

Public Diplomacy, Television News, and Muslim Opinion

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Scholars agree that extreme anti-American sentiment is pervasive across the predominantly Muslim countries of the world, but disagree about the sources of these negative perceptions. Some researchers point to cultural, religious, and value divisions as primary factors shaping negative perceptions of the United States, while others emphasize internal Muslim state politics, comparatively low levels of economic and social development, and failure to establish civil society and democracy as the key contributors to anti-American opinion. Since the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and the second Gulf War, a number of U.S. policymakers and commentators have zeroed in on television news, specifically the new pan-Arab television network Al Jazeera, as an additional major contributor. In this study, the authors test competing claims regarding the sources of anti-American sentiment with a special focus on the impact of television news. Using survey data gathered from nine predominantly Muslim countries by the Gallup Organization in spring 2002, the authors examine the relative contributions of macro-level socioeconomic and political influences, individual-level demographic factors, and TV news use to anti-American attitudes. They find that attention to TV news coverage contributes significantly to anti-American perceptions after all controls and that the type of TV network to which individuals turn for their news has either amplifying or buffering effects on the main effects of attention to news coverage.

Keywords: *public diplomacy; Arab media; television news; Middle East; Muslim opinion; anti-Americanism; Al Jazeera; transnational media*

Cross-national surveys conducted by a number of different polling agencies indicate that individuals living in predominantly Muslim countries are strongly united in their negative perceptions of the United States and in their opposition to American foreign policy (Moore 2002; Pew 2002; Zogby 2002). Although anti-American sentiment is by no means unique to the Muslim world, the

strength of anti-American attitudes in these politically and economically important countries has raised considerable concern among U.S. policymakers. Although scholars now agree that the anti-American sentiments endemic to the Muslim world are likely to have important political consequences, they differ widely on the origins of these perceptions. Some researchers have examined cultural, religious, and value divisions as the primary source of negative perceptions of the United States (Huntington 1996; Lewis 2001; Norris and Inglehart forthcoming; Tessler and Nachtwey 1998). Others have identified U.S. foreign policy and actions as the main factor shaping discontent (Telhami 2002; Hertsgaard 2003; Monshipouri 2002; Khan 2002), and still others have emphasized internal Muslim state politics, comparatively lower levels of economic and social development, and the failure to establish civil society and democracy as the key contributors to anti-American opinion (i.e., Emmerson 2002; Rubin 2002).

A fourth school of thought believes that negative perceptions of the United States are fundamentally an issue of public communication, whether it is ineffective information campaigns by the U.S. government (Peterson 2002), a “perception gap” partially created by the foreign news media (Emmerson 2002), or the many depictions of the United States available through entertainment media (DeFleur and DeFleur 2002). Recently, popular debate has zeroed in on the Al-Jazeera news network, a Qatar-based independent Arabic satellite channel. Concern regarding Al Jazeera peaked during the U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan as the network aired several Osama bin Laden speeches, gave voice to bin Laden sympathizers in interviews, hosted representatives of the Taliban regime, emphasized civilian casualties in the Afghanistan conflict more than the Western media, and aired harsh commentary directed at the United States from guests and callers on its many talk shows. The coverage resulted in complaints from the U.S. government and a consensus among American policymakers that Al Jazeera was a major contributor to anti-American sentiment (el-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002; Telhami 2002).

Despite these many claims relative to the causes of anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world, empirical investigation has been somewhat limited. In this study, therefore, using opinion data gathered in nine predominantly Muslim countries, we test the influence of structural, sociodemographic, and media influences on perceptions of the United States. In focusing on the influence of television news, we first outline why a concern with Muslim mass audiences, rather than a traditional focus on Muslim elites, has become of strategic concern to U.S. policymakers. We then review important structural, historical, and political factors shaping the contemporary landscape of television news in the Muslim world and demonstrate that any impact of TV news on Muslim opinion is likely to be the combined result of preexisting anti-American predispositions and differential content effects across Western and pan-Arab television news networks.

Why Public Opinion in the Muslim World Matters

Historically, the opinions and views of nonelites living in Muslim countries has been of minimal concern to U.S. policymakers. Because of the autocratic nature of many Muslim governments (most are either traditional monarchies or single-party states) and the lack of democratic institutions, many U.S. policymakers and Middle East strategists have dismissed mass opinion as unimportant and instead have focused only on the opinions and policies of national governing elites. Adherents to this view cite the 1991 Persian Gulf War as an example. In this conflict, even though large majorities across Muslim countries were against U.S. policies, several Muslim governments nevertheless supported the United States and actively participated in the war against Iraq.

Yet other analysts disagree with the assertion that mass opinion is unimportant for policymaking in the Muslim world. Pollock (1992), for example, asserts that this misperception of the impact of the nonelite public stems from the misapplication to Muslim society of an idealized Western model of political democracy and formal institutions to Muslim societies. According to Pollack, the influence of Muslim mass opinion functions through informal channels and processes to influence Muslim governments rather than through the more visible channels typical of the West. Telhami (1993) expands upon this criticism, arguing that the contrasting roles several Muslim governments took in the 1991 Persian Gulf War demonstrated the power and impact of Muslim mass opinion, not its weakness. Telhami (1993, 2002) argues that it is the very autocratic nature and the need to sustain legitimacy outside of democratic institutions that creates influence for Muslim mass opinion over national governments. According to Telhami (2002), Muslim public opinion can threaten the legitimacy and support of these autocratic states, creating the need for either the expenditure of more coercive resources or greater repression to sustain power.

