

The Layalina Review

On Public Diplomacy And Arab Media



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The Zeitgeist of Public Diplomacy

John Brown suggests in the Huffington Post that public diplomacy was used as a panacea for the shortcomings of US policies under the Bush administration. As the State Department and the new administration move away from this stance, struggling to redefine its role and purpose, an emphasis is being put on the quality of policy. So far, the State Department's role is defined as "engaging, informing, and influencing key international audiences." Brown notes that public diplomacy has not been given the same priority and importance under the Obama administration. Bush-era public diplomacy underwent various transformations from "branding" during the tenure of Under Secretary Charlotte Beers, to public relations under Karen Huges, and finally the "war of ideas" under James Glassman.

"During the past few years, public diplomacy was taken oh-so-solemnly by the American political elite and chattering classes," who aimed at, "selling disastrous, unpopular policies under the previous president" to publics at home and abroad.

Although public diplomacy has been approached in a less sanctimonious way under Obama, notes Brown, the US president provides an opening to restore one of public diplomacy's "greatest qualities" by properly engaging with people. Obama also realizes public diplomacy is not to be a substitute for sound policies.

Yet, some argue that several faux pas could have been avoided if public diplomacy had been granted a proper place. "Consider the flap over the DVD set Obama presented to British Prime Minister Gordon Brown as a 'gift' or the 'reset' button Secretary Clinton offered to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov," says Brown. He continues to point out that this is the sort of cultural "insensitivity" on which

public diplomacy supposedly focuses.

Brown adds, "Public diplomacy can help avoid embarrassing, damaging situations for the US abroad by being tuned in to local mores." And while it does not yield miracles, its own successes are based on acknowledging how much "engaging, informing and influencing key international audiences," can achieve.

Matt Armstrong argues on his blog Mountain Runner that public diplomacy is not likely to play an important role in the Obama administration. The remaining vacant position of Under Secretary is a clear indication of how inconsequential it may now be. "Is it that Clinton (and possibly Obama) does not know where to take public diplomacy and whether an empowered National Security Council is the route to go?" he wonders.

Armstrong believes that while the priority is low, public diplomacy will eventually come back on the agenda. He adds that the issue at stake is deciding who will be leading US global engagement that spans the whole of government.

Armstrong further implies that the State Department could lose considerable ground to the Defense Department "who will be the only vertically integrated element of the Government that can provide the services necessary in a world of state and non-state actors."

Broadcasting American Identity

Debates about the merits and limitations of strategic communication have featured prominently recently in the media. Specifically, the State Department's new media liaison Dana Shell Smith made a presentation at the University of Delaware entitled, "Dousing the flames: Public Diplomacy in action," reports UDaily.

In her capacity as liaison, Shell Smith "will be one of the select few US officials who will appear regularly on Arab television, radio and regional newspapers to present the US point of view on key Middle East issues," continues the site.

"While diplomacy happens at official levels, the relationships built between people give a better understanding of the US and who Americans are as people," remarked

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Shell Smith during the presentation.

Shell Smith suggested three ways the US can be most effective in public diplomacy efforts in the Middle East: 1) policy changes, 2) not talking over or ignoring other opinions, and 3) speaking the indigenous language to show respect for indigenous culture, continues UDaily.

“While diplomacy happens at official levels, the relationships built between people give a better understanding of the US and who Americans are as people.”

Dana Shell Smith, UDaily

After highlighting the “continuous, violent images that people in the Middle East encounter daily in practically every media outlet,” Shell Smith clarified that “US public diplomacy cannot and does not try to counter this emotional imagery.”

Shell Smith said she instead will use “several outreach tools to communicate with the public overseas,” including Al-Hurra and Radio Sawa, adds UDaily.

In response, Kim Andrew Elliot remarked on his blog, “I hope that Shell Smith has been sufficiently briefed to know that Radio Sawa and Al-Hurra are not State Department public diplomacy ‘tools,’ but autonomous news organizations under a separate entity, the Broadcasting Board of Governors.” Elliot further emphasized that “the Secretary of State has one seat on the BBG, but is not its CEO.” In a separate strategic communication discussion, former Under Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith argued in the New York Times, “The US may be able to help Pakistan prevent [the rise of fundamentalism], by supporting Pashtun

opposition to the extremists.” Specifically, Feith suggests Pashtun radio programming.

