

The Layalina Review

On Public Diplomacy And Arab Media



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Blackberry Blacklisted

Officials from the UAE and Saudi Arabia recently declared that some services of BlackBerry and smartphones would be banned as authorities cannot to monitor message exchanges of their citizens, reports Al-Jazeera. The device encrypts the users' data and stores it on the servers of Research in Motion (RIM), BlackBerry's maker in Canada. National and local governments thus cannot access the information circulated by these smartphones.

The UAE's decision to ban the BlackBerry will go into effect in October, while Saudi Arabia announced that it would block the BlackBerry Messenger (BBM) function immediately. Lebanon declared that it would be conducting its own review of the devices a few days later. According to Al-Jazeera, the "encrypted data transfer services have raised fears they could be used for crime, terrorism or even espionage."

"The impending bans have been met with anger from BlackBerry users, who have accused the authorities of censorship, explains Al-Jazeera. Some technology experts pointed out that other governments have been monitoring BlackBerry communications.

"There are certainly countries all round the world, including the US and the UK, where governments have said that they want this sort of interception capability," commented Ian Brown, a senior fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute. However, the United States and the United Kingdom have laws in place regarding privacy protections, while experts are concerned because the Middle Eastern countries do not have similar laws.

Analysts suspect the ban is most likely an attempt to control the flow of information in conservative societies, concurs The

Drum. Media content and websites deemed to carry un-Islamic content or stoke political unrest are regularly blocked.

BlackBerry users in the UAE and Saudi Arabia are messaging each other to plot alternative modes of communication, including reverting to using proxy servers, anonymous forums and emails in order to evade censors. In Saudi Arabia, young people use BBM to communicate with members of the opposite sex covertly as a form of dissent in the conservative Islamic country.

Tariq Alhomayed, Editor in Chief of Asharq-Alawsat, points out that Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which are home to the largest number of BlackBerry users in the region, were also the fastest to announce a ban on their use. But neither the Emirates nor Saudi Arabia were able to clearly explain the rationale behind their decision to the public.

"The BlackBerry ban was not related to young people becoming addicted to the devices, but a broad sector of the economy will be influenced by the closure of the service," warns Alhomayed. Foreign workers and visitors will also be affected by the ban, raising further concerns.

Kuwaiti officials are likely to follow Saudi Arabia and the UAE with a ban on certain BlackBerry services, reports Arabian Business. According to a report in Al-Rai, a local Kuwaiti newspaper, the country's Interior Ministry raised the possibility of a block on services due to security concerns last month.

The news site adds that officials wrote to BlackBerry makers RIM, requesting a central server located in Kuwait in order to monitor data. They have yet to receive a response.

Thomas Shambler, the Dubai-based editor of the Middle East edition of Stuff magazine, said to Al-Jazeera that misgivings were not surprising

given the history of state-backed telecommunications surveillance in the region.

"Last year Etislat [a national mobile-service provider in the UAE] sent out a text message to lots of its users," he commented. "That text message led users to download spyware."

The editor said that Dubai's BlackBerry users are "more concerned about losing access to their services" than about censorship and government monitoring. Shambler argued that surveillance will ultimately be a thing of the past, as technology is developing so rapidly.

Political activists in Gulf nations are also affected by the ban, reports Reuters. They claimed that BBM service boosted their ranks. Currently, they are attempting to discover new ways to evade the authorities.

While the number of users utilizing the service for political activism is uncertain, activists commented that such ranks are

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growing. “It brought us new people we hadn’t reached before. Not everybody uses the Internet but everyone uses the phone,” said Nabeel Rajab of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights, who used BlackBerry to attract a few thousand online followers.

Activists in the United Arab Emirates argued that political dissent may have prompted the ban. “When BlackBerry came, I started to get messages criticizing the government from people I’d never seen involved in activism. Regular people started discussing taboo subjects,” said Ahmed Mansour, a UAE blogger. “It widened the circle of interest.”

“A broad sector of the economy will be influenced by the closure of the service.”

Tariq Albomayed, Editor in Chief of Asbarq-Alawsat

Messenger campaigns in the UAE have included critiques of state officials and attempts to organize protests, notes Reuters. The news site adds, “Across the Gulf, governments are revealing various concerns, with Bahrain cautioning against using the BlackBerry to distribute local news, while Kuwaiti officials are calling for a block on pornography.”

