

# The Layalina Review

## On Public Diplomacy And Arab Media



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## President Nominates a Full Slate for the BBG

President Obama nominated on November 18 a slate for the Broadcasting Board of Governors, reports Variety. The Broadcasting Board is responsible for all USG nonmilitary, international broadcasting, including Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, Radio and TV Marti and the Middle East Broadcasting Networks (Al-Hurra television and radio Sawa).

Former Time editor and CNN CEO Walter Isaacson is nominated to chair the Board. The other Democratic nominees are Michael Lynton, Susan McCue, and Michael P. Meehan. The Republican nominees are Victor H. Ashe, Dennis Mulhaupt, S. Enders Wimbush and President George W. Bush's former press secretary, Dana Perino. Perino is a regular contributor to Fox News.

The Obama administration and Fox News have openly feuded for several months, according to The Hill. The White House has accused Fox of injecting opinion into its news coverage of the administration.

President Obama declared, "I am grateful that these distinguished individuals will be a part of this vital agency that has done so much to promote freedom and democracy around the world. I look forward to working with them in the months and years ahead," according to The White House Briefing Room.

Four seats on the Board have been vacant for some time, spanning from one year to nearly four years, while the terms of the seated Governors expired between three and five years ago, remarks Matt Armstrong, author of Mountain Runner Blog. "For all the lip service to the urgency

to communicate with the world, the Board has been long neglected," he says.

While Armstrong highlights that the change is welcomed, he stresses that more change is needed and remarks, "The Chairman must become a full-time position in order to fully support and champion the needs of US Government broadcasting." The nominees have to be confirmed by the Senate before taking office.

## Muslims Disillusioned over Lack of Progress

Muslims, and Palestinians in particular, remain convinced that US President Barack Obama holds as much promise of a "just world" as his war-mongering predecessor," despite the pledge made in Cairo, denounces Iqbal Jassat of Media Monitor Network.

Following Obama's historic speech in Cairo, he remarks that Muslims were overwhelmed "with a new sense of expectation" that would "reverse strained relations ... caused by the Bush administration's belligerent policies."

Yet, Arab frustration with the United States has grown through a series of recent events, namely US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's praise for Israel's "unprecedented" offer to curtail Jewish settlements. She later attempted to control the Arab backlash by claiming the US wants more concessions from Israel. Asharq-Alawsat fustigates, "Her words left a lasting sting ... [and] angered the dismayed Arab leaders."

Indeed, many fear that the failure to make progress on the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is leading to disillusionment

and even radicalization across the Muslim world, continues Asharq-Alawsat.

"Angry over the stalled peace process, even moderate Arab countries are considering withdrawing from an Arab League plan that offers Israel recognition in exchange for the return of occupied land," the news site ascertains.

Jassat notes, however, that Obama has been clear about US intentions from the beginning, "given the fact that [he] established his anti-Palestinian

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credentials during the American elections with his promise that 'Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel, and it must remain undivided.'"

Obama's approach so far has been characterized by speeches rather than actions, concurs Helle Dale of the Heritage Foundation for the Washington Times. She points out that the Obama administration has emphasized the importance of public diplomacy by intensively using new media, marking "a new era of communication with audiences worldwide." Yet, this outreach has yet to yield tangible results.

*"Even moderate Arab countries are considering withdrawing from an Arab League plan that offers Israel recognition in exchange for the return of occupied land."*

*Asharq-Alawsat*

Even though US approval ratings have surged globally thanks to Obama's persona popularity, Dale writes that this upswing may already have some unintended consequences. "Indeed, setting the bar of expectations so high has actually created a problem. Even the media that are solidly on the side of the Obama administration have started to notice," she says.

John Brown at The Guardian agrees, saying "The new administration should not give overseas audiences the false hope that its arrival on the world scene will mean a sudden, drastic departure from the policies of Bush...[it] should, however, immediately focus on results-oriented overseas initiatives."

Brown insists that the US should take a more responsible and globally minded approach, shifting away from military force to diplomacy and attempting to be more sensitive to the concerns of other nations. "Another demonstration of this new attitude would be to appoint an internationally respected public figure as UN ambassador," he asserts.

Dina Khanat at Al-Arabiya remarks that there is in fact no urgency for America to broker a peace between Israel and the Palestinians. She believes that US interests remains the same despite the change in administrations; "protecting Israel, securing cheap oil and preventing 'radical' regimes from gaining power."