“If it had the equipment and personnel for the job, the US could broadcast radio programs for the Pashtuns commemorating Rahman Baba’s life and poetry, thus helping to revive the collective memory of Sufism and inspiring opposition to the Taliban,” writes Feith. Rahman Baba, born around 1650, is the most revered Pashtun poet, he notes. The shrine of Rahman Baba was recently bombed by the Taliban.

Reacting to Feith’s argument, Patrick Barry of Democracy Arsenal decries the former Under Secretary as a “font of lazy thinking.” Barry writes, “Strategic communications directed at the Muslim World, patterned after Radio Free Europe? Sorry Doug, maybe you should have gotten involved with Al Hurra, the Bush administration’s attempt to replicate the success of Cold-War era public diplomacy, but which has been widely regarded as a sham by the Muslim world.”

In response, Kim Andrew Elliot suggests in a separate blog post that while “Al Hurra is not up there with Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, it has too many viewers to be dismissed as a ‘sham.’” Nevertheless, Elliot also criticizes Feith’s argument by noting that he “overlooked the fact that Voice of America’s Deewa Radio already broadcasts in Pashto to that very part of Pakistan.” Elliot adds that Deewa’s output includes programs about poetry. “Apparently the US does have ‘the equipment and personnel for the job,’” he concludes.

Social Media Is No Panacea

Writing for the Boston Review, Evgeny Morozov warns of the dangers of “starry-eyed cyber-optimism.” Morozov remains skeptical of the widely assumed “democratizing potential” of web 2.0 technology, and cautions that the “grandiose promise of technological determinism—the idealistic belief in the internet’s transformative power—has often blinded even the most sober analysts.”

Morozov argues that there is no evidence that web 2.0 technology will suddenly promote dreams of democracy. “We also

cannot assume that people will seek out information they do not agree with or simply do not know about,” he argues.

“For several years people in Washington have been discussing public diplomacy in the misguided belief that it is somehow enough to tinker with the form and distribution techniques of ‘our message’ to win the war of ideas. The elephant in the room (or in the Beltway) is that the war of ideas has to be waged on substance.”

*Thomas Hegghammer,
Jibadica*

In an article on the Mountain Runner blog, Matt Armstrong also notes that social media “cannot magically transform an organization’s structure or processes without support from ‘traditional’ places often viewed as barriers to progress.”

Armstrong describes the modern “now media” environment which demands “greater speed and agility.” Social media can help to bypass outdated hierarchical information structures through “information dissemination systems that facilitate and encourage dialogue.”

However, Armstrong concludes that “social media isn’t a panacea.” Rather, social media’s role as a value transformative role is still to be explored and exploited for optimal impact.

Despite the reservations of Morozov and Armstrong, “digital diplomacy’ is all the rage in Foggy Bottom,” reports Rob Salkowitz of Internet Evolution. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is “embracing new media, using the web to promote the agency and her role as the nation’s top envoy.” The Department of State’s new website now features a comment-enabled blog, a Twitter feed, an interactive map and a YouTube channel.

At The Examiner, Maria Lewytkyj highlights the State Department’s own social networking site, ExchangesConnect, announcing that “online diplomacy has arrived.”

Nevertheless, Salkowitz is also skeptical of the potential gains from a diplomatic use of social media. The writer notes, “Effective social media channels gain authority from several factors: authenticity, candor, transparency and reciprocity. These values are conspicuously absent from the discourse of diplomacy...Diplomats are proverbially evasive and indirect.”

Thus, Salkowitz emphasizes that social media cannot merely function as a capitalization on “the PR value of the newest communication fad.” Instead, “success will be dependent, as always, on the quality of the story... not on the means of conveyance.”

Thomas Hegghammer similarly argues on Jihadica that, “in the overall ‘war of ideas’ we must realize the limits of the internet and other media, because at the end of the day they are just that: media.”

