Public Diplomacy in the Age of Regional Media: Winning the
War of Hearts and Minds in the Middle East

AL-Jazeera and al-Hurra

A dissertation presented
by

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to
The Department of Political Science

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctors of Philosophy

In the field of
Political Science

Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
June, 2010
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a comparative critical discourse analysis of the coverage of specific international events in the American al-Hurra and the Qatari al-Jazeera news channels. It studies how regional satellite media challenge the way in which US public diplomacy is conducted in the Arab world. It examines the factors that contribute to the success or failure of the public diplomacy of the media, and argues that identity presentation of the self vs. the presentation by/of other plays the major role in determining performance. It also discusses how the communication revolution has shifted the paradigm of diplomacy by emphasizing the role of public diplomacy, at the same time complicating the environment within which public diplomacy is conducted.

This study demonstrates that al-Hurra news channel communicates values that primarily serve American policies and strategies in the Middle East. By adopting a clearly futuristic approach, it tends to marginalize the role of religion as well as the region’s history. It is more inclined to reflect liberal voices in the Arab world as well as Israeli views of the events in the Middle East. In contrast, al-Jazeera is evidently more open to various persuasions and orientations in the Arab world, even if it seeks to promote the idea of Arabness with its constituent elements of identity such as history, language and religion.

Given that al-Jazeera is obviously faring better than al-Hurra, the level of success of both news channels is accounted for on the basis of three factors: context, conception and content. For a message of public diplomacy to find its way to its audience, it needs a proper understanding of the context in which such messages are disseminated. A sound conception of the goals and roles of public diplomacy efforts that
emanates from a proper understanding of the context must follow. Finally, the more consistent media messages are with the basic beliefs and values of the target audience, the better chance they have to be accepted by those audiences. Thus, it could be argued that while *al-Jazeera* represents contextual objectivity, *al-Hurra* exemplifies the ‘existential crisis.’ By all accounts, the careers of *al-Hurra* and *al-Jazeera* demonstrate how regional media challenge the hegemonic discourse of soft power and produce their own hegemonic discourse.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the past five years, I have had the chance to learn from many teachers at Northeastern University, but I am especially indebted to the members of my Dissertation Committee. Prof Amilcar Barreto was tremendously helpful in the course of my career at Northeastern University, both as the Director of Graduate Studies and as my Supervisor. Not only did he read drafts of all chapters and return them to me with helpful comments and suggestions, but he also assisted me in administrative matters and always took my own convenience and personal circumstances into consideration. Prof Denis Sullivan offered me a much needed research assistantship that made possible my admittance to Northeastern University. His understanding and support during my time in Boston was invaluable. At Princeton University, I had the honor and pleasure to have Prof Amaney Jamal as a member of my Committee. Prof Jamal provided me with very helpful and insightful feedback on my work.

I also thank the Chair of the Political Science Department, Prof John Portz, and the Director of Graduate Studies, Prof Ronald Hedlund, for their valuable assistance in the past few years. Thanks are also due to Mr Lyle Ring and Ms Barbara Chin for facilitating administrative work while I was away.

Dr. Muhammad Ayish at Sharjah University and Dr. Sahar Khamis at the University of Maryland have read and commented on parts of this dissertation, for which I am very grateful.

During my second year in Boston, I stayed with Johanna Segarich. Her stimulating discussions and the warmth of her house were a great support while I was away from the people I love.
In Princeton, where I lived during most of my time in the US, I had the good fortune to enjoy the company of many supportive friends. I am especially indebted to Sussan Moinfar-Yazdi for her love and passion, Nermeen Ali, Madam Amira, Farida Habib, Madam Nadia and their families for their hospitality and support that made my time in Princeton a lot easier, Amineh Mahalati for her passionate support, and Dina, Umara, Rozaliya, Mona, Heba, Luke, Aubrey, Hajar, and Balkis for their friendship and encouragement. Nesma Sharara, my soul mate, was always a source of support and encouragement, a big listener, and a secret-keeper. Ahamd Abd el Hafiz, Walla Fathi and Marwa Issa tolerated my repeated absence and never failed to check on me.

In Egypt, I have to acknowledge my debt to my teachers who prepared me well for my career here in the US: Profs Nadia Mustafa, Hassan Nafaa, Mustafa Kamel and Seif abd el-Fattah.

In the last couple of years, God has bestowed upon me two invaluable gifts: my daughter, Fayruz Hibat-Allah Osman, and my son, Yusuf Yaqut Zakariyya Osman. Fayruz has added new meaning to my life and made me discover an empty part in my heart that I was never aware of. ‘Mommy is studying’ was one of Fayruz’s first sentences, which made me feel guilty for not giving her all the time she needed. Recently coming into the world, Yusuf has substantiated my consciousness of myself as a mother, and together with Fayruz has given new meaning to my life and encouraged me to work hard to be a mother they would be proud of.

This work would have never been possible without the extraordinary support of my beloved husband. Amr Osman was not only a helpful and supportive husband who had to satisfy himself with a part-time wife, carry all the books I needed for my work,
and proofread that work, but he was also an example that I always looked up to. Amr did that while working on his own dissertation and building a future for our family. He has enriched my life, broadened my perspective and made me more aware of my identity. It is to him that I dedicate this dissertation.

Last but not least, I can hardly think of words that describe my gratitude to my father Mahmoud Fekry Abdel Samei and my mother Nawal al-Abd for their support over the years. They believed in me since my earliest years and continued to do so more than I did. My father sowed in me the love of reading and writing and my mother supported me with her care and passion. I am also fortunate to have two wonderful sisters, Salma and Randa who were not only my best friends but, at many times, second mothers. Their families have always been a source of joy in my life.
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Introduction

The attacks of September 11, 2001, on the US have intensified the international dimension of identity politics. Although the idea of *Clash of Civilizations* and identities predated this event, the attacks were perceived as a fulfillment of this argument. The attacks raised thorny questions within American circles, foremost among which was: why do they hate us? One answer to this question was based on the idea that much of the antagonism in the Arab/Islamic world towards the US is a product of misconceptions and ignorance of the American culture and the values it represents. Changing these attitudes, so the argument goes, requires introducing the “true face” of America to this part of the world in order to reduce the existing hostilities and combat extremism. It was in this context that broadcasting to the Arab world became one of the strategic missions of the US in the region. The main goal of this public diplomacy agenda is to improve the image of the US in the eyes of people in the Arab and Muslim worlds. To achieve this goal, the US government decided to sponsor one of its largest and most expensive public diplomacy campaigns since the Cold War era: Radio Sawa and the *al-Hurra* television channel.¹

This initiative was based on the assumption that Arab media is biased and that its coverage promotes extremism in the region. *Al-Jazeera*, in particular, was the primary target of American criticism. During the war on Afghanistan and later on Iraq, *al-Jazeera’s* coverage outraged the Bush administration as being anti-American and a mouthpiece for “extremism” and “terrorism.” Therefore, it was necessary, from the

¹ The official name of *al-Hurra* is “Middle East Television Network.” It was launched on February 14, 2004, with a $62 million budget.
American point of view, to inform, engage, and influence\textsuperscript{2} the Arab public by a more “balanced” perspective, which, in turn, would set the stage for tolerance, democracy, and freedom in the Middle East.

The necessity of approaching public opinion in other countries was realized by the US after World War II. It was a way to introduce modernization and change political attitudes, which, in turn, would serve the goals of the foreign policy of the US.\textsuperscript{3} Arguably, launching a news channel to the Middle East was another Marshall Plan but in this case one of ideas.\textsuperscript{4} Some scholars argue that the international changes in 1989-91 could be explained by reference to the role played by communication technologies and the messages that people in Eastern Europe used to receive through the international communication outlets of the West, especially Radio Free Europe.\textsuperscript{5}

With the continuous development in means of communication and information, as Philip Taylor argues, “media is now playing an ever increasing role in the external relation between states as much as it used to be integral to the everyday domestic workings of the modern state during the course of this century.”\textsuperscript{6} There is no agreement, however, on the impact of this increasing communication among states. On the one hand, some scholars claim that the flourishing of global consumer culture based on the principles of the liberal economy would automatically lead to a homogenization among

\textsuperscript{4} The Marshall Plan was a key element of US foreign policy following WWII. It was a plan of economic aid and trade to help the rebuilding of Europe devastated by the war. It was based on the assumption that economic stability would provide political stability in Europe and repel communism. For more information see Marshall Plan Homepage (available at: http://www.usaid.gov/multimedia/video/marshall/. Retrieved: 12/01/2008).
\textsuperscript{5} Volkmer, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 38.
states thanks to the establishment of a global market and the introduction of media images. According to this view, the rise of national feelings in some parts of the world is associated with low levels of modernization that will eventually be replaced with a more democratic order engaged in the market economy.\(^7\)

On the other hand, other scholars in the field of International Relations speak about various forms of “fragmentation” that is taking place all over the world. An immediate example would be the explosion of identities and the spread of the separatist movements in both the developed and the developing worlds. According to this view, developments in media and the means of communication are responsible for this tendency as they provide people with spaces where they can contact with their fellows in the diaspora, revive their cultural traits and ‘imagine their communities.’\(^8\)

At the same time, despite the theories about “Americanization” or “cultural imperialism”\(^9\) that are associated with the communication and information revolutions, Ingrid Volkmer discusses how these developments empowered the former disadvantaged societies in the global communication system by giving them a means to express themselves and advance their interests and, at the same time, challenge the hegemonic discourse of the more powerful states in the world order.\(^10\)

The relationship between the Arab “public sphere,” as Marc Lynch argues, and the “American-dominated international public sphere” indicates “an analysis in terms of

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\(^10\) Volkmer, *op. cit.,* p. 48.
domination and resistance rather than dialogue.” In this sense, it can be argued that al-Jazeera’s discourse is a counter-hegemonic, one that represents, as well as introduces, a different set of ideas, values, and, most importantly, a different Arab identity. By the same token, the US public diplomacy initiative, represented in this study in al-Hurra, can be seen as an example of the hegemonic discourse of the most powerful state in global politics, and, consequently, one that introduces another presentation of Arab identity that serves American political interests. The cases of al-Jazeera and al-Hurra serve as examples of the role non-state actors are now playing in international relations and their increasing influence on the foreign policies of the nation-states. They are also examples of the changing nature of power and the increasing importance of “soft power.”

The main questions of this study are: How do regional satellite media challenge the way in which US public diplomacy is conducted in the Arab world? What factors contribute to the success or failure of the public diplomacy of the media? What is the difference between al-Jazeera and al-Hurra with regard to their media messages? It is the main assumption of the study that identity presentation – of the self vs. the presentation by/of the other – plays the major role in determining performance.


1. Literature Review

This review discusses some of the main studies in the topics of mediated identities, Arab nationalism, Arab media and public diplomacy. Media plays a role in identity representation. With the advancements in communication and information technologies, this role acquired a transnational aspect in terms of representing the identity of the self vs. that of the ‘other.’ In this way, media have much influence on the relations between cultures and civilizations and, thus, affect foreign policy. Since public diplomacy is one component of foreign policy, media, consequently, affect the way public diplomacy is conducted. Developments in the sphere of regional media – in our case Arab media sphere – have added to the importance of media in the context of achieving the goals of public diplomacy. Media, as discussed in the literature review, have become a forum for counter-hegemonic discourse. In this way, it has become both an opportunity as well as a challenge to public diplomacy.

a. Mapping Studies of Media and Identities

The role of media in the development of identities has been a subject of major debates within the social sciences in general, and political science and strategic communication in particular. Two major approaches are widely used to study this role. The first approach emanates from Jurgen Habermas’ idea about the public sphere, and the other relies on Gramsci’s views with regard to hegemony. According to Habermas, the public sphere is that domain of social life where public opinion is formed by discussing matters of general

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13 To avoid unnecessary repetition, sources of identity and the various approaches used in defining them are not discussed in this review, especially given that chapter one of this dissertation serves as the main context in which sources of identity are examined.
interest without the interference of the authorities.\textsuperscript{14} It is in this virtual space that people interact, exchange ideas, information and discuss issues of general interests.\textsuperscript{15} As for the idea of hegemony, the term was developed by Gramsci to describe how the domination of one class over others is achieved by a combination of political and ideological means. In other words, policy is not only about the material interests, but also about the domination over the symbolic world and the management of meanings. He elaborates on the role of ideas/ideology in winning the consent of dominated classes. This suggests that powerful groups monopolize the creation and circulation of ideas in their societies.\textsuperscript{16} Those in power aspire to control and manipulate the symbolic world similar to the way they control material resources and the institutions of violence. One of the most effective means used to impose such compliance with less resistance and greater willingness is the media. The media, in Gramsci’s view, disseminates the ideas that help maintain the status quo and keeps the elite’s grip over power.\textsuperscript{17}

These ideas were employed in the field of international relations by Robert Cox. According to Cox, hegemony is as important for the stability and the preservation of the world order, as well as for the internal sphere of the individual states. In his view, several world powers have succeeded in forming a global order that is compatible with their interests. This was done not only on the basis of coercion and military power, but also by establishing a kind of consent among all who belong to this system. Cox has shown how the Pax Britanica, and Pax Americana after it, for example, was based on hegemonic

\textsuperscript{14} Jurgen Habermas. 1989. The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, p. 10
ideas such as free trade, democracy, etc.  As Fairclough has argued, “achieving hegemony entails achieving a measure of success in projecting certain particulars as universals.”

Butler and Maan, for their part, have shown how hegemonic discourse is essential to national identities and how it contains reference and social implications of race, class and gender. In this manner, hegemonic discourse creates a national identity that is different or opposed to an international “other.” This, in fact, was the same line of thinking that Huntington followed in “The Erosion of American National Interests.” In his view, American interests are threatened due to the absence of a clearly defined enemy against which the nation would be unified and consolidated after the end of the Cold War. “Given the domestic forces pushing toward heterogeneity, diversity, multiculturalism, and ethnic and racial division,” he argues, “the United States . . . may need an opposing other to maintain its unity.” This, arguably, could also be the case for a transnational identity (an imagined community). As Atwater has argued, dichotomies such as


traditional/non-traditional, superior/subordinate, and standard/non-standard represent hegemonic normalcy opposing the abnormal “other.”

The media, so to speak, serves here as the common link. On the one hand, with the advancements in the means of communication, analysts have begun to talk about a global public sphere: the transmission of ideas and cultures across borders and the spread of democratic principles and modes of governments.\(^\text{24}\) Thanks to modern technologies, satellite television and the internet, people now see other ways of life and assess their life accordingly. They also observe and engage in debates on different ideas and principles. These technologies forge a new space outside the monopolizing force of state authorities and their ideologies, be they hegemonic or merely dominant. Satellite television plays an essential role in this development. On the other hand, some International Relations scholars argue that the development of means of communication only gives a global outreach to a certain culture and particular set of values. According to this view, globalization and Americanization are two sides of the same coin.\(^\text{25}\) In other words, media is only used to strengthen the hegemony of American culture and ideas. However, as James Lull argues, “hegemony fails when dominant ideology is weaker than social resistance.”\(^\text{26}\) To put it differently, hegemony fails when the counter-hegemonic discourse


\(^{24}\) Volkmer, op. cit., p. 10.


is stronger. This implies the demise of a hegemonic ideal and its demotion to that of a dominant ideal.\textsuperscript{27}

The literature review on the role of media in identities suggests the following. Media is a source of power to those who are in control of it. However, with recent developments in mass communication and the spread of transnational media, it can be used to uncover the hegemonic discourse of mainstream media, or, in the case of the current study, the foreign-sponsored media that seek to reach out to the public opinion. This review also suggests that if the media seeks to play a democratizing role, its tendency should be toward creating an open public sphere for all ideas and trends.

b. Literature on Arab Media

Analysis of different Arab media have generally centered on certain issues: its impact on democratic transition, the revival of pan-Arabism, and the political economy of the media. In addition to these general trends,\textit{ al-Jazeera}, in particular has received much interest and was the subject of several studies in English and Arabic.

Naomi Sakr has questioned the high expectations from satellite TV in the Arab world with regards to their democratizing effect. Her argument is that “Middle East satellite channels fit inside the very same power structures as governments and non-media companies.”\textsuperscript{28} In this way, “Middle East governments still had the upper hand in the evolution of regional satellite television a decade after it took off.”\textsuperscript{29} Saker’s skepticism about the democratizing effect of the new Arab media is echoed by Mirjam


\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 207.
Glaser. Glaser has described the relationship between the new media and democracy as “outsourcing democracy” because it allows critical reporting about everything except its financiers in Saudi Arabia and Qatar.\(^{30}\) This argument, however, is refuted by Lynch who believes that despite all their shortcomings, the new Arab media have created an Arab public sphere which “is probably transforming Arab political culture.”\(^{31}\) In his view, “this new Arab public … [is] building the underpinnings of a more liberal, pluralist politics rooted in a vocal, critical public sphere.”\(^{32}\)

Arab media was also seen as bringing pan-Arab contents back to Arab citizens. Khalil Rinnawi has coined the term “McArabism” to describe this phenomenon, which, in his opinion, resembles getting a Big Mac sandwich at a McDonald’s store. But when the television is turned-off, Arab citizens return to their respective local lives and particular realities, where their interests are likely to differ from those portrayed in transnational media.\(^{33}\)

*Al-Jazeera* has received much attention from Western as well as Arab scholars. However, although informative, the first studies conducted on *al-Jazeera* were journalistic in style. For example, Hugh Miles introduced a nicely written and well contextualized book on *al-Jazeera*. He conducted extensive interviews with many *al-Jazeera* staff, US officials, in addition to ordinary voices in and outside the Arab world. Although he does not present a specific argument, his work is an extensive investigation of the different accusations directed at *al-Jazeera* as well as the public reaction to it.


\(^{31}\) Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, op. cit., p. 2.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p. 3.

However, his work does not examine the actual content of the channel in terms of its news coverage or talk-shows. Similarly, in his study on *al-Jazeera*, Mufid al-Zaydi argues that the peaceful coup d’état in Qatar in 1995 was the major impetus for the birth of *al-Jazeera* as the new Emir wanted to cast a modern-reformist outlook on his rule.\(^{34}\)

Slightly drifting from this trend, Muhammad El Nawawy and Adel Iskander’s study discuss how this Arab news channel has scooped the world and achieved world-famed status. Their most important contribution is their introduction of the concept of “contextual objectivity,”\(^{35}\) which refers to the ability to provide audiences with a true presentation of real events and, at the same time, to appeal to public sensibilities. They hold that *al-Jazeera* is a pan-Arab media that defines Arab identity. However, as most other studies have done, the definition of Arab identity and its elements is assumed rather than discussed here. If *al-Jazeera* is a pan-Arab media, how are we to explain all the divisions that it has caused among Arab countries and that are reflected in its programs? Rinnawi is probably the only scholar who seeks to identify this “Arabism,” but his work lacks evidence and is mostly based on personal impressions.

The relationship between *al-Jazeera* and Qatar has also received plenty of attention and different interpretations. El Nawawy and Iskander have asked whether Qatar is using *al-Jazeera* as a public diplomacy tool to enhance its image overseas,\(^{36}\) whereas Tariq al-Shaykhan argues that *al-Jazeera* is actually the mouthpiece of the Qatari government. Relying on what he labels “the liberal official media” or “the liberal

authoritative theory,” he claims that Qatar uses *al-Jazeera* as a cornerstone of its ambitious plan to play a key role in the region. Although he emphasizes the academic accuracy and rigorous research methodology used in his study, he is evidently highly selective of events that support his arguments while completely ignoring incidents that would challenge them. Moreover, while he conducts a content analysis on four of the main programs of *al-Jazeera*, the categories according to which he analyzes the content of these programs are not the same for all of them, which highly questions the objectivity of his methodology.

This dissertation benefits from these studies in many ways. Firstly, it investigates how the development in Arab media corresponds with the general developments that took place on the level of the international system and particularly that related to the information revolution. Secondly, it seeks to illustrate the circumstances (internal, regional and international) in which the rise of *al-Jazeera* took place to facilitate the comparison later with that of *al-Hurra*. Thirdly, it deals with the apparent paradox of how *al-Jazeera* can enjoy that much credibility and popularity among the Arab public opinion while being regarded as the mouthpiece of the Qatari government (which is its main source of funding)? Fourth, it advances the argument that *al-Jazeera* can be perceived as an example of the changing relationship between state and non-state actors and the changing nature of power. Finally, it helps us fill in the gap in the current literature which lacks systematic analysis of and comparisons with other media outlets.

c. Literature on Public Diplomacy

Generally speaking, the literature on public diplomacy discusses the role of ideas and the impact of communication technologies on the increasing importance of public diplomacy. The idea of public diplomacy is based on some principles and strategies primarily encompassing the influence of public attitudes on international relations and on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It targets public opinion in other countries in order to establish cultural bridges between the states in parallel with the formal diplomatic channels.38

The term “public diplomacy” was introduced by Edmund Gullion in 1965. It has received different levels of attention at different stages of the development of the international relations and world politics. In the 1960s, scholars began to talk about the importance of people-to-people dialogue out of the belief that in democracies governments abide by public opinion.39 However, it was the Cold War in the 1970s and 1980s that brought the greatest attention to public diplomacy and the importance of approaching public opinion in foreign countries. The argument was that disseminating American ideas and information was an effective weapon in the ideological war between the Western and Soviet camps.40 It was also at this time that scholars noted the relationship between the revolution in mass communication and the rise of a new kind of diplomacy: public diplomacy.41

Glen Fischer’s study on *American Communication in a Global Society* represented a benchmark in the study of public diplomacy at that time. His main argument was that the information that the public received and the way they received it should be of great concern to foreign policy. In his view, transnational links and non-governmental relationships have become integral parts of international relations.\(^\text{42}\)

It was the role of the media in public diplomacy strategies that has received much attention on the part of academics as well as policy makers. Some scholars perceive the media as vehicles of public diplomacy. Others have focused on the role played by international broadcasting – particularly Voice of America (VOA) – in presenting the American version and view of world events.\(^\text{43}\) A third group has provided examples of how international radio was used as a bargaining instrument in the diplomatic process. By analyzing the coverage of the UK’s BBC and VOA in four crises, Gary Rawnsely, for example, has shown how international broadcasting was both an instrument as well as a determinant of foreign policy.\(^\text{44}\)

A concept that has been recently revived and employed in studies related to public diplomacy is that of “soft power.” Joseph Nye has argued that with communication revolution, soft power has become more important. In his view, promoting self image is not new. However, what has changed is the conditions for projecting soft power.\(^\text{45}\) This transformation was due to the increase in the number of democracies in the world and the

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decrease in the cost of processing and disseminating information, which, in turn, led to what he calls “the plenty paradox” – in brief, abundance of information leads to scarcity of attention. It is worth noting that the developments, in terms of the establishment of regional media, have also changed the way soft power is being practiced.

With the attacks of September 11 and the US “war on terrorism,” public diplomacy and international broadcasting have come once again to the forefront of foreign policy. The US public diplomacy in the region has set certain goals. At the top of these goals is improving the image of the US in the region by familiarizing the people there with American culture. This culture, however, has political implications. For example, the values of pluralism, freedom and tolerance are directly related to the democratic nature of the political system. It is assumed that introducing this culture to the Arab public would enable them to pressure their governments to democratize, possibly become more secular and, consequently, become more peaceful. Underlying these goals is the assumption that the “distorted image” of the US in the region is due to cultural ignorance rather than political differences.

Some US policy makers and academics believe that the American side of the story is largely absent in the Arab world and that this is due to the lack of free access to information and the widespread censorship and propaganda in the Arab world. They stress that the US has to take seriously the war of ideas which it has no option but to win. However, the US, according to other scholars, should avoid counter-propaganda and focus on supporting regional open media, democracy and civil society, in addition to
engaging in the new public sphere in the Arab world. What approach the US has adopted is yet to be examined in this study.

With the start of al-Hurra TV channel, it was assumed that since the American side of the story is being told, the Arab public opinion would be more receptive to US policies and be attracted to the American style in the representation of the news. However, a study surveyed a sample of Arab university students in five Arab countries regarding their perceptions of the news credibility of two US-sponsored networks targeting the Arab audience – Radio Sawa and Television al-Hurra – has found no correlation between the respondent’s frequency of listening to Radio Sawa or watching al-Hurra and their perception of its credibility. Moreover, results have revealed that the students’ attitude toward the US foreign policy has even worsened, however slightly, since they began listening to Radio Sawa or watching al-Hurra.

Al-Hurra’s message has been questioned by some analysts. However, they have presented more questions than providing answers. For example, Jihad Fakhreddine has studied the marketing slogans of al-Hurra, in comparison to those of al-Jazeera, and concluded with raising some interesting questions without answering them:

[Built] into Al Hurra’s visual slogan — a herd of Arabian horses galloping freely and gracefully on ice — the concept of freedom of choice between alternatives. Does this slogan match its corporate communication? Could Al Hurra’s contention that it sets the agenda be its selling theme, especially when put within the context that the Arab general public perception that the US has its own political agenda into the region?

What is noticeable in these studies that have dealt with *al-Hurra* is that none of them analyze its talk-shows programs or inquire if the channel seeks to form a different regional identity than that introduced in pan-Arab media, or how the channel presents the US. The importance of these questions lies in the fact that the main reason why *al-Hurra* was introduced was to counter what was described by American officials as “hatred-disseminating media” and to represent the true face of America. Moreover, none of these studies discuss the impact of media revolution and the spread of satellite channels on the public diplomacy efforts by other states.

2. Research Questions

The main questions of this study are: What is the difference between *al-Jazeera* and *al-Hurra* with regard to their media messages? How does this difference, if any, affect the goals of the American public diplomacy in the region? In answering these questions, it is assumed that identity presentation – of the self vs. the presentation by/of the other – plays the major role in determining performance and differences.

This, consequently, raises two sets of questions. The first set is concerned with the aspect of identity presentation, while the other is interested in the public diplomacy part. The first set deals with issues such as the basic characteristics of identity (the self or the other) as presented in both channels, as well as the “other” and how the relationship between the US and the Arab and Muslim worlds is presented. The second set of questions can be summarized in the following: One, how can *al-Hurra* present and support the American foreign policy and be a reliable source of information at the same time? Two, how far does *al-Hurra* contribute to the development of democracy in the
Arab world compared with the role played by *al-Jazeera*? Three, is the American public diplomacy based on the transmission of one’s own culture abroad or is it a two-way process? Four, to what extent does the organizational structure (staff, language used, etc) play a role in the differences/similarities between the two channels? Five, does *al-Hurra* communicate something that is not already communicated by *al-Jazeera*?

3. Methodology

In examining identity presentation of *al-Jazeera* and *al-Hurra*, this study utilizes three theoretical approaches. It relies mainly on critical discourse analysis, while framing theory and content analysis are occasionally employed.

**a. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

CDA is concerned with discourse as an instrument of power and control, particularly in the relationship between language and power, as well as with discourse as an instrument of the social construction of reality. It is interested in the way abuse, dominance, and inequality of social power are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and speech in the social and political contexts.\(^{49}\) It is also interested in the study of identity construction and changes of identities at both the national and transnational levels.\(^{50}\) The relevance of this approach to this study emanates from the assumption that identification is shaped and

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expressed through discourse, which frames the manner in which an individual makes sense of the world.\textsuperscript{51}

Not only is CDA concerned with the language itself as a means of communication, but also with the context of communication: the social processes and structures which give rise to the production of a text and of the social structures and processes within which individuals or groups create meaning in their interaction with the text.\textsuperscript{52} This means that it pays attention to certain questions such as who is communicating, with whom and why. Moreover, it is concerned with the kind of society and situation that the communication targets and the medium through which it does so.\textsuperscript{53}

For this reason, three concepts become central to the CDA: power, ideology and history. For ideology, most CDA analysts follow Habermas’ view that language is also ideological.\textsuperscript{54} Therefore, studying the ways in which meaning is constructed and conveyed, for example, by the use of language is a study of ideology.\textsuperscript{55} As for power, a central idea in most CDA literature is that of power and, particularly, the social power of groups or institutions. Even access to specific forms of discourse, as that of the media, is itself a power source. Those groups who control most influential discourse have more chances to control the minds and actions of others.\textsuperscript{56} To this, we can add that those who have more access to the media are more likely to express the ideology that the media conveys. With regard to history, CDA analysts believe that historical context is always

\textsuperscript{53} Alan Bell and Peter Garret. 1998. \textit{Approaches to Media Discourse}. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers & Garret, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{54} Habermas, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 259.
\textsuperscript{56} Dijk, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 355.
important to be analyzed and integrated into the interpretation of discourses and texts. In this way, aspects of discourse change and continuity are highlighted by CDA.\(^{57}\) As Wodak and Reisig have argued, discourse in this sense

may [at first] serve to construct collective subjects like “races”, nations, ethnicities, etc. Second, they might perpetuate, reproduce, or justify a certain social status quo (and “racialized”, and “ethnicized” identities related to it). Third, they are instrumental in transforming the status quo (and “racilaizing concepts,” nationalities, ethnicities related to it.)\(^{58}\)

There are many approaches to CDA; however, there are some pioneering works in the field that are of particular interest to the current study. These are the works of Dijk, Fairclough, and Wodak. Dijk has developed a socio-cognitive model for discourse analysis where he calls for analyzing media discourse on three levels: structure, production and comprehension. By structure, he means the use of language as well as the coherence, overall themes and topics of news stories and the whole schematic forms and rhetorical dimensions of texts.\(^{59}\) As for the production level, he means the journalistic and institutional practices of news making and the economic and social practices that surround it. In his view, the headline and the lead paragraph express the most important information of the cognitive model of journalists, that is, how they see and define the news event.\(^{60}\) With regard to comprehension, it involves taking into consideration the comprehension, memorization and reproduction of news information.\(^{61}\) What is of crucial importance of Dijk’s work to this study is his view that “mental representations are often

\(^{57}\) Wodak, op. cit., p. 12


\(^{61}\) Sheyholislami, op. cit., p. 3.
articulated along Us versus Them dimensions, in which speakers of one group will generally tend to present themselves or their own group in positive terms, and other groups in negative terms."³⁶²

Wodak’s approach, on the other hand, focuses on the historical contexts of discourse in the process of explanation and interpretation. According to her, language affects, and is affected by, social process and interaction.³⁶³ This, consequently, means three things: First, discourse always involves power and ideologies. Second, discourse is always historical; i.e., it is connected with other events either in the past or the present. Finally, the interpretation of each discourse could differ depending on the readers’ or listeners’ backgrounds.³⁶⁴

The last main approach to CDA is that developed by Fairclough. This approach focuses on three components in every communicative event: the text,³⁶⁵ discourse practices (e.g. the process of production and consumption),³⁶⁶ and socio-cultural practice³⁶⁷ (e.g. the social and cultural structures which give rise to the communicative event). A key concept in this approach is that of “intertextuality,” or the relationship between texts.³⁶⁸

³⁶³ Sheyholislami, op. cit., p. 6.
³⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 6.
³⁶⁵ According to Fairclough, any sentence in a text is analyzable in terms of the articulation of: representations (e.g. representation of Arabs or of the economy), relations (e.g. the construction of relation between politicians and the public), and social identities (e.g., the construction of scientists). The analysis of these aspects, in his view, reveals the ideological work of the media (for this, see Norman Fairclough. 1995. Media Discourse. London: Edward Arnold, p. 12).
³⁶⁶ According to this approach, this dimension has two aspects: institutional (e.g. editorial procedures) and discourse processes (changes the text go through in production and consumption) (ibid., pp. 58-59).
³⁶⁷ This dimension refers to three aspects of the socio-cultural context of a communicative event: the economy of the media, the power and ideology of the media and the issue of values. Ibid., p. 62.
³⁶⁸ According to critical linguists, discourse does not have a self-contained meaning. It takes meaning in its context. The meaning of discourse has historical as well as socio-cultural qualities built into it. Language acquires its meaning in relation to outside forces and factors: context, previous texts, and culture. The inter-relational quality of discourse prevents it from being interpreted literally. Some linguists and language philosophers term this dependency relationship between meaning of discourse and its history and context
According to Fairclough, intertextual analysis looks for discourse practice in the text. He identified two types of intertextuality: manifest and constitutive. The former refers to “the heterogeneous constitution of texts by which specific other texts are overtly drawn upon within a text.” This kind of intertextuality is marked by explicit signs such as quotation marks, indicating the presence of other texts. Constitutive intertextuality, on the other hand, refers to the heterogeneous constitution of texts out of elements (types of conventions) or orders of discourse. This type of intertextuality refers to the structure of discourse conventions that go into the new text’s production. In this sense, as Howard Davis has argued,

[C]ritical analysis combines two ‘problematics’. First there are the questions of ideology, distorted communication and cultural hegemony which hitherto have been the province of social and political theories. Secondly there are problems of message encoding and construction which have led to a search for models of linguistic ‘performance’ that include the social assumptions, conventions or ‘codes’ which govern the production and reception of messages.

This study combines elements from these three approaches. However, the aspect of consumption or how audiences/readers interpret the text falls outside the scope of the current study. The study is particularly interested in the text itself (in this case the discourse of the two channels as represented in the selected programs), as well as its socio-cultural (structural) contexts. Thus, the analysis of the discourse of the two media outlets seeks to answer three questions: Who is the speaker? What is he saying? And

‘intertextuality’. In this case, intertextual analysis is an attempt to find the influence society has in discourse and how discourse is designed to interact with society. For this, see ibid., p. 45.

what does he mean (or what must we assume for his talk to be intelligible in its context)?

This, consequently, requires a discussion of the following: the language of the discourse, the identity of the participants in the discourse, the identity of the two poles of the discourse (Us vs. Them) and exposition of their ideological biases, analysis of the historical, political and social context of discourse, and investigation of the structural context of the media messages (media practices and codes of conduct). In other words, the analysis takes part on two levels: the micro-level (the language of the discourse, identity of those contributing to the discourse, identity of who is “Us” vs. “Them,” the exposition of the ideological biases, as well as the macro level: analyzing the context of the discourse, investigating the structural context of the media messages. In applying this tool, this study analyzes the context in which both channels started their broadcasting and how this affected their future reputation and the reception of their messages. Secondly, the use of language in the discourse of both channels is analyzed to see how tactical this usage is and how it relates to the assumption of the identity they present. Thirdly, the structure of the discourse itself is analyzed to determine its degree of coherence and uncover the ideological assumptions underlying it, particularly those related to the perception of identity.

b. Framing Analysis

Framing theory helps in discerning the underlying reasons for reporting the news (in our cases introducing/framing an issue or event) in a certain way, and in suggesting why certain pieces of news (or certain issues) are given more emphasis than others. In this

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Ibid., p. 46.
manner, instead of asking what kinds of news topics and issues are being covered, framing analysis focuses on why and how these issues are being covered.

Frame analysis, unlike content analysis, assumes that the news in general is not made up of random coverage of external events, but is rather a specific process of selection and construction. Frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments and suggest remedies. In short, a frame is an emphasis on the salience of different aspects of a topic. Framing is assumed to have an impact on public opinions and reflects the perspective of the media source. For example, researchers have found that during the 1990 Gulf War, the language of the media framed the war in a way that made dissent more difficult and discouraged democratic debate.

Framing analysis is also closely connected and complementary to discourse analysis. While the former pays attention to the emphasis given to certain pieces of news, the latter does the same by figuring out the layers of presence within a text. Fairclough describes these layers as: absent (relevant to the topic but neither stated explicitly nor implied), and presupposed (implicit meaning within the text, which resonates with audiences as familiar and, therefore, authentic). The last layers are either placed in the foreground or the background. In his view, explicit information is either foregrounded or backgrounded with the former receiving more emphasis. Framing is done by those who are behind the two stations. Therefore, discussing the context in which the two channels appear and who were behind them helps understand how framing is done and why.

74 Fairclough. 1995, op. cit., p. 15.
c. Content Analysis

The content of some aspects of the coverage of the two channels will be analyzed to give a quantitative estimation of the frequency of the issues being discussed, the people who have more access to the two channels, and the trends they represent.

This study analyzes two talk shows from each of the two TV channels. As Faisal al-Kasim has rightly argued, “[o]ne can hardly talk about the phenomenon of satellite television in the Arab world without focusing on live political programs, which many consider to be central to the satellite revolution.” Special attention will be paid to the introduction in which the program’s presenter defines the limits of the topic of discussion and how it is framed. Arguably, by controlling the premises of a discussion, presenters guide what their audience thinks about and influence the conclusions drawn.

In choosing the shows, the study focuses on shows that are similar in format. The selected programs are the following. In al-Hurra, Sa’a Hura (Free Hour), a daily one-hour program that examines and discusses the news and issues of the day. The counterpart of this program in al-Jazeera is Ma Wara’ al-Khabar (What is behind the News). These programs are not aired at the same time. The second program from al-Hurra is al-Itijhat al-Arba’a (The Four Directions). This is a roundtable that provides analysis, discussion, and review of the events of the previous week, with the newsmakers and experts on the issues. Similar to this program in al-Jazeera is Akthar min Ra’y (More than One Opinion).

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76 Butler, op. cit., p. 20.
Chapter One

Contextualizing the Role of Media in International Relations

This chapter aims to draw a picture of the theoretical context in which the American approach to the Arab world has been introduced. Reviewing the state of the art with regard to conceptualizing the new developments in international affairs, certain points are relevant to the current study. First, there is a noticeable rise in the interest in cultural and identity-related issues to the point that it has become the main focus of the new approaches emerging in the field of International Relations. Parallel to this interest in the cultural aspects is an increased attention to non-state actors from within and outside the state. This has highly affected states’ policies and strategies either domestically or internationally. Perhaps the increasing interest in the role of public opinion is one of the most significant impacts of these changes. Not only do states now have to increasingly and constantly justify themselves in front of their population, but they also have to do this before the “world public opinion.” This has particularly affected the state’s foreign policy as it has become inevitable to approach populations outside its borders. Therefore, concepts like public diplomacy and soft power have resurfaced in international relations after being relatively neglected by the end of the Cold War.

With the communication and information revolution, media occupy an integral part in any attempt to approach foreign public opinion. Not only do media seek to explain and justify the policies of a certain state, but also to influence and convince others with such orientations. This, at times, is done by way of targeting certain perceptions of identity or trying to promote or emphasize some aspects of identity over the others. Media, in this manner, have become important actors in international relations that could
be an asset or a challenge to the foreign policies of certain states. As a challenge, it shows how non-state actors have gained recognition in the field of international relations, in addition to playing an increasingly influential role in determining the relationship between states and cultures. Again, this is an example of how identity has become an important component of international relations and foreign policies whether on the theoretical or practical levels. Therefore, the first part of this chapter seeks to show how debates within the field of International Relations reflected the changing status of the state, as well as its relationship with non-state actors and the sources of international power. One goal is to show how the theoretical context was heading toward acknowledging an increasing importance to the politics of identity and the importance of “dealing” with the “other.” Another goal is to shed light on the changing environment in which the state performs its policies, particularly foreign policy.

A second point pertaining to conceptualizing the new developments in international affairs is that, in line with the assumptions of critical discourse analysis, it is difficult to understand the conveyed meaning or the intent of media messages without understanding history. Therefore, the study of broadcasting and its impacts on the Arab world can only be understood within the historical and communicative contexts in which it originates. Therefore, the second part of the chapter will highlight how the definition of Arab identity changed according to the issues that were debated and circulated in the Arab public sphere, particularly in the media. It is argued that the formation of Arab identity is a function of the transformations in the political, economic, and technological spheres. Throughout its development, media have played a vital intermediary role in the expansion or the contraction of the public sphere and, consequently, the particular
definition of the identity it promotes. In this sense, the story of the Arab’s public sphere is very much related to the story of Arab identity; therefore, the study of the former is essential to the explanation of the latter.

1. International Relations Theory and Practice: From Real Politics to Identity Politics

The end of the Cold War and the accompanying information and communication revolutions engendered many contentious issues in international relations as a practice as well as a field of study. Among the major questions currently being debated is the impact of this new world reality on the status of the nation-state as the central actor in international relations studies and the current sources of power. The impact of the role of non-state actors on the sovereignty of the state has been widely discussed. Culture and identity have also witnessed a strong comeback on both the actual and the theoretical levels of international relations.77

While some scholars argue that weaker states have lost control over the flow of information within their borders in a way that threatens national cultures and breeds instability,78 others hold that these developments have provided states with opportunities to challenge the monopoly of information by the more powerful states. They also draw attention to the increasing importance of public opinion in facilitating the foreign policies of other countries.79 At the same time, other international relations scholars emphasize

79 Volkmer, op. cit.
the opportunities that these developments have offered to diaspora communities to reconnect with their home countries and ‘imagine’ their communities.80

Thus, identity-related issues have become the center of attention for many scholars not only because they challenge the very basic idea of the nation-state and the main theories of International Relations, but also for their repercussions on world security and order. The end of the Cold War witnessed a proliferation of national and ethnic identities all over the world. This was much obvious in cases like the former Soviet republics and Yugoslavia. Not only was the spread of identity expression quick and abrupt, but it was also violent, shocking and disturbing for the international community at large. This rise in identity issues in the post Cold-War era was largely associated with globalization, a phenomenon that promotes certain perceptions of identity. The effect of this promotion is, however, controversial.

a. Globalization: Between Homogeneity and Clash

The end of the Cold War has been accompanied by an intensification of (inter-) connectedness around the world in what is known as the “globalization” process. Paradoxically, this new reality has been a source of optimism, pessimism and ambivalence. Proponents of globalization see developments in communications and transportation, the accelerating rate of the spread of ideas, goods, and information, as well as capitalism as leading to an increase in global interconnectedness and interactions. They see the flourishing of global consumer culture based on the principles of the liberal

economy as automatically leading to increased homogeneity among nations and states. They also argue that new global issues of economic, social, cultural and environmental nature – for example, pollution, drug trafficking, human rights, combating terrorism, and refugees – transcend national borders and require international cooperation in order to reach effective solutions. According to this view, these developments show how the borderline between domestic and foreign issues has been increasingly blurred and demonstrate increasing restrictions on state policies. It also demonstrates how the new issues facing humanity at large require solutions that do not necessarily emanate from military power. Many of these problems require collective efforts and cooperation. Collaborative solutions require relying on other sources of power, such as soft power, that has to do with the power to convince and influence behavior. Media are one tool employed to achieve these goals. Soft power is, thus, strongly coming back to world politics. States have realized how soft power is not less important than other forms of powers.

Some scholars reject the argument that globalization decreases differences among states and cultures or that it promotes greater cooperation and homogeneity. In this view, ‘national cultures’ continue to be the basis for the collective identity for each society.

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81 Francis Fukuyama. 1992, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-36. According to this view, the rise of national feelings in some parts of the world is associated with low levels of modernization that would eventually be replaced with a more democratic order engaged in the market economy. The economic forces that previously encouraged the rise of nationalism and isolated national economies are now capable of transcending national borders through establishing one integrated global market.


and nationalism remains alive in both the developed and developing countries.\textsuperscript{84} Perhaps the most notable representative of the pessimist trend is Samuel Huntington, as evident in his “Clash of Civilizations” notion. In his view, the world is prone to culturally-defined “civilizational” conflict rather than cooperation or integration.\textsuperscript{85} The idea here is that when formerly distant groups are integrated into shared economic and political systems by globalization, inequalities become more visible as direct comparison between groups becomes possible. In this way, heading towards more peaceful relationships and cooperation and coordination on a global scale is just unattainable and unrealistic. He perceives the future of international system to be dependent on the interaction among these eight civilizations: the Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hinduism, Slavic, Latin American, and African. Moreover, he considers religion to be the linchpin in defining such differences and the center of identity. In his article, he identifies Islamic civilization to be the most prone to clash with the West.\textsuperscript{86} The attacks of September 11, 2001, and the war on Afghanistan and Iraq have revived this notion, particularly through the media.

\textsuperscript{84} Some holders of this view, however, believe that the impact of nationalism will be different from its antecedent due to the spread of democracy which, in turn, decreases the possibility of wars. Moreover, nationalists, according to this view, are now aware that national interests cannot be achieved in isolation. Instead, it requires engaging in the world market and seeking a prominent position within it (for this, see Fred Halliday. 1997. “Nationalism,” in John Baylis and Steve Smith, eds. The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 361-71.