This view seems to be pervasive throughout the Arab world, highlighted in a recent speech by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, according to Asharq-Alwasat. "What we see is absolute American commitment to Israeli interests, Israeli conditions, and Israeli security ... while disregarding the dignity or feelings of the Arab and Muslim people," Nasrallah said.

Radicals in the Middle East are filling the vacuum left by the disillusioned hopes following the US failure to secure a step forward on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Asharq-Alwasat underlines that even at the time of the Cairo speech, Arabs, although pleased by the overture, expected action, "and in particular, efforts by the US to pressure Israel to halt Jewish settlement in the predominantly Palestinian West Bank and east Jerusalem."

Khanat remains doubtful about any improvements and stresses that while American interests remain free from threats in the region, the US has little incentive to change its policies and become a more "even-handed negotiator."

## Fort Hood Renews Debates over Islamic Extremism

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officials are working with groups around the United States to combat possible anti-Muslim backlash following the shooting rampage at Fort Hood, Texas,

by Major Nidal Malik Hasan, reports The Associated Press. Hasan, who was serving as a US Army psychiatrist, born in Virginia, is an American-born citizen.

In a recent statement, Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano attempted to reassure Arabs and Muslims that the American authorities are taking measures to quell anti-Islam and anti-Arab sentiments.

Yet, mosques across the country have requested additional police patrols, reports Dawns, while others have made private security arrangements.

Representative Andre Carson (D-IN, 7th District), one of two Muslims currently serving in Congress, cautioned Americans against focusing on Hasan's religion. However, numerous Muslim organizations protested that they have so far received dozens of death threats and hate e-mails.

"This is in no way a reflection of Islam any more than Timothy McVeigh's actions are a reflection of Christianity," affirmed Carson, who supervised an anti-terrorism unit in Indiana's Department of Homeland Security and comes from a family of Marines.

Robert Salaam, a blogger and former US Marine who converted to Islam shortly after 9/11, warned nonetheless that the actions of one man can affect all Muslims. He noted that some non-Muslims in America still believe "an entire religious community shares responsibility for the actions of one guy." Yet, investigations by the FBI and the military police into the shootings have linked Nidal Hasan to internet posting, which allegedly refer to suicide bombers "whose intention, by sacrificing their lives, is to help save Muslims by killing enemy soldiers," reports The Guardian.

Furthermore, US intelligence agencies learned that the gunman had contacts with US-born Anwar Al-Awlaki late last year. The agencies relayed that information to authorities before he went on the shooting spree, US officials have declared, reports Reuters.

Al-Awlaki has spent years publishing anti-US views sympathetic to Al-Qaeda to his English-language followers on the Internet, using blogs, video, audio lectures and lengthy articles.

One of Al-Awlaki's favorite themes is the minority status of Muslims in the West, which intensified when a blog entry was posted on his website in his name praising the killings and calling Hasan "a hero." Yet, findings so far remain inconclusive to determine if the shootings were motivated by terrorism.

Ben Flanagan at Maktoob News deplors the role of the media in this tragedy seizing Fort Hood's attacks as an excuse to promote a belligerent approach towards Islam and Muslims. He remarks that much of the reporting in America has focused on the religion and ethnic background of Hasan, hinting at the possibility that his crime could emerge to be a terrorist plot.

"Why must we discount wider political and psychological factors as being responsible or partly responsible for Hasan's terrible alleged crimes?" asks Flanagan. "It's because the right-wing media has a habit of using 'Islam' as some sort of synonym for 'terrorism' or 'violence,'" he continues.

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*Ben Flanagan, Maktoob News.*

Jacob Weisberg disagrees and points and argues for Newsweek that Fort Hood is "not just a major act of domestic terrorism, but one struck from inside our security apparatus." He writes that even when interpreted as the action of a "crazed individual operating independently," Fort Hood threatens Obama's premise that greater outreach and sympathy toward Islam is a viable strategy for countering extremism.

Weisberg believes that the warning signs were ignored due to a "desire to avoid appearing prejudiced or unfair to Muslims." "America does not face a threat

from the perversion of faith in general. We face a threat from the perversion of one faith in particular," he concludes.

President Barack Obama's policy of 'Islamic rapprochement' has come under scrutiny after the Fort Hood shootings, followed by the discovery of a number of domestic terrorist plots, questioning if the president has been too conciliatory to a group comprising 1.3 billion people worldwide, reports The National.