The September 11 terrorist attacks sparked a dramatic shift away from a narrow focus on the opinions of Muslim elites. In the months following the attacks, policymakers, academics, and pollsters scrambled to understand Muslim mass audiences worldwide and to quickly fashion media and marketing campaigns to shape perceptions. As Telhami (2002) observes, policymakers realized that by previously monitoring only the opinions of Muslim elites, they had likely overlooked Al Qaeda's strong support among the general public. An apprehension quickly spread that Al Qaeda might be able to co-opt for its own purposes the same important pan-Islam and pan-Arab religious, cultural, and ideological symbols that allied Muslim governments had historically relied upon to maintain national legitimacy among their citizenry (Telhami 2002).

Indicators of Muslim Opinion

As mentioned at the outset of this article, major U.S. polling firms including the Gallup Organization, Zogby International, and the Pew Research Center for

the People and the Press have conducted recent cross-national surveys measuring public opinion in predominantly Muslim countries. These surveys indicate that general public perceptions of the United States, its policies, and its values are extremely negative, reflecting “true dislike, if not hatred” of the United States (Kohut 2003a). For example, the Pew poll found that 69 percent of Egyptians, 75 percent of Jordanians, 59 percent of Lebanese, 69 percent of Pakistanis, and 55 percent of Turks all had unfavorable views of the United States (Pew 2002). The same Pew poll found that within all these countries, the majority of respondents (ranging from 67 to 84 percent) believed “the spread of American ideas and customs was bad for their country.”

In understanding the main source of anti-American sentiment, Pew researchers concluded that antipathy toward the United States was not so much shaped by key value differences with the Muslim world but by how U.S. international policies were interpreted and viewed (Kohut 2003a). According to the Pew study, strong antipathy toward the United States primarily stemmed from U.S. support for Israel, the widespread belief that the United States ignores the interests of Muslim countries in deciding its international policies, the perception that U.S. policies serve to increase the formidable gap between rich and poor countries, and the view that the United States does too little to help solve the world’s problems (Kohut 2003a). The recent Iraqi occupation has added a new reason for disliking the United States while further strengthening these preexisting perceptions. As a consequence, the level of anti-Americanism within Muslim societies has deepened (Kohut 2003b).

In addition, since the invasion of Iraq, strong anti-American sentiment has spread beyond the immediate region of the Middle East to include predominantly non-Middle Eastern Muslim countries such as Indonesia (Kohut 2003b). For example, only 15 percent of Indonesians held a favorable view of the United States in the latter half of 2003 as compared to 61 percent in 2002. Kohut (2003b) concludes that based on Pew’s most recent surveys of the Muslim world, “there is considerable evidence that the opinion many Muslims have of the United States has gone beyond mere loathing,” with Muslims increasingly hostile toward not only the United States as a state actor but the American people as well.

Gallup’s survey across nine predominantly Muslim countries indicated that sizable proportions of the populace (ranges of 33 to 70 percent) within each country held unfavorable opinions of the United States (Moore 2002). In almost all of the countries surveyed, more than 85 percent of the population felt that the “West” did not respect Muslim values or beliefs and did not treat the Muslim world fairly in its international relations. The findings of the Zogby polls were consistent with Pew and Gallup, indicating that large percentages of respondents (ranging from 48 to 87 percent) across seven predominantly Muslim countries all rated the United States unfavorably. Also supporting the Pew conclusions, in

the five countries where the question was asked (Egypt, Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), a majority of respondents named U.S. policies, rather than the American values of freedom and democracy, as the reason for their negative opinions (Zogby 2002). As we will review in the next section, the heightened concern with the scope and strength of anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world has sparked heavy investment by the United States in public diplomacy efforts and has led to a vigorous debate relative to the impact of television news on Muslim opinion.

The Focus on Public Diplomacy and Television News

Public diplomacy is the idea of “direct communication with foreign peoples, with the aim of affecting their thinking, and ultimately, that of their governments” (Gilboa 2000: 291). Adelman (1981: 927) further defines public diplomacy as a “foreign policy asset” that attempts to promote American values to foreigners and help “create a climate of opinion in which American policies can be successfully formulated, executed, and accepted.” Public diplomacy most often takes the form of cultural or academic exchange programs, public relations campaigns in foreign mass media, dissemination of print or video materials, and government-sponsored radio or television broadcasting in foreign markets (el-Nawawy and Gher 2003; Peterson 2002; Hitchcock 1998).

Throughout the cold war, the Voice of America and other broadcasters such as Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Worldnet Television functioned as prominent components of U.S. public diplomacy efforts. Other elements of U.S. public diplomacy included exchange and cultural programs such as the Fulbright program and the publishing of various informational magazines and print materials. However, with the end of the cold war, many policymakers saw a reduced need for such efforts. As a consequence, in 1999, the main American public diplomacy agency, the United States Information Agency (USIA), was merged into the U.S. State Department with its available funding, resources, and activities severely curtailed (Kaiser 2001; Lippman 1999).