\textsuperscript{86} Huntington. “Clash of Civilizations?,” op. cit. In the article, Huntington provides the West with some recommendations in order to keep its lead in this expected clash. Among these recommendations, the following are noteworthy: to restrict the expansion of military power in both the Confucian and Islamic states, and to try to play up the differences between them as much as possible. He also recommends increasing the support for the groups that sympathize with, and are amenable to, the interests and values of the West, and strengthening the international organizations that represent Western interests and values. Finally, the West must maintain its absolute economic and military superiority.
A third group of International Relations scholars believes that differences among cultures will remain important. However, they agree that there is an unprecedented level of coordination and cooperation among different cultures. According to this trend, despite the continuity of difference in the world, international economic interdependence and the coordination of policies on many international issues is facilitated by homogeneity in the general tastes of consumers, the rise of an international common language across elites in all societies, and the increasing similarity among economic systems, as well as the acceptance of Western political values in general.87

The role of the media regarding this aspect is undeniable as it engages in defining and redefining the relationship among countries and cultures by the form of identity that it presents concerning the “other.” This representation can encourage homogeneity or heterogeneity and clash. In his study on the Bosnian Serbs, Ioannis Armakolas argues that media discourse on the conflict in former Yugoslavia is considered an integral part of the global involvement in the crisis.88 He demonstrates how the Serbian nationalist exclusionist project was not initially supported by the majority of the Serbs. However, with the international media’s perception of the conflict as an “ethnic war” and proposed solutions on the part of international diplomacy based on the separation between the three groups – Serbs, Croats and Muslims – out of belief of their immutable identities, the world has played a part in legitimizing nationalist leaders’ agendas. This unprecedented scale of intervention led to a “growing perception on the part of Serbian citizens that a


formidable and hostile ‘global other’ was unfairly representing them as a barbarian, pariah people."89 Once more, the media plays a major role in shaping the perception of the relations among cultures and civilizations. It can either be a medium for building cooperation or forging conflict.

The impact of globalization on culture and identity, as discussed earlier, was mostly seen through the lenses of world security and order. While the majority was preoccupied with the security challenges faced by the great powers, a few scholars called attention to the different challenges that states in the developing countries can face. These aspects, ranged from threats of external interventions which increasingly take the form of use of violence to the Western pressures for “democratization” and “liberalization,” can actually endanger the regional integration, political stability, and social coherence of those societies.90 However, there are other levels of studying the impact of globalization on culture and identity: the individual and communal levels.

On the one hand, there is a tendency to link the economic developments of globalization with the disintegration of class loyalty, a development that paved the way to a return to these narrow circles of identity.91 These traditional bases of identity are sought to provide a sense of security that is mostly lost due to these changes or as a psychological reaction to globalization that aims to retain dignity and a sense of rootedness.92 On the other hand, economic and communication developments provide

91 Paul Kennedy, op. cit., p. 7.
more chances for creating a global culture that transcends the narrow basis of identification. Such contradictory trends have led Ronald Robertson to call it “glocalization,” by which he means that while globalization creates the conditions for localization, it also connects the world at an unprecedented pace.\textsuperscript{93} It is exactly these contradictory aspects of globalization that led Ben Shaul to argue that “dominant ideologies…[as globalization] defined as widespread ideas about the world…function to justify elite interests within specific economic and geopolitical configurations of power, and which are propagated through modes of communication that are dependent in the elites (e.g. mainstream media).”\textsuperscript{94}

This interest in the individual and communal levels of identity politics brings two important aspects to the discussion. The first aspect is that of the role of the media in facilitating the imagining of identity on these two levels. This, in turn, is related to the second aspect which has to do with the role of non-state actors in this issue. Not only individuals and diaspora communities have become important actors in international relations, the media itself have become an actor. The latter is increasingly playing a role in relations among nations, whether by serving the interests of a particular country or just pursuing its own agenda. This brings the relationship between state and non-state actors back to the center of debates in International Relations. It will also be discussed how identity no longer falls in the exclusive realm of the state. It is currently being promoted and spread by other non-state actors as well. The changing status of the state is also directly related to the sources of power in international relations. If the state is losing its status as the most important actor in international relations, it follows that other sources

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
of power rather than the military power are gradually taking more importance in the relations between nations.

Moreover, employing the new approaches in International Relations reveals how identity is not fixed as the old assumptions hold. Identity construction is, arguably, a conscious process. Although it is not totally invented, it is subject to (re-)imagining at all times. More importantly, new approaches in International Relations attract attention to the power relations behind any discourse. This assumption helps in analyzing media discourse when it comes to its representation of identity. This helps in answering the question: why is a certain perception of identity being promoted by the media rather than others?

b. Non-State Actors: A Friend or An Enemy?

The role of state vis-à-vis non-state actors has been a debatable issue among International Relations scholars. At the heart of this debate was the impact of globalization on state’s sovereignty and its ability to remain the main source of identity. While not ignoring the existence of non-state actors, some scholars believe that the state still enjoys ultimate authority, and also remains the marker of the most important divisions between the inside and the outside, us vs. them, and the foreign vis-à-vis the domestic.\textsuperscript{95} In other words, the

\textsuperscript{95} This is particularly the assumptions of the realist paradigm, which is based on three principles: 1- Statism, meaning that states are the main actors in world politics, that they enjoy sovereignty in terms of enacting policies and laws within their boundaries, and that they exist in an anarchical world order where a central authority is missing. Therefore, they compete with each other to achieve security, market gains, etc. Such an environment retards cooperation. Inter-state competition is reduced to a series of zero-sum games; thus, the gain of one state is considered a loss for the others. 2- Survival, according to which the main goal of any state is its survival in this anarchical world. This is a prerequisite condition to achieving any of the abovementioned goals. 3- Self-help, according to which, since there is no common authority that arbitrates among states, protecting the security for any state requires self-dependence (hence self-help) as well as accumulating as much power as possible. Power here refers primarily, if not exclusively, to military
state is still the source of identity and is not challenged in this domain by any of the new forces or actors. 96

On the contrary, other scholars argue that there are new “spheres of authority” in world politics that are represented by the spread of non-state actors on the different local, national, regional, transnational, international and global levels. 97 Along these lines, they are more inclined, as David Held argues, to view the world arena as a “polyarchic mixed actor system” where political authority is widely spread. 98 They recognize several non-state actors that share or even overcome the state’s influence on world politics and surpass its sovereignty. The role of multinational corporations is always discussed in this context to show how these institutions enjoy authority and influence vis-à-vis the nation-states, and how they develop their own interests independently of those of the latter. 99

As the traditional (positivist) paradigms failed to predict or explain the end of the Cold War, new approaches in International Relations embarked on re-conceptualizing the field and introducing a different world outlook. While some scholars continue to consider the state the main actor in international relations, others recognize the diminishing prowess. For this, see Timothy Dunne. 1997. “Realism,” in John Baylis and Steve Smith, eds. The Globalization of World Politics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 110-117.


97 This was extensively discussed in James Rosenau. 1997. Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontiers: Exploring Governance in a Turbulent World. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 28-44. This view emanates from the liberalist paradigm in International Relations which developed in the 1990s to the neo-liberal institutionalism. This trend in liberalism accepts the realist propositions that states are the major actors in world affairs and unitary-rational agents. It also accepts the realist emphasis on anarchy to explain state’s motives and actions. However, the new liberal theory gives major credit to the power of international institutions. In some cases, countries will be better off if they cooperate. Nonetheless, scared of being cheated, they end up not cooperating. Yet, neoliberals argue that conditional cooperation is the best strategy to deal with problems of cheating in international anarchy, and that this type of cooperation can be enforced by international institutions (for this, see Robert Axelrod and Robert Keohane. 1993. “Achieving Co-operation under Anarchy: Strategies and Institutions,” in David A. Baldwin, ed. Neo-Realism and Neo-Liberalism: the Contemporary Debate, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 4.

98 David Held et. al., op. cit., p. 51.

sovereignty of the state, which they regard as a healthy development. Two approaches are particularly related to this discussion: social constructivism and critical theory. Alexander Wendt’s ideas serve as a representative of the former and those of Andrew Linklater exemplify the latter. The works of these two scholars are the most prominent and relevant to the topic of this study.

In his *Social Theory of International Relations*, Wendt begins by identifying both the level and the unit of analysis that are of interest to him. He begins by acknowledging that the organization of violence is one of the main problems of social life. The nature of violence, its technology, who controls it and how it is used have an effect on the rest of the social relations. Since the state is the authority in possession of power over the legitimate use of force domestically, he argues, it controls the organization of violence

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100 This theory is based on a number of assumptions. Firstly, the structure of human communities is basically constructed by common ideas not materialistic power as the realists and liberalists argue. Second, interests and identities of the actors are not given but rather formed through these common ideas and interaction. Alexander Wendt is considered the most famous scholar of social constructivism in International Relations. Wendt believes that the constructivist thought has witnessed a comeback with the end of the Cold War because of the failure of the mainstream approaches in the field in explaining – let alone anticipating – this event. For more details, see Alexander Wendt. 1999. *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

101 There are many contributions of critical theory. The root of this theory dates to a line of thinking that emerged during the Enlightenment and was associated with the writings of Hegel, Kant and Marx. In the 20th century, critical theory became associated with a trend of thought known as the Frankfurt School and became a symbol of the philosophy that challenged the existing political and social life. In international relations, critical theory seeks to remove all restrictions that hinder freedom and equality on the global level. It criticizes traditional concepts that favor the stability of the current structures of the world system and the inequality in power and wealth that accompanies it. In this way, it was inspired by the Marxist criticism of capitalism in its attempt to understand and explain inequality and domination that characterize global power relations. It, however, went a step further than Marxism. While the latter sought understanding and explanation, critical theory takes understanding and explanation as a first step towards undermining these conditions. The critical project has two aspects. The first is concerned with restructuring the modern state and the state system in a way that makes possible the development of higher levels of internationalism by eliminating the monopolizing powers of the nation-state and replacing the state system with a global structure of world governance. The second aspect concentrates on increasing respect to cultural differences in order to eradicate any contradiction between the duties of each person as a citizen and his duties as a human being. This can be achieved by moving towards more opened forms of the political community. For more information on critical theory, see Richard Devetak. 2001. “Critical Theory,” in Scott Burchill *et. al.*, eds. *Theories of International Relations*. New York: Palgrave, p. 156.
internationally.\footnote{Although this last assumption would make constructivism similar to realism, this theory, in fact, differs from both realism and liberalism in its perception of the interests and identities of the actors. While the main paradigms hold that the interest and identities of the international actors are given – meaning that they interact with each other with a pre-established identity and pre-defined set of interests, constructivism, on the contrary, argues that these interests and identities are constructed through interaction and do not precede it. This difference emanates from the constructivist definition of the international structure. For constructivists, the structure is mainly a social phenomenon, not a materialist one. As long as the social phenomenon depends primarily on the common knowledge, this leads to viewing the structure as one of the distribution of knowledge or ideas and not the distribution of the material capabilities as perceived by realists. In other words, unlike realism and liberalism in their stress on the material factors as power or trade, social constructivism stresses the importance of ideas. Instead of accepting the view that states seek survival, constructivism holds that the interests and identities of the states result from certain historical processes. It also pays much attention to social debates because they essentially reflect the dominant beliefs and interests in a society and contribute to the construction of these interests. In this way, it actually pays attention to the sources of change. For this, see Stephen M. Walt. Spring 1998. “International Relations: One World, Many Theories.” Foreign Policy (available at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/Ning/archive/archive/110/irelations.pdf. Retrieved: 11/15/ 2007).} This does not mean that the state is the main unit of analysis or that Wendt necessarily denies the existence of other non-state actors. The centrality of the state in the constructivist thought does not mean that the explanation of war and peace depends on the behavior of the state alone or even that the state is the more important actor in this context. Non-state actors, argues Wendt, can be more important than the state in initiating change, but, ultimately, the change of the system takes place only through the state.\footnote{Wendt. Social Theory, op. cit., p. 202.} In this sense, although Wendt does not deny the role of non-state actor and even gives them more space for action than the traditional paradigms, he still concludes that the states are the center of the international order.\footnote{Despite Wendt’s inspiring ideas, there are some contentious issues in his argument that have important repercussions for identity politics. Wendt talks about a certain kind of structures that are composed of ideas. Thus, he differs from many scholars who believe that social structures reflect the strong material interests. This indicates that he is not interested in certain developments that are taking place in world capitalism, nor is he interested in explaining the existing differences among states, such as inequality, on a global level. By neglecting the materialist structure, Wendt’s theory has the same weakness that he attributes to realism and liberalism: the one dimensional view of world politics. Additionally, Wendt discusses how the preexisting ideas of a given state about the international order define the interests of each state and its means to achieve them. However, he does not explain in an adequate way how these ideas are formed in the first place. This can also undermine Wendt’s project, for if we do not know how these ideas come into being, it is difficult to change the stereotypical image of the international system adopted by these states, and, consequently, there is no way we can move to a society of states that is based on the rule of law.}
Wendt’s work is directly related to the conception of identity. While the traditional view of national identities stressed its primordial factors (such as shared culture, history, language and, most importantly, common ancestry), the constructivist approach deals with the phenomenon as mainly psychological and cultural artifacts, or an “imagined community.” This study argues that national identities are neither completely invented nor discovered. Since they need to be generally accepted by the community, they do not start from nothing. However, changes in the context of identities may yield differences from their original meanings. In this manner, ideas are not only social, but have their political implications and goals as well. In this sense, one can agree with what O’Brynn calls “pragmatically socially constructed identities.” This refers to the fact that the politicization lies in the very linkage between the inner sense of identity and the external set of social, economic, political, and cultural conditions.105

On his part, Linklater has embarked on the issue of political community and discussed an important problem related to the meaning of citizenship and how a person can perceive himself as a citizen in a region or a community and complies at the same time with global rights and duties. His definition of communities as a system of inclusion and exclusion was meant to be, in the final analysis, a criticism of the state system and its core principle of sovereignty.106 Critical theory, as represented by Linklater, places social actors and structures in their historical context by studying how they appear and are formed historically. In this way, it looks at the modern state as a unique type of the

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political community which performs some roles and functions that are socially and historically formed.  

Linklater perceives the challenges imposed by globalization on the sovereignty of the state in two ways. On the one hand, there is the role of the authorities above the state due to the increasing attention to global morals. On the other hand, there are constant demands to limit the state’s influence over the local communities and dependent cultures by giving an increasing role to the local communities. In his view, the nation-state appeared when the inner circle of loyalty expanded, while the outer circle (loyalty to the Christian world) shrank. According to Linklater, the opposite is taking place now in a way that may lead to a more inclusive form of political communities. Thus, not only does Linklater acknowledge the challenges facing the sovereignty of the state, but he also welcomes them. The non-state actors, as he perceives them, are opening the way for a more understanding environment for differences from within and without the state.

Linklater’s work is related to a debate concerning the web of identities where a person could be part of local, regional, and global affiliations. These debates pertain to the modernization project itself and its main protector: the nation-state. For example, Darren O’Byrne argued that nation-states require the support of the people, and in order to achieve this, it overlooks cultural pluralism and define ‘nation’ in monocultural terms. In Byrne’s view, “cultural identity has [thus] been suppressed by political identity, and

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107 Based on this view, Linklater discusses five powers that the state monopolizes: the right to monopolize the tools of legitimate use of violence over a certain territory, the right to impose taxes, the right to demand undivided political loyalty and the prerogative of arbitration among citizens, and finally the representation in the international law. The sum of these powers is what Linklater calls “the totalizing project” that distinguishes the modern state. In his view, these powers are the product of the interaction of four main processes: state building, geographical competition, capitalist industrialization, and the moral-practical learning. This has resulted in the evolution of a certain concept of politics controlled by the assumption that the boundaries of sovereignty, region, nationalism and citizenship are common. This, in turn, has influenced the nature of the social linkage and, consequently, changed the moral and political boundaries of the community. For more details, see Andrew Linklater, op. cit., pp. 25-28.
this suppression is represented by the ‘assimilationist’ model of citizenship inclusion.”

“Naturally,” he concludes, “such an inclusion also requires exclusion.”

What globalization has done, according to this view, is that it has separated the nation from the state. Therefore, as a form of political identity, citizenship has become separate from nationality. Therefore, whereas we can find people identifying themselves as global citizens, others are typical examples of the nationalist model, while a yet third group identifies itself according to a narrower circle of identity such as ethnicity. In this way, the citizen himself can be a non-state actor working locally, regionally, or globally.

This sheds light on an important problematic in Linklater’s argument, that is, globalization does not necessarily lead to a more inclusive form of political community or world citizenship. In some circumstances, it can lead to extreme particularism or a combination of a national, regional, and a global identity. In other words, it can be argued that identity is not necessarily a zero-sum game: either national or global, towards the inner or the outer circle, or that any attachment to one circle necessarily takes from the other. A related question would be: what prioritizes one identity over the other? A second problematic with Linkalter’s argument is that he does not discuss how cultural differences and a more inclusive form of political community can develop in light of the widening inequality in power, wealth, and knowledge among countries. However, the importance of Linklater’s work is that it brings to our attention the role played by discourse in the production of knowledge, particularly the production of represented reality. Arguably, there is no other discourse worth of this investigation than that of the media, which claims to be reflecting an objective image of reality.

109 For a discussion of these three models, see O’Byrne, op. cit., pp. 139-145.
Certain conclusions can be drawn from this discussion on the status of non-state actors vis-à-vis the state. Firstly, perceiving the role of non-state actors compared to that of the state is highly connected to the perception of power in world politics. The group that refuses to acknowledge the diminishing authority of the state usually takes the military aspect as the most important determinant of state’s power. At the same time, the group that is more willing to acknowledge some retreat in state’s sovereignty tends to perceive power in a more diversified way. ‘Soft power’ and the role of ideas have been similarly recognized in the globalized world, and have thus become more acceptable to non-state actors. This is particularly the case when it comes to identity politics, where non-state actors make use of information technologies to establish their ‘virtual’ communities.

Secondly, because of these developments in the relation between the state and other actors, the way foreign policy and diplomacy are conducted has been affected. Foreign policy has become a multidimensional process due to globalization and information and communication technologies. This development has empowered non-political players as they have started to have a large influence over state’s policy in the international arena.110 For example, NGOs have exerted much influence on the United Nation’s Earth Summit in 1992 that took place in Rio de Janeiro. Moreover, groups like Green Peace, anti-globalization groups and Peace Now play a major role in the conduct of state’s foreign policy. The role of “world public opinion” has been increasingly recognized in a way that demonstrates that a state’s policy initiative cannot succeed without the support of multiple foreign publics and non-political audiences. Public

diplomacy is one area of state’s policies that has been mostly rediscovered and greatly affected by these developments. As James Napoli and Joshua Fejeran have argued, “the evolution of global technologies, particularly [the media and] the Internet, has brought public diplomacy among the range of options for groups or even individuals who wish to affect international public opinion for the advantage of their own cause, rather than a national interest.”

The increasing role of public diplomacy through media begs some questions with regard to the strategies employed by media to get its message heard as well as the effect of these messages on conducting foreign policy and, thus, its influence on the relations among nations. In other words, does the media seek to achieve hegemony or aims at providing a two-way communication, promote clash of civilizations or their dialogue, emphasize hegemony or promotes a public sphere? These questions are directly related to media’s representation of identity and, therefore, to the relationship between the state vis-à-vis non-state actors represented in this case in the media. They are also related to the role played by globalization in facilitating any of these developments. The discussion of the role of the state in framing identity shows whether media is considered a challenge to the state or an added asset to its power in conducting its policies, especially public diplomacy.

c. The Media Sphere

Media are one set of non-state actors that are increasingly seen as taking over an important role of the state: informing its citizens. This is particularly the case in the

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developing countries where media used to be the sole domain of the state. Once more, this role of the media in relation to state’s sovereignty is debatable among International Relations scholars. With the developments in media technology, some argue that while the media used to be the means of the nation-state in indoctrinating citizens by promoting a certain national identity and interest, it is now under influence from local as well as international factors. According to Price Monroe, “[t]his changing nature of the media sphere within the nation state has brought new challenges to the national identity images that are produced by the state and gave rise to new outlets for identity representation.”

Other scholars hold that the state still has the capability and means by which it protects its own information space and thus maintains its national identity. Examples of this would range from the states that control the internet within their borders – e.g., China, and Iraq under Saddam Hussein, and those that seek to have an indirect control over satellite reception by imposing the so-called “uplinking” requirement which means that any information or imagery that is sent down from a satellite to people within the state’s borders must be broadcast from within the territory.

Those who see an increasing influence of the media consider it an effective element/actor in the fall of the Berlin Wall. Proponents of media role argue that images of Western society, particularly these coming from advertisements, are responsible, to some extent, of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. They argue that the same can be done in spreading democratic values through the world. Such a claim is sometimes seen, from the perspective of the developing countries, as a threat to

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113 Ibid., p. 85.
114 Ibid., p. 40.
national identities especially with the spread of satellite channels and the different cultural contents they introduce. In these societies, the declining reliance on public broadcasting and the exposure to the content of foreign media (for example advertising) have cultural and political significance. People see on television different life styles to which they aspire with little consideration to their economic reality. This exportation of Western consumerist culture is seen as an impediment to development and economic growth.\textsuperscript{115} In this manner, economic and cultural vulnerabilities are tightly connected as free trade and economic growth are said to be impossible without free trade information.

In addition to this, the use of information technology is assumed to have an impact on the self-image of poor, developing counties. Gareth Locksley refers to information technology as “electronic colonialism.” He mainly refers to the self-image of the developing countries in the Northern/Western news which tend to portray these areas as ones plagued by earthquakes and natural and environmental disasters. He argues that information technology restructures international relations according to possession of information. Power relations, consequently, are based on information and consolidate those who control it. This is achieved by promoting the ideology of free flow of information and the idea that the market offers the best mechanisms to create and distribute information and culture. In this way, the information society is a class-based society that constitutes a great threat to developing countries.\textsuperscript{116}

There is another aspect of the role of the media in portraying the image of different countries which is affecting the relationship among cultures and civilizations. This was particularly the case after the end of the Cold War. Some analysts argue that the

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., p. 40.
reason why Huntington’s notion of “Clash of Civilizations” has received such an appeal on the part of the media is the fact that it helped shaping the media’s approach in covering the world’s news. Moving uncertainly into the post-Cold War era without much sense of how the new world order was taking shape, argues Philip Seib, the media “were receptive to a new geopolitical scheme, particularly one that featured identifiable adversarial relationships that would supersede those being left behind.”117 As he explains,

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the demise of the Soviet Union, and other events marking the end of the Cold War, the news media found themselves searching for new ways to approach international coverage. New York Times foreign editor Bernard Gwertzman sent a memo to his staff in December 1992 calling for adjustments in coverage: “In the old days, when certain countries were pawns in the Cold War, their political orientation alone was reason enough for covering them. Now with their political orientation not quite as important, we don’t want to forget them, but we have an opportunity to examine different aspects of a society more fully.”118

This sheds light on an increasingly perceived relationship between media and hegemony. While most of the discussion was about this relationship within societies, it is also possible to talk about it between countries. Domestically, some scholars hold that the media are reflecting the culture of the dominant group and serving their interests. This was mainly Gramsci’s idea of hegemony. The Italian thinker developed the term to refer to the moral and cultural leadership which he took to be a necessary condition for any class that aspires to social control. Gramsci’s idea is directly related to that of national identity. Part of the class that exercises social control is the intellectuals. To use Gramsci’s expression, these “organic intellectuals” have great influence on what to

118 Ibid.
emphasize, disregard or invent as part of the hegemonic national identity in a way that legitimizes the existing social order.\textsuperscript{119}

With the changing nature of information and communication technologies, this role of the media was questioned. How far do the media represent the dominant group is a question that Price Monroe seeks to answer by introducing the idea of “market of loyalties,” which refers to the fact that “large-scale competitors for power, in a shuffle for allegiances, use the regulation of communication or organize a cartel of imagery and identity among themselves.”\textsuperscript{120} This means that the media become means within the society to maintain the distribution of power among those who are dominant by promoting a set of political views and cultural ideas and slogans that help maintain the existing power structure. The new developments in media, according to Monroe, are challenging this arrangement. Governments, in this context, have two strategies of response. One is redefining the cartel and accommodating new entrants, and the second is taking effective steps (through law or the use of force) to try to raise the barriers of entry.\textsuperscript{121} This view could be applied to the international arena.

Lifting the barriers of entry is actually what happened in the international level in general, and in the Arab world in particular. International media were predominately Western in terms of ownership and perspective, a fact that raised doubts concerning their impact on national cultures and identities.\textsuperscript{122} However, the 1990s are considered a turning point for many countries, especially in the Arab World. As Philip Seib has argued,


\textsuperscript{120} Monroe, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 31-32.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., p. 33.

Gulf War that year [1990] was in many ways the last gasp of Western communications hegemony. CNN’s slogan at the time was, “The world is watching CNN.” That was true because most of the world did not have much choice. Beyond CNN and other American and European information providers was a near vacuum in terms of global media. The dominant news, entertainment, and other information products may have had global reach but not global outlook. Political and cultural dominance could be perpetuated by such a limited system; other voices were not heard.123

Global television, such as the CNN, has created a new phenomenon of media event which is the live broadcasting to historical events around the world. Pier Robinson has argued that this new type of coverage was influencing foreign policies around the world, an effect that came to be known as the “CNN effect.”124 The most important effect of the CNN, however, was that it revealed the ill performance of national media, especially in media-controlled societies. This was very much felt in the Arab world as discussed below. What is important here is the rise of al-Jazeera in the Arab context. Al-Jazeera, in many ways, has challenged the Western hegemony over news production. It became a new model of media, which Seib has described as “al-Jazeera effect.”

The Qatar-based station has played a historic role in transforming media not only in the Middle East but also globally, proving that the hegemony of the predominantly Western media establishment can be successfully challenged. Beyond Al Jazeera’s own success in this regard, the channel serves as model within the Arab world and beyond, and example of news organizations with regional and global reach that are certain to proliferate during the next decade.125

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In this way, the media is playing a bigger role in world politics. It can facilitate contacts or trigger conflict through their image portrayal and coverage. An important example of how media can have a global effect is the Danish cartoon controversy of 2006. Not only did the issue have national implications, but it also triggered worldwide sensitivities and anger. The media is also playing an increasing role in reconnecting people who share cultural, religious, or political characteristics, as well as overcoming the material geopolitical restraints. As Benedict Anderson has argued, any nation is “an imagined political community” when it assumes “deep horizontal comradeship” in a way that makes people willing to die for it. As Seib argues, new communication technologies and media can play a role in establishing an imagined community within imagined borders. This shows how “[g]overnments have lost the near monopoly they used to enjoy over certain kinds of information, and as a result they have less ability to direct domestic [and foreign] politics. The traditional tools of government information ministries, censorship and propaganda are withering, and governments must create new strategies and tools to cope with the new environment.”

The role of non-state actors has, thus, challenged the state’s national identity as external influences are highly questioning the state’s version of identity and promoting others. The developments in communications and information have played the major role in this context and constituted the common factor that received attention from the various

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126 This controversy was sparked when a Danish newspaper published satire caricatures depicting the Prophet Muhammad in a way that the majority of Muslims around the world saw as disrespectful to their religion.
130 Quoted in Seib. Al Jazeera Effect, op. cit., p. 111.
approaches in International Relations as a new threat to the nation-state’s ability to cultivate a particular national identity among its citizens.

Globalization creates crises of identity for many states. On the one hand, people receive foreign cultural products like movies, novels, music and news that compete with “domestic” media and the dominant culture. On the other hand, the same developments in communication and transportation make it easier for ethnic groups to remain in touch with their home countries and thus transform them from cultural communities within the boundaries of the state into communities that transcend these boundaries. Because identities are not static, this competition engenders a process of reconstructing identities as people may assert or redefine who they are as individuals, communities or nations through a wide range of media outlets such as television, music, internet, etc., and drawing on a vast range of domestic, regional and transnational cultural sources. For this reason, media and identity have become “important sites of social, political and cultural struggles over the local meaning and significance of mediated images and texts.”

Furthermore, it is clear that the centripetal or unifying forces of globalization and the centrifugal or fragmenting forces of identity politics are two sides of the same coin, or two complementary tendencies which must be understood well in order to make sense of the global scene in the post-Cold War world.

Mainstream approaches in International Relations, besides having difficulty in explaining, let alone anticipating, the new realities of the world, have a Western-centered perspective, argues Keyman. Everything is evaluated from the perspective of the West. This highlights the problem of “otherness” and stereotyping in International Relations.

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131 Thomas Eriksen, op. cit.
especially with the little attention paid to the developing countries. Keyman points out that:

this strong Western and universalist posture ... reduces the “ethical space” for the Other to represent itself in its own ownership of its history. Thus, international relations theory tends to dissolve the Other into the unitary conception of the modern self as a rational knowing subject, to privilege the self as the universal point of reference, and limits the horizon of political imagination, that is, the imposition of limits on the way in which we think about community . . . [In this way,] international relations theory operates as a practice of inclusion/exclusion, in which the privileged role of the Western sovereign-self is maintained as a rational, Cartesian, modern cogito, and what is perceived as its Other is excluded, marginalized, and denied to be recognized as different.132

This attitude of the International Relations theory has led to the rising theoretical interest in identity after the end of the Cold War. However, it was particularly the attacks of September 11, 2001, that has brought identity politics to the forefront of the agenda of the world community and, arguably, portrayed what is called “Islamic radicalism” as the other of the West. On this ground, both the academic as well as political circles were preoccupied by issues of identity and how it affects world security and international relations. “Otherness” became a central issue in the debates whether in media, academia, or politics. However, globalization and the accompanied developments in world politics have given this other opportunities to get its voice heard. How these new world realities enabled this “other” to respond and how they affected the West (in this case the US) are the subjects of chapter two of this dissertation.

Discussing the opportunities globalization offered to the ‘other’ to portray himself is discussed in a later context. However, it is important to shed light on two points: the way the study defines identity, and the history of Arab media and its relationship to the

132 Keyman, op. cit., p. 11.
formation of Arab identity. Discussing the meaning of Arab identity and its development is a preliminary step towards understanding the basis according to which \textit{al-Jazeera} is considered a pan-Arab media.' This is also an essential step in the comparison between \textit{al-Jazeera} and \textit{al-Hurra} with regard to their identity representation and the extent to which they differ or come close.

2. Defining Identity

Scholars of national identity debate the elements that define a certain identity. Generally speaking, there are two main approaches with regard to this issue. The first is called the primordial approach, which defines identities in terms of a group of people sharing a common fixed culture, history, language and, most importantly, a common ancestry. The other approach, the modernist or the constructivists, introduces a different view. According to the modernists, identities, as we understand them today, are modern developments and inventions. Instead of focusing on the “objective” characters of the identities, modernists deal with the phenomenon as mainly psychological and cultural artifacts – i.e., an imagined community.

The debate become perplexing when applied to Arab identity. Despite its difficulty, it is possible to show how Arabs developed some sort of a sense of belonging before naming it “Arab nationalism.” Gamal Abdel Nasser’s era is generally regarded as the peak of “Arab nationalism.”\footnote{Gamal Abdel al-Nasser was the President of Egypt from 1953 to his death in 1970.} For the purpose of this study, Nasser’s era will receive a special focus, especially his employment of the media.
This study makes a distinction between two concepts: Arabness/Arabism and Arab nationalism/Pan-Arabism. I adopt here the distinction introduced by Adeed Dawisha:

To say one is an Arab should denote a different connotation from saying one is an Arab nationalist. The former concedes one’s cultural heritage, expressed best in the term “Arabism,” whereas the latter . . . imbues this cultural oneness with the added ingredient of political recognition.  

Arabism is thus a cultural expression of identity that could refer to, and include, many elements like language, history, religion and culture. As for Arab nationalism, it adds to these cultural traits a political aim which is uniting Arabs in one single state. In other words, it is the solidarity vs. unity that distinguishes these two terms. While solidarity is the ultimate goal of Arabism, Arab nationalism survives on the dream of unity.

3. The Arab Media Sphere and Arab Identity

Change in Arab media seems to correspond to the general developments that have taken place in the international system. As discussed earlier, a major transformation that has affected both domestic and world politics was the information revolution and the major advancements in the domain of communication. With each development, Arab media witnessed changes in its characteristics, nature of influence, the degree of governments’ control over its content and, recently, its repercussions on international relations.

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135 Because the introduction of satellite technology is usually associated with opportunities offered by globalization, the discussion of Arab media entrance into the age of satellite channels is discussed in chapter two.
Therefore, a short overview of the development of Arab media and its relation to the formation of Arab identity is necessary to begin with.

a. Arab Cultural Revival

According to Ernest Dawn, Arab nationalism began as an opposition movement in the Ottoman Empire without necessarily separatist tendencies. On the one hand, the Arabs admired the West and its scientific progress. On the other hand, they resented it for holding Islam responsible for their backwardness. Therefore, they took it as their responsibility to defend Islam by stressing the central role of the Arabic language and Arabs in the heritage of Islam.\(^{136}\) This was the beginning of a cultural revival.\(^{137}\)

Because this was a time of economic hardship, the Ottoman Empire had to make concessions to Western powers in a way that linked its economy to the European capitalist system.\(^{138}\) This, in turn, caused a large scale transformation of Ottoman society via the creation of new social classes, a new economic environment, and the creation of new political and social structures.\(^{139}\) For example, it created a new large-landowning class and a new educated elite class composed largely of local Christians. Most

\(^{136}\) As Dawisha (2005) argues, the Turkish domination over the Arab lands did not diminish the status of the Arabic language. The Ottomans themselves saw Arabic as a sacred language. Therefore, while Turkish was the language of government and bureaucracy, Arabic remained the language of law and religious studies. According to Dawisha, “it was the Arabic language, with its unrivaled status as the language of the Qur’an, which nourished and sustained a sense of cultural proximity in the Arab lands of the empire throughout the centuries of Ottoman rule” (ibid., pp. 17-18).

\(^{137}\) This cultural revival took more tangible steps by the establishment of some cultural and scientific societies. For example, in 1874, a literary society, known as the Society of Arts and Sciences, was formed in Beirut under American patronage. Because of its links with American missionaries, the composition of the society was largely limited to Christian Arabs, but by 1857, more inclusive societies were established; for instance, the Syrian Scientific Society


\(^{139}\) Duri, *op. cit.*
importantly is the fact that these transformations were accompanied by the shift in the press from official channels into private hands. This was particularly the case in Lebanon and Syria where local Christians developed the print press during this period as a result of the wealth they accumulated.140 Private press was generally tolerated as long as there was no direct criticism of the Ottoman government. 141 It was only when the Ottomans were defeated by Russia that the press became openly critical of Ottoman rule and began to advocate cultural autonomy for the Arabs. Rashid Kalidi notes that:

When Sultan Abdel Hamid was deposed in a coup led by the “Young Turks”, Arabs were still preferring to remain united with the Turks within the overall framework of a reformed Ottoman state in which Arabs would enjoy considerable cultural autonomy. Those who aspired for total independence were still the minority but the content of the media was clearly nationalist.142

It can be argued that nascent Arab national consciousness was based primarily on language and culture to define Arab identity vis-à-vis Ottomans. This is what we can call ‘Arabness/Arabism.’ The majority was still hoping for special status for Arabs within the Ottoman Empire and the umbrella of Islam. However, the factor of religion was employed after the secular chauvinist trend of Young Turkish became apparent. The pretext was that Turkish spoiled Islam and only Arabs could bring Islam to its previous high status. Independence was presented as a preliminary step to restore the golden days of Arabs and, consequently, Islam. Turkish became the Arabs’ ‘Other.’

140 The first private Arabic newspaper was introduced by a Syrian Christian, Rizqallah Hasun, as a result of the Ottoman entry into the Crimean War. Early pioneers of the Arab press include Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq, who launched one of the most influential Arabic papers of his time, Butrus al-Bustani, who also served as secretary of the Syrian Scientific Society, and Nasif al-Yazji.
b. Colonialism and the Expansion of Arab Public Sphere

The Arabs fought with the West (Great Britain and the allies) against the Ottoman Empire in World War I. They asked for and were promised independence. However, the result of the war was the first chapter in the history of tense relations between the Arabs and the West for years to come. These friction left deep imprints on the construction of Arab identity. Three agreements marked the beginning of this tensioned history: the Sykes/Picot agreement of 1916,143 the Balfour declaration of 1917,144 and the San Remo agreement of 1920.145 These actions not only put an end to the hope of the Arabs for independence, but also ended their confidence in the West.146 Independence was, again, the primary concern of Arab nationalists and colonialism became the Arabs’ ‘Other.’

143 Named after Sir Mark Sykes of Britain and François Georges-Picot of France, the Sykes/Picot agreement was a secret agreement concluded during World War I between Great Britain and France. The agreement led to the division of Turkish-held Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine into various French- and British-administered areas. According to the agreement, France would acquire Lebanon and the Syrian provinces, as well as Adana, Cilicia, and Mosul. Great Britain would acquire southern Mesopotamia, including Baghdad, in addition to the Mediterranean ports of Haifa. Because of its holy places, it was agreed that Palestine would be under an international regime. This secret arrangement contradicted the pledges already given by the British to the Sharif of Mecca, who was about to bring the Arabs of the Hijaz into revolt against the Turks on the understanding that the Arabs would eventually receive a much more important share of the fruits of victory. “Sykes-Picot Agreement.” Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2010. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. 04 May (available at: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/577523/Sykes-Picot-Agreement. Retrieved: 05/04/2010).

144 The Balfour Declaration was a statement issued by the British government in 1917 in the form of a letter from the Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to the leader of the British Jewish community Baron Rothschild. It is regarded as the first significant declaration by a world power in favor of a Jewish “national home” in Palestine. Balfour Declaration 1917. Knowledgerush (available at: http://www.knowledgerush.com/kr/encyclopedia/Balfour_Declaration_1917/. Retrieved: 05/04/2010).

145 This was an international meeting convened at San Remo in Italy to decide on the future of the former territories of the Ottoman Turkish Empire, one of the defeated Central Powers in World War I. The meeting was attended by the prime ministers of Great Britain, France, and Italy, in addition to representatives from Japan, Greece, and Belgium. The conference approved the final framework of a peace treaty with Turkey. It abolished the Ottoman Empire and obliged Turkey to renounce all rights over Arab Asia and North Africa. During the conference, two “A” mandates were created out of the old Ottoman province of Syria: the northern half (Syria and Lebanon) was mandated to France, the southern half (Palestine) to Great Britain. The province of Mesopotamia (Iraq) was also mandated to Great Britain. Under the terms of an “A” mandate the individual countries were deemed independent but subject to a mandatory power until they reached political maturity. When King Faysal of Damascus opposed the French mandate over Syria, he was expelled by the French army. “Conference of San Remo.” Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2010. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online (available at: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/521598/Conference-of-San-Remo>. Retrieved: 05/04/2010).

European colonialism has left long lasting imprints on the patterns of governance in the region and, indirectly, on the Arab public sphere. The centralization of government administration, the set of the region’s new map, the formation of police forces and local armies, and the creation of new bureaucracies contributed to the standardizations of rules and regulations governing numerous aspects of life in a way that harmonized local societies. However, other colonial policies favored fragmentation. This was well known through the “divide and rule” strategy that promoted ethnic and tribal divisions and granted preferential treatment to some groups over the others to divide any potential opposition. As Roger Owen notes,

The colonial state engendered a new type of political practice… by providing a fresh focus for political struggle… (It) gave birth to the familiar dialectic which imperial rulers are forced to generate the nationalist forces that will eventually drive them out… The colonial powers provided both a sufficient challenge and sufficient opportunity for a local political movement to develop, until such time that it was easier to give way to it than to try to resist it forever.

Again, media, represented in the press, played a vital role in developing the nationalist sentiments among Arabs under colonialism. As a result, the colonial period witnessed an expansion of the public sphere. The interwar period was also a period of relatively greater autonomy for the press. In addition, this period witnessed the

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147 For instance, the French institutionalized Maronite political control in Lebanon and officially recognized distinction between Arab and Berber population in territories like Morocco. The British followed similar policies in Jordan, where local security forces were drawn almost entirely from the more conservative Bedouin tribes. In Egypt, alliances were made between the colonial power and the new large-landowning classes and tribal sheikhs. For this, see Roger Owen. 1992. *State, Power, and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*. NY: Routledge, pp.10-18.

148 Ibid., pp. 22-23.

149 Ayalon, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-124. National newspapers began to appear in the region in the nineteenth century. Among the most prominent of these newspapers was the Egyptian *al-Ahram*. Media propaganda in the form of radio broadcast was introduced in the region during WWII by both the Allied and Axis countries. BBC Arabic service, the Voice of America, Radio Moscow began in a later stage. For this, see Hugh Miles. 2005. *Al-Jazeera: How Arab TV News Challenged the World*. London: Abacus, p. 24.
flourishing of writing about the distinctive characters of Arabs and the need for them to be united in one nation. These ideas were well expressed in the writings of Sati‘ al-Husari. According to al-Husari, sharing a common history and a common language is what makes Arabs one nation and that they would, ultimately, aspire for unifying their separate states into one homeland.¹⁵⁰

However, the one issue that can be pointed to as the spark of Arab public sphere was that of Palestine and the danger of Jewish immigration. Arabs of various loyalties and perspectives agreed on the need to resist the demographic changes that were under way in Palestine at that time.¹⁵¹ Their defeat in 1948 represented a defining mark in their modern identity. As described by Tareq Ismael, the defeat was

so traumatic to the Arab masses . . . that it fostered a transformation of Arab nationalism from the glories of the past to the failures – particularly the failure in Palestine – of the present . . . Palestine symbolized the failure of Arab nationalism to meet the supreme challenge: the challenge of national survival. Liberal Arab nationalism had fed of the euphoria of Arab heritage; such euphoria appeared bankrupt indeed in the reality of Arab ineptitude in Palestine. Thus, a profound reappraisal of Arab society had ensued. Every aspect of Arab society has come under fire - social, political, economic, and religious. Under the threat of extinction as symbolized by Palestine, Arab nationalism has reasserted itself, not in the glorification of the past but in the reform of the present.¹⁵²

c. Independence and the Contraction of Arab Public Sphere

The post independence period was a period of massive expansion in the power of the state in all aspects of life. This has left profound imprints on the structure and function of the media and the Arab public sphere. It was a mobilization period with every possible

¹⁵¹ Dawisha, op. cit., p. 107.
means, where the expansion of the role of state led to the contraction of the incipient regional public sphere. This is due to the fact that media has become the state’s main institution in mobilizing popular support of the policies of the single party state. Consequently, political parties and their newspapers were abolished. It became a top-down model of communication in which unity (state’s unity) under the banner of nationalism became the predominant social value. Sooner, however, came the power of the media to pursue a political agenda and mobilization on the regional level realized. This was the role played by the Egyptian Nasserite Sawt al-Arab (Voice of the Arab) radio station that had the most influence, and which is always regarded as having sown the seeds of pan-Arab media. Launched in 1953, Sawt al-Arab was “a distinctive kind of adversarial, competitive political argument that crossed national borders.”

d. Nasser’s Sawt al-Arab (Voice of the Arabs)

Radio was mainly used to communicate governments’ policy to the people for mobilization purposes. However, its transnational character was soon to be appreciated by state officials. Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian President, often used radio to attack his political rivals abroad and influence their foreign policies by directly appealing to their populations. Egypt’s Sawt al-Arab broadcast became a useful vehicle which Nasser employed as an instrument of Egyptian foreign policy.

Sawt al-Arab was Nasser’s main means to get his message heard across the region. Thanks to him, the idea that Arab cooperation and unity were needed for defense against the Western powers, as well as for the benefit of other Arabs, was implanted into

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153 Owen, op. cit., p. 32.
154 Lynch, Voices of the New Arab, op. cit., p. 22.
people’s mind. In this manner, Nasser’s media fostered a regional public sphere that perceives identity, not just a cultural one, but an ability to influence other countries. This was the real crystallization of the idea of Arab nationalism. In the 1950s and 1960s, the station was used to serve the strategic interests of the Egyptian regime by directly speaking to the Arab masses to mobilize them. The aim was to put rival regimes under increasing pressures from below to challenge their legitimacy.

According to some scholars, the choice for adopting an Arab identity was a tactical movement by Nasser. The “Voice of the Arabs” started its radio transmission to the Arab world in July 1953. The timing itself is significant. Less than two months earlier, Nasser rejected the idea of a Western alliance proposed to him by John Foster Dulles, the American Secretary of State at that time. Aware that the US would seek the cooperation of more flexible Arab countries, Nasser had to stop that movement. The radio station became Nasser’s main vehicle in propagating his views, which, on many occasions, differed sharply with the views of other Arab leaders. Socialism was another characteristic of Nasser’s pan-Arabism through land reforms and nationalization. This is why he was in clash with conservative regimes whose economies were tied to the capitalist system of the West.

