

USAWC STRATEGIC RESEARCH PROJECT

**WINNING THE WAR OF IDEAS IN THE
GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM**

by

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This SRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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ABSTRACT

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The President's National Strategy for Combating Terrorism expands on Part III of the National Security Strategy by detailing the "ends" and "ways" of waging the global war on terrorism (WOT). The strategy uses the 4-D strategic concept as an expression of the President's strategic intent and as a strategic framework for prosecuting the WOT. The 4-D strategic concept consists of: defeating terrorist organizations of global reach, denying them sponsorship/support/sanctuary, diminishing the underlying conditions for terrorism, and defending U.S. citizens and interests at home and abroad. Based on past headlines, things are going quite well in prosecuting the "hot" war against terrorist organizations and their state sponsors. Similar progress is being made in denying terrorists support and in defending the homeland. What is lacking is comparable success in diminishing the underlying conditions for terrorism. Anti-Americanism is at an all-time high. This paper will look at how the U.S. needs to prosecute the war of ideas in order to diminish the underlying conditions for terrorism. It will describe the nature of the threat presented by Islamic extremists, summarize current political and public diplomacy policies to address the threat (ends, ways and means), and explore policy options and implications. Key questions to be answered include: How do we measure success? How do we know when we have won? What is the endstate of a "war of ideas"? Are we resourced and organized well enough to effectively prosecute it?

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WINNING THE WAR OF IDEAS IN THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM

President Bush states in the National Security Strategy that the U.S. is “fighting a war against terrorist of global reach...[It] is different from any other war we have fought before. It will be fought on many fronts against a particularly illusive enemy over an extended period of time.”¹ Part III of the National Security Strategy outlines the three goals of defeating international terrorism: to disrupt and destroy terrorist organizations of global reach; to strengthen the homeland against future attacks; *to wage a war of ideas* to win the battle against international terrorism.²

The President’s National Strategy for Combating Terrorism expands on Part III of the National Security Strategy by detailing the “ends” and “ways” of waging the global war on terrorism. The strategy uses the 4-D strategic concept as an expression of the President’s strategic intent and as a strategic framework for prosecuting the global war on terrorism. The 4-D strategic concept consists of: defeating terrorist organizations of global reach, denying them sponsorship/support/sanctuary, defending U.S. citizens and interests at home and abroad, and diminishing the underlying conditions for terrorism.³

Based on past headlines, things are going quite well in the global war on terrorism. The U.S. gained a surprisingly easy victory in Afghanistan over the Taliban and al Qaeda. Hundreds of terrorists were killed or captured and al Qaeda has been intimidated, divided, demoralized and reduced in both capacity and morale. Over one-third of the top al Qaeda leadership has been captured or killed.⁴ Over 165 countries and jurisdictions have issued blocking orders against the assets of terrorists. \$112 million in terrorist assets have been frozen worldwide in over 500 accounts.⁵ On the home front, agencies that once worked separately to safeguard our country are now working together within a single Department of Homeland Security. The most recent Homeland Security bill commits \$31 billion to securing the nation and supports important new initiatives across the Department to protect against biological, chemical, or radiological threats.⁶

In summary, the U.S. is making great progress in achieving two of the three goals of defeating international terrorism as stated in the National Security Strategy and three of the four legs of the 4-D strategic concept for the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism. What is lacking is similar progress in prosecuting the war of ideas and diminishing the underlying conditions for terrorism. The “immediate battle against al Qaeda must be combined with a greater effort to win hearts and minds and to alleviate poverty and resentment around the world.”⁷

It is not enough to stop the current group of terrorists if they are likely to be replaced easily by recruits. It is possible that even if the U.S. destroys al Qaeda as an organization, similar groups could rise in its place if the group is not discredited or the attraction for the group's struggle is not reduced. It is essential to win the hearts and minds of potential radicals in order to prevent them from joining or supporting al Qaeda's cause. Potential radicals and supporters must be convinced that the benefits of cooperating with the U.S and its allies outweigh the costs of warring with them.⁸

This paper will look at how the U.S. needs to prosecute the war of ideas in order to diminish the underlying conditions for terrorism. It will describe the nature of the threat presented by Islamic extremists, assess current strategy to address the threat and explore alternatives in executing the strategy.

