

**TRANSCRIPT OF JORDANIAN STATE TELEVISION INTERVIEW
WITH DR. JAMES ZOGBY OF THE ARAB AMERICAN INSTITUTE
BY DR. WALID MUHAMMAD AL-SADI (C. 1990)**

DR. JAMES ZOGBY

...Last election, seven cities elected Arab American mayors, bringing our total to 24 nationally. And in 1988, in nine Democratic Party state conventions, we passed overwhelmingly platform planks calling for Palestinian statehood. They were passed with leadership by Arab Americans, but, with cooperation, [by] progressive Jews. All across the country, this relationship is growing, developing, and making, ah, I think, a deep impact in American society.

You know, the *Intifāḍah* has not only had an impact here. Ah, the *Intifāḍah* has transformed the Palestinian personality. It's also transforming, in a significant way, the Israeli personality. It is having, simultaneously, an impact in America. Not only on the American psyche — the public opinion polls are dramatic in showing new support for Palestinian rights and new questioning about the U S relationship with Israel — [but] at the same time, they're inspiring Arab Americans and progressive Jews — blacks, church leadership, Latinos, and a whole array of constituencies around the country — to work harder for Palestinian rights, and to change American policy on the Middle East. We have been winning and I think we will win.

You know, I want to just add something here, and that is that there is a myth, if you will, and a misperception about the power of Jews and their capabilities in America. Ah, we've accepted that myth historically. Ah, we allowed them to define themselves as more intelligent than we, more competent than we, more able to win than we. We accepted a kind of defeatist sense about ourselves, you know? Ah, "They'll always win, we always lose," and so our people went into business, they [Jews] went into politics. But we have broken through that myth. We're showing that Arab Americans are every bit as intelligent as Jewish Americans, every bit as competent as Jewish Americans, every bit as able to win in politics as Jewish Americans. And as we gain confidence, the natural skills and the ability — the sense of organization we have — we're no less capable of being organized than Jews. We are doing it every day and we're winning every day, and making deep inroads all across the country. Today, they [the Jews] have control of the Hill, but even their control of Capitol Hill is rather flimsy. They have big money that they spend and have fear on their side. Some politicians are afraid of them, but while they have fear on their side, we have friends on our side. I'd rather have friends than people who are afraid of me, because friends in the end will win out over fear. We're winning friends and breaking through the fear that they have used to control the Hill for too many years.

DR. WALID MUHAMMAD SADI

Well, Dr. Zogby, this is most encouraging. Ah — ah, I'll be frank with you. Most have given up on America ever siding with them, and you are portraying to us a very encouraging picture. Now, and you're suggesting, as well, that support for Israel in the United States is eroding from the blacks, church groups, and, perhaps, academicians, and what have you. Now, the point is this: how can we translate this development, this positive development, into deeds? Because this — 'til this moment, this point in time, and although President [George H. W.] Bush has — has a reputation of being a president who is very much involved, very much interested in evens the of the Middle

East, yet so much time has lapsed, and none of this that you're suggesting, the development in a positive direction, had a bearing on the peace process. We still have a stalemate. You think what you're suggesting is something that we can expect to harvest in the future or — or — or how long do we have to wait?

ZOGBY

Well, I think it — that's a very complicated question and it will require a very long answer. I'll try to be brief. I think that to pull the question apart for a moment, um, I'm not fully confident at the present time that the "peace process," as you term, it is really a peace process. I think it's a fishing expedition and I don't think it's as serious as we would like it to be. We haven't reached the critical juncture yet, uh, in American policy-making. Uh, we're — we're as serious as we would like our government to be, uh, in this process. And at the same time, the Israelis have not yet begun to pay as deep a price domestically, uh, for the occupation. Uh, at the same time, I'm not certain that from the Arab side, enough is being done, ah, to challenge both Israel and America, ah, on both America's role in the region and — and also Israeli policy. But to now go to the next level of the question: what will be done? I am confident that the same coalition that we built in America, that helped us end the war in Vietnam, that has challenged administration policy in South Africa, that has put restraints on American policy in Central America — with Nicaragua, with El Salvador, with Guatemala, Honduras, and has called for a human rights policy rather than a war policy — and that the same coalition that effectively brought forward democratic change in the Philippines because of — of the way we were able to alienate America from [President Ferdinand] Marcos, and change in, uh, Jamaica change in, uh, [the] Dominican Republic, change in so many other parts of the world, we have helped build a coalition in America for peace, for human rights, and for a foreign policy based on the best interests of the American people. Ah, that coalition is beginning now to address the Middle East, and I'm confident that coalition can win. It needs help from here [in Jordan and from the Arab world]. I don't think that our playing around with "five points," "10 points," "1.3 points," whatever, is in our interest. I think that to some extent we have by accepting, ah, the frame of reference that Israel has created, and to some extent the administration has created, that we've done ourselves a disservice. I don't think we're as confident in this part of the world of the rightness of our position and of our collective strength *vis-à-vis* America and Israel, as we ought to be. Um, I think if we were, we would accelerate the process. The challenge that we must offer from here to America is — is greater. And I think it will yet come greater than it is at present, but, at the same time, the progressive, ah, development in America, ah, that is visible, that is happening every day, is going to make changes in America whether you do anything here differently or not, uh, and in a — in a — in a very important way.

