

# The Layalina Review

## On Public Diplomacy And Arab Media



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### Social Media Gaining Ground in Political Upheavals

In light of President Ahmadinejad's contested re-election on June 12, social media has become crucial to the spread of information within and outside of Iran – a country increasingly censored by the government's strong resentment of opposition voices, reports the Washington Post.

The news site explains, "Citizens who once had little public voice are using cheap Web tools to tell the world about the drama that has unfolded since [incumbent] President Mahmood Ahmadinejad was declared the winner of Iran's disputed election."

Just as fax machines aided the Solidarity uprising in Poland in the 1980s, and cell phones bolstered support for Ukraine's Orange Revolution in 2004, Web 2.0 technology has the potential to play a similarly fundamental role in strengthening Iran's widespread and growing democratic movement, despite thorough censorship of traditional media outlets, writes Helle C. Dale of The Heritage Foundation.

While in her article she points out, "New media is, in its own way, as vulnerable as traditional media to government interference," John Palfrey, Bruce Etling and Robert Faris from The Washington Post counter that social media sites such as "Twitter [have] proven nearly impossible to block."

They recount, "Blogger Andrew Sullivan helped kick off the cyber hype with his June 13 post, 'The Revolution Will be Twittered?' in which he argued that the use of this platform means that 'you cannot stop people any longer. You cannot control them any longer.'"

Due to the clampdown on foreign and

domestic media inside Iran, dissidents are relying on social networking Web sites such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and blogs to relay information about their experiences to a worldwide audience. Besides including links to pictures, videos and personal narratives, sites like Twitter also provide access to critical instructions on how to use proxies to avoid government censors.

Al Arabiya writer Courtney C. Radsch noted that in addition to deflecting government trackers, people outside of Iran are instrumental in offering "their computers as proxies for use by Iranian activists." In this way, revolutionary activists can successfully navigate around government filters programmed to detect and block domestic servers and which miss those provided by outside sources.

Google also launched its Persian automatic translation service which, "Like YouTube and other services . . . is one more tool that Persian speakers can use to communicate directly to the world, and vice versa – increasing everyone's access to information," wrote Franz Och, principle scientist, on Google's Blog.

The people who do not seem to have access to on-the-ground information are journalists working for traditional media networks. As Brian Murphy reports for the Associated Press, Iran's clampdown on media "has been a test requiring editors and journalists to quickly decide what to pursue from the avalanche of rumors, tips and observations [found] on social networking sites."

Many major international news outlets now rely on phone calls, e-mails and Web chats to contact Iranian protesters and officials for information that bolsters the meager reports from their correspondents in Tehran, who remain cloistered in their offices per government rule.

While these "videos, pictures and news stories of the protests are being posted almost immediately by people in Iran

and recycled by the mainstream media," Tania Tabar of Menassat notes that they are accompanied by disclaimers about the material. In fact, "It has become rare to see original footage from a major media outlet itself," she writes.

Unfortunately, while social media "are

### In this issue:

Social Media Gaining Ground in Political Upheavals	1
The Muslim World Awakes to Obama	2
Arab World Reacts to Iranian Crisis	3
Arab Programming Inspires Masses	4
Journalists under Attack	4
New Training for Improved Journalism	5
Al-Hurra Gains New Support	5
Lifting the Veil on Women's Struggle	6
Mixed Criticism for Suppressing Journalist's Kidnapping	6
Head of Qatari Media Center Resigns, Bahraini Newspaper Shut Down	7
Iran Further Clamps Down on Media	7
References	9

increasingly the only way for Iranians to reach the outside world, [ . . . ] their use of anonymity” to avoid repercussions makes their information difficult to verify, pointed out the head of the American bureau at Reporters Without Borders, Benoit Herveiu, in the Associated Press.

*“New media is, in its own way, as vulnerable as traditional media to government interference.”*

*Helle C. Dale, The Heritage Foundation.*

Odai Sirri, a Nanaimo businessman who has worked for news agencies in the Middle East, told Canada.com reporter Robert Barron that “relying on citizen journalists for information, particularly those who are active participants in the ongoing story, leaves a lot of room for misinterpretation and mistakes.” Moreover, she argues that there is “no way of holding people accountable if they spread false information.”

