

Perception of the Annapolis Conference in Arab Television Channels.

Messages the Arab street got from watching Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya's coverage of the November 2007 Annapolis conference.



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I. Study Objectives

The objective of this study is to understand what messages the Arab street got from the Annapolis conference in November 2007. To measure this, we chose to analyze and compare how the most influential Arab news channels covered the conference: For the purpose of this study, we chose to analyze both Al Jazeera - controlled by the Qatari government- and Al Arabiya – broadcasting from Dubai but controlled by Saudi Arabian interests.

These two channels represent the opinions of two Middle Eastern powers with often conflicting interests (Qatar and Saudi Arabia); they are furthermore widely considered as the agenda setting channels in the Arab world.

The data and analysis presented can therefore be considered as the messages the standard Arab viewers perceived of this conference.

II. Sample and Methodology

The Annapolis conference was held on the 27th of November 2007. All the programs dedicated to this meeting from the 26th till the 30th of November were analyzed.

Programs were categorized ¹into:

- Newscasts
- Talk shows
- Live/Special coverage

A team of 7 coders and 2 analysts conducted the study during two weeks. Data was cross-analyzed by two independent teams. As in all studies, a small margin of error can be expected. We estimate this at less than 4%.

¹ A complete list of selected programs and newscasts can be found in the Appendix section

III. Executive Summary

Arab viewers watching the trend setting Al-Arabiya or Al-Jazeera television channels had the choice between two different visions (one positive and one critical) on the objectives of the 2007 Annapolis conference, but only one message on its end results; it failed.

Viewers tuned to Al-Arabiya got an ambiguous message on the benefits and utility of this conference. The channel's reporters and presenters were equally split between optimistic (7% of the time) and critical (10%). This ambiguity was less obvious in the editorial line chosen by the channel in order to name the conference; 14% of the time it included the adjective "peace", whereas Al-Jazeera used it less than 2% of the time. The latter's viewers were usually presented with a much more one sided and negative perspective; 19% of Al-Jazeera's opinions were critical, and none were positive. These channel differences were also obvious in the opinions expressed by guests and leaders covered; 51% were positive in Al-Arabiya vs. 51% negative in Al-Jazeera.

These differences faded on the 28th of November after the conference ended, as both channels were criticizing its outcomes. Al-Arabiya's reporters were citing the lack of a final document as a sign of failure, whereas their colleagues at Al-Jazeera were more philosophical; peace conferences always fail (because of Israel's stubbornness)

This common stance was also reflected on the perception of who could be the main beneficiary of this meeting. Both channels and their guests agreed on Israel and the United States as profiting the most. The Palestinians were more often than none considered as not gaining anything. Interestingly, viewers watching Al-Arabiya could have also deducted that Syria² could be one of the beneficiaries.

These varying channel strategies were also reflected in the type of events covered in the newscasts. Al-Arabiya chose to cover events happening at the conference; meetings and speeches, whereas Al-Jazeera focused on presenting its viewers with an "outsider's view"; protests and interviews of analysts were preferred.

