APPENDIX A

Dilemma of the Middle East: Policy and Prospects for Public Diplomacy

Summary of Rancho Mirage Seminar Discussions

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We can overcome our difficulties in communicating with the Middle East by effectively using public diplomacy, including international broadcasting, but we must first identify the key obstacles to our policies in the region, recognizing that the area presents far more of a challenge to our

*The seminar was convened with the understanding that the proceedings would be published but not attributed to individual participants. This digest is intended to provide an overview of the discussions without attempting to capture all differences among participants. Not all participants agreed with all the points in this summary.

public diplomacy strategies than our previous experiences with broadcasting behind the Iron Curtain. To effectively communicate, we must consider four significant differences: the Middle East is largely populated by pro-American regimes and anti-American populations; it is an information-rich setting where international broadcasting must successfully compete with a myriad of other media; the rapid pace of technological development is constantly reshaping regional communication; and it is an environment rife with rumor and conspiracy thinking—conditions that are largely the reverse of what Western broadcasters faced in confronting Soviet propaganda behind the Iron Curtain.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

Before we can examine the Middle East in greater depth we require a better understanding of the "lessons learned" from Western broadcasting to the Soviet Bloc during the Cold War. Our efforts to foster democratic change and counter anti-Americanism in the Islamic World—strikingly similar to our broadcasting objectives for the Soviet Bloc—will benefit greatly from this effort.

New research has concluded that Western broadcasts had a remarkable impact in the USSR and Eastern Europe.

They reached both mass audiences and key elites within the Communist regimes and among regime opponents. Those audiences tuned in for an alternative to state-controlled news, for information about positive developments in other countries, and for hope that a better life was possible. The keys to reaching and building large-scale mass and elite audiences were:

1. Broadcasting reliability, established by a track record of truthful and accurate news.
2. Use of carefully selected émigré broadcasters, some of whom were celebrities within the target countries, operating within decentralized broadcasting organizations under essential American management and "quality control".
3. Understanding target country developments and audiences through information collection and analytical and media research.
4. Developing differentiated and tailored programs for multiple audiences among and within the target countries. Programming covered events of the day (e.g., the Chernobyl nuclear plant disaster) and also key democracy themes (e.g., series on civil rights in the U.S.; civilian control of the military; basic human rights; free market economies). Continuous audience feedback ensured long-term programming relevance.

5. Developing mechanisms geared to providing public funding and oversight while ensuring management autonomy and journalistic independence.
6. Providing complementary Western broadcasts including RFE/RL, VOA, BBC, and other broadcasters, each with a different emphasis and "value-added".
7. Articulating a clear purpose that earned bipartisan support in successive administrations and the Congress, ensuring adequate sustained funding.
8. Broadcasting programs that conformed to broad American national security strategy but were separated from day-to-day policy considerations.

Our Cold War efforts would not have succeeded had the United States not committed significant resources to public diplomacy. However, all recent studies of current American public diplomacy agree that it is severely under-funded and has lacked effective leadership for years. The Djerejian Commission report* is one of a number of such studies offering a systematic inventory of the problems and a comprehensive set of recommendations to overcome them. It

*Changing Minds; Winning Peace. Report of the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World [Djerejian Commission]. October 2003, Executive Summary, pp. 8–10; Specific Recommendations, pp. 69–71. http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/24882.pdf.

bluntly states that our existing programs are wholly inadequate given our present-day difficulties. Below is a brief summary of the current state of affairs throughout the Middle East.

ANTI-AMERICANISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The rise of anti-American sentiments on the Arab street, and thus much of our current difficulties, is partly traceable to a pro-Israeli shift in United States policy after the 1967 war. Prior to the Israeli victory and the subsequent occupation of the West Bank and the Sinai, American policymakers had been more balanced in their relations between Israel and Arab countries, but shifted to a more pro-Israeli policy in its aftermath. The end of the Cold War only accentuated this trend. The cause of this shift reflected, in part, the growing democratization of American foreign policy and the increased role for political pressure groups. Additionally, the demise of the Soviet Union removed the ever-present fear that drove much of U.S. policy in the Middle East: that Arab oil supplies would be lost to the West.

Consequently, Arab publics feel neglected by the United States, have recently come to sense a lack of U.S. commitment to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and have

concluded that U.S. administrations focus on the region solely during times of crisis. With the end of the Cold War, the ensuing budget cuts coupled with the end of the United States Information Agency gravely weakened the U.S. public diplomacy apparatus. Rightly or wrongly, the Arab street has come to believe that America cares little for its plight—a sentiment that extremist forces have exploited to their advantage.

