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**INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING AND THE MANAGEMENT OF  
FOREIGN PUBLIC OPINION: THE CASE OF AL-HURRA TELEVISION IN  
THE “ARAB STREET”**

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Mass Communications

by

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## ABSTRACT

This research project broadly addresses the viability and the shifting roles of U.S. international broadcasting to the Middle East, as a tool of public diplomacy in the post 9/11 political climate. Specifically, investigating the indirect influence of the U.S. sponsored Al-Hurra Television on Moroccan viewers and Arab public opinion is a main purpose of the study. The overall theoretical approach to the investigation of Al-Hurra Television here is based on the insights of indirect media influence theories, particularly Third Person Effect, to probe the “effects” that audiences assume this type of media has on public opinion. In that sense, this study assesses the “perceived effects” of Al-Hurra Television through the prism of presumed influence. It provides the first cross cultural test of the Third Person Effect in an Arab or Muslim culture, drawing on the strengths of different methodologies, quantitative and qualitative data analyses. The topic of Al-Hurra Television’s promotion of “political reform” is the issue that respondents had to react to in focus group interviews and surveys. The findings from quantitative analyses suggest that Al-Hurra Television has a negligible influence on the attitudes of its viewers, with less support for the existence of Third Person Effect hypothesis. The qualitative analysis, however, proposes that “indirect influence” of Al-Hurra Television exists, supporting Third Person Effect research. Discussion of these findings leads to the construction of a taxonomy of Al-Hurra Television audiences. Indirect media influence is further connected to the reception of the rhetoric of public diplomacy and international broadcasting. This study thus suggests new linkages between media theory and the policy rhetoric surrounding international broadcasting.

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# INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING AND THE MANAGEMENT OF FOREIGN PUBLIC OPINION: THE CASE OF AL-HURRA TELEVISION IN THE “ARAB STREET”

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1. Overview

#### i. Convergence of Media Research

Al-Hurra Television and the politics of public diplomacy for me constitute something that exceeds mere academic pursuits of a graduate student. Above all, the study of Al-Hurra Television has metamorphosed into a personal passion, on which the objective and the subjective converge, and the personal vitiates the academic. It is a personal journey that began even before the birth of Al-Hurra Television, as a fresh Fulbright student coming to Boston University in the summer of 2001. While at the time I was elated with a sense of being “an ambassador” of my culture, I was aware that the experience would be pivotal to my intellectual and personal growth. The Fulbright program trusted its grantees to contribute to “the global community,” to how different nations can better understand one another in this global world. Amidst those proud sentiments, I was both shocked and scared when I realized the full scale of the harrowing attacks on 11 September, 2001, taking place while I was riding the subway to school in Boston, Massachusetts. It was shocking to realize that some fanatics were capable of perpetrating such an attack with unnerving disregard for innocent lives. As the news media broadcast the identity of the perpetrators, all of whom were Arab and Muslim, my fear was that all Arabs and Muslims would be lumped together as “enemies,” “terrorists,” to say the least about how my personal safety as an international student concerned me.



The experience was trying, but a determination grew out of it that there needed to be greater understanding between the people of the United States and the Arab world, if not the world at large. Call it a belief in human decency and a realization that our lives and survival are interdependent.

The frequent opinion surveys conducted to gauge Arab and Muslim public opinion about the United States were sometimes encouraging, but oftentimes conflicting.<sup>1</sup> Following U.S. policy-makers, pundits, and government officials, who were calling for a serious military response to “bomb” America’s enemies into the Stone Age, was not very reassuring. But my attention was trained at the public diplomacy efforts slowly unfolding out of what seemed a reasoned consideration of those horrendous events, their causes and implications. All along, there was a pending question echoed throughout policy, media, and public discourse chambers: “Why do they hate us?” While the question was burning, and it was legitimate that the American public deserved some real answers, its premise was faulty. This is not the place to dwell at length on how flawed the question was construed; suffice it to state that it caused me enough cognitive dissonance. From a lifelong experience, the utter majority of Arabs and Muslims like and admire the American people, not their government policies, and aspire to the American Dream. If half the world’s population wanted to migrate to this country, it would not be out of hate, but because there must be something intrinsically good about it (Halliday, 2002). During that period, I became intensely interested in the United States’ public diplomacy efforts to reach out to Arabs and Muslims abroad. The bungled efforts of the U.S. State Department’s “Shared Values” campaign, trying to “advertise” how tolerant a society the

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<sup>1</sup> For instances of these conflicting polls, see *USA Today*’s “Poll on Islamic Mood Isn’t Surprising,” March 4, 2002, p. 11A, or “Even the Kuwaitis Dislike US” in *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, May 29, 2002, p. A9.

U.S. was, were horrifying. The U.S., for me, was no Uncle Bens' rice (Fakhreddine, 2004).

Then Radio Sawa was launched, followed by the launch of Al-Hurra Television in 2004. My first impression about launching these broadcasts was full of ambivalence and incredulity. I was constantly thinking: “who is going to watch Al-Hurra Television? What will those viewers think of the United States? What about the unintended consequences of international broadcasting? And can good intentions always save the day?” Perhaps, those were a novice's questions, but they were at the core of my decision to enroll in the Graduate Program in Mass Communications at the Pennsylvania State University in 2004. I was looking for theoretical ways, and research means, to hone those questions, and I was not disappointed. In that effort, I examined at length Dr. John S. Nichols' important work on a different case, Radio and TV Marti. My academic pursuit of Al-Hurra Television and the politics of public diplomacy had a second beginning. Many of my professors during my doctoral program will detect their direct, and indirect, influence on this research project since their own research work has been a guiding light all along. This project bears the fruit, and the traces, of those years of research.

In short, media research, despite the different methodological paths it employs, tends to reflect not only scholarly detachment, but the personal engagement of the researcher. This research on Al-Hurra Television is not borne out of a vacuum, nor out of purely theoretical interest. Theoretically, it is nurtured by the diverse, sometimes warring traditions and factions, within the field of communications. No example of this is more poignant than the fact that the history of mass communication research was borne out of research on “psychological warfare” (Simpson, 1994). The eras of “massive uniform

effects” of the mass media, diffusion of innovation research, to provide but two instances, were borne out of the long Cold War conflict. Simpson (1994) pointed to such linkages and how mass communication research was a tool of manipulation, a “science of coercion.” “Luminaries,” like Wilbur Schramm and Daniel Lerner, were conducting communication research with articulated “national security” implications in the halls of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Columbia University, and the Bureau of Social Science Research (pp.112-113). The work on propaganda fits within this history of media influence. Generally, this project is further sustained by the historical legacy of international broadcasting, how the U.S. would employ its media technology to wage large scale broadcasting to audiences, living in (Eastern) Europe, Asia, and Latin America whether to counter communist influence or to discourage, if not halt, despots’ atrocities.

Against this backdrop of mass communication theory, the critical tradition in mass communication research indirectly informs this research endeavor. The emphasis on understanding audiences as “meaning making agents,” a contribution of cultural studies, is well worth the attention of media researchers (Thompson, 1995; Grossberg, Wartella & Whitney, 1998). Media audiences are not supine vessels to be duped, or filled out, with whatever the messenger designs. Media content and effects differ from entertainment to news. Political economy analysis has dwelled on how audiences are “commodified,” and sold the trappings of nationalism in the service of “big media” capital (Gomery, 1993; Wasko, 2001; Bettig & Hall, 2003). Globally, as Herbert Schiller (1976) argued, transnational media companies exert new imperialistic domination of foreign media markets, what some termed “media imperialism.” Big media conglomerates have made a

mockery of the “marketplace of ideas,” and only the promise of the Internet has, to some extent, reinstated citizenship and diversity. And looking at the rhetorical implications of media discourse is of fundamental service to a topic fraught with rhetorical overtures and policy intrigues. Propaganda wars have been fought frequently at the level of rhetoric, in what one scholar has described as the “rhetorical presidency” (Parry-Giles, 2002). The topic of Al-Hurra Television falls within this larger discursive context of media research and foreign policy rhetoric. Short though it may be, this project reaches out to different methodological traditions to borrow from their strengths and learn from their limitations. Al-Hurra Television and the related questions of public diplomacy pose complex dilemmas regarding the feasibility of international broadcasting for “peace,” opportunities for application, and discovery of the limitations of communication theories. Carrying out such a project in a cross-cultural environment crystallizes these dilemmas only further.

## **ii. The Media and “the War on Terror”**

Terrorism is a highly charged, emotionally contested “label” in international communication research, international relations, and global media coverage in general. Many researchers get enmeshed in this definitional debate which inevitably incurs simultaneous praise and condemnation, leading some to conclude that probably “terrorism is in the eye of the beholder” (Norris, Kern, & Just, 2003, p.6). One scholar compares the definitional challenges to a similar experience with the term “pornography,” “difficult to describe and define, but easy to recognize when one sees it” (Laqueur, 1987). Lamenting these challenges, others counsel against the consuming preoccupation with definitions. But, following Raymond Williams’ cue in *Keywords*

(1976), it is worthwhile to provide some definitional clarity, if not consensus. At the very least, all terrorism researchers concur that the term was first used in 1795 to “denote the terror of the French revolutionary state against its opponents” (Halliday, 2002, p. 6). For practical purposes, this study adopts a broader, more malleable definition of terrorism as “the systematic use of coercive intimidation against civilians for political goals” (p.6). As Norris, Kern and Just (2003) persuasively argue, the forgoing definition encompasses conceptual and practical considerations of techniques/tactics, targets/victims, and goals/objectives of terrorism. The word “terrorism” is hereafter used in compliance with these definitional considerations, and the term “terrorist” will refer to an individual who employs terrorist methods viz. systematic, coercive intimidation and violence.

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon, but its long relationship with news media coverage has often left the latter with a bloodied nose. Oftentimes, the objectives of news media executives and terrorists coincide, creating a murky relationship that is best labeled as “symbiotic.”<sup>2</sup> Each party “thrives” on the other’s existence. For terrorists, the paramount goal is always “to wring every last drop of exposure, publicity, and coercive power” from any lethal act they carry out (Hoffman, 1998, p. 180). For the news media, to “squeeze from the story every additional ratings point that their coverage can provide” is an elemental principle of market survival. The legal rationales for broadcasting terrorist acts, turning the media spotlight on horrendous acts of violence, are found in the First Amendment in the United States, or social responsibility models of the press elsewhere, where the citizens’ need to be informed are overriding concerns. In some respects, the symbiotic relationship between the mass media and terrorism verges on “the pseudo-

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<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Professor Amit Schejter and the rest of the gang who worked on a paper on media’s coverage of terrorist events for strengthening this line of argument.

event's" political manipulation of the media, albeit with tragic consequences. Although terrorists do not usually stage their acts of violence, they create "media events" that draw around the clock media coverage. To a great extent, September 11, 2001, was the largest global media event in the history of modern mass media.

The scale of those terrorist attacks, considered as "an act of war" on the United States, revealed much about the country's vulnerabilities, and the cultural backdrop that dictated the administration's response to the assault (Winkler, 2006). The patriotic undercurrents in the face of external threats have been a frequent marker of American identity, and the events led to a surge of patriotism, cheered by the news media. "America Under Attack," the evocative news headline, found its political backdrop in George W. Bush's call for national unity as he proclaimed a day after the attacks: "Freedom and democracy are under attack." Winkler (2006) makes the case that there has occurred "a transformation of terrorism's cultural meaning" through presidential discourse via three types of "discourse units," labels, narratives, and ideographs (p.7). The President of the United States declared that the perpetrators had espoused an ideology of hate, "They hate our freedoms -- our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other" (Bush, 2001). The narrative and identity of the nation as a noble, "exceptional" experiment in democracy and freedom, besieged by "enemies" who "hate our way of life" were upheld. The struggle was between two sets of values painted in Manichean terms, good versus evil, and culminated in the well-known "with us or against us" ultimatum. But there was no more powerful "label" than the president's declaration of the launch of "The War on Terror." The news media did not await Bush's proclamation; they had already announced, and embraced, the "war on

terror.” Pat Dawson, of NBC News, was explicit about it while the attack was still unfolding on 9/11/01: “If there is a war, it’s a war against terrorism that started, rather ongoing right now, it started here at about quarter to nine this morning” (Moyers, 2007).

The story of how the news media have fared in its coverage of “The War on Terror” has been the subject of much analysis and study. Immediately after 9/11, stunned by devastation too close to home, U.S. news media experienced “a rallying-around the flag” phenomenon with unprecedented patriotic coverage. Dan Rather famously captured the U.S. media’s mood on *Late Night With David Letterman* (9/17/01): “George Bush is the President, he makes the decisions and you know, as just one American wherever he wants me to line up, just tell me where.” At times of crisis, afraid of being perceived less patriotic, the media usually capitulate to the government. Media executives agreed to the administration’s request not to broadcast Osama Bin Laden’s tapes for fear of disseminating secret messages to terrorist cells around the world. Entman (2004)’s “cascade activation model” reveals how the administration’s framing of the crisis went unchallenged, even through the run up to the war on Iraq. In the absence of oppositional frames, “Operation Enduring Freedom” and “Operation Iraqi Freedom” dominated television screens with large captions, in an unmistakable reflection of the administration’s frames and labels. Overdependence on official sources contributed to the uncritical coverage of the “War on Terror.”

Globally, terrorism’s coverage turned into a media “spectacle,” a new threat to the administration’s framing of the “War on Terror.” Refusing to abide by the dictates of the Bush administration, Al-Jazeera Television and other global media continued to broadcast Bin Laden’s tapes. The rise of Al-Jazeera, as an alternative and powerful news

media outlet in the Middle East, disrupted the dominant narratives and consensual frames of the American news media exemplified in cable news coverage. Al-Jazeera Television's increasing professionalism, preeminence and credibility had compelled CNN and other networks to broadcast footage, from Afghanistan or elsewhere, still bearing Al-Jazeera's logo to millions of American households (Jasperson & El Kikhia, 2003). The struggle was not only about how to frame terrorist incidents, but also about who set the agenda. In the immediate aftermath of the attack on the U.S., media scholars cautiously assumed the existence of consensual, overarching news frames in American news media's coverage of international terrorist acts, as in the instances of the Bali bombing in Indonesia, the bombings in Casablanca, the train bombings in London and Madrid, or the frequent abductions and beheadings in Iraq. These overarching frames operate within, or expressly indicate, the media's agenda setting function and their propensity toward consensus building (McCombs, 1997). The media's fight masqueraded the larger information warfare. Al-Hurra Television, the U.S. sponsored broadcaster to the Arab world, was destined to join this battle front, not only about "winning hearts and minds," but also about who set the global agenda during the "War on Terror."

### **iii. A Question of Media Influence**

That the mass media, and by extension international broadcasting, have discernible effects on audiences is indisputable. The accumulating body of research has historically either tilted toward the assertion of the media's large effects, or "moderate" to small effects. The mere infusion of the mass media has an impact on the environment, an "ecological" impact. The purpose of this dissertation is to build on mass media effects research by elucidating the effects of international broadcasting on foreign public



opinion, how “positive” or “negative” such effects might be. Determining whether or not international broadcasting fulfills the goals it is designed for, such as improving a nation’s image, or generally furthering a nation’s foreign policy goals, is the core objective of this research project. The theoretical contention of this study is that international broadcasting, U.S. sponsored broadcasting targeting the Middle East in particular, has historically been entangled in a rhetorical space that is marked by continuities and ruptures in U.S. Middle East policy. Mapping the spaces that international broadcasting has occupied, its intersections with issues of sovereignty and relations among states and foreign populations, constitutes the first step in the direction of understanding the potential impact of U.S. international broadcasting, and Al-Hurra Television in particular, in the Arab world. Although such spatial mapping is helpful in dismantling the intricacies, and the historical contingencies associated with the rise of U.S. international broadcasting, the rhetoric of U.S. foreign policy itself needs to be addressed because it nurtures the idea of re/acquiring international broadcasts that seek to influence foreign populations.

In the immediate aftermath of the 11 September attacks, voices emerged from both within and outside the U.S. administration, stridently calling for a concerted communication blitz that could effectively push back against Al-Qaeda’s propaganda, combat the presumed intractable anti-Americanism raging among large swaths of Arab citizens and in the broader Middle East. The working assumption of the period was that the “Arab Street,” a catch-all phrase that refers to Arab public opinion in clear distinction from the ruling elites, had fed all along on a biased local media diet that consistently demonizes the United States probably at the behest of Arab regimes to deflect domestic

disaffection (Ford, 2001; Zakaria, 2001). The strategic challenge of the time, a realization fomenting slowly in policy debates, assumed broader political significance than narrow military solutions could offer (Beyer, 2001). More importantly, the problem of terrorism and the unpopularity of the United States in Arab and Muslim public opinion polls were correctly transposed to the realm of crisis communication, rather than a sole policy or military problem. The crisis was fundamentally about “message,” as President Bush concluded in assessing U.S. efforts to reach Arab and Muslim audiences: “we are not doing a very good job of getting our message out.” Indeed, the United States government felt “outsmarted” and “out-communicated” by those anti-American forces that had been gaining traction in the region (Zaharna, 2001). The only plausible policy action for the United States, or so it appeared at the time, was to take on this communication challenge to the heart of the Arab world. In order to define its image rather than let its detractors and enemies define it, the United States had to establish its own media voice to counter those media adversaries (Zaharna, 2003). The news media paradoxically constituted a problem and a solution at the same time.

## **2. Objectives of the Project**

This research project broadly addresses the shifting roles of the U.S. government-sponsored media, or U.S. international broadcasting to the Middle East, as a tool of public diplomacy in the post 9/11 political climate. Specifically, the purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the viability of international broadcasting in managing and influencing foreign public opinion through a case study of Al-Hurra Television, the United States’ broadcaster that targets the “Arab street.” The overall theoretical approach to the investigation of Al-Hurra Television here is based on the insights of indirect media

influence theories, particularly Third Person Effect, to probe the “effects” that audiences, and to some extent policy-makers, assume this type of media has on public opinion. In that sense, this study assesses the “effects” of Al-Hurra Television through the prism of presumed influence. It provides the first cross cultural test of the Third Person Effect in an Arab or Muslim culture, drawing on the strengths of different methodologies, quantitative and qualitative data analyses.

The study focuses on the topic of U.S. democracy promotion agenda and rhetoric through an analysis of how Al-Hurra Television covers the issue of “political reform.” Examining the perceptions of Moroccan audiences regarding both Al-Hurra Television’s coverage and the U.S. democracy promotion agenda in the Arab world was carried out through field research in Morocco. The project assumes that such an investigation can be made more thorough with a triangulated research design that brings together content, audience and policy analyses to bear on the topic of international broadcasting’s role in foreign policy. Content study is approached indirectly through how Moroccan viewers perceive Al-Hurra Television’s coverage of political reform in the Arab world. Among the other goals of this research project is to provide a constructive contribution to the debate surrounding U.S. relations with the Arab world, the causes of misunderstanding and violent conflict plaguing these relations. Whether or not U.S. international broadcasting and public diplomacy efforts advance mutual understanding and respect between parties in the conflict remains to be explored throughout this enquiry.

In short, the following questions will constitute the central focus of this research study: How does exposure to Al-Hurra Television programs affect perceptions of the United States’ policies and its standing among Moroccan viewers? In what ways does Al-

Hurra Television programming articulate the U.S. democracy promotion agenda in its coverage of “political reform” in the Arab world? And how does public diplomacy rhetoric in turn influence Al-Hurra Television’s mission?

In approaching the interrelated questions above, the thesis is organized into several sections. The preliminary sections provide a general framework for the examination of international broadcasting, situating Al-Hurra Television firmly in the context of the historical and rhetorical tensions surrounding international broadcasting. In particular, the project illuminates the terrain that has given birth to Al-Hurra Television, and the reengagement with international broadcasting in recent years. The rhetorical mapping of the context provides the groundwork for the ensuing case examination of the rhetoric of public diplomacy discourse. Against this background of policy and rhetoric, the project reviews the research literature on Third Person Effect, and provides detailed research questions to be answered in the latter sections of the thesis. The results section focuses more on an in-depth analysis of how Moroccan viewers have responded to Al-Hurra Television, how they have looked at its presumed influence on Arab public opinion at large, and how its programming is attached to, or detached from, the rhetoric of democracy promotion. After the discussion of the results of this field research, and the rhetorical terrain of public diplomacy, future directions of where the study of Al-Hurra Television can be further developed are suggested. Finally, the conclusion makes a full detour to the context of Al-Hurra Television and Third Person Effect research in the context of “information warfare.”

## **Chapter I**

### **Mapping Spaces: US International Broadcasting in Historical Context**

## **1. International Broadcasting Deployed**

Al-Hurra Television is the latest bidder in modern mass media's attempt to influence foreign public opinion and the conduct of foreign policy. Communication technologies have always been deployed in international relations throughout modern history since the invention of the telegraph (Carey, 1988) and, most prominently, the development of radio broadcasting (Wasburn, 1992). The ruminations of enterprising inventors, policymakers and media scholars reveal that the interaction between new communication technologies and international politics has always existed (Rawnsley, 1996). In reflecting on his radio development legacy, Guglielmo Marconi hoped that his radio invention would help avert "the evils of misunderstanding and jealousy" among peoples and nations, and go "some way towards averting the evils of war" (Rawnsley, 1996). However, Marconi's optimism was not exactly identical to the motivations behind Nazi Germany's use of radio and print media as a tool of Hitler's propaganda to sow the seeds of hatred, and fan the flames of war. During the Cold War, the United States utilized this medium as a tool of combating the "Red Threat" in Europe and other parts of the globe through the use of Radio Free Europe, Radio Marti and Voice of America (Taylor, 1997). Great Britain's British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), (West) Germany's Deutsche Welle (DW), and the former Soviet Union's Radio Moscow not only illustrate how other nations have followed suit in broadcasting their messages and ideologies to an international audience, but also appeal to the "court of world opinion" in a post World War II environment. Similar to the trend in most scholarly research on the functions of international broadcasting in foreign policy, the implicit assumptions among most policy makers and researchers do not interrogate the issue of its "effects" in

converting, or influencing foreign governments, political events, and foreign public opinion (Nichols, 1996). As Nichols suggests in studying the effects of propaganda broadcasts on U.S. Cuban relations, international broadcasting entails the risk of being “dysfunctional;” instead of resolving international conflict, it has the potential of exacerbating it (Coser, 1984). These twin influences, political crises, international conflict, and communication technologies have remained at the heart of what is referred to as international broadcasting.

But how would international broadcasting be defined? Price (2003) suggests that it is merely:

the elegant term for a complex combination of State-sponsored news, information, and entertainment, directed at a population outside the sponsoring State's boundaries. It is the use of electronic media by one society to shape the opinion of the people and leaders in another (p. 72).

The insinuation of one State’s broadcasters in the media scape of another State oftentimes borders on violating, if it is not actually trampling, a nation’s sovereignty and constitutes a breach of international laws and regulations. Despite this legal quagmire, international broadcasters have kept on broadcasting to foreign audiences, either explicitly identifying their sponsoring governments, or operating in a clandestine fashion. Non-military international broadcasting history in the United States provides examples of both. Voice of America (VOA) represented the first category of broadcasters that explicitly declares its government allegiance and sponsor. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) shunned explicit admission of its sponsoring government, especially during the Cold War period. This difference is more fundamental than it would seem at first because it touches on the “mission” and “objectives” of each broadcaster. For the VOA, the mission, as will

be discussed subsequently, has been to provide truthful and unvarnished information about the United States, acting as a voice to express what the United States stands for, its ideals and presumably its shortcomings (Johnson, 2007). For RFE/RL, the mission has been to function as a source of unfiltered local news for foreign audiences, informing foreign audiences more about their own affairs rather than the affairs of the United States. RFE and RL were surrogate stations that presumably satisfied the assumed need for free media in communist states. While VOA marketed and faithfully presented itself as a tool of public diplomacy, entrusted with telling “America’s story,” RFE/RL were considered a propaganda arm of the United States government (Wimbush, 2007). When it comes to invading the media space of sovereign states, is there a genuine difference between propaganda and public diplomacy? Finding an answer to the former question provides one important clue to comprehending the history of international broadcasting, the promises, the rifts and the crises underlying this type of news media.

*i. Old Propaganda or New Public Diplomacy?*

Depending on ideological position and geographical location, international broadcasting efforts have variably been called propaganda, media diplomacy, or more generally public diplomacy. Propaganda remains the most widely used term historically, whether in academic and policy circles or in popular discourse (Taylor, 1997). Its familiar appeal to people’s imagination enhances the evocation of “propagation” of information, with an evident emphasis on “false” over “true” information. However, scholarly attention accorded to this concept has been schizophrenic, unable to develop a homogenous view of what propaganda means. In a study of international broadcasting, Wasburn (1992) alludes to these conflicting perceptions and definitions when he



accurately points out that “News for one person may be propaganda for another” (p.79). For news consumers, any media material that starkly contradicts their political belief system, and whose perceived goal is to influence/convert/manipulate, instead of “inform,” could be labeled propaganda. The “organizational” perspective views propaganda as the presentation and dissemination of politically relevant news to influence political orientations (p. 80). Wasburn (1992) also observes that the organizational source of news or propaganda always engages in news *framing* through selection and exclusion of information to fit the source’s agenda. Rawnsley (1996) takes a similar organizational perspective in studying radio broadcasting’s role in propaganda and diplomacy. Rawnsley’s working definition stresses that “propaganda refers to the attempt by the government of one state to influence another to act or think in ways which are conducive to the interests of the source by *whatever* means are considered appropriate” (p.8; my emphasis).

For a critical reader, appreciating the above definition’s implications does not obscure the inherent moral ambiguity of propaganda as a concept, its practical consequences, and how upright the means of influence, be they lies or truths, should be. The “utilitarian” perspective offers some insight into the moral underpinnings of propaganda. Jacques Ellul’s formidable work on international propaganda was rooted in the utilitarian function of propaganda as a weapon of war. He distinguished between “democratic,” or benevolent, and “totalitarian,” or malevolent, propaganda. Others sought to isolate these conflicting associations, ascribing a neutral status to propaganda, as in Lester Markel’s description of propaganda as “a method, a technique, neither moral nor immoral” (Rawnsley, 1996, p.9). Propaganda’s principal premise is thusly the promotion

or propagation of “particular ideas, doctrines, and practices to further one’s own cause or to damage an opposing one” (Nichols, 2003, p. 597). Indeed, the attempts to isolate propaganda from its pejorative and negative connotations have argued that propaganda should not invite value judgments about issues of “good” and “bad;” propaganda “merely *is*” (Taylor, 1997, p.16). Still, propaganda as a neutral communication process can be open only to evaluations based on scrutinizing the intentions of those who deploy it (Taylor, 1997). In other terms, the propagandist’s intentions are what make propaganda “good” or “bad.”

While this line of thought about “process” and “intentions” engenders the classic dilemma of “means versus ends,” which one justifies the other, it has given birth to rivaling concepts in the foreign policy arena (Gilboa, 2000). “Public diplomacy,” “media diplomacy,” and “television diplomacy” are recent conceptual rivals to traditional “propaganda.” They have survived policy discourses and debates to travel with some ease into the academic sphere with their explicit reference to the official deployment of broadcasting in international relations (Gilboa, 2000; Serfaty, 1990). During the Cold War and thereafter, those new concepts became useful for scholars who wished to transcend the pejorative associations linking the term “propaganda” to “disinformation” and “untruthful communication.” Probably the search for some academic purity motivated their usage. The official concern with information production and manipulation to influence foreign publics became first institutionalized during World War I as President Woodrow Wilson established the Committee on Public Information to be later known as the Creel Committee (Tuch, 1990; Simpson, 1994).). Those propaganda efforts were subsequently revived during the war against Nazi Germany

under the aegis of the Office of War Information (Simpson, 1994). Displaying no hesitation to use dis/misinformation in the service of greater security goals, these information campaigns were accurately classified as propaganda, although they subsequently assumed the broad label of “public diplomacy” (Tuch, 1990).

Public diplomacy is “a government’s process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about an understanding for its nation’s ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies” (Tuch, 1990, p.3). The former standard definition of public diplomacy highlights both its “communicative” and “structural” aspects in contradistinction to conventional diplomacy. The communicative aspects of the concept refer to the premise that communication with a foreign public has as its goals and means the unimpeded transmission of messages, creating desirable impressions about a nation and its government. The structural aspects, more narrowly, refer to the parties engaged in the public diplomacy process. Since its inception, traditional diplomacy has always referred to two or more formal state entities as main parties conducting their business behind closed doors. Public diplomacy refers to a government/nation that intentionally tries to get its message out to a foreign audience without a foreign state’s mediation (Gilboa, 2000). International broadcasting serves that purpose. In the United States, public diplomacy has been conceived during the turmoil of the Cold War and the “containment” of the Soviets, leading to its institutionalization through presidential decrees and Congressional acts such as the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 (Tuch, 1990). In brief, the prevalent assumption in public diplomacy is to strive for an unfettered communication with foreign publics in an open and transparent fashion.

New terminology variations of public diplomacy have also seeped into scholarly discourse and academic studies with flimsy distinctions at best. “Media diplomacy” (Gilboa, 2000), “cultural diplomacy” (Finn, 2003), and “television diplomacy” (Gergen, 1990) have loosely been identified with the original concept of public diplomacy. While some international communication scholars view these as mere “variants” of propaganda (e.g. Nichols, 2003), the present thesis considers propaganda an overarching communication concept, colored by insidiously negative connotations of influence and information manipulation and is thus akin to information warfare. Public diplomacy, on the other hand, opens the gates for a transparent communication process, whether in its media aspects or other cultural activities, designed to improve international understanding. These fundamental distinctions impact on the communication process, by enhancing the likelihood of an objective assessment of the merit, and effectiveness, of that process. In that regard, it also behooves media researchers to identify how international broadcasters define their practices, whether as propaganda or public diplomacy.

Without being intentionally cynical, foreign policy makers may not be as keen, at least in private, on such distinctions. While privately they may regard all these international broadcasts as propaganda, publicly they tend to use the term public diplomacy as a “sanitized” *nom de guerre*. There is also the added complication of how foreign audiences may perceive such media, as propaganda or a public diplomacy effort. Perceiving VOA as a propaganda broadcast would entail a set of different reactions than perceiving it as a tool of public diplomacy that is, as an open, transparent communication. Illustrations of these discrepancies should become subsequently clearer in the discussion

to follow of the objectives of international broadcasting. Steering away from “surrogate” and clandestine activities, usually the realm of “black propaganda,” this research project holds that international broadcasters are public diplomacy outlets as long as they adequately identify their government sponsors. VOA is a classic fit in this categorization, and Al-Hurra Television fully belongs to this media class.

## *ii. Crisis Driven Media*

The long history of international broadcasting is inextricably intertwined with the ebb and flow of the political crises that envelop international relations. Indeed, the perceived need for, and a state’s interest in, broadcasting to other nations would become more urgent whenever “world peace” and stability appeared threatened, by “rogue” regimes, totalitarian states, revolutionaries, or insurgent groups. The inherently crisis driven justification for broadcasting internationally can be traced from its birth up to its current expansion, a phenomenon that parallels only the heyday of international broadcasting during the Cold War. During World War II, VOA radio, the first U.S. international broadcast operation, began beaming to Germany on February 24, 1942. William Harlan Hale announced in this first German broadcast the lofty mission of VOA: “Here speaks a voice from America. Every day at this time we will bring you the news of the war. The news may be good. The news may be bad. We will tell you the truth” (Minow, 2002; IBB, 2006). It was this lofty goal of broadcasting the “truth,” despite the fact that VOA was part of the psychological/propaganda war effort organized by the Office of War Information (Simpson, 1996). Horton (2002) cogently details the “cultural politics” of radio broadcasts during the war period, how the FDR administration was keenly aware of the public’s skepticism surrounding state propaganda. The end of WWII

severed the radio's ties to the Office of War Information, as VOA became part of the State Department as soon as the war ended in 1945, becoming part of the newly founded U.S. Information Agency in 1953, and finally part of the Broadcasting Board of Governors [BBG] in 1999. Tracing the history of VOA may be interesting in itself, but the indisputable conclusion to draw from this example is a solid observation that international broadcasting has always been moored in international politics and foreign policy crises. Its funding, restructuring and the debates surrounding its legitimacy, or lack thereof, become hostage to those crises, and how imminent foreign threats appear to the national interest.

The crisis driven nature of international broadcasting goes even further than VOA's history, and can be traced to the development of short wave radio. Wood (1994) begins his historical overview of the reach and development of international broadcasting, especially in the form of short wave (SW) radio, from the post World War I period. During the 1930s, as European nations realized that SW radio was cost effective in terms of reaching a large audience with a manageable budget, SW radio became the main tool for projecting a nation's propaganda abroad and targeting foreign public opinion (Wood, 1994, p.1). As World War II wound down and international relations crossed into the Cold War era, SW radio, and international broadcasting as a whole, underwent a deeper transformation. While no single nation has credited SW radio for helping it win World War II, U.S. officials have routinely lauded the role of VOA and RFE/RL in winning the Cold War. The Chairman of the President's Task force on International Broadcasting credited it with averting a nuclear Armageddon during the Cold War: "Words," not bullets; and "ideas," not bombs, "helped break up an evil

empire” (cited in Wood 1994, p. 1). A similar celebratory history of RFE/RL is omnipresent in Puddington (2000), *Broadcasting freedom: The Cold War triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty*. Puddington’s history is quintessential in its unabashed claim that RFE/RL’s broadcasts to Eastern Europe constituted “the most influential politically oriented international radio station in history” (Puddington, 2000, p. ix). Listeners in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, according to Puddington, tuned in for the uncensored news RFE/RL made available.

A distrust of local media and unfiltered news attracted a range of listeners in those countries, from ordinary citizens to celebrated dissidents like Lech Walesa and Vaclav Havel, the Polish and Czech opposition leaders respectively. Quotes from these leaders and the elite are strategically inserted to support the case of the influential role of RFE/RL in Puddington (2000). To be fair, the closed and restrictive regimes that those broadcasts were targeting make it an untenable stretch to obtain accurate data on listenership or the impact of RFE/RL at the time. The point here is that, despite the absence of such data, books that purport to glorify the role of international broadcasting in successfully waging “the war of ideas,” the propaganda campaign against communism, never fail to make their case based solely on questionable evidence drawn from dissidents and the opposition. What is true about Puddington (2000) remains, more or less, true about a number of other reference works on U.S. international broadcasting’s history, development and restructuring. The same hue is found in works such as Sig Mickelson’s *America’s other voice: The story of Radio Free Europe & Radio Liberty* (1983), Gene Sosin’s *Sparks of liberty: An insider’s memoir of Radio Liberty* (1999) or Alan Heil’s *The Voice of America: A history* (2003). They all shared an insider’s perspective, drawn from

actual experience with the “freedom radios” and VOA, but lacking in actual data drawn from audiences, especially audiences living under communism at the time.

Similarly, Johnson (2007), a former director of RFE, concludes that Cold War broadcasting was successful in achieving its mission, and thus had “a huge impact,” as an ideological/information weapon. Johnson cites three main indicators to support his conclusion: audience surveys of East European and ex-Soviet citizens traveling to the West, and “retrospective internal surveys” as evidence for the large listenership in targeted countries. Second, elite and dissident testimonials mentioned above. The third indicator, according to Johnson (2007), is the extensive resources communist regimes devoted to jamming those surrogate radios’ signals. Needless to say that the first two “indicators” lack empirical support and validity because of their exclusive reliance on self-selected samples, those already prone to Western media and culture. A persuasive case can further be constructed on the premise of self interest on the part of the radios’ former employees, directors and dissidents, leading to self-serving interviews.