Barron sheds light on another perspective, that of Alfred Hermida, a journalism professor at the University of British Columbia, who admits that while “There is a problem with journalistic standards when relying on citizen journalists for information, . . . the ‘real value’ of the people reporting from the streets” is the quality and diversity of the material to which Western media would have never been privy before the growth of the Internet.

In his opinion, traditional journalists are able to evaluate and piece together the images and stories they receive from their “amateur journalist colleagues” to create a much clearer picture of the events as they take place in Iran.

Despite these successes, Palfrey, Etling and Faris remind Washington Post readers that “there are sharp limits on what Twitter and other Web tools such as Facebook and blogs can do for citizens in authoritarian societies.” Indeed, no

amount of Twittering will force Iran’s leaders to change their actions towards their citizens. Likewise, the writers posit that “If dissent is channeled into cyberspace, it can keep protesters off the streets and help state security forces track political activism and new online voices.”

The fact that new media has the simultaneous potential to circumvent and fall captive to governmental restrictions by authoritarian regimes bent on squelching political dissent shows just how crucial social networking sites and similar online tools have become to raising global awareness of the need for democratic freedoms for everyone.

## The Muslim World Awakes to Obama

In his recent speech to Cairo, President Barack Obama demonstrated his intent to shift the Middle East debate away from conflict towards cooperation and partnerships, comments author and Middle East expert Fawas Gerges in Daily Times.

“Obama’s speech in Cairo offered a powerful contrarian paradigm to that of Bin Laden,” argues Gerges, noting that the US President emphasized centuries of cooperation between Muslims and Christians rather than the religious wars they shared.

*“Obama’s speech in Cairo offered a powerful contrarian paradigm to that of Bin Laden.”*

*Fawas Gerges, Daily Times.*

Gerges insists that unlike his predecessor, Obama understands that the raging battle between the US and Al-Qaeda’s transnational jihadis cannot be won on the battlefield alone. “In the eyes of the world, particularly Islam, America lost its moral compass and the world’s hearts and minds,” when it went to war

with Iraq under President Bush, he adds.

However, this current moment of glory may not be enough to sway people across the Arab world in favor of America’s cause. Gerges explains that like Muslims, 78 percent of Egyptians say they have an unfavorable view of America, an alarming finding given that Egypt is the second largest [Middle Eastern?] recipient of US foreign aid after Israel.

Gerges continues to explain that Obama is the only US president that has linked the construction of a Palestinian state so closely to America’s strategic interests, suggesting a new paradigm for US foreign policy. An Arab critic commented that “Obama was full of humanity. He spoke power with humility.” Even some senior former jihadis (and associates of bin Laden and Zawahiri) praised Obama’s speech.

His approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was perceived as a window of hope by members of the Arab League, reports Reuters. But the League likens negotiating with Israel, whose settlements continue to expand, as tantamount to surrendering on “matters over which we [Arabs] cannot surrender.”

The Arab League said in a resolution on Wednesday that Arab states were “ready to deal positively with Obama’s proposal to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict,” and to take the necessary steps to support US efforts in achieving peace.

“Settlements destroy peace and prevent negotiations. If settlement does not stop, there will be a big catastrophe in the peace (process),” Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa told journalists after a meeting of Arab foreign ministers in Cairo.

People are now waiting to see if the President will deliver on his promises. “Obama must deliver because he has raised expectations among Muslims of a new era of relations with America, of a breakthrough on Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking,” says Gerges for the Daily Times. A failure to follow through with the proposals from his speech could be enough to revive Bin Laden’s war and spark further conflicts in the region.

According to the magazine Foreign Policy in Focus, the outcome and success of his policies towards the Arab and Muslim worlds will be decided by another public, namely, the American citizenry.

Although anti-American sentiment in the Muslim and Arab worlds is a relatively recent phenomenon stemming from the misguided approach of the Bush administration's "War on Terror," the news site notes that the negative image of Islam and Arabs among Americans has been entrenched for several decades.

The central problem with America's outreach efforts in the Arab and Islamic worlds is the tendency for the US to think only of its image and interests, while neglecting the image challenges facing a widely-stigmatized population of Arabs and Muslims. "For the United States to focus only on improving its image, as it has in the years since September 2001, is to see only half of the picture," comments the Foreign Policy in Focus.

Obama appears cognizant of the two-sided nature of America's image problem and its subsequent impact on US-Muslim and -Arab relations. His emphasis on reciprocity in "mutual interests and mutual respect" should not go unnoticed by both the domestic and international communities.