I think that the *Intifādah* is accelerating the process for us in America, but at the same time, other developments are taking place as well. The new East-West *rapprochement*. It may make life a little more difficult in this region in the short run, but in the long run, you know, the removal of East-West tension, the call for a cut in the arms, ah, expenditures from the U.S., side is going to have an impact on Israel — [an] impact on the Israeli defense, and an impact on, uh — I think, at the same time — on Israel's economy. Uh, this year, Israel not only got the \$3 billion it gets, it got an additional almost two thirds of a billion, partly with SDI monies, partly with the other forms of research and development around military, uh, programs. Those programs are gonna' come under closer scrutiny. Those programs are gonna' be cut in the years to come. Israel is an economic basket case. It is about the equivalent of, in some instances, of Bangladesh — it cannot survive

without tremendous infusion of foreign monies. And I'm not confident that given the crisis in America, our economic crisis, given the new East-West relationship, that those monies are gonna' be as free and forthcoming to Israel, ah, as Israel depends on it coming. So, ah — I — I'm looking at a lot of things developing, but the role developing in a very positive direction. And, ah, I think that we're on a track to victory.

SADI

Well, Dr. Zogby, you say something very interesting about the relaxation, East-West relaxation, or, as I see it, this is a two-edged sword. Uh, you think the Arab bargaining position with the America, would it be effected negatively or positively by the relaxation between the East and the West? In other words, at one time or another, uh, the United States was, uh, developing a good solid relationship with some other countries on the basis of, uh, to stem the — the flow of Communism. If that danger is eliminated, uh, would that necessarily mean that America would — America's interests in the Arab world would decrease? I would like your comments on that.

ZOGBY

Well, I think, more importantly than the relationship America had with some Arab States, uh, in stemming Communism or whatever in the region, was the U.S.-Israel relationship in the same way. Uh, we viewed Israel as the frontline in this entire struggle. That is going to come — become, I think, something that is going to be questioned, ah, in the next number of years, but, at the same time, uh, as Israel's role changes as a result of the relaxation of tension, so, too, will the Arab world change with the relaxation of tension. Um, the PLO in Syria will no longer be baited, uh, in America as the "Soviet agents," because they're not, and never have been. The PLO is not a Soviet agent in the region. It's gonna' be difficult for Israel to paint the PLO into that corner. Uh, at the same time, I think, ah, we need to look at the fact that the pro-democracy movements have inspired Americans in a fascinating way. We need to identify ourselves in the context of that pro-democracy movement. What happened in Algeria, what's happening in Tunisia, what is clearly happening here in Jordan, in Yemen, what is happening in the occupied territories with the *Intifādah*, and what is happening in the Palestinian movement generally is a pro-democracy movement. The extent to which we develop not only that sense of ourselves but also those relationships. We need to be reaching out to Lech Wałęsa. We need to be reaching out to [Alexander] Dubček [of the Czech Republic]. We need to be reaching out to the Eastern European new democracies and developing a relationship with them as a kind of a bridge to the new sense of democratic reform that has inspired Americans, and can transform American attitudes towards, I think, the middle East in a very serious way. It is Israel today that is the anti-democratic force in the Middle East. That is a significant statement that we need to develop. It is Israel today that is behaving in the West bank and Gaza, and among its own citizens, as Ceaușescu was operating in Romania, or as — as the East German Democratic Party, or Communist party, in the German Democratic Republic when the republic was behaving [like that] towards its own people. We need to be casting the image that way, because that's reality and that will win influence. And, I think, ah, friends in America.

