



## The Image of the United States Portrayed in Arab World Online Journalism

Dr. Ashraf Galal

Associate professor Qatar University

Dr. Mahmoud Galander

Qatar University

Dr. Philip J. Auter

University of Louisiana at Lafayette

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Philip J. Auter, Ph.D. ([auter@louisiana.edu](mailto:auter@louisiana.edu)) is an associate professor of communication in the Department of Communication at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette in Lafayette, LA USA. Ashraf Galal, Ph.D. ([a.galal@qu.edu.qa](mailto:a.galal@qu.edu.qa)) and Mahmoud Galander, Ph.D. ([galander@qu.edu.qa](mailto:galander@qu.edu.qa)) are associate professors of communication in the Department of Mass Communication and Information Science at Qatar University, Doha, Qatar.

## **The Image of the United States Portrayed in Arab World Online Journalism**

### **Abstract**

The Arab media describes the West as a great enemy. Previous research dealing with the images and 'stereotypes' of Arabs and Muslims in Western media has largely verified "that lurid and insidious depictions of Arabs as alien, violent strangers, intent upon battling non-believers throughout the world, are staple fare. Such erroneous characterizations more accurately reflect the bias of Western reporters and image-makers than they do the realities of Muslim people in the modern world." No doubts that 9-11 events revealed that: there are many waves of bad attitudes between Arab and West people. It emphasized also that the media need too much efforts to rebuild the confidence and credibility in changing this image. The importance of media coverage and stereotypes not only affect the people but also extend to affect the policy and decision makers by adopting the media point of views especially in the critical time. This study is trying to examine to what extent the online journalism in the Arab World has adopted biased coverage of the United States. The study hopes to provide a current assessment of how the U.S. is portrayed in Arab World online journalism. This valid, updated information will enable researchers and communicators alike to better understand not only what is being done, but may lead to ways of providing a solid basis for better dealing with American issues and images in the future. The total sample of the study was 1624 had been selected based on the artificial week from March 2007-February 2008. . Eight on line news web sites had been selected among 14 are considered the most important news web sites at the Arab world based on the nomination of some experts in this field. News and editorial materials at the first page (whether complete or none complete materials. Internal topics which had any signs at the front pages had been analyzed also.

## **Introduction:**

The nature of the news to report only part of what is happening, to make choices as to what to include and exclude what to cover more or less prominently. As Lippmann saw it, one must distinguish between news and truth. Not that reporting is necessarily poor or biased, but even the best reporting cannot cover all aspects of a given topic. "The function of news is to signalize an event," he wrote, "the function of truth is to bring to light hidden facts, to set them into relation with each other, and make a picture of reality, on which man can act" (Lippmann 1946). The media tend to report the news along explanatory frames that cue the reader, listener, and viewer to put events, issues, problems, and people into contextual frameworks of reference. Framing can and does affect the news in many ways, for example, in the choice of topics, sources, language, and photographs. "In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world," Lippmann recognized, "we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture" (Lippmann 1946). By framing the news along the lines of the traditional attitudes and prejudices of society's predominant groups, the news media convey stereotypes that affect a broad range of public perceptions, among them how people think about race, ethnicity, and religion. A little over two years ago, the findings were published of "Impressions of America" study. That survey of Arab public opinion of the United States and of the many ways that America impacts the lives of Arabs concluded that, there were strong anti-American negative currents throughout the region. Arab overall opinion of the US was quite unfavorable. What became clear from an examination of the data was that these negative attitudes were driven by Arab anger and frustration with American policy, especially toward what was seen as its "unbalanced policy in the Israel-Palestine conflict." They found, for example, that in most Arab countries there were favorable opinions about "American services and technology," "American freedom and

democracy,” “American people,” “American education,” “products,” etc. On the other hand, attitude toward American policy toward the Palestinians and Iraq was low (oftentimes in the single digit range).

As Jon B. Alterman wrote in 1998, in his book *New Media, New Politics?: For the US government, which often enjoys more support among Arab governments than among Arab populations, a more open [Arab] media environment is a mixed blessing. On the one hand the United States supports human rights in general and freedom of expression in particular, and the new technologies are likely to prove a boom to free expression. On the other hand, the public opinion in much of the Arab world has been turning against the United States in recent years, and the new technologies can facilitate stirring up anti-US sentiments.*<sup>1</sup>

During the War in Iraq, this dichotomy posed a major challenge for an American administration facing low public support in the Middle East while, at the same time, an increasing number of popular Arab networks portrayed the ugly face of the American-led war in Iraq

**Research problem:**

Arab information media have always been closely tied to politics. Television in most Arab countries is typically a monopoly under direct government supervision, operation and ownership. The main reason for this authoritarian approach is that these media reach beyond borders and literacy barriers and that the government therefore has a much greater interest in controlling them or at least keeping them out of hostile hands. 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. 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

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<sup>1</sup>Alterman, Jon B. (1998) ‘New Media, New Politics?’ From *Satellite Television to the Internet in the Arab World*, Policy Paper No 48, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

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

This study is trying to examine to what extent the online journalism in the Arab World has adopted biased coverage of the United States. The study hopes to provide a current assessment of how the U.S. is portrayed in Arab World online journalism. This valid, updated information will enable researchers and communicators alike to better understand not only what is being done, but may lead to ways of providing a solid basis for better dealing with American issues and images in the future.

It is commonly believed that media in the Arab World predominantly portray the United States in a negative light. However some evidence suggests that these portrayals may vary due to the type of topic being covered (e.g. U.S. foreign policy as opposed to stories about the American public.) Portrayals can also vary from publication to publication and country to country.

### **Research Importance:**

This study is important in terms of:

- 1- Increasing importance of the media and images through a number of regional and international bodies
- 2- Rising-up the rates of viewing talk shows and public affairs programs..
- 3- Growing of criticism directed to media in presenting a biased coverage for the other.
- 4- Foreign News sources are considered the main or sole source for some Arab channels.
- 5- Lack of studies that concentrate on dealing with cross cultural image in mass media.
- 6- Increasing the importance of civilizations dialogue as a result to the biased media coverage as well as the false stereotypes.
- 7- There is a case of mixture between the united state policy and people who don't know too much about the foreign and other countries.

- 8- There are mutual false perceptions between the Arab and American people. These perceptions had been formed by media coverage.
- 9- With heightened instability in the Middle East, the media has played a vital role in laying out what seems to be the groundwork for many contradictions, biases, and much animosity toward the west in general and United States specifically.

### **Research Hypotheses:**

This paper hopes to address some hypotheses and research questions as follows:

- H 1 There is differences among web sites (whether biased or not) in image type-covered topics-US image-used evidences-main concentration-ways of distortion-salience-main issue-news values-attraction tools-included figures.
- H 2 There is a positive correlation between image bias (totally biased-totally objective-some how objective/biased) and image type (negative-neutral-positive)
- H 3 There is a correlation between web site affiliation (Arab and non Arab web sites) and web sites bias, US image and image type (negative-neutral-positive) of the United States,
- H 4 There is a correlation between US image and used appeals, evidence, evidence type and main concentration at the materials.

### **Research Methodology**

Eight on line news web sites had been selected among 14 are considered the most important news web sites at the Arab world based on the nomination of some experts in this field. News and editorial materials at the first page (whether complete or none complete materials. Internal topics which had any signs at the front pages had been analyzed also. The study postulated that the most important topics are shown on the first page whether completely or partially. Analysis had been started from March 2007-February 2008 using a structured refereed tool included all the content analysis items. We depended on

many analysis units such as :( subject or issue unit-natural media unit-word unit-space or time unit). After applying the validity test, it was 93% and reliability test was 91%. .The study depended on a cumulative scale to measure the salience and attractiveness of the published materials included the following items:

- 1- Content size ( space or time )
- 2- Titles
- 3- Photos
- 4- Videos
- 5- Colors
- 6- Motion
- 7- Promo
- 8- Location
- 9- News bars
- 10- Side materials
- 11- Other items

We targeted the United States news and defined this item in the following definition :( any news or editorial material that includes the US name in a literal way). We aimed to avoid any misperception of the news by depending on a very clear definition of what is meant by US news. The sample included about one year materials using artificial week technique and materials had been gathered from both Arab and Non Arab web sites for both news and editorials using all forms published or broadcasted on the web sites such as written, sound and video materials. Data analyzers and coders had been subjected too intensive training as well as validity and reliability tests. This project is a part of a big on going research included other media such as satellite channels, other web sites and aim to measure the effect of media coverage on the audience especially the perceptions of the "Other" as presented via Satellite channels: A Comparative

Study on Arab and American Media & Audiences. The findings of this research as well as the big research project will help in presenting many techniques and strategies to improve the mutual image and false perception between the Arab and the west in general and between Arab and American in particular.