Saudi Arabia is working on servers that may make it easier for authorities to monitor BlackBerry traffic while the UAE is sticking thus far to plans for its sweeping ban. “This will definitely impact the level of activism until a secure alternative is found. Until then, I guess we are back to Facebook,” said Ahmed Mansour, a UAE blogger.

Voicing Concerns about Wikileaks

The Broadcasting Board of Governors, an autonomous entity responsible for

all US government and non-military international broadcasting, recently authorized the Director of the Voice of America (VOA) to continue reporting on the WikiLeaks story, reports Al Kamen for The Washington Post.

This decision was a reaction to an earlier decision by the IT and security personnel of the BBG, who had previously prohibited VOA employees from reading or e-mailing any of the WikiLeaks material on their government computers.

A VOA spokesman stated that “similar to other news organizations, the decisions about how to report on the leaked material are left to the VOA reporters and editors,” and covering the recent WikiLeaks episode was considered highly important. WikiLeaks released more than 91,000 classified documents related to the war effort in Afghanistan. Many of the documents contained explicit details about the struggles faced by US troops battling the Taliban while attempting to work with Pakistani leaders, who appeared to be assisting insurgency groups.

A number of American officials expressed their concerns that the leaked information could threaten national security while jeopardizing the safety of the troops fighting in Afghanistan. The International Broadcasting Bureau (IBB) argued that VOA did not have a classified computer system, and thus its journalists could not “download, browse or email” the WikiLeaks documents on their agency’s computers. The IBB maintained that although these classified documents had been leaked, they were still considered classified information.

“Highest journalistic standards means you’ve got to be able to look at a legitimate news story,” said Michael Meehan, a BBG’s governor. He further explained that VOA should use the actual material in covering the story.

Yet, Kamen explains that shortly after Meehan’s statement, the agency was “still looking for a clear green light to access the documents. Matt Armstrong asserts on his Mountain Runner blog that the central problem concerns the IBB, since it was dictating how VOA journalists may or may not report stories. Nonetheless, Armstrong praises the decision of the new Board to allow VOA to continue

reporting using the classified information released by WikiLeaks.

On his blog, Kim Andrew Elliott questions whether the same measures would apply to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), a government-funded corporation. VOA could not cover the story as it is a government agency. RFE/RL not only covered the story, but writers even interviewed WikiLeaks’ founder Julian Assange on July 27.

In related news, Rolling Stones’ journalist Michael Hastings, whose feature on General Stanley McChrystal leading to his sacking from the military, has been barred from being embedded with US troops, reports Matthew Weaver for The Guardian.

Highest journalistic standards mean you’ve got to be able to look at a legitimate news story.”

Michael Meehan, BBG Governor

According to Weaver, Hastings claimed that he was permitted to join US troops in Afghanistan next month. Consequently, Hastings posted that he had been “disapproved” on his Twitter account. David Lapan, spokesman for the US Defense Department, argued that Hastings had never been approved because US soldiers must be able to trust reporters while they are deployed. He continued that the command in Afghanistan deemed Hastings untrustworthy.

Hastings is not a unique case, Weaver points out. Ryan Lizza was not allowed to fly on Obama’s tour in Europe and the Middle East after he depicted Barack Obama and his wife as terrorists in a cartoon on the front page of The New Yorker.

The US military apparently favors sympathetic media coverage, considering that many Afghan radio stations are paid by the US military to broadcast friendly stories, argues Kim Andrew Elliott. For example, USAID presents Radio Ghaznawiyaaan as an example of independent Afghan media coverage, but thanks largely to American aid, it portrays the US army in a more favorable light than other media.

Extracts from WikiLeaks documents attest that these public image efforts aim at countering the effect of civilian casualties on the rise, even though the same strategy failed in Iraq, continues Elliott.

The Taliban in Afghanistan is using civilian casualties to muster the local population's support against the US military, depicting the insurgency in a positive light, as shown in the Taliban's "critique" of Petraeus' new approach. The Taliban stated that General Petraeus is engaging in a "mass murder" strategy.

Elliott adds that civilian casualties in Afghanistan, recently brought back to popular attention by WikiLeaks, is not a new media story. Arab and American media outlets such as Al-Arabiya, Al-Jazeera and VOA have extensively covered civilian casualties in Afghanistan.