Even before the Fort Hood shootings, the ground underneath the president's "Islamic rapprochement" was shifting because of a spate of alleged domestic terrorist plots uncovered in recent months. The news site remarks, "True, the shootings have prompted some instances of especially noxious religious bigotry," but the intense media scrutiny is "being driven at least partly by swelling indications that the motive for his attack may have been partly connected to his Muslim faith."

In the political storm now brewing, there will inevitably be a wrangle over who is a "good" Muslim and who is not, and the president is likely to seek the support for his views from Muslims and other likeminded US citizens.

Veteran Today points out nonetheless that Fort Hood accounted for more suicides than any other army post since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, a fact that seems to have been largely overlooked in the media frenzy. Fort Hood is one of the largest military bases in the country and has been heavily involved with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This year alone, Fort Hood is averaging over ten suicides each month -- at least 75 have been recorded through July of this year alone. Veteran Today also cites a similar incident on May 11, 2009, when a US soldier gunned down five fellow soldiers at a stress-counseling center at a US base in Baghdad.

Hasan joined the army just out of high school. He had counseled wounded war veterans at Walter Reed Hospital, and was transferred to Fort Hood in April. He had recently received orders to deploy to Afghanistan.

Diana Mukkaled of Asharq-Alawsat remarks, "In one aspect, Hasan's deed points to a kind of American violence, but

on the other hand, it is easy to include it in the context of violence committed by Muslims in several parts of the world."

She further asserts that what is certain and absolute is that Hasan is as American as Timothy McVeigh was American.

## Saudi-Iranian Media Battle Continues

Saudi-based Middle East satellite providers Nilesat and Arabsat have both stopped carrying the Tehran-based Al-Alam news channel, reports Asharq-Alawsat. Atif Al-Musawi, manager of the Al-Alam's Beirut office, told Asharq-Alwasat that Al-Alam did not receive notification before their broadcasts were curtailed.

However, Khalid Balkhayur, Executive Director of Arabsat, remained vague as he explained that the broadcast was halted for "contractual reasons." Many speculate that political matters were the motivation behind this move given the current tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as Al-Alam is an Iranian network.

Al-Alam claims it is "paying the price for its support of resistance in Lebanon," reports YNet News. "[We] declare our solidarity with the channel and consider this a violation of freedom of speech and opinion," Hezbollah contended in a statement. The president of the Arab Writers Union, Hussein Jomeh, has criticized satellite operators NileSat and Badr for their decision to drop Al-Alam, according to Iranian Press TV. "Any differences should be settled through dialogue and providing reasons. If we cannot find a rational solution to our differences, then how can we resolve our cultural differences with other nations?" he said.

Reporters Without Borders also criticized the Arab satellites' measure to drop the channel, Al-Alam announces on its website. Reza Moenian, a member of Reporter Without Borders, said, "What is important for this organization, is the freedom of the press and opinion."

Iraq-based Al-Nahreïn radio and TV network also condemned the two Arab satellite companies for dropping Al-Alam,

calling on them to apologize for their decision. In a statement released on its website, the Iraqi network described the move as “a mistake” and an “obvious abuse of freedom of expression and opinion.”

Analysts say some Arab governments are worried about the channel’s popularity and Iran’s growing influence in the region. Iran and its allies -- namely Syria and Hezbollah -- have been locked in a regional power struggle with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and their allies in recent years.

Broadcasting resumed eleven days after the interruption on these two satellite channels following pressure from various media organizations..

Arabsat and Nilesat’s move, which provoked condemnation from the Iranian government, deprived Iran of a valuable tool in the ongoing battle for the hearts and minds in the region, claims Variety. The move against Al-Alam comes against a backdrop of escalating tensions between Iran and some Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

*“I don’t know how the media war can escalate anymore given that it is so tense already. It reflects the situation on the ground.”*

*Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed,  
Al-Arabiya general manager.*

“You have Egypt, Saudi Arabia and their allies on one side with Iran and their allies on the other side and the media dancing in between,” says Abdul Rahman Al-Rashed, general manager of Al-Arabiya. “I don’t know how the media war can escalate anymore given that it is so tense already. It reflects the situation on the ground.”

## Guantanamo Trials Open New Phase in US Justice

The Obama administration took an important step towards closing the military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, when it announced plans to prosecute the accused 9/11 perpetrators in the United States, reports The LA Times. Five detainees, including the self-claimed mastermind of September 11, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, will be tried in federal court in New York.

