Media is a Pillar from the States' Pillars

(Translated)

By Abu Saleem al-Hassan – Palestine

Media has always had a clear impact on shaping public awareness, and directing it in a way that pleases the state. It has been instrumental in forming public opinion around particular issues, or thoughts either to highlight or oppose them. In Jahiliyyah Arab society, poetry served as a powerful and prestigious form of media. Leading poets held high social standing, due to their influence, and were sought after by some, and feared by others. As an example, a poet said,

كم خامل سما به إلى العلا، بيت مديح من بليغ ذلق "How many an indolent person has been elevated to the heights, by a house of praise from an eloquent and fluent poet."

مثل بني الأنف ومثل هرم، وكالذي يعرف بالمحلق "Like the sons of Al-Anf and the pyramid, and the one known as Al-Muhallaq."

وكم وكم حط الهجا من ماجد، ذي رتبة قعساً وقدرٍ سمق "And how many a noble person of high rank, and lofty stature has satire struck down."

مثل الرَّبيع وبني العجلان، مع بني نمير جَمَرَات الحَدَق "Such as Al-Rabi' and the sons of Al-Ajlan, with the sons of Namir, are but embers in the gaze."

This poetic excerpt illustrates how eloquent praise can elevate someone of low status to great heights, like the examples of Banu Al-Anf and Al-Muhallaq, and how harsh satire can disgrace the noble, such as Al-Rabi' and Banu Al-Ajlan. It reflects the immense influence of poetry in Arab culture, capable of both raising and ruining reputations.

The Arabs greatly revered tribal affiliation, and few among them would not take pride in their lineage, unless a shame or disgrace was associated with it, such as occurred with Banu al-Anf al-Naqa. However, even they were elevated in status, when praised by a poet, and thus rose in esteem.

قوم هم الأنف والأذناب غيرهم، ومن يسوي بأنف الناقة الذنبَ "They are Al-Anf, the nose, while others are merely tails, and who can compare the nose of a she-camel to its tail?"

This verse praises a once-ridiculed tribe.

Or as Jarir mentioned about Namir, which was a source of pride for those who claimed to be related to it, and he said,

فغض الطرف إنك من نمير، فلا كعباً بلغت ولا كلاباً "Lower your gaze for you are from Namir, you have not surpassed neither the tribe of Ka'b nor dogs."

Before Islam, Arab leaders had their poets, who would glorify their deeds, power, and authority through praise in poetry, while vilifying, belittling, and weakening their enemies through satire. Their poetry would spread among the people, which was exactly what the leaders desired. As a result, kings and leaders would honor these poets greatly, in a manner befitting their actions.

Hassan ibn Thabit was one of them. Hassan used to visit the Ghassanid kings, benefiting them with his poetry and benefiting himself from their wealth. However, when Islam came, he placed his poetry at the service of the Messenger of Allah (saw), using it to defend Islam, spread its risaalah (message), and satirize its enemies.

The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, «اهْجُوا قُرَيْشَا فَإِنَّهُ أَشَدُّ عَلَيْهَا مِنْ رَشْقٍ بِالنَّبْلِ» **"Satirize Quraysh, for it is more severe for them than arrows being shot."** So he sent for Ibn Rawahah and said, «اهْجُهُمْ» **"Satirize them."** He did, but the Prophet (saw) was not satisfied. Then he sent for Ka'b ibn Malik, but again was not satisfied. Then he sent for Hassan ibn Thabit. When Hassan entered, he said, "It is time for you to call upon this lion who strikes with even his tail!" Then he stuck out his tongue and began to move it, and said, "By the One who sent you with the truth, I will tear them apart with my tongue just as leather is torn." The Messenger of Allah (saw) said, «لَا

«تَعْجَلْ فَإِنَّ أَبَا بَكْرٍ أَعْلَمُ قُرَيْشٍ بِأَنْسَابِهَا وَإِنَّ لِي فِيهِمْ نَسَبًا حَتَّى يُلَخِّصَ لَكَ نَسَبِي» **"Do not rush. Abu Bakr knows the genealogies of Quraysh better than anyone, and I have lineage among them. So have him clarify my lineage for you."** Hassan went to Abu Bakr (ra) and then returned, saying, "O Messenger of Allah, he has clarified your lineage for me. By the One who sent you with the truth, I will extract you from them as a hair is pulled from dough." Aishah (ra) said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (saw) say to Hassan, «إِنَّ رُوحَ الْقُدُسِ لاَ يَزَالُ يُؤَيِّدُكَ مَا نَافَحْتَ عَنِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ» **"Ruh al-Qudus will continue to support you as long as you defend Allah and His Messenger."** She also said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (saw) say, «هَجَاهُمْ حَسَّانُ فَشَفَى وَاشْتَفَى» **"Hassan satirized them, and he brought healing and satisfaction."** Narrated by Muslim.