However, Muhammad Nawaz Khan for The Daily Mail sides with The Guardian, as he also doubts the authenticity of the documents released by WikiLeaks. Khan affirms that the National Directorate of Security (NDS) that generated the leaks has antipathy for the ISI and may be trying to stigmatize it.

Khan warns that this disclosure could threaten individuals on the ground and negatively affect US national security. Moreover, he blames American reports on the leaks for focusing on the close relationship between the ISI and the Taliban, rather than on the war crimes committed by the US military. He observes that American media coverage of the war in Afghanistan appears to be biased.

Nawaz Khan regrets that this report may jeopardize both the US-Pakistan and Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.

The Obama Effect on Public Diplomacy

According to the findings of the 2010 Arab Public Opinion Poll, Arabs have lost faith in President Barack Obama's policy in the Middle East over the last year, reports The Brookings Institute, while views of the Arab-Israeli conflict seemed stable.

The annual survey, released by the Brookings Institute in conjunction with Zogby International, was conducted between June 29th and July 20th among 3,976 individuals from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates.

According to Al-Jazeera, 62 percent of those surveyed declared they held negative views of Obama, compared to 23 percent from last year's survey. The decline in Obama's popularity was attributed to disappointment in the president's handling of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and what has been perceived as a lack of follow up on his "promise to pursue rapprochement with Arabs and Muslims during his campaign and the early months of his presidency."

While the findings show that 63 percent of the participants said they were "discouraged" by US foreign policy, the number of people who were "hopeful" also dropped from last year's 51 percent to an alarming 16 percent.

The survey, nevertheless, indicated a "warming to peace" with Israel, with Arab attitudes changing over the last two years regarding reaching a peaceful agreement with Israel. This change in attitude is conditional, as 86 percent of those surveyed based their opinion on Israel's willingness to "return all the territory it has occupied since the 1967 Six Day War, including East Jerusalem."

However, Edgar Bronfman argues in the first of a 5-part series on Middle East peace running at The Huffington Post that moving the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians from its current "snail's pace" into reality requires careful understanding and action upon

the openings and opportunities emerging in a time he describes as "the Obama moment."

Bronfman believes that President Obama brings a unique role and style to the international stage, adding a new approach to the foreign policy arena with new challenges, yet even greater opportunities. He points out that while the president supports Israel's security, Obama equally supports the existence of the Palestinian state, and endorses "a different approach to peacemaking."

While the Bush administration seemed to support the "Israel can do no wrong" idea, writes Bronfman, the current national security team that Obama put in place emphasizes balance and rationality. Bronfman stresses that people should revisit Obama's eight "big" speeches, including the Cairo address, in order to see the president's consistent underlying message of outreach and dialogue and overruling ideological rigidity.

Despite the findings of the Brookings Institute survey regarding Arab attitude towards American foreign policy, Obama's Cairo speech seems to yield fruit in Damascus, a year later, writes Sarah Birke for The Christian Science Monitor.

"It started with Obama's speech in Cairo," said Maan Abdul Salam, a Syrian social analyst. "His message caused enough of a change to allow US organizations to work here," something many believed to be almost impossible under the previous US administration.

Indeed, public diplomacy efforts are on the rise in Syria as a US non-profit organization called Open Hands Initiative recently started its first project in the country, despite unease about Washington's delay in appointing a new ambassador.

The project assembles a group of American and Syrian disabled children to produce a comic book featuring a disabled hero, and also incorporates collaborations between US music producers and Syrian artist's recording material used to promote the initiative abroad.

"We can play a unique role in restoring America's image around the world," says Jay Snyder, the founder of Open Hands

and a member of the US government's advisory commission on public diplomacy, reports The Christian Science Monitor. "People recognize that US-Syrian relations are at a critical moment and public diplomacy and people-to-people dialogue can play a critical part."

Yet, the question remains on how effective such programs are in bringing about wider change. "Syrians view the US through the prism of [the] Israeli-Palestine conflict and until policies change there, the effect of private interventions will be limited," notes Bilal Saab, a Middle East expert at the University of Maryland.

Other analysts however, such as Joshua Landis, a Syria expert at the University of Oklahoma Joshua Landis, believe that these public diplomacy efforts actually work and also help alter how Washington views Syria.

