

Pushing the Arab Cause in America

Eleven members of the Egyptian Parliament fanned out across the U.S. last April, appearing on local television programs, speaking to businessmen's groups, Governors and mayors. Last week, as Israeli Premier Yitzhak Rabin was stating the Israeli case in meetings at the White House, a team of six prominent Saudi Arabians completed a two-month swing through such cities as Cedar Rapids, St. Paul, Memphis and Denver. Lebanese Journalist and Spokesman Clovis Maksoud is in the midst of a four-month speaking mission from New York to Texas to California as special envoy of the 20-nation Arab League and chief Arab propagandist in the U.S. "It is important," says Maksoud, "that we catch up on 25 years of deficient communications, that we know each other through each other and not through the Israeli optic."

Oil Power. For years, Arabs and Arab Americans mounted only small and fitful campaigns to present their side of the Middle East story to Americans. But since the 1973 war, Arabs have been making their case heard. Some Arab Americans are participating in demonstrations, often for the first time. Through advertising in a growing number of newspapers and appearances by Arab spokesmen, in programs to politicize Arab Americans and encourage cultural pride, many organizations are fighting for the American hearts and minds that may ultimately influence so much of the outcome in the Middle East.

Today, says Ambassador Amin Hilmy II, the Arab League's representative at the U.N., "the picture that was painted of us—as mentally retarded cowards who couldn't handle modern machinery and would not stand and fight—has been disproved. Now Americans know that's wrong. Instead of our having to plead with them to listen, they ask us to tell them more."

The Arabs' message holds that a pro-Israeli stance by the U.S. runs counter to U.S. national interests—a clear reference to the power of oil and to Soviet influence in the region. The Palestinians, the Arabs say, have endured such sufferings that they deserve international support in the same way that the Jews deserved it after World War II. The pro-Arab spokesmen argue that Israel has been the consistent aggressor—back to biblical times, according to one full-

page newspaper ad—and is blocking peace efforts. Further, they contend, American policy has been distorted by the undue influence of Jewish organizations in the U.S.

The Arab lobby is still comparatively fragmented and modest—no match yet for the vastly powerful and persuasive pro-Israeli lobby in the U.S. (TIME cover, March 10). The Arab group is actually a loose confederation speaking from a common point of view.

Carrying the Arabs' message are some 20 organizations, ranging from moderate, scholarly enterprises to a number with an abrasively propagandistic bent. Some, like the Lebanese Association for Information on Palestine and the Institute for Palestine Studies, are based and financed outside the U.S. The Arab nations' embassies and consulates—particularly those of Egypt, Kuwait and Jordan—have been active in spreading information. The Palestine Liberation Organization runs a small New York office, an operation distinct from the older and highly vituperative Palestine Arab delegation, which is also based in New York. Among the other groups at work in the U.S.:

▶ The Arab League's U.S. branch,

working with a budget of \$600,000 a year, has five Arab information centers in the U.S. (Washington, Chicago, San Francisco, Dallas and New York). The league sends literature to newspapers, campuses and Arab-American groups.

▶ The National Association of Arab Americans, in Washington, presses the Arab point of view with the Government. Says Executive Director Helen Haje: "I keep in touch with the State Department on almost a daily basis." N.A.A.A. has no lobbyist on Capitol Hill, but it encourages its membership of 1,000 in 44 states to contact Senators and Congressmen. The group monitors the U.S. press, dispatching letters of complaint about what it considers biased articles.

▶ The Association of Arab American University Graduates, founded in 1967 and headquartered in Detroit, boasts 1,200 members. Like the N.A.A.A., it provides literature and speakers, organizes seminars and conferences, encourages ethnic and cultural pride among Arab Americans by organizing art shows and sometimes protesting against stereotypes in textbooks.

▶ American Near East Refugee Aid, a voluntary relief agency set up in 1968 to ease the lot of Palestinian refugees, budgets \$300,000 a year in aid. American corporations supply about 40% of the money, with oil companies putting up 30%. By far the biggest gift was Gulf Oil's \$2.2 million in late 1973, after the Yom Kippur War. A.N.E.R.A. does no lobbying as such, but its officers often speak in the Arabs' behalf. Last fall it dispatched a radio kit containing a record with suggested public-service announcements to 2,000 stations across the country, and its bimonthly newsletter circulates to 17,000.

Many other groups speak up for the Arab cause. The Washington-based Middle East Institute is one of the oldest and most prestigious organizations; its members include many former U.S. diplomats whose service in the Arab world left them sympathetic to the Arab cause. The Committee on New Alternatives in the Middle East, based in New York, has a pacifist orientation and some Jewish members; it specializes in promoting Israeli speakers who oppose current Israeli policy.

The Saudi Arabians, who until 1972 were represented by the public relations firm of Hill & Knowlton, Inc., are shopping for a new agency. Martin Ryan Haley & Associates, Inc., which provides its clients with expertise on politics and Government operations, is at work for several Arab countries, de-

ARAB AMERICANS DEMONSTRATING IN DEARBORN, MICH.



HARVEY EDWARDS



AMIN HILMY CLOVIS MAKSOUD
"Circumstances are on our side now."

veloping ideas to improve their standing in the U.S. Among Haley's proposals: a heavy investment on American campuses, setting up large numbers of Arab study centers, importing visiting professors from Arab lands and promoting exchange visits of all kinds.

