



Framing the Other

Bias or Imbalance?

Bias, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Prejudice may be the eye itself. Drawing the fine line between the qualities that most self-respecting journalists vouchsafe not to have—bias, prejudice or being guilty of stereotyping others—and addressing the cause and effect of these, is the prime objective of a fresh set of dialogues among forty influential U.S. and Arab journalists meeting as professional colleagues.

That this difficult exercise is taking place at the time of the ongoing war in Iraq, the Israel-Palestine-Lebanon conflict and random acts of Al-Qaeda terrorism around the world—all of which bring the U.S.-Arab relationship into stark relief—is no coincidence.

The meetings are based on the recognition that often unconscious stereotyping and bias in the media contribute to social and cultural divisions and misunderstandings. The working premise is that this bias, evident in print, broadcast, photo and cartoon journalism, must be addressed in its many dimensions and openly challenged to be overcome.



MIKE LUCKOVICH AT THE WYE MEETING

EXPLAINING OR ENCOURAGING “MURDEROUS WAR”

By Hani Shukrallah

William Randolph Hearst, the *bête noire* of American journalism, purportedly boasted of having set off the Spanish-American War of 1898; he was certainly accused of having done so—ostensibly for no greater reason than to sell more newspapers. In “The Brass Check: A Study of American Journalism,” published in 1919, Upton Sinclair charged that Hearst journalists were “willing by deliberate and shameful lies, made out of whole cloth, to stir nations to enmity and drive them to murderous war.”

It is unlikely that the Arab and American journalists who have taken part in the series of dialogues, initiated and organized by the Aspen Institute

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CRITIQUING IS EASIER THAN CHANGING MINDSETS

By Crocker Snow Jr.

It is no easy task to hold a mirror up to oneself, one’s very soul, about inherent prejudices and try to determine how this affects one’s balance and objectivity as a professional journalist and chronicler of events. It is harder still at a time of open conflict between parts of the West and Islam, when even cartoonists are held to task for inciting misunderstanding by their overtly extreme characterizations and caricatures. But this is just what the Arab and American journalists, publishers, editors, broadcasters, columnists and cartoonists involved continue to engage in as the focus of separate meetings in Luxor, Dubai and the Washington D.C. area over the last two years.

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(MIS)REPRESENTING ARAB AND MUSLIM AMERICANS

RECURRING PATTERNS IN U.S. PRINT MEDIA

By Suad Joseph

◆ The Rev. Dr. Fahed Abu-Akel sat between Mrs. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mrs. George Bush, at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, 10 a.m. on January 21, 2002. The program for the annual service honoring the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. noted his name, “Rev. Fahed Abu-Akel, Presbyterian Church.” As he spoke his Christian devotion—“God Almighty, God of non-violence, I come to you in prayer, in the name of Jesus, the Holy One, that Martin Luther King Jr. served”—National Public Radio announced to its listeners that this Presbyterian Palestinian-American was a “Muslim cleric” (Rev. Dr. Abu-Akel, Nov. 12, 2005).

◆ “Signing up for Arabic means you will be deployed to Iraq or some place equally dangerous. How do you feel about that?” Darin Kagin (CNN, June 16, 2005, 8:19 a.m. PST), asked a soldier at the Monterey Language Institute—equating Arabic with danger. The trainee, an African-American woman, replied, “I am fine with that. I have a different view.”

◆ Dan Bilefsky, writes in *The Wall Street Journal* (“How a Belgian Officer Outsmarts Suspects—Knowledge of Chemistry, Quran Helps Detective Track Down Terrorists,” Nov 5, 2001, A16), that a Belgian police officer, “uses his encyclopedic knowledge of the Quran, rather than his handguns to fend off terrorists,” implying that careful reading of the Muslim holy book, 1,300 years old, is a guide to terrorism in the 21st century.

◆ Marc Fisher, writing in *The Washington Post* (“Muslim Students Weigh Questions of Allegiance,” October 16, 2001), asks: “Is it reasonable to ask students at the Muslim Community School in Potomac whether there is a conflict between being American and being a Muslim? It certainly seemed fair after six young people, all born in this country, all American citizens, told me that no, they did not believe Osama bin Laden was necessarily the bad guy the president says he is, and no, they did not think the United States should be attacking Afghanistan, and no, they might not be able to serve their country if it meant taking up arms against fellow Muslims.”



Suad Joseph and other participants in Dubai

◆ Daniel Wakin writes in *The New York Times* (“Even Muslims on the Move Stop at Prayer Time,” May 28, 2004), “You drive a cab, wafted across the city on the whims of your fares. But you are Muslim, and must pray five times a day...” Describing how they put prayer before profit, Wakin continues, “The cabbie prayer strategies are prime examples of how outsiders trace new religious pathways in a city bubbling with the world’s faiths, sociologists of religion say”—unreflective of the fact that most Muslims do not pray 5 times a day and that he positioned American Muslims as outsiders.

After 9/11, my 10th grade daughter repeatedly came home from school crying. Her World Cultures teacher told students in other classes

that she was a Muslim and aggressively made her “explain” Islam and the Middle East to other students. She and a Sudanese student repeatedly stood up against his assertions that “All Palestinians are terrorists” and “Islam is a violent religion.” My adopted blond, blue-eyed daughter regularly wore a cross around her neck at the time, reflective of her Catholic faith. Despite her blood, she was seen as a Muslim, because she was the daughter of an Arab, even though that Arab was Christian and an adoptive parent.

In newspaper after newspaper, headlines promise the reader an article is about “Arabs” but include Iranians, Turks, Pakistanis, Indians, Sikhs and others with no distinctions.

These (mis)representations of Arabs, Muslims, Arab-Americans, Muslim-Americans and Islam and their reception by American readers/viewers/listeners raise critical questions for anyone who delivers information on these subjects—journalists, publishers, producers, scholars and teachers. How is it that all Arabs are assumed to be Muslim and all Muslims assumed to be Arab? How is it that Arabs are thought to be so violent that even learning their language is associated with danger? How is it that Muslims are repeatedly represented as so devoutly religious that they place piety before profit? How is it that Islam, but not Christianity and Judaism, is seen to be embedded in politics and culture? How is it that a teacher can gaze at a child who is blond, blue eyed, wearing a Christian cross, and call her a Muslim and make her defend Islam based on her having an Arab (Christian) adoptive mother?