"This sort of soft diplomacy – as well as rising tourism – will have an effect on Washington in time," Landis confirms. "There is so much ignorance about Syria – some of which can be blamed on the Syrian authorities – but most people who visit love it and wonder why it is demonized."

These initiatives appear to be particularly useful in a time when the new generation of Syrian youth is growing up in a globalized age, asserts John Ferguson, the founder of the Huston-based American Voices, which recently ran its YES (Youth Excellence on Stage) Academy workshop for Syrian musicians.

"People here distinguish between people and politics, especially young people who are less concerned with politics than their parents," adds Ferguson. "They want to have new experiences and to use those to judge for themselves what they hear about the US."

The Price of Pakistani Hearts and Minds

Realizing the integral role Pakistan could play in US-led war on terror, strategic talks between the United States and Pakistan began anew on March 24th

and 25th in Washington, DC, reports The News. The talks covered a wide range of areas, including the economy, health, technology, security and counterterrorism.

During the second round of dialogue in Islamabad in July, the United States promised considerable financial support for infrastructure development in a collection of projects worth approximately 500 million dollars. Nevertheless, the new plans for aid have encountered skepticism in both countries.

"If our own undisclosed actions conflict with our public diplomacy, can we really be enraged when Pakistanis are alleged to do the same?"

Nida Khan for The Market Oracle

In the United States, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry and ranking member Richard Lugar put forth a new bill to lure private enterprise to Pakistan, reports Josh Rogin for Foreign Policy. The bill is based upon similar programs that Congress enacted in Central and Eastern Europe, which successfully helped spur enterprise and growth.

Some on the Hill are reporting that Clinton's recently announced aid plan is focused on infrastructure and fails to address primary issues: developing democratic institutions, expanding the rule of law, economic development, educational investment and strengthening public diplomacy. However, a committee staffer told The Cable that the Kerry-Lugar bill is an alternative which "is not

meant to micromanage the process in any way or to show umbrage at what the administration is doing."

Despite the plan's hefty price tag, the Pakistani government and public remain skeptical of the US administration's sincerity and long-term goals, continues The News article. "Pak-US relations, in the past, have been marred by constant trust-deficit and are unstable. Both sides give more importance to short-term tactical goals," the author explains. US allegations about Osama bin Laden and the Queta Shura's presence in Pakistan, repeated drone attacks and skepticism of Pakistani loyalty have further harmed the two countries' relationship and increased popular anti-US sentiment.

The News emphasizes that Pakistan has suffered drastic economic and human costs in fighting the Taliban, with an estimated 34.5 Billion dollars in exports, investment, industry and taxation lost between 2001 and 2008, and 3,021 Pakistanis killed and 7,334 injured in attacks in 2009 alone. "Pakistan has offered tremendous sacrifices in this war. It is the victim or terrorists' wrath as is evident from the suicide attacks inside Pakistan."

Nida Khan, an American of Pakistani-descent, described her trip to Pakistan for The Market Oracle. She characterized the population as simultaneously open to American culture and suspicious of the American government and military. Furthermore, she notes that while Americans were confused and angered by reports included in the documents recently released by WikiLeaks, the US military and intelligence agencies have engaged in similar covert and duplicitous actions.

"We are not – and never have been – at war with Pakistan. So why is it that our own intelligence agency and military engages in secret, covert attacks that have led to the deaths of over 700 civilians in 2009 alone? If our own undisclosed actions conflict with our public diplomacy, can we really be enraged when Pakistanis are alleged to do the same?" asks Khan.

While traveling in Pakistan for two weeks as part of the State Department's public diplomacy, Safiya Ghori-Ahmad, a young American-born Muslim woman of Indian descent, also observed the Pakistanis'

perception of the United States. As American drone attacks continue and US military pressure increase, the general feeling among Pakistani youth is that this is America's war, not theirs, and that US hypocrisy has prevailed, she explains in a piece for altmuslim.com.

At the same time, Ghori-Ahmad describes the Pakistani youth, who comprise a huge sector of the nation's population, as optimistic about their country's future, offering creative and constructive solutions towards stability. In her opinion, the current diplomatic and security concerns would diminish if the United States could harness the youth's power and vision, increase the effectiveness and visibility of its humanitarian aid and acknowledge its own past mistakes.

