

'Times' slammed over op-eds by Hamas official

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Several Jewish organizations expressed outrage following the publication of opinion pieces authored by a Hamas figure in two of the US's most prestigious newspapers on Wednesday.

Both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* ran op ed pieces by Ahmed Yousef, a senior political adviser to Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas, one of two competing Palestinian Authority prime ministers.

The columns, which didn't note that Hamas is recognized as a terrorist organization by the United States, sparked anger from many groups, including the Anti-Defamation League, which wrote to the *Times* the following day.

"Ahmed Yousef's preposterous picture of Hamas as a moderate, peace loving organization committed to a cease-fire with Israel has no basis in reality," wrote Glen S. Lewy, ADL national chairman.

"The chaos, violence and destruction in Gaza and the looting and dismantling of the security infrastructure and border control facilities that followed shows the real face of Hamas," he wrote.

Morton A. Klein, the Zionist Organization of America's national president, called the newspapers' decision to publish the pieces "appalling," adding that it was akin to printing an article by Holocaust architect Adolf Eichmann in 1942.

Klein went on to say that publishing columns by representatives of terrorist organizations only served to legitimize their views.

Both op eds sought to justify Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip and called on the United States to "engage with Hamas," urging the Bush administration "not to repeat the mistakes that have become the hallmarks of its actions in the Middle East."

Throughout the editorials, Yousef said Hamas was committed to peace and blamed Israel and the US for the failures of the peace process.

Many in the pro-Israel community characterized the columns as little more than propaganda.

Yousef's articles were "gross misrepresentations" of the truth, according to Dr. Alex Safian, associate director of the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA). For example, Safian said that although Yousef claimed in his *Times* editorial that Hamas adhered to an 18-month cease fire, Hamas, as the governing body of the PA, did nothing to stymie the rocket attacks that were being launched from Hamas-controlled territory.

"The newspapers are allowing the terrorist groups to lie about their positions, and that is simply unacceptable," said Safian. "It's nonsensical for the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* to open up their pages to what is just pure propaganda."

Both newspapers told *The Jerusalem Post* it was against their policy to discuss editorial decisions.

Last July, Ismail Haniyeh authored a piece in the *Washington Post* titled "Aggression Under False Pretenses" that

sought to justify attacks against Israel, saying that they were merely acts of fighting against "occupying soldiers."

As a result of articles like Haniyeh's, several readers formed Eye on the Post to monitor for bias in the paper's reporting.

According to Eye on the Post's chairman, Robert G. Samet, newspapers often justify printing such editorials by labeling them as "just an opinion." Still, he said, "That alone is not a sufficient justification to publish blatant false statements of fact."

Dr. Marvin Kalb, a media expert at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, said Wednesday's editorials were unusual in that both essentially said the same thing and appeared on the same day in two different newspapers.

"I was uncomfortable seeing in effect the same op ed piece being published in two different papers," said Kalb. "It almost suggests collusion, where I'm sure none existed."

Other media experts were also surprised to see two pieces by the same author in competing newspapers. Prof. Christopher Hanson, who teaches journalism ethics at the University of Maryland, said he had never seen two editorials by the same author appear in two newspapers on the same day. Hanson said editors should question whether Hamas was trying to use as many American newspapers at the same time as possible to spread its message. If so, he said, there was less justification to publish such editorials.

Some questioned whether the *Times* or the *Washington Post* would publish pieces written by other terrorist leaders, such as Osama Bin Ladin. Hansen said this was unlikely, because Hamas and al-Qaida were viewed quite differently in America.

"The United States regards itself as at war against al-Qaida because they directly attacked the United States, [whereas] the United States is trying to be a mediator with Hamas in the Palestinian issue," he said. When it came to printing an article by Bin Laden, he said, "It's hard to imagine a real circumstance under which it would be legitimate."



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