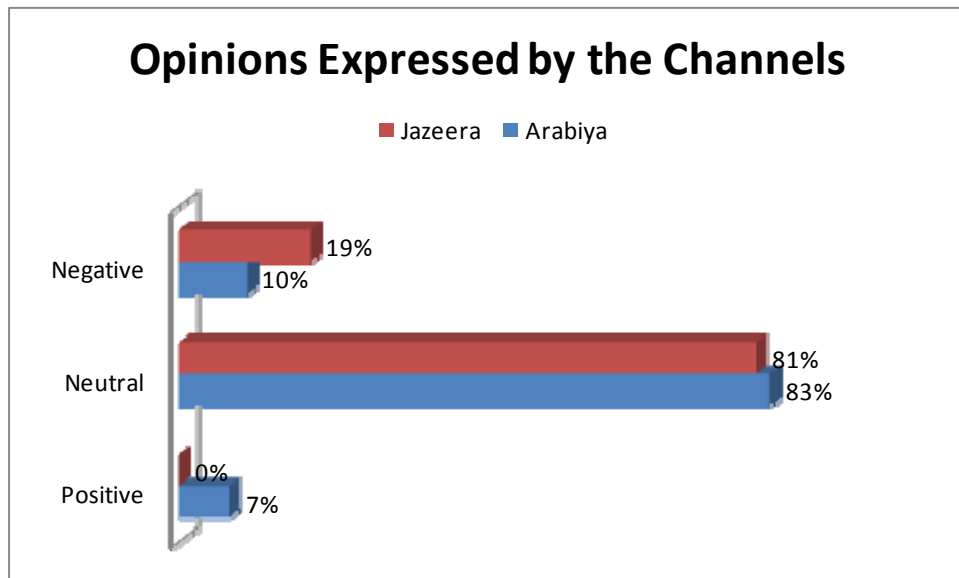
² Syria holds a tense relationship with Al-Arabiya's sponsor; Saudi Arabia.

IV. Coverage Analysis

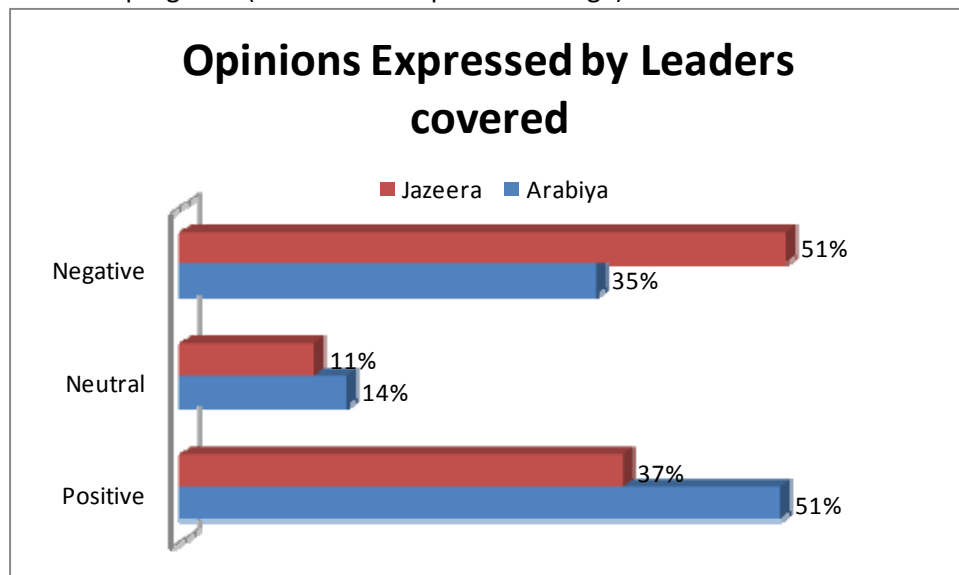
A. Opinions Expressed

If both channels tried to maintain a certain level of professionalism and neutrality in the coverage of the conference, a clear difference of perception can be found.

If Al-Jazeera was more often negative (19% of the time), Al-Arabiya's positioning was more ambiguous (7% positive vs. 10% negative). This can either reflect a concerted attempt by the channel to maintain a neutral stance, or more probably a reflection of Saudi Arabia's own ambiguous stances on the conference.



On the other hand, there were clear differences between the types of leaders the channels selected to cover in their newscasts or programs (talk shows or special coverage).



Al-Arabiya's commentators and presenters were usually hoping for peace to be achieved during the Annapolis conference, but were also skeptical of the real chances of this happening.

On the 26 November, during Al-Arabiya's main political talk show -Panorama- reporter Khaled Ouais estimated that the Annapolis peace process between the Palestinians and the Israelis was the only chance for a global peace in the Middle East.

