

Political Cartoons as Barometers of Conflict

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Changes in political cartoons often precede the outbreak of political conflict. Cartoons have been credited with hastening the French Revolution, facilitating the Holocaust and, most recently, sparking violence across the Islamic world. Using the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, my research tests the degree to which the political cartoons anticipated the outbreak of the *al Aqsa Intifada*. This presentation outlines my study of over 1200 cartoons published in the Israeli newspapers of *Ha'aretz*, *Maariv* and *Yediot Achronot* and Palestinian papers of *Al Quds*, *Al Ayyam* and *al Hayat al Jadeeda*.

Admittedly, this type of research may seem peculiar. Political cartoons are obscure and contentious, providing unsubstantiated criticism of political events. Their brevity of analysis and reliance on visual symbolism make them prone to misunderstanding. They require a high degree of linguistic and cultural familiarity. It is not surprising that scholars are more inclined to focus their attention on more accessible and less contentious forms of political discourse (Duss 2001: 995).

However, the cartoon's ambiguity and willingness to offend provide safe forum for an emotional intensity and breadth of opinion rarely expressed in the mainstream media. They reflect what people "finds absurd, worrisome and desirable without necessarily being able to say why" (Giarelli 2003: 954). As a forum for unsubstantiated fears and unfounded accusations, they also provide scholars unique insight into the domestic undercurrent of conflict