"I came away realizing that Pakistani anger at the US is not permanent. Upgraded and better-funded public diplomacy initiatives can and will make a difference," she concludes.

According to Anita Joshua for The Hindu, the US is already trying to present itself as an "all weather friend" of Pakistan, and not merely a temporary ally for the duration of the War on Terror. Following the recent floods in Pakistan, the worst the country has seen in 80 years, Joshua reports that the United States has announced every aid shipment to the media, presented news programs with daily fact sheets about humanitarian efforts and when donating supplies ensured that "the bags of food clearly bear the Star-Spangled Banner."

Meanwhile, a recent editorial in WorldMeet.US reveals that such efforts may not be enough for allied efforts in the Af-Pak region. "Militants have poisoned girls' schools, murdered teachers and students and poured acid on school children. Unfortunately, public opinion hasn't been sufficiently mobilized...The Afghan government and NATO have simply failed in the propaganda war," the editorial states.

Ground Zero Project Gets Green Light

The Landmarks Preservation Commission's vote to deny landmark status to a building located two blocks from the site of the World Trade Center has paved the way for an Islamic community center, reports Al-Jazeera.

New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg stated that this project will test American's commitment to religious freedom. "The World Trade Center site will forever hold a special place in our city, in our hearts...but we would be untrue to the best part of ourselves, and who we are as New Yorkers and Americans, if we said no to a mosque in lower Manhattan," said Bloomberg.

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Michael Bloomberg, Mayor of New York City

This decision comes amidst heated opposition to the Islamic community center, which will be developed by a group called the Cordoba Initiative. According to the group's website, its goal is to bridge the gap between the West and the Islamic world, "steering the world back to the course of mutual recognition and respect and away from heightened tensions." Currently, the Cordoba Initiative's plans

include a thirteen-story Islamic center, which will also have a mosque.

Opponents believe that an Islamic center near Ground Zero is an insult to the memory of the people who died on September 11. According to Al-Jazeera, the American Center for Law and Justice announced that it would challenge the committee's decision in a State court. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and former vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin have also voiced their opposition to the Islamic community center.

At The Washington Post's The Plum Line, Greg Sargent ridicules the concept of the "mosque exclusion zone." Several of the community center's opponents suggested building such a site further away from Ground Zero. "What's funny, however, is that critics of the mosque differ on the appropriate size of the mosque exclusion zone," Sargent points out.

At one point, Newt Gingrich suggested building the center near Central Park or Columbia University, sites located over four miles from Ground Zero. Similarly, the Anti-Defamation League's national director, Abraham H. Foxman, advised that the community center should be located more than a mile away from the World Trade Center site. "It's the wrong place," he asserted. "Find another place."

Justin Elliott at Salon's War Room blog raised a sarcastic, though important, question: "Why did no one object to the 'Pentagon Mosque?'" He comments that Muslims have prayed inside the Pentagon and that military chaplains have been ministering to the community since 2001. "They haven't even had the sensitivity to move two blocks, let alone a mile, away from that sacred site," Elliott adds. He blames the "right-wing tabloid and politicians" for stirring up the controversy.

Pamela Taylor, the voice behind The Washington Post's A Modern Muslim, is alarmed at the opposition to Islam in the United States. "While the blatant bias is surprising, I find it downright scary that opposition to the proposed mosque at Ground Zero, the mosque in Mufreesboro, TN, the mosque in California along with the Burn the Qur'an Day protest are not the actions of a lunatic fringe," she comments. "They

are supported by wide swaths of the American public.”

Taylor calls American Muslims and supporters to continue exposing the “ludicrous” fears of the opposition by the conservatives in America. Addressing “those who are so scared by Muslims” directly, Taylor encourages them to learn about Islam and talk to Muslims. “Before you picket to forbid a proposed mosque, go meet the people who are going to pray in it. Before you burn that Qur’an, read a few pages of it,” she urges.

Ultimately, Pamela Taylor believes that the outreach to Muslims begins in the United States. “If we are serious about improving relations with the Muslim world, we need to start at home, with our own Muslim population,” she concludes.

Upgrading Public Diplomacy at State

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s Newsroom speech “Remarks on Internet Freedom” and the Chinese State Information Office’s response have received little attention, remarks Monroe E. Price for the USC Center for Public Diplomacy’s CPD Blog.