NATURE OF THE THREAT

ISLAMISM

Islamism is a revolutionary and politically right-wing version of Islam. It is a powerful ideology that has effectively postured itself as the dominant form of opposition to all standing secular Arab regimes. It presents itself as a viable alternative to Arabs who have experienced a generation of political failure and injured dignity. It appeals to the disaffected and hopeless youth.⁹

The threat of Islamism is the extreme use of violence as an expression of individual faith in order to achieve political objectives. Islamists view the West as a corrupting, threatening culture. Christianity, technology, modernity and democracy are viewed as inherently evil. Islamists such as al Qaeda believe it is the individual duty of every Muslim to kill as many Western infidels (especially Americans) and Muslim heretics as possible in order to set up their extremist form of theocratic government where Islam is the unifying political ideology.¹⁰ The most harmful impact to American interests is that the culture of jihad (holy war) and the willingness to die for a cause is spreading more and more among younger Muslims. Witness the fervor of the young al Qaeda hijackers in their September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

With the September 11 attacks, Al Qaeda is trying to use the U.S. as an instrument in the struggle with other Muslims. It wants to antagonize the U.S. to strike back disproportionately in order to inspire outraged Muslims to overthrow their governments and build

Islamist states.¹¹ It is a strategy that appears to be working given the troubling level of anti-Americanism stemming from U.S. actions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

PUBLIC OPINION

The bottom has fallen out of support for America in most of the Muslim world. Negative views of the U.S. among Muslims, which had been largely limited to countries in the Middle East, have spread to Muslim populations in Indonesia and Nigeria. Since last summer, favorable ratings for the U.S. have fallen from 61% to 15% in Indonesia and from 71% to 38% among Muslims in Nigeria. A growing percentage of Muslims see serious threats to Islam. Specifically, majorities in seven of eight Muslim populations surveyed express worries that the U.S. might become a military threat to their countries. Even in Kuwait, where people have a generally favorable view of the U.S., 53% voice at least some concern that the U.S. could someday pose a threat. Support for the U.S.-led war on terrorism also has fallen in most Muslim publics.¹²

According to the June 2003 survey of the Pew Global Attitudes Project conducted in Muslim countries, “the Iraq war has widened the rift between Americans and Western Europeans, further inflamed the Muslim world, softened support for the war on terrorism, and significantly weakened global public support for the pillars of the post-World War II era – the UN and the North Atlantic alliance.”¹³

Equally significant, solid majorities in the Palestinian Authority, Indonesia and Jordan – and nearly half of those in Morocco and Pakistan – say they have at least some confidence in Osama bin Laden to “do the right thing regarding world affairs.” Fully 71% of Palestinians say they have “confidence in bin Laden in this regard.”¹⁴ It is ironic that with each successive military gain in the global war on terrorism, the U.S. appears to be losing the war of ideas.

ASSESSING THE CURRENT US STRATEGY IN THE WAR OF IDEAS

The diminishing component of the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism has two objectives. The first objective, “Strengthen Weak States,” encompasses “U.S. efforts to resolve regional disputes and foster economic, social and political development, market-based economies, good governance, and the rule of law.”¹⁵ The second objective, “Win the War of Ideas,” encompasses ongoing actions to: “[de-legitimize] all acts of terrorism; [prevent] terrorist ideologies from finding fertile ground in any nation; diminish the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit in areas most at risk; kindle the hopes and aspirations of freedom of those societies ruled by the sponsors of global terrorism.”¹⁶

One of the key questions about the current strategy in prosecuting the war of ideas is, “How do we know when we have won?” Upon closer examination of the actions above associated with winning the war of ideas, it would appear that once these actions are completed then in the eyes of the Bush Administration, the war of ideas is over. Therefore, the completed actions represent appropriate end states (ends) for the war of ideas as a major objective of winning the global war on terrorism.