Further, communist regimes’ jamming efforts, and their allocation of other resources to counter the perceived U.S. propaganda do not amount to good evidence as totalitarian regimes might have been frightened anyway from any information that departed from their official line, be it from external or internal sources. In addition, totalitarian regimes’ paranoia and fear of dissidence indicate almost nothing about the actual reach and effect of U.S. international broadcasters. Totalitarian regimes’ behavior should serve to highlight the effect of those broadcasters on the mere behavior of the targeted regimes, as U.S. international broadcasters became a chip in the diplomatic wrangling between U.S. administrations and communist regimes. In *Broadcasting to the*



*Soviet Union: International politics and radio*, Lisann (1975) details similar effects of U.S. surrogate radio on the behavior of the Soviet Union at the time. “Selective jamming,” or even “suspension of jamming,” was part of diplomatic negotiation between the U.S. and Soviet governments. In 1957, for instance, Khrushchev, the Soviet leader, publicly proposed an end to jamming VOA’s broadcasts provided that the broadcaster moderated its coverage and programming directed at his country (Lisann, 1975). On the day of his arrival in the U.S. in September, 1959, Khrushchev significantly reduced Soviet’s VOA jamming. In other respects, Khrushchev’s actions also constituted an attempt to modify the international broadcasters’ programming at the source using diplomatic tools (Lisann, 1975).

Beyond these post-hoc rationales of U.S. international broadcasting efforts, one thing is undisputed: U.S. international broadcasters’ primary objective was to advance national security goals during the Cold War. Instead of direct confrontation with communism, U.S. foreign policy centered on containment of the threat, and broadcasting was a main tool in that strategy. First spelled out in a *Foreign Affairs* article, Mr. X’s “The Sources of Soviet Conduct” (1947), the containment strategy, as conceived by its author George F. Kennan, advocated a “long term, patient but firm vigilant containment of Russian expansionist tendencies” (Kennan, 1947, p. 566). The fact that Kennan, the foremost architect of containment, was associated with RFE/RL should not be lost on the “containment” goals of those broadcasters (Wimbush, 2007). In conclusion, the Cold War witnessed the expansion of U.S. international broadcasting, and radio was conceived as a strategic tool that furthers national security. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the

rise of CNN, shook this overriding “security” mission, creating an identity crisis for those broadcasters.

## **2. The Age of Cable News: New Times, New Missions**

### *i. The Iron Curtain Falls*

The crisis driven nature of international broadcasting, its funding, operation, and intensification, has been observed by a number of scholars. Nichols’ work on U.S. Cuban relations and Radio and Marti, for instance, has shed light on the intensity of cross border broadcasting as an outcome variable of political crises between the two nations. But it serves as a useful framework to examine how U.S. international broadcasting efforts dwindled immediately after the Cold War. Price (2001) recounts how the collapse of the communist threat eliminated the old rationale justifying the funds allocated by Congress to international broadcasting, specifically VOA and the freedom radios. It was argued that CNN could do better for the image of the United States than those “propaganda” broadcasts and with no financial cost (Flournoy & Stewart, 1997). CNN was arguably a pseudonym for the proliferation of new and independent media outlets around the world, propelled greatly by the rise of satellite broadcasting, and a burgeoning Internet landscape (Honley, 2004). A major reorganization of U.S. non-military international broadcasting was initiated in the 1990s as the Clinton administration revamped these operations through a series of legislative acts and presidential directives. The International Broadcasting Act of 1994, and the Foreign Affairs Reform and Restructuring Act of 1998 culminated in eventually disbanding the U.S. Information Agency (U.S.IA), which was supervising U.S. international broadcasting efforts until 1999. The legislations established the International Broadcasting Bureau, and later the

Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) which oversaw the operations of the VOA, Radio Marti and the “freedom radios.” Belying this organizational shuffle was the more fundamental task of rethinking the objectives, mission, and target audiences of U.S. international broadcasting (Price, 2001; Honley, 2004). Unlike broadcasting during the Cold War, U.S. international broadcasting did not have to worry about jamming problems from hostile governments in the post Cold War era. But, more problematically, the lack of a definable enemy, from a U.S. foreign policy perspective, led to international broadcasters’ incoherently defined mission.

In other terms, indigenous news outlets have usurped the *raison d’etre* of U.S. international broadcasting, and the mission needed to evolve from feeding free news to audiences perceived as hungry for unfettered information in the case of the freedom radios, or “telling America’s story to the world” in the case of VOA. Limited resources and increasingly tighter budgets had led to the near collapse of those efforts until 2001. In fact, VOA has continued to operate under its charter that spelled out its mission in 1976. The VOA charter states:

1. VOA will serve as a consistently reliable and authoritative source of news. VOA news will be accurate, objective, and comprehensive.
2. VOA will represent America, not any single segment of American society, and will therefore present a balanced and comprehensive projection of significant American thought and institutions.
3. VOA will present the policies of the United States clearly and effectively, and will also present responsible discussions and opinion on these policies.

The “Freedom Radios” have lost their surrogate edge due to limited financial resources, abundant local media outlets, and the liberalization of Eastern Europe. Increasingly, the

“Freedom Radios” looked more like Cold War relics, conjuring up memories of jamming, dissidence and state-controlled media. Their original mission of informing foreign audiences about their *own* countries, rather than the U.S.A, functioning as surrogate news stations, was shaken, but they carried on. Price (2001) explains that RFE/RL’s attempts to transform themselves in the post-Cold War era led to frictions with VOA’s bureaucracy that feared encroachment on their territory.

*ii. Mission Impossible: Redefinition*

In their attempt to transform and redefine their mission, RFE/RL broadcasters positioned themselves as “facilitators of the transition” from communism, providing support to indigenous media, and expanding freedom of the press (Price 2001, n.p.). More significantly, the task of international broadcasters moved from “security,” fighting an ideological enemy, to “democracy promotion.” Gone were the days of positioning the U.S. broadcaster as the alternative provider of unfiltered news and information that totalitarian regimes deprive their citizens of. As the Iron Curtain fell, new media outlets have been spawned in previously communist dominated nations. The newly “liberated” states, the former Soviet satellites, needed broadcasting that could bolster their fragile democracies.

To be sure, the shifts that took place in U.S. international broadcasters were also due to the rise of ethnic conflict and wars, especially in the Balkans, as well as the emerging globalization. The onset of globalization made the proliferation of mediated information a reality, and most countries experienced an information clutter rather than scarcity. Also, as Price (2003) remarks, this situation was not unique to U.S. international broadcasters. To mention but a few instances, the UK’s BBC, Germany’s DW, and

Australia's international broadcaster targeting South East Asia, were undergoing similar soul-searching and mission redefinition, if not identity crises (Price, 2001). The crisis in U.S. international broadcasters' identity and mission was emblematic of these global trends, the rise of the U.S. as "a lonely superpower." The "New World Order," articulated more prominently by the George H. Bush administration, foretold a new chaotic reality to face U.S. international broadcasters in particular.

### **3. 'Re-envisioning' International Broadcasting: The 9/11 Aftermath**

#### *i. The Al-Jazeera 'Effect'*

The fractious discontent among U.S. international broadcasters, strapped funding and resources, persisted until the events of September 11 unfolded. Strident demands for their reinvigoration became as loud as during the period of the Cold War. Now, a new "war of ideas" beckoned as Islamist extremist ideology constituted the new threat to U.S. national security (BBG, 2002). As Huntington's thesis, or his prophecy, of "a clash of civilizations"<sup>3</sup> gained new momentum after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the Bush administration re-ignited policy interest in international broadcasters, with the aim of wielding them as a strategic weapon in its "war on terror." According to the Broadcasting Board of Governors' own strategic report, international broadcasting represents "a vital component of U.S. foreign policy" (BBG 2002, p.16). Due to its geopolitical importance to the U.S. strategic interests, the Middle East constitutes a major geographic area that the U.S. sponsored international broadcasting has historically targeted since the Cold War, particularly through the VOA. While the end of the Cold War represented a moment during which official attention to

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<sup>3</sup> Huntington (1992) predicted that the end of the ideological conflict of the Cold War spelled the rise of clashes between civilizations/different cultures, the West versus the rest.

international broadcasts languished, the recent launch of the US “war on terror” in the aftermath of 9/11 has led to renewal of those broadcasting efforts. The rejuvenation of international broadcasting is incarnated in new players, namely Radio Sawa in 2002 and Al-Hurra Television (“The Free One”) in 2004. Al-Hurra Television’s mission was clear: counter terrorist propaganda and the hostile media environment poisoning the Middle East. Al-Jazeera Television was deemed a principal media outlet for those hostile forces.

In addition to airing Islamist extremist propaganda, Al-Jazeera has been perceived as a conduit of anti-Americanism. The exclusive coverage of the U.S. attack on Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in 2001 constituted a watershed moment in Al-Jazeera’s history, destiny, and its strained relationship with the U.S. administration. After the defunct Taliban regime kicked all foreign media representatives, except Al-Jazeera’s reporters, out of Afghanistan, major American and Western news networks had no choice but to use Al-Jazeera’s exclusive footage. For good or bad, Al-Jazeera Television’s reputation as an international media player was sealed with that footage. Its exclusive coverage of the Afghanistan war, regularly airing Osama Bin Laden’s tapes, embittered the Bush White House, leading to the subsequent bombing of Al-Jazeera Television’s bureau in Kabul (CPJ, 2005). Even prior to the Second Gulf War of 2003, the US government expressed its ire at the alleged anti-Americanism oozing out of Al-Jazeera and pressured the Qatari government to curb this “rogue” network. The Committee to Protect Journalists expressed its consternation and concern at the US effort (CPJ, 2001). News organizations and journalists, according to the *Guardian*’s reporter, Wells (2001), shuddered from the thought that the US intentionally targeted Al-Jazeera’s Kabul bureau in November, 2001. Later in the war in Iraq, American forces fired missiles into Al-

Jazeera's Baghdad bureau, killing its bureau chief, and the Bush administration had not thoroughly investigated the matter (CPJ, 2005).

Al-Jazeera Television has established its status as a leading conduit of news in the Arab speaking world, with a nakedly ambitious global agenda. It has indeed operated in relative freedom, discernibly impacting both its media competitors and the politics of the region. Its pan Arab discourse, resurrecting a broadly transnational Arab audience, often bordered on sensationalist and venturesome coverage of hot button issues like terrorism and political reform. While its media tack has consistently irritated Arab governments, it has similarly confounded the U.S. administration's attempts to improve its image among the peoples of the region. Al-Jazeera created a hostile, public opinion environment, argued U.S. policy makers. The U.S. sponsored Al-Hurra Television has come to confront that unfriendly media environment.

Many scholars argue that U.S. international broadcasters have finally found their mission, namely working as strategic tools of information and psychological influence, instead of focusing on democracy promotion associated with the pre-9/11 era's mindset (Price, 2003). "[U.S.] International broadcasting may move from an active proponent of the relationship of media to democracy to a function more closely tied to issues of media and global security," argues Price (2003, p. 91). While such security associated roles are by no means new, as the above review illustrated, the Bush administration's response to the terrorist attack of 11 September, especially through what has come to be known as the Bush Doctrine, belies the sole focus on security. Indeed, scrutinizing the rhetoric of U.S. Middle East policy reveals that there is a renewed engagement with democratization of the Arab world. The seeming contradiction might be explained by a new realization that

democratization of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world has been recognized as a corner stone in U.S. security. A better formulation of the mission of U.S. international broadcasting would consider the historical tension between “security” and “democratization” to have merged in the recent foreign policy discourse. Al-Hurra Television would encapsulate this new mission.

*ii. Al-Hurra Television*

In the age of “hyper-power” politics, America’s supreme dominance, Al-Jazeera’s coverage of the “war on terror” campaign and the war on Iraq has been construed as unabashedly anti-American, interfering with US strategic plans and thus requiring an immediate response (e.g. Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2004). The U.S. administration’s wrath has been translated into pressure and aggressive intervention, as the previous section on Al-Jazeera mentioned. But, more importantly, both Al-Jazeera’s impact and 11 September’s repercussions culminated in greater American awareness of the need to communicate with the Muslim and Arab worlds. In the information age, mass media have been the chosen outlets for communication, leading to a concerted public diplomacy campaign that has included an advertising and a public relations campaign (the “Shared Values Initiative”), a publication (*Hi Magazine*), Radio Sawa in 2002, and Al-Hurra Television in operation since February 14, 2004. The “Shared Values Initiative” advertising campaign, touting America’s tolerance of Muslims in the US, was short lived because it did not register with Muslim audiences, on the one hand, and it was a Madison Avenue style campaign launched by Charlotte Beers, the first U.S. Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (Kendrick & Fullerton, 2004).



Public relations campaigns have been ongoing from Undersecretaries Charlotte Beers, Margaret Tutwiler, through Karen Hughes to James K. Glassman. Ms. Hughes, the former Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy, had touted her tours around the Muslim world to listen and explain, with her promise that “public diplomacy is a dialogue, [that is] as much about listening as it is about speaking” (Hughes, 2005). Secretary Hughes’ “Listening Tours,” whirling visits to a number of Islamic states, received much fanfare with no tangible rewards. In the broadcasting wars, Radio Sawa emphasized a commercial model of broadcasting that tilts in favor of “entertainment,” or infotainment. The proponent of Sawa’s commercial model criticized the Voice of America’s formula, more emphasis on news journalism. A brainchild of Norman J. Pattiz, founder of America’s largest radio network, Westwood One, Inc., Radio Sawa airs pop music, both Western and Arabic, punctuated with “light” news that target younger audiences. The broadcaster has not lost sight of its “ pro-America message, without being soft on the problems in the Middle East at the same time” (Seckora, 2002). Hailing it a success, Pattiz claimed Sawa to be “the largest possible public diplomacy mission ever” (cited in Seckora, 2002).

The BBG’s aggressive move sought to reposition, market the USA brand in the Arabic speaking world, and fully engage in the “war on terror” campaign (BBG, 2004, p. 2). In the stark terms of *The 9/11 Commission Report*, “if the United States does not act aggressively to define itself in the Islamic world, the extremists will gladly do the job for us” (BBG, 2004, p. 3). According to Kenneth Y. Tomlinson, the BBG’s former chairman,

Two 24/7 TV channels, Al-Hurra and [its sister], Al-Hurra-Iraq, were established to broadcast news, information, opinion, and debate and discussion to Arabic-speaking audiences across the Middle East. The two channels complement the progress that Radio

Sawa has made in building a significant audience for U.S. international broadcasting in the Arab world (p. 1).

As national security has become the cornerstone of international broadcasting efforts, Al-Hurra Television hopes to deliver and capture a large Arabic speaking audience. While Al-Hurra (and the BBG) provides “the United States and its leaders direct and immediate access” to that coveted audience, it also “promotes and sustains freedom and democracy by broadcasting accurate and objective news and information about the United States and the world” (p. 3). The espoused goals include encouraging free debate in a region “where free expression is denied” (p. 3). Presenting those viewers with an undiluted American worldview, “thought, institutions and policies,” that is. The BBG report insists that it broadcasts “reliable, accurate, objective, and comprehensive news” (p. 3) from studios in the Washington D.C. area halfway across the globe. As an instance of Al-Hurra’s work, the BBG report cites its extensive coverage and in-depth analysis of election campaigns in Ukraine, Tunisia, Iraq and Afghanistan. The enterprise has enlisted personnel of 168 employees with a budget of \$80.5 million (FY 2004).

In short, the official narrative gleaned from the BBG reports does not explicitly limit Al-Hurra’s role to competing with Al-Jazeera’s influence. That appears to be part and parcel of the broader mission of “fighting terror with truth” (p. 22) and “advancing freedom and democracy” (p. 16) in both the Arab and Muslim Worlds. Trusting the mass media in this “war of ideas,” both explicitly and implicitly, draws on the Cold War rhetorical legacy and memory. American officials have adduced that broadcasting had significantly impacted the end of the Cold War, notwithstanding the absence of conclusive empirical evidence. During her confirmation hearing, Ms. Condoleezza Rice, Bush’s Secretary of State, re-avowed such a conviction when she stated: “I am certainly a

major proponent of broadcasting, having come out of the Cold War experience with Radio Free Europe and Voice of America and Radio Liberty and the difference that they made. Again, I believe that the key for us is to tell the truth” (BBG, 2004, p. 3).

Preliminary BBG reports have proclaimed Al-Hurra Television a success, quoting AC Nielson’s ratings, sometimes, or its purported credibility among Arab viewers, at other times. An examination of regional media’s immediate coverage of this new competitor reveals an outright negative and hostile reception, however. About a week after Al-Hurra’s operation set sail, an internal report on Arab reactions used a provocative title, “Al-Hurra Television: Arabs say “cosmetics” won’t change “ugly” U.S. policies” (*Foreign Media Reaction*, 2004). The report’s main findings were disheartening to say the least. Four conclusions need some highlight:

- Al-Hurra Television’s debut draws widespread derision, mistrust and criticism from Arab media.
- “Sweet” words and pictures cannot cover the U.S.’ “bad policy” and “double standards.”
- Skeptics deplore another American “propaganda machine” and expect Al-Hurra “to fail.”
- A minority praises the media competition, chiding the “angry” Arab reaction as “naive.”

*The Guardian* also concluded that Al-Hurra is a “cheesy, US-sponsored channel . . . [with] a messianic mission to change the views of Arabs and Muslims around the world towards the west and America” (cited in Ryan 2004). Others have not failed to raise the ownership and sponsorship issue plaguing Al-Hurra’s relationship with the U.S. government. If values of press freedom are rooted in private ownership, as American journalism traditions suggest, then why should the U.S. government intervene and finance this television channel? The U.S. government cannot have it both ways, this line of criticism suggests; one cannot complain about how state ownership dominates Arab media and at the same while introduce another “state-owned” television to the region.

Such an approach would be construed as hypocritical behavior. Probably unsurprising, this searing criticism publicly was advanced by the then Al-Jazeera's Washington Bureau chief (Ryan, 2004). That appears to be legitimate, rather than an outlandish bias, since an Independent Task Force Report commissioned by the Council on Foreign Relations (2005) authored a similar conclusion: "Because the channel is operated by the U.S. government, the suspicion is strong within the region that it is merely a conveyor of propaganda."

On the home stretch, detracting comments and unflattering assessment of Al-Hurra's mission have fomented among Middle East analysts, experts, politicians and policymakers. William A. Rugh, a former ambassador to the UAE and an expert on the region's media, believed Al-Hurra's launch to have been misguided since it had to compete in a nearly saturated Arabic media market (McCarthy, 2004). Further than that, the underlying premise of the broadcast was flawed, in Rugh's opinion, because American officials could better serve U.S. interests by merely being more accessible to Arabic media and willing to show up for interviews on Arabic television (Rugh, 2005). In Congress, some legislators even quarreled with the notion that Al-Hurra's professionalism might set a good example for the region's media. Instead, the primary function, those legislators insisted, should be to propagate undiluted American views. A U.S. Congressman, José E. Serrano, voiced a similar opinion at a hearing when he warned, "Do not tell us it's not propaganda, because if it's not propaganda, then I think . . . we will have to look at what it is we are doing" (cited in McCarthy, 2004).

A flurry of similar critical observations has triggered defensive reactions from the BBG and Al-Hurra's management. Criticism of Al-Hurra has targeted its programming,

which appeared to be less even handed than its vaunted mission statement. For instance, unlike Al-Jazeera or other Arabic satellite news channels, Al-Hurra's coverage of the Abu Ghraib prison scandal tried to diminish the scandal's reach and repercussions by inviting sympathetic commentators (Rugh, 2005). As formerly mentioned, affiliation with the U.S. government was made more problematic since Al-Hurra Television's selling pitch was to supposedly decry state-ownership of the media in the region, among other things. Moufac Harb, Al-Hurra's former Executive Vice President and Director of Network News, claimed that professional news coverage with high standards did not necessarily entail yielding to pressure from the U.S. government (Harb, 2005). Harb insisted that, unlike Al-Jazeera, Al-Hurra's credibility stemmed not from opinionated coverage sympathetic to Arabic viewers' sentiments, but from an impartial journalistic style comparable to Reuters or UPI (Harb, 2005). In another interview, he vehemently denied bowing to pressure from the US administration and declared that the channel's editorial policies were completely "independent" (McCarthy 2004).

A precious few have since come to the defense of the beleaguered network. For these, Al-Hurra was successfully waging "the war of ideas" raging in the Arabic speaking world (Phares, 2005). Walid Phares, from the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, believed that the channel could not have been launched at a more crucial time than the present juncture. Al-Hurra impacted and elevated thorny issues, like human rights, the status of women and political reform, to the level of universal public debate, argued Phares (2005). Covering a myriad of political events in the region, Al-Hurra Television would become a reliable source of news, predicted Phares. Despite its short

span, it had become a force to reckon with in the public square. Phares' (2005) picture was far rosier as his claims below show:

Whether Al-Hurra broadcast live in Martyr's Square during the Lebanese demonstrations or inside voting stations throughout Iraq, it was able to report, analyze, and bring viewers an inside look at the news affecting them.

Such unqualified praise appears to be out of synch with the conflicted ratings the network frequently cites to bolster its claim to a sizable and competitive viewership. For it to survive and compete, "Al-Hurra needs a facelift," austere remarked a veteran USIA executive (Snyder, 2005).

**Conclusion:** Al-Hurra Television is firmly situated in the historical context of international broadcasting and politics. This chapter has reviewed the history of U.S. international broadcasting and the evolving objectives envisioned for it by policy makers. International broadcasting in general is inherently crisis-driven media that seek to resolve international political crises, and implement foreign policy agendas. The crisis driven nature of this government sponsored media, with foreign public opinion as its usual target, tends to reflect governments' and policy elites' ebbing and flowing interest in deploying media to the forefront of international conflict. In the height of the Cold War tensions, VOA and the "Freedom Radios" were immensely popular as strategic tools for the containment of Soviet power and influence. Once the threat and the crisis of the Cold War receded, interest and financial support for these broadcasters dwindled. With the rise of Islamist terrorism, renewed engagement and interest in broadcasting to the Islamic/Arab world has been rekindled, leading to the birth of Al-Hurra Television to target Arab audiences/public opinion.

Those crises further generate heated debates about the objectives, mission, and goals of the government's broadcasting internationally. The chapter has outlined two main strategic goals/missions for U.S. government's broadcasters: as a 'security' tool or a "democracy promotion" tool. While the first mission is usually allotted to surrogate broadcasters, democracy promotion is usually the realm of transparent broadcasters like VOA. The first type is conventionally referred to as propaganda and the second as public diplomacy. This distinction does not always remain as clear cut as desired because broadcasters' operations and activities tend to overlap and blend. In the post 9/11 era, the resurgence of the "security" mission has been enmeshed in the rhetoric of democracy promotion. The U.S. government-sponsored Al-Hurra Television aims at promoting democracy in the Arab world and serves as a strategic tool in the "war on terrorism." Through the ensuing examination of U.S. Arab relations and democracy promotion efforts, it will become evident that debating Al-Hurra's mission is a debate about America's role in the Arab world, whether to act as a policing force or a benign democratic promoter. Further, debating Al-Hurra Television is a debate about the rhetoric of democracy promotion in the face of security concerns.

The next section delves into this rhetoric of democracy promotion, based on the premise that the presumed effects of U.S. international broadcasting should not be isolated from the larger debates surrounding the role of the U.S. in the world. In other terms, the "rhetorical fog" and the fractured approaches to Al-Hurra Television, as a case study of international broadcasting, need to be tackled to provide context, explanation, and evaluation of such resources and their presumed impact. Viewers' perceptions of Al-Hurra's influence on their attitudes, and the wider public opinion, are situated in these

policy debates. Third Person Effect research offers insight into how indirect influence of Al-Hurra Television is strongly linked to the rhetoric of democracy promotion.



## **Chapter II**

### **Mapping Rhetoric: U.S. Democracy Promotion Discourse in the Arab World**

## **1- Defining Rhetoric and Democracy Promotion**

To approach its presumed effects on Arab public opinion, Al-Hurra Television has to be situated in the context of international broadcasting and foreign policy rhetoric. The previous chapter firmly contextualized Al-Hurra Television in the complex space of international broadcasting, its linkages with national sovereignty and the media wars inflicting current international politics. Mapping the space of international broadcasting requires a further mapping of the foreign policy agendas rationalizing and strengthening such investment. This chapter provides a complementary look in examining the rhetorical overtures of U.S. Mideast policy that punctuates the rise and reception of Al-Hurra Television. A rhetorical web growing out of the different policy debates and projects enshrouds Al-Hurra Television. The theoretical lens of audience perceptions of Al-Hurra Television's influence, the Third Person Effect hypothesis, employed in this project has more explanatory power if put against this rhetorical background. The chapter first defines the rhetorical approach to foreign policy, emphasizing the problematic issue of "effects" in a reminder of the rationale for using Third Person Effect hypothesis. Focusing on U.S. Mideast policy is implemented through the larger theme of democracy promotion and how it connects with the Bush administrations' Greater Middle East Initiative and the Bush Doctrine. Al-Hurra Television in many ways works both as an instrument and a manifestation of this foreign policy rhetoric, tightly enmeshed in discursive debates around foreign policy.

### ***i. Rhetorical Spaces***

In order to unravel the rhetorical fog that ensnares Al-Hurra Television, it is imperative to scrutinize the Bush administration's discourse regarding democracy

promotion, particularly the fraught context of U.S. Mideast policy. How this democracy promotion discourse courses through “projects” or “visions” will be amply demonstrated via the much vaunted, in some circles taunted, Bush Doctrine and the administration’s “Greater Middle East Initiative” (GMEI). Since international broadcasting can not be isolated from policy crises, it feasts on the rhetoric of democracy promotion promulgated by the Bush administration. This chapter will therefore examine three important aspects of this rhetoric in the context of U.S. Arab relations, democracy promotion, the Bush Doctrine, and the Bush administration’s GMEI. The purpose is to highlight the rationales and the paradoxes that nourish the institutionalization of U.S. international broadcasting through a brief rhetorical investigation. While thorough rhetorical investigations of foreign policy and presidential rhetoric have been conducted elsewhere (e.g. Parry-Giles, 2002; Hariman, 1995; Kellner, 2007), the goal here is to illuminate the potential divorce that exists between the rhetoric and reality underpinnings of international broadcasting. This rhetorical brush broadly outlines the context of international broadcasting since “rhetoric is central to the crafting and communication of human knowledge; to the construction of self, the other, and society; to the inducement of cooperation and conflict” (Benson, 1993, p. xii-xiii). The chapter serves the other role of laying the groundwork for a subsequent study of public diplomacy rhetoric through the analysis of policy speeches.

The “effects” of the Bush administration’s rhetoric requires a brief elucidation of the issue of “effects” that rhetorical enquiry has been preoccupied with. All too often, the emphasis on rhetorical “effect,” whether in its traditional sense as explicated by Wichelns’ “The Literary Criticism of Oratory”, or the formulation of younger critics, like Charland and McGee, who broadened the conceptualization to include the ideological

underpinnings of rhetoric, has been tied to an energetic debate about the status of rhetorical theory. Some thought the commitment to effect in rhetorical scholarship is almost rigged because it belied “a positivist tinge” and “a game-based notion of effect and strategy” that should be abandoned (Aune, 1988, p.49). James Arnt Aune argued for a return to a view of “public address [rhetorical] documents for what they really are: concrete instances of judgment, embodiments of political philosophy. Calhoun and Lincoln need to be read in our classes and in our studies more because they reveal competing political philosophies than because their speeches are more or less effective, or because they are masterpieces” (p.49). Aune’s impatience with the commitment to “effect” exhibited frustration with the privileging of theory over text, and was thusly part of the broader turn to close textual analysis.

But while reinterpretations of Wichelns’ intention appear to be a “futile quest,” they also generated poor scholarship since they did not delve into the socio cultural impact of rhetoric. In Zarefsky’s words, “Single speeches rarely have discernible effects; they work together with many other causal forces and as part of the broad social and cultural frame in which they are embedded” (Zarefsky, 2006, p.384). The question of “effects” should thus be framed in the broader critical context of the dialectical relationship between the text, the audience, the rhetor/speaker and the context. Rhetorical “effects” can be gleaned from the systematic interrogation of the text, as proponents of textual analysis would later argue. However, for such critics, those who decried “the deferral of the text,” and advocated a return to the text, the “positivist” belief in rhetorical effect is still present; it is located in the text.

McKerrow offers a rethinking of the issue of effect in rhetorical criticism by arguing that “influence is not causality.” Rhetorical effect is very rigid in suggesting a high level of determinism. Unlike traditional rhetorical criticism, McKerrow regards that to claim that discourse has an influence does not necessarily entail causing an effect on the audience. A theory of critical rhetoric suggests the complexity of rhetorical effect and how it meshes with the discourse of power and domination. McKerrow (1989) refocused the debate about rhetorical effect from the perspective of “critical rhetoric” and practice—a perspective on rhetoric that primarily sought to evade the debilitating constraints of Platonic conception of rhetoric as manipulative, and thus inferior, or the universalist tendency to privilege reason and rationality to justify rhetorical theory and practice. A theory of critical rhetoric provides a critique of “domination” and “freedom” in “a relativized world,” according to McKerrow (p.114). The role of the critic is to “unmask or demystify the discourse of power” which maintains the domination of the oppressed (p.115). McKerrow’s project of a critical rhetoric that liberates the oppressed, and challenges domination, draws on Foucault’s work on discursive formations and how they maintain power. While McKerrow seeks to construct a theory of rhetoric that is critical of the discourse of domination, he is careful to point out that his critical rhetoric theory privileges “practice,” rather than institutes a method. In a sense, the critical rhetoric perspective reconceptualizes the question of rhetorical effect beyond its “determinist” tendency inherent in traditional criticism. Still, understanding the “effect” involves an analysis of the relations of power, the discourse of domination and freedom.

The immediate effects of rhetorical discourse are further complicated by a new consciousness of the polysemic nature of the text and the multiplicity of audiences.

Beyond a mere multiplicity of meanings, polysemy is an incubator of resistant readings that the text lodges, and exacerbates the quest after explicit or immediate effects. The new move is more pronounced in the work of Ceccarelli's emphasis on the polysemous nature of the rhetorical text. Polysemy does not solely mean the existence of multiple meanings; it also unearths several readings of the text, readings that could have been secondary or marginalized (Ceccarelli, 1998, p.397-398). The secondary readings have the potential to allow subordinate audiences to find their own voices, and the subaltern to resist. The preoccupation with polysemy suggests preoccupation with how marginal audiences can be rehabilitated, welcomed, into the arena of rhetorical criticism. For instance, Ceccarelli sheds light on the resistive readings in Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address to point out that the speech provided different readings to Northern and Southern audiences. For Northern audiences, as gleaned from editorials, the focus was on the message of reconciliation and the portrayal of the Civil War as the Almighty's punishment to both North and South for having countenanced slavery. Southern audiences appear to have highlighted only the arguments that cast blame on the South and exonerated the North, exemplifying a "resistive reading" of Lincoln's speech. The quest after polysemy highlights two groups that have been battling one another, one in domination and the other in subordination, with the subordinate prizing the meanings that illuminate their grievances (Ceccarelli, 1998, p. 400-403).

The rhetorical investigation of foreign policy discourse surrounding U.S. international broadcasting, particularly Al-Hurra Television, stems from the cognizance that a particular discourse has multiple, unintended effects on the broadcasting enterprises and their audiences. Take for instance how the goal of spreading democracy overseas,

and the rhetoric such a goal generates, affecting how target/foreign audiences will view Al-Hurra Television. For all intents and purposes, Al-Hurra Television will be the media arm of such discourse. Should the rhetoric of democracy promotion be conceived as hollow “rhetoric,” discredited on the rocks of realpolitik and international reality, Al-Hurra Television will have nothing to gain, if not actually lose the credibility and goodwill it wished to generate. This section identifies the rhetorical space of international broadcasting during the Bush administration, namely its documented intent on democracy promotion, the Bush Doctrine, and its impact on Arab U.S. relations, especially Bush’s Greater Middle East Initiative. In scrutinizing this rhetorical facet of international broadcasting, attention is devoted to the reactions, the potential “effects” this rhetoric is likely to spawn. The reactions of the administration’s supporters and detractors within the U.S. foreign policy establishment, as well as foreign audiences and players are discussed whenever available. The overarching goal is to lay the groundwork for a detailed appraisal of how rhetoric affects and manipulates the multi-purposes of Al-Hurra Television as a public diplomacy project. The rhetorical analysis further supports the theoretical framework of indirect media influence, particularly how rhetoric meshes with audience’s perceptions of media influence, seeps into consciousness.

### *ii. Definition of Democracy Promotion*

Notwithstanding the ideological leanings of different administrations in the White House, the rhetoric of democracy promotion has laid claim to both historical continuity and contingency. Historical continuity refers to the fact that upholding democratic values has always been conceived as the “manifest destiny” of the United States since its founding. Not least is the fact that the Founding Fathers regarded the newly independent

nation as a democratic experiment entrusted with the beacon of hope to be raised high for the whole world to follow and inspire. As Abraham Lincoln put it, the Declaration of Independence gave liberty “not alone to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all future time.” The United States was an “experiment” for the whole world to emulate, and it should be dedicated to the promotion of democracy and freedom beyond its shores. Tucker (1986) describes this strand of U.S. policy makers and scholars as the “Crusaders.” But there was not total unanimity, neither among the Founding Fathers, nor across the subsequent presidents and administrations, about the active promotion of democracy abroad as an undisputed mission. Woodrow Wilson did not hesitate to mobilize the U.S. population and its armed forces in 1917:

for the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples...for the rights of nations great and small and the privilege of men everywhere to choose their way of life and of obedience. The world must be made safe for democracy.

In opposition to the “Crusaders,” there have been “the Exemplars,” those who advocate that the United States should lead by example, strengthening its institutions and providing inspiration rather than active promotion for the world’s nations (Tucker, 1986; Brands, 1998). John Quincy Adams argued for non-interventionism:

“Wherever the standard of freedom and independence has been or shall be unfurled, there will be [America’s] heart, her benedictions and her prayers be. But she goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own.”

Lack of unanimity has been the source of historical contingency: the rise or fall of democracy promotion as high rhetoric has inevitably been contingent upon world events and shifting U.S. strategic interests. The events of 11 September proved to be such



catalyst, and a crucible for the tension between the “Exemplars” and the “Crusaders.” No wonder that President George W. Bush, no spokesman for the “Exemplars,” explicitly articulated this mission in his Second Inaugural Address, January 2005: “It is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and every culture, with the goal of ending tyranny around the world.” His statement encapsulates the continuity and contingency of democracy promotion rhetoric. As the ensuing discussion of the Bush Doctrine will explain, President G.W. Bush is not the first U.S. president to appraise democracy promotion as an unshakable U.S. foreign policy that hopes to decimate tyranny wherever it might exist. He is by far the first U.S. president to devote more space and words to democracy promotion in his inaugural speeches.

While democracy promotion sounds as a self-explanatory concept, it still needs some definition to distinguish it from other government activities and policies that share the same goal of “ending” tyranny in foreign nations. Schmitter and Brouwer (1999) forged an inclusive definition during a research project designed to conceptualize and evaluate democracy promotion, partially funded by the U.S. Institute of Peace. It holds that:

Democracy Promotion consists of all overt and voluntary activities adopted, supported, and (directly or indirectly) implemented by (public or private) foreign actors explicitly designed to contribute to the political liberalization of autocratic regimes and the subsequent democratization of autocratic regimes in specific recipient countries (p. 14).

The definition distinguishes democracy promotion primarily by its “overtness,” rather than covert activities, and the goal is democratization of autocracies. While ending tyranny can be done through surrogate military regime change, democracy promotion is

openly advocating “liberalization” of authoritarian regimes by providing material and moral support for democratic transition and governance. It does not however exclude coercing reluctant states to democratize (Schmitter & Brouwer, 1999). The modern wave of democracy promotion is nevertheless fraught with tensions regarding the goals, the means, and the conceptualization of “democracy” itself. Does outside pressure to democratize leads to genuine democratic transitions, or democratic transitions have to be propelled by internal and local forces? Can military intervention legitimate democracy promotion? How about national sovereignty? Further, shouldn’t democracy involve the whole society or just its system of government in which case it becomes a mere method of governance? How about “sham” democracies, where authoritarian regimes use the vestiges and appearances of democracy for foreign consumption? Wouldn’t that defeat the purpose? These issues have never been totally resolved in the debate surrounding the rhetoric of democracy promotion. A brief historical overview of the United States’ efforts at promoting democracy in the Arab world illustrates the tensions and inconsistencies constraining the rhetoric.