Price believes that the speech and the Chinese response address one of the newest frontiers of public diplomacy: the internet. “Clinton’s speech laid down the gauntlet,” he states. In her Newsroom speech, the Secretary of State commented that “American people and nations that censor the internet should understand that our government is committed to helping promote internet freedom.” According to Price, Clinton’s speech ultimately asserts an international “right to connect.”

Although China’s internet White Paper reflects the work of smooth-talking bureaucrats, the State Information Office presented a solid case for censorship of the internet. Price points out that China’s White Paper portrays the nation’s use and management of the internet with “pride.”

In its response, the State Information Office bases its argument on the principles of state sovereignty. According to the internet White Paper, “Within

Chinese territory the internet is under the jurisdiction of Chinese sovereignty. The internet sovereignty of China should be respected and protected.” Despite the government’s firm stance on regulation of the internet, the White Paper’s drafters suggested “the establishment of an authoritative and just internet administration organization under the UN framework through democratic procedures on a worldwide scale.”

“The American people and nations that censor the Internet should understand that our government is committed to helping promote Internet freedom.”

Hillary Clinton, United States Secretary of State

As both sides launch programs promoting internet freedom or regulation, Monroe E. Price concludes, “The Clinton speech and the China internet White Paper will be important monuments as the diplomacy and public diplomacy battles unfold.”

In the United States, the State Department’s policy planning staff is bringing a whole new level of public diplomacy to the internet. Policy planning member Jared Cohen and Alec Ross, senior adviser for innovation to Secretary of State Clinton, are among the most followed federal employees on Twitter, reports Jesse Lichtenstein for The New York Times.

Cohen and Ross are the faces of the US public diplomacy effort. Ross credits his position to Hillary Clinton. “The secretary is the one who unleashed us,” he commented. “She’s the godmother of 21st-century statecraft.”

“21st-century statecraft is not mere corporate rebranding,” Lichtenstein points out. “It represents a shift in form and in strategy – a way to amplify traditional diplomatic efforts, develop tech-based policy solutions and encourage cyberactivism.”

Despite the duo’s enthusiasm about technology, Ross assured Lichtenstein that technology was not the only solution. “[Clinton] doesn’t believe you can sprinkle the internet on something and everybody grows up to be healthy, wealthy and wise,” he stated.

However, this is not slowing down Cohen and Ross, who recently discussed technology and public diplomacy at Google and YouTube headquarters. They are also interested with the concept of tele-medicine and tele-education. One of the programs they are working with consists of paying policemen through mobile phones. Currently in place in Afghanistan, the program is set to expand and reach the Congo.

Although the public diplomacy effort is moving quickly in the United States, the US government is retrospectively looking at the Smith-Mundt Act. According to Helle Dale at the Heritage Foundation’s The Foundry blog, the 1948 legislation “was intended to allow the State Department to counter Soviet propaganda in foreign media, while at the same time forbidding it from aiming propaganda at Americans at home through print and airwaves.”

“The world – and the world of communication technology – has changed greatly,” Dale comments. In 2009, the House Armed Services Committee published a report expressing concern that the Smith-Mundt Act had negatively affected DoD’s policy. “The committee does not believe that Public Law 80-402 should constrain the Department of Defense and its partners’ strategic communication and messaging efforts abroad,” the report stated.

Matt Armstrong, of Mountain Runner blog, is unsure of the Smith-Mundt Act’s influence in current policy decisions. According to a quote from Tim Stark’s latest article at CQ Weekly, Armstrong stated, “I hear from some people inside the department that Smith-Mundt

doesn't come up anymore; I hear from others that it comes up all the time."

Helle Dale remains wary of the Smith-Mundt Act's implications, which may prevent the US diplomatic machine from creating content for immigrants in the United States. "For U.S. global communications strategy to be effective and competitive in the 21st century, we need to use all the tools in the media box if we want to out recruit al-Qaeda," she concludes.

Al-Qaeda Attacks Al-Arabiya

Four people were killed in a car bomb attack on Monday, July 26 around 9:30 am outside the Baghdad offices of the Arabic news channel Al-Arabiya, reports Agence France Presse. The attack came approximately a month after the channel received warnings of insurgent threats.