**Sample Selection Criteria**

**The study depended on representing many criteria selection such as :**

1. **Web site** 2-**Affiliation** 3-**Content**4-**Page** 5-**Material Presentation** 6- **Time period 2007versus 2008**

**Sample distribution:**

**Table no (1) sample distribution**

VARIABLES	F	%
<b>Web site:</b>		
1. <a href="http://www.arabic.cnn.com">www.arabic.cnn.com</a>	186	11.5
2. <a href="http://www.afp.com/arabichome">www.afp.com/arabichome</a>	120	7.4
3. <a href="http://www.ara.reuters.com">www.ara.reuters.com</a>	120	7.4
4. <a href="http://www.news.bbc.co.uk">www.news.bbc.co.uk</a>	208	12.8
5. <a href="http://www.islamonline.net">www.islamonline.net</a>	265	16.3
6. <a href="http://www.news.naseeg.com">www.news.naseeg.com</a>	228	14
7. <a href="http://www.aljazeera.net">www.aljazeera.net</a>	288	17.7
8. <a href="http://www.elaph.com">www.elaph.com</a>	209	12.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1624</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Non Arab Web Pages	990	61



Arab Web Pages	634	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>1624</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Content</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
News	1305	80.4
Editorials	319	19.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>1624</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Page</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Front page	1528	94.1
Inside	96	5.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1624</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Material Presentation</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Written	945	58.2
Sound	265	16.3
Video	414	25.5
<b>Time period 2007 versus 2008</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
2007	948	58.4
2008	676	41.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>1624</b>	<b>100</b>

We coded all news items that reported on or made reference to American people or America as a State whether the context was local/regional, national, or international. As long as Americans or Unites states were the topics of these articles or were simply cited or mentioned, we deemed the news relevant for our study

The total sample of the study was 1624 had been selected based on the artificial week from March 2007-February 2008. We targeted the United States news and defined this item in the following definition: (any news or editorial material that include the US name in a literal way) . We aimed to avoid any misperception of the news by depending on a very clear definition of what is meant by US news. All the selected web pages are hourly updated based and considered the most important web pages at the Arab world based on rating figures. Some of these web pages recorded daily more than 3 million visitors.

Content analysis had been performed on stories and images about the United States collected from eight news web pages during 2007 and 2008. The eight online news web pages were selected from the 14 most important news web pages at the Middle East, representing a variety of Arab and non Arab world cultures and perspectives. Stories were obtained via the artificial week format.

After validating and checking data, coding, transcription, and entering data, statistical analysis had been performed to address the hypothesis and research questions. Findings had been used to better explain current portrayals of the U.S. in Arab and non Arab on line media and offered suggestions on how these could be changed to be more accurate.

### **Review of literature:**

When Arab respondents were asked to name the first thought that came to mind when they hear “America,” they said, “its unfair policies.” And when they were asked, “What should the US do to improve its relationship with the Arab world,” responses focused on changing policy to be “more just,” “less biased,” etc. and not on American products or values. In other words, and quite simply, what was found is that what ultimately determined how Arabs viewed America was how they saw America treating Arab people?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> James Zogby :Impressions of America 2004 how Arabs view America, how Arabs learn about America A Six-Nation Survey Commissioned by The Arab American Institute

During the past decade and especially in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, numerous polls and surveys have underscored that the image of the United States in the Middle East has steadily deteriorated. After the invasion of Iraq, a survey conducted by the Pew Charitable Trusts in 2003 found that “the bottom has fallen out of support for America in most of the Muslim world.”<sup>3</sup> A poll by Zogby International commissioned by the Arab American Institute, released in December 2006, found that respondents in five Arab countries had worse opinions of the United States than they had one year earlier, 62% in Saudi Arabia, 72% in Egypt, 57% in Morocco, 76% in Jordan, and 47% in Lebanon, compared respectively to 9%, 4%, 1%, 1%, and 10% of respondents in the same countries who had a better opinion of the United States a year earlier.<sup>4</sup> More recently, a June 2007 report by the Pew Charitable Trusts found that “The US image remains abysmal in most Muslim countries in the Middle East and Asia.”<sup>5</sup> This persistently negative image poses a formidable challenge to the ability of the United States to engage the Arab region, casting a cloud of suspicion over US political, economic, and cultural initiatives.

Throughout the Arab world, US policymakers are suspected of ulterior motives and double standards. Especially troubling is the fact that terrorist groups like Al Qaeda have deftly drawn on hostility toward the United States in their propaganda efforts. The question posed about Osama bin Laden’s communication skills six weeks after September 11, 2001, by longtime diplomat Richard Holbrooke, still haunts US policymakers: “How can a man in a cave out communicate the world’s leading communications society?”<sup>6</sup> Answering this question and remedying the situation that it reflects is vital for US interests. Nonetheless, as the Center for Strategic and International Studies Commission on Smart Power recently put it, “[r]ecent US administrations have struggled to get public diplomacy right.”<sup>7</sup>

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3 Views of a Changing World 2003: War With Iraq Further Divides Global Publics, Pew Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia, PA, and June 3, 2003.

4 AAI Poll: Continuing Conflict in Iraq and Palestine Deepens U.S.-Arab Rift With Growing Costs to Both Sides (Utica, NY: Zogby International, December 2006).

5 Global Unease With Major World Powers, Pew Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia, PA, June 27, 2007.

6 Richard Holbrooke, “Get the Message Out,” *The Washington Post*, October 28, 2001, p. B7.

7 CSIS Commission on Smart Power: A Smarter, More Secure America (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies Press, November 2007), p. 47.

The image today of the United States of America in the Middle East is extremely negative.\* It is based upon Arab perceptions of an inconsistent and biased United States Middle East foreign policy.<sup>8</sup> The Arab news media has further exacerbated negative views about United States foreign policy throughout the region. Unfortunately, America's image has dramatically worsened in the last four years. In April of 2003, Business Week stated, "Hatred of American policies in the Arab world has never been higher."<sup>9</sup> A negative image of the United States in the Middle East was mirrored by United States allies in Europe. Lee Walczak of Business Week continued, "In every Western European country, polls show that George W. Bush is seen as a greater threat to world peace than Saddam."<sup>10</sup> It was ironic that the President of the United States was perceived to be a greater threat than a ruthless dictator who murdered and oppressed his

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\* For more details about the image of the United States at the Arab Media, read the following:

- "Report of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Managed Information Dissemination" (2001), by the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics.
- "Building America's Public Diplomacy through a Reformed Structure and Additional Resources" (2002), by the US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy.
- "Strengthening US-Muslim Communications" (2003), by the Center for the Study of the Presidency.
- "How to Reinvigorate US Public Diplomacy" (2003), by the Heritage Foundation.
- "The Youth Factor: The New Demographics of the Middle East and the Implications for US Policy" (2003), by the Brookings Institution.
- "Finding America's Voice: A Strategy for Reinvigorating US Public Diplomacy" (2003), sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations.
- "Arab Media: Tools for the Governments, Tools for the People" (2005), by the United States Institute of Peace.
- "Open Media and Transitioning Societies in the Middle East: Challenges for US Security Policy"(2006), by the Stanley Foundation.
- "US Public Diplomacy: State Department Efforts to Engage Muslim Audiences Lack Certain Communication Elements and Face Significant Challenges" (GAO-06-535, May 2006), by the Government Accountability Office.
- "US International Broadcasting: Management of Middle East Broadcasting Services Could Be Improved" (GAO, 06-762, August 2006), also by the Government Accountability Office.
- "A Smarter, More Secure America" (2007), by the Center for International and Strategic Studies Commission on Smart Power.

8 Thomas L. Friedman, "Wall of Ideas." New York Times, NY: March 3, 2002, pg 4.15. [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 21 September 2004.

9 Lee Walczak, "American & the World with victory in Iraq Near, All Sides Must Focus on Repairing Relations," Business Week, April 21, 2003, Issue 3829, pg 34. [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 21 September 2004.