By the day of the conference on the 27th, the mood started to change as reports out of Annapolis were more cautious. Reporter Pierre Ghanem was for example wondering if any breakthrough was really possible, whereas his colleague Azzam Mayssouyn estimated that the United States needed a breakthrough to enlighten George Bush's presidency and that Israel wanted peace, but not its requirements.

This optimism was clearly down after the conference. On the 28th, reporter Issac Khssaouna saw in the lack of a final document a sign of failure, and on the 30th, presenter Nadia Al Boulaissi asked Toni Blair to confirm that the lack of details in the Annapolis final document meant the failure of the peace process.

Al-Jazeera's editorial line was on the other hand more pessimistic from the beginning. News presenter Nasser Yassine was on the 26th of November estimating that if Israel wanted peace, it did not want its requirements.

On the day of the conference, many comments criticized the Palestinian side. Talk show presenter (in *Ma Waraka Al Khabar* program) Layla Chaykhli estimated that the conference's aim was to target the Arabs and that the Palestinians were the tool to get there. Star presenter Fayssal Al Qassem in his *Al Ittijah Al Mouakess* program talked about the pro-Mahmoud Abbas ³Palestinian police "crushing" anti Annapolis protesters, and reporter Walid Al Omary commented on Ehud Olmert's ⁴ statement that Israel's situation had changed since 1967⁵ by expecting that Israel would not want to withdraw from the West Bank.

After the conference, Al-Jazeera's reporters and presenters tried to explain the reasons for its "failure". Reporter Wajd Wakfy estimated that the differences between Ehud Olmert and Mahmoud Abbas were too large, and her colleague Nasser Yassine analyzed that historically conferences on Palestinians/Israeli peace always failed; Annapolis' fate could therefore only be similar.

³ Palestinian president

⁴ Israeli prime minister

⁵ Israel's control of the West Bank

B. (Re)Naming the conference

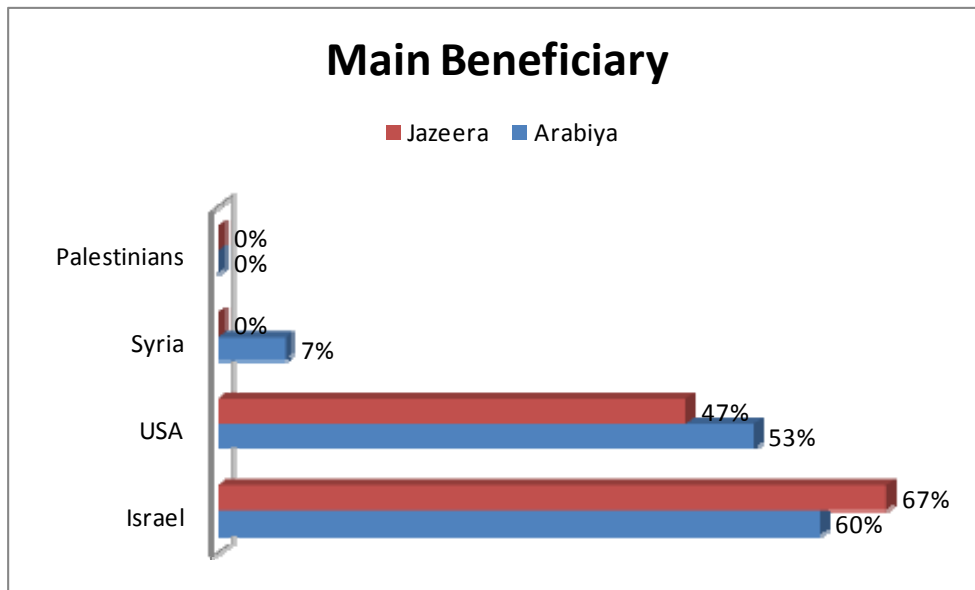
We identified 6 denominations used by the channels and their guests that express an open or an undeclared positioning of the conference. These words were used as adjectives to the “Annapolis conference” or “Annapolis meeting” most used denominations.