Arab populations are prepared to engage in activities—even negative ones—to re-engage America in the peace process, even though these activities may have seriously detrimental consequences for them. One example is support for Saddam Hussein. Arabs understood that he was a murderous tyrant, but Saddam challenged the United States and thus forced the U.S. to concentrate much of its Middle East policy on him. So, too, today with Osama bin Laden and the 9/11 attacks. Consequently, while the majority of these populations aspire to democracy and hope that the experiment begun in Iraq will succeed, they also take some satisfaction in seeing the United States bloodied and battered in the process. Not every Arab maintains these beliefs; many oppose Islamic fundamentalism but as yet do not feel any need to support American causes, and thus represent a very silent majority.

The political problems we face in the Middle East are aggravated by numerous social, economic, and demographic

trends. First, the region is bereft of democracy and burdened by corrupt regimes whose poor performances have devastated the region. Second, the failure of the Pan-Arab nationalist movements of the 1950s has led to an estrangement among Arab communities and a feeling that their current governments are too subservient to the United States. Third, the region is plagued with economic and social stagnation caused by too much state control of the economy coupled with pervasive corruption and an over-reliance on oil. The legacy of socialism has resulted in a population that expects everything from the regime. Fourth, the region suffers from an extremely high birthrate that strains social and political institutions. Fifth, education levels are exceptionally poor and are often heavily focused on religious training. The result is that schools across the Middle East are graduating students with negligible practical skills and with little hope of finding employment.

What, then, is to be done? Some believe that the region finds itself in the same condition as Western Europe during the Middle Ages and that only a "renaissance" can arouse the Middle East from its current despair. Yet today it is the Islamists who dominate the intellectual high ground, followed by large numbers of traditionalists who are opposed to what they see as illegitimate, non-Islamic philosophies seeking to control the region. There are as yet very few reformers who are willing to openly preach the virtues of

modernity and who strive to defeat its opponents. There was hope that immigration to Western Europe and the impact of living in a highly developed society would increase support for modernism within Arab society. Unfortunately, the reverse has come true. Arab populations, even those born and raised in Western Europe, feel alienated from Western society and gravitate toward Arab ghettos often centered on the mosque, where their feelings of estrangement are exploited by radical Muslim clerics.

Much of the Arab world's anti-American sentiments reflect these feelings of alienation within Muslim society. Yet their virulence can also be traced to the egregious abuse of these sentiments by ostensibly pro-American regimes that hope to channel their own peoples' hatred of them against the United States. They seek to take advantage of the envy American prosperity and innovation has engendered in these populations, and Middle Eastern regimes abuse these feelings in order to vent the hatred of the Arab street away from their dictatorships. These states are not interested in democracy and do everything in their power to suppress political debate. The governments realize that their populations have grown frustrated, and believe that they can reduce the threat to themselves by directing these disaffections towards the United States. Therefore, we must consider carefully what anti-Americanism actually means. Does it mean, literally, that the Arab world hates America,

or is it a reflection of their own feelings about themselves and their current status? Questions have been raised about the interpretation of the Zogby and Pew Research surveys that indicate that favorable attitudes toward the United States have plummeted to negligible levels. Designers of these polls should confront critics within the Middle East area studies profession who question their methods and challenge their conclusions.

Regardless of the effectiveness of public opinion polling, we face the uncertainty that our efforts to reduce anti-Americanism may in the end have little effect, as a central source of its existence is the battle between the forces of stagnation and modernism within the Arab world—a fight that must be won by the modernists within the Middle East.

IRAN: DANGER AND OPPORTUNITY

Iran presents us with circumstances that are quite the opposite of what we face in the Arab world—an anti-American government with a population sympathetic to America and supportive of its ideals. Recognizing this difference as well as the many complexities that underlie life in revolutionary Iran is crucial if we are to develop a successful public diplomacy strategy for Iran.