If Obama's speech and policies reduce American prejudice against Arabs and Muslims, then his Cairo address will truly mark a new beginning for US-Muslim relations.

## Arab World Reacts to Iranian Crisis

In the midst of the post-election turmoil in Iran, both Arab governments and people have expressed mixed feelings, reports Ian Black of The Guardian. While some find the massive display of people power impressive, others worry about the repercussions of the crackdown in Tehran.

The Arab world has been keeping a close eye on Iran as the stability of countries including Iraq, the Palestinian territories and Lebanon are directly related to the political outcomes of major regional and national powers. The loss of stability in Iran could affect the Middle East as a whole, warns Saseen Kawzally of Menassat.

Kawzally claims that Arabs are not impartial to the situation in Iran, as many moderate Arabs are promoting the notion of "Iranian danger" in an effort to shift

attention towards an alternative "enemy" and away from animosity towards Israel.

Abdel Bari Atwan of Al-Quds Al-Arabi told Menassat, "Undermining Iran's stability and spreading troubles in the country increases the possibilities of it turning into a failed state... This cannot be in the interest of the region's countries and in particular the Arab ones."

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*Abdel Bari Atwan, Al-Quds Al-Arabi.*

While all Arab countries are reacting to events in Iran, each finds itself in a loose-loose situation, reports Rami Khouri of The Daily Star. Arab leaders would be unhappy if the Iranian regime stayed in power, as regimes fear Iran's ability to inspire revolutionary Islamism as well as the country's hegemonic ambitions.

Khouri also speculates that if the Iranian regime were toppled, Arab leaders would sense their own vulnerability to similar mass political changes. Iran has withstood pressures from America, Israel, Europe and the UN, but is seemingly much more vulnerable to a spontaneous rebellion of its own citizens; a collapse would signal to the Arab world the strength of a populous movement against a regime.

While there have been reactions from both pro-Iranian-government actors such as Syria, Hezbollah and Qatar, and from anti-Iranian actors such as Saudi Arabia, there exists a third level of cautious bystanders which include Egypt. The media coverage of each region has blatantly corresponded with viewpoint of their respective states, says Khouri.

According to The Washington Institute, media outlets of the Palestinian Authority, Lebanon's March 14 coalition and Saudi Arabia have broadcast overtly anti-Iranian stances. Syrian news outlets continue to claim US interference in Iran, and Hezbollah's Al-Manar has positioned itself with Ahmadinejad, avoiding images of Iranian demonstrations.

The response of the Egyptian Islamist opposition movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, has been restrained as their website carried little commentary on the situation—just five pieces over the past ten days, two of which gave a neutral view on the events.

According to Canada.com, Saudi media has given the most attention to the demonstrations in Tehran. As stated by As'ad AbuKhalil, Lebanese politics professor at California State University, "Arab regimes may also fear that if the Iranian regime feels cornered and pressured, it may lash out, and Saudi Arabia may be the first to feel the wrath of the regime."

In addition to mixed reactions from the regimes and the media, Arab people seem to be torn on the series of events in Iran and the implications that will result out of it. On the one hand, Egyptian human rights activist and blogger Walid Abbas told CNN that he was jealous of the achievements of the Iranian people.

"Despite the difference that we have with Iran and the fact that many Iraqis don't trust their Persian neighbor, we are still Muslims and at the end of the day that matters a lot," Abbas said.

Iranians have gained support for their cause through social networking sites and SMS messaging, calling upon the Arab world to rise up in solidarity with the demonstrators, reports Menassat. Though Iranian security forces have attempted to muffle the information that has been coming out of Tehran, digital media tools such as Twitter have allowed dissidents to widen support.

However, The New York Times blog Room for Debate, features writers suggesting that Arab reactions have been, in fact, subdued. Rime Allaf, a Syrian writer and blogger for Mosaics, claims that the brutal repression of civil disobedience of any kind has suppressed responses from the Arab people.

She continues to write that resentment has been harbored due to the reaction of the world to the Gaza conflict. "With the wounds of Israel's war on Gaza still open, many Arabs are particularly stunned that the indifference with which Palestinians deaths were received has turned into an international solidarity campaign for Iranians throwing rocks at their oppressors and shouting 'we have become Palestine.'"

