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Arab Media: Tools of the Governments; Tools for the People?

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Introduction

In the aftermath of 9/11, a shocked U.S. government and public asked, "Why do they hate us?" bewildered that the so-called Arab street views them—us—with extreme antipathy. Since that day in September, an urgent desire to quench this seething regional hostility has seized the government, hoping to mitigate or at least deflect any future terrorist attacks. A flurry of studies regarding the need for more effective U.S. public diplomacy appeared on Washington desks. Yet, no study seemed to start at the heart of the matter, with the minds and attitudes of the Arab people who were supposedly so angry at the United States. Believing that the Arab media played a critical role in shaping the information environment that was fomenting the "culture of death" that ennobled suicide bombers and the cult of terrorism, the United States Institute of Peace launched a systematic investigation into how the Arab media was informing and shaping the hearts and minds of Arab publics. With the aid of in-house expert 2004 Jennings Randolph Senior Fellow Mamoun Fandy, participants in the Arab Media working group met from March to August 2004 to examine such charged questions as who and what do the Arab media speak for; what opportunities exist to reform or blunt their incitement; and what is their role in forestalling or fostering a desire for a free press?

The workshop series aimed at understanding the full range of the Arab information environment through its media. During the six-month series, *al-Hurra*, the U.S. government funded television project for Arab publics, was launched; the U.S. scandal around Abu Ghraib prison erupted; and the *9/11 Commission Report* was published.[1] All of these events informed and complicated the sessions' efforts. More groundbreaking events have occurred since the completion of the workshop series. All of them affect the troubled relationship between the United States and the region. Although activities in Iraq remain the centerpiece of today's attitudes about the United States in the region, recent shifts in the heretofore-entrenched power relationships seem to be taking place. Libya, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt, even Saudi Arabia—all have demonstrated vulnerability to the engines of international opinion and their populations' appetite for such globally televised political transformations as the Ukraine's "Orange Revolution." Even so, it would be too much to say that a single shared perspective among these regional populations exists, except perhaps suspicion about U.S. motives for being in Iraq and belief that the United States supports Israel against all Arabs, everywhere, at all times.

In the United States, the *9/11 Commission Report* and the even more critical *Defense Science Board Review* (DSBR)—both published in summer 2004, but the latter not made public until November 24, 2004—were inhaled in a single public breath, demonstrating an astonishing national desire for the "truth" about the government's mistakes leading to 9/11 and about the subsequent tide of hatred engulfing the nation from Western to Eastern hemispheres. Both reports serve the public by elaborating the many contradictions that their commissioners believe have become the locus of misunderstanding, failed vision, and misdirected U.S. policies, which over the course of years have fuelled Arab hostility—its own often vitriolic media

notwithstanding. Although the current administration has recently launched a new diplomatic approach to the region, including tasking yet another high-level administration official to lead its public diplomacy initiative, the government's effectiveness in changing hostile attitudes among Arab publics will depend on how sustained and deep its policy reformulation is. And to measure that, only time will tell.

The Immediate Problem

Americans and the U.S. government, in particular, have an increasingly dangerous image problem in the Arab world, and not just since 9/11. According to polling by Zogby International, numbers show a drastic downward slide of Arab attitudes about the United States from April 2002 to June 2004. Hostility toward the United States among Moroccans, who have a seemingly less ferocious perception about U.S. intrigues, has risen from a disapproving 61 percent in 2002 to 88 percent in 2004; Egypt, a more predictable fulminator, from 76 percent to 98 percent—almost the same percentage that votes for Mubarak.[2] Arab hostility is due in part to U.S. activities and policies in the region that date to the first Gulf War and perceived U.S. championing of the Israeli cause against the Palestinians. Added to this is disinformation about American schemes to humiliate and subject Arab peoples promoted by Arab media, Arab intellectuals, Western-schooled expatriates, and religious figures. For their part, Arab regimes in the region today weave a Web of dissembling that aggravates this situation. Regional governments play a double game through their control of the media. The first of these games involves regimes pandering to the ideological positions of their own threatening insurgency movements in order to remove themselves as targets of jihads. The second involves focusing public ire on external factors, rather than their own oppression.

Nevertheless, there is sufficient grist to feed suspicion about U.S. good faith toward the region. To the question, "Why do they hate us?" James Fallows dismisses the all-too-easy retort, "They hate us for who we are," as dangerous, self-justifying, and self-deluding "claptrap" (*Atlantic*, October 2004, pp. 68–84). He cites Michael Scheurer, a career Central Intelligence Agency officer who was head of the agency's anti–bin Laden team during the nineties: "There are very few people in the world who are going to kill themselves so we can't vote in the Iowa caucuses, but there's a lot of them who are willing to die because we're helping the Israelis, or because we're helping Putin against the Chechens, or because we keep oil prices low so Muslims lose money." Quoting an unnamed civilian adviser to the Pentagon, Fallows tells us the stakes are high: "Osama bin Laden could never have done it without us. We have continued to play to his political advantage and to confirm, in the eyes of his constituency, the very claims he made about us." His claims are, "The United States will travel far to suppress Muslims, that it will occupy their holy sites, that it will oppose the rise of Islamic governments and that it will take their resources." One need only point to Iraq to give Arab populations evidence of bin Laden's claims. Historical U.S. support for Arab governments has left the U.S. government without much of a leg to stand on as it hears how their oppressed populations hate us for that support. As the *Economist* puts it ("The War for Islam's Heart," Sept. 18–24, 2004):

> *Scandals at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo have made it difficult to maintain that there exist universal notions of human rights, rather than particularist and discriminatory ones. America's record in Iraq is not pretty. The past week's imagery alone has included a bombed ambulance, a dead infant being removed from a shelled building and the on-camera killing of an Arab television journalist.*

Without doubt, the contradiction between U.S. policies and American values is more complicated than it appears. When U.S. security needs come up against the prospect of political transformation toward more democratic governance in the region—newly minted democratic regimes that could very well eschew liberal principles and values—how should U.S. policy position itself? As Richard Haass reminds us, ("Freedom is not a Doctrine," *Washington Post*, January 24, 2005, A15)

> *Prospects for the democratic improvement of a society can prove even worse absent occupation. Those who rejoiced 25 years ago in the overthrow of the shah of Iran should reflect on the fact that unattractive regimes can be replaced by something far worse. We thus need to be measured in what pressures we place on such countries as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Here as elsewhere it is important to observe the Hippocratic oath and first do no harm. Time is a factor in another sense. There is no realistic way that democracy will arrive in either North Korea or Iran before nuclear weapons do. And even if "freedom" were somehow to come to Tehran, it is almost certain that free Iranians would be as enthusiastic as the mullahs are about possessing nuclear weapons owing to the political popularity of these weapons and their strategic rationale given Iran's neighborhood.*

Most people agree that democratization in the region is regime change by another name. Authoritarian and dictatorial Arab regimes, whether U.S. allies or not, could not survive actual exposure to the will of their populations. Many U.S. policymakers and influential opinion makers openly worry that democracy would actually "destabilize" the region.