The Bush strategy takes further steps in identifying four critical components for winning the war of ideas. Winning the war of ideas requires the U.S. to: use its influence to *de-legitimize all terrorist acts* as unacceptable behavior that all nations must oppose; *support moderate Muslim governments* in reversing the spread of extremist ideology, while assuring all Muslims that American values are not at odds with Islam; *resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*; *promote the free flow of information and ideas* via effective, timely public diplomacy and government supported media.¹⁷

Therefore, in order to assess the current strategy for executing the war of ideas, it is most appropriate to assess how well the U.S. is doing in fulfilling each of these four critical components (ways).

DE-LEGITIMIZE ALL TERRORIST ACTS

A key obstacle to the U.S. winning the war of ideas is the widespread acceptance of terrorism as a permissible course of action by a large portion of the Arab world. Immediately after the September 11 attacks, Kofi Annan expended a significant amount of prestige in a vain attempt to get the UN to accept a world treaty against terrorism. All the states accepted the carefully worded proposal, except the Islamic states, which insisted on a blanket exemption for terrorist actions against Israel. For most Islamic states, terrorism is defined not by the nature of the act, but by the cause under which it is taken. It is believed to be a most effective weapon in the face of the West’s superior military technology and prowess.¹⁸

Currently, there are 21 global or regional treaties pertaining to the subject of international terrorism. The U.S. has signed all of them except three: the Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, the Convention of the Organization of the Islamic Conference on Combating International Terrorism, and the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism. Selective language in these three treaties renders them ineffective in regulating global terrorism.

For example, language in the Arab Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism does not consider “...peoples' struggle including armed struggle against foreign occupation,

aggression, colonialism, and hegemony, aimed at liberation and self-determination in accordance with the principles of international law...[as]...a terrorist crime.”¹⁹

The Convention of the Organization of the Islamic Conference on Combating International Terrorism condemns all forms of terrorism in the clearest language possible. Yet, it permits terrorist acts as legitimate against occupiers, ignores terrorist acts not recognized as such by individual nations, and refuses to extradite terrorists with a political cause.²⁰ Similarly, the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism restricts extraditing terrorists.²¹

On 28 September 2001, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1373, reaffirming its unequivocal condemnation of the terrorist attacks that took place on September 11, and expressing its determination to prevent all such acts. Resolution 1373 also established the Counter-Terrorism Committee, made up of all 15 members of the Security Council, and called for all States to become party to all the relevant conventions and protocols related to terrorism.²² The Counter-Terrorism Committee monitors the implementation of Resolution 1373 by all States and tries to increase the capability of states to fight terrorism. However, it has no real power of influence in de-legitimizing terrorism. It cannot gain consensus, it is not a sanctions committee and it does not even maintain a list of terrorist organizations or individuals.

The Sixth Committee of the UN General Assembly is currently considering a draft “Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism,” which would include a definition of terrorism if adopted.²³ However, given the lack of consensus on an acceptable definition of terrorism and Arab ambiguity about using terrorist acts against Israel, it is unlikely that such a draft will ever be completed. In summary, the UN is making slow progress with de-legitimizing terrorism.

