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AMERICA'S CALL TO ISLAM IN THE MIDDLE EAST: THE INFORMATION WAR

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ABSTRACT

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While the United States armed forces are working hard to defeat terrorists wherever they can be found, the country is also engaged on the information front to accelerate the introduction of democracy into the Middle East. To fight terrorism, one significant aim of the US National Security Strategy (NSS) is to use this moment in history to introduce the benefits of freedom into the region. The United States government (USG) is attempting to reduce popular support for terrorist organizations while encouraging Muslims to embrace democracy. This paper will review various causes of disenchantment in Muslim populations then turn to analyze the ongoing information offensive of the USG to determine if the USG is using the correct information tools. The United States Department of State (DoS) has the highest profile among USG entities in this endeavor, so this paper will focus on their initiatives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT iii
AMERICA'S CALL TO ISLAM IN THE MIDDLE EAST: THE INFORMATION WAR 1
A WAR OF IDEAS 1
TWO RESPONSES TO MUSLIM DISCONTENT 2
THREE AVENUES FOR CHANGE 3
MISSTEPS IN MIDDLE EASTERN DEMOCRACY 3
IMPACT OF GOVERNANCE ON FUNDAMENTALISM 4
EGYPT 4
SAUDI ARABIA 6
ISLAMIC GOVERNMENTAL AMBIVALENCE 8
SHURA, A BASIS FOR DEMOCRACY? 9
MANDATORY OR DESIRABLE? 9
PARALLELS 10
DIFFERENCES 10
SHURA MUST BE AUTHENTIC 10
THE UNITED STATES INFORMATIONAL RESPONSE 11
OUTREACH TO WOMEN 11
DEMOCRATIZATION TRAINING 12
PUBLIC DIPLOMACY 12
COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES 14
THE IMPORTANCE OF TELEVISION 15
A ROAD TO SUCCESS 15
ENDNOTES 19
BIBLIOGRAPHY 23

AMERICA'S CALL TO ISLAM IN THE MIDDLE EAST: THE INFORMATION WAR

> People everywhere want to be able to speak freely; choose who will govern them; worship as they please; educate their children—male and female; own property; and enjoy the benefits of their labor. These values of freedom are right and true for every person, in every society....[i]
>
> – George W. Bush

With those words in the 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS), President George W. Bush articulated dimensions of acceptable human rights that he claims to be "the non-negotiable demand of human dignity; the birthright of every person—in every civilization."[ii] Since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the resulting mobilization of the United States-led coalition fighting the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), many have written about the clash of cultures between Islam and the West. Others have worked to clarify that the United States' argument is with terrorists—not with Islam. While working hard on the military front to defeat terror everywhere it can be found, the United States is also working on the informational front to accelerate the introduction of democracy into the Middle East. This paper will focus on the "information" front of the war to determine if the US strategy is on the right track.

To fight terrorism, one significant aim of the US strategy is to "use this moment to extend the benefits of freedom across the globe."[iii] These benefits broadly include democracy, development, free markets and trade, applied without regard for historical, cultural or religious norms.[iv] The demands of human dignity are also specified, namely: Rule of law, limits on absolute power of the state, free speech, freedom of worship, equal justice, respect for women, religious and ethnic tolerance and respect for private property.[v]

A WAR OF IDEAS

While the very visible military conflict is being fought, there is another battle going on—a war of ideas. The NSS asserts that our enemy cannot be identified as a people or a religion or an ideology. "The enemy is terrorism—premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against innocents."[vi] The NSS declares that poverty does not turn poor people into terrorists, but the horrific conditions of poverty and failed states can create the atmosphere for terrorism to grow and to thrive.[vii] Beyond poverty and failed states, any government that consistently fails to address legitimate desires of a significant minority also creates a breeding ground for discontent that could boil over into terrorism. Autocratic governments attempt to suppress discontent

through limitation of individual rights while democracies provide an imperfect avenue (minority still subject to majority rule) to reduce this pressure through participation in governance.

Against that backdrop, the NSS recognizes a gap between moderate Islamists and extremists and proposes an information battle to promote the ideas of democracy and ignite the embers of freedom that lie within the hearts of men and women everywhere.[viii]

> Just as our diplomatic institutions must adapt as that we can reach out to others, we also need a different and more comprehensive approach to public information efforts that can help people around the world learn about and understand America. The war on terrorism is not a clash of civilizations. It does, however, reveal the clash inside a civilization, a battle for the future of the Muslim world. This is a struggle of ideas and this is an area where America must excel.[ix]

TWO RESPONSES TO MUSLIM DISCONTENT

While it is a broad generalization, Muslims in the Middle East find themselves increasingly dissatisfied as growing media and the Internet reveal a non-Muslim world around them growing ever-more powerful and materially prosperous. Additionally, Muslim women see women in non-Muslim lands gaining greater societal influence and access to professional accomplishment through education and in the workplace. The Muslim/non-Muslim gap has been visible for years and is widening. How did we get here? While the answer to that question remains under intense debate and is beyond the scope of this paper, it is instructive to summarize two major positions on the question.