Hegghammer continues, “For several years people in Washington have been discussing public diplomacy in the misguided belief that it is somehow enough to tinker with the form and distribution techniques of ‘our message’ to win the war of ideas. The elephant in the room (or in the beltway) is that the war of ideas has to be waged on substance.”

Dropping “War on Terror” Rhetoric

As US President Barack Obama continued his overseas mission, a remarked change in rhetoric was confirmed by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who confirmed that the administration is no longer using the phrase “war on terror” in policy development. The change has been supported by several media outlets and human rights groups.

According to The Boston Herald, Clinton said, “The administration has stopped using the phrase, and I think that speaks for itself. I haven’t heard it used. I haven’t gotten any directive about using it or not using it; it’s just not being used.”

“The idea of a ‘war on terror’ was rather silly. Terrorism is a tactic, not a nation or an ideology. Moreover, the use of the supercharged word ‘war’ seemed to elevate small bands of cave-dwelling fanatics from the criminal thugs they are into the mighty army they never were.”

Editorial, The Baltimore Sun

The phrase appeared following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In a speech to Congress on September 20, 2001, former President George W. Bush described why the US was targeted, stating, “They hate what we see right here in this chamber - a democratically elected government...They hate our freedoms - our freedom of religion, our freedom

of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”

An editorial in The Washington Times argues that “Bush’s unifying rallying cry after the 9/11 attack was anathema to the ‘I’m OK, you’re OK’ world of the Obama administration.” The newspaper asks, “How can a nation win a war if it can’t call it a war?”

In a separate editorial, The Baltimore Sun supported the shift in rhetoric. “The idea of a ‘war on terror’ was rather silly. Terrorism is a tactic, not a nation or an ideology. Moreover, the use of the supercharged word ‘war’ seemed to elevate small bands of cave-dwelling fanatics from the criminal thugs they are into the mighty army they never were.”

Human rights groups argue that the term “was used to justify many actions, such as the opening of the Guantanamo Bay prison for detainees held without trial,” and it served as a “with-us-or-against-us” militaristic philosophy, writes Reuters.

The “war on terror” “became the justification in 2002 for Bush administration lawyers to craft legal opinions that asserted that the President...possessed ‘plenary’ or total power, thus transforming the American Republic into a new age national security state” operating under Bush’s discretion, writes Robert Parry of Consortium News.

“The ‘global war on terror’ meant scrapping habeas corpus, the ancient right to challenge arbitrary arrests,” and while most associated it with the fight against Al-Qaeda, the war covered “any irregular fighting force ‘with global reach.”” added Parry.

Despite the change in rhetoric, the reality remains the same, says The Baltimore Sun. “The problem of terrorism continues, but the ‘war on terror’ won’t be missed.”

Al-Jazeera Steps Up Productions

Al-Jazeera announced that it is significantly stepping-up the distribution of its feature programs, reports Zawya. Phil Lawrie, Director of Global Distribution stated, “With a growing portfolio of programs from these three acclaimed channels,

we're able to market a range of compelling programming that covers a wide variety of current affairs topics and issues."

The library available from Al-Jazeera English includes over 50 hours from its award-winning documentary strand Witness, comprising stories told by local filmmakers that provide fresh insight into world events as they impact the daily lives of ordinary people. Arabic-language content includes Al-Jazeera Documentary Channel's 4-part series "Arab Christians" and Al-Jazeera Satellite Channel's "The PLO" - a 13-part documentary looking at the creation, establishment and existence of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, according to AME Info.

New Christian Channel in the Middle East

A new TV channel set to broadcast in the Arab world will telecast prayers and sermons, reports Al-Masry Al-Youm. Maximus, Archbishop of the St. Athanasius Apostolic Synod decided to alter the outreach strategy by making use of modern age tools.

"The TV church would reach every Christian house in the Arab world for all to learn our principles."

Maximus, Al-Masry Al-Youm

"The TV church would reach every Christian house in the Arab world for all to learn our principles," Maximus told Al-Masry Al-Youm.

However, he noted that the channel would not be a purely Christian station. Rather, it would be a general non-sectarian station broadcasting some Christian programs

addressing a broad variety of issues relevant to Muslims and Christians alike.

