

**C**OMMUNICATION VIA COMPUTER IS FAST BECOMING commonplace and supplanting older methods. And not just information is being exchanged, people are actually beginning to "meet" via computers in "real-time".

Much of the publicity about cyberspace has been about personal encounters, computer-age relationships. Even political exchanges are taking off. In the new Cyberage people are now beginning to gather in electronic auditoriums without leaving their homes.

One example of this, and the first time a major Mid-east discussion has taken place in this forum, is the American-On-Line (AOL) "Centre Stage" — a kind of electronic auditorium with the current capability of holding 500 people from anywhere.

The following is the transcript of a recent Centre Stage electronic meeting held by Palestinian writer Fawaz Turki. The transcript has been edited and at times enhanced for clarity — current technology does have its limitations, especially since the medium, of input is still the old typewriter keyboard!

When reading through this one-hour exchange, make sure to take note of the questions asked as well as the answers given. Coming from a "room-full" of about 70 people all around the United States, the questions themselves illustrate the state of thinking of many Americans about events in today's Mid-east.

The Centre Stage evening with Fawaz Turki went like this:

**AMERICAN-ON-LINE HOST:** Your emcee tonight is MegK.

If you have a question or comment to send to the stage, please select the "Ask a Question" or "Send a Comment" feature from your menu. Type your message then use the "send" option to send it to the stage. All items sent are received sequentially, first-sent, first-received.

Fawaz Turki was expelled from Israel in 1948 along with his family, and spent his boyhood in the refugee camps of Beirut. As a young man living in Paris, he met and married an American and returned with her to the United States where he quickly was caught up in the torrents of social protest and rebellion of the 1960s. His latest book, *Exile's Return: The Making of a Palestinian American*, tells of his return to his homeland in search of his roots, and what he found there.

**FAWAZ TURKI:** Good evening everyone. Thank you for coming tonight.... And thanks to JCOME (The Jewish Committee On the Mid-east) for sponsoring this gathering.

I wrote my latest book back in 1991. I returned for the first time in 40 years to Palestine having left at the age of 8. But of course when I was writing my book I did not know what has happened last year. I didn't realise that the PLO would collapse. I didn't realise that Yasser Arafat would choose the course he did. I know him well. I spent a whole week with him, at his invitation, a few years back, going with him all over the region on his plane and to all his meetings. So I know the PLO well, too well unfortunately.

**Is it really as bad there as people say it is?**

**FAWAZ TURKI:** It's worse. It's almost hopeless the Palestinians have been shorn of all their rights, their name, their identity. And above all the Palestinians in exile have been betrayed and left by the way-side by the very leadership whom they had sacrificed and believed in all these years.

# An unhappy Palestinian



From  
Washington

Mark A. Bruzonsky

**COMMENT:** Mr Indyk is in the position because he is qualified, not because he is Jewish. Jews are only 2 percent of the US population and do not decide the fate of a presidential election.

■ No so, my friend!

**What is your opinion of the acts of terrorism against pro-Rabin Israelis in the United States that are committed by other Israelis?**

■ Well, someone else should be asked that. Jews should speak for themselves. They try too much to speak for us and I'm not going to speak for them!

**Did Clinton know Indyk and Emmanuel while he was governor of Arkansas? What years? Or have they only owned him since he became president?**

■ Did he know anyone! Are you kidding! The president of the Jewish lobby had to resign because he was overheard in secretly recorded conversations bragging that he owned Clinton — this during the campaign — that he had 12 of his people in Clinton headquarters and that Clinton was going to be real good for the Jews and for Israel. He resigned, but only because it got out!

**In an American political context, possible, would you consider yourself a Democrat or Republican?**

■ I consider them about the same — twiddle dum and dee — though some differences of course. Anyway, during elections, I vote for the Democrats (believe it or not!)

**I find it quite unbelievable that the same rejectionist rhetoric and strategies which has been used by the Palestinian Arabs for the last seven decades is still considered good strategy. How many more disasters can you visit on the heads of your people?**

■ Your question is far more unbelievable.

**I am a Catholic Palestinian, why do we not hear about the Christian Palestinians?**

■ We are a secular society. Anyway there are Christians. Edward Said for one and he's as against all this as I am.

**How can you say you'd 'prefer without'? Is that any more fair than an Israeli saying, 'frankly, I'd prefer Palestine'?**

■ That's exactly what most Israelis say! Worse, it's what they do. Now, I wouldn't lie to you. I'm not a politician.