One position holds that modern Islam is mutating and losing its roots in the Qur'an. In Arabic, *al-qur'an* means a recitation and Muslims tend to take the Qur'an literally. Many consider the Qur'an "an earthly facsimile" of an uncreated Qur'an in much the same way as Christians consider Jesus Christ to be an earthly representation of God.[x] This so-called "fundamentalist" position calls for a societal return to the Qur'an, to include repudiating Western culture, ideas, and democratic principles.

The other so-called "moderate" position holds that Islam and democracy are compatible, but democracy has been very poorly implemented in Islamic countries. The thrust for this viewpoint is the difficult road of correcting underlying social ills while also broadening the people's freedom and democratic participation in government. Recognizing both positions come from Islamic points of view leads to the conclusion that a major part of this battle lies within Islam itself.

THREE AVENUES FOR CHANGE

The Muslim who finds himself without power over his environment has four avenues for change: resorting to violence (terrorism or overt rebellion) to force change; massive recurring peaceful demonstrations similar to the anti-government street protests after the 2004 election fraud in Ukraine and the anti-Syrian protests in Beirut in 2005; democratic elections; and an Arabic idea known as *da'wa*.[xi] *Da'wa* has become the playing field of voluntary Islamic associations and is defined as "spreading the word and establishing a countersociety to propagate a movement's ideas, create support networks for members and show that Islamic values can be fully implemented in the contemporary world."[xii] These associations represent the bedrock of Islamic cultural progress along with an emergence of Islamic media. Activism through these associations has become a way for individuals to vent their frustration while advocating for societal change. Even though they experience tremendous turnover in membership, there remains an extensive cohort of young Islamic males that flock to these associations year after year.[xiii] Some of them find the beginnings of a life of terrorism in relationships forged during these meetings. The impact of these associations stands in stark contrast to the impact the average Muslim has on his political standing. Egyptian professional associations have been a leading force for turning back Westernization due to the perception that Western values work against family and societal bonds.[xiv]

Governments in the Middle East currently battle criminal violence through heavy-handed policing in concert with limitations on individual freedoms. They forestall rebellion through their armed forces. Democratic elections are rare in the region, although the post-war election in Iraq, along with elections in Afghanistan and local civic elections in Saudi Arabia provide a hopeful backdrop for spread of democracy. As a widely accepted peaceful right of assembly, *Da'wa* is more problematic for these governments because the associations involved in *da'wa* serve useful and legitimate public purposes. The fact that they also provide venues for professionals to share their thoughts about societal ills is an unfortunate byproduct. Suspending the right for these associations to assemble would be a significant intrusion into Islamic social life carrying great risk for the government.

MISSTEPS IN MIDDLE EASTERN DEMOCRACY

How did we arrive at the present situation in which some Islamists question the compatibility of Islam and democracy? Retracing Islamic history, more than 1,000 years of authoritarian rule is reflected in Islamic historical writings. Political leaders would gain religious legitimacy by using "scholars of the state," who developed the type of public discourse that

would over time lend Islamic approval to the government. The result of this tradition is that modern Muslim political discourse is "arcane, and it's not conducive to democracy," according to Dr Abdulwahab Alkebsi, Middle East Program Officer for the National Endowment for Democracy.[xv]

In a later section, this paper will discuss the Islamic tradition of *shura*, or consultation—a possible forerunner to Islamic democracy. For now, however, it compounds the difficulties ahead to realize that democratic principles have come to the Islamic world through three negative venues: colonial Britain, colonial France and lastly through American support for oppressive dictators often hostile to the aspirations of a majority of their subjects.[xvi] In at least two recent examples, the application of democracy has been actively stifled by Western powers.

In 1951, Mohammad Mossadegh was democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran. By 1952 he was making disturbing noises about a drift toward socialism and perhaps nationalizing the British-owned oil industry in the country. The British Special Intelligence Service and the American Central Intelligence Agency teamed to support a General Zahedi in a military coup pushing Mossadegh from power.[xvii] Again in the 1990, when the Islamist party in Algeria won power in democratic elections, France intervened to prevent them from forming a government.[xviii] The average Muslim might, therefore, be excused for looking to western promotion of democracy with a jaundiced eye, thinking "Only if my democracy meets your standards will I get to keep it?"