The network will begin by airing 12-hour daily broadcasts. It will also broadcast documentaries that promote Egypt's cultural and historic image. Maximus declined to comment on any of the media personalities that will work with the channel. "A well-known media personality would present the daily program to be named 'Dialogue not Debate,'" he hinted.

Other programs will tackle issues surrounding religion, freedom and sectarian problems in Egypt. The network's main focus in the coming broadcasts will be to present "a free and ideal model" of how to deal with the sate and Muslims, he concluded.

Promoting Democracy: A New Approach

Although President Obama has different foreign policy imperatives from the Bush administration, democracy remains at the core of his objectives, report former House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-MO) and former Representative Vin Weber (R-MN) for Politico. While Bush put democracy at the top of his "freedom agenda," Obama highlighted the importance of promoting democratic values, practices and institutions abroad.

In his inaugural address the new president clearly warned, "To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist."

Gephardt and Weber contend that it is not only because democracy support is consistent with a "realistic" foreign policy that the administration can be expected to adopt it as one of its guiding principles. While the new president inspires people worldwide, his charisma offers opportunities for him to further carry out his message on a global stage of "hope and human dignity."

Gephardt and Weber point out that promoting democracy "will advance a realistic foreign policy agenda

as well as one that is more 'values based.'" Both authors suggest that the issue at stake "is not whether but how to promote democracy abroad."

"The Obama administration is likely to recalibrate rather than relegate democracy as a foreign policy objective," they add. Grasping that democracies are the most effective partners in helping the US address today's international challenges, they conclude that encouraging grassroots movements in the concerned countries "will send a powerful message that the American people share and will help them realize their aspirations."

In its stance on democracy, the Obama administration took its first step by seeking a seat on the UN Human Rights Council, reversing a decision by the Bush administration to shun the United Nations' premier rights body, remarks Column Lynch for the Washington Post.

"We believe every nation must live by and help shape global rules that ensure people enjoy the right to live freely and participate fully in their societies," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in a statement. The United States announced it would participate in elections in May for one of three seats on the 47-member council, joining a slate that includes Belgium and Norway.

The decision was welcomed by UN officials and rights advocates; human rights activists have been advocating US membership in the council since its creation in March of 2006.

The Geneva-based Human Rights Council was established to replace the 60-year-old Human Rights Commission, which lost international credibility after countries with abysmal rights records, such as Sudan and Zimbabwe, were allowed to join and thwart criticism of their actions, reports Lynch.

The Bush administration refused to join the new rights body, saying it was not convinced that it represented much of an improvement. John Bolton, former US ambassador to the United Nations, said that the US would have more "leverage in terms of the performance of the new council" by not participating in it.

The Obama administration and rights advocates concede that the Human Rights Council has failed to emerge

as a powerful champion of human rights, saying it has devoted excessive attention to alleged abuses by Israel and too little to abuses in places such as Darfur, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.

However, as “Egypt seems to be going backward with President Hosni Mubarak’s government solidifying its hold on the levers of power,” eyes are on President Obama, reports The San Francisco Gate. First steps toward democracy were taken during the Bush administration when it called for reform by Mubarak after years of strains over the

“The question is not whether but how to promote democracy abroad, for such assistance will advance a realistic foreign policy agenda as well as one that is more ‘values based.’”

Richard Gephardt and Vin Weber, Politico

staunch US ally’s human rights record.

The Obama administration has already apprised Egypt of its position on the respect of human rights, stepping away from the former administration’s “overreaching” claims for democratic transformation in the Middle East.

Mubarak tightened his grip on the country by rolling back political activities, banning public protests, and enshrining “the government’s sweeping powers to detain people.” The Muslim Brotherhood also suffered heavy crackdowns, explains the site.

Many perceived the Bush administration’s efforts and pressure on the Egyptian government as “half-hearted” and insufficient to yield real and lasting change. While pushing for democracy in Egypt

failed, perhaps Iraq may offer a more positive outlook, concludes the news site.

US-Muslim Relations: Turning Words into Deeds?

President Barack Obama’s promise to address the Muslim world has been long awaited. In an article published prior to Obama’s speech to the Turkish parliament in Ankara, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, writing for the Middle East Times, stressed the similarities between Islamic law and American democratic principles.