In years of devoted reading of major U.S. print news media and listening to broadcast news, I have

Dialogue participants at Forum meeting at El Jumeirah in Dubai in December 2005. Kneeling, from left: Playfair, Singh, Kuttab, Mabrouk, Firestone, Shukrallah, Kocache. Standing, from left: Jenkins, Shobokshi, Erlanger, Farag, Hertzberg, Snow, Eltahawy, Smith, Melhem, Pintak, Joseph, Slavin, Cowan, Salama, Sites, Gad, Kamal, Funabiki, Ignatius, Andoni, Jaber.



found numerous errors of representation of Arabs, Muslims, Arab-Americans, Muslim-Americans, and Islam in the most prestigious of American newspapers. Some might have been errors in the rush to title a headline; some demonstrated a genuine lack of knowledge; some, written by highly experienced journalists in leading newspapers, left me wondering about intentionality; and most left me deeply concerned about how they were read, received, and contributed to shaping public knowledge of these critical citizens of the United States and the world. Are the journalists and teacher only recipients of misinformation or do they participate in a systemic pattern of cultural misrepresentation?

In 2003, I assigned students in one UC Davis class a project to each read one major U.S. newspaper or news magazine over a two-year period and identify patterns of representation of Arab women and men. Their findings—covering every major U.S. newspaper and news magazine—revealed an

overwhelming pattern of misrepresentation of Arab women and Arab men. It started as a pedagogical exercise in critical reading, but my students' findings stimulated my interest. In 2003, I began a small secondary project to study the representation of Arabs, Muslims, Arab-Americans, Muslim-Americans and Islam in leading U.S. newspapers.

My research assistants used the ProQuest Current Newspapers database to download articles from January 2000–December 2003 from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Boston Globe*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *Time Magazine*, *Newsweek*. The goal was to determine if there was a pattern of misrepresentation and to identify the specifics of that pattern across U.S. print news media.

The project is in process, with only one piece of the analysis written—the qualitative content analysis. I argue that there are significant errors in all the

print news media I studied with my research assistants. The errors recur frequently. More significantly, the errors, taken together contribute to a composite “lens” through which Arabs, Muslims, Arab-Americans, Muslim-Americans and Islam appear to be represented and received. This lens may help explain NPR’s mistaken identification of an Arab Presbyterian minister as a Muslim cleric and the high school teacher’s mistaking my cross-bearing, blond, blue-eyed adopted daughter as a Muslim.

To put it simply: If there is a lens, a pattern, a gaze or a template found recurring in leading U.S. news print media which misrepresents Arabs, Muslims, Arab- and Muslim-Americans, and Islam, it is our responsibility as scholars, journalists, publishers, and producers to study it, understand it and change it. ♦

Suad Joseph, an anthropologist, is director of the Middle East/South Asian Studies Program at the University of California, Davis.

PARTICIPANTS

Equal numbers of Arab and American journalists took part in the Dubai and Wye Plantation meetings, with several resource persons and observers invited by the sponsoring organizations.

Media Participants:

Naif Al-Mutawa

Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Teshkeel Media Group, Kuwait City

Emad El Din Adeeb

Chairman & CEO, Good News Group, Cairo

Lamis Andoni

Consultant, *Al-Jazeera* Satellite, Doha

Ralph Begleiter

Rosenberg Professor of Communication, University of Delaware

Khaled Dawoud

Correspondent, *Al-Ahram International*, Washington, DC

Taghreed Zuhair el Khodary

Nieman Fellow, Harvard University, Cambridge

Mohamed Elmenshaw

Editor in Chief, *Taqir* Washington, Washington, DC

Mona Eltahawy

Columnist, *Asharq al-Aswat*, New York

Steven Erlanger

Bureau Chief, *The New York Times*

Barbara G.B. Ferguson

Bureau Chief, *Arab News*, Washington, DC

Daniel Hertzberg

Deputy Managing Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*, New York

David Ignatius

Associate Editor and Columnist, *The Washington Post*, Washington, DC

Ali Jaber

Consultant, Dubai Media Inc., Dubai

Loren Jenkins

Senior Foreign Editor, National Public Radio, Washington, DC

Ossama Kamal

Anchor and Presenter, Egyptian TV, Chairman, Mercury Communications, Cairo

Daoud Kuttab

Director, *Al Quds* Educational TV, Ramallah, Amman Net, Amman

Mike Luckovich

Editorial Cartoonist, *Atlanta Constitution Journal*, Atlanta

Mirette F. Mabrouk

Publisher, *The Daily Star Egypt*, Cairo

Michael Massing

Author, *New York Review of Books*, New York

Hisham Melhem

Bureau Chief, *An-Nahar* and Senior Analyst, *Al Arabia*, Washington, DC

Jamil Mroue

Editor-in-Chief, *The Daily Star*, Beirut

John J. Oliver

Publisher and CEO, *Afro-American Newspaper* Baltimore, Maryland

Lawrence Pintak

Director, Adham Center for Electronic Journalism, The American University in Cairo

Chris Peck

Editor, *The Commercial Appeal*, Memphis, Tennessee

Salama Ahmed Salama

Columnist, *Al Ahram Daily*, Cairo

Hussein Shobokshi

Journalist/Media Consultant, *Asharq al-Aswat* and *Al Arabiya*, Jeddah

Hani Shukrallah

Research Consultant, Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, Cairo

Kevin Sites

Kevin Sites in the Hot Zone, Yahoo! News

Barbara Slavin

Senior Diplomatic Reporter, *USA Today*, Washington, DC

Terence Smith

Special Correspondent, *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, Arlington, Virginia

Crocker Snow

Founding Editor, *The World Paper*, and Director, Edward R. Murrow Center, The Fletcher School, Boston

William K. Spindle

Middle East Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*, Rome

Paul Szep

“The Daily Szep,” Syndicated Writers of America, Largo, Florida

Jonathan Wolman

Editorial Page Editor, *The Denver Post*, Denver

Resource Persons:

Geoffrey Cowan

Dean, Annenberg School of Communications, University of Southern California, Los Angeles

Robert M. Entman

J.B. & M.C. Shapiro Professor of Media and Public Affairs, The George Washington University, Washington, DC

Akram E. Farag

Chairman & Managing Director, Digital Systems Middle East SAE, Cairo

Emad Gad

Secretary General, Arabs Against Discrimination, Cairo

Suad Joseph

Director, Middle East/South Asia Studies, University of California, Davis

Jane E. Kirtley

Director, Silha Center for the Study of Media Ethics and Law, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

Conveners:

Charles M. Firestone

Executive Director, Communications and Society Program, The Aspen Institute, Washington, DC

Jon Funabiki

Deputy Director, Media, Arts and Culture, The Ford Foundation, New York

Amy Garmer

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Program Officer, Media, Arts and Culture, The Ford Foundation, Cairo

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(Shukrallah, continued from page 1)

since 2003, believe that they can actually *drive* nations to war, whether on their own initiative or at their publishers' behest, by shameful lies or through a particular and selective "framing" of the "truth."