However, the LA Times points out that the plans for closing Guantanamo do not indicate what will happen to the 200 remaining detainees, who now represent the biggest obstacle to shutting down the prison. Dozens are still awaiting approval for transfer to other countries.

Jena Baker McNeill, a domestic security analyst with the conservative think tank The Heritage Foundation, remarks, “PR-wise, this looks really good. But in reality, the Obama administration has a long way to go to meet their deadlines.”

Among the looming decisions is where to hold the trials, or military tribunals. Analysts say trials will likely be moved to a domestic US base in order to expedite the closure of Guantanamo.

“The wisest course is to send everyone to their home countries and not hold them indefinitely,” said Tom Malinowski, the Washington advocacy director of Human Rights Watch. “The irony of the congressional response is they are pushing the administration in the direction of a charge-or-release policy.”

Attorney General Eric Holder was immediately denounced by some Democrats and Republicans alike for sending the cases to the civilian judicial system rather than military commissions, remarks The LA Times. Holder emphasized, “Mohammed and the other defendants will be brought to New York to answer for their alleged crimes in a courthouse, just blocks from where the twin towers once stood.”

Those who support holding the trials in US civilian courts emphasize the necessity of granting the same rights to the defendants

as anyone else tried in America. Holder said he is confident that Mohammed and the others will be convicted and possibly face the death penalty. Yet, the ultimate decision -- unless one or more defendants plead guilty -- will be the one of the jury.

Some fear that the use of torture may affect the outcome of the verdict, and many remain skeptical that the suspects will get the sentence they deserve.

Holder also remarked that the suspects will be tried in a fashion that will not erode the American legal system, but will provide justice to the defendants and the victims of the World Trade Center attacks, claims The New York Times. He argues that a fair and equitable trial will restore the moral image of America that had been tarnished by the practices employed by the Bush administration.

*“The irony of the congressional response is they are pushing the administration in the direction of a charge-or-release policy.”*

*Tom Malinowski, Human Rights Watch advocacy director*

Conservatives still argue that military tribunals are a more secure and appropriate venue for trying terrorism suspects. The Times argues that while “Bush’s tribunals failed to hold a single trial,” experience has shown that “federal courts are capable of handling high-profile terrorism trials without comprising legitimate secrets, national security or the rule of law.”

# Fighting Radical Islam through US Public Diplomacy

David Satter of the conservative Hudson Institute, described today's Islamic extremism as yesterday's communism for Forbes. He remarks, "Although they seem different—one claims to be religious whereas the other was, supposedly, a perfect science—communism and political Islam are essentially the same. Both are radical ideologies that divide the world into the elect and the profane."

Satter disagrees with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's response to a question about the existence of ideology posing a threat, saying that "That's so yesterday." He affirms, "The drive of an ideology to apply a false idea on the basis of its own inner logic independent of external reality is a mortal threat to the West and will be for generations to come."

"In fact, it is necessary to confront the terrorist ideology directly. Instead of treating freedom as an alternative to ideology, we need to attack radical Islamic ideology as opposed to sanity," suggests Satter.

Some experts in the US have warned that the cost of fighting Islamic extremism threatens President Obama's reform programs. However, Satter emphasizes that any reform program would fall in priority behind the goal of "neutralizing ideological fanatics who could get access to weapons of mass destruction."

Yet, according to Michael Hughes for The Examiner, the US is losing the battle for the hearts and minds because it lacks moral imperative. "Due to a systematic failure in public diplomacy, Muslims also see the US lacking any foundational moral code whatsoever," he deplors.

Hughes further asserts that the persistent focus on image over content in diplomatic policy since the end of the Cold War has yielded "nugatory policies that inhibit our ability to effectively promote American values." In his opinion, the United States is so concerned with creating an image, that it doesn't substantially address "who we are."

He proposes that if a solution against radicalism is to work, it must demonstrate the "superiority of the US mission" over the mission of radical Islamists. Hughes asseverates that Western nations need to address the "perversion of religious teachings [by extremists] to meet their political goals," by reestablishing the moral legitimacy of their message.