IMPACT OF GOVERNANCE ON FUNDAMENTALISM

Genevieve Abdo, author of *No God but God*, relates "The state's fatal flaw lies in its inability to distinguish between the militant, who seeks its violent overthrow, from the peaceful Islamist, who seeks accommodation."[xix] These peaceful people first try to marry their religious traditions and culture with those modernizing forces appearing in their culture. If they begin to realize the marriage will not work, they then turn to increasing measures to protect the purity of their religion and culture from modern "pollution."[xx]

EGYPT

The Egyptian experience is worth a closer look to illustrate the rise and fall of fundamentalism in response to governance. An example of an individual speaking out and leading an effort toward fundamentalism is Sayyid Qutb. Qutb spent more than ten years in Egyptian prisons due to his radical Muslim beliefs and writings. In 1960, he wrote *Signposts on the Road* while imprisoned. Smuggled out of prison, it was eventually published in 1964.[xxi] In

his book, he claimed that the supposedly Muslim government of Gamal Abdel-Nasser was not truly Muslim because Nasser and his followers were not true believers. Muslims do not torture other Muslims, so he wrote that true Muslims actually had a duty to overthrow false Muslim governments, by force if necessary.[xxii]

Qutb broke new ground with these assertions, as traditional Islamic doctrine held that the unity of the Islamic community demanded obedience to Muslim governance, even if the rulers were unjust.[xxiii] According to Fouad Ajami, Director of Middle Eastern Studies at Johns Hopkins University, Qutb was the first to claim the right to distinguish between authentic and false Muslims. Before Qutb, and for a vast majority of Muslims today, if someone claims to be a Muslim and prays accordingly, he or she is a Muslim.[xxiv]

From 1948 to 1951, Qutb studied in the US, where he decided that both America and Europe were in a civilizational decline that could not be stopped.[xxv] Back in Egypt, Qutb felt that Westernization had failed badly in Egypt, leading to corruption, poverty and social injustice. He advocated changing society by converting non-Muslims to Islam while also engaging in a holy struggle against the enemies of God.[xxvi] As largely peaceful protests were met with increasing crackdowns by government forces, moderate Muslims felt pushed into the fundamentalist camp and turning against the state.[xxvii] Qutb was hanged in 1966, and was soon celebrated as a heroic martyr. New York Times correspondent Judith Miller noted she saw his works "on the shelf of every Islamist I visited in the Middle East."[xxviii]

The tension between a modernizing society and religious fundamentalists is certainly not limited to Islam among the world's religions. Karen Armstrong, author of three books, *Islam: A Short History, The History of God* and *The Battle of God*, notes the troubling relationship between fundamentalism in general and governments, "Fundamentalism exists in a symbiotic relationship with coercive secularism. Fundamentalists nearly always feel assaulted by the liberal or modernizing establishment, and their views and behavior become more extreme as a result."[xxix]

At the same time, governments that attempt to co-opt Islamic religious leadership into supporting their legitimacy walk a very narrow course. If religious leaders support the government, they run the risk of being marginalized by the fundamentalists, who can always claim the government is not Islamic enough.[xxx] This leads to a cautionary note – for an avowedly Islamic government to frame a debate with fundamentalists in religious terms, the government most likely cannot win.[xxxi]

Even though the practice of Islam and the practice of democracy can be compatible, fundamentalists can leverage existing societal discontent with accusations of impure Islam to

frame the government as the culprit for their suffering. They portray the government's actions as against Allah's will that the people (hence the nation) practice pure Islam.

The government should attempt to frame the debate in civil and secular terms.[xxxii] Turkey is the primary example of a modestly democratic country governed in secular terms with a vast Muslim majority. (The author acknowledges the relative weakness of the democratic institutions within Turkey when compared with the Unites States or Great Britain. The suppression of Islamic fundamentalism in that country has not been the result of a democratic process, but the stability of the government and the relative freedoms available are still instructive to the practice of Islam without the government being inherently Islamic in authority.)