SADI

Dr. Zogby, uh, would you agree that there are physical constraints facing your organization [the Arab American Institute] in the sense that the number of, uh, Arab Americans is much less than Jewish Americans, uh, their presence in the mass media — whether it's television, or newspapers,

and the academic world — is much, much lesser. Now, how do you expect a lesser number of Arab Americans to combat and effect very effective Jewish machinery in — in America, on all levels — political academic, uh, press, television? For example, uh, this is a tangent question. The *Intifāḍah* is being portrayed less and less on American television, ah, because — simply because of the control by the, uh, Jewish Americans over the mass media. Now, how — what program do you have to combat this phenomenon and how do you expect to ever reach a stage where you can be on par and — in terms of — of effect on par with the Jewish lobby groups?

ZOGBY

Well, number one, a number of points I have to make. First of all, ah, the relative difference in the numbers in our communities, ah, is not important in a real sense. All Jews are not unified in their support of Israel. The debate within the Jewish community is growing. And, in fact, a significant number of — of American Jews, uh, almost a half, are kind of dropouts to the whole organized sense of Jewish organization. Ah, I can remember a big march I participated in a number of years ago, [a] civil rights and peace march, that included Arab Americans and Middle East issues. Uh, the organized Jewish community said, “We won’t march and no Jews will march.” There were tens of thousands of American Jews who marched, who marched with us, calling for peace in the Middle East, who marched with the Salvadorians calling for human rights and El Salvador, marched with the environmentalist’s and marched with blacks and marched with everyone else. American Jews are a political constituency, a part of the American fabric of society, that are spread throughout the society and are not controlled by the Israel lobby. There is a profound difference between the Israel lobby and American Jews.

Number two, Jews do not control the media in America. There are a lot of American Jews who’ve gone into that area of work, especially into films, but we find that the press in America is a democratic press. When we have a good story, they report a good story. The *Intifāḍah* was a good story and still is a good story. In the beginning, it was a daily fact of life in America. We saw more on television about the *Intifāḍah* than maybe any political event up ’til that time.

The — one of the reasons it’s been eclipsed in the media is the events in Romania, the events in Panama, the events in Eastern Europe in general, and other world developments that have in different periods of time, uh, gained greater prominence for a period of time. But the *Intifāḍah* is still there. Bishop [Desmond] Tutu’s, ah, visit to Jerusalem was widely covered, given central coverage in America. As we do things that create a good story, we get good coverage. Uh, an example very recently: uh, some elements in David Dinkins’ mayoral campaign in New York, uh, some elements in his campaign wanted us excluded because they said if the Arab Americans are in we’ll lose Jewish votes. That was a story. Our protest against that and our work to get into that campaign was a story for five solid days in the New York City news media. We became a central issue in New York because some people tried to exclude us. So there isn’t [Jewish] control. We have an ability to move. And I think that if we — as we continue to project more dramatic ways of bringing our cause to the center stage, we’ll win media attention and support in America. If there were a mass mobilization of Palestinians and Jordanians and people of goodwill in this country [Jordan], for example, marching to the [Israeli] border, bringing solidarity movements from around the world, uh — a Jesse Jackson, a Lech Wałęsa, a Bishop Tutu — here to the border, saying, “Let our people in. We want to pray in Jerusalem. We want to go home.” Uh, we would

find the world media would focus on that. It would become the Wenceslas Square or the Berlin Wall of the 1990, uh, era.

We need to find dramatic ways of going to the media, as those young kids in — in the occupied territories, went to the media, and challenged the media and the media responded. But, just so many days in a row you can cover kids throwing stones. We need — we need to up the ante and come up with new and more dramatic ways of bringing this issue forward. And as we do, the media will respond and we will win.

SADI

Dr. Zogby, one final question. The — the predominant view in the Arab world that the Arab world has no chance to change the Israeli attitude towards the peace process, no matter what you think of it, except through Washington. In other words, the heart to — the — the — “the way to Tel Aviv’s heart is through Washington.” Yet, there’s now an — a counter view which says the way to Washington is actually through Tel Aviv. In other words, cultivate, this is what they — this is what the view suggests — we should cultivate Israeli public opinion and make change in Israeli politics, and in due course have an effect on American attitudes. How do you — how do you assess these, ah, counter views? I mean, how do you view about them?