“Once this commonality can be established, Muslims no longer will fear Western domination and the West no longer will fear Islamic expansion. Then, the phony ‘Clash of Civilizations’ can be put to rest.”

Effie-Michelle Metallidis, in an article for The National, also discussed the potential positives of an Obama speech

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Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, Middle East Times.

in Turkey. “While Turkey is not an Arab nation, it is still at the centre of this dialogue, affording Mr Obama the

best setting for his proposed speech.”

Although Metallidis favored the speech taking place in Istanbul rather than Ankara, due to its location as a bridge between East and West, the author overwhelmingly supported the choice of Turkey. “It is about a pivotal speech made by an American president in a Muslim country whose government retains the democratic and secular principles America seeks to propagate.”

Obama’s speech in Ankara acted as a “reset button” in the US-Muslim world relationship, replicating the earlier warming of US relations with Russia according to the BBC’s Paul Reynolds. Through his speech, Obama expanded his “extended hand” foreign policy to the Muslim world.

In his Foreign Policy analysis of Obama’s Ankara speech, Marc Lynch notes the “heavy coverage and rave reviews” the speech received “across the Arab political spectrum.” Obama’s assertion that “the United States is not at war with Islam” gained widespread enthusiasm.

Deemed as even “more important” by Lynch, Obama also announced, “I also want to be clear that America’s relationship with the Muslim world cannot and will not be based on opposition to Al Qaeda. Far from it.” Lynch saw this as “an incredibly important reframing of the problem” away from “the overwhelming focus on al-Qaeda, violent extremism, the war on terror...”

Thus, Lynch concluded that Obama’s closing remarks were “pitch-perfect.” However, though Obama has “performed masterfully at the public diplomacy phase of recasting American relations with the Muslim world,” Lynch emphasizes the importance of “concrete steps to translate the words into deeds and measures.”

Obama closed his speech by saying, “We will listen carefully, bridge misunderstanding, and seek common ground. We will be respectful, even when we do not agree.” This sentiment was also highlighted by Chris Seiple for Christian Science Monitor.

“Political disagreements come and go, but genuine respect for each other, rooted in our respective faith traditions, does not. If there is no respect, there is no relationship, merely a transactional encounter that serves no one in the long term.” Seiple continued, “We need to be honest with

and respect one another enough to name our differences and commonalities.”

Writing for the Huffington Post, John Esposito elucidates how Obama can move from words to deeds in his reframing of US-Muslim world relations. Esposito warns, for example, that the “firestorm and smear campaign” that forced Chas Freeman to withdraw his nomination to be Chairman of the National Intelligence Council risks undoing much of Obama’s public diplomacy efforts.

For Esposito, a new paradigm in US-Muslim World relations can only occur if Obama is prepared to take the political risk and “reverse the historic lack of even-handedness in American foreign policy in the Middle East.” A reversal of policy would prove that the Obama administration is ready to “walk the way it talks,” which critically, would include talking to Hamas.

“Finally engaging Hamas would spell the end of hypocritical Western policy and bring the peace process in line with the realities of the Middle East,” according to Ben White, writing for the Christian Science Monitor.

White argues that Western attempts to isolate Hamas have failed in their aim: “Punish the civilian population into rethinking their choice, and make a Hamas government untenable.” White suggests the US takes genuine strides toward a two-state solution and engages Hamas in order to win back the trust of the Palestinians.

Finally, Brookings Institution scholars Stephen Grand and Kristin Lord suggest that while President Obama’s moves to improve relations with the Muslim world have elicited optimism in many Muslim countries, “President Obama cannot repair this important relationship alone.” Instead, Obama requires “an army, of civilians, behind him.”

Grand and Lord argue that the US needs to “build a dense network of personal relationships and partnerships between Americans and Muslims globally,” in order to “build common ground with faithful majorities while marginalizing fanatics.”

CIA Recruits on TV Growth

The CIA is attempting to recruit more spies by advertising on the internet, radio and television, reports Times of India. It is also holding meetings with American Muslims in order to respond to a severe shortage of Arabic speakers.