SUPPORT MODERATE MUSLIM GOVERNMENTS

For obvious reasons the U.S. wants to bolster popular Muslim moderates and marginalize Muslim radicals. One of the most difficult issues for a “war of ideas” strategy is balancing conflicting interests and values. A conflict exists between maintaining the cooperation and stability of current moderate Arab heads of state versus promoting Islamic democratic aspirations. It can be argued that the U.S. has tilted too far in supporting stability and discouraged the rise of Islamist parties, contradicting a stated U.S. value of promoting democracy. This view holds that the U.S. should support greater democratization in the Middle East, even if it means losing temporary control to radical Islamists. Proponents of this view

argue that as has happened in Iran, Islamists can gain power, but their incompetence soon becomes evident and forces of moderation arise shortly thereafter.²⁴

Another view is the notion that the recent American intervention in Iraq will make it the first Arab democracy palatable to the U.S. This ambitious view envisions a secular post-Saddam Hussein Iraq replacing Saudi Arabia as the key American ally in the Persian Gulf and allowing the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the kingdom. The presence of U.S. troops in Iraq would boost moderate elements in neighboring Iran and hasten that country's evolution towards a more moderate course. This would lead to a withdrawal of Iranian support for terrorist groups, isolate Syria, reduce pressure on Israel, and lead eventually to a favorable solution of the Arab-Israeli problem.²⁵

However, the war in Iraq may have wounded the cause of moderation. It has perhaps increased the number of radical Muslims believing in the inevitability of a clash of civilizations and the need to stand up and be counted for Islam in a war against Western dominance. Radical Islamists have gained increasing support for their contention that the U.S. is unethical and arrogant as a result of its military dominance. There even seems now to exist an unnatural cooperation between radical Islamists and secular nationalists, both traditionally viewed as ideological rivals. But the Iraq war has muted that rivalry and increased the polarization between Muslims and the West. Consequently, moderates who appeal to the West may now find it harder to win hearts and minds at home.²⁶

RESOLVE THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

A "war of ideas" campaign will never take hold in the Middle East until the U.S. re-establishes credibility in the eyes of the Arab world in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Arabs perceive the U.S. as heavily biased in its policies towards Israel and are suspicious of the perceived close relations between President Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Sharon. While the Palestinian issue is not a cause of September 11, the failure of the U.S. to resolve the issue is the source of much Arab resentment and undermines the moral authority of the U.S. war on terrorism.

President Bush's vision of two states living side-by-side in peace and security is the foundation of the latest peace plan, the Roadmap to Peace. The U.S. worked extensively with Russia, the United Nations, and the European Union (the Quartet) to design a three-phased plan that proposes peace by 2005. According to the Roadmap, Phase I involves ending terror and violence, normalizing Palestinian life, and building Palestinian government institutions. Israel would withdraw from Palestinian areas occupied since September 2000, freeze all

settlement activity, and dismantle outposts. Phase II would transition to an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders and sovereignty. Phase III would convene a second Quartet international conference leading to a final resolution on borders, Jerusalem, refugees, and settlements.²⁷

By all accounts, the Roadmap seems a credible process with achievable objectives and firm timelines to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, internal forces in the region continue to undermine the Roadmap process. In violation of announced cease-fires, Palestinian suicide bombers wreak havoc on Israel's civilians and economy. Israeli retaliatory strikes against the militants in Palestinian refugee camps, targeted assassinations of radical Palestinian leaders, and bulldozing of the homes of surviving family members of suicide bombers weaken international support. In response to continual Palestinian suicide bombers, Israel erected a 90-mile security barrier in the West Bank. While the barrier enhances Israeli security by denying terrorists access to Israeli territory, it separates many Palestinian settlements into noncontiguous units that undermine Palestinian economic viability and sovereignty. The security barrier is destroying attempts to negotiate a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

PROMOTE FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION AND IDEAS

In response to flagging public opinion worldwide, an effective U.S. public diplomacy is most appropriate. However, since the end of the Cold War, U.S. Information Agency (USIA) and foreign broadcasting efforts such as the Voice of America have been neglected due to declining interest in the White House and Congress. A 1999 reorganization initiative placed the previously independent USIA within the State Department. The International Broadcasting Act of 1994 consolidated foreign broadcasting efforts within USIA under a bipartisan Broadcasting Board of Governors. Neither move has been effective in addressing public diplomacy shortcomings post September 11. The USIA has had problems integrating into the State Department culture and the Broadcasting Board's membership, consisting of part-time business executives, presents opportunities for conflict of interest.²⁸