Yet there is little doubt that, as media professionals, we are aware of being part of a powerful, highly sophisticated and complex machine—one capable of doing great good as well as enormous harm.

While we hold that our profession is indispensable to the creation of an informed public opinion on local, national and global levels—indeed, that neither the modern state nor the modern international system are conceivable without it—we also realize how far the modern mass media may be subverted to misinform, to distract, to propagate misunderstanding and, doubtless, to help "stir nations to enmity."

In short, we may not have the power to drive nations into murderous war, but we certainly can make such wars much more palatable to the public.

EACH ASKS, "WHY DO THEY HATE US?"

One significant effect of the atrocity of 9/11, and the U.S.-led "war on terror" that came fast upon its heels, has been to spotlight this "dark side" of the media. U.S. officials, talking heads and experts of all sorts, rushing to provide answers to the "why do they hate us?" question put by President Bush soon after 9/11, pointed accusing fingers at the Arab media as a major culprit.

As the "war on terror" unfolded further, in Afghanistan and later in Iraq, the Al-Jazeera satellite TV channel (once hailed as a new and revolution-

ary voice of independent journalism in the Arab world) was dramatically reframed as a major source of anti-American incitement at best, and a terrorists' mouthpiece at worst. As a whole, the Arab media was accused of fostering a virulent anti-Americanism, inciting anti-Semitism and of propagating hatred of the non-Arab, non-Muslim "Other" in general.

Similarly, the U.S. media was seen by Arabs and Muslims as a corporate instrument in bed with the Administration and the Pentagon. "Why do *they* hate us?" was no less an Arab than an American question. The U.S. media was accused of providing its public, and the world at large, with a highly distorted, bigoted view of Islam and Muslims; of fostering a zealous, even fanatical, patriotism; of unquestioningly propagating lies about Iraq's WMD and alleged links to Al-Qaeda; and not only of justifying illegal invasion and war but also of readily playing the Pentagon's game of sanitizing the killing and destruction to such an extent as to transform it into little more than a video game.

Held against the backdrop of such a yawning gap in mutual perceptions, the Arab-U.S. media dialogue might have seemed an exercise in futility. One could easily have expected the hoped-for dialogue to degenerate into a circus of mutual recriminations, bitter accusations flying across the floor, with each side going home even more confident in its damning perception of the other. The fact that it did not testified to the glaring fact that easy generalizations about the "Other" are almost always misguided and distorted.

My misgivings were unfounded. Indeed, I was pleasantly surprised to observe that, in session after session, the debate—and there was plenty of that—was rarely polarized along Arab and American lines.

Issues of contention would more often than not have Arabs arguing against other Arabs and Americans arguing against other Americans.

The latest round of the dialogue, which began in 2003, was held consecutively in Dubai and at Aspen's Wye River Conference Center. We were dealing head on with one of the more prickly aspects of mutual perceptions of the Arab and U.S. media: the role of each media in fostering hatred and contempt for "Others." Taking a leaf out of Edward Said's renowned work "Covering Islam," this round was titled "Covering the Other: Bigotry and Intolerance in the Arab and U.S. media."

There was considerable discussion of the problem of "framing" the news. The discussion was informed by probing presentations by Saud Joseph of the University of California and Lawrence Pintak, a veteran American journalist currently the director of the American University's Adham Center. Pintak focused on cultural, political and identity constraints on presenting the news. He cited numerous examples of how the U.S. and Arab media presented the same set of "facts," but in wholly different ways, thus delivering almost diametrically opposite messages. Joseph, through a study of *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* coverage of Arab- and Muslim-related issues showed that even such liberal American newspapers could be guilty of "framing" the news in such ways as to create a distorted and ultimately bigoted image.

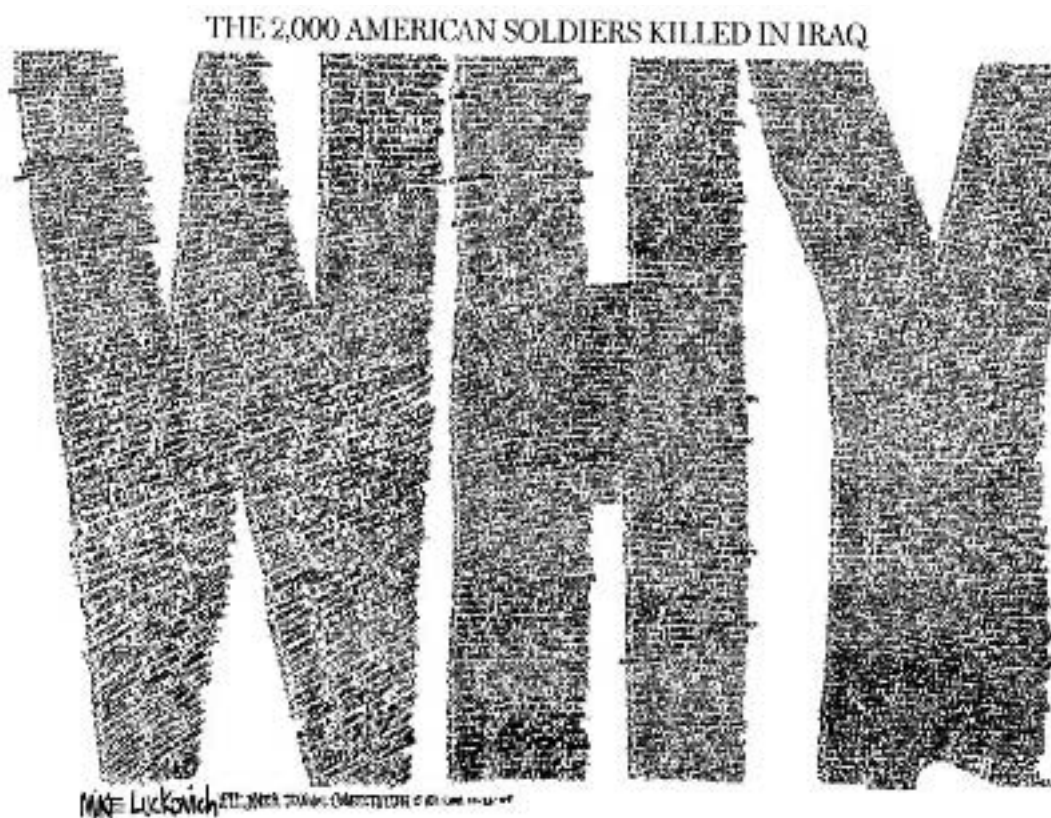
CARTOONS, CARICATURES AND SELF-CRITICISMS

The second session, at Wye River, was held in the shadow of the Danish cartoons fracas. It was only apt that it was devoted to discussion of the uneasy, often ambiguous relationship between freedom of expression and journalistic ethics and responsibility—where does freedom of expression end and incitement to bigotry and hatred begin?