“In order to accomplish our vital intelligence mission we want to market our employment opportunities to speak of Arabic, Russian, Korean, Pashtu and Urdu. We want to emphasize to those communities that we welcome first-generation Americans to apply. They bring critical language skills and knowledge of culture to support our intelligence mission.”

George Little, The Times.

Leon Panetta, the new CIA director, will meet Muslim groups to spearhead the drive to recruit Arabic speakers. He recently bemoaned the fact that only 13% of CIA officers speak a foreign language, and just 22% come from a minority background.

“In order to accomplish our vital intelligence mission we want to market our employment opportunities to speakers of Arabic, Russian, Korean, Pashtu and Urdu,” George Little, a CIA spokesman, told The Times.

“We want to emphasize to those communities that we welcome first-generation Americans to apply. They bring critical language skills and knowledge of culture to support our intelligence mission.” Mr Little said that the CIA holds about 2,000 recruiting events a year, often at universities across the country. It also advertises for recruits on billboards at airports. Last year, the agency received about 120,000 applications. This year it is on course to receive at least 180,000.

The CIA is still recovering from morale problems and an exodus of senior officials during a series of bruising battles with the Bush White House surrounding the intelligence used to justify the Iraq war.

The agency is also looking to reduce its dependence on outside contractors, which increased dramatically after 9/11. “I think we have to bring those capabilities in-house,” the Panetta said.

CIA officials say that these efforts are bearing fruit. “We are on track to meet the hiring goals set forth by former President Bush in 2004, which mandated that we increase by 50% the number of CIA officers in certain job occupations, such as intelligence analysts and clandestine officers,” says Little to Time.

MIPTV 2009

China and the Middle East, both fast-growing TV territories, as well TV in the multi-screen world, dominated MIPTV, the world’s largest audiovisual entertainment trade show, reports Agence France Presse.

“The hunt [was] on to buy more content for the growing numbers of TV platforms and channels around the world, with some 4,000 buyers expected and a higher number than normal from Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe,” Loraine Garaude, acting director of the TV division, noted.

Two of today’s main TV growth territories, the Middle East and China,

were in the spotlight during the gathering of key players from broadcasting, internet, advertising, video games and telecoms. "We are looking for creative TV programming that will help us to engage our audience, while balancing the need to preserve family and community values," Baynounah Media Group's Ahmad Zahzah told MIPCOM News.

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Ahmad Zahzah, Agence France Presse.

TV broadcast in the Middle East has grown from a humble 70 channels to an enormous network of more than 450 channels in the past six years, according to industry professionals who were representing the region at the MIPTV show in Cannes, France.

Growing links between television, digital media and advertising will also be high on the MIPTV conference agenda as the audiovisual industries start to feel the pinch from the drop in advertising revenues.

Gabriel Chahine, a partner at Booz & Company who leads the consumer and media practice in the Middle East, shared some revealing figures with the international audience at MIPTV, according to Zawya.

MBC has increased its coverage in the MENA region to a staggering 43%, in comparison to 22% in 2002.

Educating on TV

Twofour54 Ibtikar, the funding arm of Abu Dhabi's Twofour54, has joined up with a UK indie to produce a children's show in English and Arabic to air on preschool channel CBeebies, reports C21 Media. Twofour54 and 3Line Productions, the indie founded by former ITV Kids chief Estelle Hughes, will coproduce "Driver Dan's Story Train," which will debut in the UK in spring 2010 on the BBC's preschool channel.

"The fact that we have already secured an agreement with one of the world's leading children's TV channels shows how great the program is and we are sure it will be well received by Arabic TV channels throughout the region," said Twofour54 CEO Tony Orsten.

The series was created by British illustrator and children's author Rebecca Elgar and features a cast of animated animals who read and explore a different children's storybook in each show, according to World Screen.

Estelle Hughes, director of 3Line Media and executive producer of the show, explained, "It is well accepted in educational circles that introducing children to storybooks and reading at an early age is very important. The MENA region has one of the world's fastest-growing child populations with an increasing demand for relevant and high-quality children's content."

In a related story, children across the Middle East can now watch Christian television programs, reports CBN. The SAT-7 Kids channel provides Christian programming that educates children with Bible stories.