As the world watches the events in Iran, both the Arab regimes and people wait anxiously for the outcome and anticipate the consequences that will resonate throughout the region.

## Arab Programming Inspires Masses

Dubai Media Incorporated (DMI), one of the pioneering media organizations and creative services groups in the Middle East, makes a strategic endeavor to present significant programming during the Holy Month of Ramadan that caters to a highly diversified audience across the region, reports *Zawya*.

Dubai TV also ensures that it brings to the forefront works featuring leading protagonists of Arabic theatre, particularly during this Holy Month. In the past years, the channel has set a trend in highlighting a galaxy of stars through social and reality stories ranging from comedy to drama, including historical and even Bedouin ones.

With mega productions that match DMI's ambition of presenting programming to suit the tastes of viewers all across the Arab world, the series joins the level of distinguished international works, with the talent and stature of the Arab actors matching their counterparts in some of the most advanced theatres around the world.

Among the various actors featured, the Jordanian celebrity Saba Mubarak, who starred in 'Sera'a Ala El Remal', will

lead the new historical series 'Balqees' this year. The show tells the story of the queen of Saba'a, highlighting all the struggles and conspiracies surrounding her reign. The series also takes us into the roots of will power and democracy which she worked to establish in Yemen.

Dubai TV's special fare during the Holy Month of Ramadan promises programming that will allow audiences to experience some moments of indigenous theatre, while absorbing the rich nuances of Arabic culture.

*"Kashua may have achieved one of the most brilliant portrayals of the challenging life Arabs in Israel face every day."*

*Ray Hanania, SN News Herald.*

Some television series also have the power to show the humorous side of the grim reality, claims Ray Hanania for SN News Herald. The series "Arab Labor" is a mild translation of the sitcom's Hebrew name, Avoda Aravit, which is slang for "sloppy workmanship" - a derisive stereotype of the Arabs in Israel.

The sitcom is the brainchild of Palestinian writer Sayed Kashua, and produced by Israeli Danny Paran. "Yet under all this, Kashua may have achieved one of the most brilliant portrayals of the challenging life Arabs in Israel face every day," comments Hanania.

What is really impressive is how the insignificant in life becomes the symbol of the very significance of the relationship between Arabs and Jews, Palestinians and Israelis, continues Hanania. Episode after episode draws the viewer through the maze of conflicts which shape the reality of Arab-Jewish life in Israel.

The sitcom is broadcast in Hebrew

with English sub-titles that are easy to read and understand. Words are often mistranslated to disguise the more obvious racism that sometimes exists in dialect and speech patterns and habits.

However, Hanania deplores that most Arabs will not be able to see "Arab Labor," because there are no cable or TV systems that have far enough reach to present this sitcom to the public in the United States or in the Arab World.

The DVDs of the series can be purchased online at [www.AliveMindMedia.com](http://www.AliveMindMedia.com).

## Journalists under Attack

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) calls on the government of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh to end censorship of independent newspapers and to identify and prosecute those who assaulted Al-Jazeera journalists on two occasions in the south of the country. Yemen's popular daily, Al-Ayyam, the weeklies Al-Nida and Al-Watani, as well as five other independent newspapers, were banned by the government in early May.

Sami Ghaleb, editor of Al-Nida, told CPJ that government officials had promised to instruct the state-owned Al-Thawra printing house to print his weekly, but that printing has not happened thus far. Even those newspapers that have resumed publication, he said, have faced sporadic confiscation.

"We condemn the continued harassment of independent journalism and the criminal assaults on Fadel Mubarak and other Al-Jazeera personnel. All independent papers should be allowed to resume publication, and the individuals who attacked Mubarak must be brought to justice," said Mohamed Abdel Dayem, CPJ's Middle East and North Africa Program Coordinator.

The Freedoms Committee of the Yemeni Journalists' Syndicate said it has documented dozens of attacks against the press since May.

In other news, Reporters Without Borders condemns the erasure of Al-Jazeera video footage by Palestinian Authority security officials at the

outskirts of the West Bank city of Hebron on 15 June 2009, reports Menassat.

“Journalists must be able to work freely,” Reporters Without Borders said. “The erasure of this video footage proves that the Palestinian security forces try to cover up their human rights violations. This incident should be the subject of an enquiry by the Palestinian Authority.”