## **2- Historical Legacies**

### *i. Democracy Promotion in U.S. Mideast Policy*

For many U.S. policy scholars, the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union encapsulated how successful the strategy of containment had been in the “triumph” of liberty over totalitarianism. Almost a decade after the end of that era, and exactly a year and six days after the events of 9/11, President Bush wrote in the 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States (US 2002 NSS) that the “decisive victory for the forces of freedom” indicated that only “a single sustainable model for national

success [exists]: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.” These basic values of freedom are predicated on the premise that freedom is universal: “People everywhere want to be able to speak freely; choose who will govern them; worship as they please; educate their children—male and female; own property; and enjoy the benefits of their labor.” In the present century, Bush continued, world nations not only have to abide by these universal dictates, but “protecting these values against their enemies is the common calling of freedom-loving people across the globe and across the ages.” Constituting what has come to be known as “the Bush Doctrine,” freedom and democracy are not merely a god-given/birth right, “true for every person, in every society,” but defending the cause of liberty and promoting basic democratic institutions and principles across the globe is the obligation of “freedom loving people.” Further, it is the obligation, as well as in the national interest of the United States to promote democracy across the world, particularly in regions suffering from a “democracy deficit.” In light of 9/11, as the US 2002 National Security Strategy makes abundantly evident, the greater Middle East, and particularly the Arab world, constitutes the primary frontline in this democracy promotion push. While the Bush Doctrine ensures the prerogative of the United States to intervene by force whenever it perceives its interests to be under threat, the “right” to preemption, the focus here is on historicizing the U.S. democracy promotion agenda in the Arab world, especially in the wake of 9/11 policy debate.

A random examination of several previously classified reports from the State Department dating back to the 1950s makes prominent the strategic interests of the

United States in the Middle East.<sup>4</sup> Whereas most of those strategic interests, for instance the containment of communist influence, guaranteeing Israel's security, and securing oil fields, offer no surprise, the focus on the role of the United States in fostering "political and social progress" throughout the region remains instructively pertinent to the current campaign of democracy promotion. Couched in the language of "development" and "aid," the U.S. "intervention" sought to nurture economic and political transformation in the region (p.10). "Economic aid" had to be justified politically: helping elites attain "constructive objectives," measures that will ensure a degree of "moderation and stability to their regimes" (p. 10). How to carry out those objectives is of vital importance since U.S. efforts raised the sensitive issue of "dependency" and the likelihood of offending national pride." There are "great dangers" arising from "the frequent attempts at wholesale transfer of American institutions and practices, which may be inappropriate to the local situation." Despite the former caveats, many of these reports concluded that the Middle East was too important to be left to Soviet influence, and thus constituted the backbone of U.S. strategic interests. A strategy that would push for gradual reform and engage local elites was called for. Without explicitly stating the paradox, these reports pose the stark conflict between U.S. ideals, as a "moral force" for the promotion of democracy through "persuasion," a path always fraught with great risks, and the core strategic interests of the United States, both security and economic.

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4 The security archive at George Washington University houses a number of declassified US national security and the Department of State reports, as well as embassy cables, from the 1950s. These reports provide historical evidence about how security and strategic interests drive democracy promotion rhetoric despite the latter's schizophrenic tendencies. The subsequent quotes refer to a declassified report to the National Security Council in April 7, 1952, Washington DC. Available at: <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB78/propaganda%20059.pdf>

The other point to be drawn from the reports' recommendations is that the U.S. push for reform and democracy in the Middle East does not represent a novelty, but rather it is a persistent concern of U.S. foreign policy during different administrations. The Middle East had been the upper most U.S. foreign policy concern since the decline of traditional European powers' influence, culminating in the Truman Doctrine that turned Turkey and Israel into U.S. staunchest allies/ satellites. The Eisenhower Doctrine further enhanced such influence by encouraging Arab conservative regimes to oppose the nationalist policies of Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser as a counter measure to stave off Soviet influence (Yaqub, 2004). However, during the Eisenhower administration, not only did democracy promotion take a back seat since Arab nationalism was perceived as the more urgent threat to the U.S. strategic interests, but the Eisenhower Doctrine miserably failed to align Arab conservative regimes with U.S. official policies, leading to its eventual abandonment by U.S. policy makers at the time (Yaqub, 2005; Hahn, 2006). As Hahn's survey of Arab U.S. relations during that period reveals, the Arab Israeli conflict emerged as a third rail that undermined forging stronger relations with Arab states as a way of containing Soviet inroads in the region, and thus threatened the current U.S. policy of "dual containment" (Hahn, 2004).

The Carter administration's obsession with resolving the Arab Israeli conflict should be understood in this context, that is, U.S. democracy promotion in the Arab world could not be fulfilled without addressing that "third-rail." Carter's efforts bore the fruit of a peace rapprochement between Egypt and Israel upon Anwar Saddat's visit to Tel Aviv. While the demise of "global communism" was conceived to be the strongest indicator for the triumph of democracy, Bush senior's "New World Order" envisioned a

historical moment in which “nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice” (quoted in Diamond, 1992). In short, the first Gulf War did not only usher in Bush senior’s New World Order, and the U.S. ascendancy as the sole world power upon the ashes of the Soviet Union, but also represented a stronger engagement with the Middle East peace process, an opportunity to redraw U.S. interests. Tilting between active democracy promotion, and preserving perennial U.S. interests in a “unipolar” world, G. H. Bush’s administration opted for order and the status quo (Diamond, 1992). Instead of active democracy promotion, Bush’s foreign policy in the Middle East was more preoccupied with the peace process and courting the cooperation of authoritarian regimes, such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, to further the peace prospects (Carothers, 1995).

The intractable tension between democracy promotion and U.S. strategic interests, particularly securing oil flows and Israel’s security, crystallized in the successive peace plans with a consciously limited push for democracy in friendly regimes during the Clinton administration (Hawthorne, 2001). Democracy promotion assumed central status in the Clinton administration’s foreign policy agenda because of its inherent promise of peace, security and cooperation (Harbeson 1998; Carothers, 1995). It was no surprise that Clinton’s national security advisor, Anthony Lake, emphatically insisted in 1993 that “the successor to a doctrine of containment must be a strategy of enlargement -- enlargement of the world’s free community of market democracies” (see Carothers, 1995). In fact, as Carothers (1995) shows, the Clinton team appropriated the “democracy promotion” theme early on in their presidential campaign to underscore G. H. Bush team’s lack of “a vision” both at home and abroad. The Clinton administration laid claim to this agenda

with its fervent support for democracy, its readiness to back it up militarily in regions as diverse as Haiti and sub-Saharan Africa (Harbeson, 1998).

The Middle East has constituted an exception to the democracy promotion rhetoric, as Bill Clinton's push for political reform was moderate and, not unlike its predecessors, sought to balance realistic strategic interests with idealistic rhetoric of democracy promotion (Carothers, 1995). To broker a peace accord, Clinton required the support of traditional U.S. Arab allies, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the Gulf states, most of whom did not warm up to the notion of political opening and democratic reforms. A second caveat that restrained the Clinton democracy promotion agenda was the ever-existing risk that transparent elections would invite "unfriendly," namely Islamist and fundamentalist, political forces into power (Hawthorne, 2001). While a "democracy deficit" Arab world constitutes a long term threat to U.S. interests, "democracy promotion" does not preclude the possibility of destabilizing friendly regimes and thus threaten the U.S. status in the region. The lessons of the Iranian Revolution, the demise of a pro-American authoritarian regime in Iran and the challenge of dealing with a new hostile Iranian government, are neither totally impertinent, nor lost on U.S. foreign policy makers. All these considerations have culminated in what Hawthorne and others call "the democracy dilemma" in the Arab world (Hawthorne, 2001). The perennial paradox that democratic reform entails is best captured in a searing question: "How do you promote reform without undermining key United States interests?" (Hawthorne, 2001). In different terms, when it comes to the Middle East, the Wilsonian ideals of democracy promotion in the Clinton administration had to give way to the realpolitik of Baker and Kissinger (Carothers, 1995).

Two poignant arguments have surfaced from this historical overview. The U.S. democracy promotion drive in the Middle East has consistently been subjected to the fluctuations of strategic interests. Geopolitical security and economic interests override the rhetoric of democracy promotion, regardless of whether the administration was Democratic or Republican. Related to the first argument, the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict has hampered the quest for democracy because authoritarian Arab states' support continues to be fundamental to the resolution of that conflict. While democracy promotion during the Cold War tensions risked bringing nationalist regimes allied with the former USSR, the post-Cold War's democracy efforts have had the undesirable prospect of bringing fundamentalists and Islamic parties to power. From Algeria to Egypt, U.S. administrations did not frown upon the crackdown on local Islamists, if not actually welcomed it by turning a blind eye. After all, stability and security are always assets too important to be jeopardized by the rhetorical overtures of democracy promotion (Ignatieff, 2005).

*ii. Embedded Rationales*

As observed above, the tensions that plague the U.S. democracy promotion agenda, in the Middle East or elsewhere, find their roots beyond the various White House administrations into the history of the United States' rise as a nation. The "exceptional," and often contradictory, import of the conceptualization of "freedom" and "liberty" has always drawn on the Founding Fathers' proclamation that "all men are created equal." As Ignatieff (2005) put it, "American freedom aspires to be universal, but it has always been exceptional because America is the only modern experiment that began in slavery" (p.44). While that proclamation took more than a century to realize its promise at home,



from the Civil War to the Civil Rights, U.S. presidents laid claim to it by exulting in the dream of exporting democracy and freedom abroad (Ignatieff 2005). Historians and political scientists have underscored this deep tension, relating it to a resulting fractured foreign policy identity that has regularly drifted between isolationism and engagement, if not military intervention, in world affairs.

The policy rifts between these divergent forces of isolationism versus engagement in U.S. foreign policy, and the discourse of democracy promotion, parallel an intellectual debate among international relations scholars, especially among realist, liberal, and constructivist schools of thought (Walt, 1998; Snyder, 2004). For realists like Morgenthau (1960) and Waltz (1979), foreign policy and international relations are driven by states' scrambling over power and self-interest in an anarchical world system. Interest and power are culturally and politically driven, and as a consequence inconstant, whereas states remain rational actors whose actions cannot be justified by moral considerations alone (Morgenthau, 1960, pp.5-10). Because conflict as an ever-present possibility looms large in realists' theorizing, security maximization guarantees survival of states. Liberal and constructivist approaches to foreign policy highlight cooperation, the role of international organizations, and a value-based perspective on international relations as a whole. They argue that power is socially constructed, for "Anarchy is What States Make of It" (Wendt, 1992), and the behavior of states should be understood within an "an intersubjective social context" of "meaningful norms" (Hopf, 1998). In simple terms, realists give primacy to interests as a guarantor of security whereas liberals and constructivists privilege values and focus on the "absent interests" of the state, that is, issues of knowledge, culture and identity. Liberal perspectives in U.S. foreign policy

have traditionally engaged with the world community and promote democracy as a means of security.

In addition to helping install democratic governance and promoting liberty as a universal calling of the free world, a similar reasoning among liberal scholars/foreign policy practitioners draws on the premises that (a) democracies do not wage war on one another, and, as a consequence, (b) no democracy can survive amidst warring dictatorships (Hendrickson & Tucker, 2005). The latter premise has become known as “the democratic peace” theory. Hobbes’ “realist” vision of the anarchical nature of the international system, the lack of peaceful relations among states, can be eliminated. The perennial conflict of state interests can be resolved through advancing a democratic system of governance, economic interdependence and the degree of involvement in the fabric of international organizations (Russett & Oneal, 2001). The “vicious circles” in world politics can be dented by the creation of “virtuous circles,” where peaceful and cooperative interactions dominate international relations. Russett and Oneal (2001) predicate these “virtuous circles” on three “liberal behaviors”: “the promotion of democracy,” “bolstering of national economies,” and “the construction of a thick web of international institutions” (pp. 24-27). As some claimed democracies never wage war against one another (e.g. Babst, 1972), the “democratic peace” principle holds the promise of the survival of democracies and peaceful coexistence through active involvement, instead of isolationism, in world affairs. These traditions highlight the paradoxes of democracy promotion whether in the Bush Doctrine or the GMEI, and in turn illuminate the inherent tensions in international broadcasting.

### 3- Highlighting the Paradoxes

#### *i. The Bush Doctrine*

The recent rhetorical context and tenor of U.S. international broadcasting were set right after the terrorist attacks on the U.S, the launch of the war on terror campaign, and culminated in the Bush doctrine. The rhetorical shadow of the Cold War was already cast. Bush was unequivocal with his ‘either-with-us-or-against’ us warning:

Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.

The starkly Manichean options set forth in Bush’s declaration gave no quarters to dissenting views. The previous discussion of public diplomacy, democracy promotion and the resurrection of international broadcasting, as the invigorated arm of US foreign policy, converge in the enunciated doctrine of intervention and pre-emption commonly known as “the Bush Doctrine.”<sup>5</sup> “The National Security Strategy of the U.S.” begins thusly: “The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom—and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise.” It announced Bush’s vision and set a rhetorical threshold that would be reinforced in later presidential speeches and addresses.

During his State of the Union address of 2002, Bush clearly outlined his vision of the U.S. struggle against “Islamist terrorists” and their sponsors. Borrowing from John F. Kennedy’s “long war” against the Soviets, fighting terrorism is also a long struggle, but it

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<sup>5</sup> As Sarah Palin’s, the Republican vice presidential candidate in 2008, halting response to the issue showed, the “Bush Doctrine” has become a source of frustration for analysts, difficult to pin down since it was first coined by the neo-conservative ideologue, Charles Krauthammer in 2000 (Krauthammer, 2008).

is not limited in time or space. In fact, the long struggle against these terrorists, or “Islamofascists” in the lingo of the new times, would go beyond organizations to lump their main state sponsors as the “Axis of Evil.” Reminiscent of Reagan’s chosen epithet for the Soviet Union as the “Evil Empire,” Bush’s rationale was that

States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger (Bush, 2002).

The vision of a threatening enemy lurking in the shadows, amassing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to wreak havoc on the country’s strategic interests, citizens and allies, constituted a justification for action, namely intervening with forceful means, to preempt and prevent the “grave and growing danger.” America’s “ultimate goal,” Bush concluded in his Second Inaugural Address, was “ending tyranny in our world.” Whether defending or critiquing the Bush Doctrine, commentators were not at a loss to spot the vision of the United States as an empire implicitly espoused in the Doctrine (Krauthammer 2002/2003; Rosen, 2003, Jervis, 2004). Jervis sums up the Bush Doctrine’s four main elements this way:

a strong belief in the importance of a state’s domestic regime in determining its foreign policy and the related judgment that this is an opportune time to transform international politics; the perception of great threats that can be defeated only by new and vigorous policies, most notably preventive war; a willingness to act unilaterally when necessary; and, as both a cause and a summary of these beliefs, an overriding sense that peace and stability require the United States to assert its primacy in world politics.

While the context of the Bush Doctrine is vital, beating the propaganda and policy drums to the war on Iraq, its hegemonic vision was spelled out earlier in the U.S. National

Strategy of 2002 (Chomsky, 2004). It was a rationale for the invasion of Iraq, the first member of the “Axis of Evil.”

How the Bush Doctrine blends liberal and neoconservative idealism is testified by the Wilsonian echoes of freedom as a universal value that the U.S. is destined to promote in the far reaches of the world. Arming those Wilsonian ideals with Teddy Roosevelt’s “big stick,” neo-conservatism found its calling in the Bush Doctrine. It was abundantly clear, the proponents argued, that favoring multi-lateral, diplomatic channels would only shackle the United States’ hands when its unprecedented military power could do the job of safeguarding/promoting the national interest. For them, the threat of terrorism made the argument against using military force as a means of curbing that threat, and preemptive intervention, moot. Unilateralism seized the day over multilateralism. Unilateralism makes pre-emptive force an attractive asset in foreign policy, if only to call it diplomacy with a “big stick” (Jervis, 2004). That is the heart of the Bush doctrine, the neoconservative’s enthusiastic advocacy of the doctrine, and the ensuing war against Iraq.

It was these idealist claims clothed in the garb of realism that distinguished the Bush Doctrine. In fact, one of the neoconservative commentators, Charles Krauthammer waxed over this embryonic relationship, declaring that “the Bush doctrine is, essentially, a synonym for neoconservative foreign policy” (Krauthammer, 2005). Neo-conservatism’s Catholic marriage to the Bush doctrine, if not actually spawning it, lies at its essential belief in military supremacy, instead of the traditional balance of power that realists espouse. As Schmidt and Williams (2007) perceptively argue, such belief in military “hyper-power” preceded the Bush administration. William Kristol and Robert

Kagan were adamant in 1996 that “American hegemony is the only reliable defense against a breakdown of peace and international order.” Advocating U.S. hegemony, through military omnipotence, was in the works since 1992, as a secret memo leaked to the press indicated (Schmidt & Williams, 2007). The Bush Doctrine catapulted the neoconservative vision into the open, working rhetorically through the conducive political environment enabled by the “war on terrorism” campaign and the lethal potency of Al-Qaida.

As a policy response, with its combination of force and the messianic democracy promotion talk, the Bush doctrine had paradoxically drawn on both realist and idealist strains of U.S. foreign policy thought. The fact of the matter is that many influential realists tended to disagree with the hubris of empire oozing out of its prescriptions (Jervis, 2004). With very few noted exceptions, the realist establishment was aghast at the newly fangled democracy promotion agenda, preemptive/preventive use of force, and the wild eyed idealist discourse about freedom as a universal destiny that the doctrine espouses. While Henry Kissinger and very few other realists were tacit about their support of the doctrine, the majority of realists from both conservative and liberal aisles, such as Brent Scowcroft, a veteran of the Ford and Bush I administrations, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter’s former national security advisor, found it necessary to take their dissent to the airwaves and declare the doctrine an apostasy in U.S. foreign policy. Realists’ ultimate revolt against the doctrine was encapsulated in their vehement opposition to invading Iraq; it was loud and clear in 33 signatories, well known scholars of international relations, on a paid advertisement in *The New York Times* (NYT), “War

with Iraq is Not in America's National Interest" (*NYT OpEd*, 09/26/2002). The ad's preamble argues that:

As scholars of international security affairs, we recognize that war is sometimes necessary to ensure our national security or other vital interests. We also recognize that Saddam Hussein is a tyrant and that Iraq has defied a number of U.N. resolutions. But military force should be used only when it advances U.S. national interests. War with Iraq does not meet this standard.

Instead of pre-emption and military intervention, the signatories advocated "vigilant containment." The advertisement is noteworthy as a testament to the unprecedented rift between these realist scholars of foreign policy affairs and the Bush administration. Iraq constituted the first test of the Bush Doctrine, and perhaps, as some have argued, its death knell (Kolodziej, 2006). In an "explanation and evaluation" of the doctrine, Jervis, one of the signatories, concludes: "I believe it to be the product of idiosyncratic and structural factors, both a normal reaction to an abnormal situation and a policy that is likely to bring grief to the world and the United States" (Jervis, 2004).

The Bush Doctrine, while it has ebbed from current U.S. foreign policy debates, it has nevertheless served as a rationale for the invasion of Iraq (Jervis, 2004; Kolodziej, 2006). The subsequent entanglement of U.S. foreign policy arsenal and military forces in Iraq made another venture less likely. But there is no denying that in the larger scheme of things, the Bush Doctrine set a model for how to deal with other rogue regimes, whether members of the "Axis of Evil," or those courting that class of states, at least at the time of its currency as policy response. No wonder that people warned against invading Iran whenever the Bush administration hawks, such as Vice President Cheney, ratcheted their belligerent rhetoric against Iran's nuclear intentions. It is this vision that gives credence

to the argument that “a predator becomes more dangerous when wounded,” according to critics of U.S. foreign policy (Chomsky, 2007).

Among the consequences of the rhetorical overtures and overreach of the Bush Doctrine is the lack of consensus it has generated among the elites, both in Washington and outside the U.S. shores. In a 2005 symposium organized by the neo-conservative magazine *Commentary*, the absence of consensus was the hallmark thread among the responses of 36 “leading thinkers” (*Commentary*, November 2005, p. 21).

Disenchantment abounded from Paul Berman, who characterized it as “incoherent nationalism” that ought to be abolished, to the late William F. Buckley Jr., who reluctantly admitted that he “do[es] not count [him]self a supporter of the Bush Doctrine, though [he] count[s] [him]self as a supporter of Bush” (p. 24). More significantly, the Bush Doctrine was anomalous in unwarily serving to discredit the administration’s zealous democracy promotion rhetoric among large swaths of nations and populations. Despite the recognition that it potentially did not constitute a historical anachronism in foreign policy chronicles (e.g. Cohen, 2005; Ferguson, 2004), the Bush Doctrine still limited the scope and effectiveness of the administration’s persuasive powers. As an outgrowth of the Bush Doctrine, the White House’s democratization plan, known as “The Greater Middle East Initiative,” experienced similar setbacks and fractures, as the ensuing discussion illustrates.

### *ii. The "Greater Middle East Initiative"*

The Bush Doctrine took its first crashing test in the Iraq venture, but its second main test-balloon occurred as the Bush administration announced an equally bolder vision to reshape an unwieldy swath of the world, a vision that is alternatively known as



the Broader Middle East Initiative.<sup>6</sup> While it has not listed all the countries under the dominion of such initiative, Bush's "vision" to re-make the Middle East arose out of his distaste that U.S. foreign policy had had a history of accommodating tyrants and unsavory regimes with a clear history of human rights and democracy violations. In his Remarks at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, President Bush was not shy to observe that "60 years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe, because in the long run stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty" (Bush, 2003). As part of the administration's "forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East," it held liberty and democracy as a correct response to Islamists' terror and extremism (Sanger, 2003). The events of 9/11 supported the belief that "the root causes of Islamic extremism lies in the repressive nature of the regimes that populate the Middle East" (Hobson, 2005). Not only failed economic policies, the abysmal human development record among the region's countries (UNDP, 2002), but also the fact that the regimes have been sliding on their commitments to democratization are all factors that feed extremism, disenfranchisement and terrorism (Zakaria, 2003). In short, democratization of the Greater Middle East region sought to balance, at least rhetorically, the preemptive military focus in the Bush Doctrine.

A closer examination of the GMEI offers insight into its broader claims as an extension of the rhetorical war that has enveloped international broadcasting, an extension evidently pronounced in drawing on the Cold War as a lesson to be emulated.

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<sup>6</sup> The terms, "Greater Middle East" and the "Broader Middle East," are inherently problematic and thus politically and geographically imprecise. They have been used to refer to countries as diverse as Pakistan, in South East Asia, and Mauritania, in Western Africa.

While Bush's recrimination of past administrations, Republicans and Democrats alike, for their "sixty years" of accommodating and appeasing tyrants, his "forward strategy" shadowed Ronald Reagan's 1982 declaration in England that Soviet styled Communism would be doomed to failure. His challenge to Iranian and Syrian presidents to democratize their countries echoed Reagan's call on Gorbachev, the then USSR's president, to "bring down" that wall. The Cold War analogies are made explicit, and the freedom/liberty emphasis as a historical "destiny" for the U.S. to promote is reiterated endlessly throughout the speech. In this "forward strategy" address before the National Endowment for Democracy, not strikingly, the words liberty and freedom are repeated 54 times (liberty 18; freedom 36).

During the address Bush was not oblivious to the critics of his democratization agenda for the region. What Donald Rumsfeld denigrated as "old Europe," he predicted, might be leery of the "forward strategy" for democracy and freedom. The same leery reception had met Reagan's declaration, he reminded his audience, during the former president's declaration that freedom was on the march: "According to one editorial of the time, 'It seems hard to be a sophisticated European and also an admirer of Ronald Reagan'" (Bush, 2003). But he invoked the lessons of history and how the U.S. sacrificed blood and treasure for the sake freedom: the world wars and the "liberation" of Eastern European populations. For "Every nation has learned, or should have learned, an important lesson: Freedom is worth fighting for, dying for, and standing for -- and the advance of freedom leads to peace" (Bush, 2003). He demolished his presumed critics who had long sacrificed supporting "freedom" and "democracy" for the sake of stability.

The Middle East should not be the foreign policy exception it had been to U.S. support for reform abroad, he argued:

In many nations of the Middle East -- countries of great strategic importance -- democracy has not yet taken root. And the questions arise: Are the peoples of the Middle East somehow beyond the reach of liberty? Are millions of men and women and children condemned by history or culture to live in despotism? Are they alone never to know freedom, and never even to have a choice in the matter? I, for one, do not believe it. I believe every person has the ability and the right to be free.

And true enough, the high minded rhetoric and the rhetorical tool kit that Bush amassed to pronounce his vision was echoed in the applause heard throughout the room. How about the applause around the world? Or was there any outside the confines of U.S. foreign policy establishment? How was the Greater Middle East Initiative received by outsiders?

Bush's speech articulated his new vision for the Greater Middle East, "the forward strategy" for freedom in the Greater Middle East, and succeeded in performing a rhetorical coup d'état. It was widely acclaimed by the usual suspects, the neoconservatives, who declared it was the "only realistic option" for the United States in its fight against terrorism. However, a catalogue of press accounts divulged mixed reviews and reception of the initiative. One enthusiastic response was from Human Rights Watch's director, Tom Malinowski, who instantly noted that "They [the Bush administration] have ended the Mideast exception to American human rights policy.... It is welcome moral clarity in the service of a policy that still lacks moral authority." The moral clarity came out of Bush's willingness to recognize and identify recalcitrant U.S.

allies in the region, such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia, those who had demonstrated their aversion to genuine political reforms time and again.

The high-flown rhetoric of President Bush's vision got what it had not bargained for, a foiled test, when it translated the vision into a working document prior to the G-8 summit to be held in Sea Island, Georgia in June 8-10, 2005. The Greater Middle East Initiative document, as leaked to the London-based Arabic daily *Al-Hayat*, created furious consternation among Arab governments and indignation at not being involved in the process (Sharp, 2005). The draft plan

called on G8 members to provide technical assistance to monitor elections, sponsor training programs for independent journalists, increase funding for non-governmental organizations, establish a Middle East development bank, and provide training to women interested in running for elective office in countries with upcoming parliamentary elections (p.2).

In short, while the draft plan sought to translate Bush's vision of the Greater Middle East, it fell way short of the initial democratization rhetoric outlined in his speech earlier.

According to Ottaway and Carothers, who have extensively written on democratization in the Middle East, the draft plan offered no novel, or "path breaking," solutions to the "democracy deficit" of the region (2004). Most of its prescriptions, if not all, reflected existing U.S. assistance programs (e.g. Middle East Partnership Initiative) or European aid programs (e.g. the Barcelona Process) (Ottaway & Carothers, 2004; Sharp, 2005).

The main problem was the absence of sticking security issues, notably addressing the Arab Israeli conflict, their assessment concluded (Ottaway & Carothers, 2004). They argued that "The attempt to launch a new initiative without discussing the peace process is a triumph of abstract logic over political reality" (p.5). The generational confrontation

of U.S. foreign policy that Bush's vision promised seemed all but lost. The stark warning is that "The Bush administration could end up with the worst of both worlds—a sweeping initiative that fails to challenge the governments of the Middle East, yet offends and alienates them in the process" (p.7). It was the neo-cons high-mindedness giving way to the realists' modesty.

Nor could this modesty appease Arab regimes, or rekindle the "lukewarm" support of European allies. The Jordanian Foreign Minister, Marwan Muasher, expressed his government's opposition in no uncertain terms to *The New York Times* when he declared that "Our objective is for this document never to see the light." Saudi Arabia expressed its fears that democratic reform espoused in the GMEI might wreak havoc on their fragile state; Prince Saud-al-Faisal, Saudi foreign minister, used the Soviet Union's experience with the Helsinki Accords to drive home his own government's distaste: "The results on the Soviet Union we all know. It was broken up, it suffered economic deprivations, its people [were] the unhappiest people for at least two decades. So if this is presented as a lure to the Arab countries, we really don't see much lure in the Helsinki accords."<sup>7</sup> A columnist for the Egyptian weekly, *Al-Ahram*, dug deeper into history to conjure up the colonial ghosts to claim that "There is no difference between what was said by the British, French, Belgian, and Dutch colonizers...and what the modern colonial empires are saying."<sup>8</sup> The European allies did not have very flattering words either, as they emphasized gradualism and "genuine cooperation" (Joschka Fischer, German foreign minister) to avoid "impos[ing] ready-made solutions from the outside" (Dominique de Villepin, French foreign minister).

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<sup>7</sup> More of these reactions are listed in Ottaway & Carothers (2004).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Hundreds of editorials in the Arab press left no qualms about Arab intellectuals' disagreement with, and utter disregard for, Bush's GMEI. The new democratization wave was widely derided in the Arab press as being window-dressing, "smoke screens," hypocritical, and fits the 'do-as-I-say-not-as-I-do' attitude. Baroudi (2007) catalogued dozens of reactions from the editorial pages and opinion pieces in Arab newspapers in the months following the leak of Bush's initiative. Among those quoted at length in Baroudi (2007) is Ghassan Salameh's most "articulate and thorough-going critiques of US foreign policy to emanate from the eastern side of the Mediterranean" (p.402). Mr. Salamah argued that the GMEI's is foiled by the lack of credibility of the U.S. in the region, its support of authoritarian regimes, and interventionist policies were stripping it of the moral authority required to carry out such an ambitious enterprise. Indeed, Salamah argued,

Whoever is asking us to make a quick transition to the rule of law, democratic life and respect for human rights should be above all reproach, like Caesar's wife ... A superpower that calls for respecting human rights but permits its troops to act the way they did at Abou Gharib has no moral authority, a superpower that calls on us to inhale the sweat breezes of freedom but prevents the application of the Geneva protocols on the detainees at Guantanamo has no moral authority, a superpower that calls for respect international law but allows itself to sidestep the opinion of the majority of members of the Security Council and refuses to sign the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto accords has no moral authority... a superpower that believes Israel has the right to assassinate one Palestinian leader after the other and build a separation walls that cuts through Palestinian villages and groves has no moral authority (cited in Baroudi, 2007, p. 402).

Similar sentiments were echoed by dozens of Arab commentators, eventually leading the U.S. administration to scrap the initiative. The hostile reception of the administration's GMEI betrayed "the closed and negative image of the United States that particularly affected perceptions of U.S. Middle East policy" (Baroudi, 2007).

The "closed and negative image" of the U.S. is broadly due to four major factors. Baroudi (2007) outlined these broad factors:

First, the United States is in no position to "lecture" the world on democracy, given the defects of its own system and its aggressive international conduct. Second, US Middle East policy is guided by interests (Israel's security, access to inexpensive oil, and fighting international terrorism) rather than principles or ideals (promotion of democracy, rule of law and human rights). Third, US rhetoric about democracy conceals sinister plans for exerting hegemony over the Arab and Islamic Worlds in order to serve US (and Israeli) interests. Fourth, US policymakers do not understand conditions in the Arab world and in particular the Arab attachment to Islam and/or Arabism (p. 391).

More significantly, the near unanimity of Arab intellectuals' and leaders' in condemning Bush's democratization initiative exacerbated the United States' already worsening image, tattered by the war in Iraq, the Abu Ghraib scandalous revelations, and Guantanamo's violation of international law. Arab editorialists frequently reiterated the charge that GMEI's prescriptions willfully ignore the Arab Israeli conflict (Ottaway & Carothers, 2004). Even democracy activists in the region were cynical about the GMEI's latest professions, and they often distanced themselves from the U.S. plan. Democracy promotion à l'Américain was toxic. The editorials' searing attack could not but seep into the populations of the Middle East at large in a new demonstration of how foreign policy rhetorical overtures were shifting the space of international broadcasting.

**Conclusion:** The goal of this chapter was to demarcate the rhetorical landscape within which Al-Hurra Television is positioned. This goal informs the broader analysis of how Arab audiences perceive Al-Hurra’s influence on their attitudes toward political reform in the region. Beyond domestic calls and pressures, the political reform agenda has been discussed from the perspective of the U.S. foreign policy dictates and historical contingencies, manifestly outlined in the rhetoric of Bush’s democracy promotion. This chapter has rooted these rhetorical tensions in the context of foreign policy schools of thought, realists versus liberals. The rhetorical tensions and ruptures weighing down the Bush administration’s initiatives have all along plagued U.S. Mideast policy. The Bush Doctrine and the Greater Middle East Initiative are two recent experiments in the democracy promotion enterprise. Democracy promotion rhetoric has drawn on “idealist” strains in U.S. history, and oftentimes eclipses the geostrategic interests and dilemmas facing U.S. Mideast policy, namely the Israeli Palestinian problem, the threat of Islamist extremism, and securing the oil resources. Those tensions have made the discourse of democracy promotion look like a suspect rhetorical ploy in the Arab world.

Al-Hurra Television appears doomed to swim against the currents of Arab public opinion, confronting the humungous task of succoring a deteriorating perception of U.S. Mideast policy. Rhetorical tensions and fractures in the discourse of democracy promotion infuse audience attitudes toward Al-Hurra Television, and their perceptions of its influence. With these considerations in mind, this research project has sought out a non-traditional perspective to study Al-Hurra Television’s influence on Arab public opinion, the Third Person Effect theory. The shifting paradigm of media effects research fully tackles these complicated “effects” of Al-Hurra Television in the Arab world. Arab



viewers have been exposed to both media content and those rhetorical overtures, with its potential echoes in Al-Hurra Television coverage. How do the media's perceived influence on public opinion work in this rhetorically complex environment?

## **Chapter III**

### **Reviewing Media Influence and Public Opinion: Shifting Paradigms**

Media influence theories and concepts, particularly those arguing for the mass media's indirect influence on public opinion, constitute an alternative and promising research framework to tackle the presumed strategic effects of international broadcasting. With respect to this dissertation, casting a critical light on Arab audiences' perceptions of the influence of U.S. international broadcasting in the Middle East leads to illuminating the indirect effects of Al-Hurra Television on Arab public opinion at large. To reiterate, by international broadcasting I refer to cross border mediated communication that a government establishes in its effort to target foreign audiences and influence the attitudes and/or change the behavior of those foreign publics. Price (2003) calls international broadcasting "the elegant term for a complex combination of State-sponsored news, information and entertainment directed at a people outside the sponsoring State's boundaries" (p.72). International broadcasters have traditionally competed in a "market of loyalties," seeking to affect the media scapes of other nations with the ostensible goal of democracy promotion (Price, 2003, p.91) or democracy building (Carothers, 1999). The previous sections reviewed the history of international broadcasting, its impact, tactics and goals. The events of September 11 have "transformed" the traditional functions of international broadcasting, creating a discussion among U.S. policy-makers regarding the "mission" of these broadcasting efforts and the desired outcomes, a discussion that has all but been resolved. Nevertheless, the new broadcasters, mainly Radio Sawa and Al-Hurra Television that target Arab public opinion, have been the clearest signal of the huge impact of those events on U.S. international broadcasting.

While the impact of U.S. international broadcasting on Arab public opinion might be controversial, any attempt to comprehend and study these effects inevitably falls within the realm of how the mass media generally affect public opinion. The old assumptions of direct and uniform effects of the mass media on public opinion, extrapolated from the discredited “Magic Bullet” theory and research, have long been replaced by a communication paradigm of media influence based on limited, indirect and long term effects. The following review presents, first, a theoretical framework with the main concepts and hypotheses driving the indirect or perceived influence of the media in general. Specifically, this chapter examines literature on third person effect, hostile media, and persuasive press influence.

### **1. Perceived or Indirect Influence: A Conceptual Framework**

An extant body of mass communications research and theory has documented the influence of the mass media on public opinion (e.g. Cohen 1963). These researchers argue that public opinion management is primarily implemented through the type of news information and how that information is presented; that is, media priming, agenda-setting and (news) framing. Broadly speaking, agenda setting refers to the role of the news media in raising the importance and salience level of specific issues to the forefront of the public’s agenda. Succinctly put, the mass media “may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*” (Cohen, 1963). Thus, media priming specifically “refers to the tendency of audience members to evaluate their political leaders on the basis of those particular events and issues given attention in recent news reports” (Price & Tewksbury 1997, p.175). Media coverage appears to provide cues for their audiences that instigate certain

attitudes, engender particular evaluations and political judgments. In a study of priming effects, Krosnick and Kinder (1990) found out that people's opinions about President Reagan, and evaluations of his performance tended to be dominated by the President's performance in foreign policy rather than domestic issues, a tendency that was primed by the recent media coverage of the Iran Contra Affair (Krosnick & Kinder, 1990).