ZOGBY

Both views are interesting and to some extent, correct, but both views are inadequate, fundamentally speaking. Because the way, for example, to change Washington is not by appeasing the current administration, whatever administration it is, or by only dealing administration to administration. Israelis have never done that. The way that they have gone to Washington is not through the administration, but it’s by organizing, as we have, grassroots support and changing Washington. Just an example. Ah, an Israeli head-of-state comes to America. He does not go to the U.N., he does not go to Washington, he goes first to New York and speaks to thousands of cheering people. He then goes to Los Angeles and speaks to thousands of cheering people. He then goes to Chicago and speaks to a big dinner of thousands of cheering people. Then he goes to Washington and they say, “Oh, we should deal with this guy.” An Arab president or an Arab head-of-state comes to America and secrets himself into Washington and meets with the — the president in a closed room and comes out with a press conference and says, “I didn’t get what I wanted.” In fact, many Arab heads-of-state are, in fact, more popular in America than any Israeli head-of-state. For example, if president [Husni] Mubarak [of Egypt] were to come to America, the African American support — because he’s an African head-of-state — the Arab American support, the Muslim support, progressive Jewish support, people in the churches, would create thousands of — of people in audiences around the country who would cheer his support for a real peace process that would include Palestinians. If we could ever get a PLO leader in America, the same would happen. The — the King of Jordan coming to America would find that he has more allies among public opinion in America than any Israeli head-of-state has ever had, because this king [Hussein] is a very popular man in America, but we have never been allowed in America to exploit the public support for your leadership here, as — as the Jews have. Their audiences are, increasingly, only Jewish audiences, but we would find that if an Arab head-of-state came to America, that the support base would be tremendous across the board. In fact, more progressive Jews would come forward than you could imagine. Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, black leadership, church leadership, even union leadership — new union leadership that is breaking from the old mold and

supporting a — a just solution, a two-state solution, uh, would come forward. And by the time that Arab head-of-state came to Washington, Washington would listen in a very different way. So, I do believe we need to go to Washington. I do, because America plays a key role, but the way to go to Washington is not with your — your hands empty and — and your pockets out. The way to come to America is with strength and with conviction and win American public opinion. Transform it into political power, then go to Washington, because Washington would listen, because Washington knows where public opinion is. We've just not exploited it well enough. And I'm confident that we can. We just need, I think, a few more years to make the changes. The changes are happening. In the Jewish community, clearly in the Arab community, we have more confidence today, are winning more victories today than we ever thought possible. And I think we will win. I'm confident we will win, but it will take a few more years.

SADI

Well, thank you very much, Dr. Zogby, if I may conclude by just asking you a simple question, how can the Arab world, uh, improve or develop its relationship with your kind of organizations? What can we do?

ZOGBY

Well, I think that we're already doing it. Uh, the fact that so many of us are coming here, and — and so many of you are coming to meet with us. Our relationship needs to be based on an exchange of ideas based on mutual respect, and learning from each other. Uh, we have so much to learn from this part of the world. Ah, one of the things that I'm — I'm coming here to talk about is the — the desire to bring now, uh, Arab American elected officials to this country, to meet with your parliament, to meet with your — your government. Uh, Arab Americans who are elected, who are second-generation in America, need to know more about this part of the world.

Similarly, I think we can help you a lot. Ah, we can be involved with your election process here because we now know how elections work. Uh, we have ideas and you have ideas, and I think that the process of — of exchange must be accelerated, uh, as we sit together and strategize together, work together, I think that, ah, we will come to understand and respect each other and also, ah, will come to win together. Uh, so I'm looking forward to a — a new era of cooperation, uh, and a deepening sense of relationship, ah, because I think that out of that relationship will come some rather significant victories. You know, we not only have, um, a role to play for our cause, but we Arab Americans have come to feel a real sense of mission for America. We're gonna' save America from itself in the Middle East. We have something to bring to America, to help America. We have values, of family, we have values of small business, we have values of — of religion and faith in God. We have values that — that can help America in this era. And we get those values, obviously, from this part of the world. We need to have a new sense of confidence in this part of the world and a confidence in ourselves.

We are better than we have ever thought we were. We should not allow our enemies to define us. And as we gain confidence and strength, then we will win, because truth is on our side. Justice is on our side, and we are very competent people. We can win.

SADI

Well, thank you very much, Dr. Zogby, for [your] very encouraging, constructive, and enlightening views, and I, ah, hope your stay in Jordan will be also enjoyable for you and [I] look forward to seeing again, thank you very much.

ZOGBY

Thank you, very much.