Terms used in the <u>naming of the conference</u>	Arabiya	Jazeera
"Peace"	14%	2%
"International"	7%	6%
"Reduced"	0%	1%
"Large/Global"	1%	-
"Road Map"	1%	-
"Preparatory"	1%	-

If both channels equally used the “international” or Middle Eastern term, the adjective of “Peace” was mainly utilized by or in Al-Arabiya (14% vs Al Jazeera’s 2%) Unexpectedly, the definition of road map was very rarely utilized.

C. Perceived winners

There was a general consensus in the Arab media that Israel and the United States were the main beneficiaries of the conference. The Palestinian side was largely seen as none profiting. Interestingly, a few comments in Al-Arabiya mentioned Syria as a key beneficiary (in light of a possible Syrian – Israeli peace process track)



Total larger than 100% as more than one beneficiary possible

D. Guests and Leaders covered

Palestine was equally covered by both channels, Israeli opinions were mainly highlighted by the more *anti-Israeli*⁶ Al-Jazeera (14.3% vs. 7.5% for Al-Arabiya) whereas Iranian leaders were more visible in the *anti-Iranian*⁷ Al-Arabiya.

Al-Jazeera’s coverage of French stances should not be a surprise, as relations between Qatar and France’s Sarkozy were at the time of the conference in a honey moon state⁸.

	Arabiya	Jazeera
Palestine	40.0%	41.1%
United States	12.5%	10.7%
Egypt	10.0%	8.9%
Israel	7.5%	14.3%
Saudi Arabia	7.5%	3.6%
Lebanon	5.0%	8.9%
Jordan	5.0%	5.4%
Iran	5.0%	
Syria	2.5%	1.8%
European Union	2.5%	
United Kingdom	2.5%	
France		1.8%
Unidentified		3.6%

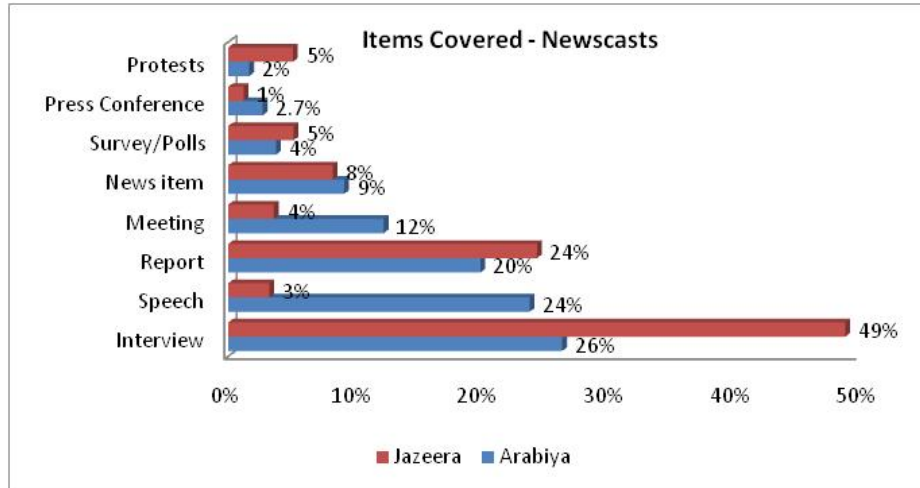
⁶ As generally perceived by the Arab public opinion

⁷ In reference to Saudi Arabia; Al-Arabiya’s sponsor

⁸ Qatar was the honorary guest on France’s national holiday on the 14th of July, 2007. The son of the Emir of Qatar is currently being trained in a French army school.