"The objective shouldn't be getting Muslims to fall in love with freedom and democracy," but rather to convince Muslims to reject extremism. He concludes, "By clearly defining our moral cause and the tyrannical nature of a pseudo-religion, America has a fighting chance of winning the hearts and minds of Muslims." Mark Lynch explains for Foreign Policy that President Barack Obama's own public diplomacy nonetheless managed to reframe the scope of US-Muslim relations, paving the way towards a "serious engagement based on 'mutual respect and mutual interests.'"

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*David Satter, the Hudson Institute.*

He argues that by taking political grievances of the Muslim world into account, President Obama stemmed away from the binary and antagonistic narrative promoted by Al-Qaeda of the "Us vs. Them." In doing so, Al-Qaeda "has simply lost its ability to present itself as the avatar of generic resistance."

Yet, Lynch remarks that Al-Qaeda's message grows more sophisticated and

the group is now developing a narrative clearly hardening the fact that Obama has not delivered on his promises, and that he hasn't really changed American policies despite his personal appeal.

Lynch believes that Afghanistan is not just a battle for victory over Al-Qaeda, but also a battle for "the mobilized Arab and Muslim publics which Obama hoped to win over."

He views the "resistance" as non-ideological, rooted far more in perceived political grievances than in the nuances of Islamist ideology. Lynch also raises questions about how the US should engage with non-violent Islamist groups, especially when it comes to fighting radicalism. "It's hard to construct a serious engagement strategy without an answer to this," he admits.

## Clinton's Public Diplomacy Fosters US-Pakistani Ties

Although the relationship between the US and Pakistan has been defined by traditional ties for several years, a striking shift to "soft-power diplomacy" and a possible change in the US foreign policy towards Pakistan seems to have emerged following the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's latest visit to Pakistan, reports the Khaleej Times. Secretary Clinton has recently returned from a trip to the Middle East, North Africa, and Pakistan.

According to Dr. Maleeha Lodhi, the former Pakistani Ambassador to the US and the UK, Clinton's visit broke the traditional mould of diplomatic engagement through meetings beyond the conventional government compass, showing willingness to address concerns regarding the relations with the US, and engaging with criticism while speaking on contentious issues.

US envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke told CNN, in an interview with Christiane Amanpour, that the Secretary of State had an extraordinary trip and engaged in massive public diplomacy as she reached out to speak directly to many media sources, leaders, students,

and hostile and skeptical journalists.

This interaction with civil society reflects the importance given by the Obama administration to public diplomacy in achieving foreign policy objectives, particularly in the “war against terrorism”, reports the Pakistan Observer. Clinton acknowledged the existence of a trust deficit in this bilateral relationship, particularly towards the United States’ intentions and actions.

Clinton assures, “The US and Pakistan remained allies and friends since Pakistan’s inception,” and stronger foundations will be used for future relationships. Her diplomatic mission aimed at resetting the tone and narrowing the gap between the two countries that have “so much in common, face a common threat, and have a common enemy in extremism and terrorism.”

Holbrooke declared that the US has committed itself to greater support of Pakistan’s ailing economy, reports the Dawn Media Group, as well as to dismantling Al-Qaeda and strengthening the country’s democratic institutions.

However, while Clinton emphasized “turning the page” on the US-Pakistani relationship, the recently enacted Kerry-Lugar legislation resulted in vigorous criticism against US foreign policy, perceived as creating a rift between civilian and military institutions, and undermining the sovereignty of Pakistan.

The law is expected to provide annual economic assistance of \$1.5 billion and military assistance to Pakistan for the period of 2010 to 2014. Blogger Muhammad Asif Raza wrote that the framework applied by this legislation leads to increased US engagement and interference with Pakistan, putting Islamabad under greater pressure to “crackdown militants and smash networks involved in proliferation of nuclear weapons.”

While the opponents of the legislation reject it on the basis of the stringent conditions, the US government is trying to win Pakistan’s full cooperation as it deliberates new strategies for the region.

Clinton’s visit gave the Pakistani civil society a chance to raise several questions and criticize the shortcomings of the American foreign policy. A journalist told

Secretary Clinton that Pakistan is fighting a war that was imposed on them, and that the US “had a September 11, while Pakistan is having a daily September 11.”

When asked for the reason underlying the “trust deficit” in the relationship between both countries, Secretary of State Clinton replied that “your enemy is not your enemy simply because they are our enemy,” reports Politico.

Even though Clinton engaged earnestly in these discussions, her answers seemed to stand strictly by the United States policy towards Pakistan: applying the Kerry-Lugar Bill and defeating Al-Qaeda, remarks Politico.