Those who worry about regional security note that revolution often leads to "one vote, one time," such as when Iran's population opted for rule under the Ayatollah Khomeini or when the Algerians elected the Islamic fundamentalist Front de Liberation Nationale (FLN) government in a "one man, one vote, one time" election. Too, there is the suspicion that in the aftermath of U.S. disengagement and support for Israel and regional allies, popular antipathy will not only continue, but, fuelled by a perception of U.S. weakness, become even more strident.

There is no easy answer to this dilemma, except perhaps from the vantage of the oppressed populations, who must take responsibility for their own destinies. In the meantime, nuanced assessment and understanding and action are not characteristic of general populations anywhere, anytime. The desire for easy answers, which point blame and responsibility to others, is, however. As a consequence, stereotyping U.S. intentions by dint of simplistic assessments, qua allegations, of its policies from the conspiracy-mongering Arab media, expatriate intellectuals, and radical religious leaders is not surprising. Arab populations, for their part, are most influenced by how they perceive the effect of U.S. policy on their immediate livelihood and their national identity. Most commonly, they characterize the United States as one of seven Cs: (1) cowboy and lawless; (2) colonialist, referring to the U.S.-Israeli relationship; (3) conspirator, targeting Arabs and Muslims; (4) crusader, reminiscent of the last great religious assault on Islam; (5) client of Israel; (6) capitalist; or (7) coward, referring to U.S. military and political history in Vietnam, Lebanon, and Somalia.

As for media's role in exacerbating these perspectives, low-cost access to satellite technology in recent years has resulted in both an explosion of Arab satellite television channels and aggressive competition among them for market share, which in turn has translated into more Arabs having access to real-time information. Although the drive to capture market share mimics commercial, independent media, these channels, like the conventional Arab press, remain predominantly instruments of their governments, such as al-Jazeera by Qatar; of their patrons, such as al-Arabiya by investors from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Gulf States; or of movements, such as *al-Manar*, the Hezbollah-owned and -run newspaper in the Palestinian territories and television station in Lebanon. As a general rule, media in the Arab world (including expatriate media, mostly located in the United Kingdom) operate in collusion with a reigning regional power to maintain the appearance of domestic social concord and the illusion of solidarity among Arab states' points of view. Meanwhile, they fuel calumny toward the perpetrators of their common "victimization," typically identified as Israel and the United States. Although cracks are beginning to show in the tight state monopoly over media because of an inability to control access to 24/7 global electronic media, including the Internet, censorship remains a fact of life. For journalists to raise objections to the picture of regime rectitude and regional solidarity is to risk censorship, jail, or worse. Strict self-censorship reigns as the modus operandi among media professionals; some might say that it takes the place of the

journalistic ethics practiced where a free press exists.

What can we, the United States, do about this? Both the *9/11 Report* and the DSBR exhort the government and the public to confront the reality of how our policies appear to those who are on the other side of them:

> *Muslims do not "hate our freedom," but rather, they hate our policies. The overwhelming majority voice their objections to what they see as one-sided support in favor of Israel and against Palestinian rights, and the long-standing, even increasing support for what Muslims collectively see as tyrannies, most notably Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Pakistan, and the Gulf states. (DSBR, p. 40)*
>
> *Right or wrong, it is simply a fact that American policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and American actions in Iraq are dominant staples of popular commentary across the Arab and Muslim world. That does not mean U.S. choices have been wrong. It means those choices must be integrated with America's message of opportunity to the Arab and Muslim world. (9/11 Report, p. 376)*

It also means that the U.S. government needs to do a better job of explaining its policies within the context of America's democratic values of freedom of choice and opportunity, respect for individual rights and diversity, and staunch defense of those rights for all of its citizens. There should be no apparent inconsistency between its policies and its core values. As unpragmatic as that may seem at the time, consistency pays off: First, because where moderate Arab populations exist, such practice provides them an example of the good governance that reason, transparency, and accountability afford, and acts as a foil against the ever-growing grounds for recruitment of their youth to the ranks of radical Islam. Second, the rest of the world is watching and taking note.

The Arab Media Context

Broadly defined, Arab media include all media written or produced in the Arabic language. Media exist in a cultural context, which must be understood before they can be accurately evaluated. Arab culture is no more static than any other culture. As elsewhere, political factors shape the media context in the Arab and Muslim world. Given the absence of citizen-based politics on the ground, say regional observers and media commentators, a caricature of it is acted out on the television screen. Media talk shows, especially call-in shows, substitute for authentic public debate in representative governments. The most highly acclaimed, watched, and emulated news outlet in the region today does not see its primary mission as news-gathering and delivering, but as providing compelling, often provocative, editorials on international events. The motto of al-Jazeera is "opinion and counteropinion."

A few voices, mostly but not all governments, dominate in the region. The Muslim Brotherhood has inordinate influence over Qatari-subsidized al-Jazeera television, for example. These voices are predictably unfriendly to the United States. That said, Arab media are in the midst of a highly dynamic transition, fueled by the emergence of low-cost, accessible satellite broadcast technology. The proliferation of satellite channels has resulted in the emergence of a genuine transnational electronic media environment, including both regionally located and diaspora media. Most of these new media organizations target as their market Arab audiences, versus a specific national audience (e.g., Egypt or Saudi Arabia), creating the so-called pan-Arab market. This de facto media reality provides an ironic twist to the nonaligned pan-Arab political rhetoric of the fifties and sixties. Ushered in by Gamel Abdul Nasser, a nationalized Egyptian media purported to speak for all Arabs. Later, pan-Arab rhetoric removed to journals and newspapers located in London or Paris, where Western-educated intelligentsia debated post-Marxist or -modern constructs rather than pushing for individual rights and freedom in the region. Today, however, it is the truly pan-Arabic

satellite channels that compete for, speak to, and shape the attitudes of the Arab "street."

Ownership by a particular Arab government does not preclude its desire for a pan-Arab media vehicle to project a regional presence. A shrewd calculation reckons that the cost of such an outlet buys continued political legitimacy among its own and regional populations. The cost of maintaining that legitimacy is high, however. Despite attempts to commercialize media activity with advertising revenues, the shortfall is formidable. Advertising revenue in the whole of the Arab world totals a mere $1.5 billion a year. This includes print, television, radio, and other media. Annual operating costs, however, are around $16 billion, which means a $14.5 billion net loss each year. It is unlikely that increasingly impoverished Arab states can continue to subsidize this kind of loss. Other patrons, such as Hezbollah or Muslim charities, may have the financial resources to claim these powerful political instruments.

Although illiteracy is high and television is by far the most popular source for news, print remains influential throughout the Arab world. *Al-Hayat* has a relatively small worldwide readership of less than half a million, but the readership tends to be opinion makers. Newspapers and magazines are associated with the West and are pretty much dismissed by the general public. At the same time, the Palestinian newspaper, *al-Manar*, which speaks for and is owned by Hezbollah, uses American market publishing techniques to deliver its virulently anti- American message.