10 Ibid.

solved.<sup>12</sup>

At February-March 2003 survey of Arab public opinion by Telhami found that US policy clearly outweighed respondents' values as a determinant of attitudes toward the United States, in some cases in factors of 2 to 1 (33% and 67% in Saudi Arabia; 29% and 58% in Lebanon).<sup>13</sup> Similarly, a 2004 six-nation survey probed the relative importance of values and policies in determining Arab attitudes toward the United States. Findings indicated that values were the main determinant for 18% of respondents in Morocco, 10% in Saudi Arabia, 16% in Jordan, 9% in Lebanon, and 9% in the United Arab Emirates. In contrast, US policies were the main determinant for 79% of respondents in Morocco, 86% in Saudi Arabia, 76% in Jordan, 89% in Lebanon, and 75% in the United Arab Emirates.<sup>19</sup> US policy outweighed US values in all six Arab countries surveyed, at 59% vs. 10% in Egypt, 83% vs. 11% in Jordan, 76% vs. 19% in Lebanon, 88% vs. 7% in Morocco, 77% vs. 18% in Saudi Arabia, and 58% vs. 40% in the United Arab Emirates.<sup>20</sup> Clearly, disagreement over policy outweighs differences in values by several orders of magnitude. Like many Europeans, many Arabs "love the idea of America, but they are not always so enamored by the practice."<sup>14</sup>

According to polling by Zogby International, Arab attitudes about the United States have taken a drastic downward slide. Hostility toward the U.S. among Moroccans has risen from a disapproving 61 percent in 2002 to 88 percent in 2004. Egypt, a more predictable fulminator, has seen negative perception of America rise from 76 percent to 98 percent. Research suggests that Arab hostility is due in part to U.S.

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11 Mark O. O'Keefe, "U.S. gives money to Muslim group to help image." *The Christian Century*, Chicago: Jun 5-Jun 12, 2002,

12 Vol 119. Iss. 12: pg 17. [database on-line]; available from Pro Quest; accessed 21 September 2004

13 Shibley Telhami, *A View from the Arab World: A Survey in Five Continents*, Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development, University of Maryland, March 13, 2003.

14 *Impressions of America 2004: How Arabs View America; How Arabs Learn About America* (Utica, NY: Zogby International).<sup>20</sup> *Global Perspectives*, Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development/Zogby International (College

Park, MD: University of Maryland, July 8, 2007). In the same poll, 35% of Saudis, 30% of Lebanese, and 54% of Emiratis (UAE) expressed favorable attitudes toward US movies and TV, compared to 60% of Saudis, 66% of Lebanese, and 42% of

Emiratis who were unfavorable.<sup>21</sup> Paul Maidment, "Is Brand America in Trouble?" *Forbes.com*, September 21, 2005

activities and policies in the region that date to the first Gulf War as well as perceived U.S. championing of the Israeli side of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. 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, through their control of most Arab media, may be playing to the fears of the “Arab street” by playing up negative stereotypes of the West. By focusing the anger of their people on external issues, they may take the focus off of their oppressive regimes.

**The problem of this passive portraying:**

The Arab opinion of United States policy in the Middle East is heavily influenced by the Arab media. Images and sounds of violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are captured and delivered by Arab satellite news channels, radio and near simultaneously by news services to millions of Arabs and Muslims around the World. United States policy is defined and debated over these mediums as it unfolds; generally, with no response, discussion or rebuttal by the United States government.<sup>15</sup> While cell phones and the Internet exist today in the Middle East, they are relatively new and access throughout the region is still limited. Satellite television, newspapers, magazines and radios have the greatest impact in the region because they reach the largest audience.<sup>16</sup> Therefore what is printed, shown and said in the Arab media about the United States is generally what the Arabs and Muslims perceive to be the truth, whether that is positive or negative.

By using the same logic, popular culture and mass media in the United States have generated and sustained stereotypes of a monolithic evil Arab; these stereotypes constructed all Muslims as Arab and all Arabs as terrorists.<sup>17</sup> Using representations and language in news, movies, cartoons, and magazine stories,

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15 Kenneth E. Cohen, <CohenKE@state.gov>, “Arab Media Outreach; September-October 2004,” electronic mail message to James Dickinson <James.Dickinson@carlisle.army.mil>, 11 February 2005.<sup>17</sup>

16 William A. Rugh, *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2004), x.

17 Debra Merskin, The Construction of Arabs as Enemies: Post-September 11 Discourse of George W. Bush, *MASS COMMUNICATION & SOCIETY*, 2004, 7(2), 157–175

the media and popular culture have participated in the construction of an evil Arab stereotype that encompasses a wide variety of people, ideas, beliefs, religions, and assumptions (Ghareeb, 1983;<sup>18</sup> Hamada, 2001;<sup>19</sup> Jackson, 1996;<sup>20</sup> Shaheen, 1998,<sup>21</sup> 2001;<sup>22</sup> Suleiman, 1988,<sup>23</sup> 1999;<sup>24</sup> Terry, 1985)<sup>25</sup>. For example, movies such as those listed earlier and several newsmagazines present dark images of Middle Eastern men, or what Shaheen (1995)<sup>26</sup> calls “America’s bogeyman.” In recent films, “Barbarism and cruelty are the most common traits associated with Arabs” (Jackson).<sup>27</sup> These stereotypes, “which tend to lump Arabs, Muslim, Middle East into one highly negative image of violence and danger,” are composed largely from collective memory, rather than from actual experience (Jackson, 1996).

American efforts to present a clearer picture of U.S. society and policies have been largely inconsequential. Washington sponsors an array of Arabic-language media outlets, including Al Hurra TV, Radio Sawa and Hi Magazine, but despite generous funding (\$62 million to Al Hurra in 2004 alone), these stations and publications have failed to win a significant Arab following or to boost American credibility in the region. A better solution is needed. In order to further its declared goal of promoting democracy in the Arab world, the United States must win the Arabs' trust. The popularity of Al Jazeera and the ineffectiveness of Al Hurra show that only independent Arab media outlets can establish that trust. If this is the case with the classical media, what about the official and non official Web pages in it's coverage to the United States issues? And how this affect on the image of the other culture?

For the US, September 11 called into question the old model of public diplomacy, as the terrorist attacks illustrated the extreme consequences of a widespread American image-problem in the Arab and

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18 Ghareeb, E. (Ed.). (1983). *Split vision: The portrayal of Arabs in the American media*. Washington,DC: American-Arab Affairs Council.

19 Hamada, B. I. (2001). The Arab image in the minds of western image-makers. *The Journal of International Communication*, 7(1), 7–35.

20 Jackson, N. B. (1996). Arab Americans: Middle East conflicts hit home. In P. M. Lester (Ed.), *Images that injure: Pictorial stereotypes in the media* (pp. 63–66). Westport, CT: Praeger.

21 Shaheen, J. G. (1988). Perspectives on the television Arab. In L. Gross, J. Katz, and J. Ruby (Eds.), *Image ethics: The moral rights of subjects in photographs, film, and television* (pp. 203–219). New York: Oxford.

22 Shaheen, J. G. (2001). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood vilifies a people*. Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press.

23 Suleiman, M. W. (1988). *The Arabs in the mind of America*. Battleboro, VT: Amana.

24 Suleiman, M.W. (1999). Islam, Muslims, and Arabs in America: The other of the other of the other....*Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 19, 33–48.

25 Terry, J. J. (1985). *Mistaken identity: Arab stereotypes in popular writing*. Washington, DC: American– Arab Affairs Council.

26 Shaheen, J. G. (1995). TV Arabs. In P. Rothenberg (Ed.), *Race, class, and gender in the United States* (pp. 197–199). New York: St. Martin’s.

27 Jackson, N. B. (1996). Arab Americans: Middle East conflicts hit home. In P. M. Lester (Ed.), *Images that injure: Pictorial stereotypes in the media* (pp. 63–66). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Muslim worlds. After an initial outpouring of public sympathy, discontent with the United States has grown around the world. According to Leonard and Smewing (2003),<sup>28</sup> recent polls<sup>1</sup> in countries in the Middle East and in the Muslim world revealed three important findings. First: there exists a fundamental distrust of American foreign policy and the accounts of the motivations behind it, which translates into antipathy. El-Nawawy and Iskandar consider feelings of a conspiracy to be so dominant in the region that they claim conspiracy theory is ‘a key to understanding the political culture of the Middle East’ (El-Nawawy and Iskandar, 2002:60)<sup>29</sup>. Second: there exists a perception that western policy aims at a ‘clash of civilizations’’. This idea is frequently referred to in the Arab media, and there is evidence from polls to back up the idea that the Islamic world feels itself threatened as a civilization. Western opinion polls and newspapers echo this cultural suspicion and fear of a clash. It must be emphasized that neither set of interviewees believes there has been a ‘clash’ so far: they fear one in the future. Third: opinions about the US are complex and contradictory, for in Middle Eastern attitudes to the US there is also a desire for a deeper relationship and further engagement with what many see as a highly successful and desirable society.