While interest in the media's influence on the public has been preoccupied with traditional media effects literature, there appear to be several directions that have pushed the door for a broader conceptualization that considers the complicated and contradictory ways people perceive the news media. In other terms, research has recently moved to account for media perception as an explanatory mechanism for public opinion formation. Three interrelated concepts, third person effect, hostile media and persuasive press are representative of this indirect media influence paradigm.

### *i. Third Person Effect*

Succinctly put, when queried about the media's impact, "Individuals may overestimate the impact that mass media exert on others [third person], underestimate media effects on the self, or both," creating what is known as the Third Person Effect (Perloff, 2002, p.490). The underlying logic of the Third-Person Effect hypothesis, the exaggeration of the media's impact on others versus the self, appears to be both psychologically and socially driven (Davison, 1983). Paul, Salwen and Dupagne (2000) suggest two seminal psychological theories underpinning and rationalizing Third Person Effect that emerge from a meta-analysis of the related literature. First, attribution theory, i.e. the internal processes people employ to justify the behavior of the other, is a major theoretical stream that first fed the Third Person Effect (Paul, Salwen & Dupagne, 2000).

This theory argues that “there is a pervasive tendency for actors to attribute their actions to situational requirements, whereas observers tend to attribute the same actions to stable personal dispositions” (Jones & Nisbett, 1972, p. 80, cited in Paul, Salwen & Dupagne, 2000, p.60). In relevance to media messages and related behaviors, for example, a person (actor) might proclaim that he or she watches a “lot” of crime television dramas because they are frequently scheduled (a situational alibi) while other people (being observed) watch the same programs because they are disposed to enjoy violence (a personal disposition).

“Biased optimism,” the second main psychological theory refers to the notion that people are more likely to minimize any harmful or negative influences (exerted by media exposure) on themselves due to self esteem and social desirability among other factors (Brosius & Engel, 1996). Operating at the level of negative media effects on the self versus the other, “biased” or “unrealistic” optimism was found to relate to “generalized negative attitudes towards media effects” as well (Brosius & Engel, 1996). When the effects are deemed positive, research suggests, people tend to profess themselves as very influenced by those benign or positive messages, a level of indirect influence termed a first person effect (Paul, Salwen & Dupagne, 2000). Brosius and Engel (1996) suggest that the scope of Third Person Effect is also rooted in the “impersonal impact” of mediated messages. That is, as long as the psychological distance between the first person or respondent and the “third person” is large, the effect’s size will be commensurate with that distance (Brosius & Engel, 1996). As many studies have demonstrated, both attribution and biased or unrealistic optimism theories delineate the operating mechanisms and principles behind Third Person Effect.

Sociological influences on the theory relate to the previous discussion of perceived distance, the anomaly between the “self” and the “other.” In a study of political attack ads, Paek and her collaborators conceptualized the third person effect as a “social judgment” moderated by “social distance” (Paek et al, 2005). Social distance was found to operate as “a multidimensional concept” composed of actual geographic distance, difference in political values, “perceived dissimilarity, and demographic heterogeneity” (Paek et al, 2005, p. 161). Provision of information about these elements affecting social distance impacts the extent of Third Person Effect (p. 162). Racial factors were also found to maximize negative media effects projected on others (David, Morrison, Johnson & Ross, 2002). That is, when the “third person” is from a different racial or ethnic background, respondents tend to overestimate the effects of media messages on that “different” other.

Cultural and political influences have been suggested to provide a different account for how third-person effect operates. Gunther and Hwa (1996) conducted their study in Singapore with these theoretical caveats in mind. The “Asian” conception of the self, they argued, is more “integrated” since Asians do not tend to isolate their perceptions about others from perceptions about the self. The political culture of a nation is another caveat. An openly democratic culture encourages freedom of expression while a repressive political system might inhibit that freedom, if not punish it (Gunther & Hwa, 1996). A consequence of these political and cultural determinants is that a third person effect could be analyzed from a different layer. That is, as Gunther and Hwa (1996) remark in a footnote, “while [the non-Western conception of the self] may reduce the

likelihood that people will see themselves as different from others, it may increase the likelihood that people will react to perceived influences on others” (p. 250).

Individual traits of audience members have been found to interact with third person effect. Price, Huang and Tewksbury (1997) researched the relationship between third person effect and individuals’ media orientations, the schemas. Their inquiry is based on an established research body that elucidated how the media orientations of audiences, such as information seeking behavior and motivations, general skepticism about the news media in general, affect the impact of the media on these audiences. Three specific schemas constituted the focus of their study: “beliefs about the *power* of the media to persuade; beliefs about *bias* in the news; and beliefs about the *vulnerability* of the audience to persuasive media impact,” which could explain larger third person effects, overestimation of the media’s impact on others (Price, Huang & Tewksbury, 1997, p. 528). Additionally, they looked at audience’s motivations or uses of the news media, particularly surveillance of the environment and entertainment, as predictors of the perceived impact of the media on one self (first person effect). While the predictive power of the variables appears to vary greatly, Price, Huang and Tewksbury found “clear evidence that political dynamics can underlie third-person effects,” especially in news that have a clear group interest (p.534). The relationship between media use for surveillance or entertainment appears to be somewhat unclear and contradictory. The authors conclude that “situational specificity” may have a lot to do with the influence of individual differences on third person effect.



## *ii. Theoretical Linkages*

A third person effect, the perception that the media have a greater influence on others, can lead audiences to use these perceptions of the media to infer the climate of public opinion in society at large. Gunther and Christen (1999) call this quasi-statistical sense “persuasive press inference,” that is, people may simply form an idea about what others are thinking based on their perceptions of the media content they assume others are getting” (p. 277). Audiences extrapolate the climate of public opinion in accordance with the media coverage they are exposed to, equating it with their sense of how slanted media coverage is (Gunther, 1998). Gunther and Christen (1999) explained the intuitive assumptions behind the persuasive press inference. While people tend to use the media to survey the public opinion environment, their own limited sample of media use is likely to produce a biased view of other people’s consumption of the media.

A number of experimental studies suggested that the perceived slant of the news is “a robust predictor” of perceived public opinion (Gunther & Christen, 2002, p. 178). Gunther and Christen (1999) exposed participants to news stories, one about bovine growth hormone to increase milk production in cattle, and the second about Congressional proposals to cut funding for college loan programs. Variations of the story manipulated either the “slant” or the “base rate” information cues. Results of the study suggested a strong effect of the perceived media content on the participants’ sense of public opinion. Gunther and his colleagues examined the persuasive press inference in a number of studies dealing with a range of contexts, from environmental and health issues, to genetically modified foods and physician-assisted suicide. In all these experiments, participants based their estimation of public opinion sentiment in accordance with the

manipulated slant inserted in the news stories they read (Gunther & Christen, 1999). Further, the perceived public opinion through influence from the mass media can significantly be complicated when people perceive media coverage as “hostile” to their point of view, an effect labeled as “hostile media effect” (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985).

Generally, hostile media perception refers to the tendency among partisans to view news coverage of issues as biased, favoring their contrasting point of view. Regardless of the actual bias of news coverage and content, research on the “hostile media effect,” first documented in Vallone et al. (1985), found out that ideological partisanship and political biases greatly account for the presence of hostile media effect (Perloff, 1989; Vallone et al., 1985). Hostile media effect is best illustrated in how liberals and conservatives view the U.S. mainstream media’s coverage of each side’s political agenda. The story plot is all too familiar with both partisans lampooning the news media for what they perceive as “bias” and “hostility” to their ideals. Conservative political ideologues and activists tend to perceive the news media as “liberal,” in the sense of promoting a “liberal” agenda, providing a favorable coverage of Democrats, while demonizing conservatives. Liberals, on the other hand, do not fail to argue that mainstream media have toed the Bush administration’s line for a long time, and have by no means favored liberals’ causes. What is important in this phenomenon is a perception divide between the two camps, each perceiving the news coverage to be hostile to their interests and political causes, regardless of the “actual” biases of the content.

Aside from the example, research on this perceptual bias registered a stronger “hostile media effect” when it employs high involvement and controversial issues in a

mass media context (Perloff, 1989; Vallone et al., 1985). For instance, Perloff (1989) and Vallone et al. (1985) exposed their participants from pro-Arab and pro-Israeli students to the controversial issue of the Arab Israeli conflict and how it is covered in the news media. Both studies reached similar conclusions in that participants from each side on the conflict perceived news coverage to be unfair to their views and biased to the other side. Vallone et al. (1985) suggested two psychological mechanisms to explain the tendency of partisans to view the media as hostile, or unfair, to their viewpoints. A cognitive mechanism permits partisans to evaluate the arguments and the issues in accordance with their set of beliefs, judging that the media's account is largely biased against them. Participants highly knowledgeable about the issue tend to exhibit a larger hostile media effect. The perceptual bias, the other explanatory mechanism, refers to the "hue" and the tone of the coverage, exhibiting differences along partisan lines. Even in the recollection of the same information, participants tend to remember the opposing arguments and exaggerate their frequency in the coverage. Perloff (1989) concluded that the news coverage of the Arab Israeli conflict did not change the attitudes of the partisans, those who have a strong feeling, and an entrenched position regarding the issue. The level of involvement in the issue was demonstrably related to the extent of the perceptual bias (Perloff, 1989).

Amongst the controversial aspects of the "hostile media" hypothesis remains the fact that a larger body of literature from psychology indicating that people tend to interpret information in a manner that conforms to their beliefs, avoiding cognitive dissonance, contradicts the "perceptual bias" of hostile media effect (Vallone et al., 1985; Gunther & Schmitt, 2004). In addressing this apparent contradiction with other theories,

Gunther and Schmitt (2004) explained that audience members tend to evaluate or perceive the influence of information in line with their perception of its “reach,” the intended audience the information is designed to target (p. 4). A news column has a larger reach than, say, a classroom essay. Hence, the news column is conceivably more influential and is likely to induce a hostile media effect, and augment the perceptual bias, in the respondents. Gunther and Schmitt (2004) explained this rationale through an experiment where partisans on the genetically modified foods were exposed to stimulus (identical) information labeled either as a news article (media source) or a college student essay (non-media source). The results of their field experiment suggested that partisans systematically exhibit a perceptual bias, and perceive the media as hostile to their views when the media cover issues these partisans care about. Predictably, the hostile media effect tends to be more pronounced and motivated by the consideration of the media’s wide reach, a perception of its influence on others.

One of the limitations of research on hostile media effect remains its focus in experimental conditions on partisans and controversial issues, especially those related to the Middle East, as well as the assumption of “neutrality” in the news. In an experimental study, Giner-Sorolla and Chaiken (1994) could not find a strong hostile media effect because the college students recruited for the study were not very partisan, and the issue was not highly involving. Alternative studies that addressed these shortcomings indicated that the hostile media effect is not as uniform as the previous review might have suggested. For instance, Gunther and Christen (2002) and Gunther et al (2001) brought attention to the concept of “relative hostile media perception” to expand the theory beyond the “neutral” assumption of news coverage predominating earlier research.

“Relative hostile media perception,” the partisans’ likelihood to perceive news coverage as more hostile to their beliefs than the opposing groups, even though the news is slanted, was found. Using a national sample of adults, their study also expanded the presence of hostile media effect to include non-partisan audience members although a stronger effect remained more likely among the highly involved participants (Gunther & Christen, 2002).

As processes of indirect influence, third person effect, hostile media effects, and the persuasive press influence share the audiences’ perception of media content as being disagreeable, unfavorable, to their beliefs, and negatively affect other people but not themselves. Instead of “assimilation,” identifying with the news media, audiences actually express a “contrast” effect (Gunther & Christen, 2002). The “contrast effect” appears to be common outcome variable among these three concepts. Audiences apparently rely on the psychological mechanism of “biased optimism” to ward off any negative personal image and hang on to positive attributes about their own character. Media reach, biased source and perceived influence have been identified as the main underlying causes behind the hostile media perception as well as the other effects. In other terms, the locus of the audience, for whom the message is intended, plays a determining role in enhancing the hostile media effect among partisans, as well as the third person effect. In addition, involvement and issue importance play a significant role in enhancing and magnifying these indirect influences on the audience.

One might ask: what are the outcomes on public opinion in light of these documented indirect media effects? As suggested before, the three concepts augment their explanatory power by emphasizing that the perceived negative effects are more

likely to affect other people more than the partisans themselves. Coupled with these perceptions, partisans might view the whole climate of public opinion as undesirably influenced by the media, and hostile to their interests, and more widespread than they are in actual reality. The perceived hostility of the climate of public opinion can lead highly involved people to suppress their views, an effect that Noelle-Neumann (1993) described as a “spiral of silence.” The persuasive press inference, the quasi statistical sense with which individuals will seek to formulate a picture of the landscape of public opinion, will culminate in probably an unrealistic fear of isolation that leads to the suppression of dissidence. And that forms one of the means by which public opinion is managed.

## **2. “Influencing” Foreign Public Opinion: Third Person Effect Research**

### *i. Examining the Rationale*

As Perloff (2002) observes, the logic of the third-person effect is “labyrinthine” and reflects the inconsistencies of human nature. But the logic of international broadcasting is steeped in its associations with propaganda, making the research task of obtaining an accurate assessment of its impact on public opinion extremely difficult. Of course, no respondent would admit that he or she is an easy prey to foreign propaganda, in its popular manipulative sense. Hence, third-person effect hypothesis holds the promise of providing a more accurate assessment of the impact of U.S. international broadcasting on Arab public opinion.

These “effect” perceptions appear intertwined with the credibility of those broadcasts, and how believable the news and information presented are assumed to be. In this regard, Hovland’s seminal work on credibility reflects his concern with the “believability” of the communication act or actor to induce persuasion. Source credibility

and message credibility constitute the main types of credibility that international broadcasting raises. Source credibility refers to the trustworthiness and expertise of the source as primary variables enhancing or decreasing the believability of communicators (e.g. Hovland & Weiss 1951). Message credibility refers to the formal features and characteristics of the message, i.e. structure, language and information organization culminating in its overall credibility. Metzger et al. (2003) organize message credibility along four dimensions, message structure (overall organization), message content (overall information quality), language intensity (impartial or opinionated language used), and finally message delivery (for example, the degree of assertiveness).

With regard to international broadcasting, the communicator or the source is, in the final count, the state or the institutional entity sponsoring those broadcasts. Whether the U.S. is perceived as credible, i.e. trustworthy and honest, as well as the overall message credibility of the broadcasts will affect reception and perception, and the resulting effect on Arab public opinion. A recent study on the credibility of U.S. broadcasts targeting young Arab listeners, have shed some light on this issue of credibility (El-Nawawy, 2006). A convenience sample of Arab college students from five countries showed that “students’ perceptions of the credibility of Radio Sawa and Al-Hurra Television news are positively correlated to their degree of favorability toward the US foreign policy” (p.198). However, the perception that these U.S. broadcasts seek to manipulate Arab public opinion appears to dominate the responses to an open ended question on what they disliked most about Radio Sawa (p.199). The study notes respondents’ inconsistencies that emerge from deep seated attitudes toward the United States’ foreign policy and the credibility of its broadcasts in the Arab world. After all,

nobody wishes to be manipulated since that runs counter to perception of the self as better than others. El-Nawawy's (2006) findings thus lend support to the use of third person effect as a potential framework for understanding these inconsistencies in human behavior that can shape public opinion.

Similarly, in a testimony to the U.S. Congress, Rugh (2004) outlines several reasons why Al-Hurra Television is faltering in its mission and standing among Arab audiences. First of all, its association with the U.S. government, and what that entails in terms of being a propaganda conduit. Second, Arab audiences have expressed their disappointment at its inability to provide in-depth news. Third, discontent at the lack of news and public affairs programs covering U.S. domestic issues has also been a source of dissatisfaction. Fourth, Al-Hurra's avoidance of a vigorous pursuit and coverage of democratic reform issues frustrates those viewers who hoped it would advance democratic reform in the Arab world.

Finally, while this dissertation aims to apply these "labyrinthine" rationales of indirect media influence, that is U.S. international broadcasting's influence on Arab public opinion, it hopes to provide a fresh account of that impact that triangulates the content, audience and policies frameworks. In sum, these issues constitute entry points for examining how the content, audience, and the larger policy structure offer a valid and comprehensive framework for the study of international broadcasting in general, and its impact on Arab public opinion in particular. From this brief review, my research goal is to examine audience's attitudes and perceptions of content and policies to provide a thorough analysis of international broadcasting and foreign public opinion. Several questions are likely to emerge during the course of this dissertation. For instance, if Arab



audiences exhibit a third person effect when exposed to U.S. international broadcasting, so what? What consequences or implications do findings of indirect media influence have? To what extent can such effects endow U.S. international broadcasting with more legitimacy? What extrapolations can communications research make regarding attitudes toward the United States? These general questions are reformulated in more specific research questions below.

### *ii. Research Questions*

The possibility of applying the Third Person Effect theory in a different cultural setting is a golden opportunity for enriching its theoretical assumptions and conclusions. No study has applied the Third Person Effect in Muslim or Arab cultures. With few exceptions in South East Asia and Israel, Third Person Effect research has been limited to Western cultures. As Perloff (2002) observes, the logic of the third-person effect is “labyrinthine” and reflects the inconsistencies of human nature. Perceptions of influence are fundamental in the current effort of managing foreign public opinion as staged in international broadcasting. Third Person Effect’s labyrinthine logic would indicate people’s unwillingness to freely admit negative media influence on the self. The inherent sense of “biased optimism” about one self prevents media consumers and audiences from explicitly attributing perceived “negative” effects likely to be the outcome of exposure to the U.S. sponsored Al-Hurra television (on biased optimism, see Brosius & Engel, 1996). Measuring the extent of Third Person Effect could indicate that Al-Hurra Television has an influence similar to other media content. In this respect, the present research is grounded in the recognition that a respondent would hardly admit that he or she is an easy prey to foreign propaganda, in its popular manipulative sense. Hence, the indirect media

effect perspective holds the promise of providing a more accurate assessment of the impact of Al-Hurra Television on Arab public opinion. Repeated polls conducted in the Arab world by the Pew Research Foundation, among others, reveal negative attitudes (with some variation) toward the United States government to be prevalent among those polled, if not the public at large.

The topic of democracy promotion and political reform has gained salience in the climate of post-9/11 and U.S. intervention in Iraq. Democracy promotion agenda, as argued earlier, has been enshrined in the Bush Doctrine as a strategic tool to combat Islamist extremism and terrorism. In response to this agenda, Arab regimes, particularly those considered U.S. allies, initiated some steps toward political opening and reform. Al-Hurra Television, the latest example of U.S. international broadcasting, has lauded such efforts (Rugh, 2004). More to the point, democracy promotion and “political reform” has been placed at the heart of international broadcasting and public diplomacy at the State Department. Hence, this investigation chooses to focus on the role of Al-Hurra Television in the U.S. drive for political reform, using a sample of Moroccan viewers. The central research question (RQ.1) that this research project seeks to answer:

RQ 1. How does exposure to Al-Hurra Television programs affect Moroccan viewers’ perceptions of the United States’ policies, if indeed it does?

In approaching RQ.1, this project relates the larger question of the perception of U.S. policies to specific questions on media perception and indirect effects. There are five specific/ narrower questions that flow out of RQ 1:

RQ 1.a. How do Moroccan viewers perceive Al-Hurra Television's coverage of "political reform" in the Arab world?

RQ 1.b. To what extent do they consider Al-Hurra Television's coverage of political reform in the Arab world a reflection of the United States' democracy promotion agenda in the region?

RQ 1.c. In what ways do they consider Al-Hurra Television's coverage of political reform to be influential on their attitudes toward the issue?

RQ 1.d. To what extent do perceptions of Al-Hurra Television's influence on respondents' attitudes differ from its perceived influence on other viewers' attitudes (third-person)?

RQ 1.e. How does national identity affect viewers' perceptions of Al-Hurra's influence on distant others? In other words, do respondents perceive that Al-Hurra is likely to be more influential on other Arab audiences rather than on their compatriots?

These research questions' primary focus is to investigate audience reception of Al-Hurra Television, their reactions and interactions with its television programs. Al-Hurra Television's influence on Moroccan viewers, and presumably Arab public opinion, is studied from the theoretical lens of Third Person Effect and indirect media influence research.

A second main research question (RQ 2) sets the stage for a future investigation of media content to explore how Al-Hurra Television covers the issue of political reform, democracy promotion in the region and the associated US policies. At this stage of the

research, it is worthwhile to provide some textual grounding for audience findings. This is achieved by examining the rhetoric of public diplomacy, and the question to be addressed is:

RQ 2. How does the rhetoric of U.S. public diplomacy contribute to Al-Hurra Television's mission?

The goal of the RQ 2 is to provide some research evidence from official public diplomacy discourse that sheds light on the audience findings. Determining whether and how public diplomacy rhetoric feeds Al-Hurra Television viewers' perceptions would connect the impacts of policy and media rhetoric on audiences.

**Chapter IV**  
**Research Methodology**

Whether at the level of audience reception, mediated content and policy implications, international communications research usually confronts significant methodological challenges and opportunities, especially due to the cross-cultural settings of its implementation. As Blumler, McLeod and Rosengren (1992) observe, cross cultural comparative research, “can pose challenges to scholars’ preconceptions and is liable to be theoretically upsetting... [But its contribution] is not confined only to testing and revising existing theory. It also has a more creative and innovative role—opening up new avenues” (p. 8). New avenues extend to the research methodologies which remain constantly under the challenge of passing through cultural prisms, experiencing renewal, revision, and enrichment. Approaching the research questions from different methodological standpoints is thus never a luxury in cross cultural and international communications research. This research project took to heart the concerns confronted in cross cultural and comparative research (e.g. Tomlinson, 1999; Livingstone, 2003) in seeking to bring different methodologies, triangulating focus groups/interviews, observations and surveys to provide a mapping of the role of international broadcasting in foreign policy questions. Olson (2004), stressing that triangulation has been recommended as a useful tool for conducting social research, describes it as “looking at the research question from several viewpoints rather as mappers will place instruments on three hilltops to get overlapping data sets concerning the valley or plain below” (p. 212). It provides “convergent validity” (Bryman, 2003) with realist and social constructionist perspectives illuminating the research question and facilitating the potential for cogent interpretations.

The site of this research project is Morocco, a country in the northwest of Africa, whose population is almost 35 million, according to the latest statistics (*CIA Factbook*, 2008). Its system of government has been branded as “an executive monarchy,” an arrangement that leaves lopsided power in the hands of the monarch rather than elected bodies and institutions. Many analysts have characterized the country as “a transitional society,” where political, economic and social reforms have been launched since King Mohamed VI assumed power in 1998 (Ottaway & Riley, 2006). Reflecting a similar population structure in other Arab speaking states, Morocco’s population is largely very young, with more than a third under 14 years old (*CIA Factbook*, 2008). State owned broadcasters have dominated the media landscape for too long until the rise of satellite broadcasting. The latter has enabled local viewers to receive a huge and diverse bouquet of foreign channels, an incredible selection of both entertainment and news media. Satellite dishes have mushroomed and can be spotted even in poor neighborhoods. A linguistically and ethnically diverse nation, Arabic is the official language, “Amazigh” or “Berber” is spoken by almost 50 percent of the population, French is the language of administration and business. The first country in the world to recognize the independence of the United States of America, Morocco’s governments have traditionally maintained warm ties with the U.S. and the West in general. Following the Bush administration’s calls for political reform, Morocco hosted the first Broader Middle East and North Africa’s “Forum for the Future” in 2004, which called for strengthening “civil society” among other things.

The investigation of Al-Hurra Television is enmeshed in the controversies surrounding the multi-purposes of international broadcasting, the use of propaganda to

target foreign populations and the rhetoric of foreign policy. Of vital interest to such investigation are audience variables, such as the attitudes and perceptions of Al-Hurra Television viewers. The literature review of “indirect media influence” pointed clearly to the feasibility and necessity of using this paradigm of communication theory, especially third person effect, as a novel means of gauging the treacherous terrain of international broadcasting. This project is fundamentally concerned with “the indirect effects” of international broadcasting on foreign populations, particularly how Moroccan viewers perceive Al-Hurra Television. To obtain a fuller picture of these viewers’ attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions, two complementary research methodologies have been selected and implemented: A survey of a sample of viewers and focus group interviews. Participant observation notes were collected to enrich the analysis of viewers’ perceptions and opinions. The goal behind this methodological triangulation is to provide overlapping data that shed more light on the research questions, and thus augment the validity of the resulting conclusions. To restate, the main research question that the focus group interviews and the survey questionnaire answer is:

RQ 1. How does exposure to Al-Hurra Television programs affect Moroccan viewers’ perceptions of the United States’ policies?

### **1. Surveying Moroccan Viewers**

In conjunction with focus group data, a survey of a convenience sample of Moroccan viewers was administered. The purpose was two fold. First, to provide a statistical analysis of viewers’ perception of Al-Hurra Television’s influence on Arab speaking audiences. Another objective is to look for “external validity” for the theory’s



assumptions, not to neglect the vital importance of exploring the role of national identity as a moderating variable on Third Person Effect.

**i. Sample and Procedures:**

This project has relied on a convenience sample of Moroccan viewers of satellite news television stations. The use of convenience sampling was dictated by the fact that it was impossible to find an audience database of Al-Hurra Television viewers in Morocco. The country does not have a tradition of companies that conduct regular or systematic sampling and polling of television audiences in Morocco. One of the main reasons behind the absence of a systematic measurement of television audiences remains the hurdle that two main national television stations are financed indirectly by taxpayers' money or, more accurately, they are still state-owned. The lack of a "liberal" audio-visual market, despite the government's baby steps in that direction, has made state-owned media's accountability perfunctory. Indeed, there would be little use for measuring audience's viewership while advertising revenues are all but guaranteed. The anachronism is exacerbated by the advent, and growing popularity, of foreign and pan-Arab satellite television. According to many accounts, viewers of these satellite channels have exceeded those of state-owned channels. In the spring of 2008, SOFIRAD, the French media giant, entered Morocco's media market, promising to deliver state-of-the-art audience ratings to advertisers.

A total of 90 respondents filled out a 67 item questionnaire. Nine questionnaires were dropped due to too many missing answers as they were turned in practically blank. Two types of respondents were recruited for the study. First, 60 respondents of those who completed the questionnaire also participated in focus group sessions (both viewers

and non viewers of Al-Hurra Television). Second, 21 questionnaires were completed by respondents who did not participate in the focus group sessions. The first tier of respondents were approached through ‘acquaintances,’ the ‘contact’ person, identified at an earlier stage (see the focus groups section below). The second tier of respondents was randomly approached in public places, mainly cafes. Participants, especially in the second tier sample, were selected on the basis of their readiness and willingness to complete the questionnaires when approached. These participants were not offered any compensation, monetary or otherwise. The researcher randomly approached respondents and explained that he was conducting an opinion survey on news media’s consumption. No specific news television channel was singled out in that introductory explanation. The researcher explained that anonymity was guaranteed, reassuring respondents that there were no true or false answers. Time and again, the researcher stressed that this questionnaire was part of an academic study conducted at a university and had no government or business affiliations. At this stage, no screening questionnaire was administered to determine whether the respondent watched or did not watch Al-Hurra Television.

**ii. Measures:**

The questionnaire was composed of these major sections: attitudes toward political reform, media usage, media coverage of political reform, third person effect measures, and demographic measures (Appendix A).

### **Attitudes toward Political Reform: Self versus Others**

The operationalization of the concept of “political reform” incorporated five aspects of political reform: women equality, educational system, political corruption, and transparent elections:

- 1) I believe women should have equal rights as men in the Arab world.
- 2) I believe that national education needs to be reformed.
- 3) I believe that political corruption is a problem in the Arab world.
- 4) I believe that political corruption in the Arab world needs to be fought.
- 5) I believe that elections in the Arab world need to be more transparent.

All items were on a five point Likert scale with “1” indicating “strongly disagree” to “5” indicating “strongly agree.” Participants were also asked to respond to how their friends view those aspects of political reform. For instance, “Most of my friends believe women should have equal rights as men in the Arab world.”

The rationale behind choosing these four aspects of the concept of political reform lies in two main reasons. First, most conceptualizations of democratization or democratic reform include some of these aspects as its foundational premises (Carothers, 1999; Price, 2002). Second, the Bush administration’s democracy promotion rhetoric, and its calls for reform in the Arab Middle East has frequently and explicitly echoed these aspects. The bulk of the current literature on political reform in the Arab world suggests that reforming the educational system, advancing women rights, and improving the political process are imperatives in the political reform agenda. Of equal importance, Al-Hurra Television programs, as well as Al-Jazeera’s, have many shows which are devoted exclusively to

these issues. For instance, Al-Hurra Television has two regular shows “Equality” and “Hunna” (Women’s views) both devoted to women issues. The station’s own synopsis of “Equality” clearly states that the show:

takes an in-depth look at the rights of women in the Gulf region in the Middle East. The show tackles issues such as voting rights, education for women, as well as social issues facing women in the region with expert guests and analysis.<sup>9</sup>

“Gulf Talks,” a political show, explicitly declares its interest and pursuit of the most important political, social and educational issues facing the Gulf. The program tackles controversial topics and goes beyond the headlines to discuss the impact that different issues have on the region.<sup>10</sup>

Al-Hurra Television’s explicit agenda gleaned from its schedule leads to the conclusion that the political reform in the Arab world touches closely on issues of education, women, and the political process.

### **Media Usage & Media Coverage of Political Reform Measures**

Media usage measures were designed to elicit the length of time respondents usually spend watching, listening, reading or surfing the web in search of local (national) and international news. Al-Hurra Television and Al-Jazeera Television were inserted among the options that respondents considered as their news sources. The measures were organized on a five item Likert scale with “1” indicating “never” and “5” indicating “always.”

Media coverage of political reform measures were designed to gauge respondents’ perception of how Al-Hurra Television programs cover issues of political reform

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<sup>9</sup> “Equality” program blurb retrieved on June 12, 2008, from: <http://www.alhurra.com/archive.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Program blurb retrieved on June 12, 2008, from: <http://www.alhurra.com/archive.htm>

compared to Al-Jazeera Television and Morocco's national television (RTM). The goal was to see how (and whether) different perception of the quality of the channel's coverage of those issues would be associated with Third Person Effect. The questions used required respondents to indicate how those channels cover issues of women rights, transparent elections and educational reform. A five point Likert scale was used in which respondents were to choose between "1" indicating "very negatively" to "5" indicating "very positively." An example of the statements that participants had to respond to included:

- 1) Al-Hurra Television news programs cover Arab women rights\_\_\_\_\_.
- 2) Al-Hurra Television news programs cover transparent elections in the Arab world \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3) Al-Hurra Television news programs cover reforming the educational system \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Third Person Effect: Self versus Others**

Third Person Effect measures were a modification of standardized measures that were frequently tested in Third Person Effect research (e.g. Gunther, 1995; Shah, Faber & Youn, 1999). Third Person Effect measures queried respondents about the perceived influence of Al-Hurra Television programs on their own attitudes. Al-Hurra Television shows that promote, or at least deal with issues of political reform, were not singled out in the questions. For instance, questions about Al-Hurra Television's perceived influence on self consisted of these items:

- 1) Overall, how has Al-Hurra Television influenced your attitudes toward women rights?

- 2) Overall, how has Al-Hurra Television influenced your attitudes toward educational reform?
- 3) Overall, how has Al-Hurra Television influenced your attitudes toward fighting political corruption?
- 4) Overall, how has Al-Hurra Television influenced your attitude toward transparent local elections?

Perceived influence on others was measured at two levels: respondents' perceived media influence on other Moroccan viewers versus on other Arab viewers. Third Person Effect research has repeatedly confirmed that the larger the social/psychological distance between the respondent (self) and the other (third person), the greater the size of the Third Person Effect. These measures built on existing literature and thus explored the role of national identity in affecting Third Person Effect.

A five point Likert scale was used to measure the media's perceived influence in which "1" indicated "has made me more negative about \_\_\_\_\_," "3" indicated "has not influenced my attitudes either way," and "5" indicated "has made me more positive about \_\_\_\_\_."

### **Demographic Information**

The last section of the questionnaire included items seeking respondents' demographic information such as age, gender, and education. The sample used in the study was highly educated since about 80 percent of the respondents had a university degree or were university students at the time. Most of the respondents, 72.8 percent were males while the rest were females. The skewed distribution of gender is due to many reasons. First, there is the fact that many females in Morocco find it difficult to go to

public places to participate in a research study due to family questions and bans. Second, many females who were contacted confessed that they were not “regular” viewers of news channels and thus declined to participate in the study. In terms of age, the study targeted an adult audience who would be able to comprehend and react to political programs. Of all respondents who completed the survey, 68.8 percent were between 20 and 30 years old. The rest of the respondents were older than 30. Since the study was conducted close to the parliamentary elections in Morocco, two questions regarding respondents’ likelihood to vote, and for which party, were added. Those who were “definitely going to vote” represented 32.1 percent. Interestingly, such a number corresponded more or less to the proportion of those who actually voted in the elections. In terms of which political faction respondents might vote for, about 40 percent mentioned that they were likely to vote for Islamists, and a comparable number expressed their intention to vote for left leaning political parties. Political leanings would also shed light on the influence of political/ideological beliefs specifically on Third Person Effect, and largely on the reception of Al-Hurra Television.

## **2. Focus Group as a Method:**

A focus group is a “carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Kreuger, 1988, p.18). Whether structured or unstructured, it is a discussion by a group of five to twelve people who share some characteristics, while a moderator leads the discussion, and the participants are encouraged to respond and reflect on their colleagues’ responses as well as their own. Merton and his colleagues set forth the first formal focus group study to gauge radio audiences’ reactions to a set of programs in the 1940s (Denzin & Lincoln,

1994, p. 365). Influenced by the ethnographic bent of anthropological research, the focus group method rose as a response to the limitations of other methodologies (Williams & Katz, 2001). While survey questionnaires would provide a picture of the respondents' viewing habits, and their individual attitudes towards both the United States' policies and its broadcasting, focus groups remain a particularly efficient means of uncovering viewers' feelings and beliefs (Morgan, 1988). More importantly, through focus groups and in-depth interviews, cross cultural research can simulate the natural everyday conversations that shed more light on participants' underlying assumptions. In the context of Morocco, a predominantly "oral" culture can be usefully understood through personal interaction with respondents rather than the sole impersonal touch of a survey. Furthermore, focus groups offered the added advantage of gauging the "group" reaction to the issue of U.S. international broadcasting, instead of being limited to individual opinions, and thus address the issue of "face validity" in media research. Stated simply, focus group interviews permit the researcher to capture a snapshot of "reality," a peek into audiences' attitudes and perceptions, which would otherwise elude the mere process of number compilations (Berg, 1995, p. 3).

Group dynamics play a pivotal role in unearthing the deep thoughts held by participants in focus groups. Specifically, group interaction is uniquely positioned to elicit "natural" responses from other respondents. This is one of the core assumptions of the focus group methodology: the combination of individual and group responses provides a very rich source of data (Williams & Katz, 2001). In a path breaking study of television audiences in the U. K., Morley (1980) paid acute attention to these group dynamics during the interviews to detect nuances of culture and class during group



interactions. Morley's decision to opt for focus groups as a research methodology was motivated by his belief that "much individually based interview research is flawed by a focus on individuals as social atoms divorced from their social context" (1980, p. 33). The presence of that "social context" in group interactions encourages some participants to follow their train of thoughts, and come up with ideas they might not think of on their own. Further, focus groups provide a sense of empowerment to the participants, not only where people feel that their opinion matters but also where they can elaborate on those opinions (Williams & Katz, 2001). Participants' sense of empowerment comes out of feeling that they are the "experts" whose opinion is being solicited, show that they can "collaborate" with other participants and the researcher (Williams & Katz, 2001). Last but not least, focus group methodology reconciles the critical cultural approach to audiences as being rooted in social reality with "mainstream" mass communications theories that tended to "objectify" media audiences. Methodological strength inevitably increases the explanatory power of the present research project.

