep within their newscasts. Al-Jazeera led with the story. They, after all, were the ones with the tape.

That last fact probably accounts for much of the initial difference in approach. Western networks were able to use snatches of the tape but Al-Jazeera was no more likely to release it to their direct Arabic-language competitors than CNN would have been to give the tape to Fox. Al-Jazeera did not, however, go into what TV people call 'rolling coverage'. The story led the news for a few hours, then they went back to focusing on what the Arab media are really concerned about just now: Yasser Arafat's departure from Ramallah for a military hospital near Paris, endless speculation about what may be wrong with the 75 year old Palestinian leader and even more pondering of the future of the Palestinian leadership if Arafat either dies or is more or less permanently incapacitated.

The BBC, for the record, led over the weekend with the presidential election in the Ukraine. If Bin Laden's goal was to effect the outcome of today's election it is too early to say whether he succeeded... but there's no question that he got everyone's attention. Disproportionately so, when one considers how others handled the story.

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