Most of what we know and think of Arabs is based on how they are portrayed in the American media. The media easily influences us because we have not been taught a great deal of the history of the Arabs and most importantly, our relationship with the Arabs. Americans do not know much about the life and culture of Arab people because we are not educated enough to understand their lifestyle and culture, especially when compared to our own lives, hopes, and problems we face here. Unless having live exposure to how their lives really are, the only view we have of them is through the news, movies, television, magazines, etc. Hollywood is our great national entertainer and also the most effective teacher of our young. Most portrayals are very one sided. It is mostly shown from the biased American point of

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<sup>28</sup> Leonard, Mark & Conrad Smewing (2003) ‘Public Diplomacy and the Middle East’, The Foreign Policy Centre.

<sup>29</sup> El-Nawawy, Mohammed & Iskandar, Adel (2002), Al-Jazeera. How the Free Arab News Network Scooped the World and Changed the Middle East. Boulder, Colorado:Westview Press.



view. The media emphasizes more on the cultural differences. In most cases, Americans are the good guys and the Arabs are the bad guys.

The media shows the stereotypical view of the Arabs, not of their normal life. Then again, it is Hollywood, and the norm would not be appealing to the public. The audience has been shown repeatedly those images and portrayals that those exaggerated and misleading stereotypes have become our view of the Arabs and the thought that they really are like that. The images of Arabs we often see in the American media often portray Arabs as being cold, brutal, heartless, uncivilized, terrorists, religious fanatics, womanizers, conservative, camel riding Bedouins, oil rich, and very foreign looking with a heavy accent. If they are in America, they are often showed to be owners of deli food stands, taxi drivers, gas station owners, and terrorists, “towel heads” who listen to their exotic Arabian music. These distortions of the Arab people have created a general mistrust and dislike for Arabs among Americans. The celluloid images have help shape our thoughts and beliefs of them.

In *Rules of Engagement* (2000), the Arabs are portrayed as a violent mob rioting outside the American embassy in Yemen, a country that the U.S. does not even have any problems with. The angry crowd consisted of men, women, and children of all ages. They were dressed in traditional clothing, such as turbans and veils. They obviously showed they hated Americans and were throwing rocks and shooting into the embassy. It also indicated that the Arabs had no value for human life because they were using the crowd as shield. All the Arabs in the film were portrayed as vicious and murderous. The Americans on the other hand, are portrayed as innocent and brave. The mother and child are scared, in contrast to the other women and children outside waving weapons and shooting at the Americans. The American hero is shown to be patriotic because even though his life was in danger, he ran back to get the American flag. The American soldiers are forced to fire into the crowd and in a way it was justified by the fact that the Americans were outnumbered and that the Arabs were violently out of control. The Americans once again

are the good guys and the Arabs are the crazy, bloodthirsty bad guys. This depiction of the Arabs is completely fictional and dehumanizing to the Arab society. The message of the movie is that it is okay to kill Arabs because they are all hateful fanatics. Movies like this make the everyday life of Arab Americans more difficult and dangerous. The effect the movie has on the audience is the same way that the September 11<sup>th</sup> event has on the rest of the world. Only this time, it's not a movie, its real. Many blame the Arabs and labeled them all as terrorists. People who never knew much about Arabs or had any prejudice towards them now have a negative view of them. Television journalism plays a major role in teaching and influencing the public about Arabs. Moreover, these one - sided views are further fueled by current events shown on the news. Major events that we hear about in the news that involved Arabs are the violence or acts of terrorism happening around the world committed by Arabs, such as Palestinian Arab-Israeli conflict, the Oklahoma City building bombing, hijackings, and the World Trade Center attack. The word "terrorist" has become synonyms with Arabs. When we hear acts of terrorism, we automatically assume that the terrorists are Arabs.

Mainstream media has an unbalanced coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict and paints a distorted image of the situation. It places the Arab states in the position of violence and power, while Israel is left as a nation attempting to protect its freedom and people. In school, our history class just teaches us how chaotic the Arabian nations are and how good the Americans are and how we are trying to promote peace in the Middle East. Ever since the World Trade and Pentagon attack, many Americans are putting in the effort to educate themselves about Islam and about the people and politics of the Middle East. The news is preferred over an episode of Friends now because people want to be updated with the military involvement in Afghanistan.

Arab publications frequently draw upon every conceivable anti-Semitic stereotype. The obvious purpose is not to engage in civilized political debate, but to stir up irrational hatred towards Israel and

Jews. One can find anti-Semitic material in the media of most Arab countries. Not just in extremist states such as Syria — which one might expect — but in so-called moderate states like Egypt, officially at peace with Israel. Since all Arab countries are dictatorships or ruled by autocratic kings, since all the media in those countries are government controlled, the hate campaign clearly has the support of the political elites.

Not a single voice is raised in the media against the hate campaign. No doubt there are people who value tolerance, fairness and truth in Arab countries, but they have no chance of having their voice heard in the mainstream Arab media. It is easy to understand why this is so. Government control ensures compliance and opposing voices are suppressed. Honest journalists are threatened if they fail to conform to propaganda requirements.<sup>30</sup>

### **Why the United States portrayed image is too bad?**

It is important to understand whether this negative image is caused by a resentment of American values, United States foreign policy, or poor communications. Many Americans perceive that this resentment is directed toward our values, culture and lifestyle. Interestingly, most Arabs do not resent America's freedom and wealth. They respect American culture, enjoy American television and movies and many foster aspirations of living in America.<sup>31</sup> Most Arabs appreciate many aspects of American culture and values. A Zogby international survey of ten nations showed that a majority of people in five Arab countries had a favorable view of America's freedom and democracy. This Arab majority also looked favorably upon American products and education.<sup>32</sup> However in this same poll, most people expressed a negative view of American foreign policy. Only a third of the Arab and Muslims polled supported the global war on terrorism and almost ninety percent viewed American policy in the Middle East unfavorably.

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30 ADC Special Report is a publication of the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation Commission Inc (ADC), the human rights arm of B'nai B'rith Australia/New Zealand which is dedicated to researching and combating all forms of racism.

31 Ibid., 371

32 Shibley Telhami, *The Stakes: America in the Middle East, The Consequences of Power and the Choice for Peace* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002), 48.

In March 2002, a survey found that eighty-six percent of Saudis surveyed said their frustration with the United States was due to its foreign policy.<sup>33</sup> The resentment that most Arabs have toward America has nothing to do with American values; rather it is with American foreign policy. A large number of Europeans have also criticized American foreign policy. They believe that George W. Bush makes decisions based entirely upon American interests without regard for the interests of others. They held this perception even before September 11, 2001.<sup>34</sup>

In April 2002, majorities in four European countries still felt that America does not consider allied interests in the global war on terrorism.<sup>35</sup> The common perception amongst Europeans, many citizens of Great Britain, and the Middle East is that American foreign policy is unilateral. Further, they believe the actions taken by the United States in the war on terror and war in Iraq solely serve American interests.<sup>36</sup> This objection to unilateralism is shared with a large majority of Americans. They protest that American foreign policy is heavily weighted in favor of American interests and does not fully account for those of other countries.<sup>37</sup> This resentment held by the majority of the Arabs and Europeans toward American foreign policy is the cause for this negative image, not American values. In order to shape a more positive image, it is important to explore which foreign policy issues cause this resentment.

### **Irrational and non reasonable relationship:**

The United States has shared a close relationship with Israel since the late 1940s.<sup>38</sup> This relationship began as the United States and the Soviet Union sought allies in the Middle East at the beginning of the Cold War. The relationship continued to evolve even after the Cold War based on mutual interests. Today,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>38</sup> Lenore G. Martin, *Assessing the Impact of U.S.-Israeli Relations on the Arab World*(Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2003), 4.

the United States and Israel share common goals and interests for their citizens; democracy, an obligation to combat terrorism, and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East.<sup>39</sup>

These common interests create a close relationship; however, it is the Israelis nuclear weapons program that makes this relationship special.<sup>40</sup> Israel will remain as a strategic ally of the United States in a region that is unstable and where nuclear proliferation continues today. Consequently, America will continue to pay a heavy foreign policy price in the Middle East for this special relationship as the actions of the Israelis in their ongoing struggle with the Palestinians are attributed to the United States.