Regarding new online media in the Arab world, a wider range of perspectives and messages exists than is available through conventional media. Although individual online access in the region does not compare with Western access, it is nevertheless a growing phenomenon, which is gorily apparent by the choice of the Internet as the preferred outlet for the public spectacle of beheadings by terrorist groups. Major Western networks such as MSNBC and NBC have Arabic-language Web sites, which are easily accessible to the growing (though still small) number of Internet users in the Arab world. Islamist organizations also have their own Web sites, as do major print and broadcast sources, such as al-Ahram and al-Jazeera. Unlike the satellite stations, many Web sites rely on Western news wires like Agence France Presse, the Associated Press, and Reuters. The electronic media are also subject to censorship once a site becomes popular or "noticed." A visit by the Egyptian state security forces to the offices of Islamonline.net, for example, resulted in the site toning down its rhetoric.

Gabriel Weimann, a 2004 Jennings Randolph senior fellow at the U.S. Institute of Peace, has tracked the use of the Internet by terrorist groups. In an Institute Special Report, *Terrorism on the Internet* (March 17, 2004), he lists the following among groups linked to terrorism in the Middle East: Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement), the Lebanese Hezbollah (Party of God), the al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Fatah Tanzim, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Kahane Lives movement, the People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI—Mujahedin-e Khalq), the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), the Turkish-based Popular Democratic Liberation Front Party (DHKP/C), and Great East Islamic Raiders Front (IBDA-C).

According to Weimann, the target audiences for these sites include current and potential supporters, international and enemy publics (i.e., citizens of the states against which the terrorists are fighting). To attract locals, the Web sites use slogans and offer items for sale, including tee shirts, badges, flags, and videotapes and audiocassettes in their own languages. The sites provide detailed information about the activities and internal politics of the organization, its allies, and its competitors. International visitors who may have some interest in the issues but are not directly involved can often find the site in their native tongue. Weimann notes that foreign journalists may be the ultimate targets for these sites, because press releases and historical synopses are readily available on them. As for enemy public targets, he speculates that although not an explicit audience, it is surely an implicit one. He argues that efforts to demoralize the enemy by threatening attacks and by fostering feelings of guilt about the enemy's conduct and motives point to that end. A secondary objective is to stimulate public debate in order to change public opinion and to weaken public support for the governing regime. Other Internet terrorism experts concur that a primary audience may in fact be foreigners, both expatriates in the region and foreign press. In an article on "terrorisme.net" (June 16, 2004), Jeffrey Donovan of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty cites Thomas

Hegghammer, a researcher at the Norwegian Defense Research Establishment in Oslo. Hegghammer believes that the Internet will play an increasingly important role for militants as they intensify their campaign in Saudi Arabia, which hosts several Muslim holy sites. "I think [Internet videos are] most certainly aimed at the Americans or the Westerners in general. It's supposed to create fear in the expatriate community in Saudi Arabia and to cause some kind of exodus from Saudi Arabia."

A less sinister perspective on the role of the Internet than Weimann's is presented by the Brookings report on public diplomacy, *The Need To Communicate: How to Improve U.S. Public Diplomacy with the Islamic World* (January 2004). The report points out that polls show that among the rapidly growing youth population in the Middle East, those who have access to the Internet are more likely to have an affinity for American values. The report argues that Internet access is a "cornerstone" for public diplomacy expansion. As usual, Internet access is a two-edged sword. Even so, the opportunities it affords should be acknowledged and pursued with vigor. Most important, the Brookings report singles out youth as a new consumer of this medium, a reality that terrorist groups have long and actively recognized.

Another area of growth presented by the report is the incredible rise of bloggers from the region. "Big Pharaoh," from Egypt, is a classic example of committed, hopeful, and educated youth from the region. The names and numbers of these free-spirited youth are too many to list, but the fact is that they are on the rise and they communicate across religious and political borders.

The most novel and interesting aspect of the Internet phenomenon in the Arab world is the prevalence and impact of listservs, which allow direct contact with otherwise hard-to-reach sources. Listservs also deliver potentially valuable information to reporters and others; the Iraqi resistance, for example, has published detailed descriptions of attacks on Americans on its listserv.

Finally, some online media reviews are making a credible showing in the region. Among them are the Institute for Professional Journalists (IPJ) at Lebanese American University and Transnational Broadcasting Studies (TBS) at American University in Cairo.

As influential as all of these new forms of media are becoming, it is the satellite channels that show the greatest potential for ushering in political change. Whether these changes will ever be realized and whether they will be for the good of Arab populations in general depends on many factors. The first question is, what role will the current media patrons play in accepting, directing, and managing this change? Will they manage the power shift by establishing the legal and commercial means to share ownership with self-realizing media organizations over their publics' "hearts and minds"? Will they cleave to their hold over media "truth," increasingly dictated to them by the insurgencies' grip over the public imagination? Or will violent revolution ruthlessly wrench power from them?

Journalists

Although media technology has advanced at breakneck speed, the profession of journalism among new stations remains high-centered on the question of their professional legitimacy. Absent a tradition of a genuine press culture, which would have established and enforced professional and ethical standards, professionalism is a rarity among pan-Arab stations. Among practitioners, there is no perceptible difference between journalists and columnists—that is to say, between reporters and advocates. In news production, for example, stations round up a few "talking heads" and put them on the air to muckrake, expiate, or generally spout off. The result is opinion-based analysis, without ever reporting the news. Arguably, this is a trend in all media today, the United States included. As Dana Milbank specified in a recent editorial, ("My Bias for Mainstream News," *Washington Post*, March 20, 2005, p. B1)

> *Partisans on the left and right have formed cottage industries devoted to discrediting what they dismissively call the "Mainstream media"—the networks, daily newspapers*

> *and news magazines. Their goal: to steer readers and viewers toward ideologically driven outlets that will confirm their own views and protect them from disagreeable facts. In an increasingly fragmented media world, ideologues have already devolved into parallel universes, in which liberals and conservatives can select talk radio hosts, cable new pundits and blogs that share their prejudices.*

For whatever comfort it gives, the decisive difference is that media in democracies are free to decide their own news agenda. In a *New York Times Magazine* article on al-Arabiya, an Arab 24-hour satellite-news channel broadcasting from Dubai, Samantha Shapiro cites Nabil Khatib, Al Arabiya's executive editor for news, as observing that "the central problem is that, although Arab journalists have access to state-of-the-art technology, the government and civic structures needed to support a free modern press don't exist in the Middle East" ("The War Inside the Arab Newsroom," January 2, 2005, section 6, p. 26):

> *Basic information like demographic statistics is treated as if it were a state secret, and it is almost impossible for the channel to report on the inner working of Arab governments —how budgets are drawn up or how leaders are chosen.*

Also, a common claim that Arab journalists and reporters lack professional training is not necessarily true. Many carry American, British, or European passports and were trained in Western communications schools or media organizations. How is it that they have abandoned such professionalism as they possessed? Three factors explain this phenomenon. First, Arab regimes brutally enforce censorship, resulting in assiduous self-censorship in the newsroom.