"SAT-7 Kids is so much needed in the Arab world because...it plants in the children of the Middle East the great values of Christianity and teaches them to be positive, filled with joy, peace and love of Jesus Christ," said the station's producer, Johnny Jallak.

SAT-7 has been broadcasting Christian programming throughout the Middle East since 1995.

The Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) will host a workshop on a

world co-production of a television program for children entitled "I am..." in an effort to highlight tolerance, according to Tunisia Online News.

The workshop will take place in Tunis, in association with the Asian Institute of Radio Broadcasting Development and the Radio Broadcasting Authority of South African States. "It will focus on children's cultural identity in the age of globalization. It also aims at promoting cultural dialogue between children throughout the world," according to the news site.

Hopes for Development at the Arab Media Forum

The sixth Arab Media Forum opened on April 5 in Dubai, focusing on the relationship between media and development, reports The Kuwait Times. Development, participants agreed, is key to solving the dilemma of poverty, providing jobs, erasing illiteracy, achieving social and economic justice between various classes of society and granting the freedom of expression.

Kuwait's Acting Minister of Information Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabah talked about the larger role of the media. "Media today has become a main party to all issues that concern the Arab world," he said.

Al-Sabah also stressed that the role of the media is no longer confined to being a tool for entertainment and for enforcing political viewpoints; it is rather a platform for sharing and discussing different views.

Madhi Khamees, Secretary General of the Arab Media Forum added that "media can be very helpful for the realization of comprehensive development."

Hedayah Darwish, a Saudi female reporter and founder of the first daily newspaper in the Gulf, commented, "It is a great opportunity to meet different experts in the field and exchange ideas with them. This is a chance for us as Arabs to prove that we are not ignorant towards media, nor are we behind world media."

Darwish, who started working in journalism over 20 years ago, says she replaced print journalism with electronic journalism in 2003. "Electronic journalism is the future of journalism... it is now time to let our voice cross the geographical boundaries and reach the entire universe. This can only be done through online journalism."

"Media today has become a main party to all issues that concern the Arab world."

Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Sabad, The Kuwait Times.

Attending the event from Iraq, correspondent Mazen Ali of Al-Iraqiya news channel said that this forum was much-needed. "The topics that are discussed in the program of are very crucial importance to our media today, especially in Iraq where we are facing a newly-born media," he said.

Meanwhile, the Dubai Press Club has announced the launch of the official website for the eighth Arab Media Forum, according to AME Info. The Forum will take place on May 11-12, 2009 at the Atlantis Hotel in Palm Jumeirah, culminating with the distribution of the Arab Journalism Awards.

Maryam Bin Fahad, Executive Director of the Dubai Press Club, said that the timely launch of the website was meant to keep pace with the soaring popularity and importance of the Forum.

The Press Club has also launched channels on You Tube that allow users to watch the various events held at the Club as well as the previous sessions of the Forum.

Obama Shows a New America at the G-20

The G-20 Summit in London last week met with much anticipation and mixed reviews. As Lincoln Mitchell of the the Huffington Post said, the summit was an opportunity for President Obama to introduce himself and, more importantly, reintroduce the United States to world leaders.

"Given its location and resources, its issues and problems and its previous and subsequent conditions, the Arab world is in the direction of the wind and the eye of the storm."

Sheik Hamad ibn Khalifa al Thani, The Los Angeles Times.

As Mitchell points out, there have been mixed reactions of how the conference went, which makes sense given the global economic crisis we are in.. Most important to President Obama was his goal to improve global relations and build diplomacy between nations.

In his blog in the Huffington Post the previous week, Omid Memarian wrote on the shift in foreign policy strategy that President Obama employs compared to the previous administration. He highlights how global opinions often characterize America as an arrogant and immoral super power in decline, using examples such as the torture scandal at Guantanamo Bay

and general US handling of the War on Terror. The G-20 summit is therefore the place President Obama must illustrate that he is different to his predecessor.

Memarian goes on to say that despite President Obama's strength in closing down Guantanamo Bay and working with countries like Iran and Syria, he must remember not to isolate any countries because his foreign policy achievements will crumble. In order to continue to separate himself from George W. Bush's foreign policy, President Obama needs to take the responsibility for the US's mistakes and build new relationships with world leaders.