Meanwhile, USIA's institutional expertise that skillfully managed information programs for overseas audiences and foreign leadership no longer exists. Media and public opinion research is misplaced in State's classified intelligence bureau. Public diplomacy efforts have atrophied to merely organizing press conferences and distributing speeches. Government sponsored libraries in foreign countries are virtually extinct. Educational and cultural exchanges, including Fulbright fellowships, have been cut. Congress reduced the foreign

broadcasting budget from \$844 million in FY 1993 to \$560 million in FY 2004, which prompted cuts in services in the Middle East and Latin America. As the final straw, Charlotte Beers, the former advertising executive and Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs in the State Department, resigned earlier this year after a failed \$15 million advertising campaign to Islamic nations that showcased Muslim life in America.²⁹

Several studies suggest reforms in government public diplomacy in order to make it more effective in the war of ideas. The Heritage Foundation recommended that the Bush administration and Congress restore public diplomacy's independent reporting and budget channels.³⁰ The Council on Foreign Relations recommended the President: establish a regularly scheduled "Quadrennial Public Diplomacy Review" modeled on DoD's Quadrennial Defense Review; create a private, non-profit "Corporation for Public Diplomacy" modeled on the Corporation for Public Broadcasting; and establish a "Public Diplomacy Reserve Corps" patterned on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's disaster relief model.³¹ Finally, the House of Representatives' Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World recommended developing structural changes to address the issues in the White House, the National Security Council, and the Department of State; and launching the American Knowledge Library, a major new initiative to translate American books into local languages.³²

Despite the number of recommendations mentioned to strengthen public diplomacy, some in the Arab world think that it will not be enough. They think U.S. public diplomacy efforts should be reconfigured. Too often public diplomacy efforts are supply-driven; messages are sent out that are neither well received nor responsive to the concerns of the intended audiences. Some Arabs assert that the U.S. should lower the rhetoric and do more listening. Instead of pursuing a top-down approach, the U.S. should develop more regional partnerships that serve the long-term objective of improving U.S.-Arab relations.³³

OPPORTUNITIES IN THE WAR OF IDEAS

In assessing the current strategy for executing the war of ideas, it appears that the U.S. is not doing very well in fulfilling each of the four critical components for success. The UN is making very slow progress in getting the world to de-legitimize terrorism as a form of political protest or military tactic. The war in Iraq has emboldened the radicals, increased the attractiveness of extremism, and exacerbated the plight of moderates and moderate Arab governments. The Roadmap to Peace process for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at a standstill. And, public diplomacy is broken. Perhaps, alternatives in executing the strategy

may prove more effective in winning the “war of ideas.” Perhaps, better organization, better messages, and better ideas should be considered.

PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT – WHO’S IN CHARGE?

How should the U.S. marshal its forces to win the hearts and minds of the world? Many agree that the government’s broad strategy to counter terrorism must include vigorous and creative propaganda to change other countries’ negative image of America. President Bush understood the importance of managing America’s message to the world by expanding on the Coalition Information Centers used with much success during the war in Afghanistan. He established by Executive Order 13283 the Office of Global Communications to coordinate overseas strategic communications, integrate the President’s themes, and truthfully depict America’s policies. The Office of Global Communications advises the President on the strategic direction, themes, and messages that the U.S. needs to reach foreign audiences. Its intent is to prevent misunderstanding and conflict, build support for the U.S. coalition partners, better inform international audiences, and counter propaganda and disinformation.³⁴

However, Mr. Rumsfeld, deeply frustrated that the U.S. government had no coherent, effective plan for molding public opinion worldwide, tried unsuccessfully to develop the Office of Strategic Influence, a program for the military to conduct covert operations aimed at influencing public opinion and policy makers in friendly and neutral countries. Such a program included efforts to discredit and undermine the influence of mosques and religious schools as breeding grounds for Islamic militancy and anti-Americanism. It also included setting up schools with secret American financing to teach a moderate Islamic position and depict sympathetically how the religion is practiced in America.³⁵