In the same *New York Times Magazine* article, Khatib acknowledged as much:

> *If in Libya or Egypt I push someone to tell a story that will get him in conflict with the authorities, I can't tell them, "We need it." Because it goes without saying that this subject is dangerous. This applies to most of the issues that matter—all the things related to corruption and political conflicts.*

Second, journalists typically compete with other media organizations not by introducing more objectivity to their reports, for which they are not rewarded, but by exciting their audiences through advocacy and opinion about international events, for which they are not punished. Third, unlike in the West, Arab populations do not look to the press to act as the fourth estate watchdog on the government. Rather, they dismiss journalists as political hacks or stooges. This low status is also reflected in their low salaries. As one Arab journalist quipped, all Arab editors together make less than Peter Jennings.

Regime fierceness in suppressing dissent, matched by an international neglect as well as a national disregard for their dissent, understandably discourages media professionals from maintaining their professional integrity. During the Cold War, the underground press and dissenting journalists in the Soviet bloc had the backing of the United States and other pro-democracy governments during their years of protest; they also had a thriving literary subculture that disseminated antigovernment publications within the bloc. A lively *samizdat* kept the values of free speech alive during that dark period behind the Iron Curtain. Radio Free Europe and Voice of America also served as models and sources of encouragement for these oppressed populations, promulgating values connected to freedom of speech.

Unfortunately, in the Arab context, most of the authoritarian regimes are allies of the United States, putting U.S. foreign policy at odds with its national values. Arab populations, and journalists among them, tend to see themselves as victims of two forms of colonialism: one imposed by their own national governments and the second by the United States and its allies. Unlike the oppressed populations during the Cold War, they see their national and international oppressors working hand in hand to threaten their livelihood and to humiliate them. The Arab people resent their own governments and their foreign allies. Partly as a result of that political alignment and the lack of a space for legitimate political expression, the

underground voices of dissent tend to be channeled into and through radical Islamist movements. When the regimes jail, torture, and oppress dissenters, they and their supporters often become radicalized. Al-Zawaheri, the second-ranking man in al Qaeda, for instance, became radicalized while jailed in Egypt.

There are brave journalists such as Fahd al-Rimawi, editor of *al-Majd* newspaper, currently imprisoned in Jordan because he ran a story critical of Saudi Arabia. His colleagues in Jordan, apologist Arab journalists, parrot the Jordanian government's rationale that al-Rimawi was arrested because he was "harming relations with a brotherly Arab country." Using clever maneuvers, a daring few get their stories out under authoritarian rule. An illustration shows the length to which they will go: In an interview for a Kuwaiti publication, President Hosni Mubarek of Egypt, believing the interview was off the record, was especially candid in his opinions about other Arab leaders. The Kuwaiti newspaper published the interview. Egyptian journalists, wanting to report the damning interview in their own press, framed it this way: "Those vicious Kuwaitis—published total lies about our president ... and here are the lies . . . [proceeding to quote Mubarek]." They ran the story about Mubarek while protecting themselves under the guise of outing the Kuwaitis. This kind of reporting would be ethically questionable in an open society where a free press shuns libel. In this context, however, it seems an act of bravery, if not adroitness, in confronting a totalitarian government.

Historically Arabs and Arab media, in particular, have viewed the Western press deferentially not only because of its technical superiority but because of its breadth and depth of accurate coverage. British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC) Arab news service has been the gold standard throughout Arab national movements following the end of colonialism in the region. Western coverage of the 1967 Six-Day War between Israel, Egypt, and Syria and again of the 1991 Gulf War demonstrated to Arab audiences the reliability of Voice of America, Radio Monte Carlo, and the BBC news coverage, especially compared with their own national media coverage. At the same time, however, although war coverage accentuated the dominance of Western media, it also revealed a fundamental hypocrisy to Arab audiences about Western interest in—thus sympathy toward—oil-soaked birds over Iraqi civilian casualties.

The competition between Western and Arab coverage was again dramatically highlighted during the 2003 Iraq War. But this time, Arab satellite channels surged ahead of the 1991 media star, CNN. Their newly won status became clear when Western media began to use Arab media feeds. Almost a Rocky Balboa phenomenon, nothing in the Arab world today parallels the effect on Arab populations of al-Jazeera's one-upmanship over Western media, illustrated by its sensational war coverage and subsequent international notoriety.

In an article on *Guardian Unlimited* (September 15, 2004), Alastair Campbell, director of communications and strategy for U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair prior to and during the recent Iraq war, describes a recent visit to the station. The article is provocatively entitled "I was wrong about al-Jazeera" (*Guardian Unlimited*, September 15, 2004. Online. Available http://www.guardian.co.uk/g2/story/0,3604,1304622,00.html).

> *I thought they would be cocky and brash because they had made themselves into the media story of the last decade. In fact, I found them worried about the way they were perceived, and genuinely perplexed by what they saw as a one-dimensional American view of their output. They see themselves as agents of change, but condemned as part of a dangerous status quo. They report anti-Americanism, but deny anti-Americanism is part of their ethos. There is widespread coverage of anti-Americanism in South America and Asia, even in Japan. But it goes unnoticed: "We are unfairly treated in the way we are singled out."*

Admittedly, production values, use of the equipment, and competitiveness among these new satellite stations, particularly al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya, are as good as any media in the world. Production quality is not the issue, critics of Arab media maintain. It is the lying and inciting against Western governments that strip these media organs of credibility and professional standing. Arab media counter that they do

exactly what the American media do: mirror and pander to the emotional and political sentiments of their audience in order to maximize their market share.

Programming in any highly saturated media market tends to reflect consumer preferences. And, like all media with a popular consumer base, Arab media is heavily entertainment oriented. Not surprisingly, news has become part of that orientation. Nor are Western media exempt. Arab media, however, although they adopt the populist posture of responding to audience demands, do not accept the corollary role of watchdog over the government on behalf of their respective constituencies. More often, they are the pawns of their owner governments. Nevertheless, it is difficult to distinguish whether governments deliberately incite their regional audiences through a pan-Arab agenda or whether the "Arab" consumer is now demanding a more violent and emotive news programming as part of the daily entertainment media fare.

Still, all these new satellite channels do tend to reduce coverage to imagery, a more powerful and cheaper way of conveying the news. Because complexity and nuance are not visually adaptive, scenes of carnage are used to emotionalize rather than to analyze the causes. Regional media prize the most visually titillating footage because it draws the largest viewership, among all Arab audiences. Moreover, Arab media organizations respond, "War is war. It produces carnage and death. Part of our job is to show that" (*Guardian Unlimited*, September 15, 2004). They point to the U.S. media outlets showing the images of the corpses of Uday and Qusay Hussein, which by all counts was a violation of journalistic ethics and norms. To be sure, a tension between the propriety of showing gruesome images and protecting freedom of speech and a right to know will always exist within news organizations' missions. To most, however, incitement, like pornography, is a case of "you know it when you see it."