It was at this a moment that a clear ‘Other’ for the Arabs was born, that is, imperialism and its local collaborators. It was this specification that led to the main

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156 Perhaps the best example of the success of Nasser’s propaganda was the campaign against the Baghdad Pact. Neither Iraq nor Jordan was able to stop the tide of internal unrest caused by Sawt al Arab’s severe propaganda campaign on pro-Western leaders who either signed the Baghdad Pact or were considering doing so. For more details, see Kramer, op. cit., p. 167.
157 Ibid., p. 193.
158 Dawisha, op. cit., p. 147.
159 By the 1960s, imperialism had become less relevant; therefore, Arab nationalist fury was turned against Arab countries that Nasser regarded as ‘reactionary.’ Dawisha, op.cit., p. 285.
division between Arabs at that time: unionists and sovereigntists. The former stressed the
idea of Arabs being unified in one sovereign Arab state that share oil wealth and offers
equal treatment of citizens and immigrants. The latter, however, stressed solidarity and
support for other fellow Arabs without compromising their sovereignty or sharing their
wealth with other Arabs. In other words, while the former defined Arab identity in terms
of Arab nationalism/Pan-Arabism, the former perceived it as “Arabness/Arabism.” It is
noteworthy that Israel, although always present in the nationalist consciousness, had not
been the direct target of Arab political rhetoric.160 This is probably because it was seen as
a creation of imperialism itself.

e. Characteristics of Nasser’s Media

_Sawt al-Arab_ was an effective incendiary propaganda weapon. It made good use of the
semantic properties of the Arabic language to stir up the emotions of its target population,
mainly the youth across Arab countries.161 It was used to open, as well as deepen, the gap
between the people and their regimes, a gap that probably exists to this day.

The programs of the first year of the radio channel indicate much about its
orientation and ideological commitment.162 The main format of the radio channel
consisted of news, commentary, reviews of newsprint media, and sometimes speeches,
interviews and talks given by prominent figures, as well as songs performed by the

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160 This changed in the fall of 1963, when Israel approached the completion of its project to divert some
75% of the Jordan River for irrigation and industrial development inside Israel. Dawisha, _op. cit._, p. 243,
al-Najar, _op. cit._
161 Dawisha, _op. cit._, p. 165.
162 See appendix A.
country’s most famous singers, particularly Umm Kulthum. As the programs titles illustrate, the administrators of the channel perceived Arabs as one nation with a common struggle. Even the news reports were Arab-struggle oriented; it was not about world news but about Arab news in the world. The channel was obviously oriented towards promoting Arab unity as the true means by which to overcome foreign domination. Palestine also occupied a special status in the channel’s programs, among which were Palestine’s Word, Messages from Palestinians to their Relatives, the New Generation, and Palestine’s Youth. The combination of news and songs was meant to stir up emotions and build on popular support.

In his 1976 study of the elements of Egyptian foreign policy during Nasser, Added Dawisha specified four values that framed the Egyptian elites’ perception: anti-imperialism, Arabism, leadership and dignity. The formation of Sawt al-Arab programs shows how these values were at the heart of its broadcasting idiom and its overall ideological goals. To serve these goals, Sawt al-Arab used different techniques. One of these was damaging the reputations and legitimacy of other Arab leaders by associating them with Western imperialism and support of Israel. This served as a major justification for Egyptian interventionist policies. This was done by use of name-calling and bandwagoning. The first was a means to discredit other governments and their

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leaders by attaching political and personal labels to them, whereas the latter sought to appeal to people’s desires to conform with the majority and, thus, either making someone holding a minority view convert to the thinking of the majority or reinforcing someone’s agreement with majority sentiment.\textsuperscript{167}

This was a unity built upon a glorious history and subsequent suffering.\textsuperscript{168} It represented a unity of language and hope.\textsuperscript{169} These were the three main elements that were emphasized in the first phase of Arabism and circulated in the Arab public sphere. Then, these cultural factors were added to a political dimension: Arabs were to be united into one nation. This was the phase of Arab nationalism and the objectification of Arab identity. Although religion was sometimes used, it was not highly stressed in these two phases. It was the 1967 War that brought religion back to the center of the Arab identity.

\textbf{f. The 1967 Effect}

The shocking 1967 war damaged the Arabs’ trust in their media. When the war started, the military was updating the station with information on the number of Israeli planes

\textsuperscript{167} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 165 and 170-72.

\textsuperscript{168} History as a component of Arab nationalism is not only questioned by Westerners but by Arab scholars as well. Muhammad Izzat Hejazzi says that the historical experience of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait with imperialism is not necessarily similar to that of Egypt. As for heritage as a unifying factor, Hejazzi does not believe that the Saudi heritage to be identical with either the Yemini or the Syrian. For more details, see Ellie Chalala, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 35-36.

\textsuperscript{169} The Arabic language, which in al-Husri’s thought was the most important component of Arab nationalism, is also contested. Carl Leiden is one critic of the emphasis that al-Husri placed on language. “The most obvious common feature in the Arab world is its language,” he argues, adding that “it is also fair to say not all Arabs speak precisely the same Arabic and, like fragments of the English-speaking world, they do not always teach each others’ quarrels to heart merely because of the language.” Richard Plaff is also skeptical of the role of the Arabic language. He writes that “the division of Arabic language between the classical form used in writing and the many colloquial variations used in daily speech adds a further complication for the Arab nationalist. With less than twenty percent of the total population within the Arab world capable of reading classical Arabic, or even ‘journalistic’ Arabic, the language is a limited tool for spreading the message of nationalism through the printed word.” Some Arab scholars are also reexamining the unifying role of language. Hejazzi questions the Arabic language as a common characteristic of all the Arabs, pointing out that classical Arabic is only confined to formal settings like symposiums. Chalala, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 36.
shot down and other “victories” of the Arab military. Such claims turned out to be untrue.

As Laura James puts it,

While the Egyptian air force lay in ruins on its runways, and Arab armies retreated on every front, The Voice of the Arabs clung to the fantasy world it had created so painstakingly over fourteen years. It continued to boast of great victories even after Western media had made the scale of the disaster — Israel rapidly took the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Golan Heights — quite apparent. Its credibility would never recover.\textsuperscript{170}

Nevertheless, it was a good opportunity for the Arab states to regain total control over their media sphere after Nasser’s regime and his station were greatly damaged. For this reason, the 1970s and 1980s witnessed a comeback of the Arab state’s power over their national and [particularly in the case of Saudi Arabia] the transnational publics.\textsuperscript{171} Saudi Arabia was one of the Arab countries that suffered the most from Nasser’s propaganda. The period following the 1967 war witnessed the rise of Saudi media ownership of regional newspapers aiming at providing a regional outlook that is more consistent with that of the Saudi regime. At that time, the Lebanese civil war prompted a growing number of Lebanese journalists and newspapers to relocate outside the region. Thus, an alliance between Lebanese professionalism and Saudi money was formed.\textsuperscript{172} At this point, newspapers like \textit{al-Sharq al-Awsat}, \textit{al-Hayat} and \textit{al-Quds al-Arabi} (re)appeared and focused on issues that are of interest to Arab readers and served as an outlet for the different opinions in the region.\textsuperscript{173}


\textsuperscript{171} Miles, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 24.

The 1967 War had long-lasting ramifications for the idea of pan-Arabism. Arab nationalists, Nasser among them, had to lower their demands from Arab unity (the fusion of all Arabs in one state) to Arab solidarity (the unity of effort and purpose among sovereign Arab states).\textsuperscript{174} Secondly, while the defeat prompted the idea of allegiance to individual state, it simultaneously opened a gate to talking about loyalty to the \textit{umma} (Islamic community). Religion, Islam in specific, made a strong come back after the failure of the secular-oriented Arab nationalism. It was argued that Muslims constituted a universal political community that stands above any narrower political authority.\textsuperscript{175}

Thus, certain issues have always played an important role in the formation of this identity: colonialism (later relations with the West), Arab cooperation (inter-Arab interactions), Arab unity (defining who is included and who is excluded), and the Palestinian issue (which became a defining character of its own as a result of colonialism). It is particularly these elements and topics that we are going to look for in analyzing the content of the two channels.

\textsuperscript{174} Dawisha, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 246.
\textsuperscript{175} Kramer, \textit{op. cit.}
Chapter Two

A Tale of Two Channels

In chapter one, the development of Arab media sphere and its relationship to the expansion and contraction of the Arab public sphere was discussed. It was argued that Arab identity was a function of the issues discussed and debated in the Arab public sphere. I also showed how the events of September 11, 2001, led Western media to portray an ‘other.’ Arabs and Muslims were presented as the Western “other.” However, Arabs’ and Muslims’ media sphere has been subject to many developments and challenged Western media hegemony.

This chapter deals with the last episode in the development of Arab media, and consequently Arab public sphere. This development refers to the satellite age where Arab satellite channels mushroomed and affected, and were probably affected by, the way the Arabs perceived themselves. This discussion helps in determining the element(s) stressed in identifying Arabs and whether this element(s) was subject to change or continued to be the main marker of Arab identity. It also furthers our understanding of the role media plays in the expansion or the contraction of the public sphere and consequently the definition of the identity it promotes. In this sense, the story of the Arab public sphere is very much related to the story of the Arab identity; therefore, the study of the former is useful in understanding the latter, as well as explaining how development in the communication and media spheres has affected international relations and the conduct of foreign policy. This is particularly the case with public diplomacy which seems to face strong challenges in accomplishing its goals.
This chapter begins with discussing the changes that affected media sphere in the Arab world due to the introduction of satellite technology. A special focus is devoted to emergence of *al-Jazeera* and the circumstances that preceded and followed its appearance in the Arab media sphere. The relationship between the state in the Arab world and the media (as an example of non-state actor) will be discussed with a special focus on the relationship between Qatar and *al-Jazeera*. The discussion is then related to the circumstances that accompanied the emergence of *al-Hurra* and the reasons the station is having difficulty establishing itself in the region. The second part of the chapter provides a content analysis of two of the programs in both stations. The goal is to examine how issues that received high coverage in each of the channels sheds light on the agenda of each them and, consequently, the perception of identity that both promote.

Investigating the theoretical and the actual context of the relationship between media messages and international relations reveals the importance of new sources of power in world politics as well as the relevance of non-state actors in this development. It also sheds light on the increasing influence of identity perception on getting media messages through and, thus, on the policies of a state to be fulfilled as planned. It also shows the difficulties in conveying and establishing the messages of public diplomacy in an unwelcoming environment and a hostile public opinion to a certain perception of identity.

1. Entering the Age of Satellite Channels

The Arab World knew satellite technology when the Arabsat satellite was launched in 1985. This technology was used for years only for transmitting Arab newspapers edited
outside the region – such as *al-Sharq al-Awsat* and *al-Hayat* – to Arab capitals for printing. The 1991 Gulf War was an event that caught the attention of the Arab governments to the potential of such a new technology. It also uncovered the ill performance of national media to the Arab public. It was particularly the war coverage of the CNN that played the pivotal role with regard to these aspects.\(^{176}\) As a result, the Arab states embarked on improving their national televisions by allowing some limited debates about domestic issues without intending to promote democratization.\(^{177}\) Most importantly was the launching of many satellite channels. However, as Miles argued,

> The output was still blatantly self-serving, usually with a heavy political bias. It steered clear of controversy and avoided anything that mixed religion and politics . . . The fact that some of these new satellite channels were based in Europe, out of reach of their own countries’ censorship laws, did not mean that they offered a higher quality of commentary.\(^{178}\)

This spread of media outlets in the Arab World does not necessarily mean editorial or political freedom. On the one hand, these new channels “focused on entertainment and offered no real political transformation,” argues Lynch.\(^{179}\) On the other hand, as Naomi Sakr has demonstrated, when it comes to the Arab World, media ownership and power relations matters more than the location of the channel.\(^{180}\) Looking at who is behind the media is instructive in this sense. For example, the London-based Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC) is owned by Sheikh Walid al-Ibrahim, a brother-in-law of Saudi Arabia’s late King Fahd who was believed to have paid a large portion of MBC’s costs. The Egyptian Satellite Channel (ESC), broadcasting from Cairo, is part of an

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\(^{177}\) Lynch, *op. cit.*, p. 38.


\(^{179}\) Lynch, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

enormous state-run monopoly, the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU). Emirates Dubai Television (EDTV), broadcasting out of the United Arab Emirates, is state-owned. As for the Lebanese networks, Future TV is partly owned by the late Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, while the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) is controlled by a board dominated by ministers and officials close to the Syrian government.181

a. The Stone that Stirred the Stagnant Water

Among all the channels that appeared during the 1990s, no TV channel has raised as much debate as that caused by the rise of the Qatari channel al-Jazeera. This news-channel was launched in November 1996 and funded by Qatar’s Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani. It was a part of his plan to introduce democratization or a democratic face to his rule. The Emir, who overthrew his father in a white coup in 1995, wanted al-Jazeera to be an independent and nonpartisan satellite network.182

Al-Jazeera greatly benefited from the aborted contract between Rome-Based, Saudi-owned Orbit Radio and Television Service and the Arabic TV division of BBC News Service that took place in April 1996.183 The disagreement happened over

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182 Nawawy and Iskander, op. cit., p. 33. The Emir offered an initial fund of $140 million to launch al-Jazeera and subsidized it over a five-year period through November 2001, after which the network was supposed to become financially self-sufficient from advertising revenues. However, this transition has not happened yet. For more information on the establishment of al-Jazeera, see Miles, op. cit., pp. 28-29, and also, Nawawy and Iskander, op. cit., p. 34.
183 In the early 1990s, a Saudi prince and a cousin of the late king of Saudi Arabia, King Fahd, set up a satellite television company called Orbit. To have access to European technicians and talent and avoid the kind of government interference that might arise if it were based in an Arab country, the prince decided to establish Orbit in Rome. In addition to offering nineteen television channels to paying subscription, the company approached the BBC to supply an Arabic version of the BBC World Service news. For a long time, the World Service had been available in the Middle East in English, but this was to be the first time that a television news channel of this sort be available in Arabic. However, the contract only lasted for twenty months. For this, see Miles, op. cit., pp. 30-32.
arguments about the editorial independence of the BBC after the broadcast of a special documentary about executions in Saudi Arabia.\footnote{Nawawy and Iskander, op. cit., p. 31.} Seeking the establishment of similar kind of service, Qatar immediately offered the Arabic-speaking staff of the BBC positions in the new channel.

From the first moments of its broadcasting, \textit{al-Jazeera} won a reputation as being revolutionary and provocative.\footnote{It is worth noting that the first year of \textit{al-Jazeera}’s broadcast went almost unnoticed. This is particularly due to the poor or no reception, of the channel in much of the Arab world since it was not broadcasted from a C-band transponder (Miles, op. cit., p. 35).} Under the motto of “the opinion and other opinion”, it fostered debates about political, religious and social topics that used to be taboo in Arab societies. This has caused much tension between Qatar and the rest of the Arab regimes. \textit{Al-Jazeera}’s bureaus have been periodically shut down by Arab governments angered by its coverage.\footnote{It is said when the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak visited Qatar in 1998, he asked to visit \textit{al-Jazeera}. When he toured the channel’s headquarter in Qatar, he said: “All this trouble from a matchbox like this” (quote in Nawawy and Iskander, op. cit., p. 33).} Arab regimes tried to pressure Qatar and \textit{al-Jazeera} to comply with the “non-stated” code of conduct. For example, in December 1998 the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU) decided to include private Arab radio and television broadcasting institutions to it. Theoretically, this was a step to free the Arab media sphere from government control. All the private Arab radio and TV stations were invited to be members of ASBU. \textit{Al-Jazeera}, however, was banned. The reason was that all members had to be committed to Arab media principles and to show respect to the Arab League Charter.\footnote{Miles, op. cit., p. 47.}

Not only was \textit{al-Jazeera}’s content debatable, but also its objectives and the role it played in “reviving” pan-Arab identity. Khalil Rinnawi has coined the term “McArabism” in reference to the nationalist pan-Arab content that is received by Arab
citizens throughout the region via transnational media, especially al-Jazeera. In this sense, it is a “revived” imagined community or, to use another term from Benedict Andersons, a “re-imagination” of Arab identity that is different from the pan-Arab movement of the 1960s. In Rinnawi’s view, the regional access to this nationalist discourse resembles getting the same Big Mac at any McDonald’s outlet. But when the television is turned-off, Arab citizens return to their respective local lives and realities, where their interests are likely to differ from those portrayed in transnational media.\(^{188}\) However, the demonstrations that broke out all over the Arab World because of al-Jazeera’s coverage of events in Palestine, for example, questions Rinnawi’s last claim. Demonstrations indicate that what has been seen on TV was not forgotten. This pan-Arab tendency was particularly seen in the station’s coverage of the second Palestinian uprising (al-Aqsa Intifada). This was regarded by many Westerners as lacking objectivity. They considered al-Jazeera’s practice of referring to Palestinian suicide-bombers as “martyrs” as being biased toward the Palestinian cause.\(^{189}\)

The comparison between al-Jazeera and Sawt al-Arab was inevitable for many scholars in the region and those outside it when it comes to its pan-Arab tendency. Both were seen to be the defining media outlet of its era but with some differences.\(^{190}\) While Nasser’s Sawt al-Arab was supported by a state in the place of Arab leadership, al-Jazeera, as Lynch argues,

was hosted by Qatar, a small state with no aspirations to Arab leadership. Where the Arab radio wars of the 1950s suggest an international public sphere dominated by states, power, and strategic action, the satellite television of the late 1990s more resembled a public sphere of individuals engaged in open-ended arguments before an imagined (and real) audience

\[^{188}\] Rinnawi, op. cit., p. 35.
\[^{189}\] Nawawy and Iskander, op. cit., p. 52.
\[^{190}\] Miles, op. cit., p. 24.
of Arabs and Muslims spread across the globe. The new media is commercial, driven more by market share than by ideology. The effect was to create a transnational media that defines issues as Arab ones which demand Arab solutions. Satellite stations such as al-Jazeera wield power very differently from Voice of the Arabs. Where the latter mobilized the masses through fiery speeches, al-Jazeera rose to prominence by giving voice to public opinion rather than directly attempting to mobilize or lead it.\footnote{Lynch, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 36-37.}

It can be argued, however, that \textit{al-Jazeera} is similar to \textit{Sawt al-Arab} in its promotion of Arabness\footnote{Seib. \textit{Al Jazeera Effect, op. cit.}, p. 21.} and in its de-legitimatization of other Arab regimes. However, while \textit{Sawt al-Arab} was a tool in the hand of a powerful state, \textit{al-Jazeera} can be considered a tool empowering the Qatari state. This is an example of the changing nature of power as well as the relationship between the state and non-state actors. The fame and influence that \textit{al-Jazeera} has gained is disproportionate to Qatar’s regional weight in a way that indicates that it is actually \textit{al-Jazeera} that is empowering the Qatari state.\footnote{Nawawy and Iskander, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 32.}

Qatar’s \textit{al-Jazeera} could be understood with reference to two main political sensitivities, the first of which pertains to Qatar’s desire to challenge the Saudi hegemony over Arab Gulf countries. On the other hand, Qatar’s relationship with Bahrain and Iran affected its regional policy. A large part of Qatar’s huge natural gas fields lies offshore within the disputed border zones with Bahrain and extending to the heart of the Arab Gulf to the maritime borders with Iran. This situation persuaded Qatar to adopt a non-confrontational approach with regards to Iran in order to guarantee the smooth exploitation of gas even during times of tension between Iran and its neighbors or the US.\footnote{Olivier Da Lage. 2005. “The Politics of Al Jazeera or the Diplomacy of Doha,” in Mohamed Zayani} Despite its actual size, military power and economic strength, Qatar has managed
to gain an increasing regional and international prominence, thanks to *al-Jazeera*’s credibility. As Mohamed Zayani has argued,

*Al Jazeera* also fits in with Qatar’s attempt to play an active role in regional politics and to achieve regional influence. Thanks to satellite technology, transnational television flow has given this small country some influence. Qatar is trying to extend its regional influence and to have an impact. As satellite media is becoming more and more pervasive, major Arab countries cannot effectively dominate smaller ones.195

**b. The Tiny Network with a Big Mouth**

As discussed earlier, *al-Jazeera* appeared when the grip of the nation-state’s ideology was being loosened and the international context was more acceptable to transnational identities. *Al-Jazeera* capitalizes on these transnational sentiments in gaining legitimacy. Mohammed el-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar have argued that what binds the Arabs together is a sense of “joint destiny.”196 This characteristic, beside the natural tendency in the region to be interested in national, regional and international news, makes it easy for a media outlet that claims to be presenting an Arab perspective on the events to attract plenty of audiences. *Al-Jazeera* has successfully managed to project its identity as an Arab station transcending its host country.197 Its sense of Arabness has also transcended the region and offered Arabs outside the region a new means to reconnect with their home countries and care about Arab issues in general.198

As the most important political preoccupation for Arabs, the Palestinian issue, as Zayani has argued, “has been and continues to be in the minds of practically all Arabs as

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196 Nawawy and Iskandar, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
a cause, a symbol and a reality.” Al-Jazeera’s coverage has successfully capitalized on the Palestinian question. It was the coverage of the al-Aqsa Intifada that gave al-Jazeera its pan-Arab credentials and won it fame and credibility throughout the region. The channel’s clip of the Palestinian boy Muhammad al-Dura who was shot dead behind his father became the emblem of the Intifada and galvanized the Arab public opinion.

Preceding the American “war on terrorism,” al-Jazeera’s coverage of the Intifada affected Arab public opinion with regard to the US. The US perceived bias to Israel promoted anger towards its policy on this conflict.

Al-Jazeera also changed the face of the media sphere in the Arab World. It broadcasts major events live from the scene, something that other Arab media did not do. Although it is only one among many satellite channels in the region, it is one of the few stations that broadcast from the region and wholly depends on Arabs for its operation. As Miles noticed,

[g]uests were deliberately selected to be as controversial as possible and for the first time Israelis speaking Hebrew appeared on Arab television. This was a major departure from anything done before and was truly shocking for the Arab public. But what made al-Jazeera’s name in the Arab world first, long before it became famous in the West, was its talk shows...[where] the audience often plays an important role in the direction shows take and plenty of heckling is not uncommon.

As mentioned earlier, Saudi Arabia greatly suffered from Nasser’s propaganda. Therefore, after the 1967 War, it sought to control the Arab media sphere through a coalition with Lebanese professionals. Al-Jazeera put an end to this Saudi-Lebanese

200 Miles, op. cit., p. 73.
201 Bessaio, op. cit., p. 160.
203 Miles, op. cit., p. 37.
204 Ibid., p. 37.
hegemony over the regional media sphere. In this manner, it changed the structure of media relations of power and opened the door to other viewpoints.

Not only did al-Jazeera challenge regional hegemony, but it also ended Western media monopoly over the dissemination of information. The channel gained international reputation with the war on Afghanistan. Al-Jazeera played a leading role in the coverage of the US war on Afghanistan as it was the only channel on the scene when the war started. It presented live coverage of the aftermath of American air strikes and paid special attention to civilian casualties and reactions to the war worldwide. Broadcasting videotapes of Osama bin Laden was another reason for its initial success. In this way, al-Jazeera presented alternative news coverage, and counter framing of events. The role that it played in the war on Afghanistan was an example of information flow reversal: from the South/Orient to the North/Occident, in which the latter lost monopoly over the media. This tiny network with a big mouth, as Ed Bradely regards it, was able to succeed because it dealt with issues that were considered taboo and because of its alignment with the Arab public opinion in dealing with issues that are of most interest to them.

2. The September 11 Effect

The attacks of September 11, 2001, and “war on terrorism” that followed it up to the invasion of Iraq were conducted within certain context in both the Arab World and the

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206 The Taliban regime asked all stations to leave before the war started. The only station that was allowed to stay was al-Jazeera.
207 Zayani, op. cit., p. 31.
208 Quoted in Miles, op. cit., p. 94.
209 El Oifi, op. cit., p. 74.
US. This context greatly complicated the relationship between the two parties and affected the American public diplomacy efforts in the region. As a first reaction, President George W. Bush adopted a new agenda for the American foreign policy based on American unilateralism. He questioned multilateralism as constraining America’s supremacy and its right to protect itself. He also emphasized that the US had the right to act preemptively against potential threats, and that the US should use its power to produce regime change in “rogue states.” Referring to his “war on terrorism” as a “crusade” was inflammatory to the Arab and Muslim World despite later attempts by the White House to rid this term from any religious connotation. It was as an example of the importance of words and cultural understanding.

Bush’s characterization of the war as a crusade and his pronouncement that every country had to choose between being with or against the US helped revive the notion of the clash of civilizations. As Zaharana argues, such a statement “reinforced an unstated cultural dividing line between Americans [the “us”, the good guys], on the one hand, and Arabs and Muslims [the “other”, bad guys], on the other hand.” The media played a major role in this regard as the coverage of the Muslim world and reports on the threat of radical Islam became common theme in the news. On one hand, media owners’ bias and journalists’ unfamiliarity with Muslim cultures further distort the agenda when it comes to covering the Muslim world. On the other hand, the talk that the military campaign

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212 Zaharana, op. cit., p. 189.
against Afghanistan might be followed by Iraq and other Islamic countries gave Muslims the impression that this was a war against Islam and all Muslims.\footnote{Nawawy and Iskander, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 109.}

Within this tense environment, the US started a military campaign on October 7, 2002, under the label of “Operation Enduring Freedom” to retaliate against the New York City and Washington attacks. It struck al-Qaeda targets in Afghanistan and managed in bringing down the Taliban regime which was accused of providing al-Qaeda with a safe haven. The coverage of the war attracted American attention to the effects of media warfare and how technological advancements have deprived the US from its ability to control media messages and images. This was specifically the case with the coverage provided by \textit{al-Jazeera}. As Ahrari has argued, while news coverage in the US reported events from a Western perspective, \textit{al-Jazeera} provided coverage of the war to Islamic audiences, i.e., from a non-Western perspective.\footnote{E. Ahrari. 2001. ‘Al Jazeera’s Unwitting Role in the ‘Unrestricted’ Afghan War.’ \textit{Center for Defense Information} (available at: http://www.cdi.org/program/issue/document.cmf?DocumentID=1418&IssueID=57&StartRow=31&ListRows=10&appendURL=&OrderBy+DateLastUpdate&ProgramID=39&issueID=57. Retrieved: 02/17/07).} \textit{Al-Jazeera} focused mainly on the impact of the war on the ordinary people and the inability of Muslim countries to have any influence on the events.

As mentioned earlier, \textit{al-Jazeera} was the only news channel that was allowed to remain in Afghanistan before the war started. This gave it exclusive coverage of the war. Its footage of young children with blown up heads and their mothers wailing and lamenting them, or of elderly people lying helpless in hospital or in front of their destructed homes, was devastating for viewers in the Muslim World.\footnote{Nawawy and Iskander, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 161.} The US was infuriated by \textit{al-Jazeera}’s coverage as it felt that it was jeopardizing the coalition that has
been formed and swaying the Arab and world public opinion from supporting the war.\textsuperscript{217}
The US and Western media found themselves for the first time losing the “on-air supremacy.” Ihab Bessaiso has mentioned the following example of how \textit{al-Jazeera} challenged the American story on the war:

\begin{quote}
[O]n October 6, 2001, Allouni [a correspondent of al-Jazeera in Afghanistan during the war] reported the destruction of two US fighter planes by Taliban forces (one was a reconnaissance aircraft and the other was an Apache helicopter). He went to the site where the planes where shot down in Gezon, filmed the ruins of the planes and filed the footage with his report. In the meantime, the Pentagon admitted the downing of one plane but not two. However, Allouni’s report was hard to ignore as it was backed up with visual evidence. The disparity between Al Jazeera’s version of the story and the US official version may provide an explanation for why Al Jazeera was demonized and why the American networks were urged to exercise self-censorship.\textsuperscript{218}
\end{quote}

Frustrated by losing the propaganda war, the US secretary of State Colin Powell complained to the Emir of Qatar and asked him to tone down \textit{al-Jazeera}’s coverage. The American official claimed that the channel was spreading anti-Americanism and giving too much time to the Taliban and bin Laden’s perspective on the war.\textsuperscript{219} For example, one of the most heart-breaking videos was the story of an Afghani who had lost fifteen family members in the war and who was searching for their bodies in the rubble.\textsuperscript{220} It was this kind of images, argued Japerson and Kikha, which “angered the US government and military establishment and ultimately led to the ‘mistaken’ bombing of the Al-Jazeera offices in Kabul.”\textsuperscript{221}

\textsuperscript{217} Zayani, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{218} Bessaiso, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 165.
\textsuperscript{219} Ahrai, \textit{op. cit.}
\textsuperscript{220} Nawawy. ‘Freedom Fighter or Terrorist,” \textit{op. cit.}
This attempt to influence the editorial independence of *al-Jazeera* ruined the US image as supporter of freedom of the media and, consequently, raised further doubts regarding its discourse on democracy. This impression was further supported by the fact that both American officials and press had been severely critical of *al-Jazeera*, despite their earlier praise of it before September 11, 2001.²²² As the British journalist Robert Fisk has described, *al-Jazeera* “is a phenomenon in the Arab world, a comparatively free bold initiative in journalism that was supported by the Americans—until it became rather too free.”²²³

What further demoralized the US “war on terrorism” was the status of al-Qaeda and Taliban detainees at Guantanamo Bay. The US refused to grant them the prisoners-of-war status and, instead, characterized them as “un-lawful combatants.” Corresponding with the shocking photos on how they were treated, public opinion in the Arab and Muslim Worlds, as well as in the rest of the world, was outraged. This reinforced the perception that the US was intentionally humiliating and oppressing Muslims and raised questions about the fairness of the war and frustration of the American unilateral approach.

This was the background against which the Iraqi war (2003) took place; a war in the heart of the Arab World and against the historical seat of the Islamic Caliphate. President Bush’s announcement that Iraq was the first phase of a military campaign to destroy the roots of terrorism further reinforced the belief among the Arabs and Muslims

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²²² Zayani, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-31. For example, the State Department spokesman Greg Sullivan claimed he watched al-Jazeera every day in his office, noting that “[w]e recognize it as a powerful voice with a wide viewership in the Arab world” (quoted in Miles, *op. cit.*, p.94). Thomas Friedman described *al-Jazeera* as “beacon of freedom and the biggest media phenomenon to hit the Arab world” (quoted in Zayani, *op. cit.*, p. 21).

²²³ Quoted in Zayani, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
that it was a war against Islam.\textsuperscript{224} Once more, due to the new information environment, the US found itself unable to impose its power over the coverage of the war. The picture of the war as portrayed by pan-Arab media was completely different from that presented by the US. The former concentrated on the humanitarian suffering and civilian loss as a result of the occupation, whereas the latter portrayed the war as an act of bloodless popular liberation. With the increasing violence in Iraq, the US was even more furious by Arab media and, above all, \textit{al-Jazeera’s} coverage that portrayed these acts as acts of resistance.\textsuperscript{225}

The Iraqi issue had preoccupied the Arab public sphere for many years before the invasion. It was again the media (Arab media) that played the major role in keeping the issue alive. The constant discussion of the devastating impact of the sanctions on the Iraqi people had increasingly raised the anger of the public opinion. As Lynch points out,

\begin{quote}
Opposition to the invasion of Iraq merged with a general anger with American politics, as well as disgust with actors viewed as American proxies in the region—from Israel to the Iraqi opposition and Kuwait. The sympathy with the Iraqi people, embodied in the demand to lift the sanctions and opposition to military action against Iraq, emerged through a complex and sustained public argument in the new Arab public sphere. This new public prioritized questions of Arab identity, searching to define Arabness in new ways and to challenge the stagnant and repressive status quo.\textsuperscript{226}
\end{quote}

\textbf{3. \textit{Al-Hurra}: Is It in the Right Place at the Right Time?}

Convinced by the importance of the “war of ideas,” the US decided it had to win over Arab hearts and minds to counter the country’s perception “as arrogant, impatient and

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\textsuperscript{224} Nawawy, \textit{op. cit.}\\
\textsuperscript{225} Lynch, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 5-6.\\
\textsuperscript{226} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 15.
\end{flushright}
unwilling to listen.” Defining the problem as one of image and information deficit, the US approached the region assuming that the image gap can be narrowed by careful explanation of the US good intentions. That is when the launch of the US biggest public diplomacy campaign towards the Middle East took place. It is worth noting that this public diplomacy campaign was actually emanating from the same thread of thinking over the “war on terrorism.” As Garfinkle explained, there are four main strategies in the war on terror. First, de-legitimizing the idea of murdering civilians for political causes. Second, refuting the misrepresentation of US policies and motivations that make Americans, and their allies, targets of hatred and violence. Third, identifying and stopping the flow of money and other resources to “terrorists.” Finally, implementing social, economic and political reform in Muslim countries and among Muslim communities outside the Middle East and South Asia where terrorist groups appear and flourish. Obviously, the first two strategies lie in the domain of public diplomacy and the “war of ideas.”

One pillar of this campaign, then, was the use of media in telling America’s point of view on events and correcting the misperceptions over US policies in the region. Therefore, the US launched *al-Hurra* (Arabic for “The Free One”) in February 14, 2003. This 24-hour TV channel is directed to 22 countries in the Arab World. When first launched, the channel’s broadcasting included cooking and fashion shows, entertainment, geographic and technological programs, documentaries, and news.

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229 The date chosen for launching the channel, which coincides with Valentine’s Day, was itself controversial. Celebrating Valentine’s Day is highly debatable in the Arab World from a religious point of view. This added to the conceptual problem tainted *al-Hurra* as being insensitive to the cultural and religious aspects of Arab societies.
However, news coverage in the station was notably different from others channels in the region. *Al-Hurra’s* coverage was relying heavily on statements by American officials and President Bush’s speeches were extensively covered.230

It was, however, a late realization of the importance of public opinion and was beset with problems from the beginning either on the conceptual, professional, or institutional levels. On the conceptual level, *al-Hurra* had a credibility problem. In this emotional-laden environment, as discussed earlier, a channel funded by the US Congress to approach the Arab people would be perceived as utter propaganda. This was reinforced by the very attempt to market the channel. *Al-Hurra’s* motto is “*Nada‘u al-niqat ‘ala al-huruf*” (Putting the Dots over the Letters). As Jihad Fakhreddine has argued,

For an Arab, putting the dots on the letters is more than a matter of fine tuning or punctuating a text. It is setting the agenda. It is dictating the sender’s opinion; the receiver of the message has no say whatsoever… Needless to say that such communication may please Al Hurra’s supporters in the Washington, but less likely to impress its target audience, it is less that any audiences would appreciate being told bluntly that a media sets, or worse, dictates the agenda. Arab audiences are migrating from their state-owned media which have been setting the agenda for decades. And even if we assume that the US agenda is all for the democratic good of the Arab world, it may be more advisable for Al Hurra to keep a low key in way it intends to send its messages.231

Moreover, *al-Hurra* was a relatively late comer to the Arab media sphere. Pan-Arab satellite channels, especially *al-Jazeera*, have been well established as the “go to” source of information. Additionally, Arab media coverage of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the US policy towards the Palestinians cast doubt on the values that the

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US claimed to be bringing to the region. The basic values to which the US publicly claimed to be committed to (democracy, tolerance, equality, freedom and the rule of law) were deemed inconsistent with US policies in the region. US policies were perceived to be promoting dictatorship, intolerance, inequality, oppression and rule by violence and military power. The public diplomacy campaign was thus perceived as an act of hypocrisy.232

This conceptual problem was, to a great extent, fed by the coverage of al-Hurra. For example, when discussing the Abu Gharib scandal, al-Hurra hosted commentators supporting the US government and completely ignored the critics of the administration even within the American circles.233 Also, al-Hurra was broadcasting a cooking show when Israel assassinated Sheikh Ahmad Yassin (the founding father of the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Group ‘Hamas’). As Ann Marie Baylouny described it, “in contrast to all the Arab television stations, Alhurra remained in the kitchen.”234 Examples like these were sufficient to taint the channel’s credibility and objectivity in the region. Moreover, the language used in al-Hurra fueled these conceptions. For example, the common greeting in Arab societies as well as most Arab channels is the Islamic greeting of al-sallamu ‘alaykum (peace be upon you). In al-Hurra, ‘welcome back’ is used instead. This greeting itself, as Baylouny notes, confirms perceptions that the United States is against the region’s religion.235


234 Baylouny, op. cit. According to Baylouny, the director of the station admitted later that this was a mistake.

235 Ibid.
The conceptual problem is also related to how the directors of *al-Hurra* perceive the station’s role. In his testimony in the House of Representative, Mouafac Harb, former director of *al-Hurra*, claimed that:

Alhurra introduces to the region ideas of truth and freedom and democracy never before discussed. Alhurra brings to the vast region of the Middle East unprecedented town hall meetings, talk shows, and debates. We are not afraid to present opposing sides. We win merely by providing the forum for conversations about human rights and economics and the role of women in society. We have to continue to foster these conversations, these debates, until they become a part of the lives of the people of this region, until they become part of life in the Islamic world.236

Such a claim perceives the Arab media sphere as a resemblance to media sphere in Eastern Europe during the Cold War. This reveals how the whole conception of the role that *al-Hurra* could play, or how it would play it, was based on false assumptions. This could explain why the channel has, so far, failed to attract audience.

### a. *Al-Hurra’s* Professional Irregularities

On the professional level, Marc Lynch conducted a survey of Arab reactions to the station and confirmed that the station’s first broadcast was frustrating. Hosting President Bush as the first guest reminded the Arabs of their official television stations that would be sure to have the head of state as the first guest. This impression was enforced by the way the interviewer questioned President Bush, where difficult and embarrassing questions were avoided.237 Moreover, in the beginning the station relied heavily on pre-

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236 Statement of Mr. Mouafac Harb. Broadcasting Board of Governors and AlHurra Television. Hearing before the subcommittee on oversight and investigations of the committee on international relations, House of Representatives. First session, Nov. 10, 2005.
produced, Western, and sub-titled programs. In other words, *al-Hurra* came into air without sufficient preparation to be able to compete with other Arab satellite channels.

In addition to this performance, the station was also accused of professional irregularities. In 2005, the state department announced that *al-Hurra* would be investigated for possible irregularities related to the process of recruiting as well as a concern that viewing figures might be inflated. Observers expressed concerns that *al-Hurra*’s staff was predominately Lebanese, not reflecting thereby the pan-Arab outlook characterizing competitive Arab channels. According to William Rugh, Arab viewers of *al-Hurra* think that

> the tone and style of the broadcasts lack pan-Arab balance. They assume from the names and accents of the presenters that most of them are Lebanese Christians, and they wonder about the absence of broadcast professionals from the Gulf, for example. Arab viewers are always sensitive to identification of the individuals by nationality, tribe and religion, so this is an important factor in creating the *al Hurra* image.

Such a concern was refuted by Moufac Harb. In his testimony before the Committee of International Relation in the House of Representative, Harb explained how he had only six month to find a working team for the station. According to him,

> after September 11, it became so difficult to recruit people from the Middle East. It takes time to clear them, to get them visas to come to the United States, and to settle and train them on the advanced technology that Alhurra has deployed…There was a television channel in Lebanon that

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238 This problem was later addressed by increasing local programs in the type of town-hall debates, covering important events in the region. One of these programs is called *al-Yum* (Today).
was shut down by the Syrian occupation, and we found there was a nice
team there, so we decided to take them immediately. There were five or
six people. So the early batch of the people who joined Alhurra came from
Lebanon and created that perception. However, today it is a
misperception. As we went on, we found talents—producers and writers—
that come from all over the Middle East and the Arab world.242

As for viewers’ numbers, the issue was raised after the BGG released a survey
done by ACNielsen in October 2004 about the viewing rates for al-Hurra in the region.
According to the survey, weekly rates for al-Hurra among adults with satellite television
ranged from 12% in Egypt to 33% in Kuwait. The ACNielsen survey also noted that 75%
of viewers who watch al-Hurra rate its news as either very reliable or somewhat
reliable.243 Such a survey raised an endless amount of criticism. Firstly, Iraq and the
Palestinian territories were not included among the seven countries surveyed. Such
exclusion, according to some analysts, was not understandable as “these war zones
[should have been] on the front lines of the hearts-and-minds campaign.”244

Additionally, an al-Hurra press release said that an average of 75 percent of al-
Hurrah viewers find the station’s news reliable. This figure was, however, derived by
adding up the percentages from each survey country, then dividing by seven. According
to Elizabeth Eaves, “averaging country results, rather than population results, [the survey]
fails to give an accurate picture of Arab opinion.”245 More importantly, none of the
independent surveys conducted on the Arab viewers confirmed such results. For example,
in a survey conducted by Keith Urbahn, a blogger who worked in the Public Affairs
Office in the American Embassy in the UAE, Abu Dhabi TV and al-Jazeera were found

242 Statement of Harb, op. cit.
243 Jeremy Sharp, August 17, 2005. CRS Report for Congress. The Middle East Television Network: An
Overview.
244 Elizabeth Eaves (quoted in Mac Lynch. 2004). “Al Hurra’s Audience.” Abu Aardvark’s Blog (available
245 Ibid.
to be dominating the market while *al-Hurra* barely appears. His results were the following: 20% watched *al-Jazeera* regularly and 32% sometimes, and only 10% never; whereas 56% never watched *al-Hurra*, 9% watched it sometimes, and 2% watched it regularly. As for credibility, *al-Jazeera* scored 3.3 (on a scale where four was the highest point), whereas *al-Hurra*'s score was under 2.2, making it the least credible of all surveyed television stations.\(^{246}\)

*Al-Hurra*'s director, Muwafac Harb, resigned under the influence of these criticisms. He was succeeded by the CNN expert Larry Register in an attempt to rescue the project of *al-Hurra*. Register tried to pump new blood in the station’s programs and the topics that were being debated. Therefore, investigating violations of Arab governments were more frequent and the ban on giving airtime to what Washington considered terrorists was lifted. This, however, fueled a ruthless campaign against him and the station by conservative journalists and some members of Congress.\(^{247}\) Shortly thereafter, Register’s support in congress and the BBG crumbled, and he quit.\(^{248}\) After Register’s resignation, the BBG chose the Lebanese news director of Radio *Sawa*, Danny Nassif. Lynch described such a choice as completing “*al-Hurra*’s transformation into an

\(^{246}\) Keith Urbahn (quoted in Marc Lynch. 2004). “Al Hurra in UAE.” *Abu Aardvark’s Blog* (available at: http://abuaardvark.typepad.com/abuaardvark/2004/08/al_hurra_in_the.html. Retrieved: 08/ 10/08). According to Lynch, in his testimony to Congress, the Chairman of the Broadcasting Board of Governors Kenneth Tomlinson did not refer to these numbers of the ACNielsen survey. Alternatively, Norm Pattiz (the founder of al-Hurra) cited a survey conducted by Oxford Research International. According to this survey, 61% of Iraqi adults watch al-Hurra each week. Among viewers, 64% find the news very or somewhat reliable. Lynch criticized the view that “Iraq is a special case for al Hurra, given the American occupation - but even there, the numbers he cites would have to be measured against other stations, how often they watch, what the primary source of news is, etc.” Lynch. “Al Hurra’s Audience,” op. cit.

\(^{247}\) The best example of this was the series of articles in the Wall Street Journal by the non-Arabic-speaking journalist Joel Mowbray.

\(^{248}\) Marc Lynch. 2007. “The failure of public diplomacy.” *The Guardian* http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/jun/16/alphurramarti. Retrieved: 09/10/2008. One of the criticisms directed against Register was that he did not know Arabic and was thus unable to closely monitor the content broadcasted by the station.
Arab TV Marti.” This is because this means a return to the policies followed by Mowafac Harb, which made the station irrelevant in the Arab world.

Lynch’s anticipation is supported by the most recent poll done by the University of Maryland and Zogby International and conducted in Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in 2009. The poll showed that *al-Hurra* enjoys only a 2% of audience (a half percent lower than the rate in 2008). According to Shibley Telhami, a leading Middle East expert at the University of Maryland and the Brookings Institution in Washington D.C., “Alhurra is at the bottom of the list of stations…[i]t was low last year too, but obviously the numbers don’t look good for them. It doesn’t mean people never watch Alhurra – they surf and watch multiple stations. But it’s not where they go for news, and those numbers were consistent from country to country.”

*Al-Hurra*’s programming content was also subject to investigation. For example, an evaluation of the station’s programming was carried out by the University of Southern California (USC) Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School in July 2008. The report, relying primarily on the content analysis as well as secondary reinforcement from a discussion group, shed light on the professional problems plaguing *al-Hurra*. The report showed how *al-Hurra*’s journalistic style was not fulfilling “its legislative mandate and its responsibilities [as derived] from the Middle East Broadcast Network Journalistic Code of Ethics.” According to section 303 of the International Broadcasting Act of 1994,

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United States international broadcasting has to “be conducted in accordance with the highest professional standards of broadcast journalism” and “to be designed so as to effectively reach a significant audience.” The study found al-Hurra’s programming to be perceived as

being similar to traditional, state-funded broadcasting in the region. Not only has Alhurra done little to distinguish itself from second-tier Middle Eastern broadcasters… but it has also failed to develop the distinctive style, format, and breadth of coverage . . . Alhurra’s reporting of U.S. policies and American life is seen by Arab viewers as undistinguished.