Fundamentalists can overreach in their efforts. After the assassination of President Anwar Sadat, the rash of violence against the Egyptian Cabinet and an attempt against the life of President Hosni Mubarek, by the mid 1990s, most ordinary Egyptians had come to reject fundamentalism as it was being expressed by the radicals. A poll by *al-Ahram*, an English-language weekly newspaper notes 86% of their readership felt that violence-oriented Islamic groups did not work to the benefit of the country.[xxxiii] By contrast, while today's Egyptian Islamic leadership say Sayyid Qutb is too radical, his officially banned writings are still popular on Egyptian university campuses.[xxxiv]

SAUDI ARABIA

As the home of the Prophet Mohammed and the two holiest sites in Islam (Mecca and Medina), Saudi Arabia should be the exemplar Islamic government. Originally founded through cooperation between a village chief named Muhammed Ibn Saud and a strict teacher of literal Islam named Muhammad Ibn al-Wahhab (the hyper-strict Wahhabi sect of Islam takes its name from him) in the late eighteenth century, the current Saudi royal family government is actually the third Saudi kingdom.[xxxv] In 1902, King Abdulaziz, also known as Ibn Saud, began a successful campaign to reconquer and consolidate peninsular lands. One notable pillar of his success was his using Wahhabi teachers to reach out to the nomadic Bedouin who lived on the peninsula, but had no firm allegiance to Islam. These Bedouin were invited into settlements and into the faith and were called *brother*. In effect they became a reserve army for Ibn Saud and helped him conqueror all his rivals by 1932—only six years before the discovery of oil.[xxxvi]

As Ibn Saud began to modernize his kingdom, he came into direct conflict with the Bedouin he had used to consolidate his power. They disagreed with Ibn Saud as he approved the introduction of many inventions into the kingdom, for example, automobiles, telephones and radio. Ibn Saud patiently waited until the extremism of the Bedouin generated sufficient public

discomfort that he was able to convince his Wahhabi "scholars of the state" to authorize a military campaign against the Bedouin.[xxxvii] His "scholars of the state" had become his accomplices in placing spiritual matters in a position secondary to important matters of state.

With the affluence that followed the 1938 discovery of oil, there was little the Wahhabis could do to recover their influence against the strength of the Saudi royal family, so they turned outside the kingdom. According to Richard Holbrooke, US Ambassador to the UN during the Clinton Administration, the government gave over leadership of religious government ministries to the Wahhabists as they needed to focus more effort on controlled modernization through oil wealth. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, the Wahhabists saw an opportunity. In the 1980s, flush with oil wealth, the Wahhabis quietly launched a campaign staggering in its scope to advance Wahhabi Islam around the world in competition with the *Shi'a* sect of Islam in Iran.[xxxviii] They exported and financed a religious school called a *madrassa* that could be mass-produced throughout the Muslim world. *Madrassas* provided education where none existed. In exchange for the free education, local governments and populations accepted a conservative form of Islam being taught to their children.

For many years, Saudi Arabia in a state of inward peace as the government and the Wahhabists left each other alone. After the Soviets left Afghanistan and the fighters returned home, other governments around the region slowly came to realize what the *madrassas* had done. They began to blame the Wahhabists' educational campaign for their own internal strife. The tranquility of Saudi Arabia changed with the collapse of oil prices in the 1980s, the recession and war with Iraq that followed.[xxxix]

Those financial drains on the economy exposed that the Saudi society had the trappings of a modern society without the ability to work to modernize itself. Suddenly Saudi males were lining up to apply for jobs that would have been embarrassing only a few years before. Those jobs had all gone to imported workers, who were now less wanted than before. Having been exposed to the modern conveniences and Western products, the society was unwilling to give them up. Wahhabis saw their opening and pounced, claiming the government was not Islamic enough. While the Saudis were, and still are, technically governed by *sharia,* (Islamic law based on literal interpretation of the Qur'an) the government had been able to ignore inconvenient parts of the Wahhabi-interpreted law when conditions were good for everyone. Now, however, the people had a gripe–and a religious leadership ready to tell them why things had gone bad. There remains today a tension between the ruling government and the religious establishment.

ISLAMIC GOVERNMENTAL AMBIVALENCE

Illustrating the ambivalence of many Islamic governments as he opened the 10th summit of the Organization of Islamic Conference, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said

> Our only reaction (to terrorism) should be to become more and more angry as we find some of our people reacting irrationally. They launch their own attacks, killing just about anybody including fellow Muslims to vent their anger and frustration. Their governments can do nothing to stop them. The enemy [the West] retaliates and puts more pressure on the governments. And the governments have no choice but to give in.[xi]

In this case, "the enemy" refers not to the terrorist, but to Western governments. Most Islamic governments are in power not because their people voted them into power, but because they took power in the past and now hold onto that power with some measure of popular support. When that support reaches a low-enough ebb, the people or the military will respond with governmental change. Trying to placate their populace in various levels of despair while also holding the line against fundamentalist Islam places these governments on a tightrope. Fall off to either side (e.g. give in to the fundamentalists and watch their society move backwards 1,000 years or pursue the fundamentalists too harshly and be branded un-Islamic) and the government will ultimately lose power. Prime Minister Mohamad is expressing part of that situation as helplessness. It is that "official helplessness" that America must combat.