Still, Mr. Rumsfeld’s efforts raised the question of whether the military should carry out secret propaganda missions in friendly nations. Many believe the military crosses the line when it targets its information operations against an ally. Allied countries would resent a foreign military targeting its citizenry. The job of perception management in allied countries should remain with diplomats and civilians, not the military. The military public affairs’ mission of providing true and accurate information could be compromised by any link to covert information operations missions.³⁶

Yet, there is an argument for the military to do perception management. Due to the lack of organization and funding, the State Department cannot do it or has not done it very well. The Office of Global Communications has had little impact on perception management beyond coordinating the message of the day from the various agencies’ public affairs offices. The

Defense Department, with its huge budget, extensive network of organizations experienced in covert operations, and technological tools (especially in satellite communications and computer warfare) is more than able to step up to the task.³⁷

Even with the plethora of initiatives on how to make perception management more effective in the war of ideas, there is deep skepticism that they will make any significant headway in changing Arab public opinion toward the U.S. Decades of official lies and manipulation from the government-controlled press have made for a rather cynical Arab public. It does not trust the national media as being especially reliable; thus, the reason for the high popularity of independent satellite news outlets such as Al Jazeera. If the Arab public does not trust its own media, it is unlikely that it will trust Western media, no matter how well intentioned or professionally presented. They will perceive Western efforts as propaganda and mere manipulation. Therefore, in dealing with the Arab public, the U.S. will have to rely on covert perception management by proxy, which the Defense Department is perhaps better equipped to do than other federal agencies.

SELLING AMERICA – WHAT’S OUR BRAND?

Secretary of State Powell declared before Congress, “I’m going to be bringing people into the public diplomacy function of the department who are going to change from just selling us in the old USIA way to really branding foreign policy, branding the department, marketing the department, marketing American values to the world.”³⁸

Yet, branding is nothing new—countries have always had brands. A notable brand for France is its long-standing service on the UN Security Council as a proponent for third world nations’ aspirations. A brand for Germany is the image of the country as the mighty industrial engine for Western Europe economic prosperity. The U.S. brand commonly promoted as justification for actions in Iraq is that the U.S. occupied Germany and Japan after World War II, restored the infrastructure, established a civil society, and left. Additionally, the U.S. went to Bosnia and Kosovo and put together an international coalition to stop the killing of Muslims and to restore order, and will eventually leave. Neither peoples rose up to throw off their occupiers, but saw the U.S. as saviors.³⁹

However, the key underlying premise of the U.S. “branding” efforts is that the U.S. and Muslims want the same things, and that the task is therefore to demonstrate the congruence of goals and actions with those shared values.⁴⁰ The State Department spent \$15 million on “Shared Values,” a TV advertising campaign broadcast in Muslim countries that depicted religious tolerance in the U.S. through the lives of Muslims in America. It spent \$6 million on a

glossy youth-oriented magazine called *Hi*. Both efforts are highly unpopular in the Middle East. Spending millions on public relations has not worked and naming Margeret Tutwiler, a highly capable former State Department spokesperson, as the new public diplomacy czar replacing Charlotte Beers may not be enough.⁴¹

Many assume that the world knows about U.S. freedoms, values, and religious tolerance. However, international polls suggest that only the governments and the elite of Muslim countries actually know about U.S. values, culture, and policies. In reality, the general population does not.⁴² What they do know is colored by American television shows or American pop music. Since many countries can no longer operate without the support of their people, the U.S. needs to take the best that it has to these countries' general population. The U.S. needs to share with them its contributions in government, science, technology, literature, and the arts. The U.S. needs to show them the diversity of its society and culture apart from what they perceive through the distorted lens of Hollywood entertainment and pop culture.

COMBATING THE MADRASSAS – DOES ANYONE HAVE A CLUE?