**i. Procedures:**

In this study, focus group meetings lasted approximately one hour and a half each. A midsize town in the northwest of Morocco was chosen as the site of this field research and data collection. This town provides an ideal site for recruiting participants who represent both the urban and, to some extent, rural inhabitants likely to watch satellite television news channels. The town provides a mix that can safely be said to reflect a cross section of Moroccan society.

**Recruitment.** Each focus group was made up of a socially "homogenous" sample of participants; that is, participants who were mostly students, young professionals, and

the like. The rationale behind this was the intent to minimize, if not avoid, any power differentials, or hierarchical relationships that could be detrimental to an open exchange of ideas and opinions. The purpose was thus to avoid potential situations where, say, a student feels too daunted to express opinions that may differ from a professor's. A homogenous focus group of students is likely to expose personal views, lay their opinions bare to their peers' scrutiny. For a group to be homogenous, there is a level of comfort that has to be in existence among its members, coming from a similar socio economic milieu, akin backgrounds, or being "friends" who socialize together. It was not occupation that the researcher primarily looked for; it was that level of social compatibility that would encourage interaction without the perception of hierarchy. The researcher wanted participants to feel they were in the presence of their peers and their opinions would be valued as such.

The selection and recruitment process relied on the concept of social/community networks to bolster confidence and ensure a higher response rate. The researcher identified an acquaintance, a "contact person," whose strong relationships, and standing in the community were likely to make it possible for him/her to recruit potential participants. Seven such contact persons were identified and they formally volunteered to help in the data collection: an engineer, two teachers, two graduate students, and two government officials (one worked for the country's Ministry of Health and the other for the Ministry of National Education). Their diverse occupations were intended to ensure a diverse pool of focus group participants. The researcher explained to each contact person that this was a university research project studying how people consume Arab news media.

Each contact person was provided with 40 to 60 copies of a screening questionnaire that they were to distribute among their acquaintances. This was designed to screen Al-Hurra Television viewers and create a large pool of potential recruits. After administering the pre-questionnaires, each 'contact person' met with the researcher to check which and how many participants were likely to be selected for the focus group interview and/or merely complete the questionnaire. Both the researcher and the contact person made phone calls and met in person with potential participants whenever it was feasible. Most of the focus group interviews were held in cafes where the researcher usually rented a quiet area. One focus group meeting was held at the researcher's house and two contact persons volunteered to host two meetings. In three instances, the researcher had to reschedule meetings because some participants had not shown up. Scheduling a meeting time that was suitable to all participants proved a tough task and sometimes led to reducing the number of participants in focus group meetings. "Over-recruiting" was very useful since some potential participants could not honor their commitments to completing the study due either to schedule conflicts or lack of interest in the study.

*Number of focus groups.* The existing body of research that would offer guidance on the number of focus groups required for a field study is too opaque and mystical to provide a mandate for the "right" number of groups. What is left for the researcher is some vague notion about what is acceptable and, more importantly, possible according to the dictates of reality. Morgan (1988) wisely cautions that "one important determinant of the number of groups is the number of different subgroups required...if there are several distinct population segments...you may want or need to run separate groups in each" (p.

42). For instance, Morley (1980) convened 29 small groups of three to ten participants for his ethnographic study of *Nationwide* viewers. Since the primary interest of this research project is to examine Al-Hurra Television audiences, seven focus groups were convened from a pool of its viewers. This decision was motivated by the thought that such a number of meetings would be necessary for the construction of a “valid” picture that explains why and how Moroccan viewers interact with international broadcasting, in general, and Al-Hurra Television in particular. In contrast, only three focus groups of non-viewers of Al-Hurra Television were convened because these were not as fundamental to the research goals of the project as actual viewers of the station (see Table I).

Table I. Convened Focus Groups

	Al-Hurra Television Viewers	Al-Jazeera Television Viewers
Number of the Groups	7	3
Size of the Groups	Between 6 and 8	Between 5 and 6

***Size of the groups.*** Merton et al (1990) suggest that “the size of the group should manifestly be governed by two considerations...it should not be so large as to be unwieldy or to preclude adequate participation by most members nor should it be so small that it fails to provide substantially greater coverage than that of an interview with one individual” (p. 137). Some researchers opt for smaller groups of three people, especially when those participants seem to have a lot of information to share about the considered issues (Lewis, 1995). Deciding on the number of participants in focus groups proved problematic and a source of frustration, as the data collection process began. The researcher initially planned on having nine participants. While nine people may not be a large number in itself, it had turned into an insurmountable logistical problem, especially

in terms of finding a suitable time that would meet everybody's expectations and schedules. Scheduling conflicts became a nightmarish task that was solved only through reducing the number of participants.

## **ii. Instrument: The Interview Guide**

An interview guide script was prepared well in advance and reflected the main concerns of the research questions. Basically, the open-ended nature of the focus group questions aimed at eliciting further reactions that would not otherwise be generated by a straightforward questionnaire. The "interview guide" script was followed to provide consistency (see Appendix B for further details and the focus protocol used in the study). The focus group interview included the following questions:

### *Introductory questions:*

- What kind of programs do you like to watch most on Al-Hurra Television?
- Who do you think are more likely to watch Al-Hurra Television?

### *Key questions:*

- How do you think Al-Hurra news television cover Arab politics in general?  
(e.g. objective, helpful..)
- How do you think its programming promote political reform, like transparent elections, fighting political corruption, and women rights in the Arab region (if you think it does)?
- How do you think Al-Hurra Television programs influence you in general? (e.g. It makes me think that political reform in the Arab world is urgently needed, or not needed at all/ large influence/ positive or negative influence)

- How about Al-Hurra Television's influence on others/Arab public opinion in general?
- Would you say that Al-Hurra Television influences others more than you?
- Do you think Al-Hurra Television programs reflect the U.S. democracy promotion agenda? If you think it does, how does it achieve that goal? If not, why?

### **iii. Recording and Transcription:**

The response rate, those who completed the screening questionnaires and expressed their willingness to take part in the study, was low to moderate between 15 and 25 percent. The number of those who were finally selected for the study hovered around 15 percent. That is, out of more than 400 pre-questionnaires, only 61 respondents volunteered to participate in the focus group section of the study. All interviews were recorded. Participants were informed that recording the interview was necessary as the researcher would need to transcribe and analyze the transcripts. Without any exception, all participants expressed their consent and the interviews proceeded. Two recording devices were used to make certain that no mishaps take place. The researcher also took brief notes about how the interviews proceeded and the main themes and conclusions.

After all the focus groups were convened and recorded, two Moroccan graduate students were hired to "transcribe" the focus group meetings. Since the focus group interviews were conducted in Moroccan Arabic dialect, the researcher decided that the transcription should reflect the exact words used by the respondents, instead of rewriting the interviews and transcribing them in standard Arabic. In Morocco, as in most of the Arab world, there is a difference between the dialect used in daily conversations and

standard Arabic, which is mainly a written language as well as the chosen language of pan-Arab mass media, like Al-Jazeera Television. At any rate, the researcher decided in favor of transcribing the interviews in the local dialect, as is, to avoid the problem of looking for the “accurate” standard term. Another main reason was the consideration that the second reviewer of the transcription should not be at a loss trying to figure out linguistic problems. In short, uniformity of style permits reliability of transcription. The graduate students were financially compensated for the transcription. One of them explained that transcribing one hour’s worth of interviewing required at least eight hours of transcribing. The researcher compared the transcriptions to the taped interviews and was satisfied with the quality of the transcription. The transcriptions were used, in combination with the personal notes and observations of the researcher, in the analysis of the focus group interviews.

### **3. Textual Analysis**

The second main research question is about Al-Hurra Television’s mission and the rhetoric of U.S. public diplomacy in a step that moves from audience research into textual/rhetorical inquiry. At this juncture, the research project uses a speech by the former U.S. Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy, Karen Hughes, to understand the conflicting rhetorical overtures of U.S. public diplomacy at large, and Al-Hurra Television in particular. Ms. Hughes delivered this Keynote Address to the Forum on the Future of Public Diplomacy, George Washington University in October 14, 2005. This textual analysis identifies the main rhetorical frames constructed throughout the Address, and how that rhetoric permeates Al-Hurra Television’s mission. Of great significance to this section is the argument that a “fractured rhetorical” landscape illuminates the crucial

question of how Arab audiences interact with Al-Hurra Television. This rhetorical inquiry investigates how the rhetoric of public diplomacy is constructed and its implications on Al-Hurra's reception in particular. The chapter responds to the second main research question of this project:

RQ 2. How does the rhetoric of U.S. public diplomacy hamper or strengthen Al-Hurra Television's mission?



**Chapter V**  
**Audience Analysis**

## **1. Descriptive Statistics**

The main research question is strictly pertinent to audience reception of Al-Hurra Television and its contribution to the “political reform” campaign in the Arab world. Specifically, viewers’ perception of Al-Hurra influence on their attitudes toward the United States’ policies, versus its influence on the attitudes of their compatriots, was a main goal of Research Question 1:

**RQ. 1. How does exposure to Al-Hurra Television programs affect Moroccan viewers' perceptions of the United States' policies, if indeed it does?**

In approaching RQ.1, this project relates the larger question of the perception of U.S. policies to the specific questions on media perception and indirect effects. There are five specific/subsidiary questions that flow out of RQ 1. The data analysis chapter is organized into three subsections. The first section provides descriptive statistics of the variables used in the study. The second section provides answers to research questions (RQ 1a, 1b, 1c). The third section focuses on the results of Third Person Effect tests (RQ 1.d, 1e.).

### **i. Measurement Analysis**

#### **Measures relating to attitudes toward political reform: Self vs. others**

The scale used to measure the construct of “political reform” was subjected to factor analysis and reliability analysis. The five items include measures on “women rights,” “educational reform,” “transparent elections,” and “political corruption.” Overall, the scale had low reliability (alpha was .52). Exploratory factor analysis using a Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Extraction on the five items composing this scale revealed that the item on “women rights” was problematic since it loaded on a factor by

itself. The reliability test confirmed the problem since alpha was low at .54. Despite the fact that alpha jumped to .74 when the item was dropped, a decision was made to keep the item throughout the analysis because of the news channels' overt focus on this issue. The five items were added up to create a "political reform" index that indicates respondents' attitudes toward women rights, reforming the educational system, political corruption, and holding transparent elections in the Arab world. A similar index was created for respondents' perception of the attitudes of their "friends," vis á vis the same issues of "political reform." Cronbach's alpha for respondents' perception of their friends' attitudes toward political reform was .51. Table II shows the means for respondents' support, and their friends', of "political reform" in the Arab world. A five point Likert scale was used, where "1" indicates "strongly disagree," and "5" indicates "strongly agree." Table II shows a very high level of support for "political reform" among Arab viewers, at the level of respondents' own attitudes and their perceptions of their friends' support for reform.

Table II Support for Political Reform in the Arab World

	Statistics
Respondents	4.5 (SD=.40)
Friends	4.1 (SD=.52)

### **Media usage & media coverage of political reform measures**

When asked about their media usage, particularly which sources they use to keep up with local and foreign news, Al-Hurra Television came at the bottom of the list among the majority of respondents. The percentage of those who watch Al-Hurra Television programs regularly (meaning "sometimes," "often" and "always") was 35.8% regarding

local news and 34.6% regarding international news. In comparison, the percentage of those who watch Al-Jazeera Television programs regularly (meaning “sometimes,” “often,” and “always”) was 95.1% regarding national news and 97.5% for international news. Overall, 33.1% of respondents spend more than one hour a day watching television news, while 55.6% reported watching television news less than one hour a day. Table III shows the means and standard deviations for media use.

Table III Respondents' Media Usage

	Sources used to learn about national news	Sources used to learn about international news
Moroccan newspapers/magazines	3.6 (SD=1.1)	2.9 (SD=1.1)
Moroccan television channels	3 (SD=.99)	2.5 (SD=1.1)
Al-Jazeera News Channel	4.1 (SD=.92)	4.4 (SD=.73)
Al-Hurra News Channel:	2.1 (SD=.97)	2.2 (SD=.94)
Internet news websites	2.5 (SD=2.5)	2.6 (SD=1.1)
Other	1.6 (SD=2.1)	1.3 (SD=1.9)

## ii. Answering the Research Questions

### **RQ 1a. How do Moroccan viewers perceive Al-Hurra Television’s coverage of “political reform” in the Arab world?**

Respondents were asked about their perception of how three news channels, the Moroccan National Television (RTM), Al-Jazeera Television, and Al-Hurra Television cover issues of political reform. While Al-Hurra Television had a negative perception comparable to RTM among respondents, Al-Jazeera Television’s programs came at the top across the three main items constituting the measure for political reform. For instance, Al-Jazeera Television’s coverage of women rights was perceived as favorable by 53.5% of the respondents. Only 13.9% and 12.3% declared that Al-Hurra Television and RTM, respectively, covered women rights issues favorably. When it comes to

providing favorable coverage of the need for transparent elections, Al-Jazeera Television was also the top choice with 57.3%, Al-Hurra Television and RTM hovered around 13%. While both television stations' coverage of the need for educational reform in the Arab world, RTM had a more negative perception than Al-Hurra Television, with only 9.5% versus 14.1%, respectively, saying that the channels covered the issue favorably. In contrast, Al-Jazeera Television had a relatively soaring rating of 59.1% of those who claimed that this channel favorably covers the need for educational reform in the Arab world (see Table IV for all percentages).

Table IV. Media Coverage of Political Reform\*

	Favorable Coverage of Arab Women Rights	Favorable Coverage of Need Arab Elections	Favorable Coverage of the Need for Educational Reform
RTM	13.9%	13%	9.5%
Al Hurra TV	12.3%	12.3%	14.1%
Al Jazeera TV	53.5 %	57.3 %	59.1 %

\*Numbers in Table IV are percentages of respondents' perception of how favorable three media outlets cover issues of political reform

Overall, to answer RQ.1a about how Moroccan viewers perceive Al-Hurra Television's coverage, descriptive statistics reveal that an overwhelming majority does not perceive the station to be furthering the cause of political reform in the Arab world. While Table IV provides clear intuitive percentages, Table V compiles the means and standard deviations, statistically illustrating how Al-Hurra Television was lagging in behind Al-Jazeera Television in terms of how respondents perceive their media coverage. A five point Likert scale was used to measure media coverage, where "1" indicates "very negatively," and "5" indicates "very positively."

Table V Respondents' Perception of Media Coverage (of Political Reform)\*

	Coverage of Arab Women Rights	Coverage of the Need for Transparent Arab Elections	Coverage of the Need for Educational Reform
RTM	2.6 (SD=1.1)	2.2 (SD=1.2)	2 (SD=1.2)
Al-Hurra TV	2.7 (SD=1)	2.7 (SD=9.4)	2.7(SD=1)
Al-Jazeera TV	3.7 (SD=1)	3.7 (SD=1.2)	3.6 (SD=1)

\*Numbers in Table V are means and standard deviations of respondents' perceptions about how favorable three media outlets cover issues of political reform

**RQ 1b. To what extent do they consider Al-Hurra Television's coverage of political reform in the Arab world a reflection of the United States' democracy promotion agenda in the region?**

Answering RQ 1b was implemented through a composite measure that asks respondents about how serious they believe the U.S. government is in promoting “political reform” in the Arab world. The same dimensions of “political reform” were used: 1. “the U.S. is serious about promoting women rights,” 2. “the U.S. is serious about reforming/developing the educational system in the Arab world,” 3. “The U.S. is serious about fighting political corruption in the Arab world,” and 4. “The U.S. is serious about demanding transparent elections in the Arab world.” These dimensions were measured at a five point scale, where “1” indicated “not serious at all” and “5” indicated “very serious.” Factor analysis of the four measures yielded one factor on which all items were loaded. A reliability analysis was conducted, yielding a high alpha of .85.

A majority of respondents held a negative perception of the U.S. political reform initiatives and efforts, indicating their belief that the U.S. was not serious about promoting “political reform” in the Arab world. In promoting women rights, a 55.8% said the U.S. was not serious in its efforts; 59.7% believed that the U.S. was not serious about promoting educational reform; 78.9% considered that the U.S. is not serious about

fighting political corruption; and 56.6% believed the U.S. was not serious about promoting transparent elections. While respondents had an overall negative perception of the U.S. political reform efforts, it was intriguing to compare these perceptions with their perceptions of the roles played by local governments and citizens. By and large, respondents held a more negative attitude toward Arab governments' political reform efforts compared to those of the U.S. The Arab citizen's role in effecting political reform fared better than either U.S. government or Arab governments. Table VI shows the means and standard deviations for how serious the U.S. efforts in promoting "political reform" in the Arab world were perceived by Al-Hurra viewers.

Table VI Attitudes toward the U.S. Political Reform Efforts

Variables of Political Reform	Mean statistic
Attitude toward women rights	2.4 (SD =1.5)
Attitude toward educational reform	2.3 (SD=1.5)
Attitude toward fighting political corruption	1.8 (SD=1.2)
Attitude toward transparent election	2.3 (SD=1.4)

A reliability test was conducted and yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .85. Then, an index of respondents' perception of the U.S. "political reform" efforts in the Arab world was created and it yielded a mean of 2.2 (SD=1.2), indicating that the U.S. was perceived to be less than serious about promoting political reform in the Arab world.

**RQ 1c. In what ways do they consider Al-Hurra Television's coverage of political reform to be influential on their attitudes toward the issue?**

Analysis of how Al-Hurra Television's coverage of "political reform" influences viewers' attitudes toward political reform was conducted. The media's perceived influence was measured by asking respondents about how they perceived Al-Hurra

Television's influence on their own attitudes toward political reform (First Person Effect). Measuring the first person effect, Al-Hurra's perceived influence on the self, is done at two stages. First, understand Al-Hurra's influence on the viewers' attitudes toward each "component," or variable, of political reform. Second, create an index for media influence on the self to be used later in measuring the extent of Third Person Effect. A five point Likert scale was used to measure influence where "1" indicated "It has made ME feel more negative about women's rights" and "5" indicated "It has made ME feel more positive about women's rights."

Among Al-Hurra viewers, 8.9 % of viewers said Al-Hurra Television had negative influence on their own attitudes toward women rights, compared to 2.2% who said it had a positive influence on their attitudes. The overwhelming majority of Al-Hurra viewers, 77.8% of them, however, said that it "had not influenced their attitudes either way."

A similar pattern emerges with regard to Al-Hurra's influence on viewers' attitude toward educational reform. The majority of Al-Hurra's viewers, 77.8%, claimed it "has not influenced their attitudes either way." Those who said they believed Al-Hurra had negative influence on their own attitudes moved a bit higher to 4.4%, twice the number of those who said the same thing about women rights. Those who believed that it had positive influence remained the same with 2.2%.

Regarding Al-Hurra's influence on viewers' attitudes toward "fighting political corruption" in their region, those who said Al-Hurra had a negative influence on their attitudes jumped to 17.8%. The number of those who said it had some positive influence



also moved to 4.4%. Those who claimed it had no influence on their attitudes toward fighting political corruption still continued to constitute a majority at 62.2%.

The answers to Al-Hurra’s influence on their attitudes toward the transparency of local elections were surprising in that no respondent said it had a positive influence on their attitudes toward the issue. Those who said it had not influenced their attitudes either way constituted 68.9% of Al-Hurra viewers. Those who said Al-Hurra had a negative influence on their attitudes toward political reform reached 15.6%. These percentages are further reflected in the means obtained in Table VII.

Table VII Perceived Media Influence on the Self\*

Variables of Political Reform	Mean statistic
Attitude toward women rights	2.9 (SD =.52)
Attitude toward educational reform	3.0 (SD=.4)
Attitude toward fighting political corruption	2.7 (SD=.78)
Attitude toward transparent election	2.7 (SD=.6)

\* Al-Hurra’s perceived influence on viewers’ own attitudes toward political reform

A reliability test of these four measures was conducted, yielding a Cronbach’s alpha of .69. Then, an index of respondents’ perception of Al-Hurra Television’s influence on their own attitudes was computed. The mean for the index of the media’s influence on the self was 2.9 (SD=.41). While there is “negative influence,” the index indicates that Al-Hurra Television’s influence was very minimal, almost reaching “3,” that is “neither negative nor positive.”

**RQ 1d. To what extent do perceptions of Al-Hurra Television’s influence on respondents’ attitudes differ from its perceived influence on other viewers’ attitudes (third-person)?**

Research Question 1d tested the existence of Third Person Effect, and checked how Al-Hurra viewers perceived the channel’s programs influenced the attitudes of other viewers.

At this stage, the third person, the “other,” was defined as “other Moroccan viewers.” The same analysis was undertaken here in first looking at each variable separately, and subsequently making an index to be used in measuring the extent of Third Person Effect. A five point Likert scale was used to measure influence where “1” indicated “It has made OTHER Moroccan viewers more negative about women’s rights,” “5” indicated “It has made THEM feel more positive about women’s rights,” and “3” indicated it “has not influenced THEM either way.”

Among Al-Hurra viewers, 20 % of respondents said Al-Hurra Television had negative influence on other Moroccan viewers’ attitudes toward women rights, compared to 13.4% who said it had a positive influence. About half of the respondents denied the existence of any influence as 53.3% said other Moroccan viewers of Al-Hurra Television were not influenced either way.

A comparable pattern exists with regard to Al-Hurra’s influence on other Moroccan viewers’ attitudes toward educational reform. More than half of the respondents, 57.8%, said that Al-Hurra viewers in Morocco were not influenced either way by the channel. Those who said they believed Al-Hurra had negative influence on the attitudes of other Moroccan viewers moved a bit lower to 15.6%, about a third less than the number of those who said the same thing about educational reform. Those who believed that it had a positive influence on Moroccan viewers also experienced a drop to 8.9%.

Regarding Al-Hurra’s perceived influence on other Moroccan viewers’ attitudes toward “fighting political corruption,” 19.8% of respondents said Al-Hurra had a negative influence, closer to the measure on women rights. The number of those who said it had some positive influence dropped to 6.6%. Those who claimed it had no influence

on other Moroccan viewers' attitudes toward fighting political corruption constituted about half of the respondents at 57.8%.

Results of Al-Hurra's perceived influence on the attitudes of other Moroccan viewers toward the transparency of local elections were also comparable to the previous results with one exception. While it was surprising that no respondent said it had a positive influence on their attitudes toward the issue (i.e. influence on the self), 2.2% perceived Al-Hurra's coverage to have a positive influence on other Moroccan viewers. The percentage is small, but it showed that Third Person Effect is at work in some way. Those who said it had not influenced Moroccan viewers' attitudes either way constituted 62.2% of Al-Hurra viewers. Those who said Al-Hurra had a negative influence on the attitudes of Moroccan viewers toward political reform reached 20%. These results reflected similar perceptions of Al-Hurra's negative influence on other Moroccan viewers. The percentages are further illustrated by the means obtained in Table VIII.

Table VIII. Perceived Media Influence on the Other\*

Variables of Political Reform	Mean statistic
Attitude toward women rights	2.9 (SD =.88)
Attitude toward educational reform	2.8 (SD=.78)
Attitude toward fighting political corruption	2.8 (SD=.87)
Attitude toward transparent election	2.6 (SD=.82)

\*Al-Hurra's perceived influence on Moroccan viewers' attitudes toward political reform

A reliability test of these four measures was conducted, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of .89. Then, an index of respondents' perception of the influence Al-Hurra Television wields on their compatriots' attitudes was computed. The mean for the index of the media's influence on other Moroccan viewers was 2.9 (SD=.69). While "negative influence" also exists in the case of Al-Hurra Television's perceived influence on the

attitudes of other Moroccan viewers, the index still indicates that Al-Hurra Television's influence was very minimal, almost reaching "3," that is "neither negative nor positive."

**RQ 1e. How does national identity affect viewers' perceptions of Al-Hurra's influence on distant others? In other words, do respondents perceive that Al-Hurra is likely to be more influential on other Arab audiences rather than on their compatriots?**

Research Question 1e also sought to test the existence of Third Person Effect, and check how Al-Hurra viewers perceived the channel's programs influenced the attitudes of other viewers in the Arab world. Third Person Effect research has found that the greater the social distance between the first person and the third person, the larger the third person effect. At this stage, the third person, the "other," was defined as "other Arab viewers," referring to Arab audiences. This research question gauges the influence of "national identity" as a moderating/intervening variable that can be added to Third Person Effect research. Further, the question sheds light on the larger context of Al-Hurra reception and perceived influence in the Arab world.

The same analysis was undertaken here in first looking at each variable separately, and later making an index to be used in measuring the extent of Third Person Effect. A five point Likert scale was used to measure influence where "1" indicated "It has made other Arab viewers feel more negative about women's rights," "5" indicated "It has made them feel more positive about women's rights," and "3" indicated it "has not influenced them either way."

Among Al-Hurra viewers, 14.6 % of respondents said Al-Hurra Television had a negative influence on other Arab viewers' attitudes toward women rights, compared to

8.8% who said it had a positive influence. More than half of the respondents denied the existence of any influence as 60 % said other Arab viewers of Al-Hurra Television were not influenced either way.

A comparable pattern exists with regard to Al-Hurra's influence on other Moroccan viewers' attitudes toward educational reform. More than half of the respondents, 57.8%, said that Al-Hurra viewers in the Arab world were not influenced either way by the channel. Those who said they believed Al-Hurra had negative influence on the attitudes of other Arab viewers moved a bit higher up to 18.8%, about a third more than the number of those who said the same thing about educational reform. Those who believed that it had a positive influence on Arab viewers experienced a drop to 6.6%.

Regarding Al-Hurra's perceived influence on other Arab viewers' attitudes toward "fighting political corruption," 15.6% of respondents said Al-Hurra had a negative influence, closer to the measure on women rights as well. The number of those who said it had some positive influence climbed up to 13.3%, the highest perceived positive influence item. Those who claimed it had no influence on other Arab viewers' attitudes toward fighting political corruption constituted about half of the respondents at 55.6%.

Results of Al-Hurra's perceived influence on the attitudes of other Arab viewers toward the transparency of local elections were generally comparable to the previous results. 8.8% perceived Al-Hurra's coverage to have a positive influence on other Arab viewers. The percentage is larger, but it showed that Third Person Effect is still at work when it comes to the elections' measure. Those who said it had not influenced Arab viewers' attitudes either way constituted 48.9% of Al-Hurra viewers, dropping for the

first time. Those who said Al-Hurra had a negative influence on the attitudes of Moroccan viewers toward political reform reached 24.4%. This result was a bit higher compared to other perceptions of Al-Hurra’s negative influence on other Arab viewers. The percentages are further illustrated by the means obtained in Table IX.

Table IX Perceived influence on Arab viewers\*

Variables of Political Reform	Mean statistic
Attitude toward women rights	2.9 (SD =.83)
Attitude toward educational reform	2.8 (SD=.77)
Attitude toward fighting political corruption	2.97 (SD=1)
Attitude toward transparent election	2.7 (SD=.96)

\*Al-Hurra’s perceived influence on Arab viewers’ attitudes toward political reform

A reliability test of these four measures was conducted, yielding a Cronbach’s alpha of .83. Then, an index of respondents’ perception of Al-Hurra Television’s influence on Arab viewers’ attitudes was computed. The mean for the index of the media’s influence was 2.93 (SD=.66). While there is “negative influence,” the index indicates that Al-Hurra Television’s influence was very minimal, almost reaching “3,” that is “neither negative nor positive.”

To measure the extent of Third Person Effect, a paired t-test was conducted revealing that there are no significant differences in respondents’ perception of media influence. Al-Hurra Television’s programs remain generally negatively perceived. Table X compares the extent of Third Person Effect by presenting the indices for perceived media influence on the “self,” “other Moroccan viewers,” and “other Arab viewers.”

Table X Perceived Media Influence Indices

	Self	Other Moroccan viewers	Other Arab viewers
Mean for political reform	2.95 SD.5726	2.92 SD.6959	2.93 SD.6609

Lack of statistical support for the existence of a Third Person Effect among Al-Hurra viewers prompted the researcher to conduct further tests and see if “trust” in Al-Hurra Television has anything to do with the level of Third Person Effect. This is another way to check how credible Al-Hurra Television is perceived in the Arab world. Trust in Al-Hurra Television was incorporated in the questionnaire via three measures focusing on the main issues, advancing women rights, transparent elections, and educational reform. Respondents were asked to express their level of agreement with statements such as “I can always count on Al-Hurra Television to support advancing women rights in the Arab world.” The items were measured via a five point Likert scale, where “1” indicates “strongly disagree” and “5” indicates “strongly agree.” A reliability check revealed a Cronbach alpha of .92. A composite index was computed, yielding a low mean of 2.00 (SD=.86). The results of these tests supported the findings obtained earlier. First, viewers’ trust of Al-Hurra Television’s reform appears to be very low with a mean of 2.00. A significant relationship ( $r=.26$ ,  $p<.05$ ,  $N=70$ ) was found between Al-Hurra Television’s credibility and its perceived influence on the self. In other words, without judging the direction of the relationship, the significant correlation suggests that a higher level of credibility, the greater the trust viewers have in Al-Hurra Television’s support of political reform in the region, the greater its perceived influence on their attitudes. A similar relationship is detected between trust in Al-Hurra Television and respondents’ perception of its influence on other Moroccan viewers ( $r=.33$ ;  $p<.05$ ,  $N=66$ ).

## **2. Analysis of Focus Groups**

### **i. Perception of Political Reform**

One of the first preliminary questions in the focus group meetings revolved around the respondents' own perception of how Al-Hurra Television covers the political reform agenda in the Arab world. This grew out of the first research question (RQ1a), "How do Moroccan viewers perceive Al-Hurra Television's coverage of political reform in the Arab world?" Focus group discussions of the question revealed a very sophisticated sense among the respondents regarding this issue. Discussions frequently problematized the cornerstone concerns that Al-Hurra Television viewers have with political media coverage. The most recurrent themes identified include: objectivity, diversity, professionalism, elitism and credibility.

Among the respondents who rarely viewed Al-Hurra Television, one respondent pointedly raised the issue of the channel's "objectivity." Recognizing that all news media tended to serve certain "ideological agendas," he argued, left Al-Hurra Television in the awkward position of serving the United States' ideological agenda when it purported to be covering local politics and the U.S. "push" for political reform in the Arab world. For this particular respondent, Al-Hurra's programs were neither "professional," nor "objective," especially when covering the violent conflicts in Iraq and Palestine. When it comes to other domestic issues that directly pertain to political reform, such as the status/participation of women in the political sphere and the larger issue of "values," Al-Hurra Television does not recognize that values differ from one society to another. Arab societies' values were not identical to those that existed in the West, the respondents observed. On issues of "political conflict," "regional problems," "educational reform,"



and “women,” Al-Hurra Television programs did not reflect the local/real “facts” because those programs fell outside that local reality.

Other responses seconded these observations regarding the channel’s “objectivity” and “professionalism.” The two traits were “inseparable” in the sense that “professionalism” presupposed certain levels of “objectivity,” “impartiality,” and “neutrality.” Without these steps “objectivity” would persist to be mere empty talk. When a respondent asserted that “objectivity” required “diversity” of opinions, or different viewpoints, one respondent was quick to point out that Al-Hurra had invited people from different political stripes such as members of the Egyptian “Muslim Brotherhood.” Overall, a majority of responses held to the opinion that Al-Hurra Television did not invite “the other opinion,” and was thus limited to “a one-sided debate.” Unlike Al-Jazeera, some respondents were quick to point out, Al-Hurra Television was consistently hostage to the U.S. worldview and did not present alternative views that could be distasteful to the administration. Some openly accused the channel of “having no faith in [the idea of] difference.” Very few respondents dissented from this assessment about the lack of diversity of opinions on Al-Hurra Television programs. A different respondent’s view questioned the absolutist definitions of “professionalism” and “objectivity” that others had underlined. All journalists tended to use the same “methods” in handling news gathering and dissemination, whether they were working for Al-Hurra, Al-Jazeera, or CNN. The way that piece of information was presented and “marketed” was what made a difference among Al-Hurra, Al-Jazeera, or Al- Manar.

Many responses indicated that “objectivity” in covering Arab issues had not been expected from Al-Hurra Television due to the consideration that it was “a mouthpiece” of

the U.S. government. Here, “objectivity” appeared to have been linked to credibility. The fact that Al-Hurra Television is “associated” and “sponsored” by the U.S. government was frequently underscored. It was only “natural” that Al-Hurra would seek to “promote” its sponsor’s interests in the region. However, such association, according to many respondents, created an emotional “wall” or a “barrier” standing in their way of dealing with, and consuming, its programs. “Lack of credibility,” other respondents concurred, was due to “the predetermined agenda” of Al-Hurra, an agenda that was closely “aligned with the Bush administration’s policies” in the Middle East. A predominant majority of the respondents across all the interviews underlined the embryonic relationship between the television channel and U.S. foreign policy as hurting the credibility of the channel.

The issue of the channel’s “elitism” was apparent across different focus group interviews. When a respondent raised the issue of “elitism” of Al-Hurra Television programs that tackle the issue of political reform in the region, many were quick to concur. While admitting that news media were generally “elitist,” she denied that the regular Moroccan viewer would benefit from such programs because the channel’s discourse tended to dabble in topics that had little pertinence to the regular citizen, that is, Al-Hurra was, again, “out of touch” with reality. For instance, debating “globalization” or “freedom of thought” would not have much resonance with regular citizens’ daily concerns; which only entrenched the “elitist” tendency of the channel. Furthermore, a different respondent added, Al-Hurra’s viewer had to have a level of political knowledge, in possession of “mechanisms for analyzing [its] political discourse.” When probed about the nature of those analytical “mechanisms,” the respondent indicated that Al-Hurra Television, Al-Jazeera Television...and other news channels are part and parcel of the

larger conflict in international relations, a conflict that he related to Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis. For this respondent, Al-Hurra's viewer should be aware of such issues in order to comprehend its coverage of political reform in the Arab world.

On the issue of "elitism," there was consensus across all the interviews albeit with different shades of interpretation. But elitism also raised the specter of media clutter amidst which Al-Hurra Television existed. While most respondents (97%) were adamant that Al-Hurra Television's main audience consisted of members of the educated elite, one argued that the structure of Moroccan society contributed to this elitism. One respondent did not neglect to observe that a regular family in Morocco did not own more than one television set. Such a fact would lead to the "prioritization" of which television program (or channel) to watch. Most family members would likely settle on entertainment programs, or, sometimes, "educational documentaries." Incidentally perhaps, another participant in a different focus group interview argued that, aside from its political biases, documentaries should be considered Al-Hurra Television's strongest suit.

When it came to the general trend of Al-Hurra Television's coverage, a number of respondents concluded that "generally, [this television channel] is in support of political reform in the Arab world." One respondent, a political activist, expanded on this view by arguing that such support was in synch with the Bush administration's campaign "to combat corruption and despotism" in the region. Supporting political reform in the Arab world, continued the same respondent, was "a principal building-block" in the fight against terrorism and political Islam in the Arab world. Respondents raised the caveats that such support for political reform did not necessarily mean positive contribution since Al-Hurra Television's agenda was to serve foreign interests instead of Arab interests.

## **ii. Merging the Agendas**

Research Question 1b focused on the linkages between Al-Hurra Television's coverage of political reform and the U.S. government's democracy promotion agenda in the Arab world. In one of the focus group meetings, a respondent evocatively described Al-Hurra Television as incarnating the U. S. "media hubris," some sort of new media imperialism, designed to subdue the region. In analyzing the linkages between U.S. policies and Al-Hurra Television's role regarding promoting political reform, some familiar themes were reiterated throughout the audience responses. These familiar themes include the fact that the [U.S.] "hypocrisy" and "double standards" perceived to dominate U.S. Mideast policy were reflected in the channel. In fact, audiences did perceive Al-Hurra Television to reflect the U.S. administration's agenda on political reform, albeit negatively.