It is not that these governments can do nothing—rather they believe they cannot safely remain in power if they do something. Since it is unlikely that America has the resources or perhaps even the will to single-handedly take on terrorism wherever it may occur until the last terrorist movement lays down its arms, we must move majority-Muslim governments to take action. When faced with the difficult choice, America has traditionally chosen to work with "the dictator we know" rather than chance the communist or Islamist we don't. That attitude has frustrated our friendship with freedom-loving Muslims all over the world as their governments repress their freedoms in order to remain in power while we support their governments for some larger foreign policy goal. It is time to fully implement the language in our own NSS. We must stop supporting governments who restrict freedom. If those governments fall and Islamists come into power (democratically or otherwise), the US will then have to adapt, as it has to every other international development over the last 200 years. At the same time, the anger of Muslims everywhere will marginally dissipate every time the US lets them work out their own solution.

SHURA, A BASIS FOR DEMOCRACY?

On another front, Islam has a history of democracy-like practice in its earliest beginnings that has been resurrected in recent times. As previously mentioned, the Islamic concept of *shura* found expression in the life and practice of the Prophet Mohammad, as well as the four Caliphs (leaders) who followed him in leading Islam. While *Shura* literally means consultative decision making, its use in the Qur'an actually refers to conducting the public life of a society, rather than specifying a form of government.[xli] Based on readings of two separate verses in the Qur'an, Islamic scholars differ on whether *shura* is mandatory or desirable.[xlii] In considering the concept and its application to governance, it is important to note that *shura,* like democracy, may have a relatively precise definition, but also like democracy, can still be interpreted differently by different people or implemented differently in different situations.

The first modern example of *shura* (Egyptian translation into English is *shoura*) occurred in Egypt. According to an Egyptian Government website, Egypt has implemented a variety of *shura* councils in its history, beginning with a Shoura Council begun by Mohammed Ali in 1829. In 1866 the Shoura Council of Deputies assisted Khedive Ismail and is considered the beginning of parliamentary life in Egypt.[xliii] The British occupation of 1882 ended the practice, as the Legislative Shoura Council they instituted had no real authority. Amending their constitution in 1980, the Egyptian Government created the existing Shoura Assembly. [xliv]

MANDATORY OR DESIRABLE?

Islamic historical writings describe a 30-year period after Mohammad where the Caliphs solicited permission or consent to govern from their people.[xlv] Islamic scholars who believe that *shura* is required by the Qur'an refer to a verse speaking directly to Mohammad addressing a decision he had made. That verse (3:159) says, "…take counsel with them in the affair."[xlvi] On the other hand, there are no verses in the Qur'an literally directing *shura.* In fact, opposing scholars refer to another verse (42:38) which states, "…and their rule is to take counsel among themselves…."[xlvii] This verse praises a group of men who used *shura* in their interactions.

While scholars debate the *shura* requirement, Islamic history records that on at least one occasion, Mohammad sought the counsel of his companions, yet chose to implement another decision. One scholar commented, "Actually there are very few instances on record when [sic] the Prophet has consulted his companions and acted upon their advise [sic] against his own wisdom."[xlviii]

PARALLELS

Both *shura* and democracy agree that a better decision is more likely to arise from consultation than from individual decisions, as the judgment of the majority frequently considers a wider view of any issue. Both also imply that individuals are equal in their rights and responsibilities and neither supports rule by heredity. [xlix] Both also imply members of a society relating by a set of rules from the governed rather than the imposition of rules from above. Neither *shura* nor democracy accepts the use of force in suppressing dissent or implementing the rule of law.[l] Obviously the use of force by police in law enforcement can be legitimate, but also can cross the line into suppression of dissent.

A culture as attuned to its history as Islam should be ready to return to such a consultative arrangement if one could be introduced with any long-term stability. That stability has eluded Islamic governments to date, and outside of Turkey's eighty-plus years of secular governmental success, no majority-Muslim nation's government has a track record of committed effort to individual freedom and participation in government.