“The Al Jazeera Effect.” However, just as the September 11 attacks and the new “War on Terrorism” stimulated interest in Muslim public opinion, the same events reinvigorated the U.S. commitment to public diplomacy. The frequent appearance of Osama bin Laden on Al Jazeera and the perceived success of Al Qaeda in spreading its message in the Muslim world led to the growing perception in the media and among policymakers that the United States was losing the “public relations battle” in Muslim countries and that it needed to step up public diplomacy efforts (Ajami 2001; Becker 2001; De Young 2001; el-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002; Kaiser 2001). In the wake of this realization, the Bush administration appointed Charlotte Beers, a former public relations executive, as under-secretary of public diplomacy. Allocated a budget and staff, her goal was to

formulate a new public diplomacy strategy geared specifically toward Muslims overseas (Ajami 2001; Becker 2001; De Young 2001; Kaiser 2001).

A second, related factor following the September 11 attacks provided further impetus for the Bush administration to find an effective means to directly influence Muslim public opinion. Specifically, there was a U.S. concern with what has been commonly referred to as the "Al Jazeera Effect" (Ajami 2001; el-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002; el-Nawawy and Gher 2003). The concept takes its name from the so-called "CNN Effect" that was the focus of much speculation during the 1990s. The CNN Effect, as commonly described, posits that international television news has "become a direct and perhaps even dominant actor in the formulation of policies in defense and foreign affairs" (Gilboa 2002: 733). Graphic, twenty-four-hour, and comprehensive news coverage of such crises as the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo created public pressure on government policymakers to address the crises or enact policies that they would not otherwise consider (Gilboa 2002).

The Al Jazeera Effect is conceived as operating in a similar manner within the Muslim world, with its regional and global reach broadening pan-Arab and pan-Muslim political interaction and perceived connectedness. The network's comprehensive and graphic "on-the-ground" coverage of the U.S. war in Afghanistan is commonly thought to have raised the level of negative sentiment against the United States in the Muslim world and to have created pressure on many Muslim governments to act against U.S. policy (el-Nawawy and Gher 2003).

New public diplomacy initiatives. To counter the ability of Al Qaeda to directly communicate to the international Muslim public, and as a way to offset the perceived Al Jazeera Effect, the Bush administration has launched a multipronged public diplomacy campaign. One component of this campaign includes reaching the Muslim public *directly* through the creation of new media outlets or paid advertising. Examples include the creation of an Arabic-language radio station; the production of documentaries, books, Web sites, and commercials depicting Muslim life in the United States; and the launch of a new lifestyle magazine for Muslim teens. A second component of the public diplomacy campaign has attempted to influence the Muslim public *indirectly* by shaping the coverage provided by Muslim journalists and media outlets (Ajami 2001; el-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002; Perlez and Rutenbergs 2003). These efforts are made up of common news "agenda-building" strategies designed to produce news coverage favorable to the United States. Examples include increased appearances by top administration officials on major Muslim television news channels and the "embedding" of Al Jazeera journalists with American troops during the invasion of Iraq (Perlez and Rutenbergs 2003). In addition to these ongoing efforts, the Bush administration is moving forward with the creation of a new twenty-four-hour, Arabic-language satellite television news channel to be broadcast across a

range of Muslim countries, with the goal of having the network operational by the end of 2003. Citing the success of their radio broadcasting effort, the Bush administration believes that this additional television news resource would allow them to better communicate directly with Muslim publics and counter the possible effects of Al Jazeera news coverage (Mussenden 2003; Satloff 2003).

The Content of TV News in the Muslim World

To better understand the nature of possible television news effects and the possible impact of any public diplomacy efforts, it is first necessary to outline the nature of the content of television news in the Muslim world and how news content might vary by the type of network or channel broadcasting the news.

Press freedom shapes content. A dominant influence on Muslim media historically has been government control of the press. Muslim countries are widely recognized as sponsoring restrictive levels of media openness within their societies. From the earliest introduction of electronic broadcasting in the 1950s, Muslim governments recognized the potential for television and radio to mobilize their citizens politically and thereby stir political unrest. This understanding led to the nationalization and formal government control of most mass media channels (Ayish 2002). Thus, throughout the Muslim world,

Governments of these countries have sought to suppress any criticism of their policies or leaderships, as well as avoid damaging revelations about personal or political scandals. After excluding hostile material from newspapers, magazines, and the airwaves, some have used the media as a vehicle for their propaganda. (El-Affendi 1993: 165)

Indeed, in cross-national ratings of press freedom, predominantly Muslim countries score considerably lower in overall press freedom than most Western democracies, including the United States and Great Britain (Windsor 2002).

Yet it would be an oversimplification to consider all Muslim media uniform in their characteristics and structure. Both Rugh (1979) and Ayish (2002) have proposed typologies of Muslim media. Rugh distinguishes between the “mobilized press,” which is outright government controlled; the “loyalist press,” which is privately owned yet may be censored or self-censored and generally supports the national governing elites; and the “diverse press,” where the press may have a degree of press freedom. From the 1950s through the early 1990s, the mobilized press and, to a lesser degree, the loyalist press were the dominant paradigms within the Muslim world (Hafez 2001).

The common content elements of the loyalist press were heavily scripted, formal nightly newscasts that were “dull and monolithic in their format content, and delivery methods” featuring coverage of the head of state, speeches by

governing elites, and official events (Alterman 1998; Ayish 2002). Thus, during the 1970s and 1980s, a single and unitary message system was the only means through which television “viewers had exposure to regional and international news” (Ayish 2002: 138). Until recently, then, the only alternative source of television news was the Western news broadcasts from networks such as CNN or BBC. The Western media’s direct impact, however, has been limited because of language barriers, limited broadcast reach (constrained not only geographically but also in its predominantly elite-only accessibility), and low credibility (Hafez 2001). Instead, Western media has had a significant indirect impact and has aided the creation of a new television news paradigm in the Muslim world.