Two prominent American cartoonists, added participants, were invited to present equally offensive "Arab" cartoons, ostensibly drawn as a reply to the Danish cartoons.

The degree of honesty and self-critical reflection on both sides was notable. The session devoted to bigotry and intolerance in the Arab media was dominated by Arab participants critiquing their own media in the harshest of terms, citing example after example of anti-Semitism, of the blurring of lines between critiquing U.S. foreign policy and bigoted framings of Americans as a people—in a process of reduction that tends to ignore the richness, complexity and diversity of American society and culture, viewing them solely through the prism of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

One Arab participant drew attention also to the ways in which intolerance towards the foreign "Other" is almost always reflected in similar attitudes towards various internal "Others." He cited the rising



tone of incitement in some of the Egyptian press against the nation's Coptic minority.

In dealing with the U.S. media, American participants were no less self-critical. Unlike their Arab counterparts, American journalists are privileged to pursue their profession within one of the oldest democracies in the world; they don't pay for their freedom of expression with their lives, as did Lebanese journalist Samir Kassir (assassinated in 2005, allegedly by intelligence bodies close to the Syrian regime). Nor do they commonly face imprisonment as hosts of Arab journalists do. They may very well, however, lose their jobs and be stifled and gagged by their editors and publishers.

PANDERING PRESS— POORLY INFORMED PUBLIC

The U.S. media is not free of constraints. American journalists cited a host of forms: pandering to the publishers' corporate and government links; to the public mood; to the media marketplace (telling the public what it wants to hear, and giving the advertisers what they wish to see); even submitting to vari-

ous forms of governmental pressure (the famous Condi Rice phone calls to publishers and editors were cited).

While the constraints under which the U.S. media operates are immeasurably more subtle and sophisticated than those we see in the Arab world, the American media was no less guilty of reductionism and expressions of bigotry and intolerance towards the Arab and Muslim "Other."

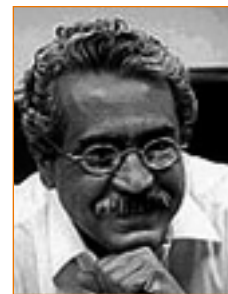
Since 9/11 the American public, insular and largely ignorant of the world outside, has been exposed to a deluge of "information" about Arabs and Muslims. That this outpouring of news, analysis and commentary has not led to greater understanding (most Americans still cannot place Iraq on the map), but rather to a much more bigoted, ill-informed view of hundreds of millions of the world's people is an indictment of American media failures that cannot simply be shrugged off by the trauma of the twin towers.

How, then, can we as media professionals help repair the damage on both sides? Through these and previous sessions we came up with various concrete suggestions (see back page). Clearly there

are no easy solutions. Certainly, we're in for the long haul. The dialogue itself has provided us with an invaluable gateway.

The Arab and American participants may not be "representative" of the general ignorance, bias and narrow-mindedness in both media. But neither are they marginal. Invariably, the participants are leading, highly visible and influential members of the profession in both the U.S. and the Arab world. Their exposure to one another, and the ongoing links of dialogue and cooperation that continue to evolve, are as much part of the solution as any concrete ideas we may pursue.

Conscientious objectors in a bigoted and growingly insane "clash of civilizations," we can, and should, provide a voice of reason and mutual understanding. ♦



Hani Shukrallah, the former editor of Egyptian-owned Al-Ahram Weekly, is a columnist for the Daily Star in Cairo.

ARAB TV VARIATIONS IN DEPICTING "OTHERS"

FOR THREE WEEKS during Ramadan in October 2005, two Canadian researchers surveyed the news reports at the same morning news hour of the pan-regional broadcast outlet Al-Jazeera, and the Lebanese Broadcasting Company International. Their object was to determine how political, ethnic and religious "Others" were portrayed in the news stories of this sample.

According to Karim Karim, associate director of Carleton University's School of Journalism and recipient of the 2004 Robinson Prize for excellence in communications studies and Aliaa Dakrouy, a Ph.D. student who won the Canadian Communication Commission's 2005 prize for a paper on Al-Jazeera, LBCI was established by Maronite Christian entrepreneurs and "positions itself clearly within the state of Lebanon as a national Lebanese broadcaster." By contrast, Al-Jazeera positions itself as "a pan-Arab channel focused primarily on the Arab region which does not identify with any particular Arab country."

A total of 263 news stories from Al-Jazeera were compared with 264 from LBCI with 57 from Al-Jazeera and 64 from LBCI having content pertaining to political, ethnic and religious others. Shown at right is an abridged tabulation.

	AL-JAZEERA			LBCI		
	positive	neutral	negative	positive	neutral	negative
United Nations	0	3	7	11	0	0
Syria (and related)	3	6	0	0	7	16
Lebanon (and related)	4	3	1	8	6	6
Iraq (and related)	3	4	7	0	5	7
Palestinians	4	4	2	1	3	6
Egypt	6	0	4	0	0	0
Other Arab Countries	2	2	3	0	0	0
Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan	1	4	5	0	0	0
Israel and Jews	0	0	6	0	0	2
America (and related)	0	0	12	3	3	0
Britain (and related)	1	0	4	1	1	0
France	0	0	0	2	2	0

CARTOONING ON THE EDGE

SATIRE OR RELIGIOUS RACISM?

If a picture is worth thousands of words as the Chinese proverb has it, then cartoons and caricatures in the sometimes incompatible Western and Arab idiom can be worth a multitude of misunderstandings.

The controversy that sparked slowly in fall 2005 and then burst into full flame in early 2006 with the publishing of twelve cartoons about the Prophet Muhammed in a small Danish newspaper serves as proof positive.