DIFFERENCES

In any debate it is important to know what the words mean. In that same vein, it is important to recognize that *shura* is not synonymous with democracy. One commentator describes three differences between *shura* and democracy. First, he notes that in a democracy, the people can amend their foundational documents, such as a constitution. On the other hand, it is not conceivable to amend the Qu'ran at the people's request. Second, *shura* is not a binding process, whereas democracy results in binding rulings that can only be changed through the democratic process. Finally, democracy is a bottom-up process, with the power devolving from the people while *shura* is a top-down process, with the leader engaging in consultation but under no compulsion to comply.[li]

SHURA MUST BE AUTHENTIC

Unfortunately, just as an election does not guarantee a democratic process, neither does the appointing of a consultative assembly guarantee *shura*. The previously mentioned example of the British-imposed Legislative Shoura Council in Egypt is one example.[lii] In Indonesia, the head of the military, General Suharto, succeeded President Sukarno after putting down an attempted Communist coup d'etat. He then installed a consultative assembly that repeatedly elected him to office until the 1990's.[liii] In Saudi Arabia today, the third incarnation of *Majlis Al-Shura* consists of 120 members and a chairman.[liv] Originally formed by Royal Order No. A/91

on 1 March 1992 with 60 members, the council has been expanded by King Fahd every time their four-year term expires.[lv] Despite the presence of an assembly, the USG does not consider any of these governments democratic nor their people free.

THE UNITED STATES INFORMATIONAL RESPONSE

The NSS states that the US will "champion aspirations of human dignity while supporting moderate and modern governments", "especially in the Muslim world to ensure terrorist ideologies do not find fertile ground."[lvi] It goes on to say we will:

- Speak out honestly about violations of the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity
- Use our foreign aid to promote freedom…ensuring that nations moving toward democracy are rewarded
- Make freedom and development of democratic institutions key bilateral themes
- Press governments that deny human rights toward a better future
- Take special efforts to promote freedom of religion and conscience and defend it from encroachment by repressive governments[lvii]

In this information offensive around the world, the hub is the US Department of State (DoS).

DoS is using its limited resources to more aggressively communicate the American message of freedom and tolerance. In 2003, for example, DoS began the Partnerships for Learning, Youth Exchange and Study program. High School-level students from majority-Muslim countries are offered scholarships for up to one year to study in the US. In its first year, the program reached out to places such as Egypt, the West Bank/Gaza, Indonesia, Syria, Yemen and Pakistan. In 2004, the program expanded to include countries such as Morocco, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Algeria, among others.[lviii] The stated purpose of the exchange is five-fold: increase foreign understanding and acceptance of U.S. goals; reach more people with accurate information about the United States and deepen their understanding through personal experiences with Americans; engage and inform the successor generation; develop a dialogue with moderates in Muslim countries; and broaden American understanding of Islam and of countries that are predominantly Islamic.[lix] This program is only one example among many that seek to provide person-to-person contact in an effort to overcome societal stereotypes.

OUTREACH TO WOMEN

In Afghanistan, DoS is very busy reaching out to women in an attempt to improve their lives and implant favorable impressions of the US (and therefore democracy by extension). In

Afghanistan, two of nine Constitutional Drafting Committee members were women, with two women Cabinet ministers and as late as late Sep 04, 41% of the voters registered to vote in January were women.[lx] Additionally, 18 women's resource centers have been funded for Afghanistan to provide women with vocational training, health care information and day care services. For academic year 2004-5, five Afghani women were named Fulbright scholarship winners.[lxi]

DoS has also been active in Iraq with similar results. There are three women in the Iraqi Governing Council which helped draft their Transitional Administrative Law, while their Cabinet contains six women ministers and seven deputy ministers. At the same time, 25% of the Iraqi National Council is women. The Iraqis are also opening women's centers to provide computer and literacy training as well as training for financial independence. DoS is fielding Women's Mobile Teams to take to the streets and rural areas to educate on healthcare issues and issues surrounding Islam and democracy. Iraq also boasts six women Fulbright scholarship winners this year.[lxii]

DEMOCRATIZATION TRAINING

Reaching outside the government, DoS funded $10M in grants for democratization training. Seven US-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will work with organizations in country to encourage women to vote, prepare women candidates to compete in January 2005, train women in business and media skills and establish resource centers for networking and counseling.[lxiii] The press release quotes Secretary Powell as saying, "These grants will directly help Iraqi women deepen their involvement in Iraqi reconstruction and mobilize women across the land to build a secure, prosperous and democratic Iraq."[lxiv] These efforts are important as they reach for one-on-one contact to help individuals, and thereby change their attitudes towards the US and towards democracy in general.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Many individuals equate DoS with public diplomacy and in this arena, DoS has also recently been expanding their outreach and their own paradigms. The *FY2004-2009 Department of State and USAID Strategic Plan* recognizes the importance of "the public face" of America and its effect on our ability to achieve our foreign policies.[lxv] The plan lays out three dimensions of improvement in America's public diplomacy: recognizing and overcoming the disconnect between of the regional impact of public diplomacy and the national orientation of the DoS public diplomacy arms; maintain dialog and build support at home; and reach out to

younger and wider audiences.[lxvi] The first channel of outreach is the 60-70% of 700 DoS employees at any one time focusing on communicating America's message outside our shores. Through an additional 16,000 embassy employees, DoS is able to see American-designed communication programs localized much more effectively than traditional outlets such as Voice of America.