The “new” TV news. The greatest impact for Western news has been its influence both on news organizations and news consumers within the Muslim world. Muslim news organizations have been pushed to be more competitive with both external media and each other. Furthermore, both domestic and transnational Muslim news organizations have increasingly attempted to emulate “Western” concepts of journalistic values, practices, norms, news structure, and delivery, with Al Jazeera the most prominent example (Ayish 2002; Hafez 2001). The Western media has also had an indirect impact on Muslim public understanding and consumption of news media. Even though the Muslim public has had limited exposure to Western media, the diversity, structure, and format of Western media coverage has provided an alternative image of what Muslim news media could provide. This image is sharply contrasted against the rather rigid, controlled, and dull message system of the dominant paradigm of the 1970s and 1980s described previously (Hafez 2001).

In addition to the impact of Western media, other developments including the end of the cold war, limited economic and political liberalization within the Muslim world, developments in broadcast technology, and increased globalization have all led to a rise in a new and more competitive news paradigm (Ayish 2002; Hafez 2001). Limited economic and political liberalization has allowed an increase in the number of privately owned news channels that enjoy a moderate degree of independence from the government. These trends, combined with advances in satellite technology, have led to the proliferation of privately owned transnational regional media channels such as Al Jazeera and the Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC).

The aforementioned changes during the 1990s have led Ayish (2002) to formulate a new element in the typology of Muslim press that he calls a “liberal commercial television” style of press coverage, which contrasts sharply with the still somewhat dominant paradigm of “traditional government controlled” press. The new liberal commercial television can be characterized as a “diverse press” that is privately owned and predominantly transnational and that utilizes a

“Western” style of journalistic practices, news content, and delivery modeled on such channels as CNN and BBC (Ayish 2002).

The rise of Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera is the embodiment of this new liberal, commercial paradigm (Ayish 2002). Since the network’s founding in 1996, Al Jazeera’s audience has grown to an estimated 35 to 45 million viewers within the Muslim world, with another estimated 4.5 million in Europe and the United States (el-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002; Falk 2003). Its success has spawned replication, with MBC and the Lebanese channel LBC either adopting the Al Jazeera format or creating new channels modeled after it (Shadid 2003). Al Jazeera has been heavily criticized by Western and Muslim governments alike for its supposed biased and offensive news coverage, with several Muslim governments temporarily expelling or shutting down its news bureaus (el-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002; Falk 2003). Critics from the West have judged Al Jazeera to be blatantly anti-American and anti-Western in rhetoric and tone when covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (el-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002; Falk 2003; MacFarquhar 2003). Conversely, Muslim governments have criticized Al Jazeera for being too critical of Muslim heads of state, treading on taboo political or social issues, or not being pan-Arab or anti-Western enough (el-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002; Falk 2003; MacFarquhar 2003).

Several content features differentiate Al Jazeera from either traditional Muslim news channels or Western news channels in the region. In a content analysis of Al Jazeera, Ayish (2002) identified sensationalism and technically alluring formats as two differentiating traits of Al Jazeera coverage from traditional Muslim news. In addition, Ayish identified a commitment to issues of concern to viewers and an emphasis on political news to the exclusion of human interest news as two differentiating traits from Western news.

Sensationalism, according to Ayish (2002), is embodied in Al Jazeera’s choice of “video films and images employed in reports” highlighting casualties and consequences for Muslims in the Palestinian and Iraqi conflicts and by the network’s “sensational screaming debates” on live talk shows (see also Falk 2003). Al Jazeera has also modeled its technical and delivery formats on Western style cable news. For example, in contrast to traditional Muslim news that employs scripted, technically simple broadcasts and voiceovers of heavily edited footage, Al Jazeera news broadcasts often include “on the scene” news reporters with “rich visual and graphic materials...timely or live news delivery methods . . . [and] the presentation of news in discrete short news ‘capsules’” (Ayish 2002: 149).

However, Ayish (2002: 150) notes that Al Jazeera deviates from the “Western notion of objectivity” in that “when it comes to issues enjoying pan-Arab

consensus, objectivity in the sense of the balanced reporting of conflicting views seems to be virtually nonexistent.” This commitment has often resulted in criticism of Al Jazeera as being particularly anti-Western or anti-American in its news coverage of specific issues (Ayish 2002; el-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002). However, Al Jazeera and its supporters reply that they are simply presenting news from a Muslim or Arab point of view and context and are no more biased than American news channels such as Fox News or even CNN that present news from a distinctly American and sometimes ideological viewpoint (el-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002).

A second main difference between Al Jazeera and Western news channels is its exclusive focus on political news to the exclusion of cultural, social, or human interest topics (Ayish 2002). Ayish (2002) believes the reason for this difference is a combination of the historical tradition of Muslim news focusing on government officials and protocol events with a high number of dramatic political events within the region over the past fifty years that has created a “deep consciousness of politics as central to the region’s future” (p. 149). The result of this news focus has been “the politicization of Arab viewers who, unlike their counterparts in Western countries, consider political education and engagement essential parts of their life” (p. 150).