Almost with no exception, respondents across all the focus groups viewed Al-Hurra Television to be the mouthpiece of U.S. Middle East policies, and as such its coverage of political reform was almost unanimously perceived to promote the administration's call for the democratization of the political regimes. Upon further probing, respondents described Al-Hurra Television coverage as fitting the "hypocritical" stances that mark U.S. policy toward the Middle East. One respondent labeled the channel as "the new face of U.S. interventionism;" meddling in domestic affairs, while propping up corrupt regimes (Egypt, as an example, was frequently cited). Some respondents were more bitter, noting that the channel's name, "The Free One," was ironic ("a name that does not reflect its referent"). It was not free at all, argued one respondent,

because its primary task was to “improve the despised image of the United States,” despised not only in the region but throughout the globe. As such, the channel was part of the strategic tools the U.S. was wielding in its conflict with the Islamic world, part and parcel of “a total war,” one respondent insisted on repeating. All the ills in the world were blamed on Muslims, the same respondent went on, and he “[would] not be shocked to hear that Muslims [were] behind global warming.”

There was a trend throughout the responses that Al-Hurra Television had been “uncritical” in its promotion of the U.S. led push at democratization of the Arab world. Al-Hurra Television was indelibly rooted in the Bush administration’s push to democratize the Middle East, and the problems associated with that democratization effort were frequently transferred to the television channel. Regarding democracy promotion, respondents claimed that Al-Hurra Television was a reflection of a new “media hubris” to dominate rather than cooperate, as previously stated. Al-Hurra opened its doors to supporters and shut down all oppositional voices. One domination tactic was achieved through changing “legitimate” terms, such as calling “martyrs” “terrorists.” While respondents freely admitted that political corruption was endemic in the Arab world, and there was an urgent need for reform, they also pointed to the possibility that the U.S. was being “opportunistic.” Its calls for democratization were not genuine, if one took the examples of Iraq’s political chaos or the administration double talk with its undemocratic allies. To make the case for the U.S. “double-standard” policies in the Middle East, and the problems inherent in its democratization project, and ultimately how Al-Hurra Television was handling its programming, some respondents cited the example of how democracy and fair elections had handed power to the Palestinian Hamas

movement. Yet, the Bush administration failed to recognize the legitimacy of the Hamas-led government, and Al-Hurra Television followed suit in denigrating the ascent of Hamas. Such examples, most of the respondents conclude, provide “real” evidence on how the channel did nothing to critically assess the Bush administration’s democracy push in the Middle East.

The “liberal agenda” of the channel was mentioned as another reason why Al-Hurra Television was promoting Bush’s democracy promotion push in the Middle East. Many respondents frequently brought out the comparison between Al-Hurra Television and its main competitors, namely Al-Jazeera Television and Al-Arabiya Television. Al-Hurra’s efforts were very likely to be “doomed to fail,” they said, because it was a foreign entity, part of new “imperial designs” targeting the region’s populations and states. Liberalization of the markets, and especially democratic reform, however, had to stem from domestic conditions. Democratic values, many respondents argued, ought to be the outcome of a local struggle among the political factions. Once democracy was perceived as imported or imposed, democratic reform would be reminiscent of foreigners’ meddling.

Al-Hurra’s “very small share of [Arab] audiences,” according to many respondents, would more likely stymie the channel’s influence in promoting democracy in the Arab world. The small size of its viewership would make it unlikely for Al-Hurra Television to contribute meaningfully to the political reform debate raging in the Arab world. For a channel to be effective, it had to have a large audience, a popular following, who would trust and tune in to its news and its programs. Unlike other competitors, chiefly Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya television stations, the fact was that Al-Hurra

Television lacked such a following. When probed about their perceptions regarding the “small size” of the channel’s audience, many respondents did not hesitate to assert that Al-Hurra Television was very unpopular in the Arab world because of an entrenched position that it was “a foe” or “enemy” channel. Like its master, Al-Hurra had no genuine interest in democracy in the region. One respondent mentioned that Al-Jazeera Television was “a victim” of the Bush administration and showed the inability of the U.S. to tolerate democracy or different views. Al-Hurra Television was a tool of the oppressor, and “how can we look sympathetically at our oppressors?” wistfully exclaimed one respondent. Less than subtle insinuations about oil and economic interests trumping democracy promotion were frequently reiterated throughout many interviews.

### **iii. “Eyes” on Media Influence**

This analysis of viewers’ responses is to glean answers to the initial Research Question 1c. RQ 1c was concerned with digging up, and comprehending, the ways in which Moroccan viewers consider Al-Hurra Television’s coverage of “political reform” to be influential on their attitudes toward the issue. After reading the transcripts and the observations recorded, it became evident that there are multiple “ways” of discerning that influence. The analysis of those ways is organized normatively around a series of “eyes,” that distinguish different ways of perceiving media influence. These “eyes” provide a narrative from the audience’s standpoint on Al-Hurra Television

“The politically trained eye,” that is respondents who were political savvy, qualified the potential influence of Al-Hurra Television on their own attitudes. The perceived influence of the broadcaster on other viewers, which would mean the extent of Third Person Effect, was similarly qualified. When asked about how Al-Hurra

Television's coverage of political reform in the Arab world might influence their own attitudes, almost all respondents asserted that it would have scant or no influence at all. Most cited the fact that their little viewing of Al-Hurra programs was a source of its weak influence on their own attitudes. One respondent willingly admitted that in his case, "as a politicized citizen," a "political animal," Al-Hurra Television's coverage of political reform would not be able to affect his own attitudes. In fact, the same respondent's cognizance of the fact that the channel's status as "a political project of the Republican party in particular, and, more generally, a tool of U.S. vital [foreign] policy interests" would not enable it to have any influence. After a probing question about the potential causes, some respondents declared that the Arab viewer's psyche was seared with anti-Americanism. The failure of Bush's policies lent the respondents "other excuses to reject whatever is 'Bushian.'" Other respondents who raised this "politically trained eye" in dealing with Al-Hurra Television coverage of political reform argued that the channel's influence on their attitudes was minimal due to the fact that they had discerned some sort of dishonesty in the U.S. calls for such reform. They adamantly stated that their recognition of the need for political reform preceded both Al-Hurra's and the Bush administration's promotion of the idea.

"The critical and inoculated eyes," respondents claiming they were inoculated from Al-Hurra Television's influence, have a sweeping denial of any perceived influence. Not all respondents were "politicized" in dealing with Al-Hurra Television's potential influence, or "inoculated" from it. Some claimed that when watching those programs, a more than usual "critical" eye was turned on those programs. An extra degree of caution appeared to underlie the respondents' "critical" viewing. Many respondents recited the



channel's source of financing, the U.S. administration, as a cause of that "critical eye." Sometimes, such "a critical eye" is due to deeply held disagreements as a respondent's answer revealed: "The Arab world does not need political reform. What is urgently needed is more stability and security [in the region]." He continued that there was enough political consciousness in the region, and there was no need for Al-Hurra to raise that consciousness or create a new awareness, and other respondents concurred with this thought. Upon a probing question regarding why they felt they were not being influenced by the channel's coverage, one respondent half-jokingly explained that he had been drinking "poison." What the respondent had in mind was that he had an anti-dote to the perceived venom in Al-Hurra Television. Audiences were immune to negative influence, such a line of thought went on.

"The selective eye" refers to respondents who were picky about the type of influence that the broadcaster wields. The few respondents who admitted to "some" influence Al-Hurra exerted on their own attitudes toward political reform explained that they were very "selective" in terms of what they watch and the positive areas of that influence. For instance, according to one respondent who admitted such influence, Al-Hurra's coverage is felt more in specific issues like combating terrorism and improving women status in their countries. Al-Hurra's coverage of those issues "serve [his] needs." Serving viewers' "needs" one interviewee took pains to explain, did not necessarily result in influence because of the "credibility gap" that had been plaguing the channel since the inception. Some responses that could be categorized under this "selective eye" argued that instead of influence there is some sort of "interaction" with Al-Hurra's programs. The "interaction" was due to their perception and beliefs that its coverage tended to

reverse many of the “established definitions” and beliefs. Another respondent spoke of the fact that Al-Hurra Television had not succeeded in setting up “an example to be emulated” by viewers like him.

In addition to the above, perceptions of Al-Hurra Television’s influence were also looked at suspiciously, “a suspicious eye,” and passionately. These “eyes” on Al-Hurra Television were purposely in denial of the channel’s programs “effects” or “influence” on their attitudes toward issues of political reform. Most appeared to point to the fact that their exposure to its programs was very limited, in terms of the amount of time they spent watching those programs. Most respondents did not fail to point to the pre-existing feelings of ambivalence, if not outright hostility, that the channel’s relationship to the U.S. as a very likely cause of that diminished influence. In the few instances where such influence was admitted to be “positive,” such respondents would consistently qualify their “admission.” For such respondents, the mere fact of Al-Hurra Television’s existence enriched “the media landscape” of the region, providing a different point of view, regardless of viewers’ agreement or disagreement with the overall message.

#### **iv. Fragmented Perceptions of Influence**

Of central importance to this research project is the issue of perceived media influence. Focus group responses were used to generate answers for Research Question 1d:

RQ 1d. To what extent do perceptions of Al-Hurra Television’s influence on respondents’ attitudes differ from its perceived influence on other viewers’ attitudes (third-person)?

The straightforward answer to this question is that the focus group meetings revealed no discernible difference between first person effect and Third Person Effect. Yet, a tea-leaf reading of the responses indicated that there was room for some “fractured” perceptions of Al-Hurra Television’s influence to emerge.

No positive influence on Arab public opinion was an assessment shared by a majority (98%) of the respondents. Most respondents asserted that Al-Hurra Television programs had a “miniscule” influence on their attitudes toward political reform in the Arab world, if at all. A similar pattern emerged throughout their responses to the channel’s influence on other viewers, or Arab public opinion at large. Reasons behind its lack of influence were varied. Al-Hurra Television programs “cannot in any possible way change the direction of Moroccan public opinion considering that its percentage of viewing is extremely small. Further, the channel has no credibility because of many reasons, chiefly its U.S. government’s financing and the absence of Moroccan opposition figures, or those who differ with the U.S. Middle East policies” from its guest list, to quote a typically representative response.

Further probing questions led to some concessions among few respondents. “If it has any influence, it would influence a very small minority in society.” It could not influence the opinions of the majority, or society in general. It could not imbue them with new ideas, new visions, or influence their thoughts about issues of political reform. One respondent admitted that Al-Hurra’s influence could be “very small,” rather than no influence, because some of its programs succeeded in reflecting Moroccan reality. For instance, one respondent observed, Al-Hurra’s show, “Moroccan Tales,” delved into some social issues that local television stations had not broached. The same people who

denied that Al-Hurra Television can influence other people still recognized that the news media's influence on public opinion was significant. In the same breath, some respondents claimed that unlike Al-Hurra Television, they believed that Al-Jazeera Television might have a greater influence, presumably positive, on Arab public opinion.

Type of viewer affected the way respondents perceived Al-Hurra Television programs affected other people's attitudes concerning political reform. Some respondents reverted to the distinction between the "educated elite" and "the masses." They explained that any influence Al-Hurra might have, would be greater on those who lacked enough education, or those who were unaware of the ideological message of Al-Hurra Television functioning as a stooge of the U.S. administration. The channel would find it very difficult to influence viewers with some sort of political education and "analytical skills." From these responses, it was difficult to reconcile such a response with those who also argued that it was members of the elite who constituted a more likely prey for the channel's influence. First, the elite constituted the majority of the channel's viewers, they argued. Second, the "elites" were more likely to be sympathetic to the overall liberal message of the channel. One respondent explained that for Arab and Moroccan liberals, Al-Hurra Television constituted "a life-line of support," particularly its success in labeling "resistance fighters as terrorists." The channel would express what they desired and thus its influence on their liberal agenda would be palpable.

Hesitation to express a judgment on the perceived influence was shared among few respondents. Those who refrained from judging the degree and the kind of influence that the channel might exert on other people's attitudes did so, not only because of its perceived small viewership, but also because they did not know anyone who regularly

watched the channel. They felt that they lacked enough data to pass such judgment. When probed further, those respondents admitted that if “they” had to talk about shaping and influencing Arab public opinion, they would undoubtedly pick the channel’s competitor, Al-Jazeera Television, as the main driving force behind the pulse of public opinion. For them, Al-Jazeera Television accurately reflected, and therefore had more legitimacy to shape, “the [political] pulse of Arab citizens.”

In short, the persistent theme was that “small viewership [led to] small influence.” It consequently led to a minimal difference of Al-Hurra Television’s influence at the level of the self or the other. A fractured perception of the channel’s influence on others was the dominant feature of the focus groups’ responses. Negative influence appeared to be a fear among some respondents who were worried that the broadcaster might exert some influence especially in skewing Arab public opinion, or at least the segment that had some exposure, in favor of the U.S. This provided a direct answer to Research Question 1e. RQ 1e. “How does national identity affect viewers’ perceptions of Al-Hurra’s influence on distant others?” In other words, do respondents perceive that Al-Hurra is likely to be more influential on other Arab audiences rather than on their compatriots? “No” was the unequivocal answer throughout the focus group meetings.

## **Chapter VI**

### **Beyond the Audience: The Underlying Politics of Al-Hurra Television and U.S.**

#### **Public Diplomacy**

Al-Hurra Television's stated goals of improving the United States' standing in the Arab world find policy echoes in officials' rhetoric on public diplomacy. For instance, a 2005 testimony of the former US Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Karen Hughes, focused on "America's dialogue with the world" (2005, p. 1). Hughes outlined three "strategic imperatives" underpinning her official tasks. First, America should promote freedom around the world because it is a fundamental human and universal right, offering a "positive vision of hope and opportunity to people around the world" (p. 2). Second, "isolate and marginalize violent extremists," showcasing their blind hatred for freedom and progress, and their unjustifiable acts of terror, as targeting all nationalities and ethnicities. The third strategic imperative is "to foster a sense of common interests and common values between Americans and people of different countries, cultures and faiths across the world" (pp. 2-3). Whilst being the latest version of America's response to the repercussions of 11 September attacks, these efforts have concomitantly stated massive communication as both an inherent problem and a solution. The road to improving America's image in the world and triumphant outcome in a global conflict, underlying those three strategic imperatives communication, appears to filter down through "dialogue" and communication. Whether those imperatives are incarnated in reality remains to be seen; nevertheless, they resurrect communication as problematic, especially in the realm of broadcasting, as both dependent and independent variables in international conflict that this research project is addressing. This chapter would like to scrutinize Al-Hurra Television's politics in the larger context of U.S. public diplomacy efforts and the reactions engendered.

Throughout the analysis of the responses of Al-Hurra Television Moroccan viewers, one fact becomes abundantly clear: viewers are savvy enough to recognize the objectives behind launching such a broadcasting enterprise in their region. The viewers' responses were sufficiently lucid to link the broadcasting enterprise to "propagandistic" goals, negative perceptions among those cohorts, which illuminate the complexity of Al-Hurra Television's mission. The complexity is also borne by the fact that the rhetoric of public diplomacy, in which U.S. international broadcasting is taking center stage, is undeniably conflicting, paradoxical, and thus fails to achieve its stated objectives. This chapter of the project moves beyond the realm of audience research to navigate the terrain of the politics of Al-Hurra Television. It provides the conflicting rhetorical positions underlying the international broadcasting enterprise: One that stems from the official public diplomacy rhetoric through a textual analysis of a major speech on "America's dialogue with the world" by Karen Hughes, a former U.S. Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy. The overarching purpose is to contrast these divergent worldviews and approach Al-Hurra Television from a different set of lens, those of the policy world, and how rhetoric may not merely obfuscate reality, but actually complicate it a notch further. Now, this chapter turns its attention to the analysis of the U.S. Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy to illustrate how Al-Hurra Television's politics can only but be fragmented, fractured, and confused because of the problematic vision that undergirds it. The analysis to follow further illustrates some of the major themes that the preliminary chapters of this project sought to delineate, primarily how the Cold War rhetoric still casts its long shadow on U.S. international broadcasting.



## **1. Beyond the Audience: The Policy Maker and Public Diplomacy**

In October 14, 2005, Karen Hughes, the U.S. Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy, delivered a Keynote Address to the Forum on the Future of Public Diplomacy, George Washington University. She introduced the topic of her speech with a powerful quote that would set the debate for the whole discussion:

‘Anti-Americanism is resurging in the Arab world. Bombings, vitriolic public statements, diatribes and fantastic rumors in the press all testify to the rekindling of Arab animosity against the United States. Whether prompted by Muslim extremists, whether encouraged by irresponsible journalists or by weak government officials who seek to divert attention from their own inadequacies or whether attributable to a sincere objection to America's part in the region's development, the current emotionalism bodes no good’ (Hughes, 2005, Keynote Address).

The excerpt from a State Department memo, dispatched in the 1950s, testifies to anti-American feelings and a loss of goodwill for the United States among the cohorts of Arabs during that period. Kept at her desk for “a little perspective,” the air gram also provides Ms. Hughes with energetic vigor to pursue her mission of improving the country's image among Muslims and Arabs, she asserted. A close textual examination indicated that her Keynote speech reflects the dual contexts of the Cold War and the War on Terror, reconstruction of American public diplomacy challenges, reconstruction of America itself and the other/Islam, as well as the multiple audiences it seeks to address.

The immediate audience, the people who were in the same room with the Undersecretary, was presumably a clique of professionals, practitioners, and students all interested in public diplomacy. Here is a highly specialized audience, with members well

versed in the intricacies of the subject, such as Gil Robinson, a former deputy director of USIA. As a public official, Karen Hughes also addresses herself to the American public at large to illuminate the nature of her task and imply her accountability. That constitutes a secondary audience. It is imperative to remember that public diplomacy's primary target is the foreign public. Should any statement by a diplomat, even in the U.S., be held as partially targeting that foreign public it seeks to both construct and address? The public availability of the Keynote speech on the homepage of the State Department is likely to indicate an affirmative reply to the preceding question. These multiple audiences therefore include an elite, American public opinion, and foreign public opinion.

The context of public diplomacy begs some information about the speaker and her position as Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy. Karen Hughes was appointed to the position in July, 2005, months after the former veteran State Department diplomat, Margaret D. Tutwiler, resigned from the job in April 2004. Prior to Tutwiler, Charlotte Beers of Madison Avenue occupied the position, in October 2001, in what some have described as a hurried appointment in the aftermath of 9/11. Ms. Beers lasted only 17 months in the position after her publicity efforts drew wide ire, condemnation, and ridicule for attempting to gloss over fundamental policy problems with slick advertising. A long time Bush's political advisor and confidante, Karen Hughes was expected to leverage her spin expertise and close ties with the president in tackling the U.S. image in the Muslim world, and thus to succeed where her predecessors faltered and failed (Milbank, 2005). Public diplomacy experts' withering reactions to, and media coverage of Hughes's activities, have not isolated her performance from her symbiotic linkages to

Bush's larger political agenda and conservative rhetoric, underscoring the domestic implications of foreign policy discourse (Weisman, 2005).

American public diplomacy discourse swims in a fog of rhetoric with multiple contexts, audiences, and strategic nuances that need further elaboration, critique, and analysis. The present study has illuminated the intricate rhetoric guiding the Bush administration's public diplomacy discourse through a close scrutiny of Ms. Hughes' Keynote address. It further treats the address as an "exemplar" through which an analysis of the rhetorical construction of the United States, and the Islamic world in the Bush administration's public diplomacy discourse, remains possible. As an "exemplar," this Keynote address does not represent, nor pretend to be, an exceptional document unique in its persuasive intent or style. Indeed, it is evidently a policy speech that probably preaches to a converted choir and, being constrained by its time and place, is rooted in the "bureaucratic style" tradition (Harriman, 1995). Its "bureaucratic style" robustly fits with Weber's characterization that "The purely bureaucratic type of administrative organization...from a purely technical point of view, [is] capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of exercising authority over human beings" (cited in Harriman, 1995, p.147). In fact, its very ordinariness transforms it into perfect "exemplar" of the administration's talking points about public diplomacy and foreign policy in general. In that case, the analysis does concern the evaluation of the speech, its success or failure in presenting a well-rounded picture of the administration's public diplomacy rhetoric.

Being an exemplar, the Keynote Address speaks like, for, and to other policy formulations of public diplomacy in the receding past and the present times. The close

textual analysis of the speech uncovers three main rhetorical frames that inform its vision of public diplomacy. For that goal, this study has drawn on Goffman's (1974) perspective on framing as "schemata of interpretation," a practice of selection and exclusion of information about reality to present specific narratives in a text. Similar to media frames, rhetorical frames become "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work *symbolically* to meaningfully *structure the* social world" (Reese, 2003, p. 4). Similarly, rhetorical frames structure social and political reality, and endow it with meaning, through their recourse to a shared body of metaphors, cultural and historical experiences, and linguistic devices. Rhetorical frames' construction and identification should be possible through an analysis of those devices, metaphors and common histories.

Three interacting rhetorical frames have been identified in Hughes' Keynote Address, the Cold War rhetorical frame, the frame of "America unbound," and the Orientalist frame. The speech foregrounds the administration's public diplomacy discourse's *grounding* in a Cold War rhetorical frame. In conjunction, public diplomacy discourse and formulation hearkens to a historical tension between idealism and realism, culminating in rhetorical reconstruction of the self/America, the "America unbound" frame, and a rhetorical reconstruction of the other/Islam, the Orientalist frame. These rhetorical frames and strategies have practical consequences on foreign and domestic policies, democratic deliberation, and domestic public opinion. Since its rough legalization during the Eisenhower and the Truman administrations, as Parry-Giles (2002) argues, propaganda or public diplomacy has predominantly been a realm of "the rhetorical presidency." This continues to be the case where the presidency exploits its

unfettered access to the bully pulpit and the power of surrogates to promulgate its foreign policy agenda and sell it to the American public without due deliberation and participation. No distinction between the “rhetorical presidency” and the rhetoric of its surrogates is attempted in this analysis because the two are symbiotic and dependent on each other for their survival and promulgation.

Blending multiple rhetorical sources and discursive forms is instrumental to deconstructing the elaborate strategies of policy formulation and identifying the persistent rhetorical frames driving modern public diplomacy. In this rhetorical analysis of Karen Hughes’ Keynote speech, the analysis first proceeds with a discussion of the Cold War rhetorical frame for the administration public diplomacy discourse. The next section deals with how the address achieves its rhetorical reconstruction of the United States and the historical tensions within that discursive edifice. Reconstruction of Islam/the other and the consequences of these rhetorical strategies constitute the final portion of this analysis. It is these rhetorical frames that Al-Hurra Television, as a diplomatic enterprise, conjures up. Digging up these frames from U.S. foreign policy official discourse claims that Al-Hurra Television’s mission is to emulate the Cold War’s international broadcasting, but it has to rejuvenate and embellish the image of the United States, meanwhile contributes to the reinvention of the Middle East à l’Americain.

## **2. The Cold War Redux**

The main concern of Hughes’ Keynote Address is an exposition of American public diplomacy, not necessarily in the scholarly explication of the issue. In her official capacity as Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, she had the task of explaining the Bush administration’s efforts, context, and strategies to an American

audience. But public diplomacy does not reflect a momentary policy thought, emanating solely from the aftermath of recent terrorist events or the “War on Terror” framework. A historical review of the origination of the concept as a tool in American foreign policy would shed light on the past discourse on public diplomacy. The official concern with information production and manipulation to influence foreign publics became first institutionalized during World War I as President Woodrow Wilson established the Committee on Public Information (also known as the Creel Committee). The propaganda efforts were revived in the war against Nazi Germany, and later led to the establishment of the Office of War Information (Parry-Giles, 2002). Those information campaigns were accurately classified as propaganda, displaying no hesitation to use misinformation in the service of largely security driven goals and imperatives.

Modern public diplomacy discourse is also a product that originated out of the Cold War, between the United States and the old Soviet Union. America was intent on amassing international support against communism. There is perhaps no better illustration of the nature and the bitterness of the Cold War than President Truman’s “Campaign of Truth” speech. Passages of the speech set the strategic paths and the tactics that came to be known as public diplomacy. In his April 1950 speech, Truman fleshed out his conception of the enemy, the problem, and the response in the following way:

The cause of freedom is being challenged throughout the world today by the forces of imperialistic Communism. This is a struggle, above all else, for the minds of men. Propaganda is one of the most powerful weapons the communists have in this struggle. Deceit, distortion, and lies are systematically used by them as a matter of deliberate policy.

This propaganda can be overcome by truth—plain, simple, unvarnished truth—presented by newspapers, radio, newsreels, and other sources that the people trust....

We must make ourselves known as we really are—not as Communist propaganda pictures us. We must pool our efforts with those of other free peoples in a sustained, intensified program to promote the cause of freedom against the propaganda of slavery.

We must make ourselves heard round the world in a great campaign of truth.<sup>11</sup>

Communism thus constituted the enemy in what John F. Kennedy's Inaugural speech referred to as a "long twilight struggle." Public diplomacy campaigns would be waged to present the U.S. as it was, not as "communist propaganda" purported it to be. While history is rich with details of the proxy wars to be fought in the Cold War, it offers insights into other strategies that America pursued during that era. George Kennan's "Mr. X" articulated the U.S. policies toward the Soviets in proposing "containment" rather than outright confrontation that could have ended in a nuclear holocaust. Among the chief tactics in the "containment" strategy was the invigoration of public diplomacy, wielding economic and political might to achieve cultural influence in the "tribunal of world opinion," augmenting the reservoir of American "soft power" (Nye, 2004). Both branches of the U.S. government during that time sought to legitimate these diplomacy efforts. The Congress passed the Smith-Mundt Act in 1948 "to promote the better understanding of the United States among the peoples of the world and to strengthen cooperative international relations" (Tuch, 1990, p.17). John F. Kennedy appointed Edward R. Murrow, the well-known American broadcaster, to head the nascent United States Information Agency (USIA) whose primary mission was to fulfill the intentions of the

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<sup>11</sup> Cited in Tuch (1990).

Smith-Mundt Act as well as “help achieve United States foreign policy objectives by...influencing public attitudes in other nations” (Tuch, 1990, p.27).

In the current context of the “war on terror,” Hughes’ speech draws on the historical context of public diplomacy but not in so many words. Indeed, the excerpt of the air gram quoted above functions as a reminder to her listeners that the challenge the United States faces now is neither new nor easy to overcome. The air gram itself dates to the heyday of the Cold War (May 1, 1950). The apparent justification of including that air gram in her address is to gain inspiration and “a little perspective,” she claims, to face the challenges of her job as the Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. After her 18 month tenure at the State department, she has found out that:

The job is interesting. It's demanding, it's very busy [sic]. And I've been reminded every day and sometimes many times each day how very challenging it is. Fortunately, I like challenges and I was sent a State Department memo that I keep on my desk for times when I need a little perspective.

Then she quotes the air gram. Her confessional style of outlining the difficulties, the frustrations and her coping strategies reinforces her status as a trusted and persistent “leader” in the whole campaign. It works to enhance her credibility among the cohorts of her audience, especially those seasoned practitioners of public diplomacy, like Gil Robinson, and other USIA Alumni who showered her with questions at the end of her address. It also serves to elicit positive feedback and assemble a wider intellectual effort in the “fight.” Hughes’ bureaucratic style functions as a rallying cry, a call to arms, for both the faithful troops and those who doubt her experience and fitness for the position. The confessional style in some portions of the address works in tandem with a



conversational style to gain legitimacy through familiarity for both the speaker and her public diplomacy effort.

The practice of public diplomacy is moored in the restructuring of the State Department since the 1950s, the folding of the U.S. Information Agency in the late 1990s, and the consequent disenchantment felt inside the circles of its employees. Hughes is consciously appealing to the disgruntled for understanding, renewed engagement, and future help. For that, the confessional and conversational styles work to achieve those effects and create conviviality among her audience. Here, the practice of public diplomacy is never divorced from its historical context, its Cold War institutionalization, its absence or negligence during the era that followed, and the renewed debate with the unleashed “War on Terror” in 2001. Issues of personnel might confound the mission and, being definitely aware of this, Ms. Hughes does not fail to settle that score, clean the air in her opening paragraphs, and then move on to her larger agenda of “explaining” American public diplomacy.

While the air gram excerpt does not mention the context of US anti-communist campaign, Hughes elaborates on the excerpt and explicitly resurrects the specter of the Cold War in her next sentences. She ensconces and praises the role of public diplomacy in defeating communism and the Soviet threat. But drawing on that era she later articulates a vision of the current “War on Terror,” with their similarities in constituting a “long struggle” and their differences along military and political tactics. The wars have different enemies, but those enemies can be vanquished by the same public diplomacy weapons and tools, Hughes would have her audience believe. The rhetorical strategies employed in the speech define the contentious situation and borrow the Cold War’s frame

to construct a similar frame for the administration's anti-terrorism campaign. The following excerpt divulges those framing strategies:

Of course, the challenge of that time was successfully overcome with the key help of public diplomacy was the *long Cold War* against communism. Today we face a very different *war* against a diffused network of stateless terrorists in a completely different communications environment. We've had a communications explosion. I say we used to be trying to get information into a closed society where people were hungry for that information. Today we compete for attention and credibility in an explosive media environment. But once again, similar to the *long Cold War*, we find ourselves engaged in a generational and *global struggle* that requires every aspect of our national power, especially the power of our ideals (my emphasis).

The repetitions of the "long Cold War" and "global struggle" in the passage constitute a main strategy. Repetitions here leave insufficient space for independent, free, and "liberal" thought among members of the audience. Once her audience is ready to move to a different concept related to the present (public diplomacy), they get re-invited to the historical associations between the old "long struggle" and new "global struggle." The rhetorical effect of reconstructing and conceptualizing the present/future in terms of the past is to reveal the rhetor's own inability to dissociate the two. Willy-nilly, both the speaker and the audience are ensnared in this rhetorical conceptualization of American public diplomacy within a Cold War rhetorical frame.

On its own terms, the speech makes evident the following argument. Unlike the past, the enemy of the United States is "stateless," difficult to define, or corner down in a geographic sense, and operates in a complex communication environment. Of course, the threat is of terrorism and al-Qaeda network. The personified description would not escape

the audience's attention. The adversary's "diffused network" transcends the traditional boundaries of nation states and as such assumes its "global" dimension. Further, the Cold War rhetorical frame smoothly moves into a subsequent framing of "America as unbound," a rhetorical feat that presents a second touchstone of the Bush administration's foreign policy discourse.

### **3. Framing "America"**

Beyond the Cold War rhetorical frame, the Bush public diplomacy discourse engages in an insidious process of rhetorical construction of the United States' image that perpetuates historical tensions between idealism and realism. The rhetorical construction of this tension is a familiar rhetorical ploy designed in this case to legitimize its public diplomacy campaign and other policies, such as the Bush Doctrine of preemption and democracy/freedom promotion in the Islamic world. The tension would be innocuous and undeserving of critical attention in this section had it not implied disastrous consequences that renewed interventionist postures as illustrated by the invasion of Iraq. Karen Hughes's address bears on these historical tensions between Jeffersonian idealism and American isolationism. The speech resurrects the administration's reconstruction of "America unbound" and tirelessly bent on freedom promotion.

On the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson sent his last letter from his deathbed to a gathering in Washington reflecting on the new political experiment, America, which he and the Founding Fathers have helped bring into the world. The American experiment of self/republican government, democracy and freedom, he claimed, will spread to "some parts sooner, to others later, but finally to all." Jefferson, "the slave-owning apostle of liberty, that incomparable genius and moral

scandal,” epitomized America’s paradoxical conceptions of freedom and democracy (Ignatieff, 2005, p.44). By now it is well-known that while declaring “all men are created equal,” denying humanity, equality, and freedom to his concubine slaves was the paramount breach of that noble declaration. Despite the apparent historical inconsistencies in the U.S.A.’s perception of itself as “the village on the hill,” whose god-like mission is the spread of freedom, American presidents continue to articulate this belief in freedom, and the “duty to defend it abroad as the universal birthright of mankind” (Ignatieff, 2005, p.44).

George W. Bush would be no exception in that belief but for his “gamble” in staking his whole presidential legacy on a Jeffersonian paradox, construing America’s image of itself as the guardian of freedom to be identical to its geopolitical interests. In his second Inaugural address, Bush makes it clear that: “America’s vital interests and our deepest beliefs are now one.” Tyranny is not to be excused to buy stability in the Middle East: “Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe—because in the long run stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty.” The “war on terror” and the threat of attacks poignantly visualized in the color threat warnings have propelled this hasty drive into democracy and freedom promotion crusades, whether in Iraq or elsewhere.

The rhetorical construction of a freedom-promoting, if not crusading, United States smacks of a larger religious or messianic fervor insidious in the administration’s policy formulations in a post-September 11 world. Bostdorff (2003) analyzed these underlying and explicitly religious overtones that account for the appeal of Bush’s rhetoric in that period. Bostdorff made the case that the president’s discourse struck many

similar chords with the Puritan rhetoric of “covenant renewal.” Whether designed for foreign or domestic public opinion consumption, despite the tenuous differentiation between the two, Bush rhetoric depicted a benevolent god/freedom and exhorted his “parishioners” to believe in their “goodness”/mission. The “covenant renewal” strategies, while exhorting domestic public opinion to “uphold the faith of the greatest generation” (Bostdorff, 2003), legitimized what came to be known as “the Bush Doctrine” of preemption.

Hughes’ Keynote address explicitly engages in a rhetorical reconstruction and presentation of America’s image and freedom mission. As the following passage shows, the sense of public diplomacy’s mission does not depart from the “founding values” of the United States. And she makes that point with no hesitation:

So we’re engaged in a fight about our most fundamental and founding values, the freedom to speak our minds, the freedom to worship freely and as we choose, the freedom to participate in the political process. President Bush has charged me with developing a long-term strategy to ensure that our ideals prevail.... Ideals which do not belong only to America but are shared by civilized people the world over.

While the passage specifies that the long “global struggle” involves a fight over the values that make America what it is, political and religious freedom, those values are not the exclusive property of the United States. In fact, those ideals and values belong to all “civilized people.” Broadening the community that shares “our most fundamental and founding values” enhances the legitimacy of public diplomacy. It is a noble enterprise, as noble as “our” values. Her audience would not fail to grasp the import of those claims and the demands of envisaging America in the way the speaker portrays it.

The spatial proximity between these reconstructions of the nation and “President Bush charged me” is strategically located. While that juxtaposition alludes to the proximity and close relationship between the president as Commander in Chief, and his surrogate, Karen Hughes, it definitely invokes the wider context of Bush’s own discourse and rhetoric on foreign policy. The argument here is meant to be a reminder of the “global struggle,” but not a novel observation. Unsurprisingly, the symbiotic relationship between Hughes’ address and the larger Bush agenda needs not be lost on her audience.

Further references to that relationship in the text are reinforced by the familiar repetition of the words “president” or “Bush” sixteen times in the text. Even when she apparently wants to detail her activities and elucidate the important status of public diplomacy, Ms. Hughes brings up the “president” or associations with the term as in the following passage:

First of all, we’re bringing public diplomacy to the policy table and integrating it into every aspect of the State Department ....I wrote an extensive memo to the Secretary and to the *President* about what I heard on my recent trip. And I also personally briefed the *President* and Vice *President* and the National Security Advisor, Secretary Rice and the *President's* Chief of Staff and spent about an hour over lunch talking with them about what I heard on my trip. And so as I travel and listen, I’m bringing that feedback directly to the policymakers of our United States Government (my emphasis).

The point here is that the study of public diplomacy in any administration should not ignore the larger goals of the White House incumbent, and the surrogate’s promulgation of the Oval Office agenda. Indeed, the Keynote address here falls not in an isolated space but rather in an environment where Bush articulated a “freedom” agenda to be extended not only to public diplomacy practice but to America as well. While the administration’s

rhetorical reconstruction of America hearkens back to foundational moments in American history, its “freedom” agenda indeed both expands and subverts even the traditions of America, and its ambivalence between isolation and engagement in global affairs.