According to the SITE monitoring group, the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) has claimed responsibility for the attack. The Al-Qaeda group bragged on jihadi websites that the suicide bomber had successfully carried out his plan despite government warnings. Founded in 2006, ISI oversees many Islamic groups. The well-organized group has ministers and governors along the same models of the central government they fight, reports Ennahar Online.

On Sunday, Iraqi authorities announced that they arrested three ISI officials, including the group's minister of defense. Nevertheless, according to Agence France Presse, SITE further reported that ISI "warned that they will not hesitate to target any media organization that insists on being a tool in the 'war on Allah and his Messenger.'"

Al-Arabiya, partly owned by the Dubai-based Middle East Broadcasting Centre Group, was founded in 2003. According to Bill Heenan for The Examiner, the news network began offering its English-language service in 2007. The station is in direct competition with the Qatari-owned Al-Jazeera, but has earned respect for moderation and restraint in its reporting.

On July 29, the news channel released results of an E-poll regarding several European countries' movement towards banning the full-body burqa. The poll asked 14,000 viewers to complete the following statement: "The European campaign against the burqa (niqab) is..." either a legal right for those countries, a violation of the personal freedom, or a counter-extremism policy. Of those polled, 43 percent perceived the ban to be a legal right for European countries, 42 percent opposed the ban and the remaining 15 percent believed that the bans were part of the governments' efforts to counter extremism.

Though Hennen expressed surprise with such mixed opinions, Egyptian media Professor Dr. Hanaa Farouk stated that the poll results were "quite logical," reflecting "the true image of Islam that despises and rejects extremism in all aspects of life." Similarly, the Al-Arabiya report stated that analysts in Lebanon, Egypt and Saudi Arabia considered the poll's finding as an indication of the enlightenment of Al Arabiya viewers, "their interaction with the different cultures as well as their full awareness of the importance of respecting European communities and their laws."

Nevertheless, Muhammad Diyab at Asharq Alawsat believes that the Saudi media is failing its readership and viewership by not reporting on attacks that have recently occurred against Saudi citizens traveling abroad. He believes that the fear of being accused of prejudice or racism. Saudi embassies unresponsiveness to journalistic inquiries and the perception that the Saudi victim may be unworthy of defense all contribute to Saudi journalists' failure to report.

Diyab emphasizes that in order to empower Saudis to make better informed travel decisions, reports of crimes occurring against Saudi citizens traveling abroad need to be covered. While the Saudi youth who recently reported being attacked and beaten by two Bahraini security guards were lucky because the incident was photographed, Diyab believes Saudi tourists cannot depend upon such quick and firm legal responses in other countries.

Al-Jazeera Sues Egypt's Newspaper

The Qatari news network Al-Jazeera is suing the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram over a story about the channel's dress code, reports Earth Times. An article entitled "Jazeera Al-Taharoush" ("The Island of Harassment") was published in Al-Ahram on June 9, indicating that the news network pressured its female presenters into wearing the headscarf.

An Al-Jazeera spokesperson declared that the allegations made against the network "were completely baseless, and without merit, and were aimed at damaging the reputation of the Al-Jazeera network." According to the lawsuit, Al-Ahram supervisor Atef Hazeen reported the statements in interviews on several satellite channels. Hazeen and staff members at the newspaper are also facing personal lawsuits.

Five women anchors resigned from Al-Jazeera in January, claiming that the company had mishandled their complaints against a superior who allegedly harassed them by telling them that they were dressed immodestly.

Al-Jazeera's spokesperson confirmed that the network plans to take legal action against Al-Ahram, and is initiating civil and criminal proceedings against the newspaper in Egypt and the in UK. According to Gulf Times, the lawsuits include criminal proceedings against Editor-in-Chief Osama Saraya, supervisor Atef Hazeen and Jihan Sharawi, the journalist who wrote the controversial article.

The Egyptian newspaper has expressed concern about an unfavorable Supreme Court ruling, which could lead to the closure of the newspaper's London office and the loss of the journalists' right to enter and report from the Kingdom, reports Waleg.

The channel, which demanded five million pounds in damages (about 877,000 USD), stated that the Al-Ahram report was criticized by the daily's own management in an attempt to appease Al-Jazeera and avoid the lawsuit.

Al-Jazeera's spokesperson indicated

that the main purpose of these legal proceedings is not financial compensation; rather the key objective of the lawsuit is to ensure that professional standards are upheld and maintained at a high level throughout the journalism industry.

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