“We were the only ones to investigate this case and we did it despite strong pressure from the Palestinian Authority,” said Walid Omari, the head of the Qatar-based satellite TV station’s operations in the West Bank.

*“[The training program will] help enhance the limits of freedoms as it equips the journalists with a strong grounding in the basics of the profession and its ethical foundations.”*

*Mona Al-Marri,  
Chairperson, Dubai Press Club.*

Al Jazeera’s Hebron correspondent went with a cameraman to the deceased detainee’s home in the village of Dura, where they interviewed the family and filmed the body. On their way back to the vehicle, the Palestinian Authority security forces confiscated the video footage and erased it.

## New Training for Improved Journalism

A DRAFT code of ethics for journalists in Bahrain is expected to be the outcome of a two-day workshop, reports the Gulf Daily News. The event is organized by the Bahrain Journalists Association (BJA) and the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) as part of a regional media development project sponsored by the Middle East Partnership Initiative program and managed by IREX.

David McCraw, a former journalist and now Vice-President and Assistant General Counsel of the New York Times Company and leading attorney for the New York Times, will attend the upcoming workshop. He has been active in drafting a code of ethics for the newspaper and will cite codes from the West and Arab world.

Based on the final product, Mr McCraw will offer recommendations for a Bahrain Journalists Code of Ethics for consideration tomorrow. Following the workshop, he will help draft a final code.

Dubai Press Club has announced the launch of a new training program for young UAE national journalists working in local media organizations with the objective to help develop their professional skills and competence, according to AME Info.

Mona Al-Marri, Chairperson, Dubai Press Club, said the new initiative was part of the Club’s efforts to meet the vocational requirements of the new generation of Emirati journalists. She further explained that the Club wants to provide high-standard training programs to foster the growth of Emirati journalism, which she argues, would contribute to the overall development of society.

“It will also help enhance the limits of freedoms as it equips the journalists with a strong grounding in the basics of the profession and its ethical foundations,” she pointed out.

Dubai Press Club has launched several initiatives for the advancement of the profession of journalism and the media sector in the Arab world, such as the Arab Media Forum, the Arab Journalism Award and the Arab Media Outlook; all performed on an annual basis.

In other news, Qatari Culture Minister Hamad ibn Abd Al’Aziz Al-Kuwari has responded to a request by Syrian Information Minister Muhsen Bilal to have Syrian journalists train at the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera TV, reports

MEMRI, a trend that appears to be emerging in Middle Eastern journalism.

## Al-Hurra Gains New Support

US-funded news network Al-Hurra, which has been on air in the Middle East since 2004, recently launched Al-Yaum, a new program that connects five live studio locations every week night.

John Parnell, from Digital Production Middle East, conducted an interview with Al-Yaum’s Executive Producer Fran Mires and Governor Joaquin Blaya of the US Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG).

Blaya, when asked about the suspicion of bias in Al-Hurra’s reporting, claimed that the channel’s viewership numbers allayed such suspicion. According to Governor Blaya, Al-Hurra’s audience is estimated to be 27 million, and in Iraq, Al-Hurra has more viewers than Al-Jazeera. Blaya also explained that although the US government funds the network, the US would not censor Al-Hurra because the BBG works to protect the freedom of the journalists.

Al-Yaum is a departure from Al-Hurra’s regular news programming; the show features live entertainment and covers issues from health to parenting. Moreover, Al-Yaum broadcasts live and simultaneously from five locations in Beirut, Cairo, Dubai, Jerusalem and Al-Hurra’s main newsroom in Virginia.

Mires explains that advanced technology enables them to connect throughout the Middle East. She further says that by “being in the Middle East in these four countries we have the flavor, stories and the content from across the region, without any of the restrictions.”

Additionally, Al-Hurra has just released Al-Hurra Al-Iktesadi in Iraq, a new weekly economic journal concerned with the Iraqi economy, international business and financial news and issues, reports Zawya.

Consequently, Al-Hurra is increasingly gaining the support of US politicians. Its annual budget has grown to \$128 million, which is more than double the launch budget. With this new budget and the new momentum behind the

network, we can all expect more exciting projects from Al-Hurra in the future.

## Lifting the Veil on Women's Struggle

Women's rights are threatened and meddled with by powerful men all over the world, says Katha Pollitt for The Nation. Though US President Obama did not address the issue for as long as many feminists would like, his speech in Cairo was "basically fine" in Pollitt's opinion.