Understanding TV News Influence at the Individual Level

Thus far, we have reviewed how several important historical and structural factors have influenced the content of TV news in the Muslim world, but what does previous research tell us about how the content of TV news is likely to shape Muslim public opinion? First, in formulating expectations relative to the influence of TV news coverage, the extreme levels of anti-American sentiment that have been measured in surveys of the Muslim world—described by one principal investigator as “true dislike, if not hatred” and “beyond mere loathing” (Kohut 2003a, 2003b)—are likely to serve as powerful individual-level predispositions that channel any effects of the news media. So although some commentators may assume, for example, that the strong anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world is principally attributable to Al Jazeera, media coverage is unlikely to create public opinion anew. Rather, the media are likely to move already extreme anti-American perspectives in small directions.

We can expect that most individuals living in Muslim countries, like their Western counterparts, are “cognitive misers,” employing information shortcuts as a means to process new information, form attitudes, and reach decisions (Downs 1957; Popkin 1991). Most individuals, regardless of their location in the world, rely on their preexisting views and the information most readily available to them in the news media as the mutable material from which to mold their opinions. Given a torrent of information and the pace of breaking events relative

to U.S. actions post–September 11, any individual would only be able to attend selectively to the news and accept certain aspects of coverage. In fact, even the best-informed individuals living in predominantly Muslim countries are likely to be limited in the amount of attention they could devote to the constant flow of information carried by television news coverage.

Guided by the above premises, theorizing specific to the “memory-based” or “accessibility” model of opinion formation helps lay out certain expectations relative to news media effects. According to the memory-based model, an individual’s opinions can be influenced by making certain considerations more salient and therefore more accessible when an individual is prompted to express an opinion (Hastie and Park 1986; Iyengar 1990; Zaller and Feldman 1992; Moy et al. 2001; Scheufele 2000). The memory-based model assumes that (1) some pieces of information are more accessible in a person’s mind than others, (2) opinion is to a large degree a function of how readily accessible these certain considerations are, and (3) accessibility is mostly a function of “how much” or “how recently” a person has been exposed to these certain considerations (Kim et al. 2002).

An individual living in a predominantly Muslim country is likely to use his or her underlying anti-American predisposition as a “perceptual screen” (Goidel et al. 1997), accepting only those considerations featured in the news that are congenial to his or her preconceived attitudes about the United States, rejecting aspects of the news that are not. The impact of increasing attention to news coverage of the United States is therefore only likely to confirm or strengthen this initial U.S. opposition. In other words, the more attention an individual pays to coverage of the United States—given a strong anti-American predisposition—the more likely the individual is to accept from the torrent of information only negative considerations about the United States that confirm preexisting beliefs. These expectations relative to the main effects of attention to TV news coverage lead to our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: For members of the public living in predominantly Muslim countries, attention to TV news coverage of the United States will be associated with anti-American attitudes.

This first hypothesis, however, is dependent in part on the nature of the messages that are available via TV coverage. For example, we might expect that high levels of attention to TV news in which the news coverage is uniformly one sided in support of the United States would soften anti-American perceptions. In other words, under a hypothetical condition where one-sided positive coverage of the United States is the only TV news available, increasing attention to coverage of the United States would promote among viewers the increased salience of

positive considerations about the United States. Given the significance of the available message system, the specific news channel through which individuals pay attention to coverage of the United States is therefore likely to play either an amplifying or a buffering role relative to the main impact of TV news viewing. More specifically, if past research that characterizes independent pan-Arab news networks such as Al Jazeera and MBC as providing sensationalized and negative coverage of the United States are accurate, then we can expect that turning to these stations for news coverage *amplifies* the main effects of TV news viewing on anti-American perceptions. On the other hand, receiving the news through a Western TV network such as CNN or BBC that depicts the United States in a generally more positive light might serve to *buffer* the negative main effects of TV news viewing. In other words, the availability and frequency of negative considerations toward the United States from which an individual may select varies across media channels, with pan-Arab news networks having a greater availability of negative messages than Western networks such as CNN or the BBC.

The specific TV news network therefore should be viewed as what communication scholars call contributory conditions for any main effects on anti-American perceptions (Eveland 1997; McLeod and Reeves 1980). In other words, the interrelationship both theoretically and methodologically at the individual level is an interaction: The influence of increasing attention to TV news coverage of the United States is dependent on (i.e., varies with or is not uniform across) the specific TV news network. This leads to our second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: For members of the public living in predominantly Muslim countries, the impact of attention to TV news coverage of the United States will be moderated by the type of network or channel through which individuals receive the news.

Finally, we do not mean to focus exclusively on TV news as the only influence shaping public opinion in the Muslim world. As mentioned at the outset of this article, other scholars have emphasized either macro-level influences such as the comparative level of social and economic development in a country as important influences on opinion or have focused on individual-level sociodemographic factors. This wider perspective relative to factors shaping anti-American sentiment in the Muslim world leads to the following set of research questions:

Research Question 1: Besides any TV news effects, what macro-level factors influence anti-American perceptions?

Research Question 2: Besides any TV news effects, what other individual-level factors influence anti-American perceptions?

Method

For our analysis, we use data from the 2002 Gallup Poll of Islamic Countries. The survey was conducted in nine predominantly Muslim countries and was designed to measure the views of the entire national population of each country—urban and rural, citizen and noncitizen, Muslim and non-Muslim. It was based on a multistage probability sample. For each country in the study, primary sampling units (PSU) were selected to determine the sample for each country.