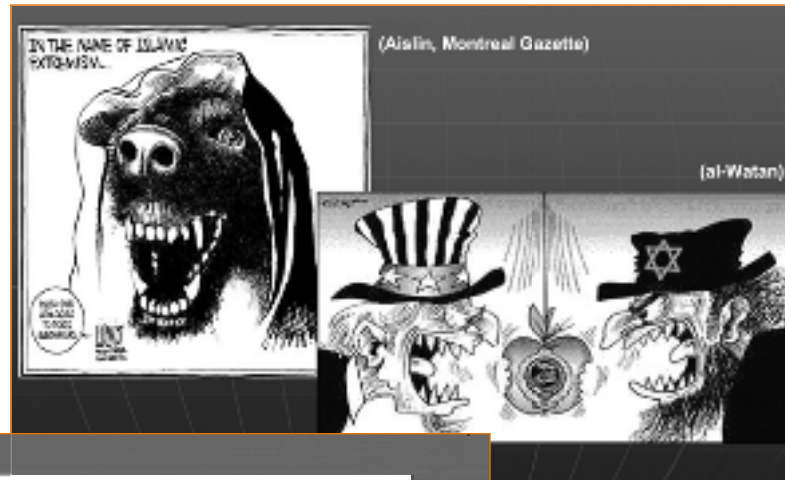
The drawings, solicited by the editor of Jyllands-Posten (circulation 40,000) in response to what he perceived to be excess political correctness in coverage of local Muslims, eventually triggered the boycotting of Danish goods in several Gulf States and rioting and looting in some other Arab lands.

Most critically, it prompted recognition of a fundamental rift between principles of religious respect in Islam and freedom of expression in the West, obscuring the canon of tolerance in the process.

PUBLISHING PERILS:

Newspaper editors around the world reacted in a variety of ways to printing the cartoons and covering the controversy. A range of reprisals resulted, mostly to the Arab press. Ivan Karakashian, a research associate for the Committee to Protect Journalists, calculated the highlights as:

- ◆ Algeria: Two editors criminally charged
- ◆ Belarus: One newspaper suspended
- ◆ Denmark: Jyllands-Posten threatened with bomb
- ◆ India: One editor criminally charged
- ◆ Jordan: Two editors criminally charged
- ◆ Lebanon: Journalists assaulted during demonstration about cartoons
- ◆ Malaysia: Two newspapers suspended
- ◆ Morocco: Government organizes demonstrations against newspaper
- ◆ Russia: Two newspapers closed
- ◆ Saudi Arabia: Newspaper suspended
- ◆ South Africa: Censorship orders against two newspapers
- ◆ Syria: Writer criminally charged for commentary
- ◆ Yemen: Three newspapers suspended; four journalists criminally charged



Three slides from a Forum presentation, "Reflections in a Bloodshot Lens" by Lawrence Pintak, director of the Adham Center for Electronic Journalism, The American University in Cairo



At the Forum, two American Pulitzer prize winning cartoonists, Paul Szep and Mike Luckovich discussed the role of the cartoonist and exposed raw cultural and religious sensitivities when asked to ink a drawing as Arab illustrators might have responded in openly sacrilegious terms to the Copenhagen controversy.



“A lot of times a cartoonist has to break glass. You do this with a pretty blunt hammer. I think you have to offend some people. I have done Arabs, Jews, Blacks, Whites, Irish and I have criticized—and been criticized by—everybody. I’m worried that there is a trend now (in cartooning) to do gags. The stuff that I see reprinted—a lot of it is gags and you don’t really know what the key issue is. It’s more

of a joke. I think a good editorial cartoon does say something beyond that. The Copenhagen cartoons seem much ado about nothing—not about satire or caricature so much as pure politics.”

—Paul Szep, former editorial cartoonist for *The Boston Globe*, is Canada’s only two-time Pulitzer Prize winner.



“You have to be careful of your symbolism, because symbolism can overrun whatever message you’re trying to make. And I think it (can be) counterproductive. I think I can be hard-hitting and hit the Christian Right (for example) without using an image of Jesus Christ to do it. I want to make people angry, but I want to make them angry because of my message.

I look at those Danish cartoons not necessarily as a message, but as a provocation. I think there’s a difference.”

—Mike Luckovich, editorial cartoonist for *The Atlanta Constitution*, has won the Pulitzer prize and the Overseas Press Club’s Award for “Best Cartoons on Foreign Affairs.” His work is syndicated in 350 daily newspapers.



“The fact that Arabs like others, engage in cultural and political double-standards, was lost in the coverage. There was not much anger or a sense of loss in the Arab world or the Muslim World when the two great statues of the Buddha in Afghanistan were destroyed by the Taliban, and very little outrage over anti-Jewish cartoons in some Arab newspapers and negative portrayal of Jews on some Arab television stations . . .”

From a paper written for the Forum by Hisham Melhem, Washington based correspondent for the Beirut daily An-Nahar and host on Al-Arabiya television

STICKS AND STONES MAY BREAK BONES—DRAWINGS TOO?

Less deadly than the rocket exchange between Hezbollah and Israel during their August 2006 war, cartoonists on both sides of the religious divide have volleyed barbed and sometimes sacrilegious images back and forth since the Copenhagen provocation.

Two hundred such went on display this summer at the Palestine Contemporary Art Museum in downtown Tehran. They were the winners among 1000 submissions from artists in 60 countries to the museum’s “Holocaust International Cartoon Contest.”

As described in a *New York Times* report, most of the winners lampooned a connection between the Holocaust of sixty-five years ago and contemporary Israeli and American militarism. Some went further, almost echoing Iran’s presi-

dent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in questioning Holocaust history and Jewish suffering altogether.

Still others were near mirror images of the Copenhagen cartoons, in this case depicting Jews, Zionists or notable Christian icons in the most threatening or unflattering of circumstance: a Jew martyred on a cross formed by the letter “T” in the word Holocaust, and the curator’s own work depicting a rabid dog collared with the Holocaust and labelled with the Star of David.

“It is not that we are against a specific religion,” Seyed Massoud Shojaei, the curator, stated to the *Times*’ Michael Slackman. “We are against repression by the Israelis.”

Some of the art on display was a graphic contradiction of his words.

ASSUMING THE OTHER'S PERSPECTIVE

PROFESSIONAL ROLES IN REVERSE

The Arab and American reporters and editors participating in the dialogues showed sound understanding of—even empathy with—the difficult practical issues faced by each in reporting “the Other.” If anything, the continued exchange about the pressures on freedom of expression and the impediments to this had many speaking with almost one voice.