The Pakistan Observer notes that there seems to be an end to the “cow-boy diplomacy” towards Pakistan practiced during the Bush presidency, and a beginning of “soft power diplomacy” under the Obama administration despite the fact that it is premature to see big differences at this stage.

## Cairo Festival Promotes Regional Media

Hundreds of entries of television and radio productions inundated this year’s Cairo Arab Media Festival, reports Al-Ahram Weekly.

This year’s festival took place from November 11 to November 15 at the Media Production City in Cairo. The festival, originally called the Cairo Radio and Television Festival, first started in July 1995, and originally promoted television productions. It is now a large number of entries in the radio show category as well. “Think of it as Egypt’s answer to the Emmy Awards,” suggests Al-Ahram’s Kamal Sultan. Eighteen countries, seven of them non-Arab, participated in this year’s festival.

The 2009 Cairo Arab Media Festival also sponsored the Naguib Mahfouz Competition, which awarded the best television and radio scripts.

The latest wave of television and radio

shows in the Middle East is not exclusive to the host country. “The festival has been particularly supportive of Syrian and Gulf drama productions, now believed to be on par with Egyptian [productions],” observes Sultan.

While Egypt continued to lead the number of participants with 67 radio and 238 television entries, Syria and Jordan posted respectable numbers as well. Syria entered 17 radio shows and 44 television shows, while Jordan sent nine radio and 32 television shows to the festival.

The television show entries spanned a wide range of genres such as historical television series, social soap operas, and sitcoms.

The contests are not the sole attraction of the event. Sultan also comments on the importance of the marketing and networking that occurs at the media festival. “As broadcast companies shop for hit shows, artists from across the Arab world get to meet and new friendships often turn into durable business propositions,” states Sultan.

Indeed, these durable business propositions are spreading throughout the Middle East as television audiences are growing. Recently, Arab countries capitalized on a failed Turkish venture.

Gümüş, a soap opera which bombed in Turkey, aired on the Dubai-based Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) from 2008-2009. Arab audiences know the television program as Noor, as the producer dubbed the Turkish show into the Syrian dialect of Arabic.

“The show drew appeal from all demographics through storylines focusing on a large, multi-generational family whose many members lounge through love stories,” writes Pierre Tristram for About.com.

Tristram analyzes the cultural implications behind the hit soap opera. Noor tackles subjects, which may trigger controversy in conservative Muslim countries, such as pre-marital sex, abortion, and alcohol consumption. “Religion is subordinate to the challenges and pleasures of everyday life,” notes Tristram of the hit television show, which attracted large audiences in Saudi Arabia.

The inevitable backlash originated from

Saudi clerics. In 2008, Sheikh Saleh Al-Laheedan, chairman of Saudi Arabia's Supreme Judiciary, called for the "murder of satellite television executives who bring such shows as Noor to Saudis' televisions."

The clerics may have to take a back seat to the market, as the television program's success reached all corners of the Arab world. The finale episode garnered a record 85 million Arab viewers, and Noor's popularity sparked the production of a 2009 feature film based on the hit television series.

Tristram adds that The Saudi Gazette showed concern for the country's youth, worrying that "many seemingly innocent soaps may also affect children adversely." Adverse effects or not, the influence of television and radio continue to expand rapidly throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

The UAE swept the awards at the 15th annual Arab Media Festival (AMF) held in Cairo and Dubai Media Incorporated (DMI) claiming the biggest share, reports Business 24/7.

Abdullatif Al-Gergawi, General Manager of Dubai TV, said the UAE participation in the Arab Media Festival in Cairo underlined the keen interest among the UAE media professionals, on being actively aware of the Arab media landscape, and offering their expertise to develop the Arab media industry.

Ahmed Al-Mansouri, Manager of Sama Dubai, said, "The Arab Media Festival in Cairo is a great platform that attracts the artists and creative minds in the Arab World. The UAE's presence was strongly and expressively felt at this event through a number of quality productions."

## Cultural Diplomacy: Scene Two, Take One

President Barack Obama signed the Interior Appropriations Bill, which will appropriate 167.5 million dollars to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities

(NEH), report Natasha Aftandilians and Neil Thakor for New University.

In addition to funding the NEA and the NEH, funding for establishments such as the Smithsonian Museum and the National Art Gallery will also increase substantially.