E. Items covered

Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya had two radically different approaches on covering the conference in their newscasts. When Al-Arabiya had more of an *insider* coverage (meetings and the resulting speeches), Al-Jazeera provided its viewers with an *outsider’s* view (coverage of protests and interviews of analysts)



This shows that Al-Arabiya was more into providing a factual coverage of the event (and maybe less viewer attractive), whereas Al-Jazeera was concentrating on showing the consequences (the protests) and opinions of many analysts (most of them criticizing the conference).

V. Appendix

A. Selected programs and newscasts

Al-Arabiya	
Program Name	Type
12hGMT newscast	Newscast
13hGMT newscast	Newscast
20hGMT newscast	Newscast
<i>Al Sulta Al Rabia3</i>	Talk Show
<i>Panorama</i>	Talk Show
<i>Bi Saraha</i>	Talk Show
<i>Special Interview</i>	Talk Show
<i>End of Week</i>	Review Program
<i>Special Coverage of the Annapolis Conference</i>	Live/Special program

Al-Jazeera	
Program Name	Type
12hGMT newscast	Newscast
Al ittijah Al Mouakess	Newscast
Ma Waraka Al Khabar	Newscast
<i>Hassad Al Youm</i>	Talk Show
<i>Special Coverage of the Annapolis Conference</i>	Live/Special program

B. Al-Arabiya's Guests & Leaders

	Name	Country	Region	TS	NEWS	LIVE	SPECIAL	OTHER
1	Blair Toni	United Kingdom	Europe	X	-	-	-	-
2	Bush Georges	United States	North America	X	X	-	X	X
3	Solana Javier	European Union	Europe	X	-	-	-	-
4	ابو العينين سلطان	Palestine	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
5	اشتهيه محمد	Palestine	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
6	ال سعود سعود الفيصل بن عبد العزيز	Saudi Arabia	Middle East	X	X	-	-	-
7	الجرباوي علي	Palestine	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
8	الطريفي عادل	Saudi Arabia	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
9	الطيني احمد	Israel	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
10	العمري غيث	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
11	الغول كايد	Palestine	Middle East	X	-	-	-	-
12	المصري طاهر	Jordan	Middle East	X	-	-	-	-
13	اولمرت ايهود	Israel	Middle East	-	X	-	X	X
14	برهوم فوزي	Palestine	Middle East	-	-	-	-	X
15	بيلوتيه مايكل	United States	North America	X	-	-	-	-
16	حماد نمر	Palestine	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
17	حمزاوي عمرو	Egypt	Middle East	X	-	-	-	-
18	خاشقجي جمال	Saudi Arabia	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
19	خامنئي علي	Iran	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
20	دحلان محمد	Palestine	Middle East	X	-	-	-	-
21	شعث نبيل	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
22	عباس محمود	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	X	X
23	عبد الجواد جمال	Egypt	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
24	عبد الله عبد الله	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
25	عبد ربه ياسر	Palestine	Middle East	X	-	-	X	-
26	عمرو نبيل	Palestine	Middle East	X	-	-	-	-
27	غريب ادموند	Lebanon	Middle East	X	-	-	-	-
28	قريع احمد	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
29	ليفني تسيبي	Israel	Middle East	X	-	-	-	-
30	موسى عمرو	Egypt	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
31	نجاد محمود احمدي	Iran	Middle East	-	-	-	-	X
32	هانلي ستيفن	United States	North America	-	X	-	-	-
33	هنية اسماعيل	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	-	X
34	حتي ناصيف	Lebanon	Middle East	X	-	-	-	-
35	عميرة حنا	Palestine	Middle East	X	-	-	-	-
36	مراد محمود	Egypt	Africa	X	-	-	-	-
37	بلتية مايكل	United States	North America	-	X	-	-	-
38	الصايف فايز	Syria	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
39	الطراونة فايز	Jordan	-	-	-	-	X	-
40	روس دنيس	United States	North America	-	X	-	-	-