But not so fast. To make the fundamental differences in their respective world views and professional circumstances starker and to illustrate the ultimate effect on coverage, participants were put through a role-reversal exercise. American journalists were asked to be Arab editors and Arabs to be Americans in response to a made-up news bulletin provided to all:

BREAKING FICTITIOUS NEWS

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 7:00 A.M.

Hypothetical: The AP News Wire sends out the following bulletin:

Iraqi Bodies Found in Kuwait Desert

A cache of 14 charred and desecrated bodies have been discovered by Kuwaiti desert tribesmen in a shallow desert grave 3 miles inside Kuwait over the Iraq border and an equal distance from a U.S. military staging camp, Camp Korea, situated in Kuwait. Based on papers found on them, the bodies appear to be Iraqi.

Kuwaiti authorities have issued the following statement: “The Government of Kuwait has confirmed the discovery of 14 Iraqi citizens inside our borders near the Iraqi border. We have no knowledge how these bodies arrived in the country. An investigation of their deaths is underway.”

Kuwaiti authorities have mobilized a pool of six journalists—three from the U.S. media and three from Arab media—to visit the site.

U.S. military authorities informally deny any knowledge of the situation. They confirm that the site is near a practice firing range used by Camp Korea.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 9:00 A.M.

A statement from Al Qaeda has been received by all major news outlets:

“Al Qaeda deplores the ‘desert killing field’ which the United States invasion and occupation of Iraq has brought to this region of the world. This is another violation of the very Geneva Accords that U.S. authorities promote. It fuels our desire to drive the infidels from all Arab lands.”

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 3, 12:00 NOON

The pool report from the first Arab and American reporters on site is released:

The bulletin confirms the charred bodies, and includes some new information based on several items uncovered in the immediate area and documented with accompanying photos. These were:

- **Some U.S. small arms casings and an American baseball hat**
- **A charred Quran in English which appears to have been new**
- **A copy of the Geneva Accords on prisoner treatment in Arabic**

SWITCHING ASSIGNMENTS

With this made-up information in hand, participants were divided into six groups, with all American journalists assigned to one of three thinly disguised Arab media and all Arabs to American media:

Group 1 works for a pan-Arab satellite channel (independent)—**Group 2** works for an American 24-hour news channel (conservative)—**Group 3** works for Arabic-language Egyptian daily newspaper (pro-government)—**Group 4** works for a daily newspaper in a major Midwestern city in the U. S. (liberal)—**Group 5** works for an Arabic-language weblog (jihadist)—**Group 6** works for an English-language website (independent).

Charge to the Working Groups

Each Group will design a news package for its particular news organization. The political leanings of the organizations are indicated. Each package, depending on medium, will include:

- ♦ News assignments for the next news cycle;
- ♦ Headlines of the main stories (or teasers in case of TV) with bullet points, regarding expected coverage;
- ♦ A 100–150 word analysis piece which takes a position on who is responsible for the massacre and why.

MORE BREAKING NEWS

While at work, each Group was provided additional information “from a variety of news sources”:

- ♦ A month earlier, U.S. authorities released a captured e-mail message reportedly authored by Al-Zawahiri urging insurgents to emphasize U.S. atrocities on Arab prisoners to heighten U.S.-Iraqi tensions.
- ♦ An Iraqi prisoner released from Abu Graib was identified by U.S. sources as a confirmed recipient of the Zawahiri e-mail directive.
- ♦ In late October, a Military Police unit from the Alabama National Guard that had been stationed at Abu Graib Prison for a one-year tour and had suffered casualties from mortar attacks and an aborted prisoner uprising was transferred to Camp Korea for two weeks before stateside discharge.

- ♦ On November 8, a dozen or more Shi’a contract workers for British forces in Basra went missing, with some speculative reports that they were kidnapped by Sunni insurgents.

MOCKING UP THE MADE-UP NEWS

The news teams mocked up news budgets, packages and editorials to present to the Forum. All assumed the role of “the Other,” sometimes with tongue firmly

in cheek. An agitated Arab Gerardo Rivera made a dramatic appearance in the presentation for **Group 2** (read *Fox News*) in the desert of Kuwait.

The editorial presented by **Group 3** (read the Egyptian daily *Al-Ahram*) drew approval for its perceived authenticity:

“It’s a lot easier being biased.”

The Enduring Shame of Abu Graib

They were only humble Iraqis. But as President Hosni Mubarak has said, for the Arab nation, ‘every life is precious.’ The Arab League must immediately investigate how the bodies of 14 innocent Iraqis came to rest inside fraternal Kuwait, three miles from a U.S. military camp where guards from the infamous Abu Graib prison were stationed. The excesses of the American intervention—the failure to plan or control—has been bitter fruit. Is what Thomas Friedman meant when he

The presenter for **Group 6**, the independent English-language website, acknowledged that her team had difficulty concocting a believable editorial compared to the other less independent media because “It’s a lot easier being biased.” ♦



MUMITA™

CREATING ISLAMIC SUPERHEROES

CONSTRUCTIVE COMIC CHARACTERS

By Naif Al-Mutawa

from above, nor on the Eastern mold of Pokemon, where teamwork and shared values overcome all. Rather an amalgam of East meets West—an appropriate compromise given the foundation of Islam and the geography of the Middle East.

COUNTERING WESTERN CULTURAL IMPERIALISM

My goal, in part, is to overcome the self-stereotyping that takes place in much of the Arab and Islamic world, prompted by a variety of historical, political and economic factors. It is to counter the powerful cultural hegemony, if not imperialism, of the Western world in this age of globalization. It is also to counter the ideological and instinctive fight-or-flight reaction from the Islamic World in response to this onslaught.

The 99 may serve, I hope, as a boost to Islamic pride and sense of history. It is an attempt at creating a popular culture that is from the people, for the people, and not simply adopting one of the two most prevalent choices in the age of globalization—the Western hegemony or the ultraconservative Islamic approach. This is about creating a gray area that is safe to relegate one's allegiance to, without feeling like one has abandoned the principles one grew up espousing.

Our original financing came from 54 investors in eight countries on four

continents, including a sizable portion from my classmates at Columbia University's School of Business. Our hope is that *The 99* will serve more than the one-quarter of the world's population who subscribe to the basic beliefs of Islam. Our characters intentionally transcend all language and cultural barriers. They offer the most commonly shared ideals of all people as the basis of heroic figures.

Today, three years in, *The 99* comics appear regularly in five newspapers in four countries, and an animation and separate comic book division has been formed. We are currently preparing a second round of investment through an Islamic investment bank whose Sharia Board has approved the concept for Islamic audiences.