*"I reject the view of some in the West that a woman who chooses to cover her hair is somehow less equal."*

*President Obama.*

"I reject the view of some in the West that a woman who chooses to cover her hair is somehow less equal," Obama said in Cairo. "Good," Pollitt responds, but a woman being forced to cover her hair is far more common, especially in the Middle East.

In most of America's actions and policy statements in the region, the issue of women's rights has been touted as a top priority. No one could say that universal suffrage and political equality with men is not a rational expectation for a 21st century society, but there is a flip-side to all this. The hardships of women in the West today are not rooted in the law so much as in the subtleties of the institution of gender.

In a recent article, Gulf Times claimed that while the West sees Muslim women as slaves to their hijabs or burkas, women are slaves to their appearances in those places where coverings are not forced onto the female population. The news site reports that despite the liberation of women in many countries, "a woman's worth is still tied to her level of physical beauty which is still considered her greatest asset and one to be exploited

in the worst way." Thus, many women see covering up as a way to prevent the objectification of their bodies.

Unfortunately, a happy medium has not yet been reached in most places. Where in much of the Middle East there is no alternative to covering up, in Europe, conservative women are punished for it. Asharq Alawsat tells the story of Mahinur Ozdemir, a recently-elected member of the Belgian Parliament, who is of Turkish descent and has worn a hijab her entire life.

The news site reports that although she won the support of her constituents, she may be forced to resign from Parliament because headscarves are not allowed in the chambers.

"I am concerned about the future of every female candidate who wears Hijab and wants to run for parliament because that person will face major challenges and difficulties," said Sofia Bouarfa, a fellow Belgian Member of Parliament.

To the west of Turkey, a far more publicized war is being waged against what Muslim women see as their right to dress as they choose. CNN reports that Nicolas Sarkozy, President of France, has set his sights on outlawing the burka and may even succeed in banning it from the country.

CNN adds that since 2004, all forms of headscarves have been forbidden in France's secular schools. "This is an issue of a woman's freedom and dignity. This is not a religious symbol. It is a sign of subservience; it is a sign of lowering. I want to say solemnly, the burka is not welcome in France," said Sarkozy after announcing his new plans for how France's Muslim women shall dress.

In a country with nearly 6 million Muslims, French legislators will have to tread lightly lest their efforts in favor of women's rights backfire.

## Mixed Criticism for Suppressing Journalist's Kidnapping

David Rohde, a reporter for the New York Times, was kidnapped seven

months ago in the North Waziristan region of Pakistan where he was working on a book, reports Asharq Al-Awsat. After much deliberation, the Times decided not to publish the story, although Executive Editor Bill Keller told Howard Kurtz at the Washington Post that, "we agonized over [the decision] at the outset and... over the last seven months."

"It makes us cringe to sit on a news story... but the freedom to publish includes the freedom not to publish," Keller continues. Asharq Al-Awsat also reports that the Times justified withholding the story because they felt it would help limit danger to the kidnapped man. The situation was complicated further when Rohde won his second Pulitzer Prize last month, and the Times feared they would be unable to prevent word of his kidnapping from leaking, says Brad Norington of The Australian.

Kurtz also quotes Keller as saying that the Times only made their decision after consulting with kidnapping experts and other media outlets that had been in similar situations.

*"It makes us cringe to sit on a news story... but the freedom to publish includes the freedom not to publish."*

*Bill Keller, Executive Editor, New York Times.*

"We obviously would always err in favor of the safety of the reporter," said Washington Post Executive Editor Marcus Brauchli to Kurtz. He goes on to also cite editors at the Associated Press and the San Francisco Chronicle in defense of the Times' complicated position.

Kurtz claims that "at least 40 major news organizations," including Al-Jazeera, complied with the Times' appeal to suppress the story of Rohde's capture. When it was reported by an Italian news agency and subsequently began appearing

on a few popular blogs, Keller convinced each blogger to remove the information.

But some in journalism are questioning the ethical grounds and double standard of the media blackout. On the Global News Blog at the Christian Science Monitor, Dan Murphy points out that when Monitor reporter Jill Carroll was kidnapped during an assignment in Iraq in 2006, other major news sources denied the Monitor's requests to keep her situation out of the press.

In response, Murphy asserts that the handling of Rohde's situation "reflects the set of informal rules" that the news media has developed in response to modern warfare and "the new kinds of reporting [it requires]."