Aftandilians and Thakor believe that the signing is a "historic move" benefiting artists, aficionados, and patrons alike, as funding for the arts was not a priority for the previous administration. For the Obama Administration, art is 'in,' and cultural diplomacy has a prominent role on the political agenda.

Despite a lack of emphasis on cultural diplomacy in American foreign policy, the concept itself is not new. At American Diplomacy, Scotty Greenwood traces the origin of modern cultural diplomacy to the Cold War era, when the United States government sent jazz musicians, painters, writers, and actors around the world to enhance the image of US culture. "Since then, the US federal government's cultural efforts ebbed and flowed, re-surfing in the wake of September 11th," recalls Greenwood.

Both the State Department and private initiatives bolster the efforts of cultural diplomacy. Greenwood details the creation of the Foundation for Art and Preservation in Embassies (FAPE) in 1986. The FAPE, a non-profit organization, works in conjunction with the State Department to contribute art to US embassies around the world.

Now an important part of the Obama Administration's agenda, top officials laud the benefits of cultural diplomacy as an effective component of US policy. "As our nation and world confront the multiple challenges of our time, effective communication is imperative. Bypassing written and spoken words, art expresses the human spirit and human creativity, connecting all citizens on a deeper level," noted Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

However, the very concept of cultural diplomacy is not without its naysayers. Aftandilians and Thakor cite examples of conservative backlash against federal support for the arts, such as former Speaker Newt Gingrich's attempts to eliminate NEA funding completely.

In a lecture to mark the 75th anniversary

of the British Council, Benjamin Barber applauded the benefits but also attacked the very nature of cultural diplomacy.

"The trouble with cultural diplomacy – don't get me wrong, I like cultural diplomacy – is that it is redundant. Culture is diplomacy," said Barber in a lecture printed in The Independent.

"Which is to say, cultural diplomacy cannot pretend to change how countries do business and probably should not even try," continued Barber. He stated that sending Black Watch to New York did little to change President Bush's perception of American engagement in the Iraq War. While the acts of cultural diplomacy have inherent value, Barber maintained that they "need to be allowed to speak on their own terms."

*"The trouble with cultural diplomacy ... is that it is redundant. Culture is diplomacy."*

*Benjamin Barber, Demos senior fellow.*

John Brown details the backlash against cultural diplomacy for The Huffington Post. While he advocates the US government's support for cultural events overseas, he also takes the critical stance into "serious consideration."

Brown cites "The Embassy's spoof of cultural diplomacy" as an example. The Embassy, a multi-disciplinary group show, which conceptualized that globalization, has rendered the sometime patronizing kind of cultural exchange once conducted by embassies outdated.

"While it can always use rejuvenation and must avoid becoming propagandistic, cultural diplomacy remains as important as ever," he concludes while remaining aware of the possible shortcomings of cultural diplomacy.

Greenwood also approves using cultural

diplomacy to promote values such as democracy and free expression. “At a time when two wars rage and our safety has proven intricately related to our world-image, art and architecture remind us that we are all part of a common human experience – one that shares the daily sentiments of life beyond politics, governments, and national borders,” he asserts.

## Crackdown on MidEast Media

The Dubai Press Club has enjoyed a decade of “unfettered two-way communication between the news makers and news communicators,” during a period in Arab media that was “marked by epoch-making paradigm shifts,” writes Mona Al-Marri in Gulf News.

At the Kipp Report, Dana Al-Baltaji has a different opinion. She writes that journalists in the conservative United Arab Emirates are subject to a completely different set of rules than they are in the “free press” system of the Western world.

“Anyone who knows anything about the region would guess that so long as you work with a local outfit, you’ll never have the kind of freedom in the UAE as you would in the West. It simply isn’t in the fabric of the region to accept the sort of criticism seen in foreign newspapers,” Al-Baltaji comments.

In an effort to combat this already pervasive stereotype of Arab journalism, another media group in Dubai has commissioned an award for the “best coverage” of an upcoming legal conference by the International Association of Prosecutors - Middle East, Asia and Pacific (IAP-MEAP), according to Dubai City Guide.

However, Al-Baltaji points out that the heavy restrictions in the UAE on conducting investigative journalism can be extremely difficult, if not impossible. The IAP-MEAP conference is taking place under the sponsorship of the Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, who is also the Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE.

But the UAE is not the only Arab country to attempt to protect its political leaders from critique in the media. An Iraqi court

recently fined a British journalist at The Guardian “as part of a wider crackdown... to discourage scrutiny of public officials,” according to an article in that publication.