But our overall goal is to stimulate the psyche more than the purse strings. We have approached a topic that to anyone's mind would have been considered taboo a few years ago and are making a business of it. The Sharia Board's approval is a sign of hope for the future. ♦

In the late 1990s, I was working on my doctorate in clinical psychology while training at New York's Bellevue Hospital's Survivors of Political Torture Unit.

Being a native Arabic speaker, many of the patients assigned to me were those who had been tortured in Arab prisons. I treated people who had been systematically tortured for all sorts of reasons, not necessarily in search of information, but in punishment for what they were: their religion, political beliefs, even their tribal heritage.

Sadly, many of those who were responsible for the torture were cast as heroic public figures. The disconnect for so many of the torture victims and their extended families was that the leaders they had been taught to respect as children were the same people who offered them ruthless responses as adults.

My people, it seems, were all too often provided the wrong heroes.

In the summer of 2003, after completing my MBA, I made a decision to combine the two very distinct parts of my educational life in a search to create new superheroes for the children of the Islamic World.

The result of my search is *The 99*. *The 99* is a series of traditional superhero comic books geared to the imagination of children and young adults. *The 99* name is taken from the ninety-nine attributes of Allah. These attributes—strength, honor, truth, mercy, invention, generosity, wisdom, etc.—combine to become the superpowers of my superheroes. With the caveat, of course, that no one hero has more than a single power and no one power is expressed to the degree that Allah possesses it.

My superheroes are built neither on the Western style of individual heroes like Superman, Batman, Spiderman and the like, who typically come down



Naif Al-Mutawa is the founder of Teshkeel Media Group, based in Kuwait City.

VIEWS ABOUT ISLAM AND MUSLIM-AMERICANS

July 2003 July 2005

Islam encourages Violence?

Yes	44%	36%
No	41	47

Neither/Don't Know 15 17

Opinion of Islam?

Favorable	40	39
Unfavorable	34	36
No opinion	26	25

Opinion of Muslim-Americans?

Favorable	51	55
Unfavorable	24	25
No opinion	25	20

Islam and your religion?

A lot in common	22	27
Very different	60	59
Don't know	18	14

Survey of 2000 adult Americans by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press

(Snow, continued from page 1)

SIMPLIFYING SPELLS STEREOTYPING

The first issue for participants was achieving overall agreement about the magnitude of “Intolerance and Bigotry in the Arab and American Media” as the initial gathering was titled. Aspen Institute moderator Charlie Firestone cut to the chase in opening remarks with the question, “Is stereotyping in the nature of journalism?”

The responses were direct, and replete with *mea culpas*:

“The nature of journalism is to oversimplify and try to find a pattern,” stated Steven Erlanger, Jerusalem correspondent for *The New York Times*. His conference counterpart from *The Washington Post* David Ignatius, a columnist not a correspondent, took it further: “The rule for a columnist is to simplify and then exaggerate.”

Kevin Sites, the sole international correspondent for the online Yahoo! News pointed to TV’s reliance on visual clichés regarding Islam (*muzzein* at prayer, a prison door clanging shut) as a part of media stereotyping. Prize-winning political cartoonist Paul Szep upped the ante in referring to his own medium: “A cartoonist’s job is to break glass. You do this usually with a pretty blunt hammer.”

Some Arab participants were slightly more nuanced in their views:

“A good reporter humanizes the other side. A bad reporter demonizes the other side,” said Lamis Andoni, an Amman-based consultant for Al-Jazeera.

Hani Shukrallah of *Al Ahram* described stereotyping as a form of racism: “Each side is assigning essentialist characteristics and features to the other.”

Others saw the real stereotyping as self-directed. “Palestinians have long been characterized in the Arab press as superheroes or supervictims,” pointed out Daoud Kuttab, director of Al-Quds Educational TV in Ramallah. “It’s inaccurate and a form of self-stereotyping.”

A particularly blunt note was struck by Mona Eltahawy, writer for Arab media and occasional contrarian commentator on Fox News, who acknowledged that “Really, it’s so much easier being biased.”

CONTRIBUTING TEMPLATES AND SCHEMAS

Such down-to-earth confessions from the practitioners were leavened by several researchers who have examined the dynamics of what lies behind stereotyping in a systematic way.

Suad Joseph, a Lebanese-American scholar who directs Middle East/South Asia Studies at the University of California, Davis, drew preliminary conclusions from her analysis of 220 articles in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. “The media portrays acts of Muslims as Muslim acts, but not so of Christians,” she noted. “The word ‘evil’ appeared 103 times (in the 220 articles). It is clear that we have lenses with which we look at and approach others and this in turn produces templates for how we view other peoples and societies.”

Robert Entman, professor of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University translated Joseph’s “templates” into “schemas.” “It revolves around empathy; do you have it or do you not? Lack of empathy means lack of interest, and this is based on what I call ‘schemas’ in our minds about the status and character of things.”

Both researchers seemed to agree that individual and professional biases derive almost equally from lack of direct contact and experience.

Such insights were verified in practical terms by former CBS television reporter Larry Pintak, now a professor of journalism at the American University in Cairo, and former CNN Correspondent Ralph Begleiter, Journalist in Residence at the University of Delaware.

Each presented stark examples of actual imagery used by Arab and American media depicting the exact same event or news story from the war in Iraq.

The documentary evidence was indisputable: as the point of view and access to news sources of the Arab and American media differed, so too did the selection, presentation and cropping of photographs that comprised the coverage. With slide after slide, the two former TV correspondents illustrated how the professional perceptions and expectations of national media impacted and distorted its coverage.

FROM LARRY PINTAK'S PRESENTATION "REFLECTIONS IN A BLOODSHOT LENS"

- What Americans saw
 - The overthrow of a tyrant
- What Arabs and Muslims saw
 - U.S. colonization

What do you see?

ECONOMIC DETERMINISM AND NEW MEDIA

Fully objective coverage of any important news event—certainly of any cross-cultural one—is virtually impossible. Where do you begin? Which source to use ahead of others? What tone is set by the headline?

Reasonably balanced coverage is almost as difficult. Most journalists regard lack of time or space to tell the full story as their biggest impediment. But one of the Forum sponsors identified something deeper.

Smita Singh, representing the Flora and William Hewlett Foundation, observed that stereotyping by Western media of another country diminishes as the economy of that country or culture advances. Western coverage of Japan, Korea, China and India, for example, is today more grounded. In part, the perception playing field has been leveled by economics.