And, increasingly, Arab audiences, journalists among them, are calling it for what it is. Appropriately, satellite channel broadcasts of terrorist atrocities such as abductions and hostage beheadings have begun to spark outrage. In the days following the abduction of French journalists in Iraq al-Sharq al-Awsat (London), September 1, 2004, columnist Samir ‘Attallah grappled with the implications for all Arabs and Islam:

> *What would happen if the journalists were not French or a country expressing solidarity with the Arabs? Would it then be permissible to abduct them? Is it permissible to abduct Koreans, Italians, and Americans and to slaughter them before the camera...? It saddens me to say that the responsibility for this lies not only with several wild barbarians...*

And, laying the climate that tolerates these actions at the door of Arab governments, he concluded:

> *It is the doing of the government parties, authors, and elected officials who feared and were silent, as if giving legitimacy to a culture of abduction, murder, and beheading and keeping [the heads] in the refrigerator alongside the mangos and the morning milk.*

Abd Al-Hamid Al-Ansari, former dean of the faculty of Shari'a at the University of Qatar, noted the double standards that reveal a moral duplicity in the London Arabic-language daily *Al-Hayat*, (September 9, 2004):

> *Why have we not seen an expression of solidarity in similar instances of abduction of innocent journalists, workers, and drivers? Where was our moral conscience sleeping when our satellite channels aired before our eyes and ears the pictures of slaughter and mutilation of bodies? Why have we heard no similar condemnation of these terror operations? Why this duplicity...?*

Numbering among these occasions for self-examination was Secretary Rumsfeld's testimony to Congress about the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. It was carried live on al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya, two of the region's most popular satellite channels. Apparently, the testimony affected Arab journalists in unexpected ways.

One print reporter suggested that the speaker of the Egyptian parliament should use the event as a training session for members of parliament on how to interrogate their own executives. What was notable to those who spoke out was that the scandal was an American problem, exposed and reported on by the American media, which made the debate public and accessible not only to Congress, but to U.S. citizens at large. Why, one journalist wondered, shouldn't we have a similar debate about torture and human rights abuses in Egyptian prisons? Other journalists focused on the robust functioning of a serious parliament—how American elected officials held the Secretary of Defense's feet to the fire. American culture has demonstrated an irresistible appeal, which historically has exacted a powerful pull by way of example.

Media Markets

Scholars have tried to track audience profiles and content preferences among Arab populations, but good data are limited and resources are not plentiful for these studies. Those that have been conducted tend to reflect the survey sponsor's values. There are a few things that can be said about this still mostly unexplored area. In New Media, New Politics? From Satellite Television to the Internet in the Arab World (Policy paper published by The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998), Jon Alterman observed:

> *The rise of regional information organs has reinvigorated a sense of common destiny among many in the Arab world. The regional media market is notable for several reasons. It is, in fact a market. Relying on supply and demand, programming does not simply meet the needs of government broadcasters, but rather actively seeks viewers who enjoy a variety of news and entertainment options. The consequence is an enormous empowerment of the viewership and a dramatic improvement in viewer satisfaction with programming.*
>
> *The imperative is to produce programming that enlarges and unites, rather than fractures the regional market. This has resulted in a media focus on international rather than domestic affairs, with the unifying slant of "Arab-world-versus-the-rest" rather than the potentially divisive examination of their national and cultural distinctions and differences. As a consequence, the issues around which Arabs tend to unite and which also elicit "anti-American" feelings are strong and ubiquitous.*

Given "the Arab" as the prototype consumer, marketing for that consumer has tended to affect media content— the reverse of conventional assumptions that media content shapes popular attitudes. Tracking historical media preferences among Arabs living in Israel shows a fairly clear picture of consumers selecting the outlet that best coincides with their political point of view. When the credibility of the Arab press died with the Arab defeat in the 1967 war, a younger Arab generation began listening to the more informative, less polarized Hebrewlanguage press. During the 1970s and 1980s, Arab elites in Israel got their news largely through the Hebrewlanguage media. Fueled by a sense that an Arab-Israeli peace was eminent and responding to Arab populations that wanted information about Israel, a new upstart satellite station, al-Jazeera, captured large audiences with its unique coverage. Originally, it was regarded as "Zionist" by other Arab media because it criticized the various Arab governments of the region and covered Israel. Yet in fall 2000, with the collapse of peace negotiations, the rise of the Intifada, and increasing Israeli incursions into Gaza and the West Bank, public opinion shifted, and so did al-Jazeera's coverage.

During the past five years, its approach to regional issues has reflected the shift in Arab popular sentiment, backing the Intifada and opposing the U.S. invasion of Iraq. State Department surveys over the past four years also record this dramatic shift in confidence in the good offices of the Unites States in the peace process. In spring 2000, 63 percent of Arabs had confidence that the United States was mediating in

good faith. By fall 2003, that percentage had dropped to 40, then in March 2004, to 30 percent. It is no wonder, then, that Arabs watch al-Arabiya and al-Jazeera, which align with their view of facts on the ground and which, accordingly, they trust.

Although "the Arab" is the consumer profile for regional and diaspora Arab media, it would be a mistake to conceive of that audience as homogenous. Arab audiences are a rich demographic mixture. The vacuum created by media neglecting national and ethnic focus, per se, has left Arabs ignorant about "others" included within the pan-Arab profile. Syrians are likely to know more about the United States than about their fellow Arab states. That said, personal loyalty to a pan-Arab identity is conflicted. Until recently, national cultural identity has represented a key source of individual dignity. This fact shows up when discussing language on these pan-Arab stations. Lebanese do not necessarily admire Egyptian or Saudi dialects or vice versa. Yet, despite a generally felt abhorrence toward their respective governments, today, reclaiming their "greater" Arab destiny through the stature of such stations as al-Jazeera offers these disparate populations a more meaningful international presence.

Content

As a general rule, the minister of information in each Arab regime makes it his business to shape the content of Arab media by enforcing harsh laws backed up by imprisonment and physical violence. Nevertheless, the explosion of media voices in the region has complicated his traditional control over content. Not only must the regime monitor the messages of a mushrooming media scene, it must also gauge its effect on an expanding population of a predominately poor, illiterate youth—also the target audience of radical Islamist groups.

The prominence of the pan-Arab market affects content in at least three overlapping and reinforcing ways. First, with the increased accessibility of satellite television, broadcasters compete for audiences in a highly saturated market. Second, high viewership coupled with low literacy means that programming aims at the lowest common denominator, usually entertainment. Third, Arab governments use their media to maintain their hold on their populations.

Regarding competition and entertainment, the extraordinary regional popularity of Future Television's Superstar underlines this dynamic. Within a saturated market that prefers entertainment as its daily fare, news must titillate in order to compete. Again, this situation is not unique to Arab media.