[Alhurra’s] technical presentation is not as proficient as that of the best Arab channels . . . Alhurra’s news stories lack appropriate balance and sourcing. Discussion group respondents noted journalists’ apparent lack of experience and flawed presentation of news, including the poor use of graphics and a lack of standardized Arabic language. The content analysis found that Alhurra relied on unsubstantiated information too often, allowed the on-air expression of personal judgments too frequently, and failed to present opposing views in over 60 percent of its news stories.251

These professional flaws supported the perception that al-Hurra was biased. This was also supported by the results of the content analysis which found al-Hurra’s news to be more likely to promote Western perspectives at the expense of their Arab counterparts and that when personal judgments were expressed they were likely to be pro-West or anti-Arab, particularly on sensitive topics such as the Arab-Israeli conflict. Many of al-Hurra’s professional problems, nonetheless, are highly related to the institutional constraints directing the work of the station. This institutional restraining environment is the focus of the following section.

b. Al-Hurra’s Institutional Constraints

The virulent campaign that Register was exposed to, according to Lynch, “demonstrates that trying to produce a professional news product for the American government means career suicide . . . [A]l-Hurra staff will always look over their shoulders in fear of a conservative crusade, and will be unlikely to take risks or even try to put forward interesting news or political argument.”252 This campaign reveals the institutional constraints within which al-Hurra is working. To uncover these constraints, it is important to discuss the allegation that urged Register to resign.

In December 2006 through early spring 2007, the press in the US focused on what it considered violations on the part of al-Hurra to its journalistic code and how some of the station’s reports were not appropriate, objective or accurate. Two examples were particularly highlighted. The first was a speech on December 7, 2006, by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah that, according to the Report of Inspection, was “aired for slightly over an hour and without contextual comment.”253 The second example was a short report (two and one-half minutes) on December 11, 2006 by a reporter covering a conference on the Holocaust in Tehran. In this case, “Alhurra’s management agreed the reporter had not followed MBN’s journalistic code and did not put the issue in appropriate context to reflect the meaning of the conference objectively. Alhurra pointed out its other coverage of the Holocaust and coverage in general followed the journalistic code.”254

253 Report of Inspection. May 2008. “Alhurra’s Programming Policies and Procedures.” United States Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors. Report No. ISP-IB-08-45, p. 4. According to the report, al-Hurra explained that its intent was to air the speech for a few minutes, just to let the viewers know that it was taking place. However, because of miscommunication with the producer, the speech was aired longer than planned.
These incidents explain why *al-Hurra* updated its 2005 Journalistic Code of Ethics in May 2007, adding a section entitled “Controversial/Sensitive Issues,” which explicitly states that “MBN will not broadcast live speeches or interviews with persons designated as terrorists unless the broadcast has been previously approved by the vice president for news or his or her designee.” The new director of the Channel Daniel Nassif made it clear that he was going to abide by these rules and that *al-Hurra* would tell the story “without giving an open microphone to terrorists. We can talk about a speech by Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah using a sound bite so viewers hear the most newsworthy points of his speech without airing inflammatory statements intended to play to audience emotions.” As the report of the Annenberg School revealed, “[a]lhurra’s refusal to cover Islamists, Hamas, and Hizbollah as real/legitimate political actors significantly decreases its credibility and ability to accurately reflect events in the Arab world.”

Working within these institutional constraints in addition to a competitive Arab media environment makes the work of *al-Hurra* extremely difficult. The station is being asked to satisfy Congress, American conservative press and people in Washington D.C as well as Arab audiences. Such an expectation is unattainable giving the different perspective of each part. It seems that the channel chose to satisfy Congress and the American parties rather than their Arab counterpart to get the fund that it needs. As Anne Marie Baylouny argues, “Alhurra is faced with what one writer described as an

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“existential” problem, which results in the station either appearing to be the old-style government-sponsored propaganda, or evading Congress’ dictates. It cannot be critical of the United States due to its structure and organizational funding, but to effectively draw viewers from other stations for news coverage it must cover a variety of viewpoints as the others do, which inevitably involve criticism of U.S. policies.”

Failing to establish a distinct identity for itself, *al-Hurra* could not attract viewers. Perhaps the best evidence of its failure is the fact that President Obama gave his first interview with an Arab language network to the more popular *al-Arabiyya*. For *al-Hurra* to better its performance, analysts suggest, it should focus on broadcasting provocative documentaries about the missing Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and American relations with authoritarian regimes in the Arab world. According to Marc Lynch, “such programming would help [al-Hurra] to win credibility, would make it interesting to Arabs, and would be real demonstration that American ideas of a free press really are more than propaganda.”

In conclusion, it can be argued that US approach to the Arab World came at a particular historical moment when the increased access of Arabs and Muslims to information that they produce had an important effect on how they receive media messages from an outsider. It has also raised popular awareness of events in places like Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan through news stories that often promote sympathy and solidarity with fellow Arabs and Muslims. By challenging Western, and particularly American, monopoly over information, *al-Jazeera* made it difficult for the US to sell its image and empowered an oppositional discourse that calls for authenticity and

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258 Baylouny, *op. cit.*
independence. As Thomas Friedman noticed, “the idea of America as the embodiment of the promise of freedom and democracy . . . is integral to how we [Americans] think of ourselves, but it is no longer how a lot of others think of us.”

After this preview of the context in which both al-Jazeera and al-Hurra emerged, a content analysis of some of their shows follows.

4. Content Analysis

This section is a content analysis of two political programs in al-Jazeera and al-Hurra (More than One Opinion and What is behind the News in al-Jazeera, and Four Directions and Free Hour in al-Hurra). Reviewing the episodes of these four programs over four-six months period, seven categories of issues were discussed. These categories are as follows:

a- Inter-Arab interactions: this refers to relations among Arab countries. Here, the study looks at how Arab countries are perceived as a collective group in terms of approaching them and the challenges facing them. The goal is to investigate how far Arab countries are recognized as a distinctive group of states.

b- Intra-Arab interactions: this refers to the internal politics of Arab countries. The goal is to investigate the preferred way to deal with Arab countries on an individual or a group basis, as well as to investigate how many of the Arab countries are covered and whether it is a selective or a news-based process.

260 Lynch, Voices of the New Arab Public Sphere, op. cit., p. 25.
c- Issue related to the US: two topics were covered, US foreign policy and its status as the primary world power. Due to the special coverage that Iraq received in both channels and the focus of the US on Iran, the interest in these two states is being counted separately. The rest of US foreign policy deals with the US relations with other countries in the region as well as its general strategy. The second topic is the status of the US as the main world power and how this is represented.

d- Inter-civilizational interactions: this category has two aspects, religious and socio-political. The goal is to investigate if the relation is important in the first place, and, second, if it is an issue, what aspect of the relation is emphasized.

e- Palestine: as it appeared from reviewing the development of Arab identity, the Palestinian issue from its beginning was the one issue that united the Arabs and left lasting imprints on their identity. Therefore, it was dealt with separately in this category to see what of the following issues receives the main focus: Palestinian-Palestinian relations, the Palestinian-Israeli relations, the 2008-09 Gaza war, and the regional and international aspects of the Palestinian issue (this includes Security Council resolutions, regional and international efforts and envoys visits). The final point is whether the Arabs consider the Palestinian issue a core of the whole dilemma which was nonetheless constantly deferred in peace talks. This includes issues like the Palestinian refuges, the right of return and the status of Jerusalem.

f- Regional Powers: this category includes episodes dealing with regional powers and whether it focused on their internal or external policies. This, along with the
analysis of critical discourse in later chapters, will help in identifying what
definition of the region is held by both channels.

g- World Wide Problems: this refers to the episodes that discussed problems seen
important to the world community at large.

a. Al-Jazeera’s Programs

1. Ma Wara’ al-Khabar (What is behind the News)

This daily program will be analyzed from the period of October 2008 to June 2009. The
total number of episodes is 252.262 The internal matters of Arab countries received the
largest portion of the program’s coverage (22.6% during this period). This is followed by
the issues related to the Palestinian problem (21.8%). In the third place are issues related
to the US (14.3%). US relations with individual countries, its general strategies in the
region as well as its status as a world power are grouped in this category. Inter-Arab
interactions, as well as dealing with Arab countries as a collective entity, occupy the
fourth place (13.1%), while interest in regional powers comes in the fifth place (11.1%).
This interest covers both their internal affairs as well as their foreign polices. Issues
related to Israeli foreign policies were predominantly related to the peace process or the
actions towards the Palestinians. Therefore, it was grouped in the category dealing with
Palestine. This explains why the percentage of interest in the Israeli foreign policy in this
category may appear to receive less attention when compared to other regional powers
like Turkey, for example. Discussing problems facing the world as a whole comes in the
sixth place (6.8%). Inter-civilizational relations represent 2.4% of the total number of
episodes.

262 See appendix C.
By grouping all the categories that have an Arab dimension, the program’s interest in Arab issues represents 57.5% of the total number of episodes. This reflects a big interest in Arab politics and explains why the channel is considered an Arab media: its main focus is Arabs. However, two issues in particular received the largest portion of attention: internal affairs in Arab countries and Palestine. While the first promotes divisions and creates problems with other Arab countries, the latter unifies them. This contradictory aspect explains why *al-Jazeera* is accused of being a divisive means and a forum for Arab nationalists simultaneously.

2. *Akthar min Ra’y (More than One Opinion)*

This weekly program has 32 episodes from October 2008 to June 2009.\(^\text{263}\) Intercivilizational relations came in first place (28.1%). The socio-political aspects of this relation received slightly more attention than its religious counterpart. In the second place come the Palestinian-related issues (21.9%). Just like the first show, the Gaza War received the largest coverage. Intra-Arab politics occupies the third place with the main focus on Iraqi politics. Both US-related issues and interest in regional powers come in the fifth place at (9.4%). Discussions of the Obama’s administration and its approach and policies to the region received the biggest share in this category. As for regional powers, each of them – Iran, Turkey, Israel – received a similar weight. While interest in Iran and Turkey was on issues related to foreign policies, the elections were the center of attention when it came to Israel. The topic chosen for both Turkey and Iran had something to do with their relations to the West and/or Israel. While the main issue for Iran was “nuclear Iran between the Israeli threats and the changes in Washington,” for Turkey the issue was

\(^{263}\) See appendix D.
“Turkey and the closed doors to Europe.” This may indicate how Iran and Turkey are treated differently than Israel as regional powers. The Islamic bond can help in explaining this variation. The final place goes to world wide problems where piracy in the red sea and the economic crisis received equal attention.

b. Al-Hurra’s Programs

1. Sa'a Hurra (Free Hour)

Just like al-Jazeera’s “What is behind the News,” al-Hurra’s “Free Hour” is a daily program. The total number of episodes from October to June 16 is 166. US-related issues came in the first place with a percentage of (33.7%) of the total episodes. This can explain why the channel is considered the mouth piece of the US State Department. In the second place is internal politics of Arab countries (28.9%). Iraq was the focus of (57.3%) within this category. Issues related to Palestine occupy the third place (16.9%), while interest in regional powers comes in the fourth place (9.0%). Inter-Arab interactions received attention in only 5.4% of the total episodes. At the same time, discussions of world-wide problems come in sixth place (3.0%). In the last place is the category of inter-civilizational relations (1.2%).

Adding all the categories that deal with Arab politics together would give a percentage of 51.2%. When compared to al-Jazeera, al-Hurra is behind in its interest in Arab-related issues. This is also consistent with the high percentage of coverage given to US related issues in al-Hurra (33.7%) compared to al-Jazeera (14.3%). Also, al-Jazeera was more interested in dealing with Arab countries as a collective unit (13.1%) compared to al-Hurra (5.4%). Moreover, while the issue of Palestine occupied the second place in

264 See appendix E.
al-Jazeera’s coverage (21.8%) – with almost 1% difference from the first ranking issue – it occupied the third place in the coverage of al-Hurra (16.9%) which represents a difference of (16.8%) from the coverage of the first place issue. Thus, the Palestinian issue seems to be at the heart of al-Jazeera’s definition of Arab identity but does not represent the same thing for al-Hurra. This position furthers the impression that al-Jazeera is a pan-Arab media, while al-Hurra is not. This also explains why al-Jazeera is considered a promoter of Arab identity, at the same time al-Hurra is seen as challenging this identity.

Al-Hurra’s focus on Iraqi internal politics (57.3%) was much higher than that of al-Jazeera (31.6%). This is consistent with the American foreign policy that treated Iraq as a harbinger of change in the region. It is also interesting to see how the focus on regional powers in al-Hurra’s “Free Hour” was, first, on Iran, and, second, on Israel. The episodes that tackled the former dealt mainly with the Iranian influence in Iraq, nuclear Iran, Iranian elections and their aftermath, and the future of Iran. This portrayed Iran as, among other things, a nuclear threat to the world and a destabilizing actor in Iraq. As for Israel, the episodes that focused on Israel were about the Israeli elections. Issues related to Israel’s foreign policy were not discussed in the program, even when discussing the peace process.

Notably, in this content analysis of the “Free Hour,” Turkey was the focus of only one episode that discussed its relationship with Iraq and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Given Turkey’s increasing regional role, this may suggest that al-Hurra is more interested in curtailing the influence of some regional powers rather than encouraging it.
2. Al-Itijihat al-Arba’a (The Four Directions)*

The Four Directions is a weekly program that resembles al-Jazeera’s Akthar min Ra’y. The total number of episodes from January to June 12 was 24. Just like “Free Hour,” the focus of “The Four Directions” is the US. Issues related to the US came in first place with a noticeably high percentage (66.7%). This consolidates the impression that al-Hurra is a US media that is mainly concerned with marketing the American policies or, at least, making sure that American policies are well represented. In the second place, and with a huge difference from the first place issue, is the interest in intra-Arab interaction and Palestine (10.4%). This further highlights how the Palestinian issue – unlike the situation in al-Jazeera – is not given any special status. Focus on regional powers comes in the third place (8.3%). Even when the Palestinian issue is grouped with intra-Arab interactions, they only enjoy a third of the program interest in the US (20.8%). Intercivilizational interactions occupy the fourth place (4.2%). Even the one episode that dealt with this aspect was about Obama’s 2009 Cairo speech. Noticeable in this program is the total absence of any reference to Arab countries as a collective group or interest in their relationships.

5. Conclusion

As this content analysis has demonstrated, al-Jazeera’s coverage of the Palestinian issue received a special focus. For its part, al-Hurra was heavily interested in the situation in Iraq as well as the general strategy of the US in Afghanistan which, as Obama made it

* For technical issues, I was able to record the episodes of Four Directions only from January 2009. This is due to the changing nature of the site of al-Hurra on youtube as updating the site was done randomly earlier episodes were constantly removed.

265 See appendix F.
clear in his speech to the Muslim World in June 4, 2009, connected to the general strategy of combating extremism. The Palestinian issue, as the discussion of the development of Arab public sphere and Arab identity showed, was the one issue that left deep imprints on both Arab identity as well as Arab relations with the West in general and the US in particular. Because of this organic relationship between Arab identity and the Palestinian issue, a comparison between the coverage of the two channels will follow to investigate how Arab identity is represented in both of them.

Since the main goal of US public diplomacy towards the region is improving the image of the US and making its policies more understandable, Obama’s Cairo speech is a good example for analysis. The whole point of the speech was to try to fix the rupture that happened in the US as well as the West with its relations with the Muslim/Arab world. Focusing on the two station’s coverage of the speech will give the study the opportunity to investigate, first, the challenges facing these kinds of efforts, and, secondly, the relations between the West, particularly the US, with the Arab and Muslim worlds and how they are portrayed in terms of the identity of both parties.
Chapter Three
The Gaza War and (Re-)Imagining the Middle East

In 2004, the United States revealed an initiative entitled the “Greater Middle East.” The proposal was to be presented to the Great Eight (G8) Summit in June 2004. It began by describing the region as both a challenge and an opportunity facing the world community. It also stressed how the continuous deprivation of political and economic rights would result in an increase in extremism, terrorism, international crimes and illegal immigration in a way that jeopardizes the national interests of the G8 countries. The solution, according to the proposal, is political, economic and social reforms. The elements of reform revolve around encouraging democracy and good governance, building a knowledge-based society, and widening the economic opportunities.266

Various circles in the region ranging from statesmen to intellectuals criticized the disclosed proposal.267 The former felt humiliated because they were not consulted on the proposal and threatened by reform from an outside power.268 In their view, this was a blatant intervention in their domestic affairs.

As for Arab intellectuals, the initiative gave rise to some other concerns, notable among which is its potential threat to the Arab identity. On the one hand, the initiative was seen as a step to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict by overlooking the Palestinian issue. In this view, this would be accomplished by putting an end to geopolitical issues

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266 See appendix G.
267 A leaked version of the proposal was published in the London-based Arabic newspaper al-Hayat on 02/14/2004.
and replacing them with geo-economics, i.e. promoting cooperation and coordination.\textsuperscript{269}

To do this, the resistance movements in the region – referred to by the American administration as ‘spots of terrorism’ and obstacles facing the peace process – should be eliminated. It also requires putting an end to, or at least marginalizing, ‘rouge states’ to ensure the necessary stability for economic cooperation. According to this view, this is how both American and Israeli security can be protected. In other words, it is a way of sustaining the American economic, political, and military hegemony, as well as guaranteeing Israel’s supremacy over Arab countries and putting an end to Arab nationalism.\textsuperscript{270}

The ulterior motive of the US, according to some views, was to weaken and fragment Arab countries. Conservative Arab countries were being asked to follow multi-level reformations that appear to be targeting the cultural and social bases of terrorism. However, in their essence, they were aiming at affecting the internal unity of these societies. As for those with good relations with the US, they would be subject to more pressures to accommodate the American policies and be completely under American control.\textsuperscript{271}


Extending from Morocco to Pakistan, this greater Middle East raises the doubts of Arab intellectuals about the repercussion of this externally-articulated notion of the Arab-Islamic identity by portraying the region as a geographical area that suffers from an identity crisis.²⁷² Arabs, according to this view, would not be perceived as a one nation but only peoples who speak the same language. As a result, it will urge the acceptance of normalization with Israel as a country in the region that enjoys high levels of political, industrial and social development.²⁷³ Peace, normalization, and development are thus posed as inseparable phenomena.

Arab intellectual’s reservations on the initiative were eloquently expressed by Jalal Amin who argues that:

Freedom and democratization would make Iraq’s occupation more palatable. Changing the education curricula -- under the guise of fortifying knowledge and improving the lot of women -- would make students accept the idea of cooperating with Israel. Television channels created with US funding, on the pretext of improving knowledge and the media, would help sell US and Israeli goods. Creating a Middle East development bank, as mentioned in the initiative, would give Israel a share in the distribution and sharing of oil revenues and any foreign aid coming to the region. It is no wonder, therefore, that an initiative exclusively critical of Arab countries should be envisioned at the scale of a Greater Middle East -- for its aim is to bring the prey closer to the predator.²⁷⁴

These reservations, as Sami Baroudi argued, emanate from the image of the US held by those intellectuals. In his view, there are three themes that portray the negative image of the US in the regions. First, they feel that the US has no right to dictate democracy to the


world in view of the defects in its system and its undemocratic international conduct. Secondly, they hold that the “US foreign policy is guided by interests (hegemonic dominance, safety of Israel and access to inexpensive Middle Eastern oil) rather than principles or ideals (promotion of democracy, rule of law and human rights).” 275 Thirdly, the US discourse about democracy is perceived as a propaganda that conceal ulterior hegemonic plan over the Arab and Islamic worlds, either directly or through its close ally, Israel. 276

Although many scholars viewed the American initiative as dead on arrival, this chapter argues that the ideas and strategies behind it are still alive in American thought and strategy implementers. These fears resurfaced with the Lebanon war in July 2006. When US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice described the conflict as a “the birth pangs of a new Middle East,” 277 it was understood that this military campaign was a means to change the rules of the game in the whole region. It was thought that the “moderate” Arab majority will not allow the region to be dragged into a conflict because of “extremists” like Hezbollah and its allies, Syria and Iran. These rules were further revealed with the War on Gaza in late December 2008.

Focusing on the Gaza war, this chapter shows how regional identity is portrayed differently in al-Hurra as opposed to al-Jazeera. While the former represents regional identity in a way that conforms to the American foreign policy and derived from the Greater Middle East Initiative, the latter is promoting an identity based on the infusion of


276 Ibid.

Arabness and Islam. This chapter relies on two sets of data: the evening news bulletin in both al-Jazeera (Hasad al-Yum: “Today’s Harvest”) and al-Hurra (al-‘Alamiyya: “The Global”), and the episodes of some discussion shows presented by the two channels. The analysis covers the period from the 27th of December 2008, when the war began, to the 18th of January 2009, when Israel announced a unilateral ceasefire. The analysis applies three complimentary tools: content analysis, framing theory, and critical discourse analysis.

1. Mapping War Coverage on the Two Channels

Before discussing the details of each channel’s coverage of the Gaza War, it is important to give a general overview of the way each of them covered this conflict. Al-Hurra primarily covered the war in a way that conveys that it was mainly against Hamas or targeting “locations belonging to Hamas in the [Gaza] Strip.” This was done through various strategies: in the comments of the news reporters, the way the news was framed, the opinions of the guests in the discussion shows, and the questions they were asked. This tendency was also reflected in the photos of devastation which were displayed for a few seconds only and mainly concentrated on the destruction of buildings and the corpses of police members who were considered members of Hamas.

Al-Hurra was also more representative of the Israeli point of view. In the news bulletin, Israeli guests represented 32% of the guests while the Palestinian voice was represented by 28.5%. Although the number of Palestinian guests (24%) in al-Hurra’s daily discussion show ‘Free Hour’ exceeded that of the Israeli guests (10%), the

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279 This was particularly the case in the first day of the war.
280 See appendix H.1.
American guests (30%) were staunch defenders of the Israeli view.\textsuperscript{281} This raises the percentage of the representation of the Israeli point of view to 40%. Moreover, the news excerpts from Israeli sources were 62%, while those from the Palestinian sources were 37%.\textsuperscript{282} This was also the case with the discussion shows were Israeli sources, such as journalists and political analysts, were frequently cited and quoted. This representation of the Israeli view was also reflected in the number of times that the reporter from Israel began his report. While the reporter from the Israeli side started 57% of the times, the reporter from Gaza started only 42% of the time despite the fact that an Arab viewer would be interested to first hear and see the news from the Palestinian side.\textsuperscript{283}

Representing the Palestinian voice was also biased towards one party. For example, Palestinians belonging to Fattah represented 28% of the Palestinian voice in ‘Free Hour.’ At the same time, Hamas was not represented at all.\textsuperscript{284} Non-Palestinian guests represented 68% of the total guests. 40% of them were against Hamas, which they held responsible for the war and halting the peace process.\textsuperscript{285} The same pattern appears in the news bulletin where Fattah’s guests constituted 75% of the Palestinian voices whereas Hamas was also absent and other Palestinian voices only represented 35%.\textsuperscript{286} It is also significant to observe how \textit{al-Hurra} focused on the official viewpoint of various parties. 46% percent of the guests in the talk shows represented official voices, while the popular voice was only represented by only 4%.\textsuperscript{287} This was also the case in news bulletins where

\textsuperscript{281} See appendix I.1.
\textsuperscript{282} See appendix H.6.
\textsuperscript{283} See appendix H.3.
\textsuperscript{284} See appendix I.2.
\textsuperscript{285} See appendix I.2.
\textsuperscript{286} See appendix H.2.
\textsuperscript{287} See appendix I.3.
the official voice was also more represented (53.6%) when compared to the popular one (16%). This questions the democracy message that al-Hurra claims to be preaching.289

As for al-Jazeera, the channel quickly developed a promo for the war through its news coverage. It concentrated on the corpses of the police members and one of them was uttering the two professions of Islam.290 “Gaza under Fire” was the title they chose for their coverage to indicate that it was a war on all of Gaza, not only on a certain group. This was also stressed by the use of language. Those who lost their lives were named “martyrs,” and members of Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups where called “resisters.” The truce, which preceded the war and ended on the 19th of December, 2008, was itself a subject of criticism on al-Jazeera. For example, in one episode of “What is behind the News” on 12/29/2008, the term truce was highly criticized by the guests. The content of the criticism was repeated in various episodes as well. The crux of the critique was the word’s deep political meaning – one that wants the Palestinians to stop what they perceive as legitimate resistance to the occupation in exchange for food. The presenter of the show seemed to be supportive of this view; he quickly framed it in the following terms: “then we returned to the tone of food in return of the truce.” This frame brings to mind many of the political formulas that now enjoy bad reputation in the Arab world like “Oil for Food” and “Land for Peace.” Not only are these formulas currently judged as failures, but they also had disastrous consequences on the issues with which they were dealing. They also recall how the stronger parties were always unfair to their Arab

288 See appendix H.4.
289 This reliance on official voices seems to be a characteristic of al-Hurra. In its evaluation of al-Hurra’s programming, the discussion group of the report of the Anneberg School found that “Alhurra too often relied on official sources about issues important to the general Arab public. Rarely were sources entirely independent, and the voice of the average Arab was either non-existent or subordinated to official pronouncements.” “An Evaluation of Alhurra Television Programming,” op. cit., p. 6.
290 This is to acknowledge that there is no God but God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.
counterparts. This is consistent with most of the views that were circulated in *al-Jazeera*, where truce was clearly distinguished from the Palestinian legitimate right of resisting occupation.

*Al-Jazeera*’s coverage was also more interested in expressing and, somehow, encouraging the anger of the Arab street. This was achieved by extensively covering demonstrations across the Arab world, giving ordinary people the chance to speak out on the channel and express their anger and frustration and hosting those who are known to have Arab nationalist tendencies. Even children were given the microphone to speak their minds. *Al-Jazeera* was, thus, more representative of a broader spectrum of Arab opinion and reaction, especially the Palestinian one. Thus, we find that the Israeli guests represented 4.5% of the guests in the news bulletin, while the Palestinian ones were 21.8%.291 This pattern was even more apparent in the channel’s daily discussion show of ‘What is behind the News,’ where Palestinian guests constituted 30.8% of all the guests while Israeli guests were absent.292 While excerpts from the Israeli sources during the news time were used 23% of the time, those from the Palestinian side represented 76%.293 Interest in the Palestinian side was also reflected in the number of reporters working on Gaza and, second, the number of times the news started by reports from Gaza. Ninety five percent of the time, *al-Jazeera*’s news started from Gaza in comparison to 0% from Israel.294 Representing the Palestinian voice was also biased towards the party involved in the fight, Hamas. Therefore, the percentage of Palestinians in the news bulletin belonging

291 See appendix H.1.
292 See appendix I.1.
293 See appendix H.6.
294 See appendix H.3.
to Fattah was 17.2% while that representing Hamas was 37.9%.

For the discussion show, 2.6% belonged to Hamas in contrast to 0% for those who belonged to Fattah. However, the voices defending Hamas and expressing its point of view either from non-affiliated Palestinians or other guests represented 66.7%.

In contrast to *al-Hurra*, popular voices were heard more frequently in *al-Jazeera*. The number of official voices in *al-Jazeera* was 49 while the number of the popular voices was only 37. While the difference appears to be in favor of the official one, it is not that big when compared to *al-Hurra* (30 vs. 9).

Putting into consideration the fact that the specialists’ voices are non-official ones, this makes the percentage of the non-official voices 63.2%. As for the discussion show, the official voice was the minority (7.7%) compared to the popular one (18%) and the specialists 74.4%. This makes *al-Jazeera* more representative of the popular voice when compared to *al-Hurra* and helps in portraying it as the channel of the people, a channel that speaks to them and for them.

Mapping the coverage of the two channels can be done through the following categories: targets (who/what was the target), responsibility (who was responsible for the war and its developments), results (who was successful), and the repercussions of the war. Answering these questions leads to examining the representation of the region’s identity in both channels (who is the ‘other’ and what elements are stressed in identity construction?).

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295 See appendix H.2.
296 See appendix I.2.
297 See appendix H.4.
298 See appendix I.3.
a. The Target

The coverage of al-Hurra conveyed the message that the attacks were mainly targeting Hamas and its operations in the Gaza Strip. This was reflected in continuously repeating the Israeli assertion that “all the targeted locations belong to Hamas.” News headlines and reporters’ comments somehow also reflected this view. For example, in the second day of the war, one reporter said: “The operation is continuing to give Hamas a painful hit.” One of the headlines was: “The Israeli forces continue their military operations targeting the activists of Hamas and the air force strikes specific targets.”

When attempts to neutrality were made, they inadvertently exposed biased positions. For example, one news segment on day fourteen of the war said that “with the Israeli military operations entering its third week, the civilians from the two sides pay the price even if the number of the dead people is different.” Additionally, the reporter mentioned that “although there is no military balance, humanitarian fear and worry balances in both side equally.” Arguably, reporting the news in such a way sidesteps the suffering and misery of the majority of casualties while exaggerating those of the stronger side. The developments on the grounds proved that neither the military balance nor the humanitarian fear and worry were equal. In the view of many in the Arab world, a Palestinian who was amputated or lost his/her whole family is not the same as the Israeli who was afraid or even terrified by a rocket fired on an empty school or in the dessert.

Al-Jazeera’s coverage, in comparison, was conveying the message that the attacks, or the aggression as it was repeatedly called, were targeting all and everyone in

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the Gaza Strip, not only Hamas’ members and locations. It focused on the number of civilians killed or injured and the percentage of women and children among them. This was done via a certain strategy. First, following a certain routine in the news that started by mentioning which day of the war it was (to remind the viewer of the duration of the crisis), the number of martyrs and providing figures on the percentage of martyrs from children and women. The same was done with the number of injured people. Second, the channel also had a network of reporters in Gaza (about three reporters) in addition to one on the Israeli borders with the Strip and another on the Egyptian side of the borders. One of the reporters in Gaza was always reporting from Gaza’s main hospital (al-Shifa’). He interviewed the wounded who were telling their stories and talking about the horrors of the aggression. He was also confirming the news about the number of civilians both killed and wounded. In this way, al-Jazeera was keen on pointing to targeting homes and how this led to the death of entire families, as well as the destruction of mosques and intentional attacking of ambulances. It relied on eye-witnesses on the phone and via live interviewing to lend credibility to its message.

The same trend was reflected on the discussion shows. For example, the episode of ‘What is behind the News’ on January 6 started with a shot of a father mourning the death of his children. The introductory part of the episode started as follows:

This was a father exposing the death of his children by the bullets of Israeli soldiers during the Israeli aggression on Gaza. It is a scene from a disastrous picture that Israel continues to draw since the beginning of the aggression on the strip on the 27th of December. With this picture, we stop in this episode and ask two questions: is the increase in targeting civilians in Gaza a part of the Israeli aggression plan in the Gaza strip? To what

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304 Stories of Za’lufa’s family, which lost five of its children at once after the Israeli forces targeted their house, and that of the Samanuri’s family, where the Israelis grouped many of them in a house and denied them access to water or food for a whole day and then targeted the house with a missile, were all focused on in al-Jazeera.
extent is it possible to legally pursue the Israeli politicians and military men for the crimes they committed in the strip? While the number of civilian victims is increasing because of that continuous aggression for 11 days now, Israeli military leaders and politicians are still insisting that they do not target Palestinian civilians although the numbers show how the majority of Gaza’s victims are civilians.  

This was followed by a kind of a sarcastic question: “Is the definition of a civilian according to Israel different from what we understand.” This tendency was repeated in the questions asked by the presenters and the comments of news reporters. For example, the news presenter asked the reporter in the al-Shifa’ hospital the following question: “if Israel is stressing that it only targets the infrastructure of Hamas, what does its threat of bombing the hospital, or any of its extensions, mean?” The reporter, on his turn, answered: “Israel broadened its operation. Targets are not limited to Hamas, but include houses, universities, and civil centers. It seems that there is nothing forbidden in this war. All the places are targeted.” Questions asked by the presenter of “What is behind the News” on 12/28/2008 were trying to show how Israel intentionally wanted to produce the biggest number of victims. The presenter asked: “When we see some Israeli military analysts say that Hamas could have understood the message that Israel wanted to send with a smaller number of victims, do you think that this strong strike was really aiming at causing many victims so that the message is correctly understood? Does Israel want, with such a strong hit, to guarantee the success of the operation as long as we are talking about the fortune of this operation?”

306 Ibid.
Neutrality was, thus, not an issue with al-Jazeera. The channel’s position, as revealed by its coverage, was clearly siding with the Palestinians who were under attack. According to al-Jazeera, neither the military nor the humanitarian suffering balances were equal. This was reflected in the death toll and the horrors seen on the Palestinian side. For example, on day fourteen of the war, the first headline in al-Jazeera’s news bulletin was the following: “Gaza’s martyrs exceed 800 and al-Qassam Brigades say that it killed eight Israeli soldiers.” The point is clearer if one compares the headline for the same piece of news from al-Hurra. Al-Hurra’s headline read as the following: “The Israeli operations in the Gaza strip enter its third week and the missiles target anew the Israeli towns.” Al-Jazeera’s headline sought to emphasize that the two sides were not equal; in contrast, the way al-Hurra framed the news sought to convey the message that they were.

Reporting from the West Bank was also different from al-Hurra to al-Jazeera. For example, on 12/28/09 al-Jazeera’s news mentioned that “a Palestinian youth was killed after the ‘occupation’ forces shot him in Ramallah.” This piece of news came immediately after the news from Gaza. It follows, then, that the Israeli occupation has the same face, be that in Gaza or in the West Bank. The same piece of news was mentioned in al-Hurra after the first interval in the context of the Arab, regional and international reactions. The news was that “a Palestinian youth was killed after clashes with the Israeli forces.” Instead of ‘occupation’ forces, al-Hurra uses ‘Israeli forces,’ and in place of “the occupation forces shot him,” it mentions that he was “killed after clashes with the

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311 Al-Alamiyya, Al-Hurra. USA, VA. January 10, 2009.
313 Al-Alamiyya, Al-Hurra. USA, VA. December 28, 2008.
Israeli forces.”\textsuperscript{314} In this manner, the Israeli forces were not directly blamed for his death. The way in which this story was portrayed by \textit{al-Hurra} also bought into the Israeli narrative, which denied or dismissed Palestinian resistance on the ground that the shooting was portrayed as only an act of police brutality.

Language, thus, was a tool that was employed differently in the two channels to reflect their respective coverage policies. In \textit{al-Hurra}, people who lost their lives by Israeli strikes are not referred to as martyrs as did \textit{al-Jazeera}. Furthermore, \textit{al-Hurra} never referred to the war as a form of aggression, which \textit{al-Jazeera} consistently did. As mentioned earlier, “Gaza under Fire” was the promo that \textit{al-Jazeera} developed for the war. It showed scattered corpses of Palestinian police in Gaza and a wounded person raising his fingers and enunciating Islam’s two professions. With its unmistakable religious aspect, this scene was meant to entice feelings of anger and sympathy among the viewers.

\textit{Al-Hurra}, for its part, and after a few days from the beginning of the war, developed a promo broadcasted between the news and commercials. This promo was a photo of an artillery truck with the title “War in Gaza.” Using the proposition ‘in’ indicates that there are equal parties involved in this conflict without blaming one party in particular for waging the war. This is different from saying “War on Gaza,” which indicates that the strip was under attack and that it is particularly a lopsided war. The Israeli military actions were also described as “operations,” not war.\textsuperscript{315} Again, this belittles the wide scale and strength of the action.

\textsuperscript{314} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{315} For example, one of the news headlines of \textit{al-‘Alamiyya} was “Israel continues its operations in Gaza and the UNRWA suspends its mission in the [Gaza] Strip.” \textit{Al-‘Alamiyya}. \textit{Al-Hurra}. USA, VA. January 8, 2009. 

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This deliberate use of language was also apparent in the news’ headlines and the way it was framed. For example, *al-Jazeera*’s first news title on the second day was: “More than 200 martyrs and 700 wounded in the Israeli strikes on Gaza, and Ulmert and Barack threaten more.” Arguably, the way this was framed makes the viewer wonder if it means that Ulmert and Barack – the Israeli Prime Minister and his Defense Minister – were threatening more strikes or threatening more (potential) victims. Here language plays this role via intentional ambiguity. *Al-Jazeera* also tended to use inflammatory language, notably metaphoric. For example, there were general titles summarizing events on the news of the first day of the war after reading the headlines. One of these titles, for instance, read as follows: “Gaza cries blood, pays farewell to the martyrs, and waits for more.” The words used in this title entice anger and sadness at the same time. It is also worth noting that *al-Jazeera* used to use the Arabic word “muqawimun” to refer to Hamas’ members, which means freedom fighters rather than simply fighters or activists. It also used martyrs instead of killed or victims to refer to any Palestinian killed in the war. Language, thus, was one of the strategies used by *al-Jazeera* to convey its message and the way it portrays the war.

*Al-Hurra*, too, made use of language to present the news in a certain way. On the tenth day of the war, for example, the news in *al-Hurra* read as follows: “Tens of children were killed in bombing a school in Gaza.” It is noticeable that the identity of the party responsible for the killing here is not identified. The news did not mention, for
example, that it was an Israeli bomb. Second, the identity of the school was not revealed in the headline. It did not say that it was one of the UN schools in the strip. This was done to avoid the shocking impact on the viewers.

This attitude of omission continued in covering the news later. A reporter from Israel was asked about the details of the accident and how the Israeli side reported the incident. At the same time, the reporter from Gaza or the people who survived the attack were not asked about what happened, nor did a representative from the UNRWA was hosted to listen to the other side of the story. Moreover, the following day the second headline was the following: “The continuation of reactions about the bombing of Gaza’s school after the Israeli army showed tape showing how the gunmen were hiding between civilians.”

Ironically, in the report about the accident the reporter said that the UNRWA denied the existence of any fighters. This, however, was not mentioned in the headline, which gave the impression that the Israeli story was accurate because it showed a tape. Even when the UNRWA suspended its operation in Gaza on 01/08/09 in order to get the necessary guarantees from the Israeli army, the focus of al-Hurra’s coverage was on Hamas’ criticism of the UNRWA for doing this, not on the Israeli strikes that targeted its trucks and staff.

Related to the efforts to save the face of Israel were the questions asked by al-Hurra’s news presenters. For example, one of the news presenters asked the following question: “The Israeli planes are continuously throwing pamphlets to warn the

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320 The news presenter asked the reporter from Israel about the details provided by the Israeli side. He replied by saying that “the Israeli army says that some militants were shooting from the school, so the Israeli army responded with mortars at the source of fire.” He added that “Israel accuses Hamas of using the school as a human shield” and reminded how “Israel showed pictures a year ago of armed men from Hamas shooting missiles from a school” (ibid.).

inhabitants; to what extent does this reduce the fall of civilians?” The question assumed the good intention of the Israeli army and put this action in the context of its effort to avoid targeting civilians.

Framing the UNRWA’s incident in al-Jazeera was different; it was clear who performed the action. The headline of news was “The Israeli war machines are targeting schools in Gaza.” In this manner, the doer of the action was clearly identified and put upfront. According to the coverage of the channel, the ground of the act was clear. The attack is consistent with the series of crimes that Israel committed against the Palestinian people during the long history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. A recollection of the Qana massacre was mentioned in this story, putting the conflict thereby in a larger context.

Contrary to al-Hurra, al-Jazeera hosted the UNRWA’s spokesman in the region to talk about the incident. He undoubtedly denied the Israeli claims and accused that government of targeting the school intentionally. Interviewing an eyewitness and a high-ranking international official was meant to bestow more credibility on al-Jazeera’s account. When the UNRWA suspended its aid mission in the strip, al-Jazeera made it clear that this decision was due to the continued intentional targeting of its staff by Israel. Moreover, the channel hosted many experts in international jurisprudence to give their opinion on how far the shooting of UN schools in particular, and the overall war in

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324 This refers to what is known as the Qana massacre, which took place on April 18, 1996. This was a village in Southern Lebanon, where Israeli artillery bombed the area of a UN refugee compound. More than 100 Lebanese civilians who had taken shelter in the compound were killed and around 116 were injured. The Israeli military said it was a mistake. A United Nations’ investigation concluded that “the pattern of impacts in the Qana area makes it unlikely that the shelling of the United Nations compound was the result of technical and/or procedural errors” (for this, see Letter Dated 7 May 1996 from the Secretary General Addressed to the President of the Security Council. UN Security Council (available at: http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/6d5aa740c14293b85256324005179be?OpenDocument. Retrieved: 04/20/2010).
general, violates international law and international treaties and on top of it the Geneva Conventions, especially those dedicated to the protection of civilians. For example, in the episode of January 6, 2008, of “What is behind the News,” one of the guests – an international law professor from Leon University – was stressing that Israel was violating the humanitarian international law in Gaza.\textsuperscript{325} According to him, the definition of civilians is clear: those who do not take part in the conflict. According to article 50 in the humanitarian international law, as he mentioned, it is not permissible to target civilians even if militants were hiding among them. Article 57 considers targeting properties, threatening by the use of force, forced migration and random aggression as a crime. Challenging the Israeli claims that Hamas was hiding among civilians, the guest was clear in saying that even if Hamas was violating the humanitarian international law, Israel did not have the right to do the same. These statements by an expert belied all the Israeli claims and pretexts in waging its war on Gaza. This was the message that \textit{al-Jazeera} wanted to make clear.\textsuperscript{326}

Generally speaking, \textit{al-Jazeera} made its mission to broadcast, contrary to \textit{al-Hurra}, whatever affects the reputation of Israel in this war. Examples on this attitude are many. In day three of the war, for instance, \textit{al-Jazeera}’s reporter from Gaza mentioned that Israel warned of a possible bombing of the \textit{al-Shifa’} hospital and described how this caused fear and panic among the staff, the wounded, and their families.\textsuperscript{327} The question was then asked, if Israel was only targeting Hamas and its members, why did it threaten a

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{325}] Bil Taher Bu Jalal (guest.) \textit{Al-Tawsif al-Qanuni li-l-‘Udwan al-Isra’ili ‘ala Ghazza}, op. cit.
\item[\textsuperscript{326}] \textit{Al-Jazeera} also dedicated another episode on January 11 to discuss the possibilities of bringing Israeli leaders to justice before international law. The episode also discussed whether the accusations directed to the Israeli leaders were making a good case or not. \textit{Taharukat al-Munazamat al-Huquqiyya li-Mulahaqat Isra’il Qada’iyyan} (The Steps of Human Rights Organizations to Bring Israel to International Law). Khadija bin Qina. \textit{What is behind the News. Al-Jazeera}. Qatar, Doha. January 11, 2009.
\item[\textsuperscript{327}] Tamer Mishal, \textit{op. cit.}
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possible bombardment on a hospital?\footnote{Hasad al-Yum, ibid.} This piece of news was never mentioned in \textit{Al-Hurra}. A second example was on day four of the war. \textit{Al-Jazeera} gave big coverage to the “Dignity Boat” that took off from Cyprus with the aim of reaching Gaza to break the blockade and show solidarity with the Palestinians. The way the Israelis dealt with the boat was highlighted to show how it is a state that did not abide by international law.\footnote{According to \textit{al-Jazeera}’s reporter on the boat, Israel attacked the boat and caused great damage to it. At the same time, Israel insisted that the boat return to Cyprus which was impossible given the damage inflicted on it and the fact that it ran out of fuel. \textit{Hasad al-Yum, Al-Jazeera}. Qatar, Doha. December 30, 2008.} \textit{Al-Hurra}, on its part, did not mention anything regarding the boat. There was also a special report on \textit{al-Jazeera} on how Israel was targeting mosques. In addition, interviews were conducted with physicians in Gaza about the nature of injuries and their relation to the use of forbidden weapons. This adds to the overall image that portrays Israel and arouses feelings. It is also noticeable how \textit{al-Jazeera} put the flyers that the Israeli army was throwing over the Gazans in a different context compared to that of \textit{al-Hurra}. The former put it as part of the psychological and media war, while the latter portrayed it as an attempt to save lives.\footnote{For example, \textit{al-Jazeera}’s presenter in one of the discussion shows asked one of the guests “If Israel was really targeting civilians, why did it warn them upfront?” His answer was that it was a part of the psychological war. Giving the whole context of the episode, the presenter intentionally asked this question in order to get that answer. She was not expecting a different answer but wanted to uncover what she believed to be lies in the Israeli claims. \textit{Al-Tawsif al-Qanuni, op. cit.} As for \textit{al-Hurra}, throwing pamphlets from the Israeli planes was seen as an attempt to avoid the fall of civilians. See \textit{Al-'Alamiyya, Al-Hurra}. USA, VA. January 10, 2009.}

\textit{Al-Hurra}’s coverage, so to speak, sought to exonerate Israel from accusations of intentionally targeting civilians in general, not just Hamas fighters or the movement’s locations. This was achieved by showing how Israel took steps to warn civilians and keep them away from the line of fire. Additionally, it used a language that described the
operation in a low profile tone. It also framed the news in a deliberate way to emphasize certain points and downplay others.