Reporting not just on *Coups and Earthquakes* (to apply the fitting title of a 1979 book by Mort Rosenblum) of developing countries, but moving on to the trade and business interests which generate the links of globalization is just what Singh had in mind.

Another “*aperçu*” to which most participants agreed is the positive impact of technology in mitigating media bias. The advent of interactive media,

e-mail responses to newspaper articles and blogging all challenge the assumed authority of traditional media in shaping stories and images and setting public agendas. The instantaneous nature of see-it-now, sweeping feedback loops, the ascendance of pull-over-push media and the checks

and balances that come from the blogosphere diminish the role of the editor or anchor from even the most powerful print or broadcast outlet to drive the news and associated public impressions.

New media technologies and access make it more difficult for a culturally inaccurate or misguided profile to survive indefinitely and to prevail. The time-honored, self-fulfilling nature of journalism with reporters turning to the same bank of accredited experts to interpret international events is being channeled into an equal, if opposite, self-correcting dynamic. All courtesy of the Internet.

FRAMING THE DEATH OF ZARQAWI

Tellingly, the dialogue about the framing of stories in June was marked by the death of insurgent leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq. All participants were attentive to just how their own media played the story in the context of balanced or biased reporting. It was noted that U.S. military authorities in Bagh-



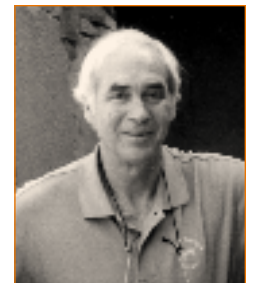
dad were more than aware of this process, displaying the photo of the dead Al-Qaeda leader inside a gold-colored frame.

The Washington Post saw the significance, headlining a story in its Style section “A Chilling Portrait, Unsuitably Framed.” Writer Philip Ken-

nicott concluded his essay: “Zarqawi is gone and good riddance. But there’s nothing in the image of his face that deserves a frame. It’s a small thing to be sure. But it suggests a cynicism about this war that is profoundly distressing. Our political and military leaders simply can’t resist packaging the war and wrapping it up in a bow.”

The framing of the dead Zarqawi was all too real and relevant to the self-consciously self-critical discussions. Talk about wrapping the dialogue up in a bow. ♦

Crocker Snow Jr., founding editor of *TheWorldPaper*, is director of the Edward R. Murrow Center of public Diplomacy at the Fletcher School.



قَوْلُكَ إِنَّكَ لَنْفَهُ وَمِجْرَ الْأَسْتَحْقَانَا
وَإِهَانَتُكَ لَمْ تَسْتَحِقْهَا أَنْتَ

“Your claim not to understand me is praise I do not merit and an insult you do not deserve.”

HOW WESTERN PUBLICS VIEW MUSLIMS, CHRISTIANS AND JEWS

	Muslims		Christians		Jews	
	Favorable/Unfavorable %		Favorable/Unfavorable %		Favorable/Unfavorable %	
Great Britain	72	14	85	6	78	6
France	64	34	84	15	82	16
Canada	60	26	83	9	78	11
United States	57	22	87	6	77	7
Russia	55	36	92	3	63	26
Poland	46	30	86	5	54	27
Spain	46	37	80	10	58	20
Netherlands	45	51	83	15	85	11
Germany	40	47	83	13	67	21

Pew Global Attitudes Project, Spring 2005

CREDITS

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THE FORD FOUNDATION



The Aspen Institute organizes and administers the dialogue through its Communications and Society Program headed by Charles Firestone, with assistance from Amy Garmer and Tricia Kelly.

“Framing the Other” was prepared and edited by Crocker Snow Jr., with editorial assistance by Hani Shukrallah, layout by Sid Hall of Hobblebush Books and printing by Puritan Press of Hollis, NH.

The Media Forum is an ongoing initiative.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TOWARDS BETTER, MORE BALANCED COVERAGE

FUTURE FORUM MEETINGS:

Following four meetings of the core group of thirty U.S. and Arab editors and reporters, participants agreed that future meetings should focus on two associated categories of media professionals:

➤ **PUBLISHERS AND OWNERS**—Given the influence of publishers and presidents in the U.S. media and the commercial pressures they face and the authority of media owners in the Middle East primarily dealing with state pressures, a meeting focusing on their concerns could contribute significantly to the Media Forum goal of improved coverage on both sides of the U.S.-Arab equation.

➤ **NEW MEDIA**—With the growth of electronically based interactive media in the Middle East, including websites, blogs, online portals (e.g. Arabia Online, Maktoob) matching those in the U.S., and their relative freedom from traditional government control, an exchange among new media leaders of the U.S. and Arab countries could help fulfill the Media Forum objectives.

The Arab and American media participants came up with a number of specific ideas to help generate more balanced news coverage of their two cultures and societies. The key recommendations from recent meetings in Dubai and Aspen Institute's Wye plantation:

➤ **EXCHANGES**—Fostering internships and increased exchanges among working journalists, editors, commentators, camera crews and even cartoonists of the media properties engaged in the Forum and others to build better understanding and empathy.

➤ **TRAINING**—Programs to encourage more cross-cultural training for junior journalists and media professionals in America and the Arab world.

JOINT ARAB-U.S. PROJECTS

➤ **CARTOON JOURNALISM**—A collection of political cartoons by a select number of Arab and American cartoonists on identical subjects to illustrate and highlight different political and cultural perspectives. The collection could be presented as an exhibition in Washington and Arab capitals and gathered into a book for additional public exposure.

➤ **PHOTO JOURNALISM**—A volume based on contrasting pictures and other visual images appearing in the U.S. and Arab media depicting the same charged, contemporary events (e.g. 9/11, the

war in Iraq and Israel-Lebanon) to illustrate different perspectives presented through the media to their respective populations.

➤ **JOINT REPORTING**—A major reporting assignment to be undertaken by U.S. and Arab journalists from participating media on a subject of mutual relevance. A "Tale of Two Rivers" comparing the political, economic and cultural roles of the Jordan and Mississippi Rivers respectively was proposed as a possible series to be jointly reported and published by print media in the Midwest and the Jordan River basin.

ARAB JOURNALISM REVIEW

A new professional journalism review to highlight the best and most balanced reporting of U.S.-Arab events, and critique the worst. The Review could feature original studies focusing on U.S. and Middle Eastern media performance and provide a weblog for exchange and clearinghouse for reliable sources. The Review would be undertaken by the Adham Center for Electronic Journalism at the American University in Cairo.



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