Arab resentment of this relationship is significant and adversely affects United States policy throughout the Middle East. To soften this tension toward America, Lenore Martin suggests four options: 1) step down the Israeli relationship, 2) promote political reforms, 3) reduce United States dependency on Gulf oil, and 4) promote peace between the Israelis and Palestinians.<sup>41</sup> With respect to these four options and given the political situation in the region today, the two most promising options are to promote political reform in the region and aggressively assist the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In regards to the two remaining options, it is not practical for the United States to step down our relationship with Israel.

Although the United States has done this in previous administrations, the political risk of weakening the relationship with a strong and stable regional ally is not practical.<sup>42</sup> Reducing American oil dependency in the region is not likely in the near term and could cause market instability while potentially undermining policy efforts.<sup>43</sup> Political reforms, although growing slowly, are underway in the region in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Kuwait. Saudi Arabia is holding municipal elections and numerous democratic reforms have been undertaken in Qatar. Granted these reforms are in their infancy, but nonetheless, they have the potential to encourage others in the region. With the new Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas and

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>40</sup> 20 Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*(Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>41</sup> Martin, 19-21.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 20-21

the new U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, there is renewed optimism and momentum in promoting peace in the Middle East. The forward progress and ultimate resolution of this conflict will have the greatest impact on reducing Arab hostility toward the United States.<sup>44</sup>

Though most of these reports make useful recommendations, public diplomacy efforts toward the Arab world are hampered by several challenges. These include: a lack of awareness of the history of international broadcasting to the Arab world; a lack of knowledge of the current Arab media and communication environment; an approach that focuses on “branding” the United States and finding instruments to get to the “hearts and minds” of Arabs; a lack of understanding of what communication can and cannot achieve; and an unwillingness to address the gap between US rhetoric and US action, while ignoring some basic, commonsensical steps that can begin to restore the US standing in the region.

### **Unfair policy:**

Back ward steps at the ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS While the United States was heavily engaged in the global war on terrorism and combat operations in Iraq, there was no forward progress made in the Middle East peace process.<sup>45</sup> It was not until April 2002, after the destruction of the Jenin refugee camp and the deaths of many Palestinians that the United States moved forward in peace process.<sup>46</sup> By the summer of 2002, the United States along with the United Nations, the European Union, and Russia developed the “road map for peace.” However it was not until April 30, 2003, after major combat operations in Iraq,5 Afghanistan and in the global war on terror, the Arabs perceived that once again the Israeli- Palestinian peace process was not a priority for the United States.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.,1.

<sup>46</sup> Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two People* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 265.

<sup>47</sup> Martin, 1.

### **U.S. government sponsored media in the Middle East:**

In response to increasing anti-Americanism, the United States government increased funding to sell America and United States policy in the Middle East. This funding was used to increase existing radio programming and to start a new radio and television station. Since September 11, the Voice of America has increased their programming in the region. In 2002, the Middle East radio network or Radio Sawa was established. The broadcast was received in six Arab countries with a music format designed to appeal to young Arabs. The feedback from the target audience shows that it has been successful.

However some media analysts suggest, only the music is being positively received by the audience, not the political message sent by the U.S funded radio station.<sup>48</sup> An editorial in the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram Weekly said, "chances are [that] the Arab youth will split the strategy: take the U.S. sound and discard the U.S. agenda."<sup>49</sup> Al-Hurra, a new satellite television station located in Springfield, Virginia began broadcasting to Middle East countries in January 2004.

The purpose of this television station was to provide the Arab audience, specifically in the Middle East, with an alternative source of news and information to al-Jazeera and other Arab news channels. The Middle East television network or Al-Hurra cost the United States government \$100 million and met with immediate criticism as with Radio Sawa.<sup>50</sup> Rather than increase support for United States policy, al-Hurra sent the opposite message. Journalist Rami Khouri suggests that, "...its main impact will be to heighten Arab anger and irritation with U.S. policy in the Middle East because the gap between American values and American foreign policy will become even more obvious to newly enlightened Middle Easterners". And according to the Washington Post, "it has a chance of turning out to be one of this country's most ill-conceived and wasteful experiments in public diplomacy." The U.S. government's funding of al-Hurra undermined the credibility and objectivity from the Arab perspective. If they do not trust al-Hurra, then

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<sup>48</sup> Mohammed El-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar, *Al-Jazeera: The Story of the Network That Is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2003), 213.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Miles, 273.

who do they trust or at least who do they watch? The answer is that al Jazeera is the television station that most Arabs watch.<sup>51</sup>

### **A strategy to improve negative image**

The United States must commit to an aggressive public relations campaign to positively shape our image in the Middle East. The war on terrorism is more than a military struggle it is a public relations battle and one that we are dangerously close to losing.<sup>52</sup> We must challenge the lies before they become facts in the eyes of the Arab world. The United States must begin to fight the war of ideas as aggressively as we have fought the terrorists throughout the world.

The United States military will defeat this generation of terrorists and their ideals, but the war of ideas can influence those people of the next generation.<sup>53</sup> Given the relatively free and open access to multiple sources of information, satellite television, online newspapers and magazines, Internet chat rooms and email, the formulation of these ideas can be influenced through aggressive United States public diplomacy. Policymakers are aware today of the critical need to speak out and engage the Arab media. They understand that the United States must clearly articulate and appeal to the moderate and tolerant societies in the Muslim world.<sup>54</sup> however we cannot appeal to these societies, if public diplomacy programs are under-funded. In 2003, the United States spent 1.2 billion dollars in advertising America to the world through the media. Surprisingly, this is less than half of the Ford Motor Company's individual annual advertising budget. Out of the 1.2 billion dollars, only 25 million dollars is spent on programs that directly target the Arab audience.<sup>55</sup> This is simply not enough to support a public diplomacy campaign composed of educational programs, television and radio stations, Internet resources, and most importantly,

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51 Rugh, 230

52 Gibson.

53 79 Ibid.

54 Eickelman, xi.

55 Miles, 373.



the training of department spokespersons. The negative image and resentment of United States is described by New York Times author Thomas Friedman as, “an iron curtain of misunderstanding separating America and the Arab-Muslim world.”<sup>56</sup> The administration must fund public diplomacy programs in order to open<sup>13</sup> this curtain. The public diplomacy programs in education have received a substantial amount of emphasis since September 11, 2001.<sup>57</sup>

These programs provide for a long term strategy and commitment toward improving our image. A large amount of money has been spent on Radio Sawa and al-Hurra television. The United States should continue with these two programs given the investment. The long term strategy for these programs is a continuing effort to increase its Arab audience by separating itself from the United States government.<sup>58</sup> The United States public diplomacy program must directly confront the Arab satellite networks through routine exchange, debate, and explanation in Arabic of United States foreign policy. To engage in this campaign, more State Department spokespersons fluent in Arabic are needed. In February 2005, the Near East public diplomacy department had fewer than four spokespersons that were skilled enough to appear on interviews or debates on Arab television.<sup>59</sup>

These individuals should be trained to a level where they are capable of debating issues on live Arabic television news programs. This training takes a long time and in the interim, the State Department can call upon the services of retired department officials who have served in the Middle East. A few of these officials are fluent in Arabic and should routinely take part in television interviews and debates.<sup>60</sup>

In order to win this public image campaign, the U.S. must demonstrate to the Arab audience a consistent and meaningful commitment toward the issues most important to Arabs and Muslims. With

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<sup>56</sup> Matt Lussenhop, “Creativity and Patience: Public Diplomacy Post-Sept. 11.” *Foreign Service Journal* 79 (April 2002).

<sup>57</sup> Margaret Deb. Tutwiler, “Public Diplomacy Activities and Programs,” Testimony before the House Committee on Government Reform, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging

58 Threats and International Relations, 10 February 2004; available from <<http://www.state.gov/r/us/2004/29251.htm>>; Internet; accessed 2 February 2005.

<sup>59</sup> Martin, R. Quinn, Telephone interview regarding public diplomacy with Mr. Quinn, Office Director, International Information Programs (IIP), Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State, 9 February 2005.

<sup>60</sup> Miles, 385

more access to Arab audiences through satellite television, the United States can better articulate its accomplishments and concerns in Iraq and Afghanistan. President Bush's determination to spread democracy throughout the world can be explained, defined, and our policies in Syria, Lebanon, and Iran made clear.