The Messenger of Allah (saw) ordered the killing of certain disbelievers who composed poetry, because of the influence they had on people, against the Muslims. Among them were Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf, and two female singers in Makkah, on the day of the Conquest, whom the Prophet (saw) commanded to be killed.

In our time, we are surrounded by the rapid advancement of technology. At the beginning of this era of modern technology, media consisted mainly of official state outlets, where each country had its own radio stations, television channels, and newspapers, whether fully official, or semi-official. However, as times changed, and the need arose for so-called independent media, often sponsored by states. Then, came the rise of social media, a powerful form of media that is unrestrained by any regulation, though at times deliberately manipulated.

States are now faced with the challenge of trying to control this vast and complex landscape of media outlets. In the Muslim World, most states have adopted a similar approach. It is is keeping government-run media alive in the face of strong competition from satellite channels, and social media platforms. There is no doubt that state-run media has become severely weakened, or appears weak in this competition. There was a time in the past when it was virtually the only media source available to the public, and it was strong for that very reason. It was the sole, or nearly sole, option for viewers, listeners and readers.

Today, these states, while still maintaining their official media institutions, are well aware that such outlets will never surpass a certain ceiling of influence over the public, and that ceiling is quite low. This is because those in power know full well that the competition is fierce, and that government media is plagued by stagnation, bureaucratic complexity, financial and administrative corruption, and a declining level of public trust in the rulers of these countries.

The next step was to launch so-called independent media outlets, through new laws that allowed a limited margin of media activity, involving figures from within the political medium, and others. These media outlets were secretly tied to the state in ways the public could not see, while being given a certain degree of freedom in their media work, which was enough to make them appear entirely different from official state media, in the eyes of the people.

Thus, if it is a news outlet, its news broadcasts would show less focus on the actions of the president and the government, compared to the official state media. Its programs would be bolder, its guests more diverse, and its reporters more professional, and open to a wider range of information sources. If it is an entertainment or variety outlet, it would be more liberal or rather, looser in moral boundaries in its talk shows, the personalities it hosts, and the dramas, songs, and movies it promotes through commercial advertisements. If it is a religious outlet, it presents a conservative image of religion, whether through its hosts, its content, its guests, or the pre-prepared material it broadcasts, whether that material is documentary, narrative, or entertainment in nature.

Regardless of the type or style of these media outlets, they aim to make certain individuals within the institution become well-known, even beyond the channel itself, whether through being hosted by regional or international networks, participating in media forums or festivals, preferably as speakers, or through other means of gaining fame. This, in turn, increases their acceptance and popularity among the local public.

Regardless of the type or style of the media outlet, its personnel are those who are content with the ruling system in the country, even if some of them claim dissatisfaction with the performance of those in power. Nevertheless, all of them are fundamentally satisfied with the system itself, and do not think beyond its framework. So it should come as no surprise if we learn

that certain state agencies maintain close contact with all these media outlets, in order to regulate their output in a way that serves the state's overall direction.

If one of these states succeeds in pushing this media sector to operate on a regional level, so that its audience extends beyond the country itself to the entire region, then that state has achieved a significant breakthrough, that is recognized on the regional stage. It also secures for itself a regional standing in the eyes of its patrons in the West.

What remains is the role of social media, which has entered every home, and become the focus of everyone's attention. It has captured the interest of the general public on a massive scale, and as a result, every entity seeking to influence people has turned its attention to it creating platforms, influencers, YouTubers, pages, and more. Among these entities are the regimes that rule the countries. These regimes have gone beyond merely using social media as direct tools of influence. They have extended their reach to connect with other active platforms as well, ensuring that no content directed at the public strays from the regime's overall policy of shaping public awareness.

However, social media contains security loopholes, that are difficult for regimes to control, and these fall into two main areas:

The first area concerns groups that are neither supporters, nor traditional opponents, of the regime. Instead they are groups that reject the regime's very existence and work to overthrow it. The regimes are unable to control the content these groups produce for the public, as part of their influence aims to dismantle the collective awareness being shaped by the ruling states, whilst building a new direction in public awareness. Therefore, the main effort made by governments to counter the influence of these platforms has been to block their websites, though this has had only a limited effect.