“Legal cases have flooded from all sides into publishers and media outlets throughout Iraq,” Jabar Dharad, a member of the Journalists Freedom Organization, told the news site. The Guardian, The New York Times and Associated Press have all been served with legal writs in Iraq. Al-Jazeera, a respected Arab news network, has been thrown out of the country completely, “allegedly because of an anti-government bias,” the article continues.

“Freedom as a word exists in Iraq, but in application it has been totally lost,” Dharad declares.

Similarly, The Daily Star comments that Lebanon also suffers from a “culture of censorship,” despite the Reporters Without Borders World 2009 Press Freedom Index, which ranked the country higher than Israel for the first time.

*“So long as you work  
with a local outfit,  
you’ll never have  
the kind of freedom  
in the UAE as you  
would in the West.”*

*Dana Al-Baltaji, Kipp Report.*

According to The Daily Star, Lebanon rose slightly in the annual rankings due to the “relative political calm” after the 2009 elections. By contrast, Israel fell almost fifty places to 93rd due to the heavy restrictions and eventual media blackout during recent military clashes in Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories.

Despite the availability and seemingly democratic nature of the internet, online censorship is also becoming increasingly common in the Arab world and does not seem to be improving, writes Jan Kuenzl for OpEdNews. He points out

that the censorship is facilitated in part by non-Arab multi-national corporations, like Nokia and McAfee, which agree to provide monitoring technology in exchange for lucrative business deals.

“Some pressure from the civil society can make a difference,” Kuenzl comments. “Hopefully, in the digital arms race, the [censorious] regimes will not prevail permanently.”

## New Media Affecting Social Norms

Abeer Al-Najjar states on her blog for the University of South California’s Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD Blog), “Twitter has had a phenomenological influence on the international news media in the post-Iranian elections period in June 2009 onwards.”

“After years of state monopoly and censorship twitter and other social media sites and applications are making governments more concerned over news. Social media is placing more power in the hands of citizens in this region,” Al-Najjar continues. She believes that regional governments in the Middle East need to be more pro-active in their approach to conducting public diplomacy campaigns and efforts.

Social media is blooming amidst the backdrop of the opening of one of the world’s most technologically advanced and promising institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA): the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), according to Ulf Laessing and Asma Al-Sharif for Reuters. The creation of the university is part of a realization of a long overdue initiative to overhaul the court system, educational system, and to create jobs for the young population.

A perfect example of intermixing public diplomacy and social media studies, Al-Najjar writes that KAUST is meant to be a leading research university and has been received very well in the foreign media. This, however, does not mean that King Abdullah has received favorable reactions at home. The most salient difference in the structure of the university is that it is

neither controlled nor influenced directly by the conservative Wahabbi clerics, who control and influence other public aspects of the Kingdom, such as the judiciary, the police, and most of the education system

The unprecedented move to keep the university out of the conservative clerics' sphere of influence is creating quite a stir and may have much to do with the success of this new institution, remark Laessing and Al-Sharif for Reuters.

"Unlike all other educational institutes... the university is not administered by the Ministry of Education and is dealt with as an independent entity in order to circumvent the ministry's rules," writes Al-Najjar.

Heated battle regarding the role of KAUST social media outlets is playing a significant role in transforming societal norms, according to Reuters. Both the supporters of King Abdullah and the conservative opponents have been utilizing social media tools to muster support for their stance on this issue. The debate surrounding the University has brought

social media forums to the center stage.

This use of the social media to network and muster support has also

*"After years of state monopoly and censorship twitter and other social media sites and applications are making governments more concerned over news."*

*Abeer Al-Najjar, University of Southern California.*

been seen in the recent creation of a Saudi-based Facebook group, called, "The Facebook Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice," according to Al-Arabiya. The group, says Al Arabiya, is named after the kingdom's Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, also known as the religious police. The Facebook group administrators have maintained that as long as there is no foul language or slandering of officials, tolerant postings will be allowed. Each member will have up to three warnings before being deleted from the group.

Volunteers respond to allegations about the committee and provide advice and promote Islamic principles. The official religious police, however, have said they have no ties with the Facebook group, according to Al-Arabiyya. The committee's media spokesman Abdul-Mohsen Al-Qafari told Al-Arabiya, that officials have yet to contribute to the Facebook postings, and are not responsible for its content.

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