The rulers of the Islamic Republic consider recent events to have significantly strengthened their position in the Middle East and provided them with greater leverage in their confrontation with the United States. The insurgency in Iraq has tied down over 150,000 U.S. troops in a commitment that might last for years, thus precluding serious military pressure against Tehran. Their religious brethren, the Shia, will dominate the new Iraqi government, and along with their allies in Syria, Iranian leaders believe they have effectively encircled and outmaneuvered the United States in the region. Through astute use of their oil assets, they have successfully nullified the most significant threat to their regime: UN sanctions in response to their burgeoning nuclear program. Recent deals with China have practically guaranteed a veto of any Security Council resolutions authorizing sanctions against Iran. Iran's mullahs are so confident in the strength and stability of their position that they openly disparage the United States in a manner unlike any since the revolution. Consequently, the danger from the Islamic Republic has rapidly escalated and threatens both the Middle East and the world.

The development of a nuclear capability by Iran poses one of the most critical long-term challenges for the United States. Iranian leaders consider possession of the bomb the key to their survival—a guarantee that they will not follow in the footsteps of Saddam Hussein. Rather, leading Iran-

ian clerics openly admit that they intend to follow, instead, in the footsteps of North Korea, whose nuclear program — they believe — has made it immune to U.S. pressures. Iran's leaders learned from Saddam Hussein's failure and have developed a two-front approach to ensure the ultimate success of their program. First, they have effectively negated the military options available to the United States by cleverly dividing the program into numerous parts spread across the country and often located within urban areas to ensure significant loss of civilian life if attacked. Thus a replay of the Israelis' preemptive strike against Iraq's Osirak reactor is out of the question. Second, by enticing Security Council members with lucrative contacts in both oil and nuclear power, they have realistically ensured a veto of any potential Security Council resolution calling for sanctions. Oil contracts with China and India, a nuclear power agreement with Russia, and the prospect of similar economic opportunities for Europeans have enticed some members of the Security Council to resist the imposition of sanctions on Iran. The mullahs of Iran believe that they have checkmated the United States.

Iran's domestic picture, however, provides a powerful ray of hope for U.S. policymakers and for avenues for public diplomacy. Some polling data and an extensive amount of anecdotal evidence suggest that the United States is quite popular with the Iranian people. Iranians admire and

respect America because the United States has for so long stood for the Iranian people against the regime. Conversely, Western Europe, China, and Russia are despised for sacrificing the interests of Iran's population for their own economic benefit.

Polling data also paint a far more precarious situation for the ruling leadership than the mullahs are willing to admit. Disintegration of the Iranian economy, rampant corruption, and the yearning of the Iranian people for elements of Western and, in particular, American culture, have led to an almost universal disdain for the current domestic order. A Gallup poll several years ago that surveyed several thousand Iranians concluded that ninety percent of the Iranian population is opposed to the status quo. The regime responded by imprisoning several of the pollsters.

Cracks are developing as well within the Iranian leadership. The Revolutionary Guard wants a share of power and wealth in Iran, and is exploiting its station to enrich itself. In recent years a number of Revolutionary Guard leaders have become millionaires through the Guard's control over key customs posts. They have also obtained lucrative contracts for construction projects throughout the country. Yet there are others within the Revolutionary Guard who are beginning to express dissatisfaction with the state of the country. The former deputy head of the Revolutionary Guard has defected with the hope of leading the opposition

against the mullahs. Other reports indicate that even within the religious leadership, differences over the role of clerics in government have strained relations among the mullahs, even at the level of Grand Ayatollah. Finally, Iran faces significant nationality concerns. Nearly seven million Kurds live in Iran and aspire to their own Kurdish state. A minimum of one-fourth of the Iranian population is Turkic and attracted to Turkey.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY AND BROADCASTING TO THE MIDDLE EAST

With the end of the Cold War, American interest in public diplomacy waned. The Congress, White House, and State Department no longer considered public diplomacy essential to U.S. national security; consequently, budgets were slashed and reorganizations occurred that weakened the apparatus inherited from the successful struggle with communism. Public diplomacy had become so belittled that by the late 1990s only low-level officials manned the public diplomacy offices within the White House and State Department.

Substantial budget cuts have also weakened the Fulbright Scholars and International Visitors programs that were crucial to our victory in the Cold War. These programs allowed foreign students to study in the United States, and

young decisionmakers to visit, providing them with an invaluable opportunity to learn about America first-hand rather than through the distorting lens of foreign media. Reductions in language-training grant programs have led to a dearth of Americans fluent in Arabic and capable of representing the United States on Arab-language television programs. This problem has been further compounded within the United States by the disdain of many academic circles for area studies.