American oil companies have donated at least \$9 million to various groups over the past eight years. The subject is sensitive to the companies. Gulf Oil's Chairman Bob Dorsey, under questioning by Idaho's Senator Frank Church, revealed that his company had given \$50,000 for an education program to promote U.S. "understanding" of the Arab side; last month a conference of presidents of 32 Jewish organizations called for "acts of conscience"—a boycott, in effect—against the company.*

Syrian Forebears. Aramco, a consortium composed of the Saudi Arabians, Exxon, Mobil, Texaco and Standard Oil of California, gives about \$200,000 a year to support groups in the Arab lobby. In the past twelve years, Mobil has donated \$170,000. Exxon, excluding its gifts for Arab studies at various U.S. schools, contributes about \$150,000 a year. Most oil companies are reluctant to discuss such gifts, but despite the oil companies' obvious self-interest, Aramco Senior Vice President Joseph J. Johnston insists that the donations could play a crucial educational role. "It would be useful," he says, "if Americans had a little better understanding of Arabs as a people. Everyone thinks of Arabs as living in a tent with four wives or driving a Cadillac. The Arab is hardly any different from you or me."

Arab Americans have long been among the nation's least visible and vocal minorities. Al Amen, an Arab community activist in Dearborn, Mich., says he could not get a job at a local community college because, in the words of a college official: "You're not black,

*Oil-company contributions to Arab or other information and education drives are legal. But the legal status of Gulf's \$50,000 gift is still unclear.

you're not white, and you don't speak Spanish." He complains that Arab Americans, contemptuously called "camel jockeys," are never given time off for Islamic holidays. Arab Americans are relatively small in number—between 1 million and 1.5 million—and they are dispersed in the nation and split by their disparate national and religious (both Christian and Moslem) origins. But Arab-American pride is asserting itself, especially in Detroit's community (about 80,000 people) and on Brooklyn's Atlantic Avenue.

Like any immigrant group, Arab Americans have found their way in a variety of occupations—as peddlers, small shopkeepers, cooks, restaurant owners, then lawyers, doctors, engineers. Now they point proudly to such men as Ralph Nader, Comedian Danny Thomas, Heart Surgeon Michael DeBakey and former Pan Am President Najeeb Halaby, who are all descended from Lebanese or Syrian forebears. One great hero is South Dakota's James Abourezk, a Lebanese American who is the first person of Arab extraction to make it to the U.S. Senate.

How effective is the Arab lobby? To date, it has been least successful with Congress, which remains overwhelmingly in favor of Israel. One of the worst setbacks for the Arabs came last month when 76 Senators signed a letter to President Ford encouraging him to allot aid sufficient "to be responsive to Israel's urgent military and economic needs." Abourezk says that as far as Congress is concerned, "we don't have an Arab lobby. The Israeli lobby is running a protection racket up here on the Hill."

Open Mind. The Arabs' newspaper ads used to be remarkably crude, and some still seem strangely unprofessional. The *Wall Street Journal* recently rejected as "in poor taste, inflammatory and inaccurate" an ad attacking U.S. arms shipments to Israel. But the *Christian Science Monitor*, which is the major U.S. newspaper considered most sympathetic to the Arabs, ran the ad. Other advertisements, notably those of the Lebanese Association for Information on Palestine, have become more sophisticated. Instead of harping on the supposed evils of Zionism, they have shifted emphasis to the Palestinians' plight. Those ads have encouraged many Americans at least to keep an open mind.

"We have been very bad at advertising, at public relations for many years," says Hilmy. "Ah, but we have improved, and we will continue to improve." The Arabs are still outgunned in the crucial propaganda and political battle in the U.S., but they have just begun to fight.

CRIME

The S.L.A. Verdict

The day after Oakland, Calif., School Superintendent Marcus Foster was gunned down on the street in November 1973, a newspaper and local radio station received notes from something enigmatically called the Symbionese Liberation Army, which claimed credit for the killing. The S.L.A. blamed Foster, an imaginative and progressive black educator, for trying to establish what it called a repressive security system in the Oakland schools.

It was not until three months later that the S.L.A. achieved its bizarre notoriety by kidnaping Patricia Hearst, who became a convert and fellow fugitive. Meanwhile, two S.L.A. members named Russell Little, a former philosophy student, and Joseph Remiro, a Viet Nam veteran, were arrested and eventually charged with the Foster murder.

The defendants claimed that they were "prisoners of war" and refused until three weeks into their ten-week trial to appear in court. Then they reversed themselves and asked to come to Judge Elvin Sheehy's heavily guarded courtroom. They cross-examined witnesses, and at one point Little lost his temper and tried to throttle a witness on the stand.

After hearing more than 150 witnesses and considering more than 800 pieces of evidence, the jury retired. Lacking any direct evidence or witness placing Little and Remiro at the scene of the crime, the all-white jury argued for an extraordinary eleven days about whether the web of circumstances was tight enough to warrant conviction. Finally, last week the jurors were unanimous. They found Little and Remiro guilty of murder in Foster's death and attempted murder of Foster's assistant, who was wounded in the attack.

REMIRO & LITTLE DURING TRIAL