Bob Steele at the Poynter Institute addressed Murphy's comment, saying, "We show a preference for one of our own in journalism generally by holding back a story... [but not for] the kidnapped oil field worker or diplomat or tourist."

In an editorial for the National Post, Kevin Libin points out that because Rohde was safely returned home, the decision of the Times and other media outlets to suppress the story seems justified and reasonable. But, he asks, would we be able to take the moral high ground if there had been "a different, unhappier ending?"

Although it is impossible to say whether or not the media blackout saved Rohde's life, or any other journalist who has received the same treatment, Libin shows that the question still remains as to why abducted reporters should be more carefully managed than those outside the profession.

## Head of Qatari Media Center Resigns, Bahraini Newspaper Shut Down

Robert Menard, former Director of the Doha Centre for Media Freedom (DCMF) in Qatar, resigned amidst claims of violations of press freedom, writes Habib Toumi for Gulf News.

The DCMF was created in December 2007 by the Qatar Foundation and Emir Shaykh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani, in partnership with French-led Reporters Sans Frontieres (Reporters Without Borders). The Emir's wife, Shaykha Mozah, is the chairperson of the DCMF.

The relationship between the DCMF and the government has become tense over the past few months, beginning earlier this year when a group of foreign journalists was denied access to the country, writes Christie Silk for Editors Weblog.

The DCMF was attempting to provide safe houses for threatened journalists, but the government claimed that "giving shelter to journalists from some countries might go against Qatar's diplomatic interests," according to Gulf News.

Menard responded with an open letter to Shaykha Mozah on the DCMF's website, in which he cast blame on "some people who are close to you and others you have appointed to senior positions at the center."

The DCMF expressed its opposition to existing press laws in Qatar, which make speaking out against the royal family, the army, or the Islamic faith a punishable offense.

"It's practically impossible to criticize government policy... The Qatari press law is both obsolete and repressive," Menard reportedly said in The Financial Times on 7 April 2009.

Menard, former head of Reporters Without Borders, was criticized in local press for "insulting Muslims" and for "crossing the red line in press freedom," reports Gulf News.

As Spokesman for the DCMF, however, Menard has been vocal about the positive impact of his former organization, one of few groups outside the West dedicated to protecting press freedom. He listed "starting an independent news agency for Somali journalists, providing bulletproof jackets in Somalia, Iraq, and Pakistan, opening a press center in Gaza, and supplying newsprint to newspapers in Guinea-Bissau" as among the Center's accomplishments.

Menard's resignation comes at a time of widespread concern over the question of

press freedom in the Middle East though media censorship was officially abolished by the Emir of Qatar in 1995.

In a similar issue involving restriction of press freedoms, Bahrain's oldest newspaper was temporarily shut down last week for "violating the country's press code," according to the Project on Middle East Democracy.

Akhbar Al-Khaleej, founded in 1976, was shut down by the country's Ministry of Culture after the publication of an op-ed piece by Samira Rajab in which the author criticized the recent Iranian elections and implied that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is Jewish.

According to an article in Al-Arabiya, Rajab referred to a presidential debate between Ahmadinejad and former opposition candidate Mehdi Karroubi, in which Karroubi asked Ahmadinejad to state his full name in front of a large audience. Ahmadinejad responded tersely, stating only part of his name and reportedly omitting one of his surnames that would point to his supposed Jewish ancestry.

The Bahraini government asserted that the article "affected Bahrain's relationship with a neighboring country," noted Salman Dossari for Al-Sharq Alawsat causing the journal to be shutdown.

The Bahraini Journalists Association (BJA) issued a statement which urged the Ministry of Culture to reconsider its decision "in order to promote the atmosphere of freedom and democracy that is seen in Bahrain under the leadership of King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa."

The BJA expressed its concern that the decision had come directly from the Ministry of Culture and not the judiciary, which they said was in violation of the country's official press code.

Publication of Akhbar Al-Khaleej resumed after less than twenty-four hours.

## Iran Further Clamps Down on Media

Media coverage of the protests in Tehran has been heavily restricted after Iranian officials accused the foreign media of playing a role in the unrest, reports Al-Jazeera. The current repression of the media eerily echoes the 1979 Iranian Revolution when reporters were also restricted.