The second area is that of the personal pages and accounts of individuals. On these platforms, people express what's on their minds, and among them are individuals who follow those groups that reject the legitimacy of the current ruling regimes. The general public has become increasingly bold in speaking, and writing, on their pages, which has posed a major challenge to these regimes. In response, the states have taken security measures to intimidate the public, in the hope of closing this gap in the media sphere. These measures include enacting cybercrime laws, conducting security surveillance, and other forms of crackdowns.

Through all these measures, and their connections with media outlets and influential social media pages, the regimes in our countries have built a cohesive media system. The media system is aimed at controlling the direction of public awareness, steering people's emotions in a way that protects the regimes during times of crisis, promoting a specific culture that serves the ruling authorities, and ensures their continued dominance, and combating any other culture they perceive as a threat to their rule, among other objectives.

The impact of this media system became evident during the Gaza War, Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, when media outlets split into two distinct camps:

One camp supported the actions of the resistance in Gaza, or leaned toward it, in its coverage, while the other camp adopted an opposing viewpoint, even if indirectly. The public's rejection of the second camp led them to gravitate toward the first camp, whether those media outlets were local or regional. However, both camps, especially the, first worked on a specific portrayal.

It was portraying the military efforts of the mujahideen in Gaza as a powerful force, capable of standing up to the military might of the Jews, needing only supporting fronts to distract the enemy, without directly entering into war. This is despite the fact that the Jews threw their full military weight into the war on Gaza, calling upon the support of the US, Europe, and regional and non-regional regimes, who backed them with equipment, supplies, and even manpower at times.

As a result, viewers came to expect a decisive victory from the people of Gaza, and a crushing defeat of the Jewish army on the battlefield. However, as the war dragged on, and the killing and destruction increased, a sense of despair began to creep into people's hearts.

People's minds and emotions were then redirected to believe that Gaza's need was purely humanitarian, not military. As a result, public attention became fixated on scenes of destruction, images of tents, displacement, starvation, and the bodies of martyrs left in the streets. The emotional impact on people was immense, as their compassion was genuine. The media skillfully steered these emotions toward calls for humanitarian aid, aid that would only reach Gaza with the approval and permission of the very criminals responsible for the genocide.

People were also directed to offer Dua for Gaza, rather than to send what would truly repel the harm of the Jews and their allies, the armies. Thus, these media outlets led the public toward treating the symptoms of the crisis, rather than addressing its root causes.

These media outlets diverted the people from calling for the mobilization of armies in support of the people of Palestine, even though the crisis in Palestine is, at its core, a military crisis. It would have been more appropriate, and necessary, for those specialized in such matters, namely the military forces in the region, to intervene. However, this was not what the tsars of these media outlets, nor the regimes backing them, wanted. In fact, this course of action was strictly forbidden, even though it had strong popular support at the beginning of the war.

Social media pages, run by individuals and groups dissatisfied with the existence of these regimes, played a significant role in calling for military intervention in the Gaza war. However, with the help of their tightly controlled media systems, these regimes succeeded in diverting the public away from this option.

These media outlets also played a role in attaching people's hopes to political solutions being promoted, and to the delegations that came and went throughout the region, in the hope that they might bring an end to the suffering in Gaza and provide relief. As a result, the criminal, oppressive leaders of certain regional states were given status and importance. People forgot the truth, which is that no real relief can come from an oppressor who aids your enemy against you, and that true relief only comes by following the commands of Allah (swt) in resolving crises.

Throughout the war, people turned to Allah in Dua, yet the oppressors and their media convinced them to wait for relief to come from the political delegations of Qatar, Egypt, America, and others like them.

The public's reliance on media during the Gaza war was evident, and their engagement with social media was intense, especially with platforms that provided the most live footage and breaking news. The weakness of the official state media institutions was clearly exposed.

This is a highly valuable lesson for those working toward change in the region. The powerful impact of media on the public must not be overlooked. In the upcoming Islamic State, by Allah's Permission, the official media institution must be given full freedom to operate under a new leadership, made up of politically aware individuals, with expertise in media. The institution must be restructured to serve the overarching goals of implementing and spreading the Dawah of Islam.

Likewise, other media outlets operating under the authority of the newly established Islamic State must be reorganized in accordance with the Islamic system. They must be informed of the state's public policies, media regulations, and the public image the society is expected to present. At the same time, constant surveillance over these outlets must be lifted, and direct communication between media and state agencies especially security agencies, must be avoided. However, there must be strict adherence to the Shariah Laws and firm commitment to the general policy of the Islamic State.

The Middle East is experiencing great turmoil. We ask Allah (swt) that it be resolved with the establishment of the great Islamic State, the Khilafah Rashidah (Rightly-Guided Caliphate), and that He (swt) supports those who will lead it. Every aspect of people's lives is in need of recalibration, including the media.