Proving himself up to the task, Fred Kaplan of the Slate writes that President Obama is on his way to proving he is a change from the last administration. Meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev on April 1, Obama later stated at a press conference that despite differences the US will work with Russia on "vital matters, such as nuclear proliferation, counterterrorism, regional conflicts, and international trade." Unlike the Bush administration, Obama's foreign policy, at the moment at least, is a realist one, that Kaplan calls "statecraft: literally, the art of conducting the affairs of state."

Writing on a similar theme Ilan Goldenberg, in his Huffington Post blog, argues that the G-20 Summit illustrated a new form of US diplomacy, with an emphasis on working together through global actions and compromising on solutions, particularly on the financial crisis.

There was recognition from President Obama that on Afghanistan he request alternative types of support instead of troops, because many of America's allies have these kinds of resources. Continuing its effort to improve global relations the Obama administration continues to reach out to Iran, where Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke spoke with the Iranian representative.

The New York Times' article on the summit also emphasized the change in US foreign policy through President Obama's actions, highlighting the international press' emotional support for the new president and his role in diffusing a debate between French President Sarkozy and President Hu Jintao of China.

Throughout the summit, Obama stressed the importance of working as a global community to solve world problems saying, "If there's just Roosevelt and Churchill sitting in a room with a brandy, that's an easier negotiation, but that's not the world we live in, and it shouldn't be the world that we live in."

Marc Ambinder is less convinced of President Obama's success in his blog, from *The Atlantic*, arguing that media distractions, such as the controversy surrounding the iPod he gave to Britain's Queen Elizabeth II and making amends with Medvedev detracted from more important issues. There was less US coverage on the economic debate, though Ambinder says this was probably not the case in Europe. He concludes by pointing out that the US not gaining the spending flexibility they were probably looking for is better for diplomatic relations with Europe.

Arab Leaders Converge in Doha

Leaders of the Arab world gathered in Doha, Qatar for the 21st Arab Summit. Seventeen heads of state were present, and reports, according to Marc Lynch at *Foreign Policy*, described "a relaxed and positive atmosphere." Despite this, the two-day summit ended after only one day, lacking the usual "side-meetings and private discussions" that often occur. As Lynch points out, either personal conversations did not seem necessary, or the heads of state were "unable to talk to each other."

The summit, as Lynch states, was not as successful as one might have hoped. While the Doha Declaration showed strong support for Omar Bashir, the president of Sudan, other issues were "resolved" on ambiguous terms. For example, the leaders agreed that Arab topics need to be settled and Palestinian divisions need to be overcome, but no guidelines were set as to how to go forward on either of these matters.

Leaders also issued a "vague warning that Israel must demonstrate progress on peace." The *Los Angeles Times* reports that the Arab leaders encouraged Israel to accept a 2002 Saudi peace initiative that offers Israel diplomatic recognition if it

recognizes an independent Palestine. Still, no timeline was agreed nor consequences imposed if Israel fails to comply. Lynch also states that the Declaration barely mentions Iran and does not even make an allusion to its nuclear program.

However, one issue that was prevalent throughout the summit was the global economic crisis. The *Los Angeles Times* reports that Sheik Hamad ibn Khalifa al Thani, the emir of Qatar, warned the other Arab leaders that the crisis "is set to plunge a Middle East already reeling from war and extremism into further chaos." Khalifa ignored the disputes among the Arab countries to caution that, economically, the Middle East is in danger. He stated, "Given its location and resources, its issues and problems and its previous and subsequent conditions, the Arab world is in the direction of the wind and the eye of the storm."

Sudanese President Omar Bashir attended the summit in defiance of a warrant out for his arrest pertaining to the counterinsurgency in Darfur. The strong support and positive reception for Bashir caused some to worry, since it is equivalent to the support of the "alleged architect of the Darfur horrors," writes Lynch in a separate *Foreign Policy* entry. Bashir's presence also led others to doubt the true power of the International Criminal Court. Lynch says that Darfur has become, in the Muslim arena, not a question of international justice, but just another conflict between Islam and the West.

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