As for *al-Jazeera*, the channel’s position was unambiguous in accusing Israel of targeting everything and everyone in Gaza. Similar to *al-Hurra*, it made good use of language and framed the news in a deliberate way. Moreover, it relied on intensive interviews with average Gazans as well as receiving phone calls from eye-witnesses. The picture of Israel as a criminal state that committed previous similar crimes against Arabs and Palestinians was stressed. Thus, *al-Jazeera* made every effort to set the conflict in Gaza in a broader context, one that recalled painful episodes from the region’s post-World War II history. In general, Israel was represented as a state that does not abide by international law, international agreements or common morals. *Al-Hurra*, on the other hand, sidestepped this issue entirely and tried to present the Gaza conflict as either a unique incident or one that was only representative of Israel-Hamas antagonism.

**b. The Responsibility**

Although *al-Hurra*’s coverage did not take an overt position concerning who was responsible for the war or for the huge number of civilian casualties, it can be argued that, depending on the guests they invited on both the news and discussion shows, the questions presenters asked and the comments from the reports, the channel tried to put much of the responsibility on Hamas. For example, the news presenter asked one of the hosts on the first day of the war: “Does Hamas alone bear responsibility of what was happening?” Al-‘Alamiyya. *Al-Hurra* USA, VA. December 28, 2008. The question itself reflects position in which Hamas is presumed responsible. A neutral question would not have mentioned any particular party but would
have only asked for who was solely, primarily, or partially responsible? Moreover, the presenter of Free Hour asked the guests:

Wasn’t Hamas mistaken in ending the truce and starting firing rockets at that particular time? Will military operations carried out by Hamas and other Palestinian groups achieve the establishment of the Palestinian state. Or, on the contrary, what they achieve—the biggest evidence on it is what is taking place now—was the destruction, the wounded, the killed and the many crisis?332

Such a question bears many value-laden issues. First, it accuses Hamas of ending the truce, which is technically not true. Hamas did not end the truce, Hamas only refused to extend it. This accusation itself makes Hamas responsible for the war especially when the interviewer said: “Ending the truce and continues firing rockets.” Second, it exaggerates Hamas’s actions. On al-Hurra’s news, Israeli attacks on Gaza were called “operations,” a word that grossly understates its bellicose actions. Why was firing short-range rockets – ammunition that, for the most part, exploded in empty places – referred to as “military operations”? Such a term equates Hamas’s actions to the Israeli’s much wider scale of violence. By saying “on the contrary, what they achieve . . . etc), the interviewer was trying to convey the message that Hamas is inflicting the destruction, the killing and imposing crisis on the Palestinian people. It is obstructing, perhaps even putting to an end, the Palestinian project. It is noteworthy here how he used the superlative in stressing the idea in a way that does not give any credit to what Hamas was doing or raising the possibility that it might be helping the Palestinian cause.

Denying Hamas any credit was also apparent in the pattern of interruption that the presenter used with his guests. For example, a Palestinian writer, Yahia Rabah, denied the accusations raised by a former Israeli ambassador to the United States in which he

described Hamas as a terrorist group threatening the lives of the residents of the southern part of Israel.\textsuperscript{333} When the Palestinian guest said that Hamas agreed to the truce, the presenter immediately interrupted him by saying “but it suspended the truce on the 19\textsuperscript{th} of this month and refused to renew it.”\textsuperscript{334} Again, the presenter is talking as if the truce was effective and Hamas unilaterally decided to abandon it. The truce ended according to the terms of the truce agreement itself on the specified date. According to Hamas, the truce was conditioned on lifting the blockade imposed by Israel on the strip, something that was never done. These aspects were never brought up by the \textit{al-Hurra}’s presenters.

Moreover, one of the guests on the news bulletin, Michael O’Hanlon, held Hamas responsible for protecting civilians. The presenter did not try to challenge such a statement in any way or ask about Israel’s responsibility in this matter or what international law mandates in these circumstances.\textsuperscript{335} In contrast, when the presenter of Free Hour spoke on 12/29/08 over the phone with the spokesman of the Syria Embassy in London and the latter said that Syria “hold Israel responsible for what is going on,”\textsuperscript{336} the presenter immediately interrupted him by saying that “but the Palestinian President put the responsibility on Hamas.”\textsuperscript{337} This way, he was trying to direct the attention away from Israel, as the Syrian diplomat was trying to do, and putting it on Hamas. Although many Western parties blamed Hamas for the break out of war, mentioning the Palestinian President was a maneuver meant to add credibility to such an accusation. Here is the Palestinian President blaming the other Palestinian party for the war. Another example

\textsuperscript{333} December 28. \textit{Free Hour}, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{334} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{335} \textit{Al-\textit{Alamiyya}}, \textit{Al-Hurra}. USA, VA. January 17, 2009.
\textsuperscript{337} Ibid.
came in the news bulletin where it said that there was a “Continuation of strikes: operations from air and sea on targets in Gaza in line with the Palestinian rocket filing.”

To read the news in this way, it suggests that the operation is continued because of Palestinian rocket firing, which is the Israeli point of view.

*Al-Jazeera*, for its part, was taking an unambiguous position. The war, as well as the sufferings before and after it, was Israel’s sole responsibility. In this context, special reports were broadcasted the first and second day of the war about the Israeli blockade of the strip for almost a year before the war started. Describing the sufferings of the Palestinians and shortages in basic necessities of life, like electricity and food, were all highlighted. The blockade itself was portrayed as the equivalent of a military action and, thus, was itself a violation of the truce. In this way, the truce that many blamed Hamas for not renewing it was portrayed as worthless because it did not achieve anything for the Palestinians who continued to endure the blockade. Thus blaming Hamas for refusing to renew the truce was not an issue in the channel’s coverage. Most of *al-Jazeera’s* guests, in particular those who specialized in international law, blamed Israel for what was called “mass killing” and said that there was no way any pretext for what it was doing, including the blockade.

A second point that *al-Jazeera* elaborated on to show how Israel was responsible for the high death toll among civilians was the timing of the strikes. It was, according to *al-Jazeera*, carefully chosen by Israel to inflict the greatest possible loss of life. According to the coverage of the first day, the strikes started at a

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339 For example, this was mentioned by Micheal Abd el-Massih, a lawyer in the British High Court, on the coverage of the first day of the war. He said that from a legal point of view, the Israeli actions were clear crimes regardless of the announced pretexts. Therefore, in his view, those who planned the operation or any soldier who obeyed the commands should be tried before an international tribunal. Micheal Abd el-Massih (guest.) *Hasad al-Yum, Al-Jazeera*. Qatar, Doha. December 27, 2008.
time when school children were going home, causing thereby many casualties among them.

The way al-Jazeera interviewed its guests, especially the Israeli ones, was very challenging. This is unlike al-Hurra’s presenters who never tried to challenge their guests but were only asking them for clarifications. On the first day of the war, for instance, an Israeli army soldier was interviewed by al-Jazeera. The news presenter started his question by saying: “At the beginning of this news, we saw a photo of an infant at the al-Shifa’ hospital in a serious condition. Her mother was not able to bring her to the hospital. Are they on the terrorist list which Israel is targeting?” Another example appeared on the second day of the war. Al-Jazeera’s news hosted the consultant of the Israeli defense minister. When the latter was talking about Hamas’s continuous missile strikes for eight years, the presenter interrupted him and said: “Israel was the first party to violate the truce. In six months, there were more than 117 violations from the Israeli part.”

As the conflict progressed there were increased accusations that Israel was violating human rights in its operations. When asked by an al-Hurra’s news presenter about that issue, the reporter answered as follows: “The Israeli army justifies this issue by saying that Hamas’s fighters fire rockets from the schools. In war every party has much to say about the other party. The truth remains that many children and women are falling,

340 This also seems to be a characteristic of al-Hurra. In its report about the performance of al-Hurra, the report of the Annenberg School found that the station took “uncritical presentation of Israeli positions and [its] journalists [failed] to challenge Israeli pronouncements.” “Clearly,” the report goes on, “the coverage needs better policing. Any news organization that seeks to appeal to an Arab audience but is perceived to be pro-Israeli and an apologist for the American military presence in Iraq will suffer credibility problems.” An Evaluation of Alhurra Television Programming, op. cit., p.24.


and perhaps Hamas uses them as human shields."343 He did not actually answer the
question but repeated Israeli claims. However, by saying that “perhaps Hamas uses them”
lends more credibility to the Israeli story. Also, when the presenter of Free Hour spoke on
the phone with the spokesman of the Syrian Embassy in London and the latter said that
Israel has become a moral burden on the West for what it was doing in Gaza, the former
immediately asked Ann Somerset, the spokeswoman of the American State Department
for the Near East, to comment on this. The spokeswoman made fun of the comment and
described it as a “silly one.”344

As for al-Jazeera, it was conveying the message that Israel alone was responsible
for the high civilian death toll. It actually accused Israel of intentionally targeting them.
This was confirmed via interviewing average Palestinians who were presented as eye-
witnesses to what was happening. Stories were told about the Israeli killing of whole
families and the grouping of unarmed citizens in one house and then blowing it up. A
special focus was given to the use of phosphoric bombs which can cause serious burns
and how they should not be used in densely populated areas like Gaza. The Palestinians
who were interviewed on al-Jazeera denied the Israeli claims that Hamas’ members were
hiding in residential areas. In a densely populated area like the Gaza Strip, it may be
impossible for Hamas members to not live (or hide) in residential areas. This does not
justify attacking civilians but it shows how al-Jazeera (just like al-Hurra) are “myth
making” as much as they are “story reporting.”

In this way, Israel was portrayed as deliberately harming civilians. Language use
also played a role in confirming the message. Calling Israeli forces “occupation forces”

and Hamas and other Palestinian groups “resistance groups,” was meant to legitimize the actions of the latter. Therefore, the missiles launched towards Israel were not an act of terrorists but the response of freedom fighters.

The incident of the UNRWA was also represented in al-Jazeera as another example of Israel’s responsibility for civilian deaths. The channel’s report started by saying that: “the Israeli artillery shells chase Palestinian civilians even after they took shelter in one of the UNRWA’s schools in Jabaliya. But the shells killed and wounded tenth of them. All the locations are targeted without sanctuary or limits.” The following interview took place between al-Jazeera’s news presenter and the spokesman of the Israeli government. It gives an idea on how Israeli guests were interviewed by al-Jazeera in a way that put the whole responsibility on Israel.

**Presenter:** What do you say about targeting rescue crews and aid staff in a way that made the Red Cross and the UNRWA suspend their activities?

**Spokesman:** We do not target humanitarian organizations. Israel has cooperative relations with these organizations. If there are problems, we help to solve them. We are happy to cooperate with them.

**Presenter:** But they are not happy. They say that you do not cooperate with them at all.

**Spokesman:** I do not think this is true. We met today with the Red Cross. All are worried and angry about the casualties in Gaza. This is the responsibility of Hamas. We presented a map taken from one of Hamas’ combatants and showed how some of them centered inside mosques and laid landmines in houses and use residents as human shields. Hamas does not protect civilians.

**Presenter:** You repeat the same tape to such an extent that it becomes boring. The Red Cross and the UNRWA say the opposite.

**Spokesman:** Maybe. And with all due respect, you seem as if you are repeating a boring tape when you talk in this way. We know that in refugee camps Hamas transformed UNRWA buildings into military bases.

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and was firing rockets from them. After that, Hamas is angry because civilians are being killed. This is Hamas’ fault and this is a war crime. Everybody in Gaza knows that Hamas exposes civilians to danger.

**Presenter:** My boring tape is confirmed by facts, photos and the statements by international officials. Nothing supports your boring tape.

**Spokesman:** That is not true. There was documentation of what I said. There are photos that document this. Hamas is like Taliban; it controls the media.

**Presenter:** The last thing was a condemnation from [U.N. Secretary General] Ban Kee Moon for the killing of two UNRWA’s staff. Is Ban Kee Moon also misguided?346

Exchanges such as these reinforce the impression that *al-Hurra*’s coverage sides more with Israel compared to *al-Jazeera*. In terms of Arab public opinion, comments by Israeli officials condemning Hamas or holding it responsible for the situation hold little merit. On the other hand, reports about other statements that condemns the excessive use of force by Israel or the reports of some organizations working in the field of human rights field denouncing Israeli violations were not mentioned. So while Ban Kee Moon, the U.N. Secretary General, expressed his worry about the situation in Gaza and the excessive use of force as well as Hamas missiles, *al-Hurra* limited its report to the part of his statement in which he “condemned strongly missile strikes from Hamas and held Hamas responsible for what is happening because it refused to renew the truce.”347 Also, one piece of the news was on how the “Likud party leader expressed his country’s sadness for civilian deaths and said that civilians from both sides were paying for Hamas’ attacks.”348

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Al-Jazeera, for its part, did exactly the opposite. On the one hand, Arab nationalist and Islamist voices, which are traditionally against Israel and supportive of armed struggle, were well represented in the channel’s coverage. People like Azmi Bishara, Abdel Halim Qandil, and Fahmi Huwaydi were frequent guests on al-Jazeera. Also, international figures known to be supporting the Palestinian cause and the right of resistance, such as George Galloway, were hosted. On the other hand, Hamas’ leaders were given an ample opportunity in al-Jazeera to explain the movement’s positions and also to reply to Israeli accusations. For example, on the second day of the war, and after interviewing the consultant of the Israeli defense minister, Hamas leader Sami Abu Zuhri categorically denied the Israeli accusation. He said:

I heard him saying that Hamas violated the truce; this is nonsense. Hamas abided by the truce firmly but the blockade continued. Electricity was cut off during the truce period; something that was never done before the truce. Therefore, why should we renew it? Why does Israel make intrusions into Ramallah from time to time if the problem is the missiles? What is happening in Gaza is a war from one party.


350 Abdel Halim Qandil is an opposition Egyptian journalist who has a clear Arab nationalist attitude. He is the Editor in Chief of the Egyptian opposition newspaper Sawt al-Umma (Voice of the Nation) and the General Coordinator of Kifaya opposition movement.


The Egyptian initiative and a subsequent Security Council resolution were also opportunities to criticize Hamas on *al-Hurra*. First, when Hamas expressed some reservations about the initiative, the presenter of Free Hour asked in his introduction to the discussion “what, after Hamas’ rejection of the Egyptian initiative, is the alternative?” The truth was that a group of Palestinian resistance groups issued a declaration rejecting the initiative. Hamas was one of the signatories. However, the official position of Hamas’s leaders, up until that point, was that they were still considering it with some reservations. This means that if these reservations were met, or at least negotiated, Hamas would accept the initiative. The discussion of the Egyptian initiative in subsequent episodes concentrated on Hamas’ position as the main obstacle. For example, in one of the episodes of “Free Hour,” three questions were discussed, the first of which was “the fate of the Egyptian initiative that does not receive full reception from Hamas while Israel continues its pressures through extending the operations and politically through delaying the visit Ehud Barack’s deputy [Israel’s defense minister at that time] to Cairo.” Here, the presenter did not talk about the Israeli position in terms of the initiative itself. The way he raised the issue may have meant to give the impression that while Hamas did not fully accept it, Israel might be more receptive to the initiative.

What is more revealing is how the headlines were put in order. For example, on the news of the seventh day of the war, *al-Hurra’s* news headlines read as follows: 1- the White House stresses Israel’s right to defend itself; 2- Israel strikes locations that belong

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to Hamas in Gaza; 3- Hamas files rockets on the Israeli towns. When read together, these headlines read as follows: Hamas files rockets, therefore, Israel strikes back. This means that Israel is defending itself. Al-Jazeera’s news framing took a different path. Generally speaking, the news headlines started with the number of martyrs and wounded resulting from the Israeli attacks. This was followed by how Hamas and the Palestinian groups responded to the attacks in terms of the number and range of the rockets filed. At the end comes the news about demonstrations and reactions in the Arab countries and around the world. This way, both the demonstrations and the missiles were reacting to Israeli aggression.

Al-Jazeera, in general, was first focusing on the demonstrations in Arab countries. Usage of the term “Arab Street” was frequently used when reporting on the demonstrations erupted at various parts of the Arab world. The second focus was on Islamic countries such as Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan. In the third place comes the coverage of the demonstrations in European countries. Here, it was highlighted how the Arab and Muslim political activists in these countries were the organizers of these acts of solidarity. At last, there was the coverage of the demonstrations and acts of solidarity around the world from groups that were peace loving or belonging to humanitarian organizations. Noticeable here is how the network depends on the infusion of Arabism and Islam. Although Arabism seems to be prioritized in the channel’s coverage, Islam still plays a major defining role. This means that the station’s intended audience is basically Arab Muslims either in the region or outside of it.

It can also be said that al-Hurra’s coverage tried indirectly to discredit Hamas as well as to portray it as a group that destabilizes other countries in the region. Although

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the news is not an arena to exchange accusations and insults, one piece of the news was: “The spokesman of the Israeli Prime Minister criticized Khalid Meshaal who asks the Palestinians in Gaza to fight a ruthless war while he lives in luxury.” So, al-Hurra gave Israelis airtime to disgrace Hamas and attack it without giving Hamas the same opportunity. If this position could be understood in terms of the institutional constraints on the station, it is not understood why it did not host those who can present Hamas’ views. Another piece of news was covering the “demonstrations in front of the UN in Beirut enticed by Hamas and the Islamic group.” This piece of news serves two goals. On the one hand, it shows that the demonstrators are either members of Hamas or the Islamic group or misled by them, i.e. not an act of the majority of people or an informed rational actor. On the other hand, it shows that these groups are trying to destabilize other countries or, as is the case in Lebanon, the reason for its instability.

A third example of how Hamas was negatively portrayed was when al-Hurra’s news reporter said regarding a U.N. Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire. The reporter said: “Nobody in Israel thinks that Israel will abide by the resolution because Hamas is a movement that does not abide by UN resolutions.” In this way, the reporter primarily put the blame on Hamas for not respecting the resolution. The Israeli decision, thus, is only a reaction. In so doing, the reporter overlooked Israel’s long history of not abiding by UN resolutions. This was in contrary to what al-Jazeera was reporting about the reactions to the resolution. It was Israel first and foremost, according to al-Jazeera, that refused the resolution and thus led to its futility. For example, on the 9th of

357 As discussed in chapter two, the code of ethics of al-Hurra forbids giving airtime to organizations that are on the terrorist list of the US State Department.
January episode, the presenter of the discussion show began by saying that “we deal in this episode with the resolution of the Security Council that calls for ceasefire in Gaza. Such a diplomatic movement was received by with total disregarding from Israel, while Hamas said that it does not care about it.” So while al-Hurra tried to show that Hamas was responsible for the ineffectiveness of the Security Council resolution, al-Jazeera placed responsibility on Israel and on the ‘biased resolution,’ as it portrayed it, as well.

Al-Jazeera’s coverage also denied the connection between refusing the Egyptian initiative and the Security Council’s resolution and the responsibility for the continuation in Palestinian casualties. Therefore, when the Palestinian President criticized resistance groups in case they did not abide by the Egyptian initiative and held them responsible for perpetuating the current situation, al-Jazeera’s discussion show dedicated a special episode to such statements and wondered if that connection was right. The opinions circulated, with the apparent approval of the presenter, refused to lay the responsibility for the ineffectiveness of the ceasefire on both parties equally. This is because this conflict, according to these views, was a one-sided war. The Palestinian side is just receiving; therefore, it should not be held responsible.

Al-Jazeera was, thus, sending a different message. Hamas was portrayed as the choice of resistance and dignity, one that was widely supported by people in Gaza and

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361 For example, the episode of January 9, 2009, was almost fully dedicated to criticizing the resolution because it did not condemn what the guests considered as Israeli atrocities. The resolution was also criticized for ignoring the fact that the resistance was mainly fending off aggression. The presenter also mentioned how the resolution dealt with the crisis from a procedural angle without touching on the core of the problem. There was also a kind of support to the rejection of the resistance Palestinian groups to the resolution, especially in the view of the fact that the council did not give an obligatory tone to its resolution. The resolution, according to the guests, was only “calling” for full respect of the ceasefire, but it did not mention that the parties must abide by it (ibid.).
across the Arab world. It was represented as the epitome of resistance contrary to the inability of Arab governments. Therefore, voices supporting Hamas were extensively heard in *Al-Jazeera*. The news coverage also played a role. For example, on the fifth day of the war, a news presenter said: “Despite the continuous falling of martyrs, many of the people in Gaza expressed their persistence in resisting Israel by all means. The people of the Gaza strip stressed that the huge number of martyrs would only increase their resoluteness.” Similar news was presented on the eighth day where the news presenter mentioned that “Eight days of Israeli strikes on Gaza did not shake the Palestinian steadfastness despite the large number of martyrs and wounded.” The channel was also keen to highlight any positions that highly criticized Israel and laid the responsibility of the situation on its shoulder. For example the episode of ‘What is behind the News’ on January 3, 2009, started with quotes from both the Qatari Emir and the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The former described Israel’s actions as crimes and that any attempt to equalize the victim and the slayer was not acceptable. As for the Turkish PM, he held Israel responsible for the situation because it did not abide by the truce and because it refused a Turkish mediation offer a few days before the war.

This is also evident in cases where the network aired speeches by people like Hassan Nasr Allah or Ismail Haniya. Several parts of these speeches were broadcasted and quoted in the news. This is in contrary to what *al-Hurra* was doing. In reporting the speech of Hassan Nasr Allah, the channel did not air the voice of Nasr Allah; it only aired a quick shot of the crowds in front of him and another quick shot on Nasr Allah.

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himself. In commenting on Nassr Allah’s speech, the reporter seemed to belittle it by saying: “The speech of the General Secretary of Hezbollah did not surprise the Israelis and Ulmert himself expected it yesterday when he warned from opening a front from the North . . . Hezbollah and Nassr Allah would not take the risk this time . . . the speech comes in context of Arab solidarity or Hezbollah’s solidarity with Hamas.”

On the basis of this analysis, we can say that al-Hurra’s coverage held Hamas more responsible for the war and the death of civilians than Israel. Israel, according to this coverage, is a country that is trying to defend itself and is supported by the international community, while Hamas represents a bunch of irresponsible hypocrites who inflict misery on their people and try to destabilize other countries as well. In contrast, al-Jazeera blamed Israel for both the war and civilian fatalities. Israel, in this view, is an occupation force that commits all possible crimes needed to end the Palestinian dream of freedom and independence. This is an aspiration that resonates with popular Arab sentiments far outside Israeli and Palestinian administrative boundaries. As al-Jazeera’s coverage sought to show how Israel tries to break Hamas and other resistant groups in the region, not because they are terrorists but because they are against its imperialistic tendencies. Resistance, according to this view, is a legitimate way to end occupation. It is Israel, according to al-Jazeera, which causes Palestinian misery and tries to destabilize the region in order to achieve its dominant ambition.
c. Success

Who succeeded in the war was one of the issues that *al-Hurra’s* coverage dealt with. From discussion shows, reports and various news pieces, it can be concluded that *al-Hurra* portrayed Israel as the winner of the war without explaining exactly what success or failure meant in an operation like the Gaza War. Reporters repeated many times that the “operation can be described as successful,” and how Israel “feels comfortable and feels victorious.” There was also an attempt to show the weakness of Palestinian armed groups and how easy it was for Israel to advance in this war. For example, in the special coverage at the beginning of the land operation, *al-Hurra’s* reporter from Israel said: “The Israeli military said that at dawn the Gazans will witness things that they never dreamt of. They completely occupied a location that belonged to Hamas. The Israeli army has very developed capabilities to see during the night while there is a complete paralysis to Hamas’ and al-Qassam’s facilities.” Another report said: “The Israeli army reached places it did not expect to reach that quickly and with the least losses.” Focusing also on the decreasing number of missiles and stressing this in the news and reports sought to convey the message that Hamas was retreating.

*Al-Jazeera*, on the contrary, was stressing from the beginning that Israel was losing the war. Therefore, almost all of the guests hosted were belittling the Israeli land advancements in the Strip. They were mentioning how most of these intrusions happened in empty places with low or no population density and how the real fight would take place when Israel decides to move its troops into residential areas. For example, Safwat al-Zayat – a military analyst that *al-Jazeera* used to host everyday to comment on the

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developments – said that “The Israeli army is surrounding the city from the south but does not have the ability to occupy it . . . [I]t seems that the Palestinians are resisting well. Fifteen thousand fighters are among the residential areas. This lays the groundwork for sniper actions. They are very precise.”

Land intrusion was also portrayed as something Israelis feared, probably more than the Palestinians. This was reflected in the questions presenters asked in the discussion shows. For example, on January 2, 2009, the presenter of “What is behind the News” asked in his introductory remarks: “Is Israel really capable of performing a land operation with all the complications that surround the operation?” He also asked a similar question in the same episode: “There is an agreement that there are many precautions to that land intrusion. Here, according to the analysts, the ability of the resistance to fend off Israel or to try to inflict many loses on the Israeli lines if they engaged in a land intrusion played the main role. To what extent could that possibility be real?”

The answer, according to the guest, was as follows:

Israel lacks the tactical intelligence which means that Israel has been away from fighting since 2005 and it does not really know how the situation changed. Secondly, time is a factor against a land operation because it requires long time and in these wars resistance wins when it survives and the nation state loses when it does not win. The third factor is how Hamas prepared for this war . . .

The presenter interrupted him and said:

The question that I mentioned has particularly to do with the military side. We heard talk of the Hezbollah General Secretary saying that according to information he has, if the Israelis decided to enter Gaza, their

humanitarian loss will start. What do we understand from these words concerning the capabilities of the resistance?\textsuperscript{373}

The guest replied:

Street fighting is the most difficult one for military power. When Israel enters residential areas, success will be to those who are originally on the land and that is called situation awareness, i.e. I know the area better. The last factor is technological ability and the Israeli technological advance. In this area, the army will lose lots of its capabilities. Air power would be secondary and even the movement of the Israeli tanks in residential areas will be difficult. This gives the resistance the opportunity to afflict loses on Israel. These losses mean political problems, it also means more time and that will be working in favor of the resistance.\textsuperscript{374}

The increase in the death toll among Palestinians was itself, according to \textit{al-Jazeera}’s coverage, a sign that Israel was not able to achieve what it thought it would. For example, on the tenth day, when asked about the severity of the Israeli strikes, \textit{al-Jazeera}’s military analyst said that “In every stage, when they fail, they claim that there is a new stage. It seems that until now they did not succeed in anything. Therefore, madness is increasing.”\textsuperscript{375} \textit{Al-Jazeera} was also keen to mention the daily death and injury toll among the Israelis as a result of Grad missiles. It also aired whatever tapes were released by the Palestinian groups showing snipers’ actions or traps for the Israeli soldiers.\textsuperscript{376} This was never done on \textit{al-Hurra}. \textit{Al-Jazeera} also focused on the significance

\textsuperscript{373} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{374} Ibid. Discussing the meaning of success or failure in the military operation was also brought up in the discussion of the 15\textsuperscript{th} of January episode. The point discussed was how to define success or failure of two militarily unequal parts, i.e. a resistance group and a state’s army. \textit{Ab’ad al-Tas’id al-’Askari al-Isra’ili fi Gha’aza} (The Aspects of the Israeli Military Escalation in Gaza). Jumanna Nmur. \textit{What is behind the News. Al-Jazeera}. Qatar, Doha. January 15, 2009.
\textsuperscript{375} The same was expressed on the 13\textsuperscript{th} of January episode. One of the guests said “Israel, day after day, becomes confident that it is not capable of achieving its military goals and tries to make up for this by killing the largest number of civilians and generating the largest number of victims as well as using illegal weapons.” See Abd el-Halim Qandil (guest). \textit{Al-’Aqabat allati Ta’tarid Najah al-Mubadara al-Misriyya} (Obstacles Facing the Success of the Egyptian Initiative). Khadija bin Qana. \textit{What is behind the News. Al-Jazeera}. Qatar, Doha. January 13, 2009.
\textsuperscript{376} From example, on day 13 of the war, \textit{al-Jazeera} aired a tape showing snipers from the Palestinian groups shooting two Israeli soldiers. \textit{Hasad al-Yum. Al-Jazeera}. Qatar, Doha. January 13, 2009.
of the increasing range of the missiles and not only their numbers, as *al-Hurra* used to do. The focus on the missiles’ range enhanced the confidence in the abilities of the Palestinian resistance groups, while focusing only on the numbers may shake this confidence by showing how they were decreasing or at least oscillating. This was reflected in reporters’ comments as well as the opinions circulated by the guests. For example, Safwat al-Zayat said that “Some people may focus on the randomness of these missiles. I remind that what is important is not killing, but paralyzing the life of five main cities in Israel.”377

There was also a kind of justification for the Israeli war in *al-Hurra*’s coverage. For example, the presenters in *al-Hurra*’s discussion shows used to ask their guests whether the Israeli strikes would succeed in stopping the Palestinian missiles and recovering Israel’s deterrence power. The answers given usually stressed that even if the missiles were not stopped completely, Israel succeeded in reestablishing its power of deterrence in the eyes of its neighbors and taught Hamas a tough lesson. This was expressed by one guest in the ‘Four Directions’ program on January 9.378 The question itself was not neutral; even if it was answered affirmatively, this, in the view of the critics of the war, could not justify a war that resulted in such scale of devastation. Asking a question in this manner opens the possibility to justify the war.379

This justification was also shown in how the news headlines were edited. For example, on the news of the fifth day, the second title of the news was: “The Israeli security government decides on continuing its operations and Hamas shows readiness to

379 An opinion was expressed concerning the possibility that If Israel did not win in Gaza, the ideas of terminating Israel militarily may flourish (*ibid.*).
[consider] a conditional truce.”380 This gave the impression that the Israeli strikes gave Hamas a lesson; therefore, the movement changed its position and would agree on a truce. Although Hamas belied this news later, *al-Hurra* did not put that in the headlines. It was mentioned as a quick piece of news in the following day. What bolstered this inference is how the reports described this war as “a declared war on terrorism and destruction of its infrastructure.”381 Putting this conflict in the context of war on terrorism can also be inferred from the framing of the news headlines. For example, the headlines of the third day were as follows: The Quadrate asks for a continuous ceasefire in Gaza; The total number of four day of air and land strikes approaches 400; The leader of Israeli opposition denies to *al-Hurra* any electoral motivations behind the strikes in Gaza; Pakistan intensifies its efforts to wipe out Taliban from Khaybar strategic passage.”382 The headlines attempted to connect the Israeli war in Gaza and the Pakistani war against Taliban. By putting the attacks in the frame of the war on terrorism, *al-Hurra*’s coverage tried to legitimize the war.

The questions asked by *al-Hurra*’s presenters were also giving the impression that it was logical for the Israeli army to win over a disorganized group. For example, the news presenter asked one of the hosts: “This is a battle between a well equipped army, on the one hand, and elements from Hamas who are threatening Israel that what is happening is not going to be a break; to which side victory will be?”383 This reflected the same material thinking that governs the American administration: by material calculations, Israel must win. Such a calculation ignored non-material considerations

such as a people’s dream in freedom and independence. Its broadcasts implicitly buy into the thesis that one community’s right to self-determination trumps another’s.

This non-material aspect was apparent in al-Jazeera. The performance of Hamas and other Palestinian groups was, as al-Jazeera’s reporter mentioned on the eighth day, a reflection of the continued will to resist. In this way, it was portrayed as a war of wills. This is connected to al-Jazeera’s definition of success and failure in this war. Success meant steadfastness in front of the Israeli war machine, whereas failure meant that Israel did not achieve any of its goals, the apex of which was putting an end to rockets filing. According to the views on al-Jazeera, even filing one rocket meant that Israel was failing in the war. According to one of the guests in the discussion show, “the weaker remains the winner as long as he remains in the fight.”

When Israel announced a unilateral ceasefire, there was also an attempt by al-Hurra to confirm that this does not mean a victory for Hamas. The reporter said concerning Hamas’ claims of victory: “This is just a rhetorical discourse that Israel expected,” and stressed that “Israel succeeded by taking guarantees from the US and that the international community recognized its right to defend its inhabitants.” This was exactly the opposite of what was circulated in al-Jazeera. The unilateral ceasefire was framed as Israeli acknowledgement of its failure in its Gaza operation. For example, Safwat al-Zayat said in answering the question about the Israeli celebration of victory by saying that “Israel cannot take another loss in two years. But it, for sure, lost. This is only the act of Israeli propaganda machine.”

The American-Israeli agreement that took place one day before the ceasefire was itself portrayed as a proof that Israel failed in

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384 Safwat al-Zayat (Guest). The Possible Direction of the Military Campaign, op. cit.
achieving its targets. For example, Azmi Bishara commented on this agreement by saying:

This agreement is dangerous, but, at the same time, it demonstrates that Israel’s position is not what it likes to show. Israel reached a fork in the road: either to occupy the Strip, a situation which will involve it in a historical crisis, or withdraw without conditions which means that it failed. [Israel] cannot simply return to its public opinion for a second time with a thousand and something killed – half of whom are children and women – without a political achievement out of fear of endorsing the Lebanon complex. Therefore, it needs commitments.387

The meaning of failure and success was different in the two channels. This affected the view of each of them in terms of who won the war or, at least, who was more successful than the other. While al-Hurra stressed rational material calculation in deciding the winner, al-Jazeera employed abstract and moral determinants for the same issue. For al-Hurra, it was a matter of a balance of power, while al-Jazeera considered it a war of wills and the right to resist the occupation. It was also shown how the operation according to al-Hurra’s coverage resulted in a difficult humanitarian situation waiting for diplomatic efforts to stop the fighting and not to put an end to occupation as al-Jazeera was conveying.

d. Repercussions of the War

Al-Hurra was mainly interested in two main issues that may result from this war. The first was the future of the peace process, and the second was the impact of this war on the region. The future of the peace process was linked to the US role and Obama’s administration’s future strategies. As for the impact of the war, this was mainly referring

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to the future of the regimes, the future of the Palestinian authority vis-à-vis Hamas, the establishment of Israel’s power of deterrence, and the influence of Islamic extremism.

In the first two days of the Gaza War, al-Hurra was interested in whether the war would be extended to other fronts or not. This was reflected in the introductory parts given by the presenters of ‘Free Hour’. For example, the presenter of ‘Free Hour’ directly connected the possibilities of opening new fronts to a *fatwa* (a religious edict) issued by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and wondered how this *fatwa* could be translated into actions by Iran’s allies in the region.\(^{388}\) In this way, he directly brought Iran into the discussion and linked it to the ongoing instability and also the possible deterioration of the situations. Accordingly, the program’s presenter was actually bringing the relation between Hezbollah and Iran under the spotlight. This was also the core of the discussion in the 9\(^{th}\) of January ‘the Four Directions’ episode, where Iran was blamed for encouraging this war because it wanted to play an increasing regional role.\(^{389}\) The Palestinian issue opened the gate to this possibility.

On the third day, the presenter of ‘Free Hour’ started by mentioning a number of *fatwas* from extremists calling for Jihad. He, then, asked: “How would the Gaza war be reflected on the Arab systems and countries?”\(^{390}\) The question implied that religious extremism was a threat to current Arab regimes, ignoring how these regimes were not responsive to the boiling sentiments of the Arab street. There was also an attempt to show how Hamas’s success or failure in the war was directly related to the influence of the


Islamic trend. Moreover, religion is once again negatively portrayed as a factor generating instability and violence neglecting that some trends on the Arab street and intelligentsia are not part of any religious trend but support resistance.

*Al-Hurra*’s coverage also gave the impression that the Palestinian issue is the major source of Arab-Arab dispute. This was reflected in the concentration on the Arab official split and neglecting the united voice of the Arab street. This is why the presenter of ‘Free Hour’ asked if “is it possible that the Gaza war becomes an Arab-Arab conflict?” Another repercussion of the war that was highly discussed in *al-Hurra* was the future of the Palestinian authority vis-à-vis Hamas. Whether the war would strengthen Hamas or weaken it was a big issue on this network. The way the discussion progressed in most episodes was to give the impression that it was better if Hamas lost, i.e., Israel has to take the time to finish the job; otherwise, the consequences would be disastrous for the whole region in general and on the Palestinian situation in particular. Hamas, in the view of most ‘Free Hour’ guests, was not an option to be considered. Even if it was reelected, one of the guests expressed, dealing with it was not possible.

It is also interesting how the Palestinian-Palestinian split was represented as irreconcilable if compared to the possibility of resuming the peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis. Any success granted to Hamas in the war was considered something that not only consolidated the Palestinian duality but also put the whole future of the Palestinian Authority in question. There were also questions about whether the war “would lead to the creation of new military equations and political beliefs on the ground

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391 The Gaza War and the Impact of disregarding UN Resolution 1860, *op. cit.* The presenter asked: “Does not the weakness of Hamas have an impact on the spread of Islamism in the region?”
that changes the face of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in particular and the situation in
the region in general? And whether the Israeli army would be able to put an end to
Hamas?394 Putting these questions within al-Hurra’s broader discussion framework
imply that if Israel manages to terminate Hamas, there would be new arrangements that
could change the face of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict: putting an end to it. Hamas’
failure was, thus, in the best interest of the Palestinian authority, particularly President
Abbas, as well as the future of the peace process.395

Despite the shed of blood on the land, the peace process was still possible but
needed a cooperative Palestinian party and a dedicated American administration, al-
Hurra implied. However, the Palestinian duality, which was most probably consolidated
by the war, was highlighted on al-Hurra as the main obstacle to the peace process. This
ignores the Israeli obstacles and on the top of it the continuation of settlements. This
focus on the Palestinian split seems to be opening the door for an old Israeli argument
that there was no Palestinian partner. This could be inferred from the presenter’s
question: “With whom would Obama negotiate?” 396

The Palestinian situation was also represented as a challenge to the Obama’s
administration that may oblige him to reconsider the priority given to the Middle East
problem out of fear of extending the war circle,397 or how the results of the war would be

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394 This was the introductory questions of the presenter of ‘The Four Directions’ on January 2, 2009. The
Impact of the Ongoing Gaza Struggle. Sam Mansi. The Four Directions, Al-Hurra. USA, VA. January 2,
2009.
395 This was the hub of the discussion in Free Hour in several episodes: January 2, 5, 6, 11, 12, and January
13, 2009.
397 This was the discussion in the Free Hour’s episode on January 1, 2009. Day 6. Hussien Jardi. Free Hour,
reflected in Obama’s strategy towards the peace process. This interest in the war’s repercussions on the new American administration was also linked to an effort on the part of al-Hurra to explain the American position on the war and the efforts the US was exerting to alleviate Palestinian sufferings. This is consistent with al-Hurra’s purpose – improving the image of the US in the region. Therefore, there was an attempt to portray the US as a benign and rational power that thinks in the long run. This appears in the special focus given to the American position that “asked Israel to avoid civilian casualties.” There was also a focus on the US interest in the humanitarian situation. News was repeated about the US intensified efforts to find a solution to the crisis and providing aid, or how the US state department “sent a press statement in which it stressed that the US will offer $85 million dollar aid to the UNRWA to contribute to rebuild the destroyed homes and provide hospitals with their needs.” The official American point of view was also given considerable time. For example, the spokeswoman for the State Department’s Bureau for the Near Eastern Affairs was frequently hosted in ‘Free Hour’ to express the American point of view and was given the opportunity to reply each time criticism to the American role was raised.

On the Israeli level, the interest in al-Hurra focused on whether the war would re-establish the Israeli deterrence that was shaken following the 2006 war in Lebanon. Therefore, when missiles were shot from Southern Lebanon, al-Hurra’s discussion was interested in knowing who did it rather than the message that action wanted to convey, as was the case with al-Jazeera. This was probably done to call into question the Syrian role

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398 This was the discussion in Free Hour on January 2. Day7. Hussien Jardi. Free Hour. Al-Hurra. USA, VA. January 2, 2009.
and that of other Iranian allies. It was stressed that Hezbollah quickly denied its connection with the missiles as evidence that the 2006 Lebanon War succeeded in deterring Hezbollah. This was contrary to what al-Jazeera was saying. Al-Jazeera highlighted that it was Israel that quickly denied the connection between Hezbollah and the missiles.\footnote{This was the topic of the episode of January 8, 2009. 
Maghza wa Tada’iyat Ilaq al-Sawarikh min Janub Libnan (The Significance and Repercussions of Firing Rockets from Southern Lebanon). Ali al-Zufiri. 
What is behind the News, Al-Jazeera. Qatar, Doha. January 8, 2009.} This was to show that Israel was not ready to open new fronts and also that the “power of resistance” had taught Israel a lesson in Lebanon.

Discussions about the repercussions of the war were different on al-Jazeera. There was an interest in one main issue: reframing Palestinian unity and the Arab positions in accordance with a strategy of resistance. According to many of the guests, and the comments of the presenters, the Palestinian project should abandon the path of negotiations because it was not leading to any solutions, but only to a dead end. There was also a reminder that the Palestinian authority, a locus of political contestation, was an illusion since it was a polity under occupation. The Arab initiative was also criticized for being at the negotiating table while the Israelis were not responsive in any way to it. According to al-Jazeera’s extensive coverage, the Arabs have to reconsider the choice of resistance and support the Palestinian armed groups, especially when there was an agreement on the part of the presenter that what Israel sought to break was the will of the resistance in this conflict.\footnote{In the episode of 12/27/08, the spokesman of Hamas in Beirut, Osama Himdan, said that Israel wanted to break the will of the resistance. The presenter interrupted him by saying there was no disagreement over specifying what Israel wants. 
Al-Mawqif al-’Arabi min al-’Udwan al-Isra’ili ’Ala Ghaza (The Arab Position towards the Israeli Aggression on Gaza). Muhammad Krishan. 
What is behind the News, Al-Jazeera. Qatar, Doha. December 27, 2008.}

While al-Hurrura was interested in the consequences of the war with regard to the position of Hamas vis-à-vis the Palestinian authority, al-Jazeera was questioning the
possibility of reaching any settlement to the conflict without, actually, engaging Hamas. This was reflected in the kinds of questions asked. For example, the talk show’s presenter was wondering “whether the European diplomatic efforts were missing something such as contacting those who are practically in charge of things in Gaza, i.e. Hamas.”

Putting the question this way focuses attention on the possibility that not all the parties seriously wanted to end the situation; if they did, they would have contacted Hamas rather than ignoring it.

The Palestinian issue, according to al-Jazeera’s coverage, was not a source of Arab divisions; on the contrary, it was the official Arab-Arab split that was blocking the Palestinian unity talk and deepening the Palestinian-Palestinian drift. Therefore, there was an interest in the possibility of overcoming Arab division in order to take a united stance against the aggression on Gaza. In his introductory remarks the presenter of ‘What is behind the News’ on December 30, 2008, said: “In the context of the demonstrations of the Arab street that are asking for an official stance to counteract the Israeli aggressions on the people of Gaza, the debate continues among the Arab governments around holding a summit devoted to get out with a united Arab stance that deals with the current developments in the strip.” Again, this was meant to show the difference between the official stance of Arab countries and that of the Arab people.

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Remarkably, the American role was not highly focused on *al-Jazeera*. This was sometimes justified by the fact that the American administration was going through a transitional period, which, in turn, gave greater weight to other roles like the European and Turkish ones. However, the European role was criticized for highlighting the humanitarian aspect of the crisis at the expense of its political essence.

2. Regional Identity Representation

It can be argued that *al-Huura*’s coverage of the war gave the impression that it is a region suffering from an identity crisis. Division is the fact that remains apparent in this coverage without distinguishing between the official government and popular levels. This applied even to the Palestinian level where interest in the political split between Hamas and Fattah took precedence over the solidarity spread in the Palestinian street. The coverage ruled out the impression that the war may promote unity among the Palestinians. On the contrary, it focused on how the split was at its maximum in Gaza even when the strip was under attack. For example, *al-Hurra* reporter from Gaza pointed out that “families belonging to Fattah were demonstrating in front of the Saraya building asking for the release of their sons from jails and how Fattah asked the people to continue the sit in so that Israel would not strike the location.”