According to the Associated Press, authorities have banned foreign media from reporting from the street and are only allowing phone interviews and information from official sources such as state TV. The Iranian government has especially monitored news reports, blogs and Internet reports that are in Farsi. The Guardian reported on June 29, 2009 that Iran has more than 33 journalists in its jails, more than in any other country, including China and Cuba.

*“The regime has been visibly shaken by its own population and does not want to let this perception endure. That is why the media have become a priority target.”*

*Reporters Without Borders.*

Al-Jazeera also reports that Iranian authorities detained Newsweek journalist Maziar Bahari without charge. Bahari has not been heard of since his arrest. Although the Iranian government accuses the foreign media of biased coverage, Newsweek defends that Bahari, who has lived in Iran for the past decade, “has always been fair and nuanced, and has given full weight to all sides of the issues.”

Yolanda Alvarez, from Spain’s RTVE public broadcasting network, tells Washington TV that the Iranian government ordered the expulsion of her television crew. Alvarez declares that,

“we are the unwelcome witnesses... they want to get rid of all the foreign media... the streets last night were full of anti-riot police.”

According to the Guardian, the Iranian foreign ministry specifically condemns BBC and Voice of America for being mouthpieces of their respective governments and seeking to manipulate the post-election riots. BBC recently confirmed that Iranian officials have been interfering with the satellite broadcasts of BBC’s Farsi-language news service.

Jon Leyne, a correspondent for Britain’s BBC news network, was expelled from Iran for “distortion of news regarding the Islamic Republic of Iran and... news pertaining to the election,” according to the Associated Press. The semi-official Farsi News Agency announced that Leyne was, “ignoring neutrality in news, supporting rioters and trampling the Iranian nation’s rights.”

In addition to the restrictions on Western media, the Dubai-based Al-Arabiya television channel has been ordered to shut down its bureau in Tehran after being charged with “unfair reporting.” Mohammed al-Khateeb, the channel’s editor-in-chief, explains that, “the authorities accuse Al-Arabiya of diffusing news that is not necessarily fair from their point of view.”

Moreover, according to The Guardian, the entire staff of Mir-Hossein Mousavi’s newspaper, Kalemeh Sabz, has been arrested, demonstrating the increased pressure on domestic journalists. The list of current detainees includes other Iranian citizens such as Ali Mazroui, the head of the Association of Iranian Journalists, Jila Baniyaghoob, the editor of a women’s rights website and Bahaman Ahamadi Amoe, a pro-reform writer.

The Associated Press quotes Reporters Without Borders (RSF) as claiming, “The regime has been visibly shaken by its own population and does not want to let this perception endure. That is why the media have become a priority target.”

As a result of the crackdown on the media, Internet outlets such as Twitter and YouTube have been the only means of conveying information out of Tehran.

Yet the use of anonymity by blog posters trying to avoid repercussions makes information difficult to verify.

The possibility remains that the foreign media is distorting its coverage and the Iranian authorities have cause for concern. Anthony DiMaggio of CounterPunch argues that the press is thus far worked up over what is only “alleged” perversion of the democratic process until the charges of electoral fraud are verified. DiMaggio claims that, “a review of the media’s reaction to the election reveals much about American journalists’ arrogance and ignorance.”

DiMaggio argues that the media assumes the worst of Iran’s political system, before considering the evidence. He refers to an editorial in The New York Times as an example. The editorial claims that the election is certainly fraud and denounces the Iranian government’s “even more than usually thuggish reaction.”

The Times editorial also emphasizes the Iranian government’s aggressive reaction to the protests and the oppressive action the government took when it closed all universities in Tehran, blocked cell phones and text messaging and limited Internet access. The Times concludes that had the results truly been “real and free” the voters would accept the results and there would be no need for the government to respond hostilely.

A poll of Iran’s electorate, conducted three weeks before the election suggest that the declared electoral results may be accurate. The poll shows Ahmadinejad leading by a 2-to-1 ratio, reports Reuters. Pollsters Ken Ballen and Patrick Doherty claim, “While Western news reports from Tehran in the days leading up to the voting portrayed an Iranian public enthusiastic about Ahmadinejad’s principal opponent...our scientific sampling from across all 30 of Iran’s provinces showed Ahmadinejad well ahead.”

In the current situation, it is difficult to accurately decide the fair results of the election, therefore making it a challenge for media outlets to provide unbiased coverage.

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