Once the household sample was determined, Gallup conducted in-person, at-home interviews of randomly selected individuals within each household. The interview, which consisted of approximately 120 questions, required about one hour to administer. The countries included in the Gallup survey included Pakistan ($n = 2,043$), Iran ($n = 1,501$), Indonesia ($n = 1,050$), Turkey ($n = 1,019$), Lebanon ($n = 1,050$), Morocco ($n = 1,000$), Kuwait ($n = 790$), Jordan ($n = 797$), and Saudi Arabia ($n = 754$). For more information on the sampling and methodology of the 2002 Gallup Poll of Islamic Countries, see the Gallup Organization Web site (www.gallup.com).

Our analyses are based on a hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model. In these models, blocks of variables are entered according to their assumed causal order. In other words, exogenous variables, such as demographics, are entered first, followed by other antecedent endogenous variables (Cohen and Cohen 1983). For our analysis, we pool together the samples from the nine predominantly Muslim countries into a combined data set resulting in a total sample size of $N = 10,004$.

Exogenous Variables

Since our analysis includes a cross-national data set derived from surveys in nine countries, our model included two sets of exogenous variables. One set included macro-level or contextual measures that were country specific. The other set included micro-level or individual-level measures.

The four macro-level variables account for country-level differences in economic and social development (i.e., longevity/health, aggregate education, and standard of living), the degree of Islamization (the percentage of the population that is Muslim), the degree of political freedom within the country's society (ratings of political rights and civil liberties), and country-level differences in the nature of the media market (i.e., pan-Arab broadcast area). For economic and social development, we selected an annual measure created by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) called the Human Development Index (HDI).¹ The second macro variable, the percentage of the population that is Muslim, was derived from data within the 2002 CIA *World Factbook*.² The

measure of political freedom for each country was based upon the 2001 Freedom House ratings for political rights and civil liberties.³

For the last macro-level variable, we dummy coded five countries as being primarily within the pan-Arab media market, including: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Morocco, Lebanon, and Jordan. These countries were important to control for in the analysis since accessibility to independent television networks such as Al Jazeera or MBC is limited mostly to individuals living in these countries, due primarily to their broadcast in Arabic. Table 1 provides a listing of the macro-level variables and assigned values for each of the nine countries surveyed.

The set of exogenous individual-level variables included gender, income, education, and age. Age was measured with a 10-point scale in five-year increments with the median age between 30 and 34 years old. Gender is dummy coded with women coded high (49.6 percent). Education was measured by a 7-point scale, with *no formal education* the lowest value and *university education or greater* the highest value ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 1.8$). Because of important economic and currency differences, income was standardized across countries into a 16-point scale.

Antecedent Endogenous Variables

We included seven endogenous variables in our regression models. Television exposure was a relatively straightforward measure of the number of days per week a respondent watched television ($M = 6.0$, $SD = 2.2$). Primary TV news channel of choice was determined by the individual's open-ended selection of which specific news channel he or she turned to first for news. Respondents who mentioned Western media channels (either CNN, CNN International, CNBC, or BBC) were coded as *Western media users* (7.4 percent of cases). Respondents who mentioned independent pan-Arab news channels (Al Jazeera and MBC) were coded as *pan-Arab media users* (21.4 percent of cases), and all others were coded as *domestic or national media users* (71.2 percent of cases).

Attention to coverage of the U.S. and American foreign policy was an additive index of five measures that asked respondents to rate on a 4-point scale their level of attention to television news about "events in Palestine," "events in Afghanistan," "the September 11 attacks on the U.S.," "anthrax dissemination in U.S./World," and "Arab/Muslim world reaction to the war in Afghanistan." The combined additive attention index ranged from 0 to 15 ($M = 5.6$, $SD = 4.8$, $\alpha = .82$), with greater attention scored high.

As an additional series of controls in the model, we also included two measures that tapped generalized views of Western nations. Western Nations Treat Muslim Nations Fairly and with Respect is an additive index of four items that asked respondents whether the following statements did or did not apply to Western nations: "Western nations respect Arab/Islamic values"; "Western nations are fair in their stance toward Arab/Muslim countries"; "Western

Table 1
Macro-level variables used in the analysis

Country	Human Development Index Value	Percentage Muslim	Political Freedom Score	Pan-Arab Broadcast Area
Indonesia	.684	88	3.5	No
Iran	.721	99	6	No
Jordan	.717	92	5	Yes
Kuwait	.813	98	4.5	Yes
Lebanon	.755	70	6.5	Yes
Morocco	.602	98	5	Yes
Pakistan	.499	97	5.5	No
Saudi Arabia	.759	100	7	Yes
Turkey	.742	99	4.5	No

Note: For Political Freedom Score, a score between 1 and 2.5 is considered “free,” a score between 3 and 5.5 is considered “partially free,” and a score between 6 and 7 is considered “not free.”

nations take stances that support Arab causes”; and “Western nations take a fair stance toward the situation in Palestine.” The combined measure ranged from 0 to 4 ($M = 0.31$, $SD = 0.68$). Western Societies Show Concern for the Muslim World is a single item that asked respondents their agreement with the statement, measured on a 1 to 5 scale ($M = 2.7$, $SD = 1.3$).

Criterion Measure

The criterion measure was an additive index of Anti-American Attitudes or negative perceptions of the United States. Respondents were asked to answer yes or no to whether ten different traits applied to the United States or not. The ten traits were “aggressive,” “conceited,” “trustworthy,” “friendly,” “arrogant,” “gets provoked easily,” “ruthless,” “peaceful to live in,” “high rates of crime,” and “adopts biased policies in world affairs.” Responses to the traits were recoded where necessary and summed to form an overall index of anti-American attitudes, with negative perceptions scored high ($M = 7.1$, $SD = 2.4$, $\alpha = .77$).