Media in free markets also pander to their audiences in order to capture ratings and advertising revenues. Yet, add the Arab government-owned and -run factor and you have a different brew: The similarities between the Arab and Western media environments collapse. Because Arab media organizations are owned by and scripted under the watchful eye of their oppressive governments, they are instruments of the government's agenda rather than authentic news vehicles. The *Economist* (September 18–24, 2004) reported how on September 1, Egypt's leading newspaper, the government-owned daily al-Ahram, buried deep inside its pages the brutal massacre of twelve Nepalese kitchen workers by Iraqi guerrillas, who claimed to be doing God's work by executing Buddhist invaders. A day later, on its front page, al-Ahram featured rioters in Katmandu, the Nepalese capital, attacking a mosque, without any cause-and-effect explanation.

Moreover, the pan-Arab market offers irresistible opportunities for regional collusion among governments. They own the means to construct a fabricated reality, presenting an international environment in which Israel and the United States victimize Arabs everywhere. And, in so doing, they rationalize their own ironhanded legitimacy as a "pan-Arab" necessity. To reinforce their solidarity, Arab governments have never allowed their respective media to evaluate critically national domestic policies or those of friendly (other Arab) governments. The media do not delve into national or local issues because these are the issues that most threaten their governments' authority and legitimacy. Coverage of specific problems in

individual Arab countries is absent. The justification offered is that people in one country—Oman, for example—would not be interested in Morocco's national issues. Today, little or no coverage is given to the crisis in Darfur, Sudan. Al-Jazeera, which is financed and run by Qatar, a close ally of the United States and the staging area for U.S. Iraq deployment, features speakers who are hostile not only to the United States, but to all moderate Arabs, in effect repudiating any diplomatic understanding between the two states about forestalling radical incitement. Nor does al-Jazeera's posture as a renegade and daring media organization extend to its investigation of well-known succession issues within the Qatari ruling family.

This situation raises the question about the Arab media coverage of terrorist proclamations and acts. Notably, al Qaeda has primarily used al-Jazeera to make global statements about its activities. Other terrorist groups have also used well-known and not-so-well-known media, including Internet sites, to announce having taken hostages in Iraq and to portray their deaths in real time. As outrageous as this is, Western observers still find it difficult to determine where to come down on censorship of the press. Although the argument that portraying such gruesome images fulfills terrorist agendas to frighten and intimidate Western publics, it also has a reverse effect of "putting off" regional audiences and deglamorizing this sort of jihad.

An impressive outpouring of disgust among regional media over the Beslan, Russia, terrorist act includes such reactions as Mundir Badr Haloum, a lecturer at a Syrian university, in the Lebanese daily al-Safir (September 13, 2004):

> *The Islamic press searches for something that will absolve "Islam" of the crimes of the Shahada [martyrdom]... It is Islam that adorns television screens with body parts... Islam—whether those who praise its mercies like it or not—is the foul odor of the putrefaction of Islamic history and its stench... Indeed, we as Muslims produce terrorism, succor it, and praise it. We condemn it only when forced to. Motivated by considerations of power, interests, and diplomacy, we wear a pained expression on our faces but in our hearts we rejoice at the brilliant success—a large number of casualties.*

There have been some promising, unanticipated effects of the intense media competition in the region. Despite the tight hold patrons have over media scripts and programming, the scramble for market share has introduced an incentive for a few more daring media outlets to strive for more credibility in the market. The distinction between pan-Arab and national media has begun to divide along these lines: pan-Arab media clinging to the tried-but-true topics that excite Arab passions, and the national media beginning to search for niche markets and authenticity within them. How independently these daring few can function depends on the culture as well as the ruling regime. Despite occasional arrests of journalists for attacking fellow Arab governments, Jordan is relatively open. Looking for a niche in a saturated market, Jordan Television has recognized that media outlets must compete with each other for credibility among their audiences. If stations are not credible in a saturated market, audiences change the channel. Credibility versus authority is a painful choice for these governments, which they may be facing all too soon.

This recognition may explain why some Arab governments appear to be taking steps toward cultivating more professional media organizations. United Arab Emirates Sheikh Abdullah bin Zaid, the son of the president and minister of information, was not disappointed when, with a little loosening of the reins, Abu Dhabi television's audience market share increased. When Syria's Bashar al-Asad first ascended to the presidency, he began to liberalize the media before backing away and reasserting strong state control because of political pressure from within the government. In Saudi Arabia as well, the leadership sees itself caught between religious conservatives and reformers, creating a context in which the media have recently been allowed to publish reformist views that were not allowed in the past.

Impact and Media Reform

The relationship that binds media, patrons, and publics in oppressive political regimes is a curious dependence. This dependence appears to be loosening in the Arab world. No matter how they try, regimes can no longer control the information environment. Both the intense regional competition that satellite channels represent and the newfound confidence in their media power demonstrated by scooping most Western media during the Iraq war have fueled this dynamic. The Arab satellite channels, like the genie let out of the bottle, leave us knowing more about what we do not know than what we do know about the degree and nature of their impact.

The glass-half-empty view: Radical voices use the media effectively because their message is simple and easily transmitted in visuals. Accurate reporting requires a thoughtful viewer to sort out and assess its meaning. Comprehensive analysis, as opposed to commentary, also puts the burden of final judgment on the viewer. Neither is favored by popular audiences, whether they live in a democracy or not.

The glass-half-full view: Increased competition for regional audiences has made clear that electronic media can influence popular attitudes, and, conversely, media-empowered audiences demand and get the programming they want. The result is that media patrons have begun to vie with their outlets and with each other for their traditional authoritarian influence over programming content and thus, the public's point of view. This is occurring in the context of a flourishing transborder media market that has not yet recognized itself as a social force. Moreover, these same patrons must contend with the availability of 24/7 global broadcasting from Western media, which is outside their control.

Reality: Although Arab media can put a modicum of pressure on governments regarding issues, they do not yet have the power to set the political agenda as the media do in the West. The fact that representatives of Arab governments call in to television programs to defend their human rights records indicates some advancement, however. Without question, topics besides Iraq and Palestine are important to Arab audiences. Like people everywhere, Arabs care most about their own personal and local concerns, such as their schools and their neighborhoods. Arab media should focus on these issues if they seriously intend to cater to their markets. But going off the regional "message" invites accusations of breaking ranks, selling out. In the "Jordan First" campaign (the government's program that emphasizes the preeminence of Jordan's interests), focus is on national issues; yet Jordan Television has become a target of regional attack for having abandoned Palestine for its own local interests.

Reform in the media will happen as a process, not a decision by fiat; and with the tradition of governmental control, it will not occur easily. The king of Jordan wants credibility, but bureaucrats and practitioners are not willing to change their familiar "safe" practices. As an illustration, an editor of Jordan Television described assigning a reporter to cover a somewhat controversial story. The reporter delivered a report with absolutely no substance. The editor insisted that he redo it and had to insist twice, whereupon the reporter asked, "Are you sure you want me to do this? ... We never did this before." It is a cultural process—it will take time for journalists to redefine their role. Nor is the political environment sufficiently developed for meaningful reform. Governments always prefer to do their work behind closed doors, and the media's position in the culture is not yet strong enough to challenge their governments.