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Al-Hurra did not air any statements from the leaders of Hamas and was only reporting what they said with a photo of a Hamas member, the focus of that particular news story. Despite this attitude, when disagreement between Fattah and Hamas increased to the extent that Fawzy Barhum, Hamas’s spokesman, accused the Palestinian authority of being involved in the war. Al-Hurra reported Barhum’s words in his voice. What is more interesting is that news about the Palestinian split was deemed worthy of a news story while the clashes with the Israeli army in the West Bank were hurriedly mentioned in their reports. Acts of solidarity and demonstrations in the West Bank and the call for unity were not mentioned in al-Hurra. In this way, the Palestinian “other” was made ambiguous, and “occupation” was evidently neutralized.

Regional divisions received special focus. On the one hand, there was a repetition of the policies of axis rhetoric and how Hamas, Iran, Hezbollah, and Syria are forming a united front to confront the “moderate Arab countries camp.” For example, al-Hurra’s reporter said: “Iran will never accept the end of Hamas authority in Gaza at this time and therefore we expect a widening in the circle of violence.” This statement blamed Hamas, with the support of Iran, for the violence in the region, or at least for the continuation of violence. In another report, the reporter mentioned that “Israel tries to show its anger on Hamas which Israel considers as Iran’s arm.” In this way, the war was represented as “an attempt to twist the Iranian arm if Israel succeeds in terminating Hamas.” Moreover, in one of the night news, al-Hurra hosted the Israeli minister of National Infrastructures who gave the following statement: “Listen to the voices coming

411 The Impact of the Ongoing Gaza Struggle, op. cit.
from the Arab world and from the People of Gaza. They are sick of Hamas and its leadership.” The presenter did not try to challenge this by mentioning, for example, the voices coming from the Arab street. In line with this attempt to camp some Arab countries with Israel, the presenter of ‘the Four Direction’ on January 9, 2009, said that “The members of the Arab moderation camp were also worried about the tendencies of the new American administration, especially the possibility of dialogue engagement to other parties, especially with Iran.” He was, thus, implying that wagging war at that time was blessed by some Arab countries as well as an attempt to limit the Iranian influence in the region.

This “assumed” identity crisis is also revealed through ignoring Arab street unity. News about the demonstration was mentioned quickly with very quick photos and without seeing people’s opinions or airing their chanting slogan or expressed demands. Even when a demonstration in Jordan was covered more extensively, the report started by saying: “Politics was never with that emotional enthusiasm.” This is because the demonstrator called for annulling the peace treaty and closing down the Israeli embassy in Amman. Then the news read that Saleh al-Galab, the then Jordanian Minister for Information and Communications, said in an interview with al-Hurra that his country “does its best to stop the aggression on Gaza and that the issue of cutting off the relations is early.” This piece of news was trying to juxtapose the supposed emotional Arab street in contrast to the official and rational voice of moderate states.

413 The Gaza War and the Impact of Disregarding UN Resolution, op. cit.
415 Ibid.
Adding to the identity crisis is the downplayed role of religion in *al-Hurra*’s coverage. Religious solidarity was not covered in *al-Hurra* and the positions of organization like the Organization of Islamic Conference were not mentioned at all. Even when religion (Islam) was spelled out, this was in a negative rather than a positive way. For example, in one of the news, two consequent pieces of news were as the following: first, the Vatican Pope calls for denouncing violence in the Middle East. Second, the Saudi authorities arrested Awad al-Qarni because of his *fatwa* that permitted targeting Israeli interests.\(^{416}\) In other words, while the Roman Pope (a Christian cleric) was calling for peace, the Muslim Sheikh was calling for violence. This impression is reinforced with the focus of the discussion show. As previously mentioned in the first two days of the war, *fatwas* were issued by Iranian religious leaders and other Muslims clerics calling for *Jihad* and defending the Muslim brethren in Gaza.

*Al-Jazeera*’s coverage was reflecting on a region that suffers from a political crisis not an identity-related one. Divisions are mainly political in nature but the popular level is characterized by solidarity and unity. Political divisions were portrayed as an external strategy that was being implemented with the help of the leaders in the region. Arab and Islamic solidarity, according to this view, was a dominant feature of Arab street. Therefore, *al-Jazeera* hosted those who rejected the regional division of “moderates” and “extremist.” This was seen as an imposed categorization from the US, one that only helped Israel’s interests. For example, on day three of the war, *al-Jazeera*’s news hosted Muhammad al-Sa’id Idris, an Egyptian researcher in al-Ahram Center for Strategic and Political Studies, who said that: “Talking about moderation and evil axis is

\(^{416}\) *Al-‘Alamiyya, Al-Hurra*. USA, VA. January 1, 2009.
an American classification. America puts the Arab counties in the face of Iran, Syria and the resistance groups.”

The ‘other,’ according to al-Jazeera, was well defined. It was Israel that destabilizes the region, works on splitting it, and kills innocents. News reported from Gaza and the West Bank was framed in a way that clearly identified the Palestinian, as well as the Arabs’ “other”. It was Israel, not Hamas or Fattah, that was harming the Palestinian people. The occupation was the reason for their misery and split. It was Israel that was trying to embarrass other Arabs and show them collaborates in the aggression against Gaza. It is not Iran or Syria but Israel that is to be blamed for the situation in the region.

Demonstrations that broke out in all parts of the Arab world were extensively covered on al-Jazeera. In every news bulletin, there was a special section that covers demonstrations not only in the Arab world but in the rest of the world itself. The news of every demonstration was separately mentioned and followed by a report from the place of the demonstration. Slogans chanted and demands asked by the demonstrators found good place in the channel’s coverage. Demonstrators were given the microphone to express their feelings and solidarity. In this way, the gap between the popular and the official levels was highlighted. This was especially the case where the official position was highly criticized like that of the Egyptian government. For example, on day five of the war, al-Jazeera aired a report showing the exceptional sympathy among the residents of Northern Sinai with the wounded Palestinians who were transferred across the borders and how the former asserted their commitment to resistance. This sought to show how the Egyptian people differed from the Egyptian government. This distinction was generalized

on the whole Arab official level and their popular counterparts. For example, the news on the meeting of the Arab foreign ministered was followed by a report. The report started with the calls of the Arab street who did not want “condemnations and denunciations.” The report commented that “that is what Arab Street does not want, and this is exactly what happened.”

The Arabs were portrayed as a nation, no matter where they are, that shares each other sadness at times of crisis. Therefore, news about demonstrations of Arabs around the world was also well covered. Even Arabs in Israel were portrayed as first and foremost Arabs who feel the pain of their Palestinian people. In this way, the big demonstration that was organized by Arabs who live within the 1948 green line on day eight of the war was covered in al-Jazeera. It was described as the biggest one they ever participated in since the 1948 Nakba. The infusion of Arabness and religion was apparent in al-Jazeera’s coverage. Religion was portrayed as the glue that holds all Arabs together. News on the activities of the religious figures was well covered like the visits that the Delegates of Muslim Clerics’ Union made to different Islamic capitals to discuss the aggression and the way to respond to it. Religion’s portrayal is one of the main differences between al-Jazeera’s and al-Hurra’s coverage. As previously mentioned, while al-Hurra tried to depict this role in a negative way, al-Jazeera was keen to do the opposite. It used to host religious figures, not only from the Arab world, but also from all over the Islamic world, to ask them about the religious duties of Muslims in face of this crisis. Even the language used had religious connotations. Expressions like nusra (religious solidarity) were repeated many times in the questions of news presenters and

419 This word literally means setback or catastrophe in Arabic.
the comments of reporters. It is an expression that brings to mind the duty of Muslims towards his Muslim brethren. In this way, religion was not a call for violence, but one for unity and solidarity.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, comparing the coverage of the Gaza War in the two channels reveals the presumed conception of the region’s identity held by each of them. *Al-Jazeera* was keen on stressing Arabism in terms of history, religion and culture as the defining elements of the region’s identity. The network was also representing Arabs, no matter where they are, as one people whose feeling of brethren solidarity keep them connected to the region and affected by its events. In other words, *al-Jazeera* presented an ideal image of popular solidarity in face of the imperfect role of governments. *Al-Hurra*, on its part, left out regional history, belittled or ignored the role of religion, and focused on regional political divisions. Tactical use of language was also employed by the two channels to convey certain messages and help framing the issues discussed in a certain way. Because identity representation has to resonate with the people, media strategies employed by *al-Jazeera* seem to be more successful than those of *al-Hurra*. The former has the reputation of the people’s channel, whereas the other seems to be out of touch with its audience.
Chapter Four

Hegemony and Its Antithesis: Challenges to Soft Power

The end of the Cold War produced two schools of thought with regard to relationships among civilizations. The first school stressed that civilizations were destined to clash. Religion, in this view, was at the heart of these clashes. Inter-confessional differences were expected to trigger conflicts. Islam, in particular, was perceived as the most belligerent of all, particularly towards the West. According to Samuel Huntington, “the greatest number of conflicts during the last decade of the twentieth century arose along the fault-lines where Islamic civilization clashed with other civilizations.” The other school was interested in the dialogue of civilizations and cultures out of belief that the common fate of humanity needs cooperation and common understanding. According to this school, globalization (with increased contact between cultures) leads to a heightened understanding rather than to increased isolation and cultural self-assertion.

The events of September 11 were perceived by some scholars and many people in the West as a harbinger of a clash of civilizations. This way, the school that anticipated the clash was brought to the forefront of academic and political discussions, as well as to the popular language of politics. The American administration, for example, framed the

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420 In his *Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel Huntington argues that under the influence of modernization, global politics is being reconfigured along super-cultural lines. Alignments on the basis of ideology are being replaced by those of cultures and civilizations. Civilizations are thus replacing the Cold War blocs, and the fault-lines between civilizations are becoming the frontlines of global political conflict.


422 The idea of the dialogue among civilizations was introduced by Former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami in 2001 as a response to the theory of Clash of Civilizations. The UN designated 2001 as the “Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.” It was a major move based on relevant resolutions adopted by three successive UN General Assemblies and promoted vigorously by the United Nations. For more information, see http://www.un.org/Dialogue/background.html (Retrieved: 01/01/2010).
attacks in the language of a clash of civilizations. The Islamic terrorists, according to this view, attacked America because they “hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other.”423 The American military intervention in Afghanistan, and later in Iraq, was, therefore, perceived by many Muslims as a war against Islam.

It is now generally believed that using the American military machine is not sufficient to eliminate terrorist organizations. On the contrary, the American military interventions in various parts of the world have contributed to the establishment of other smaller groups that practice a kind of random terrorism under the influence of despair, injustice, and the absence of international standards for conflict resolution. Realizing that hard power alone could not achieve the desired results, the George W Bush administration started to pay attention to the other sources of power, specifically soft power. This was partly reflected in the idea of broadcasting to the Arab and Islamic worlds in a bid to convince others of the “legitimacy of US policies and the values that underlie them.”424 With all the mistrust that grew between Arabs and Muslims, on the one hand, and the Bush administration, on the other hand, it was difficult for the US to regain its soft power in this part of the world.

The Obama administration, however, came to power with a different discourse to the world in general and to the Arab and Islamic worlds in particular. Obama was stressing the values of understanding and cooperation rather than that of conflict and clash. It was an attempt to restore America’s soft power and lessen the extent of tension

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that the relations between the two parties have reached during the eight years of the former administration.

Knowing that public diplomacy is an integral part in promoting soft power, Obama was keen to directly speak to the Islamic world. The President’s June 4, 2009, Cairo speech was perhaps the best example of this public diplomacy efforts performed by the new administration. This event received special coverage from both the Arab and American-funded media in the region. The different coverage on al-Jazeera and al-Hurra highlights the complexities of, and challenges to, soft power and public diplomacy in the satellite age. This is especially the case when addressing a public opinion that already has deeply held negative beliefs. Obama was, thus, facing a difficult situation, where he was trying to convince the audience that a new American policy would be effective. This also shows, as Philip Seib argues, how “clashes between civilizations can occur in ways other than armed conflict. There can be clashes of perspective, the beginnings and outcomes of which are affected by information flows; how people see the world shapes their attitudes toward other cultures.”

This chapter argues that conducting public diplomacy in the satellite age has become increasingly difficult. This is because the hegemonic ideas on which soft power depends are losing ground in the face of critical analysis by other media outlets. This challenge to the hegemonic ideas has something to do with a different perception of the relations between civilizations, on the one hand, and a different perception of self-identity, on the other hand. In comparing the two channels’ coverage of the speech, certain criteria will be discussed: content, structure, context and the overall ideas that

govern the speech. This tests the message in light of its internal credibility or contradictions, what was left unsaid but could be inferred from the analysis of the message structure and context.

1. A New Beginning: Winning the Hearts but not the Minds

Before investigating the aforementioned criteria, it is important to give an overall view on the speech itself. The speech was delivered in 55 minutes. It began with the greeting of Islam, al-salamu ‘alaykum (peace be upon you). The American President knew how to win the hearts of the audience from the first moment. The speech was divided into three parts: introduction, main issues, and a conclusion. In almost fifteen minutes, the American President was approaching the people through his positive remarks on Islam, the Islamic civilization and Muslims in the US. He was also able to capture the attention of the audience by starting with a kind of self-criticism in which he mentioned the role played by Western colonialism, and later the Cold War, in impeding the hopes and the development of the people in the region. According to him, ‘violent extremists’ have exploited these tensions in a way that led some to “view Islam as inevitably hostile not only to America and Western countries, but also to human rights.”426 He was particularly referring to the attacks of 9/11 in this context.

Obama, then, elaborated on the need to establish mutual respect and interest as the bases for the relations between the US and the Islamic world. As a continuation in connecting with the people, Obama reflected upon his personal background and experience that enabled him to know about Islam as a faith and as a civilization. He

linked this to the part Islam represented in the story of America and connected it to the advantages of the American model. He announced that it was his responsibility as the President of the US to “fight against negative stereotypes of Islam wherever they appear.” At the same time, as Obama mentioned, he wanted to correct Muslims’ perception of the US. Here, Obama was promoting the American model that enabled “an African-American with the name Barack Hussein Obama [to] be elected President.”

The idea of the US as the land of opportunity and freedom, particularly religious freedom, to all immigrants was highly stressed. Obama was, thus, repeating the myth of American hospitality “on which the myth of immigrant America is founded, [a myth that] denies both hostility toward immigrants and the laws of immigration that inform the relationship between citizen and alien.”

Obama was keen to mention how American aspirations are shared by all humanity, particularly in an interdependent world where:

A financial system weakens in one country, prosperity is hurt everywhere. When a new flu infects one human being, all are at risk. When one nation pursues nuclear weapon, the risk of nuclear attack rises for all nations. When violent extremists operate in one stretch of mountains, people are endangered across an ocean. And when innocents in Bosnia and Darfur are slaughtered, that puts a stain on our collective conscience. That is what it means to share this world in the 21st century. That is the responsibility we have to one another as human beings.

Thus, Obama was stressing how the whole world faces the same challenges. Failure to confront these challenges would therefore affect all countries. He was also focusing on what people have in common, not on how much difference they have.

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427 President’s Speech, *op. cit.*
430 President’s Speech, *op. cit.*
It can be noticed in this part how Obama was constantly comparing the US and Islam. As Rafiq Habib argues, this comparison itself is inappropriate: the former is a country while the latter is a religion and the experience of the two is different in terms of the length of their history and their different frames of work. In his view, perhaps the President was trying to stress the idea that US was not at war with Islam.\textsuperscript{431} Moreover talking about what we have in common does not negate our differences, which do not necessarily mean conflict and hatred.

The second part was a discussion of the issues considered to be the sources of tension, as Obama described them. This is where he moved from the public diplomacy part of the speech to the core of his views. This is exactly where he did not completely win the minds of his audience throughout the Islamic world. This is probably the case because he seemed not only to be addressing the Islamic world, but also his domestic audience. The first issue he mentioned was violent extremism. Out of his 55 minutes speech, this issue took almost six minutes. It was discussed primarily in two places: Afghanistan and Iraq. Starting with Afghanistan, Obama spoke for about four minutes stressing that America does not want to keep neither troops nor military bases there once it is confident that “there were not violent extremists in Afghanistan and Pakistan determined to kill as many American as they possibly can.”\textsuperscript{432} He, however, admitted that military power alone could not solve the problem and this is why the US was trying to help the Afghans in developing their economy and invest in building schools, businesses, roads, hospitals and so on. He, then, spoke about the situation in Iraq for two and half


\textsuperscript{432} President’s Speech, op. cit.
minutes. Although it was a war of choice, as Obama described it, he believed that “the Iraqi people are ultimately better off without the tyranny of Saddam Hussein.” He also stressed that the US seeks no military bases in Iraq and are going to leave Iraq to Iraqis and help them “forge a better future.”

Although Obama did not use the term “terrorism,” perhaps to detach himself from the inheritance of the former administration, he did not introduce a definition of “violent extremism” and chose to deal with the issue of Afghanistan and Iraq under this title. War on Iraq, however, was not initially part of the “war on terror” and the country did not know extremism before the American troops came on the Iraqi soil. The hostilities that erupted in Iraq, according to some Muslim intellectuals, is a form of resisting occupation and should not be dealt with as simply ‘extremism.’ This raises the question of what to be considered extremism and what is not from the different civilizational views. In addition, dealing with the issue of extremism separately from its perceived causes in the Islamic world – which is largely connected to the Palestinian issue, the American policies towards the region, and lack of democracy, etc. – reflects the same Orientalist biases inherent in an American strategic thinking that refuses to understand this phenomenon in its social, political and economic contexts. It also seeks to exonerate the West in general and the US in particular from any responsibility when it comes to dealing with this issue. Obama was thus throwing the burden of fighting this phenomenon on Muslim societies and linked the withdrawal of American troops from countries like Afghanistan to the degree of rejection these groups would receive from their Muslim communities.

Ibid.

The second major source of tension, as Obama mentioned, was the situation between Israelis, Palestinians and the Arab world. Obama discussed this issue in ten minutes starting with stressing the special ties between the US and Israel and the necessity to understand the suffering of the Jews in history. According to Obama,

America’s strong bonds with Israel are well known. This bond is unbreakable. It is based upon cultural and historical ties, and the recognition that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland is rooted in a tragic history that cannot be denied.

Around the world, the Jewish people were persecuted for centuries, and anti-Semitism in Europe culminated in an unprecedented Holocaust. Tomorrow, I will visit Buchenwald, which was part of a network of camps where Jews were enslaved, tortured, shot and gassed to death by the Third Reich. Six million Jews were killed—more than the entire Jewish population of Israel today. Denying that fact is baseless, ignorant, and hateful. Threatening Israel with destruction—or repeating vile stereotypes about Jews—is deeply wrong, and only serves to evoke in the minds of Israelis this most painful of memories while preventing the peace that the people of this region deserve.435

This part of Obama’s speech took about a minute and half. He then spoke in a minute about the Palestinian suffering ‘in pursuit of a homeland,’ but not with the same sympathy that appeared when he was talking about the persecution of the Jews. According to Obama,

For more than sixty years they [the Palestinians] have endured the pain of dislocation. Many wait in refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza, and neighboring lands for a life of peace and security that they have never been able to lead. They endure the daily humiliations—large and small—that come with occupation. So let there be no doubt: the situation for the Palestinian people is intolerable. America will not turn our backs on the legitimate Palestinian aspiration for dignity, opportunity, and a state of their own.436

Obama later stressed how Palestinians must abandon violence and Israel to stop settlement projects. He also pointed out that the Arab peace initiative was an important

435 President’s Speech, op. cit.
436 Ibid.
beginning but not the end. The American President, this way, did not solve a main problematic issue between the US and a broad spectrum of people in the Islamic world: Hamas and other Palestinian groups are being perceived by many in the region as resistance movements that struggle against occupation, a right that is recognized under international law. Although Obama refrained from referring to Hamas as a terrorist group, he did not recognize it as a political and social movement that won the support of the majority in the elections. In the perception of many Muslims, Hamas and the similar Palestinian groups cannot be simply described as ‘violent extremists’ or that their actions be described as extremism. Obama, thus, put the operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine in one basket: violence that needs to be rejected and fought.

The third issue was nuclear weapons. According to Obama, this issue was a source of tension between the US and the Islamic Republic of Iran. It took Obama two and half minutes to cover this matter. In his view, nuclear weaponry was a decisive point because it is not about America’s interests, but rather about “preventing a nuclear arms race in the Middle East that could lead this region and the world down a hugely dangerous path.” Here, it was not clear what kind of nuclear arms race Obama was talking about: was he indirectly referring to a race between Iran and Israel? If so, why did not he clearly comment on the Israeli nuclear weapons and asked both Israel and Iran to join the non-proliferation treaty and make the region free of all weapons of mass destruction?


438 President’s Speech, op. cit.
As for democracy, it came as the fourth issue and took almost four minutes of Obama’s speech. Obama made it clear that “no system of government can or should be imposed upon one nation by any other.”\textsuperscript{439} He mentioned how the US respects the right of all peaceful and law-abiding voices to be heard around the world even if it disagrees with those perspectives and will welcome all the elected, peaceful governments provided that they govern with respect for all their people. Despite the good intentions that Obama wanted to show, his statement on this issue was very loose and was open to various interpretations, especially what he meant with peaceful and law-abiding voices. For example, Hamas was not merely supported by some Palestinians, as Obama said, but rather elected by the majority of the Palestinians in 2005. Still the US and other Western countries refused to deal with it. Could this statement be used in the future as a pretext for the US to decide who should or should not govern regardless of the outcomes of elections?

Related to democracy was Obama’s fifth issue: religious freedom. Obama spoke about this point in three minutes and stressed the need for tolerance and freedom to choose and live each one’s faith whether this was in Muslim or Western countries. As for Women’s rights, it occupied two minutes of the speech. The American President recognized women’s right to wear what they choose and how this should not be considered an indication of inequality. However, he stressed that denying education for women was a kind of inequality. He pointed out how the US would partner with “any Muslim-majority country to support expanded literacy for girls, and to help young women to pursue employment through micro-financing that helps people live their dreams.” What could be read in his talk about religious freedom and women’s right is

\textsuperscript{439} Ibid.
that Obama has a certain perception of the role played by religion and tradition in the society. This role, according to Obama’s view, particularly lies within the personal sphere. As Rafiq Habib read in Obama’s speech, religion should not be the bases for public order. This is supported by the fact that he was using the terms Muslim-majority countries not Islamic countries. He was trying to avoid identifying these countries by their religion. It just happened, according to this view, that the inhabitants of these countries were mostly Muslims but that should not be the basis of identity for these countries. Such a perception of these roles is, according to some Islamic interpretations, contradictory to the role Islam claims to be playing in people’s life. This could be understood by some in the Muslim world as an attempt to impose a certain view or lifestyle out of belief that they are superior.

As for economic development and opportunity, it came as the final issue in the speech and took a whole five minutes of it. Despite admitting the other faces of globalization in terms of losing control over economic choices, politics and identity, Obama did not see the relation between development and tradition as inherently exclusive. He emphasized that “while American in the past has focused on oil and gas in this part of the world, [it now] seek[s] a broader engagement.” This engagement, as Obama expressed, includes education through the expansion of exchange programs, an increase in scholarships, as well as investing in online learning and developing networks. It also refers to economic development through the creation of corps of volunteers that partner with their counterparts in Muslim-majority countries. The third dimension of this engagement is related to science and technology and how the US would launch a new

\[440\] Habib, *op. cit.*
fund to support technological development and transfer ideas to the market in order to create jobs, develop new sources of energy, clean water and grow new crops.

The immediate impression that Obama’s speech gives is his effectiveness of in winning the hearts of his audience, but not necessarily their minds. His frequent citations from the Quran were well received by his audience and must have given him much appeal. However, the order in which he tackled the sources of tensions reflected the priorities of American foreign policy at this point of history, which are not necessarily the same for the Islamic world. Understanding this requires analyzing the context in which the speech was delivered. Economically, there was, and relatively still is, an economic and financial crisis that started in the US but extended to threaten the whole stability of post WWII order. Politically, there is the failure of Bush’s policies in achieving its targets in the region and which cost the US much of its reputation and resources. Thirdly, the deteriorating situation in the regional as well as national levels across the Islamic world after the former American administration pushed democracy and human rights confirmed to many that they were only tools in combating terrorism not standalone goals per se. It was clear that these policies were only a pressure tool used to make the region’s rulers more cooperative with the American strategy. This context and the content of what Obama said made the speech not only an attempt to reconcile with the Muslim world, but a call for help in the challenges that the US faces in this part of the world. This context is also important in understanding the messages of al-Hurra and al-Jazeera in covering this event as we are going to see later in this chapter.

The tone of Obama’s sympathy with the suffering of Jews during the Holocaust was not the same as when he talked about Palestinian suffering. This is particularly

441 Mustafa. “The Unsaid in Obama’s Speech,” op. cit.
important because he was addressing an audience who, at the best, does not care about this. In the view of many Arabs and Muslims this was a crime in which they did not participate and, therefore, should not be asked to pay the price for. This is especially important given the fact that Obama preferred to remain silent when Israel started its war on Gaza.

Moreover, Obama’s use of history was inconsistent. While resorting to history to prove some of his points, he called for forgetting it when it was challenging his arguments and efforts. But when he was asking the Islamic world to forget the past, other people’s past was alive in his memory and influencing his attitudes. This was particularly clear when he talked about the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

Additionally, although Obama avoided using the term “war on terrorism,” his approach was actually emanating from its main assumption. As Garfinkle has argued, war on terror included some strategies on the top of them was denouncing the idea of murdering civilians for any political cause, i.e., refuting the idea of militant resistance. A second strategy is refuting the misrepresentation of US policies and motivations and believed to be behind the hatred and violence against Americans and their allies.442 Obviously, these two strategies can easily be detected in Obama’s speech.

Finally, despite the generality with which Obama spoke, his speech showed how he believes that there were hegemonic values that govern humanity at large or, at least, should do so. This represents a comeback of the language of globalization, a rhetoric that stressed the hegemony of Western values and on the top of it American ones. This is true when connected to his attempt to show how interdependent the world is in a way that anything happening anywhere has a possible effect on the US and its interests. This was

442 Adam Garfinkle, ed. op. cit., p. xvii.
exactly the view on which the idea of the American hegemony was established. The difference, however, is that while Bush projected hegemony in its military form, Obama is trying to portray it on the liberal form, i.e. Obama prefers the use of soft power tools rather than solely relying on hard power. This will be done, as Rafiq Habib argues, by resorting to the hegemony of values. This, according to Habib, emanates from the belief that American people would not enjoy security and peace unless other people in the world follow the same central values that Americans sees as common human norms. This hegemony of values, in Habib’s view, will also be blended with exchanging interests and mutual respect.443

2. Obama’s Speech between al-Hurra and al-Jazeera

The two channels covered this event differently. Al-Hurra dedicated seven episodes to the event distributed along two talk shows (six episodes in the daily program Free Hour and one in the weekly program The Four Directions). Four of these episodes were aired before delivering the speech. Al-Jazeera, for its part, discussed the event in four episodes distributed along three talk shows (only one episode discussed the event before it took place). The number of episodes dedicated to the event before its actual happening in particular gives us an idea of what can be called the propaganda and image promotion that preceded the speech. This was a clear act of public diplomacy and al-Hurra made every effort to maximize it. This was not the case with al-Jazeera; it took a more wait-and-see approach.444

443 Habib, op. cit.
444 Al-Jazeera’s low profile coverage before the speech was even in contrast to many Arab media, especially those belonging to what is called the moderate camp, which celebrated the event before it took place. The mere fact that an American President was going to talk to the Muslim world was seen as an
a. Characterizing the Message and the Messenger

The speech was represented in *al-Hurra* as historical in itself regardless of its content. It was put in the framework of the civilizational relations between Western civilization and its Islamic counterpart. Generally there was an attempt to refer the troubled relationship between the two civilizations to the years of G.W. Bush’s administration. This was probably done to, first, minimize the conflict of interests that some may say that it is the cause of this conflictual relations, and second to emphasize the message that even if there were disagreements, they were political in nature and had nothing to do with religion. This is why there was no attempt to accuse President Bush himself of being responsible for the deterioration in relations. On the contrary, there was a tendency to defend him or at least show that there was a big misunderstanding on the part of both parties. For example, the presenter of ‘Free Hour’ wondered at the comment of one of the guests: “Why do you look at the discourse of the former administration as inimical to Islam although President Bush stressed more than once that it is a religion of freedom and tolerance and that the war is not with Islam.”445 He later asked the American guest to comment on these accusations against the former administration. However, Obama was represented as a more open-minded person whose experience would enable him to be more understanding to the Islamic World and, thus, capable of establishing better relations with that part of the world.

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When the speech was delivered, it was reaffirmed as historical and one that lays down a new beginning. The presenter of ‘Free Hour’ started his episode with the following introduction:

A new beginning is the title of the American president’s speech in Cairo University. The speech has established, according to some reactions, a new stage in the relations between the US and the Islamic world. Some political and cultural issues were discussed in the speech and were directly linked to the main reason for giving it: moving to a new stage in the relations with the Islamic world. What are the conditions of this stage and this beginning? Will the Islamic world receive this initiative and what are its priorities to grant the American president a clear support for his tendencies?

These were the questions that the presenter wanted to discuss with his guests and he seemed to be dragging the discussion in the direction of recognizing the speech as one that really marked a new beginning. All of the guests agreed that the speech was beyond expectations and was a landmark in the relation between the Islamic world and the US.

This was also the case in the episode of ‘The Four Directions’ where the presenter stressed that “Obama’s speech to the Islamic world must pave the way to a new page in the relations between US and the Islamic world” by stressing dialogue rather than conflict. The positivity revealed by the American President, as the presenter claimed,

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447 Will Obama’s Speech Establish New Grounds for Peace Talks. Sam Mansi. The Four Directions. Al-Hurra. USA, VA. June 7, 2009. Although one of the American guests said that there would be no new American policy towards the Middle East, the presenter was keen on extracting any comment that stresses change. This is why he asked the same guest again whether he “noticed that there was a new language, a new practice or even suggesting a new tool that is completely different to the former presidents?” When the guest insisted that nothing was new from the political aspect, the presenter directed the question to another guest by asking whether he agreed on this or not. When the second guest mentioned that there were elements of continuity as well as others of change, the presenter asked him to start with those indicating the change. He did not ask later about elements of continuity. The changes mentioned were focused on the balance he stroked between Israel’s right of existence and security on the one hand, and the necessity of stopping settlements and the establishment of two states, on the other hand. In general, the positive points mentioned with regard to the Palestinian issue focused on Obama’s stance on the Israeli settlements and how he described them as illegitimate.
was quickly followed by the main concern in *al-Hurra*’s coverage of the event: “who is going to meet Obama in the middle of the road,” and whether countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia would respond by offering a “quick initiative.” This position is particularly significant if connected to the question raised by the presenter at the end of the episode, where he asked: “Will dialogue go on indefinitely or it has its limits?” This implied that unless Arab countries take practical steps in reaction to the speech, the US would resort to means other than dialogue. It is astonishing how the words of the American president, in *al-Hurra*’s view, should be met with actual practical actions from the Arab and Islamic countries.

The perception of the speech in *al-Jazeera* was quite different. The channel did not provide extensive coverage of the speech before its delivery. It did not try to speculate its contents or describe it. The only episode that dealt with the speech was one day before it was delivered and it discussed “how realistic were the hopes around the Islamic world on the ‘awaited’ Obama’s speech and the limits of the American president in fulfilling his promises.” The mere description of Obama as the “awaited Obama” implies a kind of sarcasm, unrealism or, at least, over expectations.

*Al-Jazeera*’s coverage was leaning towards the pessimist side. It was trying to show that all the media propaganda on the upcoming visit was baseless and it was not

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448 Will Obama’s Speech Establish New Grounds for Peace Talks?, op. cit.
449 Ibid.
451 According to some Muslim views, the Mahdi is a redeemer who will appear before the end of time to rid the world of injustice and tyranny. The idea was not explicitly mentioned in the Qur’an. Some Sunni scholars have therefore questioned this notion. The idea of a coming Mahdi is, however, a powerful and central religious idea for Shi’i Muslims who believe that the Mahdi will appear one day. For this, see “al-Mahdi al-Muntazar fi al-Fikr al-Islami” (The Awaited Mahdi in Islamic Thought). *Al-Risala Center* (available at: http://www.rafed.net/books/aqaed/mahde/index.html, Retrieved: 10/04/2010).
working its way into Arab and Islamic public opinion. This was given credibility by citing the results of a survey conducted one day before Obama’s visit to Cairo. The survey was conducted by the University of Maryland and revealed that 67% of Egyptians anticipated that Obama would not come with anything new. They expected that his policies would change in terms of their discourse, but not in terms of facts on the ground.

It could, thus, be inferred from the channel’s coverage that there were doubts about Obama, a man with robust rhetorical skills, but also a leader who would not do much to change American policies. The argument was that if he really wanted to open a new page in this relation, he should come to the region with a different agenda. Although one of the guests was defending Obama or, at least, trying to give him the benefit of the doubt, the questions asked by the presenter were all leading in one direction: any change would come in the discursive language towards the Islamic world, but the content of the policies would remain the same. This was revealed by quoting Osama bin Laden who ridiculed the assumed good intentions of the American president and gave an example by the situation in Pakistan’s Swat Valley.452 The presenter asked:

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452 Swat Valley is an area in the north-west frontier province of Pakistan. By January 2003, there was a notable increase in violence as militant groups in this valley began attacking police check posts. By 2009, the region came mostly under Taliban-allied group. As an attempt to bring peace to the region, the Pakistani Government signed a peace accord with the Taliban on 16 February 2009, and agreed to the imposition of Shari’a law in Swat and the suspension of military offensives against the Taliban. This agreement invoked critique from Washington, who viewed it as a giving in to terrorism. For example, the American Secretary of State Hilary Clinton described the agreement as a threat to the Pakistani state and the Afghani society and talked about how this would create a safe haven for the rest of the Taliban members. In the end, the agreement broke down, a step that many saw as a result of the pressures from Washington. The Pakistani army launched a vigorous military operation in the valley. The operation also coincided with the US consideration of 310 million dollars aid package so vital to the revival of Pakistan’s economy. The timing of the operation, critics suggest, lends credence to their view that the operation is more of a “compliant action.” The upturn in military engagement has caused a massive displacement of the population bringing to the fore complex and tragic human dimensions and desperate country-wide militant reaction, particularly by way of suicide attacks that threaten the infrastructure and generate fear among the masses. Therefore, the US was blamed for this humanitarian situation and was accused of not caring for the lives of civilian Muslims. For this, see Arif Kamal. “Upsurge in the “War on Terror” in the Pakistani Arena: Dimensions and consequences.” Al-Jazeera.net (available at: http://www.aljazeera.net/mritems/streams/2009/10/25/1_948027_1_51.pdf.
If Obama was really coming with a new agenda, how could we understand what is happening in the Swat Valley? How could we understand a man who calls for dialogue and see what we saw in Swat?\footnote{Chances of Changing US policy, op. cit.}

Bringing the issue of Swat Valley into the discussion was an attempt to show the US as a party that was interested in neither dialogue nor compromise and was still more inclined to use military force irrespective of human sufferings, especially if Muslims were involved. It was another attempt on the part of \textit{al-Jazeera} to stress the gap between US talk and actions.

\textit{Al-Jazeera} also, contrary to \textit{al-Hurra}, was not preoccupied with what the Islamic world was going to offer to the US in return of this speech. This emanates from its assumption that the speech was not necessarily going to make real changes in US policies towards the region. This is why the coverage was left with an open question: “Was Obama’s speech enough to make reconciliation with the Islamic world?”\footnote{\textit{Al-Muqaraba al-Amrikiyya li-Mas’alat al-Dimuqratiyya wa Huquq al-Insan} (The American Approach to the Issues of Democracy and Human Rights). Laila al-Shikhy. \textit{What is behind the News. Al-Jazeera}. Qatar, Doha. June 4, 2009.} Moreover, \textit{al-Jazeera} was more representative of those who criticized the speech and pessimistic about its transformative impact of US foreign policy. For example, the presenter showed how the reaction to the speech was different from one recipient to another depending on their positions:

What is called the moderate camp saw the speech as an indication on a new shift in Washington’s strategy towards Arabs and Muslims in dealing with their main issues, especially in Iraq and Palestine. The conservatives, on the other hand, say that he did not come with something new. According to them, sweet talk is not enough if it was not accompanied by actions on the ground. Their evidence was that Obama, who claim to be coming to open a new page with Muslims, stressed the strategic relations with Israel, the first enemy to Arab and Muslims.\footnote{\textit{Khitab Obama li-l-’Alamyn al-’Arabi wa al-Islami} (Obama’s Speech to the Arab and Islamic Worlds). Khadija bin Qina. \textit{More than One Opinion. Al-Jazeera}. Qatar, Doha. June 5, 2009.}
Articulated this way, the introduction was more elaborate on the position of those who had reservations on the speech and doubted its transformative tendencies. The presenter particularly chose the example of stressing the relationship between the US and Israel out of knowledge of the sensitivity of this issue to Arabs and Muslims. The special relations between the US and Israel were always perceived by many in the Arab and Islamic worlds as the main impediment to peace and to any improvement of the relations between the US and the Islamic world.

*Al-Jazeera* was also interested in discussing not only what Obama said but also what he did not say but could be inferred from the overall speech. For example, the presenter asked the pessimistic guest about what he wished that Obama would have said but did not. The guest answered: “Focusing on the Gaza blockade, ordering to stop the killing of Muslims in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and touching the issue of Sudan.”

Again, the presenter asked the question to the guest whose attitudes were clearest since the beginning of the episode. The question, this way, was meant to get this exact answer. This is what *al-Jazeera’s* presenter probably wanted to convey to the viewers.

### b. Debating the Speech: Before and After

The issues discussed, mainly in *al-Hurra*, before the speech were related to how Obama should address the issues of democracy, freedom of religion and expression, his approach

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456 Obama’s Speech. *More than One Opinion*, *op. cit.*

457 Although the other guest was more on the positive side towards the speech, he made it clear that what matters to the new US administration was American interests. In his view, this administration sees American interests fulfilled through rationalizing the practices of the Bush’s administration thorough the combination of military and diplomatic tools. According to him, the US needs its Arab and non-Arabs allies and that the US was going back to a realist reading (*ibid.*).
in seeking a qualitative shift in the relations, and the symbolism of the location he chose for delivering his speech.

1- Obama and Democracy: Between Values and Interests

The issues of democracy and political and social rights were linked to the logic behind choosing Cairo for delivering the speech. In general, the opinions circulated in *al-Hurra* and the comments of the presenter were appraising this choice as wise. Since the speech was historical, it needed to be delivered, as the argument went, from an historical and strategic place like Cairo. It was also perceived as bolstering Egypt’s regional and international role after years of marginalization under the Bush administration. This argument did not, however, distinguish between the choice between Egypt as a country and a regime.

As for the connection between this choice of venue and the issue of democracy in Egypt, and the pressures that could have been put by Washington on Egypt in this regard, some aspects were brought up in the discussion. On one hand, the release of Ayman Nour, and the clearing of Saad al-Din Ibrahim of all the charges against him were

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458 Ayman Nour is a former lawyer and member of Egyptian Parliament. He formed his political party in October 2004, and announced his intention to compete in Egypt’s first presidential election the following year. Three months later, he was charged with forging signatures to secure the formation of al-Ghad Party (al-ghad means tomorrow in Arabic.) He was stripped of his parliamentary immunity and imprisoned. After several external interventions and campaign, he was released and took part in the presidential elections. He came as the first runner-up with 7% of the vote according to government figures. His trial went ahead after the elections, ended with a guilty verdict and handing and sent him to a five-year jail term. Nour was released on health grounds on February 18, 2009. For this, see Profile: Ayman Nour. December 2005. bbc.co.uk (available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4558054.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4558054.stm). Retrieved: 04/10/2010). *Egypt’s Nour Released from Jail*. February 2009. bbc.co.uk (available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7897703.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7897703.stm). Retrieved: 04/10/2010).

459 Saad al-Din Ibrahim is an Egyptian American Sociologist. He is one of Egypt’s human rights activists. He was arrested in 2002 under charges of misusing European Union funds for election monitoring, and for allegedly defaming Egypt’s image abroad. He was sentenced to seven-year imprisonment. His arrest stirred a storm of international support and direct intervention by the US against Mubarak’s regime. He was cleared of all the charges and released in 2003. On August 2, 2008, an Egyptian court sentenced Ibrahim to
mentioned as two important steps that Cairo “had to take before the Obama’s visit.”

The Egyptian guests, of course, strongly denied any connection by saying that if that was the case, it would have happened during the Bush administration. The presenter, however, was trying hard to make it self-evident because these two examples only happened before Obama’s visit. Debating the status of democracy in Egypt, the presenter warned against the easy charge of betrayal that was directed against any Egyptian activist who would write or talk in foreign forums. The presenter, therefore, wondered if “it was possible to describe Saad al-Din Ibrahim as a tool being used by the outside to attack the regime, could he be accused of treason?”

It is interesting how the issue of democracy was discussed mainly on its internal levels without critically discussing the role the US has always played in this matter. On the contrary, there was also a tendency by the presenter to show that foreign pressures for democracy were not, at least consistently, bad, and how they sometimes were the only way out for political activists. The opinions circulated were also stressing the importance of foreign pressures for the development of democracy. This way, the discussion was trying to show that when the US interferes, this is probably in the best interest of democracy not the opposite. In other words, American intervention has positive outcomes. The study finds al-Hurra’s attitude conforming to what Gareth Locksley calls

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Before Obama’s visit to Egypt, Ibrahim was, again, cleared of all the charges.

460 Obama’s Upcoming Visit, part 1, op. cit.

461 Ibid.
“electronic colonialism.”\textsuperscript{462} He used the term to describe the image of the developing countries portrayed in Western news as areas plagued by crises. It is also an image that blames these countries for their own situation without reference to external influences. By trying to exonerate the US from its responsibility in supporting authoritative regimes in the region and thereby hindering the region’s democratic development, \textit{al-Hurra} was presenting a kind of “electronic colonialism” that conveys a certain messages to the viewers: do not blame anyone for your misery because it is your entire fault.

Discussing democracy was also an opportunity to promote the American model of democracy as an inspiration to the Arab and Islamic worlds. For example, the presenter kept asking if there was “an influence of the American model of democracy especially the model of electing Obama in the imagination of the Arab street,” and to what extent “the Arab and Islamic worlds would accept the American model of democracy if it was presented in the Cairo speech.”\textsuperscript{463}

Freedom of religion and expression was also stressed as something that Obama should discuss “as understood by the American families,”\textsuperscript{464} as one guest expressed in ‘Free Hour.’ Given the fact that this guest was American, the way he framed the issue was not successful because it gave the impression that the values of the American families were higher than those in the Islamic world. What made it even worse was the presenter’s silence on such a comment. The presenter did not try to lessen this superior tone by, for example, talking about these values as universal, not only American.

\textsuperscript{463} \textit{Ibid.},
After the speech had been delivered, ‘Free Hour’ discussed again the issue of democracy. While there were concerns, as expressed by the presenter and the guests alike, that the US might not exert a great deal of pressures when it comes to human rights, there was an admiration of the American model of democracy. This was apparent in a question asked by the presenter related to whether people “would like to see the model of the American democracy in Egypt, for example?” There was also a tendency to show that such external pressures, or maybe interventions, are at times unavoidable or desirable. For example, in discussing the American strategy in Iraq, the presenter asked: “When [Obama] talks about not imposing democracy by force, do you think that the people in the region are able to express their choices concerning the type of the regime they want?” The question also implies the impotency on the part of the people in the region to establish democracy without foreign intervention. This inference is supported by the context in which the question was asked. The episode was about Iraq and was implying that, as we are going to discuss later, without US intervention and support, Iraq was not going to enjoy a democratic system.

There was a kind of disappointment from the speech expressed by political activists in the region and circulated in many forums where they accused the Obama administration of giving up the call for democracy in the region. The presenter of ‘Free Hour’ tried to ridicule such positions by wondering if the activists “did not grasp the message?” The guests, on their part, positively evaluated Obama’s approach in dealing with the issues of human rights and democracy as the previous approach of constant

465 Obama’s Speech in Egypt, op. cit.
467 Obama’s Speech, op. cit.
criticism was a big failure. This could be explained by knowing the background of the guests who were mostly journalists known to be affiliated, in one way or another, with the ruling regimes in the region, especially the Egyptian regime.