The Arabs need to see for themselves a sincere commitment by the United States to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>61</sup> The United States commitment must be seen on the news channels that are trusted by the Arab audience, not channels that are tied to the United States government.<sup>62</sup> with over 100 Arab satellite channels today, the public dialogue by the State Department on the peace process and other foreign policy should initially be on al-Jazeera and al-Arabiyya. *The Media Landscape: Trends and Challenges External and Internal Forces Drive the Middle East Media Transformation*

Much of the impetus for this new media era derives from the coverage of regional wars and civil conflicts in the 1980s and 1990s. Direct credit for the new media era belongs to strategic regional elites. Due to the small amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) and advertising dollars available, the development of media infrastructure and talent continues to rely heavily upon their support. Yet foreign pressure and influence also drive dynamic and fresh media in the region. Small states with strong ties to the United States and Europe such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, and Lebanon lead the media revolution. These states' more outwardly focused orientation enables each to increase its influence by using rather than suppressing change and globalization.

The United States impacts regional media directly via the5Implications for US Security Policy The rapporteurs, Michael Kraig and Kathy Gockel, prepared this report following the conferences. It contains their interpretation of the proceedings and is not merely a descriptive, chronological account. Participants

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<sup>61</sup> El-Nawawy, 214.

<sup>62</sup> 87 Ibid

neither reviewed nor approved the report. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

### **Open Arab Media and US Foreign Policy**

Availability of its programming on satellite television and its foreign policy efforts particularly in the area of public diplomacy. Paradoxically, it is the non strategic and unconstrained components of US media that have the strongest affect on Middle East culture and society.<sup>63</sup>

Arab governments have sought to influence pan-Arab media developments, indirectly in the case of the Saudis, and directly in the case of the Egyptians. The Saudi elite has a near monopoly over most pan-Arab print and broadcast media, and Egyptian state-run or state-directed media only have influence over Egyptians within and outside of Egypt. Jordanian and Syrian government-owned satellite broadcasters routinely rank at the bottom of the ratings, while Jordanian and Syrian viewers turn to privately owned channels based in Beirut, Doha, and Dubai. The success of Al-Jazeera has been at least partly due to the degree of separation from the Qatari government that the channel maintains. (This seems to be changing, as the recent rapprochement between Qatar and Saudi Arabia appears to have restrained Al-Jazeera's coverage of Saudi affairs.) Several complicating factors notwithstanding, the lesson is clear. Direct government ownership or involvement in broadcasting turns viewers off, a message that public diplomacy practitioners in Washington ought to hear loud and clear.

The sheer complexity of the Arab media environment must also be taken into account. Though Al-Jazeera is the most recognized and fretted about pan-Arab satellite channel, there are more than 300 satellite channels broadcasting in Arabic to an audience residing between Morocco and Iraq, in addition to worldwide cable distribution for some channels. Among these, there are a dozen influential outlets, including the Qatarbased Al-Jazeera; the Saudi-owned, UAE-based Al-Arabiya and Middle East

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<sup>63</sup> Open Media and Transitioning Societies in the Arab Middle East: Implications for US Security Policy The Stanley Foundation in association with Institute for Near East & Gulf Military Analysis 2005-2006

Broadcasting Center (MBC); UAE-based Dubai Television and Abu Dhabi Television; the Lebanese-Saudi owned, Lebanese-based LBC-Al-Hayat; and Hezbollah's Lebanese-based Al-Manar. In addition, there are numerous channels specialized in business (CNBC Arabiya, Al-Aqariya and Al-Iqtisadiyya), women's issues (Heya TV), religion (Al-Rissala, Al-Majd, Iqraa'), and music (Rotana, Music Plus, Melody), in addition to state satellite channels. It is important to note that the sector remains in a state of flux, with new players coming on the scene on a monthly basis each month. (In November 2007 the daily Al-'Arab was relaunched in Qatar with plans for a pan-Arab readership, and Hariri-owned Future TV is poised to launch a satellite news network from Beirut).

However, there are unmistakable signals of a trend toward consolidation, with the merger of LBC's satellite operation and Rotana in the summer of 2007, the fact that several channels have restructured themselves as multi-platform networks, such as the Al-Jazeera Network (Al-Jazeera, Al-Jazeera English, Al-Jazeera Children's Channel, Al-Jazeera Live, Al-Jazeera Sports, Al-Jazeera Documentaries) and the MBC Group (Al-Arabiya, MBC 1, MBC 2, MBC 3, and MBC 4). Not all of these channels are equally successful, but a few regularly attract a mass audience. What kinds of programs attract Arab viewers in large numbers? There are many factors that can explain audience attraction and retention, but the most popular Arab television programs have been those with the following features: (1) historical or political resonance, (2) narratives of social mobility, (3) and interactive features. If we consider the last three or four years, we see that talk shows, reality television, and drama series with historical or political themes are ratings busters. During Ramadan, the year's most important month for Arab media industries and the equivalent of the "sweeps" in US television, drama series attract the largest audiences.<sup>9</sup> Two shows dominated the ratings and discussions this year. The first, King Faruq, revisits an important period in Egyptian history that led to the rise of Gamal Abdul Nasser. The second, Bab Al-Hara (The Neighborhood

Gate), is a nostalgic look at social life in a Damascene community, offering a powerful vision of a simpler, more meaningful and locally centered life.

A few other hits in recent Ramadan seasons have followed the making of terrorists from Afghanistan camps to the streets of Arab capitals, or explored the attraction of religious ideas for segments of Arab youth. Reality TV shows like *Star Academy* and *Superstar* have also been immensely popular, precisely because they stage competitions whose outcomes are interactively decided by viewers voting for contestants who move from anonymity to stardom within a few months.<sup>10</sup> The dynamism and interaction on pugilistic talk shows also attract viewers, especially when they are able to call in and express their opinions. Historical resonance, social mobility, and the possibility for viewers to interact with programming content (not to mention the revealing wardrobe of alluring program hosts and guests) are key indicators of popularity.<sup>64</sup> Grasping the complexity of the Arab media environment entails moving beyond asking whether an Arab media outlet is “anti-American” or “pro- American.” It is clear even to the casual observer that *Al-Arabiya* and *LBC-Al-Hayat* are friendlier to the United States than *Al-Jazeera* is. Beyond these obvious differences, however, the complexity of the Arab media scene makes binary distinctions (anti/pro) superficial and unhelpful. Though some institutions display biases for or against US policy, many channels present a more ambivalent package.

Some Arab media outlets create dilemmas because they advocate some declared US objectives, even if indirectly, while countering others, sometimes directly. Consider the Lebanese satellite television channel *New TV*. Initially launched as a platform for the Lebanese Communist Party, the channel is currently owned by businessman Tahseen Khayyat but maintains its leftist stance. *New TV* has led a relentless anticorruption drive in Lebanon, coupled with a staunchly secularist editorial line and a multi-sectarian staff, a rare occurrence in Lebanon’s sectarian media landscape. The channel’s editorial line is

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<sup>64</sup> Comedy programs like *Tash Ma Tash* (MBC) are also popular, but drama dominates the Ramadan season. <sup>10</sup> Marwan M. Kraidy, *Reality Television and Politics in the Arab World* (Preliminary Observations) 2006, *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* [peer-reviewed paper edition] 2(1), pp. 7-28, <http://www.tbsjournal.com/Kraidy.html>

also sharply critical of US policies in the Middle East. New TV is an excellent example of local, relatively independent (the channel's owner reportedly has political and business links in Qatar, Libya, and Tunisia) media that advocates economic and political transparency and a secular outlook that is nonetheless critical of the United States' agenda in the Middle East. To recapitulate, New TV is aligned with two professed US policy goals to (1) promote non sectarianism and (2) tackle corruption and foster transparency in governance, while also criticizing US policy in the Middle East. It is extremely difficult for US broadcasts to compete with such a channel. Arguably, New TV presents more positives than negatives, since its tough reporting on corruption is unique and its non sectarianism rare in the pan-Arab media industry, while its criticism of US policy is shared by numerous pan-Arab channels. To appreciate that balance, however, US policymakers will have to put long-term policy goals ahead of immediate foreign policy needs, which is an arduous task in the age of the 24-hour news cycle.

The economic impact of the pan-Arab media scene is difficult to measure in the absence of reliable information about the advertising market. Available data reflect publicly available "rate card" figures, which are larger than the amounts that are actually paid. However, there is a considerable economic impact in that the media sector employs a growing number of Arab citizens, especially younger men and women. The success of these media institutions has an economic impact beyond their owners. As Dubai emerged as an Arab media capital, it siphoned off mostly young and qualified media workers from throughout the Arabic-speaking world, creating disequilibrium in other media markets.