At the same time, a media explosion is occurring among the Muslim countries of the Middle East and East and South Asia. Additionally, DoS web-based products have been recently broadened to include Arabic, Farsi, Urdu and Pashtu products.[lxvii] Constantly striving to gauge their audience reach and impact, DoS has come to recognize that they needed to modify their television strategy, producing more stories in-house and also digging deeper to find stories out of the headlines.[lxviii]

Through an assessment of their mission and their performance, DoS questioned how they were targeting their audience. They recognized that too much of their effort was directed as engaging governments, so they began a campaign in 2003 to redirect some of their energy to engage Islamic peoples directly. Islamic governments officially claimed their populace knew about America, yet DoS and other American experience "on the ground" was telling a far different story. [lxix]

The Department began to purchase some of their own media placements, avoiding the intentional or unintentional foreign governmental burying of other DoS communication efforts. These new efforts featured Muslim-Americans talking about their own lives living as Muslims in America. Some of these people also volunteered to go on the road to Muslim nations to continue spreading the message that America is tolerant of Muslims living and actively worshipping.[lxx] The anecdotal evidence showed remarkable opinion change for the level of effort. Comparing this effort with historical American advertising campaigns, DoS found that the "recall" percentage in the targeted Muslim population was higher than six months worth of soft drink advertising while the "message retention" was also very high. This small campaign worked like a champ.[lxxi] At the same time, Congress appropriated funding for a Middle East Television Network, Inc. to inaugurate a satellite television channel called Alhurra, Arabic for "The Free One." Alhurra began operations to the Middle East on 14 February 2004 and plan to expand their programming outreach to European Muslims in 2005.[lxxii]

Another small and quiet but very effect "secret weapon" is the teaching of English. Due to the requirement for English to understand so much of current technology and science, English teachers are welcomed almost everywhere in the world.[lxxiii] Testifying before Congress,

Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Charlotte Beers spoke on the DoS' successes through person-to-person contacts:

> We have the whole potent world of our best literature, music, sports and movies. But it is not out there. Our American people are willing to go. In your states are people who constantly approach the State Department and ask, "What can I do to help?" And we need to organize these kinds of people, these businesses, these sophisticated musicians and artists so that they can move as emissaries through the world on our behalf.[lxxiv]

With over 35,000 exchanges a year, DoS consistently finds educational and cultural exchanges change individuals' perceptions of America for the better.[lxxv] Ms. Beers told Congress we already have 90,000 Americans volunteering in some form on exchanges.[lxxvi]

COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES

When discussing communication, scholars often write about the difficulty in resolving what the communicators believe they said with what the listeners believe they heard. Aside from that structural communication difficulty, there are cultural barriers to open communication as well. One area where America needs to better harmonize its message of democracy concerns the separation of church and state. With freedom of religious belief and expression being a primary motive in our founding over 200 years ago, Americans treasure our freedom of religion and many understand democracy to contain a separation of church and state.

In America today there are arguments about the meaning of this extra-Constitutional phrase, with some feeling it simply guarantees no government participation in religion or imposition of any one religion over another, while others have taken it a step further to attempt to neutralize religion in the public sphere. The latter interpretation is anathema to a Muslim. While there are certainly nominal Muslims who pay little attention to issues of faith, for the mainstream, moderate or fundamental Muslim, they could no more separate Muslim faith from day-to-day public and private life than stop breathing. Their faith defines who they are in ways that are not familiar to many Christians or Jews.

Rather than highlighting our differences by including separation of church and state in dialog about democracy, America could attain the same result (shifting power from the government or religious leaders to the people) with greater chance of success by focusing on *shura*. At the same time, development of a consultative arrangement between religions in Muslim lands would improve interfaith communication and reduce built-in conflict between a government intertwined with a single religion and the remaining religions.