Results

As previously mentioned, to test the hypotheses, OLS hierarchical regression was used, and before-entry standardized betas and final standardized betas are reported.⁴ Before-entry betas control for all previously appearing variables in the model but not variables within the same block or variables appearing in subsequent blocks. Given the large sample size, to guard against Type I errors, we limit our inferences to coefficients that are at the .001 or .01 significance level and that can be theoretically supported. The sequence of the blocks of variables

as they are entered into the equation is based on their assumed causal priority. In other words, no independent variable or block of independent variables is presumed to be a "cause" of a variable or block of variables that has been entered earlier (Cohen and Cohen 1983). Based on the reasoning outlined in the literature review and the description of the variables in the Method section, the blocks were entered beginning with macro-level variables, followed by individual-level sociodemographics, general television exposure, the preferred channel source for news, level of attention to coverage of the United States, and generalized schema regarding Western nations.

The hypotheses in this study state expectations about interactive effects. To provide for a stringent test of these interactive relationships in a multivariate context, it is necessary to build a hierarchical regression model that enters the main effects and other controls first and then lastly the interaction term. In addition, to avoid multicollinearity problems between the product term and its components, the main effect variable was centered (put in deviation score form). The two interaction terms were formed by multiplying the standardized attention to coverage of the U.S. variable by each of the dichotomous news channel variables. In the regression model, if the product terms remain significant after controlling for the two main effects components, as well as other third variable influences in the model, then the interactions are significant (Aiken and West 1991; Cohen and Cohen 1983; Cronbach 1987; Eveland 1997). This method for testing interactions has been used in a number of recently published studies testing moderating influences related to media effects (Eveland and Scheufele 2000; Shah et al. 2001; Scheufele 2002).

Main Effects

As Table 2 indicates, both macro-level variables were significant in predicting anti-American attitudes. According to the results, individuals living within the pan-Arab broadcast area have significantly higher levels of anti-American sentiment ($\beta = .04$), even after controlling for levels of media use.

It is important, however, to draw only cautious conclusions from this finding since the purpose of the measure was more to control for access to pan-Arab media at the individual level than to test whether the populations of the nations in the pan-Arab network coverage area are significantly more negative in their perceptions of the United States than other predominantly Muslim countries. The coverage area includes all of the Arab countries within the nine-country Muslim data set, and it is more likely that either cultural, political, and historical influences indigenous to these Arab countries not controlled for in the current analysis, most notably their close ties to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, are responsible for the comparatively higher levels of antipathy toward the United States.

Table 2
Predicting anti-American attitudes

	Before-Entry Beta	Final Beta	Final Beta with Interaction
Macro-level variables			
Broadcast area			
Pan-Arab broadcast area	.16****	.04***	.04****
Incremental R^2 (%)	2.7****		
Country-specific socioeconomic factors			
Human Development Index	-.05****	-.14****	-.12****
Percentage of population Muslim	-.07****	-.07****	-.08****
Degree of political freedom	.06****	.03***	.05***
Incremental R^2 (%)	1.1****		
Individual-level variables			
Demographics			
Age	-.02**	.00	.00
Gender (female)	-.10****	-.08****	-.07****
Income	-.02	-.02*	-.02
Education	.15****	.12****	.12****
Incremental R^2 (%)	2.3****		
General exposure			
Television exposure (days per week)	.08****	.07****	.09****
Incremental R^2 (%)	0.5****		
Primary news channel			
Pan-Arab satellite news	.09****	.06****	.04***
Western news channels	-.10****	-.09****	-.09****
Incremental R^2 (%)	1.3****		
Attention to coverage of United States			
Incremental R^2 (%)	0.8****		
General views of the West			
Treat Muslim nations fairly and with respect	-.08****	-.08****	-.07****
Show concern for Muslim nations	-.17****	-.16****	-.12****
Incremental R^2 (%)	2.9****		
Interactions			
Pan-Arab News \times Attention	NA	NA	.04****
Western News \times Attention	NA	NA	-.03***
Incremental R^2 (%)	0.2****		
Total R^2 (%)		11.6	11.8

* $p \leq .10$. ** $p \leq .05$. *** $p \leq .01$. **** $p \leq .001$.

In terms of socioeconomic macro-level influences, Table 2 indicates that respondents living in countries with comparatively higher levels of socioeconomic development as measured by the HDI score lower in anti-American attitudes after all controls ($\beta = -.14$). For the HDI, when it first enters the

regression as indicated by the before-entry beta ($\beta = -.05$), its influence is considerably weaker than its final form when controlling for all other variables in the regression. A closer look at the variable across the regression as each block of successive variables is entered indicates that the influence of socioeconomic development increases after controlling for demographics. In other words, only after controlling for individual-level variations in education and income across the sample does the influence of socioeconomic development at the aggregate level increase.

The other two macro variables have opposite influences on anti-American attitudes. Within the nine-country sample, individuals from those nations that have a higher percentage of Muslims within their population are less prone to negative perceptions of the United States ($\beta = -.07$). In contrast, within the nine-country sample, individuals from those nations that have a higher degree of political freedom are more likely to have strong anti-American views ($\beta = .03$). In terms of individual-level sociodemographic variables, Table 2 indicates that women were less negative in their perceptions of the United States after all controls than men ($\beta = -.07$) and that individuals with higher levels of education were more negative in their perceptions of the United States ($\beta = .08$) after all controls.