**You couldn't be more wrong, that Jews all support whatever Israel does. What about Peace Now? What about all the Jewish journalists who cover the area and report on it every single time Palestinians gets shot? Why do you concentrate only on the conservative Jews?**

■ Peace Now, that's a part of the Labour Party and always has been. But then there

are a lot of progressive Jews. This event is even sponsored by them, JCOME

**Just want to reiterate that American Jews are not a monolithic 'Israel right or wrong' bloc. Many are sensitive to the P situation, though they may not be the ones in positions of power.**

■ Yes, some are. Thanks for your concern and support, but the organised community is not and a lot pretend to care, but really don't.

**Can we believe a Palestinian state would be truly democratic?**

■ Not if the PLO is in charge and it is made into a client regime. That's precisely my main point!

**How can the Jews or the US negotiate with the Palestinians when their leaders are the ones with the most guns?**

■ The Israelis have all the guns. And the Americans supply them and a lot more!

**Do you feel Arafat is ... a true activist?**

■ I think he's a flunky and he should have resigned long ago, going back to the 1970 Civil War in Jordan.

**Do you feel the Jews have been wronged?**

■ Yes, much, but not by us.

**How do you differentiate the area Palestine, as you know it, from the area that would be Israel? You say the place was called Palestine until 1948. Who settled Hebron in the 14th century? Since when are Bedouins of fixed address, anyway?**

■ We'll settle for the 22 percent that makes up West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza. With that we can live. With this deal we cannot.

**I am a Palestinian and I have lived in my country all my life until four years ago. The problem between the Palestinians and the Jews is a religious thing truly by the Jews saying that Palestine is the 'promised land'. If you think that it is not then you must not know about Islam.**

■ Let's talk some other time about Islam.

**What about progressive Arabs? Are there any? Who?**

■ Lots of them. But, not those ... you normally meet here through the American media.

**Is there truly such a thing as a historic Palestinian people? If so, why does it have almost no recorded history until recently — that is, since he establishment of Israel?**

■ You've got to be kidding! Just go look at the travel books published in the 18th and 19th century. It was called the Arab World or the Ottoman Empire and there are hundreds of villages destroyed by the Israelis

that were there for a thousand years.

**It looks to me as though there is a lot of hate and generalisation going on here. Not one word about possible solutions to real problems that will not go away just because you say that they have 'no right to exist'. The fact is they do exist, and what are we going to do about it?**

■ You're right. Hate breeds hate. So there is a lot of hate. A people occupied and beaten up and tortured for so long have hate. Give us our rights and stop demeaning us, and the hate will begin to go away.

**How can you justify your demands for a state when the PLO is responsible for destroying another state (Lebanon) from 1970-1982 and for killing so many fellow Palestinians (PLO killings outnumber Intifada deaths 20:1 at last count)?**

■ Goodness, amazing the nonsense some people believe. Where in the world do you get such nonsense?

**What is your long view of the situation? Will the Intifada need to be revived?**

■ It's still going on. Just because your TV shows don't show it — 90 percent of the 22 percent is still occupied by the Israeli army and the Palestinian cops are working with the Israelis in the other parts.

**How can you say Palestinian society is a secular society. I've spent ... a lot of time in the West Bank and Gaza, and it is not secular. Majority of women scarves and the mosque is paramount. Don't you see Palestinian society leaning towards religious conservatism, rather than a secular Muslim society, like Turkey.**

■ You're right. My answer is confusing here, but anyway, well, a future topic.

**Would you rather live here or there? Why are you cutting down Americans?**

■ Not American people. I'm American myself. But American government is oppressive and imperialistic, not to mention self-righteous and militaristic.

**Palestinians-Ottomans? I did not know that!**

■ Now you do....

**You missed my whole question! The Arabs living in Palestine were not identified or known as Palestinians! Why not?**

■ Just go back, it was called the Ottoman empire. After the British-West defeated it, they carved the region up into little fiefdoms.

**What about factionalism between Palestinian groups — how will that affect the formation of a Palestinian state ... especially with a leader such as Arafat?**

■ There isn't a Palestinian state and it doesn't look like there will be one. There are now Palestinian Reservations, Palestinian Bantustans. We are witnessing the creation of a client Palestine. But also keep in mind, that every human community in the world is embodied with many currents sensibilities.