Again, George W. Bush’s second Inaugural Address in 2005 provides a peek into how democracy and freedom promotion are the centerpiece of contemporary American foreign policy. In succinct terms, the speech proposes that freedom promotion is paramount and identical to America’s security. At least three justifications and motivations could rationalize this rhetorical move as some have indeed argued. A primary rhetorical purpose of the speech is to “define Bush’s place in history” through picking up the legacy of the American presidency and the Founding Fathers, especially Lincoln’s insistence that “Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves” (Hendrickson & Tucker, 2005, p.2). The second motivation for the expanded freedom agenda is a domestic political calculation of rallying public support for the foreign policy agenda, argue Hendrickson and Tucker (2005). The third motivation has to do with re-legitimizing America’s leadership abroad, especially the global discontent engendered by the Iraqi misadventure. Unlike the “Bush Doctrine,” articulated in the first term of his White House tenure, the “global freedom agenda” targets a state of “being” undemocratic around the world, particularly the Middle East (Hendrickson & Tucker, 2005).

Hughes makes explicit these associations and ruminations in her Keynote address. Indeed, for her, public diplomacy boils down into realizing Bush’s vision and freedom agenda throughout the Muslim world. One example could illuminate such explicitness

and underscore the symbiotic relationship between the presidency and the practice of public diplomacy:

First, we must offer a positive vision of hope that is rooted in the President's freedom agenda....So our policy is to stand for freedom; freedom for people to express themselves, to have the opportunity to make an impact, to know their voice can make a difference in the future of their country. Freedom took a long time in our own country and so we understand that this pace of change will be different in different places. But freedom must be fostered and nurtured and encouraged.

Neo-imperialist overtones and fantasies ooze out of the passage. Identification of public diplomacy with the president's freedom agenda excludes any American who does not espouse similar conceptions of America's identity and global role in spreading freedom. In this instance, and throughout her address, Karen Hughes is disciplined and speaks from specified talking points. Such an immersion of the president's ambitious agenda in public diplomacy should raise eyebrows about the validity of the administration's approach to policy concerns. Albeit the sphere of foreign policy, public diplomacy remains hostage to partisan politics, domestic campaigning and narrowly conceived politicking, prominently illustrated in Hughes' rhetorical strategies.

#### **4. Reinventing the Middle East**

The above arguments delineated the main "strategic" thinking underlying the Bush administration's public diplomacy discourse. In that vein, the rhetorical reconstruction of America belies Bush's larger strategic vision of freedom promotion. In a rhetorical situation, the rhetor should usually not be content with the mere presentation of her self and what she stands for. Indeed, the rhetorical work is always incomplete if it is distant from the audience it seeks to persuade and manipulate. The structural context of



public diplomacy is what perhaps differentiates it from the blatantly negative associations with propaganda. The “partners” in that structural context remain the speaker/ communicator/ government and the listener/ audience/ foreign public. The Keynote address’ spirited presentation engages in rhetorical reconstructions of both partners.

The Bush administration public diplomacy rhetoric has legitimized itself on the basis of historical idealism, freedom promotion, that functions both as a non-military response to September 11th and terrorism threat of Islamic extremism (hereby narrowly located in the Islamic world). “Since September 11th, public diplomacy, like every other part of the State Department, has been focused on the war against terrorism,” admitted Charlotte Beers, Hughes’ predecessor, in a Congressional hearing in 2002. Similar to its precursor during the Cold War, current public diplomacy reconstructs a target-- a foreign public that needs to be converted and wooed from a dark and misleading ideology.

Charlotte Beers framed the situation problematics in the following manner:

As we *woke* to the realization that our country’s perception around the world is at best misunderstood, and at worst skewed, we also woke to the reality that we needed to improve and magnify the ways in which we are addressing people of the world - not necessarily other world governments, but people. This is especially true of those disaffected populations in such areas as the Middle East and South Asia, whose *poor perception* of the U.S. leads to unrest, an unrest that has proven to be a threat to our national and international security (my emphasis).

The primary target of American public diplomacy constitutes those masses of disaffected Muslim populations whose “poor perception” of the U.S., claims Ms. Beers, is the cause of anti-American and skewed sentiments. That rhetoric would have its audience believe that the problem lies in a loss of control over America’s image, partially its fault in letting

others define what the U.S. stands for, indisputably constitutes the centerpiece in official public diplomacy discourse. The United States was unconscious of the hostilities raging in those regions (or was it?), and the terrorist attacks “awoke” it from its slumbers, the same rhetoric continues. But the passage also locates the perception problem squarely in a geographical sense, the Middle East and South Asia, as the fertile ground where “those disaffected populations” reside. Disaffection among foreign public opinion as a threat to national security emerges as the new paradigm and prism of public diplomacy.

Of frequent emphasis in the current public diplomacy rhetoric is that “those disaffected populations” suffer from “a freedom deficit,” as even a cursory reading of Ms. Hughes Keynote address would find. The region lives in starkly different terms to the ideals of America, freedom, equality and opportunity embodied in “Lady Liberty.” Women lack freedom, young people see no promising future ahead, and tyranny carries the day. That bleak reality offers fertile recruiting grounds for Islamic extremists to pump up hatred against the United States and channel the rage toward the outsider. In drawing these sketches, Hughes has recourse to her recent trips to the Middle East and provides testimonial evidence in a fashion revealed in the following passage:

In Saudi Arabia, one of the *most interesting* events of the trip -- I went to a private home for a late night discussion known as a majlis and it was *very unusual* because both men and women were there and this doesn't usually happen. Usually, only men attend or only women and they're not together. And the moderator, we noticed, kept calling on the men to express their points of view. And our Ambassador, several times, gently suggested that perhaps he might want to hear from a few of the women and at one point the moderator said, “Oh, well, the women don't have anything to say.” And the *women jumped up and waved their hands* and yes, they did, have lots of things to say. And I found that Arab

women were *very articulate* and *very passionate* and *very eager* to express their opinions (my emphasis).

As a Western woman, she is entering the harem, the “closed societies,” and carries the historic burden that Rudyard Kipling, the bard of the British Empire, had celebrated. But can the case of Saudi Arabia be really generalizable to all Islamic nations? The Keynote address falls silent.

Within the administration’s rhetoric, it is plausible to draw parallels between this “freedom” promotion agenda and older discourses of empire (although policy analysts might object to that). The “Orientalist” scholar and critic would have a field day in tracing the language used in the former passage. It paints the Middle East as the place of the exotic Orient. The emotive and expressive language dominates the imagination, as in the italicized: *most interesting*, *very unusual*, and the next ones—*women jumped up*, *waved their hands*, *very articulate*, *very passionate* and *very eager*. Since language and discourse generally construct the world around us, the address brushes the old Orientalist imagination and equates the region with backwardness and tyranny. The sticky point is that the current public diplomacy rhetoric cannot achieve its policy goals if it remains moored in the suspect language of superiority. For audiences of that region, such discourse remains disturbing and suspicious. It is unfortunate that it comes from the highest American public diplomacy official.

Edward Said’s detailed analysis of the underpinnings of Orientalist discourse can further inform how the United States’ relationship with the Middle East could not escape the imperialist legacies of Britain and France. Orientalism refers to the “system of ideas that ... remain unchanged as teachable wisdom” from European encounters with the Middle East and as it has seeped into America’s current relationship with and foreign

policies in that region (Said, 1978). The “American experience of the Orient taken as a unit” and “the American Oriental position has fit—I think quite self consciously—in the places excavated by the two earlier European powers [Britain and France],” Said (1978) argues. To reinterpret Said, Orientalist discourse perpetuates power relationships, and enshrines formulaic understanding of a diverse set of cultural and historical contexts. In a Foucauldian sense, discursive formations highlight relationships of domination and power that barricade informed understanding of social and cultural realities.

Public diplomacy rhetoric operates in a fashion that reproduces those (former?) associations of guilt and victimization albeit inadvertently, perhaps. Karen Hughes’ address provides few attempts at reevaluation of those associations through the admission of past ignorance or wilful misunderstanding. Ignorance has begotten the current terrorism threat and its visitation on the continent. The speech makes a passing reference to these ideas:

For 60 years, America basically ignored the freedom deficit in the Middle East, hoping that stability would achieve security. And as a result as Secretary Rice has recently noted, we got neither. Instead, we got conditions so cancerous that people were willing to fly airplanes into buildings full of innocent people.

In any case, the “freedom deficit” is partially due to the United States’ past policies in the region and the seething anger should be ascribed to those accommodating policies. Of importance, that admission of guilt, if not wrong doing, is rarely heard. But the admission legitimizes a new form of intervention, like the experience of Iraq, in the name of “freedom promotion.” Ms. Hughes frequently conflates the two in order to legitimize the Iraqi adventure, as in: “They [the Iraqis] are showing the world that freedom is not just an

American desire but a universal one; that people everywhere want to be able to be free and participate in their societies.”

The rhetorical reconstruction of the administration’s targets in the Keynote address extends beyond the portraits drawn here, to sketching the dangers of Islamic extremism and the threat of terror. Islamic extremism’s own appropriation of religious discourse and authority should be contested to isolate these terrorists from the larger Muslim populations. Terrorists should not be allowed to hijack religious and political discourse in the Muslim world because their vision is that of bearded men and imprisoned women, as was shown during the Taliban’s rule, to paraphrase Karen Hughes. The speech again quotes President Bush’s description of terrorists’ intentions: “They wish to make everyone powerless except themselves. They banned books and desecrated historical monuments and brutalized women. They seek to end dissent in every form and to control every aspect of life and rule the soul itself.” Constituting “the second key foundation of our strategic vision,” isolation of Islamic extremism and radicalism will be useful only if people of different faiths, as well as Muslim themselves, come together to prevent extremism from taking roots in places like Iraq. For Ms. Hughes, “the third strategic pillar [of American public diplomacy] is to work to foster that sense of common interests and common values between Americans and people from different countries.” Her Keynote address proposes a roadmap to triumph through the use of several tactics, namely the “4 E’s—engage, exchange, educate and empower” Muslim populations.

The rhetorical presentation of terrorism’s dangers and “terrible intentions” reiterates similar strategies identified in the reconstruction of America’s image, mainly the symbiotic linkages between the President’s own discourse/vision and the project of

American public diplomacy. The power of the presidency is wielded in the whole enterprise and underscored in the “buddy” relationship between the President and his surrogate. The surrogate’s ideas imitate and reproduce the President’s own agenda at the level of domestic and foreign policy platforms to enact a process of legitimization. For example, the issue of Iraq is explicitly referenced at least nine times in the address with the undeniable motive of highlighting the “success” story in Bush’s narrative of America and its freedom agenda.

## **Chapter VII**

### **Discussion and Future Directions**

## **1. What's the Matter with Al-Hurra Viewers?**

At all the different phases of the field research, whether focus group meetings, surveys, interviews, or participant observation of Al-Hurra Television audiences, some findings were consistently pre-eminent. First, audiences were savvy enough to discern that the channel was a “tool” of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. There were no dissenting voices that objected to the characterization, raised by participants in the focus group meetings, that this broadcasting enterprise was inseparable from the U.S. government's larger strategic goals, namely combating terrorism and improving its standing in the “Arab street.” Respondents were not at a loss to define and identify the U.S. political reform agenda that had been brought to the forefront of political and public discourse in recent years. Growing out of those policies, audiences believed that Al-Hurra Television reflected those efforts. How Al-Hurra Television contributed to this foreign policy agenda, especially promoting issues of political reform or not, was not a matter of disagreement either. Respondents preponderantly concurred that Al-Hurra Television would not be able to have any vigorous or positive contribution because of its limited reach. The channel's limited reach translated into limited influence, according to most of the participants. Al-Hurra viewers who participated in the study frequently scoffed at the intentions of Al-Hurra Television, denying any influence it might have on their attitudes, their compatriots, or Arab public opinion at large. They were also scoffing at the reform initiatives embedded in the U.S. Middle East policies.

Second, Al-Hurra Television was perceived to hurt, not improve the U.S. image and standing in the Middle East. Audiences were not hesitant to argue that the channel



functioned as a new and different tool of control. U.S. government's sponsorship had proven toxic to the reputation of the channel, shattering the broadcaster's credibility from the beginning. Respondents made it abundantly clear that they perceived the channel as a "propaganda" outlet, in the pejoratively popular sense, whose task was to serve its master rather than the target audiences. As long as such goal was perceived, it was met with willful defiance. Defiance took the form of actually boycotting the channel, as some explained, it was no longer on their dial any more. Defiance also took the form of "hostile" viewership among many members of its audience: "I don't lend any credence to what it [Al-Hurra] says because I know it is out there to attack Arabs and Al Jazeera" was a frequent response. Al-Hurra Television was not a clean media slate; its agenda reflected the agenda of the Bush administration. The source's lack of credibility leads to the media's lack of credibility. In the perception of some viewers, Al-Hurra Television was the media response to Al-Jazeera Television. It was all part of the siege to be drawn around independent, nongovernmental, news sources. The media agenda was bogged down by the political agenda; the consequence was that Al-Hurra Television had had no fair chance, or level playing field to compete for its target audience's trust. No amount of "lipstick on a pig," can obscure those facts. Audiences are unlikely to trust the message if they do not trust the messenger.

Third, the analysis of participants' responses gleaned from the focus group meetings identified a set of audience "eyes" on Al-Hurra Television's influence. While those categories organized respondents' seemingly chaotic and self-contradictory revelations, those categories are still useful to comprehend the make-up of Al-Hurra audiences. Respondents distinguished between the "ordinary," regular, viewer and the

“political,” elitist, viewers. Broadcast media tend, by definition, to attract the regular guy in using popular jargon, populist discourse, in debating public issues. Al-Hurra Television was not perceived to fit this category and description, according to many respondents. Many respondents believed that only a very tiny minority of Arabs would watch Al-Hurra, a minority of liberals who might be sympathetic to U.S. policies regardless of the existence of Al-Hurra. The channel might provide an echo chamber where liberals could freely rant against extremists and probably against corrupt Arab governments, while muting criticism of the United States. The “eyes” categorization of audiences revealed how politically savvy audiences might consciously resist, and object to, media influence. At least, this type of viewer feels empowered enough to resist media influence, specifically media influence that is perceived to be pernicious and negative. Respondents appeared to find it difficult to reconcile the fact that, according to their logic, viewers lacking “political education” might constitute an easy prey to Al-Hurra’s negative influence.

But these sets of “eyes,” while being analytical tools, they can be the basis to set up a taxonomy of Al-Hurra viewers. Above all, those respondents were first and foremost viewers of the television channel. Their diverging levels of viewership, the extent of time they spent watching Al-Hurra Television, partially account for their diverging analytical “eyes,” from the “critical” to the “political.” Needless to say, as the result section argued, that these categories are potentially more than an ad hoc classification. The categories of Al-Hurra viewers overlap, and they are not exhaustive at all. Box 1 reorganizes these sets of “eyes,” the corresponding viewer types that emerged throughout the focus group interviews.

## Box 1. Typology of Al-Hurra Audiences

'The politically trained eye'  
'The critical/inoculated eye'  
'The selective eye'  
'The suspicious eye'

Fourth, on the issue of political reform, focus group respondents provided fresh evidence regarding their cognizance of the need for reform and the role Al-Hurra Television played in the U.S. government's call for such reform. Their objections were directed at the U.S. attempts, which seemed to be less than honest. Their preconceived perceptions that the U.S. government was not "serious" about democracy promotion would find support in the entangled relationship of the U.S. administration and Arab regimes allied with it. Al-Hurra Television did not alleviate such unfavorable disposition, but actually made it worse. The anachronism was that an administration or a foreign government purporting to support "free speech" was perceived to have declared war on a supposedly "independent" broadcaster, Al-Jazeera Television. The rhetoric of foreign policy, particularly democracy promotion and its paraphernalia, was undercut by reality. Hence, Al-Hurra's launch appears to have been a self-defeating strategy at best, as shown by focus group responses. A large segment of Arab viewers feel that Al-Jazeera Television represents their own "voice," while Al-Hurra represents a hostile voice, a voice of the U.S.

Fifth, neither were the ailments of the Arab world as inscrutable as they might have been portrayed throughout the Bush administration's rhetoric, nor were respondents in denial of their existence. Respondents consistently revealed a low opinion of their governments, their educational system which was spawning legions of unemployed

graduates, and rife corruption crippling the political process. In fact, a majority of respondents had a lower opinion of their governments than the United States' government. Al-Hurra was perceived to do a service in bringing public attention to those dark areas that needed reform, probably a "heckuva job" only to a fault. In most focus group meetings, some respondents expressed their suspicions that most programs portrayed their culture and society very negatively. As one respondent exclaimed, "We know that our reality is bad; yet, we also need to see a positive outlook" on the future. In no uncertain terms, the responses indicated that Al-Hurra's unflattering portrayals of their local politics and society did not present a solution they would welcome or cherish. "Letting [them] know that [their] society was backward" was perceived to be a main objective and trend in the broadcast. Political reform was painfully needed, but Al-Hurra's prescriptions were short of delivering tangible outcomes. This juncture appears to be a treacherous territory in the sense that respondents were confounding Al-Hurra, a media outlet, with the U.S. administration. When the moderator interjected that it was perhaps "unfair" to task a broadcaster with conjuring solutions to some of the most intractable problems in their society, some responses explained that they would not like to be "lectured" at by a government that did not "respect" or "appreciate" their values. Defensive use of local values was raised also when many respondents put the onus of reform on their local citizens rather than the U.S. or Arab governments.

Sixth, the exclusive brand of the U.S. perspective in the coverage was not met with unanimous approval or adulation. While many respondents were cognizant that Al-Hurra's mission was to promote U.S. policies in the region, air U.S. viewpoints, and function as a "propaganda" arm of the U.S. government, their distaste for that exclusive

focus was palpable in many responses. One respondent expressed some bitterness as he explained that “[he] watched Al-Hurra to laugh at [him]self..how they think about us..[and] how they seek to penetrate us.” Respondents frequently mentioned the U.S. invasion of Iraq as one instance of how Al-Hurra was trying to “rewrite” their history with no regard to local memory or viewers’ sentiments. No matter how Al-Hurra was trying to explain the U.S. rationale for militarily invading an Arab country, the perception that it was illegitimate, hostile, and imperialist action was staunchly held. It did not help that the Bush administration’s own rationale for the war had fluctuated widely and constantly as it shifted from ridding the world of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction, upholding the United Nations’ resolutions, to liberating the Iraqi people from dictatorship, while alleging the Iraqi regime’s connections with Al-Qaeda in between. Those fluctuations complicated Al-Hurra’s task, as the perceived inconsistencies only hurt whatever credibility it hoped to build. Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*’s insight that “All war is based on deception” rang truer than ever in the ears of Arab viewers. And Al-Hurra footed the bill, as its “credibility” went into tatters.

Finally, somewhat paradoxically, Al-Hurra viewers vented their frustrations at the channel’s failure to provide more programming about the United States. In some sense, viewers would like to be informed more about the U.S., its social and cultural issues, educational opportunities, rather than “informing Arabs about Arabs.” Two conclusions emerge from Al-Hurra viewers’ stated desire for more programming about the U.S. First of all, as a U.S. sponsored channel they expected more programming about the U.S. rather than their own backyard. There was an implicit admiration of the U.S. as a “brand,” an admiration for U.S. cultural industries, and the promise of its political

institutions. Second, Al-Hurra's role as a "surrogate" station, a broadcaster that sought to pass itself as a legitimate source for local news, seems to backfire. Its viewers wanted its identification with the U.S. to be made loud and clear. In other respects, their desire for more U.S. focused programming chart fruitful direction for Al-Hurra and shows that there is a place for it in the region. These interpretations find support in the fact that Al-Hurra is competing in a crowded media market, with more experienced, and far credible outlets. Instead of scarcity and hunger for news, there is abundance and surfeit of news; and Al-Hurra has to break through the crowd. Its proximity to the U.S. administration presents another underexploited opportunity in terms of canvassing frequent invitations of senior administration officials.

## **2. "Perceived Influence" and International Broadcasting**

The accumulated body of research on perceived media influence reveals the depths, and intuitive interpretations of Third Person Effect in audience consumption of media. In accordance with the existing evidence, exclusively experimental and survey data, this research project expected its findings to affirm the existence of "Third Person Effect," perceived media influence. Retesting the theory would have validated the assumptions and robust findings of studies that media audiences have a tendency to minimize negative media influence on them while exaggerating similar influence on other viewers, the third person. The difference in media influence between the respondent, the "first person," and the "other," the third person, is labeled "Third Person Effect" since it shows the extent of exaggerating negative media influence on others. The more distant the "other" person is, that is the larger the social/psychological distance between the respondent and the "other," the greater the Third Person Effect. This project

has used two sets of data to examine Third Person Effect in the context of audiences' reception of Al-Hurra Television in Morocco. One set of data was focus group interviews, the other was traditional survey method, where viewers of Al-Hurra Television programs were asked about their perceptions of Al-Hurra Television's influence on their attitudes toward political reform in the Arab world. Again, the project had implicitly hypothesized that Al-Hurra Television viewers would claim that watching Al-Hurra Television programs did not negatively influence their attitudes toward political reform, while other viewers would be alienated, negatively influenced, by their viewing experiences. The findings from both data sets suggest otherwise and are somewhat diverging from existing conclusions on Third Person Effect.

The focus group data, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter, "What's the Matter of Al-Hurra Television Viewers?," made it evident that some level of Third Person Effect is at work in audience responses and discussions of the issue. Focus group data illuminated the fact that the landscape of perceived media influence, let alone traditional media influence, is more complicated. While Al-Hurra Television programs were presumably considered negative by an overwhelming number of respondents, the same respondents had not explicitly exaggerated its negative influence on others. It was surprising to discern that some segments of Al-Hurra Television audiences were ready to admit that television programs might have an influence on their attitudes toward political reform. The nature of that influence, positive influence, appears to conform with the theoretical expectation that media audiences ascribe positive attributes to them. In most of the cases, they still agree that Al-Hurra Television can have some negative influence on the attitudes of other viewers toward political reform. In effect, the qualitative data

support the existence of Third Person Effect in ways more complicated than existing literature indicates. The Third Person Effect is not uniform among audiences because there are core differences, attitudinal and behavioral, that could be shaping respondents' estimation of media influence. The interviews made it clear that different categories of viewers need to be considered when researchers and policy-makers deal with international broadcasting. In the matter of Al-Hurra Television, those viewers have ranged from the “suspicious” to the “inoculated,” as Box 1 summed them up. Box 2 sums up these audience categories' perceptions of Al-Hurra television's influence at the level of “self” and the “other.” For simplicity’s sake, influence is categorized as either “Yes” or “No.”

Box 2 Al-Hurra Viewers and Perceived Influence

	Al-Hurra’s Perceived Influence on Viewers’ Attitudes toward Political Reform	
	Self	Other
‘The politically trained eye’	No	Yes
‘The critical/inoculated eye’	No	No
‘The selective eye’	Yes	Yes
‘The suspicious eye’	No	Yes

Perception of Al-Hurra Television’s influence differed from one audience category to the other, which is clearly a matter of their preexisting attitudes. Their individual differences have affected the presumed influence of Al-Hurra Television programs on their attitudes toward promoting equal rights for women, fighting political corruption, calling for greater transparency in elections and appreciating the urgency of reforming their education system. Al-Hurra Television's role in promoting such issues, affecting public attitudes regarding political reform, while perceived as marginal, is not totally denied.



The quantitative analysis of survey data reveals that respondents have similar view of the marginal nature of Al-Hurra Television's influence. However, multiple statistical tests did not support the existence of Third Person Effect because respondents tended to report comparable scores for Al-Hurra Television's influence both on the "self" and the "other." The mean score for Al-Hurra Television's influence on both the "self" and the "other" approaches three (around 2.91). In other terms, respondents are neither exaggerating the media's negative influence on themselves, minimizing those negative effects on themselves, nor are they ascribing positive influence of Al-Hurra Television programs to themselves. The basic indicators of the existence of Third Person Effect are absent in the quantitative data. To recheck for the existence of Third Person Effect, multiple tests were conducted on Al-Hurra Television's perceived influence on respondents' attitudes toward specific aspects of political reform. The presumed influence of Al-Hurra Television programs on attitudes toward women rights and educational reform, for instance, was remarkably comparable at the level of 'self' and 'other.' The pressing question at this stage is what are the sources of these seemingly conflicting findings? Or should these findings be interpreted as conflicting?

Several interpretations can explain the absence of a discernible Third Person Effect in the survey data, based on insights from the focus group interviews. One thing to keep in mind is that the respondents were part of the same sample in the survey data and the focus group interviews. The first interpretation refers to the possibility that viewers do not perceive Al-Hurra Television to be capable of changing their attitudes, or their compatriots, because they perceive that there is an entrenched "anti-Americanism" among likely audience members. Negative perceptions of the source, the U.S. government, are

so strong that Al-Hurra Television would be marginal in transforming people's attitudes. Strongly held beliefs regarding the source overwhelm any likely influence that Al-Hurra Television wields in the region. In the earlier discussion, it was pointed out that the low credibility of the U.S. government overrides the credibility of its broadcaster. What this interpretation also suggests is the existence of some credibility transfer that affects audience's perceived influence of Al-Hurra Television in the region.

Second, participants do not feel that Al-Hurra Television is going to have any negative influence on their attitudes toward political reform in the region because their support for political reform is already very strong. The first section of the questionnaire measured their existing attitudes toward political reform in the Arab world. The results yielded a very high degree of support for reform among Al-Hurra Television viewers. The very high level of support for political reform was recorded not only in their own support for political reform initiatives, but also in their perception of their friends'. Participants are indicating quantitatively that they are not expecting Al-Hurra Television to have any influence, be it positive or negative, on Arab citizens' attitudes toward the promotion of women equality, fighting political corruption, reforming the educational system, or calling for transparent elections. Indeed, Al-Hurra Television seems to have no added value in citizens' concern with reforming the political process in the region, at least in the opinions of its viewers' self-reported answers. The analogy is similar to a person who is trapped in a house on fire. The person does not need to be told that the house is on fire. If the goal of Al-Hurra Television is to merely show its viewers that the Arab world needs political reform, the news is Arab viewers know that only too well.

The third plausible interpretation is the possibility that the measures were not challenging enough for the respondents, potentially creating a “ceiling effect.”<sup>12</sup> A “ceiling effect” could have occurred due to the set attitudes of the respondents toward the issues in the study. The attitudes of Al-Hurra viewers toward “political reform” are overwhelmingly positive, and their attitudes toward the United States’ “seriousness” about promoting “political reform” are so negative, that the answers would appear “self-evident.” The potential for a “ceiling effect” could confound the Third Person Effect.

Finally, responses to Al-Hurra Television’s perceived influence on their attitudes toward each item making up the construct of “political reform” provides some insight into the rhetoric of “political reform” and how it might be connected to Third Person influence. Generally, respondents had a lot of support for political reform in the region. However, upon checking the reliability of the construct, it was found that an item on their support of “women rights” did not quite fit in the construct, i.e. an improved reliability occurs if item was deleted. The theoretical justification for keeping the item in the construct was very strong, but the statistics suggest that viewers were probably not viewing “women rights” as an urgent component of the “political reform” agenda that Al-Hurra and the United States should focus on. There seems to be some prioritization taking place as respondents indirectly indicated that women rights should not take central importance, unlike educational reform and the political process.

The methodological approach used in the study supports these competing explanations. The “spiral of silence” theory holds that audiences may resort to suppressing their own dissenting views because they sense the prevalent hostility of the

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<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Professor Mary Beth Oliver for raising this alternative possibility.

dominant trend of public opinion. If that was the case in the focus group interviews, the “spiral of silence” would lead us to expect that respondents might reveal more about their attitudes in the solitude of their paper and pencil questionnaires. However, the results suggest that respondents were very forthcoming in the focus group meetings, bringing up a diverse set of views, arguing with one another.

### **3. Where is the Public in “Public Diplomacy”?**

While seemingly distant from the policy maker, international broadcasting does in effect fall in the larger apparatus of public diplomacy. Al-Hurra is no exception: to market U.S. policies abroad is a primary objective. To garner the goodwill of Arab public opinion is another. Throughout this project, Al-Hurra’s mission has been the subject of analysis from the perspective of how it succeeds in improving the U.S. standing in the Arab world. A detailed analysis of a convenient sample of Al-Hurra viewers was conducted. It revealed that Al-Hurra has not met its objectives as a bulwark, a tactical defense, against anti-U.S. sentiments in the Arab world. Audience analysis revealed some interesting insights about the increasingly complicated task of international broadcasting in the face of proliferating media resources. Audience analysis has always enriched media research, but when considering international broadcasting, an examination of Al-Hurra’s implications on public diplomacy needs to be conducted. In other terms, the policy questions are as important to research on international broadcasting as audience research. That is why this project has devoted such attention to the underlying rhetoric driving Al-Hurra Television. The rhetoric of public diplomacy was scrutinized in a single chapter that analyzed how U.S. public diplomacy is being framed per the then U.S. Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy’s speech. Al-Hurra understandably

addresses foreign public opinion, but how about the American public? Now, this section of the discussion turns to the implications of the rhetoric of public diplomacy to address a crucial policy question: What role does the U.S. public play in public diplomacy? And how does that spill into the future of U.S. public diplomacy and/or U.S. international broadcasting?

While the role of the U.S. public in formulating foreign policy is beyond the scope of this study, some understanding of this role bears on the issue under scrutiny here. The brief answer to the first question posed above is that the U.S. public remains marginalized in the administration's concerted efforts to improve the United States' standing abroad. Public diplomacy, as an informational or propaganda tool targeting foreign public opinion, falls prey to domestic political machinations. The construction of its lofty goals falls in synch with the administration's larger agenda of freedom promotion and the campaign against terrorism. While some public diplomacy goals could find legitimacy in rational deliberation, analysis of the current administration's public diplomacy discourse argues that it alienates major sections of Americans whose perceptions of the U.S. and its role in the world might not fall within the spectrum of the Bush world and its rhetoric. The rhetorical frame of the Cold War seeps into current public diplomacy discourse in pursuit of historical legitimacy, inspiration and strategic advice. However, unlike communism, Islamic extremism does not seek a revolution in America; it has very limited policy claims that could rationally be construed, despite its threat to the geopolitical interests of the United States in certain parts of the world. The Cold War rhetorical frame conflates the present with the past, the adversaries in different eras, fine discursive distinctions, and eventually cripples the mission of the present.

At the level of its target audience, whether foreign or Muslim public opinion, the administration's public diplomacy rhetoric might lead to alienation and suspicion instead of the stated and desired good will. This study briefly indicated how representation of the Middle East and the Islamic world remains susceptible to Orientalist interpretations. The operating rhetorical logic excludes differences in its reconstruction of its target. In the political reality of opinion polling, frequent PEW and Gallup polls indicate the deep mistrust felt among Muslims toward the United States' policies and its half-baked "freedom" agenda.

Some critics have pointed to the paradoxical nature of words and deeds with the assertion that policy enunciations remain short of mending the "image" problem. While the Keynote Address studied here pitted public diplomacy's mission in a struggle between starkly competing visions of the world, it glossed over policy failures and genuine grievances in the region. The problem is woefully reduced to image construction and marketing. Public diplomacy thus continues to be rooted in modernist beliefs in the power of communication to resolve disaffection among foreign publics. The entailed optimistic conceptualization is bolstered by idealist beliefs in freedom and America's role in the world. Hughes captures the power of both ideals and communication when she claims that:

America is also confident of our ideals. We believe, *given a fair hearing and a free choice*, that people the world over will choose freedom over tyranny, tolerance over extremism, diversity over rigid conformity and justice over injustice. Our opponents have to resort to propaganda and hate speech and myths because they want closed minds (my emphasis).

These rhetorical formulations might obliterate a balanced understanding of the other. After all, communication might not be a panacea or salvation unless real obstacles are addressed (Cosser, 1984).

On a different plane, the presidency's own domination of public diplomacy rhetoric shields American public opinion from (international) reality. Further, incomplete or inaccurate presentation of what is at stake inhibits American public opinion from a fair assessment and deliberation of the perceived grievances of international or Muslim public opinion. At the extreme, public diplomacy rhetoric raises the concern that it might well be enacting a process of double dealing, manipulation and delusion. The current public diplomacy discourse continues to use the power of surrogates to legitimize its foreign policy enterprise, inhibiting popular support and participation in its formulation. As a remedy, a genuine public diplomacy needs to realize its promise and be transformed into "people diplomacy" instead of "presidential diplomacy." That is, the active engagement of the American people, or at least its representative opinion stripes, in both the formulation and enactment of the nation's foreign policy.

A recent formidable lesson on how the involvement of the U.S. public can positively contribute to public diplomacy is amply illustrated by the initiative of one U.S. citizen, Greg Mortenson, who has helped build schools in the hills of Pakistan and Afghanistan. In the inspiring record of this initiative, *Three cups of tea: One man's mission to promote peace . . . One school at a time*, Mortenson and Relin (2006) recount Mortenson's accidental journey into his belief that educating the young children of Pakistan and Afghanistan can stem off the tide of violent ideologies more than missiles. "Schools are a much more effective bang for the buck than missiles or chasing some

Taliban around the country,” Mortenson told *The New York Times*’ columnist, Nicholas Kristof, recently (Kristof, 2008). Despite the billions of aid to the Pakistani government, the U.S. has not palpably changed the trend of public opinion toward it in the country. In assessing the impact of such initiative, Kristof (2008) concludes that “a lone Montanan staying at the cheapest guest houses has done more to advance U.S. interests in the region than the entire military and foreign policy apparatus of the Bush administration.”

To a great extent, Al-Hurra testifies to the consequences of marginalizing the U.S. public in public diplomacy efforts. Examining Al-Hurra’s effectiveness in laying out a positive U.S. agenda to Arab viewers revealed the complicated “effects” this enterprise engenders abroad. The lack of involvement of the U.S. public only serves to discredit the enterprise as a whole in the view of its target audience. By any stretch of the imagination, Al-Hurra has not been successful in persuading legions of disaffected audiences that the U.S. government is genuinely interested in their welfare. That is, the view peddled in the halls of some intellectual circles that the U.S. is “a benevolent imperial power” finds no resonance among foreign public opinion. For audiences in the Arab world, that assertion starkly contradicts what they know about how U.S. administrations have all along propped homegrown dictators. Since Al-Hurra might not succeed in erasing historical memories, it rekindles existing hostility toward the U.S. The importance of how relentless preexisting attitudes toward the U.S. defeat Al-Hurra was demonstrated by the conclusions drawn from applying a Third Person Effect theoretical model in this study.

#### **4. Contributions of the Study**

This dissertation contributes to three areas of media studies, Third Person Effect research, the study of international broadcasting, and media and policy rhetoric. At the



theoretical level, this is the first research study to test the Third Person Effect hypothesis in an Arab/Muslim culture. This cross cultural test enriches indirect media influence literature in outlining the complex role cultural and individual differences have in the scholarly understanding of the effects of the media. While there are solid evidence and data in support of the existence of Third Person Effect, the quantitative analysis in this study suggests that the Third Person Effect is somewhat limited and more complex than the bulk of the literature has indicated so far. The cross cultural test of the Third Person Effect has revealed that audiences do not always indulge in their overestimation of negative media effects on others. The study has shown that participants' estimation of the media influence on third persons is remarkably close to their estimation of the media's negative influence on the self. Previous research has demonstrated the moderating role of social distance on the extent of the Third Person Effect. This study has shown that social distance is marginal in affecting people's perceptions of negative media influence. Participants did not significantly differ in their estimation of the media's influence on their compatriots, who are socially closer to them than "other Arab viewers" or the impersonal category of "Arab public opinion."

The reasonable explanation of these divergent findings on Third Person Effect is that the attitudes of participants toward the media programs studied here are staunchly fixed and entrenched. Negative preexisting attitudes toward Al-Hurra Television are so overwhelming that they obscure respondents' tendency to indulge in their overestimation of its negative influence. Similar to research on the consumption of pornographic media material, respondents are underplaying their own consumption of, and exposure to Al-Hurra Television programs. Underplaying exposure serves to build respondents' case for

its limited influence on their attitudes. In responding the way they did, Al-Hurra Television viewers in this study reveal that they are highly rational and sophisticated in marginalizing even positive influence. Some of the mechanisms underlying the Third Person Effect hypothesis could still be discerned to operate here. A sense of optimism about their own invulnerability, resistance to foreign media influence, underpins this type of reactions. It is important to recall that the present study did not use a representative sample of Al-Hurra Television viewers. The convenience sample was of participants who are overwhelmingly highly educated viewers of Al-Hurra Television. In that, the convenience sample also reflects the type of viewers likely to tune to Al-Hurra Television. Those with an educated background, and of relatively financial and stable means of support, represent the main constituency of Al-Hurra Television. The conclusion to be drawn here is that perception of negative media influence, a main Third Person Effect, tends to be limited when participants are highly educated.