Despite more talk among Arab media about human rights violations, it would be too much to say that they are encouraging government accountability and democratization. Some say such talk merely serves as a safety valve, rendering issues like women, Islam, and ethnicity into entertainment. At this juncture, what can be said is that serious critical discussion of public policy issues is occurring more frequently than before the advent of the satellite era. Arab citizens have become accustomed to criticizing their own governments and to discussing issues more openly. Arabs are also learning more about one another, becoming familiar with dialects other than their own. The new satellite channels and other media are a pivotal emergent factor in the Arab world. Inadvertently or not, they offer a forum for the Arab street to vent, formulate, and discuss public affairs. They bring Arabs closer together, breaking taboos and generally competing with each other and their respective governments for the news agenda. All in all, Arab satellite

stations have pushed ajar the door of democracy and flanked state monopolies on media. However qualified this assertion is, it does amount to a significant latitude when we say that al-Jazeera can talk about any topic except Qatar. Yet, we would be reminded by an editorial in Rose al- Yusef, the Egyptian weekly: "Our fear of speaking out has become the terrorists' fifth column."

Conclusions

Like most of today's media, Arab satellite stations cater to and compete for their audiences' hearts and minds. Accordingly, regional history and its absence of democracy accounts for pan-Arab media's content and their success among Arab populations. Arab audiences watch the news through a prism of individual and collective humiliation and resentment. To cater to those audiences, media portray the distorted reality created by this prism; and to compete with each other, they exaggerate the distortion. The pictures out of Fallujah do not in themselves necessarily incite Arab viewership against the United States, but reportage claiming that Americans intentionally target civilians does. It confirms an already distorted view of reality. The stations play to a popularly held belief in order to up the ante in their competitive media environment. Such claims spur others to even more spurious allegations. This pernicious cycle ensures that moderation, much less reasoned truth, cannot be voiced.

Although the new satellite channels are technical improvements over what preceded them, their lack of professionalism— accountability regarding objectivity and fourth estate responsibilities to the public— renders them suspect, if not a genuine danger to the West. To ignore or somehow justify their lies and inflammatory reporting as incidental to doing business in their political environment amounts to gross relativism. If al-Jazeera and its peers are not held accountable to the highest standards, they will never become genuinely professional media outlets. Countering their arguments that U.S. media are just as biased, one need only point to the speed and transparency with which the American media self-corrects. The public flaps over the *New York Times*' Jayson Blair, USA Today's Jack Kelley, and 60 Minutes airing fake documents about President George W. Bush's National Guard records demonstrate the punishments for those who do not meet the professional standards of reporting.

Despite their shortcomings, these new satellite stations should be encouraged. They should be criticized when they broadcast lies, and they should be applauded when they merit credit. Again, quoting Alastair Campbell: (*Guardian Unlimited*, September 15, 2004)

> *Western politicians should feel free to attack it [al-Jazeera] if they think it deserves it. But there is a case for a more engaged approach. It is no good just complaining that your policy is constantly misrepresented. You have to engage in the task of putting your case, whatever you think of the medium, and you will probably do the job better if you try to understand where the medium is coming from.*

The workshop series finished its investigation of the current Arab media environment with a fundamental question about which factor was responsible for the incendiary tone and violent attacks on the West in general and the United States in particular. Was it the governments that owned the media organs, or was it the public who, in the media-saturated market, demanded confirmation of their own perceptions, and the media pandering to either or both? Clearly, the question points to the dynamic media transition underway in the region. Workshop participants recognized that media reform was an internal question, which the U.S. government could encourage through a number of mechanisms. Such efforts were viewed as having only marginal value if they were not accompanied by policy change toward the Arab governments and an insistence of the "rule of law" as a political condition.

Regime reform that institutionalizes a rule of law, that protects individual rights and concurrently freedom of speech, is the necessary precursor for media reform. Increasingly, calls by the public for political reform are appearing in and being disseminated by regional media. Partly in outrage over recent terrorist events,

the public seems no longer able to remain silent about what is happening to its religion as well as its self-identity. If publicly recognizing that the "problem is within us" is a sign, root-level introspection may be occurring in the region. In answer to the incendiary fatwa by the Muslim Brotherhood urging attacks on American soldiers in Iraq, Arabs have stepped forward to renounce the call in the severest and most self-reflective terms. Kifaya may be a genuine clarion call, but to what destiny?

Possible Destinies

The June 30, 2004, move to recognize Iraqi autonomy in the form of a U.S.-appointed government and the January 30, 2005, elections—which happened on schedule and in a mostly free-and-fair way—have gone far to release the insurgents' psychological grip on the region's blind acceptance of U.S. malevolence. Add to this the mostly free-and-fair election of Abu Mazen in Palestine and the however-limited local elections recently conducted in Saudi Arabia, and we begin to sense a tectonic political shift in the region. It is still too much to hope that Western-style democracy is around the corner, but something fundamentally new is emerging in Arab politics. However tenuous the tie, it seems to have something to do with the awakening of the Arab public to its own power. Could it be that Arab media, for all their warts, have played a part in that awakening?

Despite emergent signs that regime reform may indeed be gaining ground in the region, regnant regimes have much to lose in power and wealth, threat of bloody insurgencies by jihadists, or retribution from those who replace them. What regional institution would be capable of midwifing this transformation? Will it be left to foreigners or insurgents? Is it plausible to hope that the public will find its voice and challenge the regimes to transform into a just rule of law? Not until the public recognizes itself as an institution and a change agent. Only the media can provide a reflection of their public's values, which, once recognized, could empower citizens to claim their rights and obligations. Can these hobbled media, perceived a lackeys to their governments, perform this role?

Notwithstanding the deeply moving images of throngs of Lebanese youth attempting to usher in the "Cedar Revolution" or Hosni Mubarak's recent gestures toward expanding human and civil rights to other candidates in the upcoming Egyptian election, it is prudent to remain merely cautiously optimistic. Whatever shifts are afoot, they will take a while to become anchored in the civic understanding of citizen responsibility and political accountability of just governance. The regional press has a critical role to play in this transformation. It is not at all clear whether this press has the wherewithal to transform itself, much less the citizenry of its respective countries.