How do we rebuild our public diplomacy apparatus given these glaring weaknesses? We must restore the Cold War public diplomacy apparatus in all its many forms and adapt it to the 21st century. Broadcasting was but one element of a broad-based, global public diplomacy effort that operated in every region of the world. Fulbright scholarships and International Visitor programs should be expanded, despite the difficulties that post–9/11 immigration restrictions have now placed on these programs. Middle East area studies and language programs must be strengthened.

We must also augment our broadcasting efforts. Currently, U.S. budget officials question the need for multiple broadcast instruments within the region: why have an overlap of two radio stations broadcasting to one country when having only one would save money? The lesson of the Cold War is that more broadcast instruments allow for broader

audience focus than a single station, thus enabling the United States to reach more mass and elite audiences in a variety of countries. If we are to challenge the terrible misconceptions about the United States that are rampant throughout the Middle East, we must have an effective broadcast capability that will attract differentiated audiences.

Such broadcasts must present news and information in total objectivity. The level of conspiratorial discourse in the Middle East effectively prohibits the use of propagandistic methods; we must entice the populations of the Middle East with fair and balanced news and information (including that which is critical of the United States). Broadcasts must recognize that in reality there is no one "Islamic World" but multiple "Islamic worlds" with widely different cultures and histories. Indeed, many of these societies (for example, the Persians of Iran) date back thousands of years to pre-Islamic times. To succeed we must tailor our messages to these varied groups. We must stress that the values we espouse—democracy, free enterprise, freedom of speech—are universal and not merely Western or American values. Extremist Islamists have very effectively begun to discredit these concepts as purely Western, and not founded in Islamic tradition—although that is not the case. We must support those Middle Eastern scholars brave enough to embrace modernity as an intrinsically Islamic idea.

MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

Successful broadcasting, an essential element of public diplomacy, should both provide a comprehensive view of the United States and promote universal values of tolerance, human rights, and democracy in the region. Under the oversight of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, the United States currently supports a variety of stations that communicate by radio, television, and the Internet to the Islamic World. They include RFE/RL, VOA, and the Middle East Network (Al Hurra Television, Radio Sawa). One radio station (Radio Sawa) and one TV station (Al-Hurra) cover the Arab world. Sawa has a significant audience among younger Arabs, but its information content is necessarily limited by its entertainment format. Al-Hurra is attempting to find an audience in the face of strong competition. The Voice of America Arabic-language radio service has been eliminated and Radio Free Iraq has been downsized. Radio Farda (an RFE/RL-VOA cooperative project), VOA TV, and VOA Persian Service radio reach Iran. These stations also have Internet sites.

Efforts are under way to evaluate the effectiveness of these broadcast media. A series of country Media Survey Reports prepared by InterMedia, an independent nonprofit research organization, help us understand the most effective means of communicating with the Middle East.

Using extensive audience surveys of nearly all countries in that region, InterMedia has compiled data indicating audiences for television (both satellite and local), radio, and the Internet.

These reports conclude that television is the medium of choice in the Middle East—respondents were nearly unanimous in their preference for television as the primary source of news and entertainment. Indeed, possession of a television set is a mark of prosperity, and in Iraq, for instance, one hundred percent of those surveyed claimed that they own one. Ownership of satellite television dishes has dramatically increased in some countries, covering nearly fifty percent of the population. Even in Iran, where satellite dishes are illegal and police regularly fly helicopters to catch those who possess them, satellite television is an extremely popular way for the average Iranian to watch international news programs. (The black market sales of satellite dishes have become so lucrative that the son of a high Iranian government official is reportedly the principal supplier.) Not surprisingly, Al-Jazeera tops the list as the most watched international television station. However, its new competitor, Al-Arabiya, is offering a significant challenge.

Radio has fallen to second place among the preferred methods of gathering news. While the vast majority of the population owns radio sets, their daily use has declined. For instance, when asked what they used "yesterday," only

twenty-six percent of Iranians responded with radio, whereas ninety-one percent said they had used television.

Newspaper use is even lower than radio use. In Jordan only ten percent of the population admitted that they used a newspaper "yesterday." In Iran the figure was twenty-four percent, and in Iraq only six percent claimed to read a newspaper on a daily basis.

The survey data indicate that Internet use in the region is still quite limited, often below ten percent of the population. Even in the relatively more advanced Gulf States of Qatar, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates, "yesterday" use registered at only six percent of the population.

Consequently, while radio still plays a key role in informing the Islamic worlds, television has become the medium of choice, and Internet use will increase with the spread of personal computers. Media use by decision-makers is more difficult to establish.

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