C. Al-Jazeera's Guests and Leaders

	Name	Country	Region	TS	NEWS	LIVE	SPECIAL	OTHER
1	Bush Georges	United States	North America	-	-	X	-	-
2	Rice Condoleeza	United States	North America	-	X	-	-	-
3	ابو ليلى خليل	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
4	افنديري اوري	Israel	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
5	البرغوثي مصطفى	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	X	-
6	البطش خالد	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
7	الجبير عادل	Saudi Arabia	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
8	الحية خليل	Palestine	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
9	الخطيب غسان	Palestine	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
10	الزهار محمود	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
11	المالكي رياض	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
12	الهندي محمد	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
13	اورون اميرة	Israel	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
14	اولمرت ايهود	Israel	Middle East	-	-	X	-	-
15	بحر احمد	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
16	بشارة عزمي	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	X	-
17	بيلوته مايكل	United States	North America	-	-	-	X	-
18	بيلين يوسي	Israel	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
19	جنبلط وليد	Lebanon	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
20	حماد نمر	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
21	حمزاوي عمرو	Egypt	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
22	حواتمة نايف	Jordan	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
23	خاشقجي جمال	Saudi Arabia	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
24	رجا انور	Palestine	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
25	سعيد عبد المنعم	Egypt	Middle East	X	-	-	-	-
26	شحادة جميل	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
27	صلوخ فوزي	Lebanon	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
28	عباس محمود	Palestine	Middle East	-	-	X	-	-
29	عبد المجيد وحيد	Egypt	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
30	عبد ربه ياسر	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
31	عريقات صائب	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	X	-
32	عطوان عبد الباري	Palestine	Middle East	X	-	-	-	-
33	عمرو نبيل	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	X	-
34	ففتت احمد	Lebanon	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
35	قنديل عبد الحليم	Egypt	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
36	ليفني تسيبي	Israel	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
37	مجدلاوي جميل	Palestine	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
38	مخول عصام	Israel	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
39	ملوح عبد الرحيم	Palestine	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
40	هنية اسماعيل	Palestine	Middle East	-	-	X	-	-
41	يوسف احمد	Palestine	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
42	ميونيه فيليب	France	Europe	-	X	-	-	-
43	جونز جيمس	United States	North America	-	X	-	-	-
44	مالي روبرت	United States	North America	-	X	-	-	-
45	الحمد جواد	Jordan	-	-	X	-	-	-
46	ابو زيد كارين	-	-	-	X	-	-	-
47	ليفيريت فلينت	United States	North America	-	X	-	-	-
48	ابو عودة عدنان	Jordan	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
49	شكري عز الدين	Israel	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
50	حدرج حسن	Lebanon	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
51	لقمان جورج	-	-	-	-	-	X	-
52	الاشعل عبد الله	Egypt	Middle East	-	-	-	X	-
53	نزال جمال	Palestine	Middle East	X	-	-	-	-
54	قنديل ناصر	Lebanon	Middle East	X	-	-	-	-
55	الجراد خلف	Syria	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-
56	ابراموفيتش الون	Israel	Middle East	-	X	-	-	-

VI. About Comtrax Solutions

An innovative company

Comtrax Solutions is a Beirut based company specializing in the strategic and content analysis of Arab television. We help our clients build efficient grids, identify problems within programs and reach specific markets. Our methodology is based on innovative content analysis and research models.

An intimate knowledge of the Arab Media world

Our clients include television channels, governments and advertising companies, such as:

Al-Arabiya, New TV, Brand Central Ltd, Saatchi & Saatchi, Quantum, the Lebanese Ministry of Information and various foreign embassies in the Arab world.

A recognized expertise

Our studies and analysis have been published in the most prestigious magazines of the profession: Campaign Middle East, Arab Ad, Middle East Broadcasting Journal, Communicate, An Nahar, Al Rai Al Aam... Comtrax Solutions is also a member of the Radio and Television News Directors Association.

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