There was also a criticism on the part of one of the guests in ‘The Four Directions’ related to how Obama dealt with the Arabs as a monolithic group and completely ignored liberal Arabs. The presenter then said: “But some would mention that Arabs melted in the Islamic surrounding?”^468 Implied in the question is an assumption that Islam was not an integral part in the creation of Arab identity or that the two components can be separated. In the view of many, the majority of the people in the region are Muslims and that liberal and secular ideas in the region are still not that popular, specifically the role they perceive for religion in life. Islam still shapes people’s identity and life in the region and the main bond that holds them together especially after the many setbacks that affected Arabism. For example, in a poll conducted by world public opinion organization and released in February 2009, the majority of Muslims agreed on giving Shari’a (Islamic law) a larger role in Islamic societies. In Egypt, 81% said they agreed with the al Qaeda’s goal of “requir[ing] a strict application of Shari’a law in every Islamic country (86% of whom strongly),” while only 12 percent disagreed. Pakistanis were similar, with 76% agreeing with this goal (52% strongly), while only 5% disagreed. Indonesians, however, agreed by only a narrow plurality: 49% supported the goal (14% of whom strongly), while 42 percent disagreed. In Morocco in late 2006, 76% agreed.469 These results indicate how religion remains a major shaper of social life, at

^468 Will Obama’s Speech, op. cit.
least, in the minds of the majority of people in this part of the world that any attempt to marginalize it or minimizing its influence is doomed.

*Al-Jazeera* did not discuss the issue of democracy before the speech but this issue was the hub of the discussion immediately following its delivery. “No compulsion in democracy: the gist that could be extracted from the sentences that Obama mentioned in his speech that were related to the question of political reform in the Islamic world.”

This was the main introductory note of *al-Jazeera*’s presenter. The presenter mentioned how many people in the Islamic world were expecting a clearer and more frank position in the speech with regard to supporting those call for political reform. She was making a contrast between Obama’s famous saying in his inaugural speech “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,” and what he said about these regimes when he was already in the region. The interpretation of what seemed to be a backing off from the call to democratize was either that Obama had fallen in the trap of the Islamic scare that was promoted by Arab rulers, or had a deal with these regimes according to which the issue of democracy would be postponed in return of focusing on other boiling issues. All these questions and comments were implying that the policies of the US would be the same and that any hope for change was just unfounded especially when a conflict between US values and interests occurs. This inference could be supported by examples that the presenter mentioned which showed how the US agenda in the region was basically the same. According to the presenter,

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470 American Approach to Democracy, *op. cit.*
We have seen examples of the American administration: Biden visits Lebanon and insists on meeting a certain group rather than the other. We also saw the position of the American administration from the agreement between the Pakistani government and the tribes and Taliban in Swat. The president did not change his position with regard to the $150 million that was allocated to shake the security of Iran. Were these examples what encouraged some to say that it is just about sweet words?472

In this way, al-Hurra was trying to show the novelty in Obama’s approach in terms of respecting others’ choices. However, it was, at the same time, promoting the idea that US interventionist policies are done in favor of the democratic process in the region. There could be a conflict sometimes, as could be inferred from the coverage, between American interests and its support of democracy; but that does not mean that America was ready to abandon its values. The history of US supporting autocratic regimes or conspiring to topple down democratic ones in the region was absent from al-Hurra’s discussion. Al-Jazeera, on the opposite, was trying to convey the message that the new American administration has already chosen its interests over the American values as was always the case with all the former administrations. This was in line of its coverage which was stressing that no change should be expected from the new administration and that Obama’s talk was just old wine in new bottles.473

472 American Approach, op. cit. Again, the question was directed to the guest who was expected to criticize the US and who did not believe in any possible change in the American policies towards the region. The guest answered by saying that the US under the Obama’s administration “would not abandon its imperial soul” (ibid.).

473 It is also worth mentioning that none of the channels dealt with what the people in the region wanted from the US: to support their aspiration to democracy or at least not work against it. If they want its support, then they should not be offended when it calls for democracy and respect of human rights. If they do not, then they should not be disappointed when it turns its back to them. There is a need to define what supporting democracy means: is it pushing for democracy or just stopping the American support to the authoritative regimes across the Arab and Islamic worlds.
2- Iraq: No Apology for the War of Choice

The Iraqi issue was one of the topics that constantly came up during the discussion of the speech in *al-Hurra* before and after its delivery given the importance of the Iraqi issue to the American strategy in the region. Asking what Obama should do to strike a new approach in dealing with the Islamic world, one of the guests said that he should apologize for what the former administration had done in Iraq. The presenter quickly interrupted him by saying: “Why do not we leave for the Iraqi people to say whether they want an apology or not. There were victims but there are also millions of voters who have a system now?” A similar argument was repeated in another episode where the presenter commented on one of the guests by noting: “You were talking about violations in Iraq and I told you that elections took place and that, after 30 years of a totalitarian regime, any building of a new state must have some violations. Regardless of this, some say that the situation has improved a lot in the last few years.” Remarkably, the presenter of an episode of ‘Free Hour’ asked a guest who mentioned the importance of an American apology to the Arab and Islamic worlds about what “If Obama were to ask Egypt, Saudi Arabia and others to apologize for their violations against human rights, would these regimes do so?” When one of guests rejected this logic and insisted instead on the importance of apologizing to the Iraqis, the presenter interrupted him.

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474 Obama’s Upcoming Visit, part 1, *op. cit.*
475 Obama’s Upcoming Visit, part 3, *op. cit.*
477 The presenter later explained that what he meant was that the US ask these regimes to apologize for their people, not to the US itself. Despite such clarification, the question still raises some points. To begin with, to ask this question in the context of suggesting that the US should apologize to the Muslim world does suggest that the Arab regimes should reciprocate by apologizing to it rather than to their peoples. Secondly, irrespective of what the presenter actually meant, the two situations are not necessarily similar. In the first case, the Arab and Islamic worlds are asking the US to apologize for its past policies, whereas in the second case, the US is interfering in the internal affairs of other countries.
right away by asking: “Why do not you leave to the Iraqis to ask this from the US. Why do the Arabs ask on behalf of the Iraqis who say that they paid the price of building a new state after the reign of the former dictator?” Although the presenter was actually criticizing Arabs for speaking on behalf of the Iraqis, he was doing the same thing: claiming to present the point of view of the Iraqis as well. Thus, there was no way that al-Hurra would allow any reference to the war on Iraq as a mistake that needed an apology.

In his speech, Obama referred directly to the Iraqi issue in a way that did not provide a clear apology for the military action against this Arab Muslim country, even if he admitted that it may not have been the right choice. As one of the reasons that shaped the troubled relations between the US and the Arab and Islamic worlds, and as an integral part of the American strategy in the region, the Iraqi issue in Obama’s speech received coverage of a distinct episode in ‘Free Hour’. The discussion started with some questions raised by the presenter:

Was what Obama mentioned about Iraq a confession that what the US did in 2003, and resulted in toppling Saddam Hussein, was wrong? And how could this wrong choice that could have been solved by diplomacy, as expressed by Obama, be fixed? How would this be reflected on the Arab parties that are conservative when it comes to the political situation in Iraq? How would the extension of a hand to Iran be reflected on its position in Iraq?

It is noticeable in this introduction how the presenter highlighted the toppling of Saddam Hussein as the by-product of the US military action there. Making such a connection creates difficulty in describing the act as, at least, completely wrong. Had the presenter wanted to convey the message that the US invasion of Iraq was wrong, he would have highlighted other consequences of this action. For example, he could have

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478 Ibid.
479 Obama’s Iraq Strategy, op. cit.
mentioned the sectarian violence that erupted or the insecurity that many Iraqi witnessed after the ending of the old regime. Framing the question in such a way makes the demands of apology unfair.\textsuperscript{480}

The presenter was trying to convey the message that Iraqi democracy was a source of concern to other Arab regimes and this was the reason why they have such a conservative approach in their relations with it. This appears clear when he linked his question in the introduction about the conservatism of some Arab parties towards the political situation in Iraq with another question he raised during the discussion:

[Obama] stressed the continuation of his administration in supporting Iraqis in establishing their democratic regime. Many say that supporting a democratic system in Iraq is a source of worry to many regional governments and regimes that are allies to the US. How will the president calm those? Would this happen by giving up democracy in Iraq?\textsuperscript{481}

Discussing Iraqi-Arab relations was extensively covered in \textit{al-Hurra} but from the sectarian aspect. This was particularly the case with Iraqi-Saudi relations. The presenter was discussing Saudi Arabia’s hesitation in developing relations with Iraq. He mentioned in this context a \textit{fatwa} (religious opinion) issued by the imam of the Grand Mosque in Mecca where he “put a big section of the Iraqi society in a category that justifies their targeting.” He was implying that this \textit{fatwa} could not be separated from the official stance of Saudi Arabia towards Iraq especially since the official position of the Saudi state remained silent on this \textit{fatwa}. He was wondering if the cold relations between Iraq and its Arab neighbors were due to the fact that there were religious parties or that these

\textsuperscript{480} The presenter asked the American guest whether Obama’s comments amounted to an apology. She avoided any direct answer to the question and said that the President was more concerned with the future rather than the past. Obama’s Iraq Strategy, \textit{op. cit.}

\textsuperscript{481} Ibid.
parties were Shi‘is.482 This Shi‘i-Sunni rift was, thus, presented as the main cause of the hesitant relations between the two parties, and also the main cause of tension with the Iranian regime.

Kuwaiti-Iraqi relations were also another focus of the discussion in terms of Kuwait’s hesitation to end its disputes with Iraq. There was a reminder of how Kuwait moved in the Security Council to prevent Iraq’s escape from Chapter Seven because it did not meet its obligation towards Kuwait in terms of the borders, compensations, and the fate of prisoners of war.

Thus, discussing Obama’s strategy in Iraq as revealed in his speech was shifted towards discussing the Iraqi-Arab relations and how the new policy of the American president could make these relations better. How the American invasion of Iraq affected Muslim-American relations or even Arab-Iraqi relations and how this could be fixed were completely missing in this discussion. On the contrary, what was considered a new American approach towards the region was seen as helping in improving these relations. Again, this was in line with the positive image being drawn of Obama as a historical savior who was going to put relations between US and the Islamic world on a new path, as well as mending the Arab-Arab relations.

482 The answers provided were suggesting that the problem in the unilateral relations was not the existence of Shi‘i religious parties, but rather the policies promoted by them. On the other hand, there was the problem of the nature of the coalition between the current regime in Iraq and that in Iran. Obama’s Iraq Strategy, op. cit.
c. Peace in the Middle East: Does the New Beginning Require New Concessions?

In al-Hurra’s talk show that dealt with the event of Obama’s speech to the Islamic world, a certain point could easily be detected: what will the Arabs and Muslims offer in return for this step by Obama? This question was repeated in almost all the episodes that discussed the speech. For example, the presenter of ‘Free Hour’ wondered: “You lay bets on the changes from the US but do you not see that the Arab and Islamic worlds have also to offer some encouraging changes?” Such a question should actually be linked to another one in the same episode where the presenter doubted that the high ceiling of expectations on the part of Arabs and Muslims was “an attempt to embarrass Obama by pushing him to say things in his speech where they would bet on them in the coming period.” Linking these two questions together makes clear al-Hurra’s tendency to prepare Arabs and Muslims to make future concessions to the Obama administration with regard to its policy in the region.

This was particularly apparent in the discussion of peace in the Middle East. It is interesting how the discussion in al-Hurra was highlighting what seemed to be an Israeli-American disagreement. However, this was not discussed in the context of Israel’s seriousness with regard to peace, but was put in a different frame. It was portrayed as constituting an additional necessity on the part of the Arabs to offer some encouraging actions to support Obama. For example, the al-Hurra’s presenter said: “Obama met with Netanyahu and Abbas. There was disagreement with Israel concerning the two states solutions and an agreement with the Palestinians. To what extent do the Arabs bet on the

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483 Obama’s Visit to Riyadh, op. cit.  
484 Ibid.
role of the President in stressing the principle of the two states solutions? Are the Arabs ready to respond to any of the demands that Obama may ask for during his visit to Riyadh and Cairo in order to support him in this direction? He later added: “You want Obama to not protect Israel and keep his stance on these issues [like that of the settlement], but if he tells you that this requires modifications in the Arab peace initiative and that you have to cooperate with him in this, are the Arabs ready to make any modifications to the Arab peace initiative? Is this initiative sufficient for President Obama? “What can the Arab also offer to Obama?,” he adds. These questions were frequently repeated during the discussion of this issue.

*Al-Jazeera’s* coverage, for its part, was sending different messages. First, it had doubted what appeared to be an American-Israeli disagreement. This could be inferred from the presenter’s question on the issue: “Bin Laden said that the American policy towards Palestine will trigger more problems to the US, how is that so while the man [Obama], as we have seen, is putting pressures on Israel and there is an open disagreement – at least this is what we read in the newspapers – between him and Netanyahu. How could this trigger more problems asBin Laden said?” Here, while *al-Hurra* was talking about the disagreement as a fact, *al-Jazeera* gave the possibility that this could be a media-made disagreement especially given Obama’s confirmation that the relation between his country and Israel was ‘unbreakable’. Second, *al-Jazeera’s* presenter asked this question to the guest who was taking a quite pessimistic attitude towards Obama’s speech as if she was giving the guest the opportunity to prove Bin Laden’s

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485 Obama’s Visit to Riyadh, *op. cit.*
486 Obama’s Upcoming Visit, part 2, *op. cit.*
488 Change Chances of American Policy, *op. cit.*
words to be true. The guest’s answer was as follow: “The problem with Obama is that he did not come with anything new when it comes to how he perceives the problem. The main problem is the Zionist invasion to this land and the problem of four or five million refugees who want to come back.”

The way al-Hurra dealt with the Palestinian issue could not be described as even handed. If Israel was, as the message was conveying, not cooperating, why should the Arabs offer concessions to facilitate a settlement of the conflict? Why did the presenter not ask about what the US should do with Israel in case the latter continued putting obstacles in the way of a two-state solution? Generally speaking, a special focus was given to Obama’s stance against the Israeli settlements. It was portrayed as unquestionable evidence of his strong and fair stance when it comes to the Palestinian issue. There was also an attempt to blame the current divisions among Arabs for any failure that Obama could face. The presenter of ‘Free Hour’ asked: “With all these divisions, how dare the Arabs ask Obama to solve these issues. Where are the Arabs from what is going on?”

After what Obama had already said about peace in the Middle East, al-Hurra was trying to show how balanced he was in his approach to the issue. For example, the presenter was asking whether the speech was going to establish a beginning to solve the conflict. He introduced the question by first stating how Obama was “balanced in stressing the rights of the Palestinians in a state and at the same time Israel’s right in

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\[490\] Obama’s Upcoming Visit, Part 3, *op. cit.*
peace and security.” 491 The speech was also described as a qualitative shift in the discourse of an American president towards peace.

*Al-Jazeera*, on the other side, was also not optimistic about Obama’s attitudes towards the Palestinian issue. This was shown, for example, in the episode of ‘More than One Opinion’, where the presenter asked the pessimistic guest whether Obama’s position towards settlements was indicative of an administration that would exert pressure on Israel with regard to this issue. The guest, as could be expected, denied any hopes related to changing the American support to Israel. In his view, “we heard this talk before . . . I am afraid that the Palestinian issue would be minimized to the issue of settlements . . . there were issues that Obama could have immediately settled like the separation wall.” 492 The presenter the wondered: “What two-state solution is Obama talking about? How could he promise today with a two state solution while he did not offer any program or mechanism in this speech?” 493 The way the question was framed raises doubts about the seriousness and practicality of Obama’s approach. 494 Framing the question in such a way was, thus, not neutral. Obama’s position towards settlements also came under criticism in *al-Jazeera*. The argument was that it was not the first time that the US denied the building of settlements. Secondly, Obama called only for stopping settlements not removing them. Unlike *al-Hurra* whose guests were praising the fact that Obama described the settlements as illegitimate, *al-Jazeera*’s guest was particularly critical of such a description.

491 Obama’s Speech, op. cit.
492 Ibid.
493 Ibid.
494 This question was directed to the more positive-leaning guest. In his view, the Arab world has all the right to doubt the promises of the American presidents. However, he mentioned how the Palestinian issue received early attention from Obama’s administration and how the discourse about settlements, although not new, was qualitatively important if compared to the unconditional agreement received by the Bush administration (*ibid.*).
Hamas’ position was also a point of discussion on al-Jazeera. When one of the guests mentioned the different American position towards Hamas, the presenter immediately asked him

**Presenter:** How did you notice this change, is it only for not calling it a terrorist group?

**Guest:** He went on saying that it has the legitimacy of existence.

**Presenter:** If we stop at the words, he said it was supported by some Palestinians while the movement is the legitimate elected movement that is supported by the majority.495

Voices that were talking about the legitimacy of armed struggle under occupation were often heard in al-Jazeera in a way that distinguishes between resistance and violence.

*Al-Jazeera,* in this way, was using the strategy of addressing certain questions to certain guests, asking questions that implied certain attitudes towards the speech and, finally, critically evaluating certain words and terminologies that Obama used in his speech to prove that it was only about sweet talk and not a real change in attitudes.

The channel also tried, contrary to al-Hurra, to throw the responsibility of any probable failure of Obama’s new attitudes on the nature of the American system. According to this view, American foreign policies were not about a new president, they were the result of institutional planning and these institutions did not change. For example, *al-Jazeera*’s presenter questioned if “Obama has the determination and will to make a true shift in Washington’s policies towards Arabs and Muslims in a country that is ruled by institutions not individuals?”496

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496 Obama’s Speech, *op. cit.*
Related to peace and stability in the region, there was the portrayal of Iran. In *al-Hurra*, Iran was represented as the region’s other. The presenter of ‘The Four Directions’ asked: “What do you say about Khamenei’s talk, which coincided with the 20th anniversary of Khomeini’s death, about the US and how he described the new attitudes of Obama as a matter of sweet talk.”497 The presenter was also claiming that while the US was sending positive signals to Iran, the latter, on the contrary, did not send any. The answers received concentrated on how Iran hates the US and how that constitutes the heart of the regime’s ideology. In other words, the message was that Iran does not promote peace and stability in the region or wants more peaceful relations with the US because of ideological rather than historical or interest related reasons. It can be inferred from this message that Iran, not Israel, is the main obstacle of a better future for the region.

While Iran was brought to the discussion through the lenses of fanaticism in *al-Hurra*, it was mentioned in *al-Jazeera* as an example of the continuation of double standards when it comes to US policies in dealing with Islamic countries vis-à-vis Israel. The issue in *al-Jazeera* was why everybody talks about the Iranian nuclear issue but not the Israeli one. The argument was that Israel is not challenged in this issue at all and that this discourse has to be changed if the US, under the Obama administration, wants to gain some credibility.

497 Will Obama’s Speech, *op. cit.*
3. Al-Hurra and al-Jazeera: Another Arena of Conflict?

James Lull argues that “hegemony fails when dominant ideology is weaker than social resistance.” 498 To put it another way, hegemony fails when the counter-hegemonic discourse is stronger. This implies the demise of a hegemonic ideal and its demotion to that of a dominant ideal. 499

It was shown from the analysis of the coverage of both al-Hurra and al-Jazeera that the two channels had different messages to be sent with regard to Obama’s speech in Cairo. These different messages are building up two different weltanschauungs with regard to the relations between the Islamic world and the West, particularly with the US, on the one hand. On the other hand, they provide two different perceptions with regard to the region’s identity. These two different orientations show how soft power, and its public diplomacy component, is being challenged by the developments in the media.

For the relationship between the Islamic world and the US, al-Hurra was trying to convey the message that the period of conflict has gone with the coming of a new administration and the personality of the new American president. There was a kind of celebrating the new beginning as an unprecedented time in the relationship between the two parties. There was also a tendency in the channel’s coverage to not highlight the clash of interests that might be the cause for this tensioned relationship. The clash was mainly perceived as the result of extremists on the part of the Islamic world and some political mistakes on the part of the Bush administration. The latter was not accused, however, of being anti-Islamic. This reputation about the former administration was

mainly a matter of misunderstanding, as the channel’s tried to convey. The assumption of clash is, thus, maintained but with ‘violent extremism.”

Despite the fact that Obama addressed the Islamic world as an entity and *al-Hurra* discussed the relations between the US and Islam, there were reservations in the channel to make the Islamic identity as the main identity definer in the region. This was shown, for example, from the comments of the presenter of ‘The Four Directions’ about the melted Arab identity in the Islamic surrounding in a way that triggered the guest to refuse such a claim.

*Al-Hurra* also was pragmatic, not to say hypocritical, in its dealing with the image of religion. As was noticed during its coverage on the war on Gaza, it tried to marginalize the religious factor. When religion was brought to the picture at that time, it was often portrayed in a negative way: a call for hatred, violence, and extremism. This pragmatic use of religion was also evident in the channel’s coverage of Obama’s speech. In one episode of ‘Free Hour,’ the Egyptian *mufti* (a top official religious scholar) welcomed Obama’s visit and said that the values of democracy and human rights should emerge from the culture of the society and not be dependent on any other culture. This was in harmony with the new tendency of the American administration that was stressing cultural particularism when it comes to issues of democracy and freedom. However, this tendency neglects the possibility of understanding what cultural particularism is differently. It is also contradictory because what Obama said, and was positively portrayed in *al-Hurra*, implies a certain vision of the values that should prevail and the role of religion in the society. The American President was stressing the importance of any government to be law abiding, peaceful and works for all its citizens. These
statements, despite their appeal, were too general, which could make them susceptible to different interpretations in the future depending on what the American interests are.

Secondly, although Obama acknowledged the right of women to dress what they want and choose their roles in life, he put the issue of women’s right as one of the causes of the tensioned relationship. He was, thus, covertly alluding to a certain argument that claims that “the cultural fault line that divides the West and the Islamic world is about sex,” i.e. gender equality and sexual liberalization. Putting this as a source of the tension between the US and the Islamic world indicates that Obama believes in the “sexual clash of civilizations,” as termed by Inglehart and Norris. What supports this conclusion is the fact that Obama made a woman’s right to wear what she wants contingent upon her personal choices and approval. This, as mentioned before, confines religion and tradition into the personal space. This, nevertheless, can be inconsistence with what people in the region think about religion and tradition and brings us to the same vicious circle: whose perception should prevail and be respected. This makes Obama’s speech, and al-Hurra’s coverage of it, a reproduction of the discourse of globalization and how the ‘Western values’ should prevail. He was only more latent about what he was saying.

On the opposite side, Khamenei’s words in celebrating Khomenei’s death anniversary were described as “the words of God,” where he criticized the US and doubted the sweet talk of Obama. Religion, in this case, was negatively portrayed as an incitement to hatred. This contradictory use of religion reveals how the channel is deep-

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500 Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris. 2003. “The True Clash of Civilization.” Foreign Policy, p. 67. According to this view, the main fault lines values separating the two cultures have much more to with eros than demos. As younger generations in the West have gradually become more liberal on these issues, Islamic nations have remained the most traditional societies in the world (ibid., p. 68).
down convinced that when it comes to the Arab and Islamic worlds, religion matters a great deal. It is what perception of religion and what role it should play that makes the channel coverage and the messages that it wants to convey different.

This inconsistency does not only apply to \textit{al-Hurra}, it applies to Obama’s speech itself. One could notice how Obama was using the term Muslim-majority countries instead of Islamic countries. This way, while acknowledging that the majority in these states were Muslims, there was a tendency to deny Islam as a determining factor in forming the identity of these countries. This, as mentioned before, refers to a certain perception of what role religion should play in the society. This also comes in contrast to the position of the Obama administration towards preserving the Jewish nature of the Israeli state.

Generally speaking, Obama, followed by \textit{al-Hurra}, was trying to picture two kinds of Islam. One was peaceful and contained in the personal life which characterized the majority of Muslims; the other was the ‘extremist’ form of Islam that intrudes into public life and deteriorates the relations between countries. This latter form of Islam was portrayed as the main reason behind what appeared to be a clash between Islam and the US. The latter, as Obama revealed and reflected in \textit{al-Hurra}, should be fought by America and Muslims alike. Thus, just like Bush, Obama looked to the relations between the US and the Islamic World through the lenses of religion. The difference between the two men is that Obama preferred to take the path of dialogue after the failure of military confrontation.

\textit{Al-Hurra}’s coverage, in line with Obama’s speech, was an attempt to pacify the Islamic world and promoting the tendencies of peace even if the price was to give up
rights or, at least, accepting the logic of the more powerful in defending their interests and allies regardless of the rights of Muslim countries. This has been clear in repeating the message that the American President took the first step and now it is the Islamic world’s turn to take the second step. However, while Obama’s first step was words, the Arab and Islamic countries are expected to do actions. What is wanted is to stop all kinds of resistance even those that may be perceived as legitimate under international law. This is the one thing that is wanted from Muslims: choosing peace and work against anything that destabilizes it or threatens its achievement. Peace, then, is the hegemonic idea that is being spread.

Dialogue, as could be inferred from al-Jazeera’s coverage, should not be understood as the antithesis of conflict.501 Actually, the assumption of conflict was still there but with a particular form of Islam: the non-pacifist Islam (called violent extremism in al-Hurra). This is why what is considered in al-Jazeera as resistance groups (like Hamas and Hezbollah) were treated by al-Hurra as part of “violent extremism.” Obama, in this manner, introduced what could be described as a ‘liberal reading to Islam’ that focuses only on one side of the coin which is related to peace not power. While the US calls on Muslims to incline to peace, Obama made clear that the US would not hesitate to use its powers to protect its citizens. This is why, for example, war in Afghanistan shall continue until the American people become safe.

Al-Jazeera’s coverage, by conveying the message that Obama does not necessarily represent a revolutionary change in US policies, was perceiving this call for dialogue and mutual interests and respect as another tool of managing conflicts. This

501 According to Samuel Huntington, the clash of civilizations is inevitable, but it does not have to be violent. Samuel P. Huntington. “The Clash of Civilizations?,” op. cit., p. 25.
way, it was not only a speech to mend the image of the US in the Islamic world, but also a way to help the US in the problems it faces in this part of the world which were not solved by military power. The conflict was, however, not portrayed as religious in nature. It is a conflict of interests where the US, and the West, always preferred their interests over their values. Religion clashes only if it involves values that contradict the promotion of these interests.

According to *al-Jazeera*’s coverage, peace should be made conditioned on justice and respecting rights. Therefore, the channel did not see Arabs and Muslims obliged to do anything in return for Obama’s speech. On the contrary, it was the US that is now expected to act evenly to prove these good intentions expressed by its President. Pacifist Islam was also not the only form presented on *al-Jazeera*. Resistance to occupation in order to restore Arab and Muslim rights was a form of action fully accepted and defended in different forum on the channel. This way, the hegemonic idea of peaceful action was highly challenged. It was challenged on the conceptual, legal and historical levels. On the conceptual level, peace was always linked to power: peace needs power to protect it. On the legal level, there was always a reminder that resisting occupation was a right granted in international law. As for the historical levels, events were drawn from history to support the argument that peace by itself never achieved freedom and independence.

History was the other factor that could challenge such promotion of interests. Therefore, *al-Hurra*’s coverage focused on the present and future rather than the past. This was clear, for example, in tackling the issue of democracy and peace between Arabs and the Israelis. The role of the US in backing authoritative regimes was absent, while its role in ‘establishing democracy’ in Iraq was highlighted. By the same token, the channel
was silent on US support for Israeli policies over the years, but Obama’s position with regard to the issue of settlement was a focus point. The new beginning, according to *al-Hurra*’s coverage, meant forgetting the past, and, henceforth, exonerating the US from its historical mistakes and policies. This focus on the present and future makes the region’s identity as elastic as it is needed to promote the interests of the more powerful. This also makes the people in the region more amenable to accept the hegemonic ideas that serve these interests.

History in *Al-Jazeera*’s coverage, on the contrary, was always alive. For example, in tackling the issue of ‘violent extremism,’ as Obama called it, the role played by the US in promoting these groups (like the Taliban and al-Qaeda) was always mentioned. The problem as such is not something that the Islamic countries alone should bear its responsibility. It was, according to the channel’s conveyed messages, the US that played a major role in creating the problem and now wants the Islamic worlds to pay the full price of solving it. However, no issue is filled with as many historical references as the Palestinian issue. Arab rights, as perceived in *al-Jazeera*, are rooted in history; therefore, none of these rights should be surrendered. History is, thus, an indispensable component of the region’s identity. Rather than the contradictory use of history, as Obama did, *al-Jazeera* employed the constant use of history.502

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502 Employing history is itself a selective process that does not necessarily mean a right or an accurate presentation of reality. Historical narratives usually include both acts of forgetting and remembrance. For more on this argument, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot. 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon.
4. Conclusion

Comparing the coverage of *al-Hurra* and *al-Jazeera* signifies the dilemma that soft power strategies now face in promoting their hegemonic ideas. While *al-Hurra* was endorsing the ideas of peace as the only alternative and looking forward to the future rather than looking back to history, *al-Jazeera* was supporting the idea that peace should not be the only option available to Arabs and Muslims and that peace, as Obama was asking for, meant abandoning rights. History was an important component of *al-Jazeera*’s coverage. The present and future, as perceived in *al-Jazeera*, could not be pursued without reference to history. According to this view, it is history that defines rights and justice, not only negotiations that could only reflect the imbalance of power.

Thus, the two channels were conveying contradictory messages and portrayal of identity. *Al-Hurra* was sending the message that the US is still the benevolent power that most of the time intervenes for the sake of values, even if it makes mistakes. The US was also portrayed as the party that seeks reconciliation now and extending a hand to the Islamic world. *Al-Jazeera*, on the contrary, was conveying the message that the US remains the same power that prefers its interests over its values, especially when it comes to its relation with the Islamic world.

As for the identity of the region, *al-Hurra* was promoting the image of a region that should get over its past and look forward to the future. The future should be characterized by the marginalization of both religion and history. *Al-Jazeera*, in contrast, was promoting the idea that both religion and history are main components of the region’s identity, and that any attempt to overlook them would result in surrendering rights and losing its cultural characteristics.
Conclusion

Public Diplomacy in a Changing World

The world has witnessed a surge in the power of identities under the impact of globalization. As Manuel Castells argues in his analysis of the “Information Age,” the main challenge to globalization is the spread of “powerful expressions of collective identity that challenge globalization . . . on behalf of cultural singularity and people’s control over their lives and environment.”\(^{503}\) Rather than being swept away by globalization, identity offers local cultures resistance to the centrifugal force of capitalist globalization. It is this role of identity that challenges the nation-state’s hegemony internally and externally; internally as its hegemony over its population’s sense of cultural attachment has weakened, and externally as the hegemonic ideas that help it promote its interests are being widely questioned.\(^{504}\)

1. Rethinking International Relations

This study shows how, under the influence of globalization and developments in communication and information technologies, the field of International Relations has moved from excessive reliance on positivism towards the new approaches of post-positivism which pay special attention to the role played by values and ideas in the conduct of International Relations. This has influenced the way identity is being perceived in IR. Identity is now widely conceived as more constructed than fixed. Although it does not necessarily be invented, it is subject to (re-) imagining all the time.


This combination of ideas attracts attention to the power relations behind any discourse. This assumption is useful in analyzing media discourse when it comes to its representation of identity, and thus answering the question of why certain perception of identity is being promoted by the media rather than others.

In a discursive approach, international politics is increasingly seen as a struggle over ideas and values. In this view, public diplomacy is an important mean of political influence in conjunction with traditional diplomacy among governments.\(^{505}\) This, for its part, shows how the traditional definition of power has itself changed from solely relying on hard power (military powers in particular) to increasingly acknowledging the importance of soft power.

Perceiving politics as a struggle over ideas and values – a war of hearts and minds – means that what is important is facts and events \textit{per se}, but rather how these are presented and interpreted. As Ramussen argues, “[a] discourse is the result of social practice that establishes relations among concepts and thereby their meaning. Public diplomacy thus operates through what essentially communicative practices intended to influence foreign political discourses, i.e. seeking support for one’s particular definition of reality.”\(^{506}\) This highlights media’s role with regard to reality depiction and, thus, the conduct of public diplomacy. Media, in this sense, does not depict reality; they only construct an image of it. This is especially the case with images of foreign countries or


\(^{506}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 4.
foreign policies. Media now constitute an indispensable part in any attempt to approach foreign public opinion. Their role is not limited to explain and justify the policies of a certain state but also to influence and convince others with such orientations. This could be achieved by either targeting certain perceptions of identity or by trying to promote some aspects of one identity over other aspects. In this way, media can be seen as an asset or a challenge to the foreign policies of states. In other words, media have become an important actor in international relations.

This, in turn, has something to do with the increasing importance of soft power. As Ramussen argues,

Public diplomacy is associated with the notion of soft power. It is seen as the efforts by which an actor seeks to transfer ideas and beliefs by influencing foreign political discourses through direct contact and participation in political debates. Public diplomacy is, thus, a communicative practice through which the more powerful tries to influence others’ conception of their own interests. This could be done, with the help of the media, by influencing how “specific issues are perceived abroad, or by adding new issues to the political agenda, by relating them to important discursive elements.”

Media globalization has provided weaker states with opportunities to challenge the monopoly of information on the part of the more powerful states. After being predominately Western in terms of ownership and perspective, international media have witnessed what has been described by one scholar as lifting the barriers of entry into the media business in a way that challenged Western hegemony over news production. This has had great repercussions on the United States and its actions/policies. The US is now under an unprecedented level of international scrutiny. This level of “global

508 Ramussen, op. cit., p. 4
509 Volkmer, op. cit., p. 20.
transparency” poses a challenge to United States’ foreign policy. The rise in anti-Americanism, partially driven by media globalization, is an example of how increased access to information may threaten the effectiveness of soft power.510

The presence of al-Hurra stands as an evidence on the challenges that the US policies are facing in this part of the world because of the influential role of the media. It shows how effective Arab media are to the extent that, as Ann Marie Baylouny argued, they put the US in a situation where it felt the need to “legitimize itself, to defend itself against counter-[hegemonic] claims.”511 It was particularly al-Jazeera that transformed the media sphere not only in the Middle East (by putting an end to the Saudi-Lebanese hegemony over the media sphere), but also globally, by ending Western media monopoly over the dissemination of information in what came to be known as “al-Jazeera effect.”512 It also stands as an example of how “otherness” has become an inescapable issue in International Relations.

2. Searching for a Model for Public Diplomacy of the Media

This brings us to one of the main questions of this study, which is the difference between the messages of al-Hurra and al-Jazeera and how it affected the goals of the US public diplomacy in the region. According to a survey conducted in March 2008 in six Middle Eastern countries, al-Jazeera came in the first place, with a decisive margin, as the most watched news stations (53% of the respondents). In comparison, al-Hurra was only

selected by 2%. This study argues that the difference in the level of success of the two channels can be explained with reference to different factors related to “three Cs”: context, conception and content. For a message of public diplomacy to find its way to its targeted audience, a certain kind of harmonic interaction needs to exist between these three components (see figure 1 below). The construction of identity lies at the heart of the content of the messages, i.e. it lies at the heart of public diplomacy messages of the media. Any inconsistency in these elements leads to the failure of the public diplomacy media messages.

Figure 1: Public Diplomacy Messages Require Consistent Interaction Among Three Elements: Context, Conception and Content.

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513 James Shanahan, *op. cit.*
a. Context

Contextual dimension has two aspects: historical and institutional. For the historical aspect, as discussed in earlier chapters, the time when *al-Hurra* began its career in the Middle East was not favorable to its success. On the one hand, the hostility to American policies in the region was at its highest due to the American war on terrorism (in the context of which the US justified its invasion of Iraq) which was perceived by many people in the region as a war against Islam. On the other hand, *al-Hurra* was a latecomer to the Arab media sphere and was trying to establish itself against an inhospitable historical background and very competitive environment. According to Marwan Kraidy, the Arabs have been bombarded by international propaganda since World War II. This made them suspicious of any attempt to influence their opinions by foreign countries.514 Moreover, the media sphere in the Arab world has gone through major developments since the 1990s. It became more competitive and more open especially after the appearance of *al-Jazeera*, which tackled, in an unprecedented manner, issues that were generally regarded as taboo in Arab societies. “These drastic regional developments present an extremely competitive communication environment for US public diplomacy in the Arab world,” explains Kraidy, adding that “with a plethora of Arab media reflecting a broad ideological spectrum, foreign broadcasts come across as dubious in motivation, redundant in content, and preachy in tone.”515 This is particularly true for *al-Hurra*, whose message seemed to be contradicting American policies in the region. While *al-Hurra*’s message emphasized freedom and democracy, the Middle East was

514 Kraidy, “Arab Media and US Policy,” op. cit., p. 3. In addition to the United State’s *al-Hurra*, there is Iran’s *al-'Alam*, Russia’s *Russia Today*, the UK’s *BBC* Arabic service, Germany’s *Duetsche Welle*’s Arabic broadcast, and the Arabic broadcasts of France. Recently, the Turkish TV Network *TRT* launched a new Turkish TV channel in the Arabic language.

515 Ibid., p. 3.
witnessing US occupation of Iraq. This inconsistency, as understood by the Arab populations, was sufficient to damage the reputation of the station and taint it as an American propaganda machine.

In contrast, *al-Jazeera* established itself well through its innovative journalistic style, as well as its adoption of techniques that appealed well to the Arab audience. As discussed earlier, *al-Jazeera* came into existence in an international context that was more acceptable to transnational identities. The channel capitalized on these transnational sentiments in gaining legitimacy and appeal, whether between Arabs in the region or outside it. Moreover, the station succeeded in projecting its identity in a way that transcended its host country, Qatar, which is why it is mainly perceived as an Arab rather than a Qatari station.

Western criticism of *al-Jazeera* reflects its strength among Arab viewers eager to see news from their own perspective. For example, news presentation on *al-Jazeera*, as was shown in the station’s coverage of the Gaza war, reflects a passion that matches an audience that is passionate for many of the issues covered in the channel. It also demonstrates how the station is conscious of Arab’s passion towards the Palestinian issue and knows how to capitalize on this. It can be argued that *al-Jazeera* had first established its credibility and competence before seeking to propagate certain ideas and messages. The station represents a successful example of the public diplomacy of the media. Obviously, Qatar has managed to gain an increasing regional and international prominence, thanks to *al-Jazeera*’s credibility. On the contrary, *al-Hurra* sought to spread its ideas and messages while still struggling to establish itself in the Arab media.
sphere, which it probably failed to do so far. This seems to be a main difference between the careers of the two channels.

Not only did the historical context work against *al-Hurra* and in favor of *al-Jazeera*, but also the institutional context curtailed its ability to establish itself. The organizational structure of US public diplomacy itself is ambiguous due to changes made after merging the United States Information Agency (USIA) with the Department of State. The latter lost its independent budget and reporting channels. The Under Secretariat of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs was created as an advisory position with no significant budget and no authority over public diplomacy personnel. Many argue that *al-Hurra* and other new international broadcasters work within a fragmented organizational structure. The problem seems to be the absence of a general, well-defined strategy regarding the goals that international broadcasting tries to achieve. As discussed in chapter two, attacks from Capitol Hill or *The Wall Street Journal* on *al-Hurra*’s management for airing a speech by Hezbollah Secretary Hassan Nassr Allah were counterproductive and confirmed the impression that the station was a US propaganda tool. These attacks could easily be seen as based on ideology rather than the standards of professional journalism. The station thus failed to provide an exemplary model of tolerance. Such a position questioned the democratizing message of the US and, consequently, negatively affected the reputation of *al-Hurra*. As the report of the Annenberg School concluded, “[a]l-Hurra’s refusal to cover Islamists, Hamas, and

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517 Ibid.,
Hizbollah as real/legitimate political actors significantly decreases its credibility and ability to accurately reflect events in the Arab world.\textsuperscript{519}

Another institutional aspect that affected the way \textit{al-Hurra} was perceived in the Arab world is the belief that the channel is primarily stuffed by Christian Lebanese and does not therefore reflect the pan-Arab outlook characterizing competitive Arab channels. As discussed in chapter two, Moutfak Harb – the first news director of the channel – explained that this was the case only in the beginning and that the channel took a more representative outlook to most of the Arab countries in later stage of its career. Given the channel’s low credibility in the Arab world, it was difficult to convince people of this change in its outlook, especially when the Lebanese accent is still widely used in \textit{al-Hurra}. As Lina Khatib argued, language use is sometimes symbolic rather than communicative because it carries many connotations.\textsuperscript{520} Since Lebanon is generally perceived in the region as being culturally close to the West, the prevalence of Lebanese dialect on \textit{al-Hurra} is seen as “establishing a hierarchy in the Arab world through prioritizing Lebanon as a cultural leader.”\textsuperscript{521} Working within these institutional constraints in addition to a competitive Arab media environment makes the work of \textit{al-Hurra} extremely difficult. The station is expected to satisfy Congress, American conservative press and people in Washington D.C., as well as Arab audience. Given the different perspective of each of these parties, this goal seems unrealistic and unattainable.


\textsuperscript{521} Ibid. p. 2.
This is exactly the opposite of what appears on al-Jazeera. There is no dominant representation of any of the Arab countries on the station, which promotes the perception of the channel as a pan-Arab media. Moreover, the channel’s medium of communication is standard simplified Arabic used by the presenters in all the shows as well as in reading the news. This standardized use of Arabic language gives a sense of Arab unity and endorses Arabic as a main demarcation of Arab identity. Moreover, the margin of freedom that is given to al-Jazeera seems to be larger than that of al-Hurra. This is reflected in the channel’s ability to host different and even conflicting views, regardless of their political or religious affiliations. This may explain why al-Jazeera has constantly been accused of being a platform for terrorists, Israelis, Americans and Arab nationalists simultaneously.

The US approach to the Arab World, thus, came at a particular inhospitable historical moment where the increasing access of Arabs and Muslims to information, particularly news produced as well as disseminated by them, had affected how they receive media messages from an outsider. Raising popular awareness of events in places like Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, al-Jazeera made it difficult for the US to sell its image and generated an oppositional discourse that calls for authenticity and independence.522

b. Conception

The success of public diplomacy media messages depends also on the conceptual understanding of the context in which media works and how to present media messages in this context. It also depends on how those in charge perceive the role of the media, the

522 Lynch, op. cit., p. 25.
goals expected of it, and the strategies employed to achieve these goals. For this reason, some scholars see the failure of *al-Hurra* lies in the flawed ideas behind the station.

Two major ideas seem to have particularly influenced the establishment and working of *al-Hurra*. The first is the conviction that American policies need better marketing to be supported by Arabs, i.e. perceiving the problem as a one of communication and thus neglecting its political side. Attitudes towards the US in the Arab world are “a substantive policy issue that must be solved by smart policies whose rationales and objectives must be skillfully communicated.”\(^{523}\) This flawed conviction influenced the way US public diplomacy messages are being conveyed. It mainly takes the style of “push-down” rather than dialogue. This is evident in the way average Arab opinion was absent in *al-Hurra*’s coverage in the two case studies. The US, this way, did not seek to listen to Arabs, but concentrated instead on reshaping their minds, which is why its message was perceived as propaganda. If a media strategy lacks the ability of responding to peoples’ views and their self-constructed reality, it quickly loses credibility. As mentioned earlier, this questions the democratizing message that *al-Hurra* claimed to promote. The US, in this sense, is promoting a hegemonic discourse rather than establishing an open Arab public sphere.

In this way, *al-Hurra* was meant to be the voice of the US in the region. For its part, *al-Jazeera* was initiated by the Emir of Qatar to be, at least theoretically, an independent and nonpartisan satellite network.\(^{524}\) He also abolished the Ministry of Information as an evidence of lifting constraints on freedom of expression. This was reflected in hosting different views on the channel. Additionally, Qatar resisted all the

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\(^{523}\) Kraidy, *op. cit.*, p. 12.  
\(^{524}\) Nawawy, Iskander, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
American demands to control the content of the channel. This reflects how al-Jazeera was perceived as a media outlet that can only achieve its goals if granted independence. Credibility, it may be argued, was a key issue in the minds of those behind the station. These positions were sufficient to enhance popular conception of the network as an independent one and get its messages through. Moreover, al-Jazeera’s ability to capitalize on the sources of Arab identity strengthened the Arabs’ sense that al-Jazeera not only spoke for them but also fought for them.