Yet regime transition is occurring in the region. To some degree it is occurring in spite of recent U.S. encouragement, but to some degree because of it, too. One of Egypt's most prominent human rights activists, Saad Eddin Ibrahim, just released from three years of imprisonment for having questioned Egyptian electoral procedures, observed that President Bush midwifed a process that was already in formation. Despite breathless attempts by U.S. pundits to recast the direction of regional politics from tyranny to democracy since January, more prudent observers will still query the volatility of these publics' political affiliations. It is not plausible that widespread suspicion and hatred associated with the U.S. government's occupation of Iraq and historical support of Israel have evaporated in the sunlight of purple fingers, Mubarak's election promises, or Syria's agreement to withdraw, however gradually, from Lebanon. Too, as Richard Haass argued, "Democracies are not always peaceful. Immature democracies—those that hold elections but lack many of the checks and balances characteristic of a true democracy—are particularly vulnerable to being hijacked by popular passions. Post-communist Serbia is but one illustration of the reality that such countries do go to war" (*Washington Post*, January 24, 2005, A15). Islamists have not lost their influence in the region, especially among the mostly illiterate, poor, unemployed youth who comprise one-third of the region's population.

Consequently, as change in the region advances, it is likely to become bloodier and even more confusing.

Bloody because so much is at stake for the regional actors, confusing because no one is quite sure who the actors are and what they represent. In an analysis of the political dynamic of insurgency movements, Michael Vlahos wrote in Terror's Mask: Insurgency Within Islam (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002, pp. 28; 26), "The [radical Islamist] insurgency is an authentic Islamic renewal movement and central to change." Accordingly, "a successful Islamist revolution today is possibly the best way to defuse 'radical' Islam—because of necessity it will do the defusing itself." In other words, reform may not come through liberal democracy ushered in by moderate Islamists. It may have to come through the turbulence of a French Revolution that turns what exists for a political space in on itself and comes out the other side. That, of course, is a truly scary prospect.

Robin Wright explored this argument in the *Washington Post* "Outlook" article (September 12, 2004), "After Grief, the Fear We Won't Admit." She quotes Ellen Laipson, president of the Stemson Center, as saying, the reality perimeters are that "it's hard to imagine political evolution in the next twenty years that does not include the Islamists. They have established legitimacy and a following and you won't make them disappear overnight by supporting the activities of a small elite of secular modernists...you have to image a political space that has both." How, then, would that political space become less threatening for the West? To answer this question, Wright turns to regional expert Olivier Roy, who responded, "Conservative and even fundamentalist views of religion are manageable in a plural environment, as shown by a host of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish cases. A pluralist approach allows civil society to reach the cadres of youth who could be ideal targets for radicals and neo-fundamentalists groups."

How do we get there from here? Wright points to Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, Robert Hutchings' reasoning in a recent issue of Foreign Policy magazine, "Even as it wages a resolute campaign against international terrorism, America should not believe that it is engaged in a fight to the finish with radical Islam. This conflict is not a clash of civilizations, but rather a defense of our shared humanity and a search for common ground, however implausible that may seem now." Without doubt, until political reform toward classical liberal values occurs in the region, the media will never become an objective fourth estate to ensure good governance. To a greater extent than we would like to acknowledge, most of the work toward that end is for the people in the region to do themselves. Fouad Ajami observed, "For at heart, this war for Islam is one for Muslims to fight. It is for them to recover their faith from the purveyors of terror" ("Facing up to unholy terror," USNews.com. September 20, 2004. Online. Available http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/040920/ 20fouad.htm.).

In some respects, such reflections remove the burden of having to answer the question about why they hate us by saying that all of this boils down to an internal struggle over ascendancy in the region. Yes and no. Whether or not revolution is inevitable, the United States could ease the path to regime reform and a freer life for the Arab peoples by pursuing policies that these populations do not see as a threat to their lives and identity and that encourage their efforts to work for legitimate, responsible, accountable, and representative governments of their own. David Brooks ("War of Ideology," *New York Times*, July 24, 2004, A13) provided a tough reality check for Americans as we ready ourselves to take on this newest burden:

> *We now need a commission to analyze our intellectual failures. . . .We need to see that the landscape of reality is altered. In the past, we've fought ideological movements that took control of states. Our foreign policy apparatus is geared toward relations with states: negotiating with states, confronting states. Now we are faced with a belief system that is inimical to the state system, and aims at theological rule and the restoration of the caliphate. We'll need a new set of institutions to grapple with this reality, and a new training method to understand people who are uninterested in national selfinterest, traditionally defined.*

Although through the years, U.S. policies toward the region have exacerbated a festering indignation among diverse Arab populations, who are only broadly unified by their common language, it is their shared religion that represents their greatest political challenge. Arabs, who inhabit the heartland of Islam's

sacred sites and who must show appropriate stewardship of this divine providence to the rest of Islam, are politically conflicted. They are quite naturally drawn to the defiant hope of the radical and violent resurgence of the religious and cultural hegemony of a "restored" Islam offered by the ideological movement of al Qaeda. Yet, their own rich history as handed down through the writings of such thinkers as Al Farabi, Averroes, and Ibn Khaldun could guide them to governance based on toleration, rule of law, reverence for truth, as well as piety—a much sounder reclamation of a golden age of Islam.

Endnotes

1. Besides the edifying *9/11 Report*, other illuminating publications about the Arab predicament and the U.S. response include Terror's Mask: Insurgency Within Islam by Michael Vlahos (Johns Hopkins, May 2002); "The Kingdom of Silence," by Lawrence Wright (*The New Yorker*, January 5, 2004); "War of Ideology" by David Brooks (*New York Times*, July 24, 2004); "Bush's Lost Year," by James Fallows (The *Atlantic*, October 2004); and "After Grief, the Fear We Won't Admit," by Robin Wright (The *Washington Post*, "Outlook," September 12, 2004). Yet, the sine qua non among resources on the new Arab media is Jon Alterman's New Media, New Politics? From Satellite Television to the Internet in the Arab World (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998). During the preparation of this report, these extremely insightful articles were published, "The War Inside the Arab Newsroom," by Samantha M. Shapiro (*New York Times Magazine*, January 2, 2005), and "Success Without Victory," by James Fallows (The *Atlantic*, January/ February 2005). The devastatingly critical Defense Science Board Report on Strategic Communication was published in November 2004.

2. *Defense Science Board Review*, 2004 Summer Study, p. 54.

About the Report

In March 2004, the United States Institute of Peace organized a six-month workshop series, as part of its Muslim World Initiative, to analyze the role of Arab media in shaping the information environment that encourages popular hostility in the region toward the West, particularly the United States. Senior Fellow Mamoun Fandy (2004–2005) chaired and Sheryl Brown, director of the Institute's Virtual Diplomacy Initiative, cochaired the series. The overarching objective of the series was to complement the many U.S. public diplomacy projects directed toward diffusing Muslim, particularly Arab, resentment toward the United States. The series examined the primary media sources of information, perceptions, and opinions among Arab populations—ostensibly the most hostile, perhaps the most misunderstood, and certainly the most oppressed populations in the Muslim world.

The Institute is grateful to Mamoun Fandy for his leadership of the series during his fellowship residence, to Dan Consolatore, Fandy's research assistant, for his written briefs of each workshop meeting, and to Virginia Bouvier of the fellowship staff for her organizational and editorial support of the series and final report.

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