The media's economic impact is sometimes felt locally. For example, when the Lebanese channel MTV, a minor institution by today's Arab television standards, was shut down in 2003 by Lebanese authorities under Syrian pressure, more than 300 families lost their livelihood. Because they are increasingly important employers, Arab media institutions play a growing socioeconomic role. As a result, people feel protective of these socially embedded institutions, and harsh criticism of Arab media from

Washington adds to negative opinions of the United States. Though television remains by far the most influential medium in the Arab world, the pan-Arab media scene is not restricted to television. Mobile phones and other portable devices are now part and parcel of the new Arab media environment. (Internet penetration rates are still comparatively low, with the exception of the small Gulf States.)

In fact, the most successful media institutions in the Arab world integrate multiple media in their production and programming strategies. This is especially the case in entertainment programs, where the use of text-messaging by viewers to nominate, select, vote, or express opinion are now ubiquitous. This media convergence is driven by business considerations. In a region where audience measurements and ratings remain not fully reliable, embedding interactive multimedia features enables a new business model. Every time a viewer votes, nominates, or selects using text-messaging, they pay a fee. This income is rumored to have matched, even surpassed, advertising revenues in some cases.

The impact of media convergence is not only at the economic level. The new Arab communication environment creates social and political opportunities, and security challenges. The connectedness between different media, due to commercially driven technological convergence, creates new ways to communicate and to reach new publics. When average citizens can connect mobile phones and television, traditional communication patterns are transformed as access to the means of communication becomes easier and more widely spread. The resulting situation, one I have called “hypermedia space,” enables social and political communication that previously may not have been allowed.<sup>65</sup> It also allows any social group, including terrorist organizations, access to public space through media convergence.<sup>65</sup>

A short video of a beheading taken on a mobile phone and then posted on the Internet makes its way to local, pan-Arab, and subsequently global television screens, Internet sites, and newspaper front pages. Perhaps more importantly, Arab hypermedia space, with its interactivity, stealth, and slick

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<sup>65</sup> Marwan M. Kraidy, *Reality Television and Politics in the Arab World (Preliminary Observations) 2006*, *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* [peer-reviewed paper edition] 2(1), pp. 7-28, <http://www.tbsjournal.com/Kraidy.html> .

multimedia gimmicks, exposes the gaping hole between the vibrancy of the Arab media sector and the stagnancy of Arab politics. Viewers used to calling in live and venting about their rulers' incompetence on one of Al-Jazeera's shows are all the more frustrated when they hang up and return to a world where their words make no difference whatsoever.

The pan-Arab airwaves simply are more pluralistic and free-wheeling than Arab streets and parliaments, and the connection between screen and street has been weak and sporadic—Lebanon's 2005 Independence Intifada, known in Washington as the "Cedar Revolution," one of those moments when television screens and Arab streets were in sync, was short-lived, but its memory makes the current standoff over Lebanon's presidential election all the more bitter. Similarly, the Damascus Spring initiated by the newly minted president Bashar Al-Asad, which was widely covered in the Arab media, quickly sunk into a frigid winter of repression.<sup>66</sup>

When I convened a meeting of distinguished public diplomacy practitioners, journalists, and scholarly experts in Washington, DC, last year, the gap between media dynamism and political stagnation emerged as the most important long-term dimension of the growth of Arab media.<sup>67</sup> The vast expansion of media discourse raises hopes and aspirations that are then dashed by authoritarian politics. This paradox breeds extremism and sets the ground for resentment, instability, and violence.<sup>68</sup>

As an independent television station, al-Jazeera began broadcasting on November 1, 1996 from the small Persian Gulf country of Qatar. The Emir of Qatar's bold decision to create new kind of television network was not the only revolutionary initiative undertaken in this conservative and relatively unknown Arab country. Emir Al Thani, introduced democratic elections for a number of authorities, created a new constitution, and established an elected national body. With all of these democratic reforms it is not surprising that the first uncensored Arabic news channel was set-up in Qatar. In March 1998, the Emir

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66 Marwan M. Kraidy, "Hypermedia and Governance in Saudi Arabia," *First Monday*, 11(9), [http://firstmonday.org/issues/special11\\_9/kraidy/index.html](http://firstmonday.org/issues/special11_9/kraidy/index.html).

67 Marwan M. Kraidy, *Public Media in the Arab World: Exploring the Gap between Reality and Ideals* (Washington, DC: Arab Media and Public Life [AMPLE] Project), [http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/files/pdf/arab\\_public\\_media.pdf](http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/files/pdf/arab_public_media.pdf).

68 13 Ibid.



abolished the Ministry of Information. As one observer noted, he “belongs to a new generation of Arab leaders more open to political and social ideas familiar in the West.”<sup>69</sup>

### **Results:**

Final results indicated that media plays an important role in presenting biased coverage for the news. Objectivity is closer to be a myth. Always there are different degrees of bias and distortion. (whether negative or positive). The nature and bias level depends on:

- Web site affiliation & orientation whether this is Arab versus non Arab
- Web site content news versus editorials
- Web site material location front page versus inside
- Web site material presentation written-sound-visual material.

12 analyzers and coders participated in the study after an intensive training course. All the web pages updates had been analyzed via visiting the web sites 4 times daily (6 AM-12NOON-6PM-12NIGHT). This gave us a good chance to trace and follow all updates at the web sites. Also, all emergency and updates news had been analyzed. The results of the study would be beneficial for decision makers in all media not only the electronic media. The results would be an added value in all exerted efforts in improving the bad image of all parts especially the United States. We are in a bad need to adopt the Media professional ideology by all communicators. This would be reflected in better understanding

### **Testing hypotheses:**

*H 1 There is differences among web sites (whether biased or not) in image type-covered topics-US image-used evidences-main concentration-ways of distortion-salience-main issue-news values-attraction tools-included figures.*

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<sup>69</sup> Miles, Hugh. *Al-Jazeera: The Inside Story of the Arab News Channel That Is Challenging the West*. New York: Grove Press, 2005.

**Table no (2) sample distribution Testing hypothesis (1)**

VARIABLES	DIFFERENCES	SUM OF SQUARES	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F	SIG
image type	Between group	200.170	2	100.085	364.892	.000**
	Within Group	444.618	1621	0.274		
	Total	644.788	1623			
covered topics	Between group	24.560	2	12.280	5.974	.003*
	Within Group	3332.297	1621	2.056		
	Total	3356.857	1623			
US image	Between group	41.101	2	20.550	5.186	.005*
	Within Group	6423.825	1621	3.963.		
	Total	6464.925	1623			
used evidences	Between group	3.699	2	.0330	8.858	.000**
	Within Group	338.456	1621	.0522		
	Total	342.155	1623			
main concentration	Between group	23.524	2	11.762	6.327	.002*
	Within Group	3013.711	1621	1.859		
	Total	3037.236	1623			
ways of distortion	Between group	43.297	2	20.263	5.502	.004*
	Within Group	6378.543	1621	3.960		
	Total	6421.840	1623			
salience	Between group	11.134	2	5.567	2.751	.064
	Within Group	3280.292	1621	2.024		
	Total	3291.426	1623			
main issue	Between group	38.365	2	19.183	4.833	.008
	Within Group	6433.595	1621	3.963		
	Total	6471.960	1623			
news values	Between group	368.443	2	184.221	696.001	.000**
	Within Group	429.055	1621	.0265		
	Total	797.498	1623			
attraction tools	Between group	23.990	2	11.995	6.570	.001**
	Within Group	2959.507	1621	1.826		
	Total	2983.498	1623			
included figures	Between group	23.427	2	11.736	6.328	.002*
	Within Group	3006.385	1621	1.855		
	Total	3029.857	1623			

The previous table indicates that there was a difference among web sites in image type whether it is positive-negative or neutral where both the positive and negative image was biased. Also, there was a difference in US image as unfair, imbalanced and imperial country violating law or use it to justify aggression whether by US or by it’s close alliance Israel. Also, there was a difference in evidence used (figures, facts, examples and testimonial).Some of the Arab web sites used more than one evidence. Also, differences extended to main concentration whether issue- event-person .Except the main issue and salience the first hypothesis had been approved.