Contributing to Third Person Effect research literature was achieved at the level of methodology, which is a second contribution of this dissertation. This is the first study to conduct focus group interviews in testing Third Person Effect hypothesis, whether in a Western culture or outside the West. The qualitative and interpretive analysis of focus group data has supported many of the findings of existing research on perceived media influence. Without the interviews, the study would have found no existence of Third Person Effects. In other terms, qualitative data, while sometimes “imprecise” and less “objective,” indicate the reach and complex terrain of Third Person Effect. It humanizes media audiences by revealing the depths and complicated ways of how people deal with their own habits of media consumption. Face to face encounters with Al-Hurra Television

viewers demonstrated their awareness that Al-Hurra Television has an influence on them and the wider public in the Arab world. The study calls for more similar undertakings to understand the reach of indirect media influence.

The third area of contribution is to enrich the study of international broadcasting by providing an understanding of the mosaic viewership of Al-Hurra Television. The focus group interviews brought to life the different audience types, from the “suspicious viewer” through “the political viewer” to “the selective viewer.” This has been a serendipitous finding that illuminates the role of individual differences in the reception of Al-Hurra Television and international broadcasting. Significantly for media scholars and policymakers alike, the changing landscape of global media, the proliferation of media voices, has made it all more urgent to examine the rationale of broadcasting to foreign audiences. No longer does a monolithic audience suffering from the dearth of media products exist. International broadcasters have stark choices to make, depart or adapt. Audiences of Al-Hurra Television are opinionated and have a clear idea of what a U.S. broadcaster needs to offer them, more content about the United States. In other words, foreign audiences in countries where local media voices proliferate do not perceive a need for foreign media to tell them about their own affairs. They want to know more about the other culture, the political institutions of the United States, the educational and scientific achievements of other countries. Even the U.S. perspective appears to be lost on Al-Hurra Television viewers, as the participants in the focus groups indicated. No wonder that many viewers prized Al-Hurra Television documentaries. One potential explanation for this predilection is their desire to neutralize negative political influence popularly associated with “propaganda.” International broadcasting has to irrevocably sever its ties

with “war-like” propaganda, and the Cold War logic still underlying much of its current operations is passé. International broadcasting for “peace” and “democracy” still has a place if it is couched in humility and “informative” agendas. These are the tasks that international broadcasters have to set for themselves.

At another level, this study of Al-Hurra Television has contributed to understanding the implications of policy and media rhetoric on audiences of international broadcasting. While it has been a tough exercise to articulate smoothly how rhetoric connects with Third Person Effect as such, this dissertation has argued that policy rhetoric seeps into, and affects the operation of international broadcasting. In particular, Al-Hurra Television is tightly contextualized in the U.S. administration’s stated objective of fighting terrorism and extremism by promoting democracy in the Arab world. The rhetorical overtures of the U.S. administration, be they the U.S. president’s own proclamations, or his surrogates’, like the former Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Ms. Hughes, have consequences on the perception of Al-Hurra Television among Arab audiences. For viewers, Al-Hurra Television is both a product and manifestation of the democracy promotion rhetoric. In a sense, evaluating the viability of Al-Hurra Television is an evaluation of those rhetorical overtures. Those rhetorical overtures seep into Al-Hurra viewers’ consciousness. When viewers judge that the U.S. administration is not serious about promoting democracy in their lands, Al-Hurra Television does not alleviate such suppositions. In many cases, it is used as evidence for a perceived lack of seriousness, if not outright hypocrisy, on the part of the U.S. government. Policy rhetoric contributes to Al-Hurra Television’s failure in the minds of

its viewers. The short answer to the sticking question of whether policy rhetoric and media can resolve conflict hence tends to be negative in most of the cases.

### **5. Limitations of the Study: Challenges and Opportunities**

Among the strengths of the study is its initiation of an inquiry into the “effects” of international broadcasting, most commonly known as “media propaganda,” employing a paradigm of “perceived influence,” particularly the Third Person Effect theory. This theoretical choice was motivated not at all by a pursuit of “fancy” theoretical investigation, as much as it was dictated by the fact that Al-Hurra Television, and international broadcasting in general, conjures up conflicting emotions and perceptions among its target audience. The study examined the reception of Al-Hurra Television in the Arab world.

Several directions in which the study of Al-Hurra Television can be investigated in depth further have come up during the analysis of the data. These directions constitute the limitations of the present project too. Among the most prominent limitations of this study is the fact that it has used a convenience sample of viewers. This was due to the realization that it would have required more logistics and financial resources to expand the sample to a representative section of Al-Hurra Television audiences. The second limitation is the “self-selected” nature of the sample of viewers. Even at the level of focus group participants, there is always the possibility that some participants chose to participate in the study because they wanted to air their negative perceptions of both the U.S. and its channel. This was unmistakable in one focus group whose “anti-Americanism” was demonstrably clear in refusing to entertain any views that were deemed positive toward the U.S. In some instances this was positive in that it instigated

further responses from participants who hold different views. In other instances, this proved debilitating as it skewed the discussion toward a unilateral focus rather than the diversity expected of focus group discussions. It required additional effort and sensitive attention on the part of the moderator to steer the conversation from such treacherous terrain. These sample attributes limit the generalization of the study's conclusions.

Talking about Al-Hurra became an opportunity for some people to voice out their deeply held beliefs about what they perceived as an injustice, an assault, a humiliation enacted by the world's superpower against a people with a history. Unconsciously, or so it seemed, their historical contributions to human civilization were downplayed, if not outrightly denied. Upon concluding one interview, the researcher was speechless when one respondent stood, warmly shaking hands, he effusively thanked the researcher for having allowed them the possibility of getting their opinions across the Atlantic. While the intimation of some arcane collaboration oozed out, it was impossible not to be touched by how genuine his thanks sounded. Of course, the researcher's Moroccan nationality helped some participants unburden/unload their feelings, ease some suspicions without quelling the distrust in all.

The study's generalizability to the Arab world is inherently limited because of the diversity of the region's populations, sociopolitical and cultural make up. There is a great potential in extending the study beyond the context of Moroccan viewers, enhancing the level of theory testing and strengthening the validity of the conclusions. Beyond the Arab world, a sample of Arabic speakers residing abroad, especially in Western Europe, could be added in a large scale study of Al-Hurra Television. Al-Hurra Television's management appears to have taken the problem of transnational Arab audiences

seriously. Al-Hurra in Europe was set up to address the fact that a large immigrant Arabic speaking community permanently lives in Western Europe. The perceived radicalization of its members is a fear that has been expressed by Western policy makers and intelligence agencies from the UK's MI6 to Germany's Bundesnachrichtendienst.

Gender distribution was a challenge throughout the study. It was very daunting to recruit female participants and persuade them to attend focus group meetings in public places. Relying on "informant" networks to recruit focus group participants who view Al-Hurra was the best recruiting tool, under the circumstances, and it made the project feasible. Since the researcher's informants/contacts were all males, the overwhelming majority of participants were male. The researcher tried to remedy the problem by using a female contact person to recruit female viewers who were willing to participate in the focus group interview, but things did not work out, and the problem persisted throughout the data collection process. Two main reasons at least, one objective and the other cultural, explain why females desisted from the study or were unwilling to get interviewed. Objectively, media consumption skewed along gender lines accounts for the inability to recruit female participants in focus group meetings. It is greatly probable that the largest section of the female audience does not watch Al-Hurra Television, or news channels in general, compared to entertainment and light programming. My sole female "recruiter" suggested this as a justification of the fact, a justification reiterated to the researcher by other women. Culturally, it is more difficult to invite a female viewer to a meeting in a public place, such as a café, because for some of them it is associated with "loose" women, unwonted behavior, or mere lack of social desirability. The researcher's gender affects the research process, and in this sense, a female researcher could have

obtained more access from female viewers. Education and socio-economics do play an important factor in women's abstention from participating in the study. These are significant findings about cross cultural research's challenges. In this case, it bespeaks of how patriarchy, traditional, and cultural mores persist in Morocco probably in defiance of modernity while often times taking a modern garb. Future research in similar societies has to take stock of the gendered nature of research. A trained female moderator could have reduced the gender hurdle.

The questionnaire design and administration faced some challenges and there is room for improvement. Despite the fact that the questionnaire was translated, and back translated, by both a professional translator and the researcher, some problems emerged only when respondents were completing the questionnaire. For instance, there were many more items that focused on Al-Hurra Television than Al-Jazeera Television or Moroccan Television. While this decision was motivated by the study's primary focus on Al-Hurra, some respondents expressed their discomfort with the lack of comparable attention to the other media outlets. Pretesting the questionnaire did not unearth those concerns probably due to the small number of those pretested. In informal conversations, some respondents felt the study was biased and expressed these impressions and concerns to the researcher. In hindsight, the questionnaire could have included more items on different media outlets, which would have had the added benefit of masking the real purpose of the study and alleviate respondents' concerns.

Content analysis of Al-Hurra Television programs is an area that has been nearly absent in this research project. Content is as important a consideration as audience and policy questions of international broadcasting research. It is needless to claim that content



analysis of its political shows would have had a great contribution to the overall strength of the study. The channel's content would shed light on the controversies and issues that are immanent in international broadcasting. There are many objective considerations to be mulled over in future research undertaking an analysis of the content of U.S.

international broadcasting. In the United States' borders, researchers and the public have had no direct access to the government's international broadcasting content by virtue of the Smith Mundt Act of 1948. The Act's original intention was to prohibit the government from disseminating propaganda to U.S. citizens. Until the summer of 2008, this has led to the lack of accountability on the part of international broadcasters.

However, new media technologies have made these intentions and prohibitions moot and anachronistic. While the public still does not have direct access to international broadcasting content, the Internet has made it possible to retrieve the content. Close to the conclusion of this research, the United States government provided additional funds to Al-Hurra Television to store its content in cyberspace and provide live streaming of its main shows online.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This research project has analyzed the role of Al-Hurra Television in the public diplomacy battle waged in the Arab world. A multi-faceted examination of Al-Hurra Television audiences in Morocco reveals that this type of broadcasting has not alleviated the difficulties the United States image confronts among the cohorts of Arab citizens. In fact, it exacerbates the standing of the United States in the region because viewers tend to associate it with U.S. Middle East policies. Arab viewers' grievances associated with that policy are transferred to the broadcaster, hobbling any prospective tackling of the underlying problems. The focus group methodology provided a rich landscape of audience data, where Al-Hurra Television audiences could be categorized along their perceptions of the channel. From the "suspicious" to the "selective," however, viewer perception and reception appear not to cut through the policy debate surrounding Al-Hurra Television in the U.S. One can rest assured that Al-Hurra Television has been designed to appeal to the largest audience in the Arab world, disregarding the make-up of those audiences. Field research conducted here illuminates the shortsightedness, and short shrift, entailed in those strategies. No matter how small its viewership is, Al-Hurra Television viewers are a diverse bunch albeit they are watching the channel for different reasons. They have different needs and expectations that the channel has not lived up to, as was revealed in the focus group interviews. For instance, the viewers want to be able to learn more about the U.S. than about their own countries, local cultures, and local politics. Al-Hurra has not met that need, and that is a potential contributing factor to its low viewership and very limited influence.

Further, the theoretical prism of third person effects research has illuminated audiences' conflicting attitudes toward foreign broadcasters, particularly the state-run ones. Existing research on Third Person Effect has confirmed, time and again, that media audiences minimize negative media influence on the self, meanwhile exaggerating such influence on the other ("third person"). This study has plainly revealed that respondents did not exaggerate Al-Hurra Television's negative influence on the "other," be they socially distant or close. In other terms, evidence from this project strongly supports the conclusion that Al-Hurra Television's perceived influence on Moroccan viewers is very minimal, despite being still regarded negatively. The prevalent belief about the limited nature of Al-Hurra Television's influence among its own viewers raises questions about the viability of this media enterprise. If its own viewers assume that no positive influence may accrue out of its efforts, what to be expected of the rest is potential marginalization of the channel in the local media diet. On the television dial, Al-Hurra Television continues to be banished into oblivion.

From the field research conducted in Morocco, the following thoughts were prominent in respondents' self-revelations throughout the focus group meetings. Al-Hurra Television would work better if it is not perceived as a direct competitor to Al-Jazeera; it would work better if it sticks to showing the interesting range of American society. The fact that it purports to support the democratic agenda in the Arab world, while failing to provide even handed critique of all the political regimes regardless of their allegiances to the U.S., is detrimental to the image of the United States. The uneven-handedness confirms the suspicions of the Arab viewer concerning the U.S. presumed hypocrisy, invalidating the discourse of democracy promotion. An Arab viewer, who may

wish to give Al-Hurra Television the benefit of the doubt, confronts the dissonance created by Al-Hurra's biased coverage, even the willful negligence of the dismal living conditions they face every day. Al-Hurra Television is confirming the preconceived notion that it is a mere propaganda tool in the hands of U.S. foreign policy makers and administration. No doubt, the same theme of legitimate news source versus a propaganda tool was constantly raised during the interviews and focus groups conducted in Morocco. The few viewers could not isolate the discrepancies, hypocrisy, and demagoguery perceived to dominate Al-Hurra's coverage of political reform, women, and other pressing political concerns in the Arab region and Morocco in particular. Such constant reminders were frequently raised irrespective of respondents' political affiliation. For viewers who belonged to the leftist political spectrum, Al-Hurra Television reeked of an imperialist project despite the viewers' recognition that it was waging the same fight against Islamic fundamentalists in promoting women equality and minority rights. For those viewers who had clear Islamist sympathies, Al-Hurra Television was the latest form of Western hostility against Islamic values and Islam as a religion.

The competitive media environment contributes to the difficulties hampering Al-Hurra Television's persuasiveness and credibility as a mass communicator abroad. The U.S. sponsored Arabic language television has never operated, nor will it operate, in a vacuous media environment. No longer are Arab viewers hostages to their own state-run media; at their finger tips is a range of relatively independent and private television broadcasts, most notably Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya television stations. The exponential growth of the Arab information environment has made it possible to tune in to Arab broadcasters that are critical of the existing political regimes. Simultaneously, such

independence endows those television networks with credibility. Because Al-Hurra Television faces very credible broadcasters, it has sought to vie for viewer attention by broadcasting what might have seemed “popular” media events in the region. Al-Hurra Television’s coverage of an Iranian sponsored conference on the Holocaust, sometimes described as a “love-fest” for Holocaust deniers like Robert Faurisson and David Duke, in Tehran in 2006 illustrates such complexities. In addition to U.S. Jewish groups’ outrage at Al-Hurra Television’s coverage, an Op Ed in *The Wall Street Journal* condemned the station for “provid[ing] a platform for Islamic terrorists and help[ing] further Holocaust denial” (Mowbray, 2006). U.S. Representative Steve Rothman, and other members of the U.S. Congress, cried foul, and demanded the resignation of Al-Hurra Television’s news director, Larry Register, a former CNN producer (Cooper, 2007; Rothman, 2007). Outraged at Al-Hurra Television’s airing of the Hezbollah leader’s speech live and unedited, he argued that “U.S. taxpayers should not pay to air terrorist tirades.” The bashing of Al-Hurra Television and Larry Register bespeaks of how the channel’s attempt at competing with local Arab television stations is likely to draw only ire and backlash. A congressional investigation into the television’s alleged malpractices recommended further accountability, oversight, and control of live news coverage (Cooper, 2007). If Al-Hurra Television is to be a credible media outlet, it has to meet the urgent needs of its audiences, rather than kowtow to domestic political pressure. That “the news may be good, the news may be bad, but we will always tell you the truth” continues to be a golden standard to be emulated, and still is a two-way street.

Situating the rhetorical investigation in the context of empirical Third Person Effect research in this study of Al-Hurra Television has a lot to contribute to the study of

international broadcasting and security studies since both areas focus on the role of language and media in shaping audience perceptions. The Copenhagen School of international relations has long argued that the very issue of security is basically constructed through speech acts (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde, 1998; Archetti & Taylor, 2006). Buzan, Waever and de Wilde (1998) have made these “speech acts,” of which the media constitute the main actor, the basis for understanding their concepts of “securitization” and “societal threat.” Societal threats are not relegated to military or economic fronts. By and large, societal threats encapsulate the realms of media, and culture (broadly construed), which can either exacerbate the military aspect of the threat or help to reduce its effects and dangers. In an interesting application of this concept, Archetti and Taylor (2006) have concluded “that managing the imagined threat of terrorism is an essential part of dealing with the terrorist danger and that the media, willingly or not, play a vital role within this context.” Archetti and Taylor (2006) examined the perceptions engendered by the terrorist alerts throughout Britain and Europe and how the threat of terrorism was framed. If the adage that people are what they “watch/read/listen to” is true, then perceptions are reality. The “War on Terror” is a war about perceptions, and not cynically, about “hearts and minds.” The campaign for “hearts and minds” is fought around perceptions of the United States through a media war that Al-Qaeda terrorists have been adept at exploiting. The war is enmeshed in the rhetoric of foreign policy, and the Bush administrations’ rhetorical spasms provide ample food for this war. In essence, studying the perceptions of audiences in the Middle East constitutes a vital step to illuminating U.S. international broadcasting’s role (and supposed effects) in U.S. Middle East policy.

It is no longer a stretch to stress that the news media wars in the Middle East truly constitute only one battlefield in a larger information war between the forces of extremism, incarnated in Al Qaeda and its franchises, with their savvy new media apparatuses, and the United States' government. The concept of total "information war" has originated since the first Gulf War, and was encapsulated in the U.S. Department of Defense strategies about future threats. Its evident national security implications behooved the U.S. Air Force to define "information warfare" as: "any action to deny, exploit, corrupt, or destroy the enemy's information and its functions; protecting ourselves against the actions; and exploiting our own information operations" (Air & Space Power Journal, 1995). Military strategists regard "information" as a "strategic asset" to be deployed to achieve total "information dominance." However, this definition remains somewhat short of describing the full implication of the new challenges.

The definition above is most appropriately applicable to states with "known" borders, rather than shadowy, non-governmental organizations. That is why terrorists' messages find myriad ways of dissemination to the public from the occasional tape, or compact disc, to consistent online presence. Al-Hurra Television's role is complicated by the ever shifting sands and fronts of this ongoing information war. To be credible, Al-Hurra Television needs not only carry its sponsor's "propaganda," but it needs to report the "enemy's propaganda," achieving some level of symmetry. Otherwise, there is no difference between Al-Hurra Television and the Pentagon's failed experiment in implanting "good news stories" in the Iraqi press that "troubled" the U.S. president and the Congress, let alone the Iraqi people (Gerth, 2005). And the American public does not embrace the idea of implanting deceptive stories in international news media, as indicated

by the scuttled Pentagon's "Office of Strategic Influence" to market America's war on terrorism outside the United States (Carver, 2002). If information warfare is a reality, it does by no means dispute the fact that propaganda is so 20<sup>th</sup> century a mindset that needs to be rethought in light of its consequences on the target, foreign public opinion's perceptions of the source of propaganda, and its limited influence.

The age of total propaganda dominance appears to be passing, if it has not done so already and irrevocably. No government, non-governmental organization, or commercial entity can any longer claim total and everlasting control of the information landscape (Kamalipour & Snow, 2004). In an ever expanding media spectrum, warring information factions' only hope is to provide constant presence, sustenance to their points of view. A frank conversation that amply explicates policy decisions directly to foreign publics is an incessant need, an uphill battle, and lingers on into the foreseeable future. That ongoing conversation, a dialogue instead of didactic monologue, has to be at the forefront of the channel's mission. What should not be lost in that battle is the empathy of Arab and Muslim public opinion. Forfeiting that empathy is a victory for extremists in what might turn out to be an epic information confrontation. Al-Hurra Television has not empirically and credibly gained any new support or momentum in that battle, as this research project has concluded.

Addressing the core policy problems in the region can go a long way in softening the roughened edges of the United States' image, and strengthen the public diplomacy enterprise, a recommendation frequently overlooked in the rush to international broadcasting. While it can be part of the solution to the deterioration of U.S. standing in the Arab world, Al-Hurra Television still adds a layer of complexity to the U.S. image in



that part of the globe. As previously stated, Al-Hurra Television is partially entrusted with responding to the dictates of the post 9/11's searing question, "why do they hate us?" And it behooves this project to point to the confusion that that question itself perpetuates. A deconstruction of the question that a whole issue of the journal *Arab Insight* carried out found that the question misleadingly implies "a monolithic" Arab or Muslim public opinion. More dangerous is the question's confounding of "us," indistinctively referring to the U.S. government and the American people (Elmanshawy, 2007).

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## **APPENDIX A: Survey Instrument**

### **International Public Opinion Survey**

Please circle a number to indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

**1) I believe women should have equal rights as men in the Arab world.**

Strongly disagree 1      Disagree 2      Neither agree nor disagree 3      Agree 4      Strongly agree 5

**2) I believe that national education needs to be reformed.**

Strongly disagree 1      Disagree 2      Neither agree nor disagree 3      Agree 4      Strongly agree 5

**3) I believe that political corruption is a problem in the Arab world.**

Strongly disagree 1      Disagree 2      Neither agree nor disagree 3      Agree 4      Strongly agree 5

**4) I believe that political corruption in the Arab world needs to be fought.**

Strongly disagree 1      Disagree 2      Neither agree nor disagree 3      Agree 4      Strongly agree 5

**5) I believe that elections in the Arab world need to be more transparent.**

Strongly disagree 1      Disagree 2      Neither agree nor disagree 3      Agree 4      Strongly agree 5

Please circle a number to indicate the extent to which your friends agree with the following statements.

**6) Most of my friends believe women should have equal rights as men in the Arab world.**

Strongly disagree 1      Disagree 2      Neither agree nor disagree 3      Agree 4      Strongly agree 5

**7) Most of my friends believe that national education needs to be reformed.**

Strongly disagree 1      Disagree 2      Neither agree nor disagree 3      Agree 4      Strongly agree 5

**8) Most of my friends believe that political corruption is a problem in the Arab world.**

Strongly disagree 1      Disagree 2      Neither agree nor disagree 3      Agree 4      Strongly agree 5

**9) Most of my friends believe that political corruption in the Arab world needs to be fought.**

Strongly disagree 1      Disagree 2      Neither agree nor disagree 3      Agree 4      Strongly agree 5

Please circle a number to indicate how serious you believe each of the following groups is about promoting women rights.

- |                                   |                         |   |   |   |                   |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|
| <b>10) Local Arab governments</b> | 1<br>Not serious at all | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5<br>Very serious |
| <b>11) Arab citizens</b>          | 1<br>Not serious at all | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5<br>Very serious |
| <b>12) USA</b>                    | 1<br>Not serious at all | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5<br>Very serious |

Please circle a number to indicate how serious you believe each of the following groups is about promoting educational reform.

- |                                   |                         |   |   |   |                   |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|
| <b>13) Local Arab governments</b> | 1<br>Not serious at all | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5<br>Very serious |
| <b>14) Arab citizens</b>          | 1<br>Not serious at all | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5<br>Very serious |
| <b>15) USA</b>                    | 1<br>Not serious at all | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5<br>Very serious |

Please circle a number to indicate how serious you believe each of the following groups is about promoting transparent elections.

- |                                   |                         |   |   |   |                   |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|
| <b>16) Local Arab governments</b> | 1<br>Not serious at all | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5<br>Very serious |
| <b>17) Arab citizens</b>          | 1<br>Not serious at all | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5<br>Very serious |
| <b>18) USA</b>                    | 1<br>Not serious at all | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5<br>Very serious |

Please circle a number to indicate how serious do you believe each of the following groups is about fighting political corruption in the Arab world?

- |                                   |                         |   |   |   |                   |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|---|---|-------------------|
| <b>19) Local Arab governments</b> | 1<br>Not serious at all | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5<br>Very serious |
| <b>20) Arab citizens</b>          | 1<br>Not serious at all | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5<br>Very serious |
| <b>21) USA</b>                    | 1<br>Not serious at all | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5<br>Very serious |

## II. Media Use

22) In an average weekday, how much time do you spend watching television news programs?

\_\_\_\_\_ Minutes

Please circle a number to indicate how often you use the following sources to learn about **national news.**

**23) Moroccan newspapers/magazines:**

Never 1 Rarely 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

**24) Moroccan television channels:**

Never 1 Rarely 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

**25) Al Jazeera News Channel:**

Never 1 Rarely 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

**26) Al-Hurra News Channel:**

Never 1 Rarely 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

**27) Internet news websites:**

Never 1 Rarely 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

**28) Other (please specify):** \_\_\_\_\_

Never 1 Rarely 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

Please circle a number to indicate how often you use the following sources to learn about **international news.**

**29) Moroccan newspapers/magazines:**

Never 1 Rarely 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

**30) Moroccan television channels:**

Never 1 Rarely 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

**31) Al Jazeera News Channel:**

Never 1 Rarely 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

**32) Al-Hurra News Channel:**

Never 1 Rarely 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

**33) Internet news websites:**

Never 1 Rarely 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

**34) Other (please specify):** \_\_\_\_\_

Never 1 Rarely 2 Sometimes 3 Often 4 Always 5

### III. Media Coverage of Political Reform

Based on your viewing experience, please circle a number to indicate how you believe these Arabic language news channels cover political and social issues.

35) Moroccan Television news programs cover Arab women rights\_\_\_\_\_.

Very Negatively		Neither negatively nor positively		Very positively
1	2	3	4	5

36) Al-Hurra Television news programs cover Arab women rights\_\_\_\_\_.

Very Negatively		Neither negatively nor positively		Very positively
1	2	3	4	5

37) Al-Jazeera Television news programs cover Arab women rights\_\_\_\_\_.

Very Negatively		Neither negatively nor positively		Very positively
1	2	3	4	5

38) Moroccan Television news programs cover transparent elections in the Arab world\_\_\_\_\_.

Very Negatively		Neither negatively nor positively		Very positively
1	2	3	4	5

39) Al-Hurra Television news programs cover transparent elections in the Arab world\_\_\_\_\_.

Very Negatively		Neither negatively nor positively		Very positively
1	2	3	4	5

40) Al-Jazeera Television news programs cover transparent elections in the Arab world\_\_\_\_\_.

Very Negatively		Neither negatively nor positively		Very positively
1	2	3	4	5

41) Moroccan Television news programs cover the need to reform the educational system\_\_\_\_\_.

Very Negatively		Neither negatively nor positively		Very positively
1	2	3	4	5

42) Al-Hurra Television news programs cover reform the educational system\_\_\_\_\_.

Very Negatively		Neither negatively nor positively		Very positively
1	2	3	4	5

43) Al-Jazeera Television news programs cover reform the educational system\_\_\_\_\_.

Very Negatively		Neither negatively nor positively		Very positively
1	2	3	4	5

Please circle a number to indicate how you think **Al-Hurra** news channel has influenced **YOUR** attitudes regarding the following political and social issues.

**44) Overall, how has Al-Hurra TV influenced your attitudes toward women rights?**

Has Made Me More Negative About Women's Rights		Has Not Influenced My Attitudes Either Way		Has Made Me More Positive About Women's Rights
1	2	3	4	5

**45) Overall, how has Al-Hurra TV influenced your attitudes toward educational reform?**

Has Made Me More Negative Toward Educational Reform		Has Not Influenced My Attitudes Either Way		Has Made Me More Positive Toward Educational Reform
1	2	3	4	5

**46) Overall, how has Al-Hurra TV influenced your attitudes toward fighting political corruption?**

Has Made Me More Negative About Fighting Political Corruption		Has Not Influenced My Attitudes Either Way		Has Made Me More Positive About Fighting Political Corruption
1	2	3	4	5

**47) Overall, how has Al-Hurra TV influenced your attitude toward transparent local elections?**

Has Made Me More Negative About Transparent Elections		Has Not Influenced My Attitudes Either Way		Has Made Me More Positive About Women's Rights
1	2	3	4	5

Please circle a number to indicate how you think **Al-Hurra** Television has influenced **OTHER Moroccan** viewers' attitudes regarding the following political and social issues.

**48) Overall, how has Al Hurra TV influenced OTHER Moroccan viewers' attitudes toward women rights?**

Has Made <b>Them</b> More Negative About Women's Right		Has Not Influenced Their Attitudes Either Way		Has Made <b>Them</b> More Positive About Women's Rights
1	2	3	4	5

**49) Overall, how has Al-Hurra TV influenced OTHER Moroccan viewers' attitudes toward educational reform?**

Has Made Them More Negative Toward		Has Not Influenced Their Attitudes Either Way		Has Made Them More Positive Toward
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Educational Reform

Educational Reform

1

2

3

4

5

50) Overall, how has Al-Hurra TV influenced OTHER Moroccan viewers' attitudes toward fighting political corruption?

Has Made Them More Negative Toward Fighting Political Corruption

Has Not Influenced Their Attitudes Either Way

Has Made Them More Positive Toward Fighting Political Corruption

1

2

3

4

5

51) Overall, how has Al-Hurra TV influenced OTHER Moroccan viewers' attitudes toward transparent local elections?

Has Made Them More Negative Toward Transparent Local Elections

Has Not Influenced Their Attitudes Either Way

Has Made Them More Positive Toward Transparent Local Elections

1

2

3

4

5

Please circle a number to indicate how you think Al-Hurra news channel has influenced OTHER Arab viewers' attitudes regarding the following political and social issues.

52) Overall, how has Al-Hurra TV influenced other Arab viewers' attitudes toward women rights?

Has Made Them More Negative About Women's Right

Has Not Influenced Their Attitudes Either Way

Has Made Them More Positive About Women's Rights

1

2

3

4

5

53) Overall, how has Al-Hurra TV influenced other Arab viewers' attitudes toward educational reform?

Has Made Them More Negative Toward Educational Reform

Has Not Influenced Their Attitudes Either Way

Has Made Them More Positive Toward Educational Reform

1

2

3

4

5

54) Overall, how has Al-Hurra TV influenced other Arab viewers' attitudes toward fighting political corruption?

Has Made Them More Negative Toward Fighting Political Corruption

Has Not Influenced Their Attitudes Either Way

Has Made Them More Positive Toward Fighting Political Corruption

1

2

3

4

5

55) Overall, how has Al-Hurra TV influenced other Arab viewers' attitudes toward transparent local elections?



Has Made Them More  
Negative Toward  
Transparent Local  
Elections

1

Has Not Influenced Their  
Attitudes Either Way

2

3

Has Made Them  
More Positive Toward  
Transparent Local  
Elections

4

5

Please circle a number to indicate how you think Al-Hurra Television news programs has influenced Arab public opinion's attitudes toward the following governments?

56) Overall, how has Al-Hurra TV influenced Arab public opinion's toward their local governments?

Has Made It More  
Negative Toward Their  
Local Governments

1

Has Not Influenced Its  
Attitudes Either Way

2

3

Has Made It More  
Positive Toward Their  
Local Governments

4

5

57) Overall, how has Al-Hurra TV influenced Arab public opinion's attitude toward the U.S. government?

Has Made It More  
Negative Toward the  
U.S. Government

1

Has Not Influenced Its  
Attitudes Either Way

2

3

Has Made It More  
Positive Toward the  
U.S. Government

4

5

58) Overall, how has Al-Hurra TV influenced Arab public opinion's attitude toward other Arab governments?

Has Made It More  
Negative Toward Arab  
Governments

1

Has Not Influenced Its  
Attitudes Either Way

2

3

Has Made It More  
Positive Toward Arab  
Governments

4

5

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

59) I can always count on Al-Hurra Television to support advancing women rights the Arab world.

Strongly disagree  
1

Disagree  
2

Neither agree nor disagree  
3

Agree  
4

Strongly agree  
5

60) I can always count on Al-Hurra Television to support advancing transparent elections in the Arab world.

Strongly disagree  
1

Disagree  
2

Neither agree nor disagree  
3

Agree  
4

Strongly agree  
5

61) I can always count on Al-Hurra Television to support advancing educational reform in the Arab world.

Strongly disagree  
1

Disagree  
2

Neither agree nor disagree  
3

Agree  
4

Strongly agree  
5

## IV. Demographic Information

**62) Are you going to vote in the next elections?**

Definitely yes \_\_\_\_\_  
Definitely no \_\_\_\_\_  
Undecided \_\_\_\_\_

**63) If yes, which political party are you most likely to vote for in the next elections?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**64) What is your gender?**

Male \_\_\_\_\_  
Female \_\_\_\_\_

**65) What is your age?**

20-25 \_\_\_\_\_  
25-30 \_\_\_\_\_  
30-35 \_\_\_\_\_  
35-more \_\_\_\_\_

**66) Educational level?**

\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire!

## APPENDIX B: Focus Group Interview Script

### Introduction

Let me first begin by thanking you for having volunteered to participate in this study. My name is Aziz Douai, and I am doing research on how people watch television news in Morocco and elsewhere. First, as you can see, we are audio taping our discussion so that I don't have to take notes while talking. I don't want to miss any ideas that will come up during our conversation. So, please forget the tape. Also, when you talk, remember to mention your name.

Second, I want to emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions I will pose here. I really need to know your honest opinions. Feel free to express them the way they are. If you disagree with an opinion expressed here, please respectfully express your disagreement. The opinions expressed in this discussion will remain confidential and anonymous. Again, thank you for coming, if you have any questions before I continue, feel free to stop me.

### *Opening questions:*

Let's begin by telling us your names, and when did you last watch Al-Hurra Television? Where is it headquartered?

### *Introductory questions:*

What kind of programs do you like to watch most on Al-Hurra Television?  
Who do you think are more likely to watch Al-Hurra Television?

### *Key questions:*

How do you think Al-Hurra news television cover Arab politics in general?  
(e.g. objective, helpful..)

How do you think its programming promote political reform, like transparent elections, fighting political corruption, and women rights in the Arab region (if you think it does)?

How do you think Al-Hurra Television programs influence you in general? (e.g. It makes me think that political reform in the Arab world is urgently needed, or not needed at all/ large influence/ positive or negative influence)

How about Al-Hurra Television's influence on others/Arab public opinion in general?  
Would you say that Al-Hurra Television influences others more than you?

Do you think Al-Hurra Television programs reflect the U.S. democracy promotion agenda? If you think it does, how does it achieve that goal? If not, why not?

### *Conclusion*

To summarize our discussion, Al-Hurra Television news programs appear to\_\_\_\_\_.

Would you agree this is a fair assessment and summary of our discussion?

Would you like to add anything else that you think we should have talked about but didn't?

Finally, thank you very much for participating in this study. Your comments and opinions are greatly appreciated. If later on you think of any thing that would help this study, or you have any general questions, please feel free to contact me. You have my card with its contact info. Thank you very much, and have a good day!

## VITA: Aziz Douai

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### Employment

- 2007-2008 Assistant Professor, Franklin College, Switzerland.  
1997-2001 High School Teacher, Ministry of National Education, Morocco.

### Education

- The Pennsylvania State University, Ph.D. in Mass Communications, May 2009.  
Boston University, M.Sc. in Advertising and Communication Research, May 2003.  
École Normale Supérieure, Diploma in Teaching, May 1998.  
Ibn Tofail University, B.A. in English, May 1996.

### Research and Teaching Interests

- Global Communications: Political and Social Effects  
Media and Conflict: Media and Public Diplomacy  
Political Economy: Media Organizations and Audiences

### Publications

- Douai, A. (2009). In Democracy's shadow: The 'new' independent press and the limits of media reform in Morocco. Peer reviewed article in the forthcoming issue of the *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture Journal*.
- Douai, A. (2008). Offline Politics in the Arab Blogosphere: Trends and Prospects in Morocco. Chapter in *International Blogging*, Russell, A. and Echachaibi, N. (Eds.), forthcoming, Peter Lang, 2008. [Refereed article]
- Douai, A. (2007). Tales of transgression or clashing paradigms: The Danish cartoon controversy and Arab media. *Global Media Journal*, 6, 10, Spring 2007. [Invited article]
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