There is debate today about whether or not Islam allows coexistence with other faiths. Islamic scholars reveal a tradition in Islam of protecting Christians and Jews as "People of the Book" while current events reveal an intolerant side of Islam killing its own adherents who dare convert to Christianity or Judaism. This debate brings home once again the fact that the major battle in play is between two sides of the Muslim faith.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TELEVISION

In 2002, three organizations (Gallop, Pew, and Zogby) independently moved to poll Muslim nations to measure the level of anti-Americanism. They found a strongly united population in negative perceptions of America and our foreign policy. At about the same time, academics were assessing possible media impacts on anti-American sentiment. Three major schools of thought developed: one holds that these sentiments are the result of ineffective information efforts of the USG; another holds that foreign news media lies at the core of the problem; the third school places the blame at the feet of US entertainment media.[lxxvii] Using the Gallup poll sample of 120 questions administered in person to 10,004 individuals, a team of academics assessed that the amount of television news viewing had a direct and measurable impact on the level of anti-American sentiment.[lxxviii] In a surprising conclusion, however, they determined that the channel through which the news was received (Arabic or Western) did not effect the direction of the change—only the magnitude. They found that watching television on an Arabic channel such as Al-Jazeera increased anti-American sentiment, while watching a Western channel such as CNN International also increased anti-American sentiment—only to a lesser extent.[lxxix]

A ROAD TO SUCCESS

A key element of a refined information campaign will be accurate feedback. Reading the pulse of Muslim populations through anecdotal evidence and an American lens is aiming our weapons with one eye closed and the other eye squinting. The DoS should immediately assess the Middle Eastern environment for additional polling of Muslim populations. Initial polls assessing anti-American sentiment have been useful, but the depth of knowledge and breadth of coverage needs to be expanded. Polling should be expanded to assess the effectiveness over time of existing cultural and educational exchange programs as well as USAID economic development assistance and the current direct-media campaigns highlighting Muslims in America. Advocating polling comes with a word of caution: more polling is better only up to a point. Both over-saturation and any highly publicized campaigns could produce negative results

if they mobilize our opponents to ramp up an information campaign to discredit our polls or intentionally skew the results. This tool is best used quietly.

Investing in the empowerment of women within Muslim society will provide a mixed bag of return in the near-term, as males within their society will work with varying degrees of intensity to keep women's progress limited. While we view our position as the "moral high ground," we are working with a millstone around our neck as popular media continues to produce visual and audio entertainment that degrades Western culture in the minds of Muslims, tarring democracy in the process. Our greatest hope for success in the long term is to encourage these women to progress in their culture without fomenting a cultural upheaval. The key will be to understand the various Muslim cultures we operate in to ensure we do not "Americanize" their women in the name of empowerment. The slow building of positive, "real life" results through a well-focused campaign will slowly overcome the more distant impact of Western media and Muslim males attempts to denigrate the effort through disinformation.

Person-to-person diplomacy through exchanges appears to bring excellent results in relation to the resources expended. As noted earlier, the small scale of these programs necessarily limits the speed of progress and breadth of impact. If possible, these programs should be more finely targeted to Muslim citizens who will have the greatest impact when they return home. This program also has the side benefit of introducing the American hosts to another culture, also slowly overcoming an American weakness in the international arena. A measured effort to increase the number of Americans involved would also pay dividends.

American democracy is imperfect, yet resilient, strong and admired by those who study it. The focus of our public diplomacy should be to reveal the strengths of authentic America to those whose view has been shaped by Friday sermons at the mosque and more lately through American media. At the same time, attempting to "sell" a Muslim version of democracy by appealing to *shura* does not have the same hope of success, as the *shura* concept is currently being imperfectly employed in the region, increasing the difficulty of the effort.

While we need to compete with the Al-Jezeeras of the Muslim world, we should advance our efforts in satellite television news outreach with caution to determine if the negative effects noted previously hold true over the long term. Producing and delivering media highlighting Muslims in America should continue and be adjusted as results direct.

It is clear that America has entered a conflict that will last for years. President Bush and his Cabinet have been consistently calling the nation to focus on the distant horizon of ultimate success and to gird ourselves for an enduring commitment. In those areas where combat operations ensue, our armed forces have acquitted themselves well, while away from the

gunfire and explosions, we find our national reputation severely tarnished. Through former policies and diplomatic missteps, our nation rightly bears a portion of the blame for that reputation, yet much more of the tarnish is unearned. As a nation, we find ourselves playing a game of catch-up to those who would demonize us in the eyes of the Muslim world. Failure in this battle will greatly extend the length and cost of both the military campaign against those who would use terror as a weapon and the broader diplomatic campaign to encourage the birth and growth of democratic governments around the world.

Recent history provides encouraging evidence that long-oppressed peoples do indeed want to be free. From Iraq and Afghanistan to Ukraine and Lebanon, a wave of popular democratic momentum is building that must be sustained or even accelerated. Our information arsenal must be refined and then re-engaged with resources adjusted according to measured results. The success of this arsenal will save American lives.

WORD COUNT = 6891

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