*H 2 There is a positive correlation between image bias (totally biased-totally objective-some how objective/biased) and image type (negative-neutral-positive)*

**Table no (3) Testing hypothesis (2)**

IMAGE TYPE BIASED OR NOT	NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL	POSITIVE	TOTAL
totally biased	1326	63	90	1479
totally objective	2	47	--	49
somehow objective/biased	18	6	72	96
Total	1346	116	162	1624

Chi Square tests

TEST	VALUE	DF	SIG
Chi Square	1084.734	4	.000
Likelihood ratio	521.735	4	.000
Linear by Linear association	502.852	1	.000

Symmetric Measures

TEST	VALUE	SIG
Contingency Coefficient	.633	.000
Pearson's R	.557	.000
Spearman Correlation	.570	.000

The previous table indicates that the second hypothesis had been approved where there was a positive correlation between image bias (totally biased-totally objective-some how objective/biased) and image type (negative-neutral-positive). Almost the majority of all news and editorial presented about US were biased whether some how or totally and whether negative as imperial country or positive as a developed one. The biased news and editorial is too dangerous in shaping the public opinion especially if this opinion was oriented passively as results for many historical factors. Contingency coefficient factor was very high and significant at .000. This means that regardless of the identity or the affiliation of the web sites the US is facing a very critical situation at the Arab world. Although the peaceful relationship between Arab and US on the formal level but on the informal level there are waves of hostilities and disputes that need to be solved for any constructive as well as fruitful relationship. Some of the Arab illiterate- and in some case intellectual – people mix and can not differentiate between US as country-US as people and US as a foreign policy .This foreign policy is subjected to many pressures from stockholders .pressure groups, capitalist, media and other factors to form finally the US policy whether it was matching with law, Arabic interest or not. Some analyzers interpreted the sphere bias of the US as results to the American election system which allow to candidate to collect Jewish capital from industry and businessmen's .So the candidate has to pay the bill of his success. Not only this but also this game remains as threaten and pressure tool. This logic is matching with the Arabic point of view which of course contradicts with US foreign policy. Between two points of view we have to review the media and

international communication literature about the concept of bias ,measuring bias and the results of biased news. This dilemma must be on the top agenda of the US foreign policy public relation campaign to improve the US image and build more credible relationship between Arab and US.

*H 3 There is a correlation between web site affiliation (Arab and non Arab web sites) and web sites bias, US image and image type (negative-neutral-positive) of the United States.*

**Table no (4) Testing hypothesis (3)**

IMAGE TYPE AFFILIATION	NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL	POSITIVE	TOTAL
Arab web sites	811	89	90	990
Non Arab web sites	535	27	72	634
	1346	116	162	1624

Chi Square tests

TEST	VALUE	DF	SIG
Chi Square	14.384	2	.001
Likelihood ratio	15.525	2	.000

Symmetric Measures

TEST	VALUE	SIG
Contingency Coefficient	.094	.001

*\*There is no correlation between web site affiliation (Arab and non Arab web sites) and web sites bias, US image as calculated Q2 was less then tabulated one.*

There was a very weak correlation between web site affiliation (Arab and non Arab web sites) and US image .This means that the problem not in the web site affiliation but in the communicator themselves as they need to be well educated on the code of ethics as well as the principles of media use especially that the highly educated people are exposing these web sites more than the other categories. So, they are working as influential for the others due to personal communication process. The majorities of analyzed web pages are biased and have a very bad image for the US. This contributes in maximizing a case of tension and creates a very bad atmosphere .All this vicious circle is reflected badly on the US Arab relation as well as creates a trust crisis between two sides.

*H 4 There is a correlation between US image and used appeals, no. evidence, and main concentration at the materials.*

**Table no (5) Testing hypothesis (4)(A) relationship between US image and used appeals**

US IMAGE	APPEAL	EMOTIONAL	RATIONAL	BOTH	NA	TOTAL
Unfair		630	28	10	13	681
Imbalanced		119	190	15	24	338
Using law to justify aggression		34	9	127	2	172
Violating Law		84	-	-	-	84
Imperial Country		94	-	-	-	94
Others		91	-	1	-	92
NA		38	6	5	114	163
Total		1090	223	158	153	1624

Chi Square tests

TEST	VALUE	DF	SIG
Chi Square	2281.943	18	.000
Likelihood ratio	1518.127	18	.000

Symmetric Measures

TEST	VALUE	SIG
Contingency Coefficient	.764	.000

The previous table indicates that there was a very high correlation between US image and emotional appeals as it had been used whether at news or editorials .Emotional appeals had been used via pictures, titles, symbols, colors .This is very up normal especially that the crews who are working at web sites are highly qualified and almost up to standard. It was supposed that they would present a state of the art and apply the professional criteria.

**Table no (5) Testing hypothesis (4)(B) relationship between US image and No. of evidence**

APPEAL	ONE EVIDENCE	MORE THAN ONE EVIDENCE	TOTAL
US IMAGE			
Unfair	171	510	681
Imbalanced	88	250	338
Using law to justify aggression	36	109	172
Violating Law	17	67	84
Imperial Country	35	59	94
Others	38	54	92
NA	78	85	163
Total	1090	223	1624

Chi Square tests

TEST	VALUE	DF	SIG
Chi Square	50.186	6	.000
Likelihood ratio	48.496	6	.000

Symmetric Measures

TEST	VALUE	SIG
Contingency Coefficient	.173	.000

The bad and negative image had been emphasized by using more than one evidence ,this gives the reader impression that this bias whether intentional or it has become as usual in the web sites writing and editing criteria. The most important and critical issue that many web sites try to imitate the analyzed web sites or presents this material quoted on these famous web sites. In this case the problem would be repeated in other form.

**Table no (5) Testing hypothesis (4)(C) relationship between US image and main concentration**

	APPEAL	ISSUE	EVENT	PERSON	MORE THAN ONE ELEMENTS	TOTAL
US IMAGE						
Unfair		449	31	4	197	681
Imbalanced		106	124	10	98	338
Using law to justify aggression		34	9	127	2	172
Violating Law		44	-	-	40	84
Imperial Country		46	-	-	48	94
Others		91	-	1	-	92
NA		32	9	5	117	163
Total		776	174	99	575	1624

Chi Square tests



TEST	VALUE	DF	SIG
Chi Square	1015.793	18	.000
Likelihood ratio	734.885	18	.000

Symmetric Measures

TEST	VALUE	SIG
Contingency Coefficient	.620	.000

There was a correlation between US image and main concentrations as the unfair image was associated with the issue as a main concentration while imbalanced image was associated with events. Violating law or using it to justify illegal actions was associated with the American president or the foreign minister (Rice). The other features of the bad image as well as good image were associated with more than elements to present the image of the United States. Any trial to improve the US image must consider those three elements as the person component is working as a symbol to the US. The Middle East issue is very sensitive and critical to US foreign policy as well as to the image of the United States. This issue includes many events and incidents especially that all polls emphasized that this image had been deteriorated after September 11, 2001. The most of the US campaigns and invitations to democratize the Arab world and starts reform project at the whole Middle East failed as it has been perceived as external interference and a trial to impose a foreign model on the Arab world. This model ignored the cultural privacy of the Arab world. This model could be applied and adopted if the public awareness of the US is good and the public attitude is oriented to accept this model. So, the US selected the wrong and risky way to achieve its goals. The Arab Israeli conflict is working as a parameter for the relation with United States. US have to revise and rationale the whole situation.

At the same time, regardless of the political situation, we are in a bad need to apply not the Arab, or American east or the west ideology but the professional and neutral one.

## **Conclusion& recommendations;**

US have a very bad image at the Arab media s a results to its foreign policy at the Middle East in general and at the Arab world specifically. There are no big differences among Arab and non Arab web sites coverage for US news as many of the crews who are working at the non Arab web sites are belonging to Arab roots. They are working as a gate keeper in publishing news and editorials especially in electronic coverage.

US image is associated with many bad images and meanings such as unfair country adopts imbalanced policies toward Middle East. IT always adopts offensive policies as an imperial country but in a new way. It violates law or uses law to justify illegal actions. Arab and non Arab web sites didn't differentiate or separate between US a country and US as a foreign policy. Dealing with Arabic issues such as Iraq-Palestine, Lebanon and Gulf area is working always as a parameter for the way the media deal with US.

We actually need to provide the communicators with valid updated and accurate information enabling them to have an excellent solid basis for dealing with Arab and West issues and images. This could be achieved via developing an action plan to improve the distorted image the media which had been cultivated by different segments of West and Arab society through different media in light of the various international political developments since Sept.11th, 2001.Also, we need to define the dimensions of distorted image of both Arab and West people as well as compare between the shaped image among different political systems and different media.

More intensive efforts are needed for measuring the historical factors which lead to the cumulative distorted image for both Arab and West. 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