The prominent role of clerics in the religious schools, or madrassas, in shaping public opinion presents the most imposing obstacle to the U.S. winning the war of ideas. The people who are most likely to express animus towards the U.S. are those most likely to follow the preaching and guidance of extremist Islamic clerics. The clerics' guidance to the masses is that it is a true Muslim's sacred duty to conduct jihad against non-Muslims. Therefore, few authoritative clerics would likely be swayed by a U.S. ideological campaign or voice sympathy for the U.S.⁴³

However, the power of the clerics may be waning. In country after country, government officials, traditional religious scholars, and officially sanctioned preachers are finding it very hard to control what people know and think. Through newspapers, the Internet, smuggled cassettes, and television, many are examining and debating for themselves the fundamentals of Muslim beliefs and practices. They have unparalleled access to sources of information and knowledge about religion and other aspects of their society.⁴⁴ Banned books that challenge religious authority and tradition have become extremely popular. They reinterpret sacred Islamic texts, apply them to contemporary social and moral issues, such as the role of women in society, and attack the intolerance of religious radicals.⁴⁵ Unilateral control of information and opinion is much more difficult than it was in the past and can foster a society of civil dissent. U.S. perception management efforts must exploit this opportunity for combating the influence of the madrassas.

Although it is lambasted in the U.S. as having an anti-West bias, al-Jazeera is a significant player in Arab language broadcasting because of its talk shows. Such shows feature live discussions on such sensitive issues as women's role in society, Palestinian refugees, sanctions on Iraq, democracy and human rights in the Arab world. Satellite technology and videotape circumnavigate traditional censorship. Tapes of the al-Jazeera broadcasts circulate from hand to hand throughout the Middle East. Al-Jazeera shows that people across the Arab world want open discussion of the issues that affect their lives, and that new communication technologies make it impossible for governments and established religious authorities to stop them. In televised chat shows, interviews, and occasional sermons, reformists speak about Islam and science, democracy, modernity, religious and ideological tolerance, the importance of education, current events, and the lack of inherent clash between "East" and "West."⁴⁶ This is perhaps the most fertile opportunity that U.S. perception management efforts can exploit now in order to combat the influence of the madrassas.

PROMOTING ISLAMIC DEMOCRACIES – ARE WE SERIOUS?

Democracy has not yet taken root in the Middle East. Some skeptics say that the traditions of Islam are inhospitable to representative government. Others have questioned whether a particular country or people are "ready" for democracy while some claim that "Islamic democracy" is an oxymoron. Recent polls suggest otherwise, showing that 87 percent of Muslims in nine countries believe democracy to be the best choice.⁴⁷

However, Middle Eastern democracies may not be the same as Western democracies. Representative governments in the Middle East reflect their own cultures and may be constitutional monarchies, federal republics, or parliamentary systems. Keeping in mind that the U.S. took over 200 years to advance to what it is today, Islamic democracies will need time to develop.⁴⁸

Also, the Muslim world is in the middle of an Islamic revival over which interpretations of Islam should define today's societies. Many want democracy, but are restricted by an Islamic law which serves as the authentic guide to their individual and communal life. Many believe secularism and democracy conflict with Islamic law and teachings. If forced to choose between democracy and Islam, they will likely choose Islam. If taught though, they can be good Muslims as well as good democrats without compromising their beliefs.⁴⁹ U.S. ideological efforts must pursue this opportunity for promoting democracy.

Still, democracies are built on civil societies that value pluralism and tolerance. Many Muslims see the intolerance in some countries as fairly recent, sparked by narrow concepts of

sharia, or Islamic law. Most of what is called sharia today is opinions of scholars who lived centuries ago – it is not in the Koran or sayings of the prophet. To counter this, some Muslim scholars are working on reinterpretations of Islamic law related to human rights, religious freedom, and tolerance. Some are translating papers into Arabic, putting them on the Internet, and publishing books on their findings.⁵⁰ U.S. ideological efforts must advance this opportunity to foster debate about the moderate interpretations of Islamic law.