The second dominant idea that governed the establishment of al-Hurra is approaching Arab media sphere as if it resembles the former Soviet Union space during the Cold War. As Marc Lynch argued:

Al-Hurra’s founders seemed to think that the Arab world was like the former Soviet space, deprived of information and desperate for an objective, credible source of news and free public debate. That would have been true in the 1980s. But at the time of its launch (2004) the Arab world was actually drowning in satellite television, with multiple sources of information and talk shows which already discussed all the issues which al-Hurra claimed to be introducing. Al-Hurra, with its stigma of American funding, never had a chance to be more than a drop in the ocean.525

People behind the Iron Curtain were information-deprived and had no alternative to government media sources. The Arab world, in contrast, has a plethora of information and Arab viewers now have access to a variety of views on different issues, many of them were until recently considered taboo. This has allowed the Arabs to be “increasingly discriminating users of media,” according to Kraidy.526 Moreover, during the Cold War, the US sponsored media was challenging a hostile, totalitarian empire in Eastern Europe. This is not similar to the case in the Arab world which does not seek liberation from

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526 Kraidy, op. cit., p.3.
foreign domination. On the contrary, many Arabs view the US as a successor of European colonialism and imperialism, which seeks to control their resources and weaken their countries.\textsuperscript{527}

Kraidy eloquently summarized the conceptual flaws behind US public diplomacy in the region. It is a policy that is characterized by

a lack of awareness of the history of international broadcasting to the Arab world; a lack of knowledge of the current Arab media and communication environment; an approach that focuses on “branding” the United States and finding instruments to get to the “hearts and minds” of Arabs; a lack of understanding of what communication can and cannot achieve; and an unwillingness to address the gap between US rhetoric and US action.\textsuperscript{528}

\textit{Al-Jazeera}, on the contrary, understood well the context in which it was going to work. Arab viewers, at the time of \textit{Al-Jazeera} establishment, had just started their experience with satellite channels. Dominated at the beginning by Saudi money and the Egyptian official satellite channel, the satellite experience was still much reflecting the views of its owners. What \textit{Al-Jazeera} did was introducing a new model to Arab viewers that was not particularly associated with a specific country. It was similar to introducing the CNN in Arabic and from an Arab perspective. The channel, accordingly, understood Arab viewers’ eagerness to open media and capitalized on this. What helped in achieving this goal was the fact that the hosting country – Qatar – did not have specific messages to send. Qatar was mainly seeking to establish a status of itself in the region and, perhaps, internationally by getting out of the Saudi orbit. Observably, \textit{Al-Jazeera} enabled Qatar to realize this goal.

\textsuperscript{527} Ibid., p. 8.
\textsuperscript{528} Ibid., p. 2.
c. Content

As the content analysis in chapter two has demonstrated, *al-Jazeera’s* coverage of the Palestinian issue received a special focus. In contrast, *Al-Hurra* was heavily interested in the situation in Iraq as well as in the general strategy of the US in Afghanistan which, as Obama made clear in his Cairo speech to the Muslim World in June 4, 2009, was connected to the general strategy of combating extremism. The Palestinian issue, according to our discussion of the development of Arab public sphere and Arab identity, was the one issue that left deep imprints on both Arab identity as well as Arab relations with the West in general and the US in particular. Because of this organic relationship between Arab identity, the Palestinian issue and relations with the US, this study conducted a comparison between the coverage of the two channels with regard to the Gaza War and Obama’s Cairo speech to the Islamic World.

The two case studies discussed here reveal important points. Each channel has a presumed conception of the region’s identity. During its coverage of the Gaza war, *al-Jazeera* was keen on stressing history, religion and culture as the defining elements of the region’s identity. The network was also representing the Arabs, no matter where they are, as one people whose feeling of solidarity keep them connected to the region and affected by its events. In other words, *al-Jazeera* presented an ideal image of popular solidarity in face of the inefficient role of governments. *Al-Hurra*, on its part, ignored regional history, bypassed the role of religion and focused instead on regional political divisions.

Tactical use of language was also employed by the two channels to convey certain messages and help framing the issues discussed in a certain way. Because identity representation has to resonate with the people, media strategies employed by *al-Jazeera*
seem to be more successful than those of al-Hurra. The former has the reputation of the people’s channel, while the other seems to be out of touch with its audience.

Al-Huura’s coverage was conveying the message that the region has an identity crisis and that divisions are inevitable. For example, the channel’s coverage of the Gaza war tended to marginalize Arab street demonstrations by not giving them adequate coverage. On the other hand, the Palestinian “other” was made ambiguous by ignoring acts of solidarity and demonstrations in the West Bank and the many calls for Palestinian unity. What adds to this identity crisis in al-Hurra’s coverage, as discussed in chapter three, was the downplayed role of religion. Religious solidarity was not part of the station’s coverage of the war. There was an attempt to portray religion – Islam – in a negative way as promoting violence in the region.

Al-Jazeera’s coverage, in contrast, was portraying a region that suffers from a political crisis, not an identity-related one. Divisions, in this way, were presented as political in nature while the popular level was characterized by cohesion and solidarity. Arab and Islamic solidarity, according to this view, was a dominant feature of the Arab street. Arabs were portrayed as a nation that shares each other’s sadness at times of crisis. This was reflected in the heavy coverage of Arab demonstrations around the world. The infusion of Arabness and religion was also apparent in al-Jazeera’s coverage. Religion was portrayed as the glue that holds all Arabs together. This, for its part, made the definition of the “other” clear and straightforward. According to al-Jazeera, it was Israel that destabilized the region, worked on splitting it, and killed innocents.

Differences between the messages of the two channels were also apparent in the second case study, Obama’s 2009 Cairo speech to the Muslim World. They were
presenting two different worldviews with regard to the relations between the Islamic world and the West, particularly with the US and the region’s perceived identity. For the first perspective, *al-Hurra* sought to convey the message that the true clash was between the US and violent extremism. The channel even avoided talking about the possible clash of interests between the US and the rest of the Islamic World. Generally speaking, *al-Hurra*, as well as Obama’s speech, was trying to picture two forms of Islam, one peaceful and contained in the personal life which characterized the majority of Muslims, and another, ‘extremist’ form of Islam that intrudes into public life and damage the relations between countries. This form of Islam was portrayed as the main reason behind what appeared to be a clash between Islam and the US. The latter, as revealed by Obama and reflected by *al-Hurra*, should be fought by America and Muslims alike. *Al-Hurra*’s coverage, thus, was an attempt to promote peaceful tendencies among the Arabs even if this meant giving up rights or accepting the logic of the more powerful in defending their interests regardless of the rights of Muslim countries. What was sought, then, was to stop all forms of resistance, including those that may be perceived as legitimate under international law. Peace and peaceful actions were, then, the hegemonic ideas that were being spread.

As for the region’s identity, religion was once again marginalized as one of the main definers of the region’s identity. This was evident in Obama’s speech itself. While Obama addressed the Islamic World as an entity, he was keen to use the term “Muslim-majority countries” in his speech, which may suggest what he wanted to convey is that although the majority of their population were Muslim, these countries do not have to be described as “Islamic countries.” This perception of religion confines its role into the
personal space. Moreover, the Arabs, according to this view, are not perceived as a one nation, but rather peoples who only speak the same language. Consequently, this would encourage normalization with Israel as a country in the region that enjoys high levels of political, industrial and social development. Peace, normalization and development are thus posed as inseparable phenomena.

Dialogue, as inferred from al-Jazeera’s coverage, should not be understood as the antithesis of conflict. In fact, the assumption of conflict was still there but with a particular form of Islam: the non-pacifist Islam (branded violent extremism in al-Hurra). This is why what is considered in al-Jazeera as resistance groups (like Hamas and Hezbollah) were treated by al-Hurra as part of “violent extremism.” Al-Jazeera’s coverage was thus conveying the message that Obama did not necessarily represent a revolutionary change in US policies. His call for dialogue and respecting mutual interests was only a tool of managing conflicts. The speech itself was seen not only as a way to help mending the image of the US in the Islamic World, but also a way to help the US in the problems it faces in this part of the world which were not solved by military power. The conflict was, however, not portrayed as religious in nature. It is a conflict of interests where the US, and the West, always prefers their interests over their values. Religion clashes only if it involves values that contradict the promotion of these interests.

According to al-Jazeera’s coverage, peace should be made conditioned on justice and respecting rights. Therefore, the channel did not see Arabs and Muslims obliged to do anything in return for Obama’s speech. On the contrary, it was the US that is now

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expected to act evenly to prove these good intentions expressed by its President. Pacifist Islam was also not the only form presented on al-Jazeera. Resistance to occupation in order to restore Arab and Muslim rights was a form of action fully accepted and defended in various forums on the channel. This way, the hegemonic idea of peaceful action was highly challenged.

History was the other element that distinguished the content of the coverage of the two channels. Al-Hurra’s coverage focused on the present and future rather than the past. This was clear, for example, in tackling the issue of democracy and peace between the Arabs and the Israelis. The role of the US in backing authoritative regimes was absent, while its role in ‘establishing democracy’ in Iraq was highlighted. By the same token, the channel kept silent on US support for Israeli policies over the years, but Obama’s position with regard to the issue of settlement was emphasized. The new beginning, according to al-Hurra’s coverage, meant forgetting the past and, henceforth, exonerating the US from its historical mistakes and policies. This focus on the present and future makes the region’s identity as elastic as required to promote the interests of powerful countries, which makes the people in the region more amenable to accept the hegemonic ideas that serve the interests of these countries.

History in al-Jazeera’s coverage, on the contrary, was always present. The idea of resistance itself is portrayed as highly representative of Arab history. Resistance has always been a main element in Arab’s identity, and it resurfaces whenever the Arabs encounter colonial or imperial threat to their identity. This was a common element in al-Jazeera’s coverage of both the Gaza war as well as Obama’s speech to the Islamic world. Additionally, the language employed by the station in representing this resistance can be
taken to indicate that military resistance is to be privileged over other options. In tackling the issue of ‘violent extremism’, as Obama called it, the role played by the US in supporting these groups (like Taliban and al-Qaeda) was always highlighted, which suggests that the Islamic world is expected to pay the price of solving a problem it did not create. However, no issue is filled with as many historical references as the Palestinian issue. Arab rights, as portrayed in al-Jazeera, are rooted in history; therefore, none of these rights should be surrendered. History, thus, is an indispensable component of the region’s identity.

Thus, the content of the message of the two channels are contradictory with regard to the portrayal of identity. Al-Hurra was sending the message that, irrespective of its possible mistakes, the US is still the benevolent power that frequently intervenes for the sake of values. The US was also portrayed as the party that seeks reconciliation by extending its hand to the Islamic world. Al-Jazeera, on the contrary, was conveying the message that the US remains the same power that prefers its interests over its values, especially when it comes to its relation with the Islamic world. As for the identity of the region, Al-Hurra was promoting the image of a region that should get over its past and look forward to the future. The future should be characterized by the marginalization of both religion and history. Al-Jazeera, in contrast, was promoting the idea that both religion and history are main components of the region’s identity. Any attempt to overlook these would result in surrendering rights and losing its cultural characteristics.

Analyzing the discourse of both al-Hurra and al-Jazeera reveals certain differences that explain the variant level of success for both stations. Al-Hurra, for its part, communicates values that are consistent with the American policies or are beneficial
for its political strategies. In this way, it is particularly representative of the liberal voices of the elite in the Arab world and Israeli points of view. *Al-Jazeera*, in contrast, constitutes an open platform for various views in the Arab world. Its target audience is the average Arab, particularly those belonging to the middle class. The station stresses community values and stresses the calamities of Arabs. It obviously promotes the idea of Arabness that encompasses the cultural elements of identity, such as history, language and religion. As long as media messages should resonate with the audience, this can explain why the messages of the two channels are not received and believed equally.

3. Democracy: Between Slogans and Solutions

This study demonstrates that *al-Hurra* does not open a dialogue with its Arabs audience about the US unpopular policies. The US approach towards the Arab World stressed informing rather than engaging, i.e. talking rather than listening. In this way, it has not shown interest in acknowledging the concerns of Arabs, which is why US public diplomacy efforts, represented here in *al-Hurra*, appear detached and dismissive of Arab interests. This was shown in the coverage of both the Gaza war and Obama’s speech where certain viewpoints were predominantly represented. The US, in this way, appears intolerant to different views and does not have the ability to agree or disagree on key issues, such as Iraq and the Palestinian issue. Democracy is assumed to be the outcome of the development of a critical rational public sphere. If the US sponsored channel to the region is unwilling to establish such a kind of public sphere, then its declared message of promoting democracy is highly questionable. Moreover, discussions on *al-Hurra* on issues such as democracy overlooked the role Washington played in supporting
authoritarian regimes in the region and focused instead on the internal dimension of the issue. This single-sided focus on what could be described as the region’s backwardness without reference to American policies is seen as reflecting arrogant and hypocrisy.

If *al-Hurra* really wants to democratize the Arab public sphere, it has to provide a working example by airing critical reports on the US or hosting guests who are critical of American policies in the region.531 By showing tolerance to various views and values, *al-Hurra* would reinforce the democratic ideals and establish its credibility. Furthermore, in its attempt to counteract what was seen as the “emotionalization” of the news presented by *al-Jazeera*, *al-Hurra* appeared to lack sensitivity to people’s feeling, which also goes against its favorable reception by the Arab audience.

For its part, *al-Jazeera*’s democratizing effect is also not clear. Although the station constitutes an open Arab public sphere where various opinions are expressed and debated, it has not lead to any serious political change in the reality of Arab politics. It became an arena where Arabs can talk politics but not actually practice. Additionally, it has been observed that at times views that contradict the channel’s general orientation are co-opted, and that certain questions are directed to certain guests to solicit particular answers. *Al-Jazeera*, in this way, can be seen as promoting a critical public sphere but one that is not necessarily a rational one. This is directly related to the notion of Arab identity that it presents. *Al-Jazeera* stresses a certain idealized notion of Arab identity, a monolithic identity that is founded upon authentic elements. These elements revolve around religion (Islam), language, and history. The tenets of Islam are highlighted in a way that matches the principle of Arab identity intrinsic to the Arab legacy and cultural tradition. As for language, this authentic construction of identity relies on the use of the

531 Helle C. Dale, *op. cit.*
classic Arabic language. The station’s anchors, reporters and journalists tend to use the rhetorical and even derogatory words that they are explicitly urged to avoid according to the network’s behavioral and professional guide. The dynamic nature of the Arabic language and its rhetorical power to touch off the emotions makes al-Jazeera amenable to an undue influence on the Arab public’s interpretation of events.

4. Public Diplomacy and International Relations at Crossroads
Comparing al-Jazeera and al-Hurra demonstrates how the changing relationship between the state and other actors has affected the way foreign policy and diplomacy are conducted. Foreign policy has become a multidimensional process due to globalization and information and communication technologies. This development has empowered non-political players as they have started to have more influence over state’s policy in the international arena. Among these empowered players is the media, which proved to be either a challenge or an opportunity for the state in conducting its foreign policy agenda. Al-Jazeera, for example, has proved to be a successful tool in empowering the Qatari state. The fame and influence that al-Jazeera has gained is disproportionate to Qatar’s regional weight in a way that suggests that it is actually al-Jazeera that is empowering its host state. At the same time, al-Jazeera stood as a challenge to the US public diplomacy towards the Middle East.

The media, then, is increasingly playing a role in relations among nations either through serving the interests of a particular country or just pursuing its own agenda. This

532 The rules of al-Jazeera call on journalists and reporters not to use rhetorical and emotion-laden language.
534 Nawawy, Iskander, op. cit., p. 32.
brings the relationship between state and non-state actors back to the center of debates in the field of International Relations. It also shows how identity no longer falls in the exclusive realm of the state. It is now promoted and spread by non-state actors as well. The changing status of the state is also directly related to the sources of power in international relations. If the state is losing its status as the most important actor in world politics, it follows that other sources of power rather than the military power are gradually taking more importance in the relations between nations.

Soft power has gained prominence in international relations. However, developments in communication and information technologies have increasingly brought the promoted hegemonic ideas and values under scrutiny. Regional media, for instance, have vehemently challenged the hegemonic discourse of soft power and, instead, produced its own hegemonic one. The communications revolution has thus shifted the paradigm of diplomacy. On the one hand, it emphasized the role of public diplomacy; on the other hand, it complicated the environment within which public diplomacy is conducted.

For public diplomacy to succeed, certain conditions have to be met. Firstly, a proper understanding of the context in which public diplomacy messages are being disseminated is essential. Secondly, a sound conception of the goals and roles of public diplomacy efforts that emanates from a proper understanding of the context is required. As Joseph Nye argued, “[c]redibility is the key to success [of public diplomacy] in an information age. Once a message is seen as propaganda, it loses credibility and so does
its source.\footnote{Joseph Nye. 2005. “The Military and Soft Power.” The Huffington Post (available at: \url{http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-nye/the-military-and-soft-power_b_12117.html}. Retrieved: 10/10/2007).} Finally, the content of the message itself is crucial. Trying to change the basic beliefs of others is difficult. The task is much easier if it targets others’ opinions of phenomena of marginal importance to them. In this way, media’s messages get through easier if it is consistent with the basic beliefs and values of the targeted people.\footnote{Ramussen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.} The more consistent the message is with the context and conception, the more successful it is. If the content of the message contradicts the context or the perception, the message is doomed to failure. For example, while \textit{al-Jazeera} represented contextual objectivity, \textit{al-Hurra} exemplified the existential crisis. This can explain why one is more successful than the other.

Moreover, actions speak louder than words. This means that “communication is not done only through speech, but also through practice.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 7.} In other words, some actual policies may be more powerful in approaching foreign audience than any words.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 7.} Finally, public diplomacy should be interested in the political discourse of the target group. As Malone cogently argues,

\begin{quote}
[i]f we strive to be successful in our efforts to create understanding for our society and for our policies, we must first understand the motives, culture, history, and psychology of the people with whom we wish to communicate.\footnote{Gifford D. Malone (quoted in Ramussen, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 6).}
\end{quote}

5. Ideas for Further Research

Research on US public diplomacy towards the Middle East still lacks some aspects. For example, it is important to study the effects of \textit{al-Hurra}’s agenda on the agenda of the
Arab public and whether it affected the former in anyway. Moreover, a comparison between *al-Hurra*’s performance and other transnational channels in the region – such as BBC Arabic and the Turkish Channel – would be important to see how successful, or unsuccessful, the US channel compared to others. Finally, this study has not tackled the issue of the reception of the message by the targeted audience. How the Arabs interpret messages from *al-Hurra* will be the subject of a future study.
Appendices

Appendix A: Sample of Voice of the Arab’s Programs in 1956

Noon
1:00 Clock Ticking
The opening music of the channel
Details of noon
1.03 Songs
1:30: Clock Ticking
The first Arab struggle and it includes:
- news
- Sawt al-Arab’s comment today
- 1.35 the details of the evening
- 1.59 end
Evening
7.00 Clock Ticking
The opening music of the channel
Qura’n
7.16 Details of the Evening
7.20 songs
7:30 Palestine’s Corner
The holy land program and it includes
- Palestine’s world
- Palestinians’ messages to their relatives
- Our new generation
- Palestine’s Youth programs
7:45 Songs
8:00 Clock Ticking
The second Arab struggle and it includes
- news
- Sawt al Arab’s comment
8:20 Songs
8:50 The Arab Nation in Sawt al-Arab
9:00 Songs
9:15 An Arab Diary
9:30 Songs
10:15 Clock Ticking
The Third Arab struggle and it includes:
- last news
- Arab and the World Today
10:30 songs
10:58 Tomorrow’s details
End

Appendix B
MIDDLE EAST BROADCASTING NETWORKS REVISED
JOURNALISTIC CODE OF ETHICS (MAY 2007)

JOURNALISTIC CODE OF ETHICS
MBN’s mission is to broadcast news which is consistently accurate, authoritative, objective, balanced and comprehensive. MBN strives to serve as a model of the free marketplace of ideas and a free press in the American tradition, promoting freedom, democracy and human rights, including freedom of religion. Additionally, MBN has a mandate to present the policies of the United States government in a clear and effective manner through news reporting and responsible discussion.

ACCURACY
MBN journalists shall do their utmost to ensure that all broadcasts are factually accurate. Where doubt or controversy exists on significant points of fact, information must be based on at least two independent sources. No program material shall be broadcast that is based on rumor or unsubstantiated information.

Any documents, video or audio obtained from outside sources must be properly authenticated. Factual errors will be corrected on-air as soon as possible.

IMPARTIALITY
Information shall be reported or discussed in a factual, objective context that enhances understanding of the events and issues and provides clarity without distortion or bias. Objective language shall be used to reflect events and issues accurately and dispassionately. Broadcasters shall present opposing or differing views accurately and in a balanced manner on all issues. When groups or individuals whose views are important for balanced programming decline to comment, it is appropriate to note this on the air. MBN shall be independent from any political party, ruling or opposition group or organization, émigré organization, commercial or other special-interest organization, or religious body, whether inside or outside the broadcast area; and shall not endorse or advocate any specific political, economic, or religious viewpoint.

CONTROVERSIAL/SENSITIVE ISSUES
MBN does not provide an open platform for terrorists or those who support them. This has long been the policy of all United States international broadcasting organizations and grantees, and MBN fully complies with this policy. MBN will not broadcast live speeches or interviews with persons designated as terrorists unless the broadcast has been previously approved by the vice president for News, or his or her designee. When the broadcast will be on the radio, the Radio Sawa news director should be consulted.

ANALYSIS, COMMENTARY AND EDITORIALS
All broadcasts should contain sufficient background information and explanation to enable the audience to better understand the significance and consequences of information being reported. Journalists shall not insert their personal opinions or judgments in factual reports at any time. Failure to abide by this policy constitutes
grounds for termination of employment. Material that is primarily analytical will be clearly labeled as such, to distinguish it from factual news reporting and commentary.

*Analysis* provides background information, explanation, and differing authoritative views on an issue or event—but states no personal opinion on the part of the speaker. Analysis is preferred over commentary.

*Commentary*, which is to be clearly labeled as such, is analytical in content and judicious in tone but reflects the personal judgment or opinion of the speaker on a particular issue.

**TONE OF MODERATION AND RESPECT**

Broadcasts, including talk shows and debates, shall at all times maintain a calm and professional tone and shall project a model of civilized, reasoned discourse, as well as respect for the human rights of all persons. Broadcasters and guests shall not make religious, ethnic, socio-economic or cultural slurs upon any person or groups and shall observe common standards of etiquette and taste.

Broadcasts shall not contain material which could be construed as an incitement to violence. Programming on disturbances or other tense situations must be balanced and factual. MBN will not permit its programs to be used as a platform for terrorist organizations.

**AVOIDANCE OF ADVOCACY**

MBN supports freedom, democracy and the human rights common to democratic states. However, MBN does not advocate the adoption of specific policies or legislation, or endorse or oppose candidates for elected or appointed office.

**ETHICAL CONDUCT**

MBN staff members and contributors shall maintain the highest ethical standards in all conduct, taking particular care to avoid any conflict of interest, or the appearance thereof, in their relations with individuals, groups and/or political or commercial interests inside or outside the broadcast area. MBN staff members and contributors shall remain free of associations and activities that could, or could appear to, compromise their integrity, damage their credibility or jeopardize their journalistic independence. They shall refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations to the extent any of these could compromise journalistic integrity. MBN staff members and contributors shall in no way abuse their status as public figures, or the good reputation of MBN, to promote personal interest or gain.

In keeping with this policy, MBN employees are not permitted: (a) to appear on radio or television programs, in print, or in commercial advertising under their own names or pseudonyms; (b) to write (under their own names or pseudonyms) for publication (electronic or otherwise) on any topic; or (c) to serve in an advisory capacity for any media organization or political or advocacy group without the express written prior permission of the vice president for News.
INTERVIEWS
Interviews must be unrehearsed and specific questions must not be submitted in advance. It is permissible to discuss in advance with the interviewee the purpose of the interview and the general subjects to be covered. All recorded interviews are subject to editing and no MBN staff member or contractor may represent to anyone that an interview will be carried in full. The raw or edited film, tape, other electronic version of the interview or transcript may not be shown to or played for an interviewee or representative in advance of its broadcast, nor may the interviewee or a representative participate in the editing of the interview.

EDITING AND PRODUCTION STANDARDS
All persons who edit reports, interviews and other materials for air shall ensure that their editing reflects fairly, honestly and without distortion what was seen and heard by MBN reporters and recorded by our cameras and microphones.

Interviews are to be edited in a straightforward manner, preserving, even in short sound bites, the sense of the interview. Answers may not be taken out of context or edited together in a manner to change their meaning. The narration leading to a sound bite must reflect the question that elicited the response.

PLAGIARISM
When a journalist at MBN uses facts gathered by any other organization, those facts must be attributed. This policy applies to material from newspapers, magazines, books, CDs and broadcasts, as well as to material taken from news agencies like Reuters, Agence France Presse and the Associated Press (for example, “the Secretary told Reuters”). In other words, even when we purchase news services, we do not treat the reporting done by others as reporting done by us. MBN’s preference, when time and distance permit, is to do our own reporting and verify another organization’s story; in that case, the reporter, correspondent or anchor need not attribute the facts. But even then, as a matter of courtesy and candor, the reporter, correspondent or anchor should credit an exclusive to the organization that first broke the news (for example, “CBS reported this morning ...”). Attribution to another news organization, however, does not mean MBN’s journalists can broadcast rumors or allegations that would not independently meet the test of MBN’s own reporting standards, as set forth in this policy. Rumors and allegations must satisfy MBN’s standard of newsworthiness, taste and plausibility before being broadcast, even when attributed. And when the need arises to attribute, that is a good cue to consult with a senior producer or editor about whether broadcast is warranted at all. Thus, MBN would not permit the broadcast of a statement like this – “One Commissioner apparently accused another Commissioner of lying about the grain statistics, according to the Associated Press” – unless MBN had independently confirmed, in accordance with this policy, that “One Commissioner accused another Commissioner of lying about the grain statistics,” in which case attribution would not be necessary.

In cases when it makes a difference whether MBN staffers or stringers directly witnessed a scene, MBN should distinguish on air between personal interviews and telephone or E-mail interviews, as well as written statements.
### Appendix C

**Themes Discussed in *Ma Wara’ al-Khabar* (What is behind the News)**

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Appendix E  
Themes discussed in *Sa‘a Hurra* (Free Hour)

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* In the period under study, the only time Syrian politics was discussed was in the context of the Syrian-Israeli negotiations.
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### Appendix F
Themes discussed in *al-Ittijahat al-Arba'a* (The Four Directions)

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<td>Algeria(^{541})</td>
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\(^{540}\) One of the episodes dealing with Iraq was divided into two 4 parts. Each part was divided into two topics: Iraqi elections and Palestinian split. This explains why in assigning the values, Iraq has taken .5 and Palestine took the other half.

\(^{541}\) This episode discussed two issues: elections in Algeria and Obama’s visit to Turkey. This is why the value assigned to it is .5.

\(^{542}\) This episode discussed two issues: Shimon Peres’ visit to Washington and the situation in Yemen. This is why the value assigned to it is .5.
Appendix G

Greater Middle East Partnership

The Greater Middle East (GME) region poses a unique challenge and opportunity for the international community. The three "deficits" identified by the Arab authors of the 2002 and 2003 United Nations Arab Human Development Reports (AHDR) - freedom, knowledge, and women's empowerment - have contributed to conditions that threaten the national interests of all G-8 members. So long as the region's pool of politically and economically disenfranchised individuals grows, we will witness an increase in extremism, terrorism, international crime, and illegal migration. The statistics describing the current situation in the GME are daunting:

- The combined GDP of the 22 Arab League countries is less than that of Spain.
- Approximately 40% of adult Arabs - 65 million people - are illiterate, two thirds of whom are women.
- Over 50 million young people will enter the labor market by 2010, 100 million will enter by 2020 - a minimum of 6 million new jobs need to be created each year to absorb these new entrants.
- If current unemployment rates persist, regional unemployment will reach 25 million by 2010.
- One-third of the region lives on less than two dollars a day. To improve standards of living, economic growth in the region must more than double from below 3 percent currently to at least 6 percent.
- Only 1.6 percent of the population has access to the Internet, a figure lower than that in any other region of the world, including sub-Saharan Africa.
- Women occupy just 3.5 percent of parliamentary seats in Arab countries, compared with, for example, 8.4 percent in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Fifty-one percent of older Arab youths expressed a desire to emigrate to other countries, according to the 2002 AHDR, with European countries the favorite destination.

These statistics reflect a region that stands at a crossroads. The GME could continue on the same path, adding every year to its population of underemployed, undereducated, and politically disenfranchised youths.

Doing so will pose a direct threat to the stability of the region, and to the common interests of the G-8 members.

The alternative is the route to reform. The two Arab Human Development Reports represent compelling and urgent calls for action in the GME. These calls have been echoed by activists, academics, and the private sector throughout the region. Some GME

leaders have already heeded these calls and have taken steps toward political, social, and economic reform. The G-8 countries have, in turn, supported these efforts with their own Middle East reform initiatives. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the U.S. Middle East Partnership Initiative, and the multilateral reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq demonstrate the G-8’s commitment to reform in the region.

The demographic changes described above, the liberation of Afghanistan and Iraq from oppressive regimes, and the emergence of democratic impulses across the region, together present the G-8 with a historic opportunity. At Sea Island, the G-8 should forge a long-term partnership with the Greater Middle East's reform leaders and launch a coordinated response to promote political, economic, and social reform in the region. The G-8 could agree on common reform priorities that would address the AHDR deficits by:

- Promoting Democracy and good governance;
- Building a knowledge society; and
- Expanding economic opportunities.

These reform priorities are the key to the region's development: democracy and good governance form the framework within which development takes, well-educated individuals are agents of development, and enterprise is the engine of development.

I. Promoting Democracy and Good Governance

"There is a substantial lag between Arab countries and regions in terms of participatory governance... This freedom deficit undermines human development and is one of the most painful manifestations of lagging political development." Arab Human Development Report, 2002

Democracy and freedom are essential to the flourishing of individual initiative, but are sorely lacking throughout the GME. In Freedom House's 2003 report, Israel was the only GME country rated "free," and just four others were defined as "partly free." The AHDR noted that out of seven world regions, the Arab countries had the lowest freedom score in the late 1990s. Databases measuring "voice and accountability" rank the Arab region the lowest in the world. Further, the Arab world ranks above only sub-Saharan Africa in the empowerment of women. These discouraging indicators hardly square with the expressed wishes of the region's people: in the 2003 AHDR, for example, Arabs topped the worldwide list of those supporting the statement that "democracy is better than any other form of government," and expressed the highest level of rejection of authoritarian rule.

The G-8 could show its support for democratic reform in the region by committing to:

**Free Elections Initiative**

Between 2004 and 2006, numerous GME countries have announced intentions to hold presidential, parliamentary, or municipal elections.

Working with those countries that demonstrate a serious willingness to hold free and fair elections, the G-8 could actively provide pre-election assistance by:

- Providing technical assistance, through exchanges or seminars, to establish or strengthen independent election commissions to monitor elections, respond to complaints and receive reports.
• Providing technical assistance for voter registration and civic education to requesting governments, with a particular emphasis on women voters.

Parliamentary Exchange and Training
In order to strengthen the role of parliaments in democratizing countries, the G-8 could sponsor exchanges of parliamentarians, with a focus on drafting legislation, implementing legislative and legal reform, and representing constituents.

Women's Leadership Academies
Women occupy just 3.5 percent of parliamentary seats in Arab countries. In order to increase women's participation in political and civic life, the G-8 could sponsor women's training academies to provide leadership training for women interested in running for elective office or establishing/operating an NGO. The academies could bring together female leaders from G-8 countries in the region.

Grassroots Legal Aid
While the U.S., the EU, the UN, and the World Bank have already undertaken numerous initiatives to promote legal and judicial reform, most are working at the national level in areas such as judicial training, judicial administration, and legal code reform. A G-8 initiative could complement these efforts by focusing at the grassroots community level, where the true perception of justice begins. The G-8 could establish and fund centers at which individuals can access legal advice on civil, criminal, or Sharia law, and contact defense attorneys (which are very uncommon in the region). These centers could also be affiliated with law schools in the region.

Independent Media Initiative
The AHDR notes that there are less than 53 newspapers per 1,000 Arab citizens, compared with 285 papers per 1,000 people in developed countries, and that the Arab newspapers that do circulate tend to be of poor quality. Most news television programs in the region are state-owned or controlled, and their quality is often poor, lacking analytical and investigative reporting. This deficit leads to a lack of public discourse and interest in print media, and limits the information available to the public. To counter this, the G-8 could:

• Sponsor exchanges for print and broadcast journalists.
• Sponsor training programs for independent journalists.
• Provide scholarships for students to attend journalism schools in the region or abroad; fund programs that would send journalists or journalism professors to hold training seminars on issues like election coverage or spend a semester teaching at schools in the region.

Transparency / Anti-Corruption Efforts
The World Bank has identified corruption as the single biggest obstacle to development, and in many GME countries it has become endemic. The G-8 could:

• Promote adoption of the G-8 transparency and Anti-Corruption Principles.
• Publicly support the OECD/UNDP Middle East-North Africa initiative, through which senior government leaders, donors, IFIs, and NGOs discuss national strategies to fight corruption and strengthen government accountability.

• Launch one or more G-8 transparency pilots in the region.

Civil Society
Since quite genuine reform in the GME must be driven internally, and since the best means to promote reform is through representative organizations, the G-8 should encourage the development of effective civil society organizations in the region. The G-8 could:

• Encourage the region's governments to allow civil society organizations, including human rights and media NGOs, to operate freely without harassment or restrictions.

• Increase direct funding to democracy, human rights, media, women's, and other NGOs in the region.

• Increase the technical capacity of NGOs in the region by increasing funding to domestic organizations (such as the UK's Westminster Foundation or the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy) to provide training for NGOs on how to define a platform, lobby government, and develop media and grassroots strategies to garner support. These programs could also include exchanges and the creation of regional networks.

• Fund an NGO that would bring together legal or media experts from the region to draft annual assessments of judicial reform efforts or media freedom in the region. (This could follow the AHDR model.)

II. Building a Knowledge Society

"Knowledge constitutes the road to development and liberation, especially in a world of intensive globalization." Arab Human Development Report, 2002

The Greater Middle East region, once the cradle of scientific discovery and learning, has largely failed to keep up with today's knowledge-oriented world. The region's growing knowledge gap and continuing brain drain challenge its development prospects. Arab countries' output of books represents just 1.1 percent of the world total (with religious books constituting over 15 percent of this,) roughly one-fourth of all university graduates emigrate, and technology is largely imported. Five times as many books are translated into Greek (spoken by just 11 million people) as Arabic.

Building on education reform efforts already underway in the region, the G-8 could provide assistance to address the region's education challenges and help students acquire the skills needed to succeed in today's global marketplace.

Basic Education Initiative

Basic education in the region suffers from inadequate (and declining) public funding, increasing demand due to populations pressures, and cultural factors that limit access for girls. The G-8 could commit to a new GME Basic Education Initiative with the following components:
**Literacy**: In 2003, the United Nations launched the literacy Decade Program, under the theme "literacy as Freedom." The G-8 literacy initiative would complement the U.N. program through a focus on creating a literate generation in the Greater Middle East over the next decade, with the goal of cutting in half the region's illiteracy rate by 2010. As with the U.N. program, the G-8 initiative would target women and girls. Given that 65 million adults in the region are illiterate, the G-8 initiative could also focus on adult literacy and training with a variety of programs, from on-line curricula to teacher training.

**Literacy Corps**: To improve literacy among girls, the G-8 could create or expand teacher-training institutes targeting women. At these institutes, female school teachers and educational specialists would train women to become teachers (in some countries men are not permitted to teach girls), who would then focus on reading and basic education for girls. The program could employ the guidelines established in the Education for all program coordinated by UNESCO, and the goal would be to train a "literacy corps" of 100,000 female teachers by 2008.

**Textbooks**: The AHDR notes a marked shortage of translations of basic books on philosophy, literature, sociology and the natural sciences, and makes note of the "sorry state of libraries" in universities. To counter this deficit, each G-8 country could fund a program to translate its "classics" in the fields, and where appropriate, countries or publishers (in a public-private partnership) could reissue classic Arabic texts that are now out of print. These books would then be donated to school, university and local libraries.

**Discovery Schools Initiative**: Jordan has begun implementing its "discovery schools" initiative, in which new technology and teaching methods are employed. The G-8 could support the expansion of this concept to other GME countries, providing funding and calling on support from private sector.

**Education Reform**: Prior to the G-8 Summit (in March or April), the U.S. Middle East partnership Initiative will sponsor a Middle East Education Reform Summit. This event will bring together reform-minded public, private sector, civic, and community leaders from the region, along with their counterparts from the United States and EU in order to identify common areas of concern and discuss methods for bridging education deficits. This event could be hosted as a G-8 event, as a way to build support for the GME initiative in the run-up to the summit.

**Digital Knowledge Initiative**: The region has the world's lowest level of Internet access. Given the ever-increasing stock of Knowledge available on the Internet, and the growing importance of the Internet to education and commerce, it is critical to bridge the "digital divide" between the GME and the rest of the world. The G-8 could launch public-private partnership to provide or expand computer access in schools throughout the GME, especially in remote areas. With the great diversity of wealth and infrastructure among countries in the region, and between rural and urban areas within the region's countries, in some areas it may be more appropriate to provide computer access in post offices, as has been done successfully in Russian towns and villages. The project could initially focus on GME countries with the lowest Internet penetration (Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, Syria, Libya, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco), and would seek to wire as many schools/post offices as possible, funding permitting.
This initiative to wire schools in the region could be coupled with the "literacy Corps Initiative" described above: Institute teachers could train local teachers to develop curricula for on-line instruction, and the private sector could supply needed hardware. The computer could then be used by local teachers/students, particularly in rural or poor areas.

**Business Education Initiative**: In order to boost business education throughout the region, the G-8 could establish partnerships between G-8-based business schools and educational institutions (universities or specialized institutes) in the region. G-8 countries could fund the placement of faculty and resources in these partnership institutes, which would host specific educational programs. These programs could run the gamut from formal year-long graduate training to short courses on specific issues, such as preparing a business plan or marketing strategy.

The Bahrain Institute of Banking and Finance, which has an American director and partnerships with several U.S. universities, could be a model for such institutes.

### III. Expanding Economic Opportunities

Closing the Greater Middle East region's prosperity gap will require an economic transformation similar in magnitude to that undertaken by the formerly communist countries of the Central and Eastern Europe. Key to that transformation will be to unleash the region's private sector potential, especially small and medium enterprises, which are the primary engines of economic growth and job creation. The growth of an entrepreneurial class in the GME would also be an important element in helping democracy and freedom flourish. The G-8 could commit to the following actions:

**Finance For Growth Initiative**

Increasing the efficiency of the economic growth and job creation. The G-8 could commit to an integrated finance initiative consisting of the following components:

**Microfinance**: While some microfinance institutions exist in the region, entrepreneurs continue to face a large financing gap: only 5 percent of the people seeking microfinance receive it, and only 0.7 percent of the total financing needed is actually provided. The G-8 could help fill this gap through microfinance, especially for-profit microfinance, focused primarily on women. For-profit microfinance institutions are self-sustaining and do not depend on external grants of funds for continued operation growth. We estimate that, assuming an average loan of $400, $500 million over 5 years could help 1.2 million entrepreneurs help themselves out of poverty, 750,000 of whom could be women.

**Greater Middle East Finance Corporation**: The G-8 could agree to co-finance a corporation modeled on the International Finance Corporation to help incubate medium and larger-sized businesses, with an aim toward regional business integration. The corporation could be managed by a group of G-8 private sector leaders committed to applying their expertise in business development to the GME region.

**Greater Middle East Development Bank (GMEDBank)**: The G-8, along with creditors in the GME region, could establish a new regional development institution modeled on the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) to help reforming countries finance basic development priorities. The new institution would pool
the resources of wealthier GME nations and the G-8 to focus on improving access to education, health care, and basic infrastructure. The GMEDBank would also serve as a store of technical assistance and development knowledge for the GME. Lending (or grant-making) decisions would be governed by each borrower's ability to demonstrate measurable reform results.

**Partnership for Financial Excellence**

To advance reform of financial services in the region, and to better integrate the GME into the global financial system, the G-8 could offer a new partnership to reform leaders in the region. This partnership would aim to liberalize and expand financial services in the Greater Middle East, by providing a basket of financial sector technical assistance and expertise focused on:

- Implementing reform plans that reduce state dominance of financial services;
- Removing barriers to cross-border financial transactions;
- Modernizing banking services;
- Introducing, refining, and expanding market-oriented financial instruments; and
- Building regulatory structures that encourage the liberalization of financial services.

**Trade Initiative**

Intra-regional trade in the Middle East is extremely low, comprising just 6 percent of all Arab trade. Most GME countries trade with countries outside the region, and have built preferential trade agreements far away rather than next door. As a result, tariff and non-tariff barriers have become the norm, while cross-border trade remains rare. The G-8 could commit to establish a new initiative designed to promote trade in the Greater Middle East, comprised of these elements:

- **WTO Accession / Implementation and Trade Facilitation**: The G-8 could increase its emphasis on WTO accession and implementation for countries in the region [iii]. Specific technical assistance programs would include providing in-country advisors on WTO accession and generating a G-8-wide commitment to encouraging the accession process, including a focus on identifying and removing non-tariff barriers to trade. Once WTO accession is complete, the focus would move on to the signing of additional WTO commitments such as TRIPS and Government Procurement Agreement and linking continued technical assistance to implementing these WTO commitments. This technical assistance could also be linked to a G-8-sponsored region-wide program on customs facilitation and logistics to reduce administrative and physical barriers to intra-regional trade.

- **Trade Hubs**: the G-8 would establish hubs in the region focused on improving intra-regional trade and customs practices. The hubs would provide a variety of services to support private sector trade flows and business to business contacts, including "one stop shopping" for foreign investors, linkages to customs offices to reduce transportation processing times, and unified regulations to ease entry and exit of goods and services from the region.
**Business Incubator Zones (BIZ):** building on the success of export processing zones and special trade zones in other regions, the G-8 could help establish specially designated zones in the GME that would encourage regional cooperation in the design, manufacturing, and marketing of products. The G-8 could offer enhanced access to their markets for these products, and provide expertise in establishing the zones.

**Greater Middle East Economic Opportunity Forums**

To encourage enhanced regional cooperation, the G-8 could establish a Middle East Economic Opportunity Forum. Which would bring together top officials from The G-8 and GME (with possible side meetings of non-governmental officials and individuals from the business community) to discuss economic reform issues. The forum could be based loosely on the APEC model, and would cover regional economic issues, including finance, trade, and regulatory issues.

[i] The "Greater Middle East" refers to the countries of the Arab world, plus Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, and Israel.

[ii] Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Iran, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Turkey, and Yemen have elections scheduled.

Appendix H: News Bulletin

H. 1. The number of guests in each channel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Al-Jazeera</th>
<th></th>
<th>Al-Hurra</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Palestinian Guests</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21.81%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28.571%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Israeli Guests</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.51%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32.143%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>73.68%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>39.286%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H. 2. The Palestinian Voice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Palestinian Voice</th>
<th>Al-Jazeera</th>
<th></th>
<th>Al-Hurra</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamas</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>37.93%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fattah</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.24%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>44.83%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H. 3. The reporter who spoke first in the news

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Gaza</th>
<th>Israel</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al-Hurra</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>42.857</td>
<td>57.143</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Jazeera</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>95.455</td>
<td>4.545</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H. 4. The popular vs. the official voices (as represented by the guests)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Al-Jazeera</th>
<th></th>
<th>Al-Hurra</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Official</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>36.842%</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>53.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialists</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>35.338%</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>30.357%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27.82%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16.071%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The study considers representatives of Hamas and Fattah as part of the official voice, whereas other Palestinian groups and parties as popular voices. The same applies to the representatives of the UN. As for physicians and specialists in international law, they are counted as part of the specialists’ voice.

** Any piece of news preceded by: said, announced, confessed, recognized, broadcasted, etc.

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H. 5. The Popular Voice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Al-Jazeera</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Al-Hurra</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil society</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>66.66</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>69.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Witnesses/ lay persons</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.67</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H. 6. The excerpts from the Palestinian and Israeli sources in the news**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Palestinian</th>
<th>Israeli</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al-Hurra</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>37.313</td>
<td>62.687</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Jazeera</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>76.596</td>
<td>23.404</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H. 7. The American Voice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Al-Jazeera</th>
<th>Al-Hurra</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statements</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guests</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Any piece of news preceded by: said, announced, confessed, recognized, broadcasted, etc.
Appendix I: Discussion Shows*

I. 1. Number of Guests in Each Channel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Al-Jazeera %</th>
<th>Al-Hurra %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Palestinian Guests</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Israeli Guests</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. Of American Guests</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I. 2. Hamas’ vs. Fattah’s Point of View

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guests</th>
<th>Al-Jazeera %</th>
<th>Al-Hurra %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fattah</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Affiliated Palestinians</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Hamas</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against Hamas</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Hamas</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Against Hamas</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I. 3. The Popular vs. the Official Voices (as represented by the Guests)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Al-Jazeera %</th>
<th>Al-Hurra %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Official</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialists</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popular</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I. 4. The Popular Voice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Al-Jazeera %</th>
<th>Al-Hurra %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Party</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil society</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on the two daily shows on both channels: al-Jazeera’s ‘What is behind the News’ and al-Hurra’s ‘Free Hour.’
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