A U.S. ideological campaign to promote democratic processes and institutions must not be limited to a specific audience. It should target Arab rulers, the Arab middle class and Arab youth. Arab rulers may be somewhat recalcitrant, especially to ideas that threaten the status quo, and the youth are ambiguous vessels for both radicalism and modernism. It is the solid, stable middle class of intellectuals, politicians, journalists, and other public figures that are most instrumental in shaping Arab public opinion. Efforts to engage them may provide fertile opportunities to stake out the middle ground between both extremists—secular authoritarians and religious radicals. The key to a viable future is a coalition of moderate Islamic and non-Islamist groups committed to representative government.⁵¹ The U.S. wins by helping moderates win. The U.S.'s challenge will be trusting those Islamic democracies arising as the result of legitimate democratic processes even when they act against U.S. short term interests. This will do far more towards thwarting al Qaeda's pursuit of Islamist regimes than militarily toppling distasteful regimes or continuing to support authoritarian regimes and their continued repression of their people.

CONCLUSION

The U.S. is making great progress in achieving two of President Bush's three goals of defeating international terrorism. The U.S. is doing quite well in militarily prosecuting the war on terrorism and in safeguarding the homeland. However, prosecuting the war of ideas has not progressed as well. Due to the ineffectiveness of U.S. public diplomacy, a pervasive anti-Americanism remains in the Middle East that threatens to breed more radical Islamic extremist groups even after the defeat of al Qaeda. This paper looked at how the U.S. should prosecute the war of ideas in order to diminish the underlying conditions for terrorism. It described the nature of the threat presented by Islamic extremists, assessed the current strategy to address the threat and explored alternatives in executing the strategy.

Changing U.S. public image is not a matter for the short or even the medium term, and it cannot be accomplished merely with slick Madison Avenue ad lines. The U.S. is the best-known brand in the world, but that has not caused people to like us. In order to reduce the Arab

world's hostility towards the U.S., we will have to proceed less by polishing our image than by improving the Arab-Muslim way of looking at things. The problem is not our brand; it is their buying habits.⁵²

In getting Arab-Muslims to buy our brand, the war of ideas is one in which the U.S. enjoys important long-term advantages. Al Qaeda promulgates a repressive, sexist, authoritarian distortion of Islam that is unattractive to the vast majority of Muslims. It denies educational opportunities for women and prevents women from having any meaningful life outside of the home. It enforces strict conformance to standards of personal piety that it hypocritically fails to follow itself (note the impious acts of the September 11 hijackers in the U.S. days prior to the attack). Many Muslims reject it. The U.S. cannot approach a war of ideas as a war to convert Muslims to Western ideas. However, the U.S. must create opportunities for politically uncommitted Muslims to express themselves within the context of Western freedoms, even if it threatens authoritarian regimes historically friendly to U.S. interests.⁵³

Finally, in order to win the war of ideas, the U.S. must relate to the rest of the world with less arrogance, bluster, and bellicosity. Continuing to do so alienates our staunchest allies and emboldens the cause of radicals worldwide. The U.S. can no longer afford to be the "lone ranger" in prosecuting the global war on terrorism. The U.S. will have to listen more, compromise more, in order to establish relationships with other countries built on trust. This may, in fact, require some real changes in current policies, especially with respect to issues of less than vital importance (e.g., global warning, de-mining, and the International Court). Ultimately, in order to win the "war of ideas", the U.S. must be unfailing in its commitment to democratic ideals and act consistent with those ideals even at the expense of short-term gains.

WORD COUNT = 5753

ENDNOTES

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⁶ Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President on Signing Homeland Security Appropriations Act," 1 October 2003; available from <<http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?content=1816>>; Internet; accessed 16 October 2003.

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¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ George Bush, *The National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, 23.

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¹⁷ Ibid, 23-24.

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