Beyond macro-level variables and individual-level sociodemographic variables, our results indicate that media use had significant effects on anti-American attitudes. First, in terms of general television exposure, time spent watching television promoted negative perceptions of the United States ($\beta = .07$). The fact that this measure of general exposure holds up after controlling for TV news use indicates that other content features of television not hypothesized in the current study may shape public opinion. As we will discuss in the conclusion, future research should further disaggregate the effects of television content on perceptions of the United States in the Muslim world.

In terms of the main effects of the primary news channel of choice for individuals, Table 2 indicates that individuals turning to pan-Arab regional networks, which include Al Jazeera and MBC, were more negative in their perceptions of the United States after all controls ($\beta = .06$), whereas individuals turning to Western networks, such as CNN or the BBC, were significantly less negative in their perceptions of the United States ($\beta = -.09$). In terms of the effects of attention to TV news coverage of the United States, this variable was one of the strongest predictors of anti-American attitudes in the final regression. Specifically, the more attention individuals reported paying to television news coverage of the United States, the stronger their anti-American attitudes after all controls ($\beta = .09$).

Not surprisingly, generalized views of the West had a significant impact on anti-American attitudes. The view that Western nations show concern for Muslim nations was the strongest negative influence on anti-American perceptions

($\beta = -.16$). The view that Western nations treat Muslim nations fairly ($\beta = -.08$) also tended to lessen the strength of anti-American attitudes.

Interactions

To formally test the hypothesized moderating relationship, the interaction terms for primary news channel and attention to coverage of the United States were entered in the model as the final block. As expected, there was an amplifying effect for pan-Arab network viewership ($\beta = .04$) and a buffering effect for Western network viewership ($\beta = -.03$). In Figure 1, the interactions are presented graphically.

Visually, the graph depicts differential effects relative to attention to coverage across the two types of news networks. The first part of this gap is likely to be a result of selective exposure. More specifically, viewers even at the lowest levels of attention to coverage of the United States who turn to Western networks for coverage are considerably less negative in their views of the United States than those viewers at low levels of attention who turn to pan-Arab network news. In other words, given competing choices, individuals turn to news sources where they are likely to find coverage with which they expect to agree.

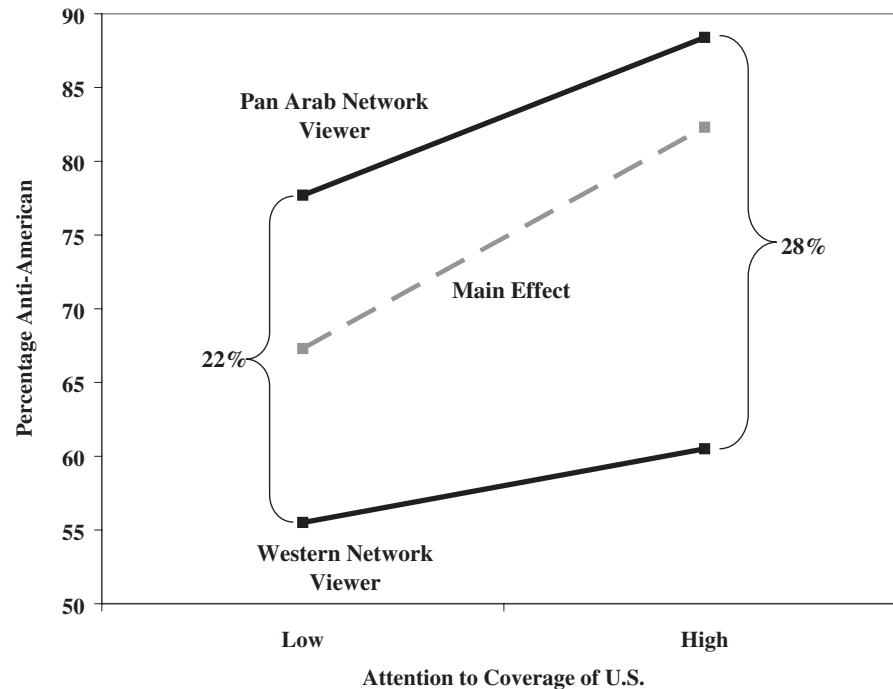
Moreover, due likely to content differences between pan-Arab network coverage and Western network coverage, the perception gap is amplified as the level of attention to coverage of the United States increases. For example, among pan-Arab viewers at high levels of attention to coverage, the number of negative considerations available when formulating an opinion about the United States are differentially greater than for the Western network news viewer at the same level of attention since the Western network viewer likely encounters an overall message system relative to the United States that is less one sided and negative.

Conclusion

Before elaborating on the implications of the presented findings, it is necessary to look more closely at some of the technical aspects of the study.

Some Data-Related Considerations

First, the current analysis is only able to explain a small part of the variance in public opinion. This is attributable in part to the fact that anti-American sentiment is fairly strong across the sample, but part of the problem also derives from the limited measures available in the study. For example, in our analysis we were not able to include measures of individual-level religiosity since in several of the countries, Gallup was not allowed to administer questions regarding religion. Moreover, of greater value to our study than a general categorical measure of religious affinity or identity would have been interval- or ordinal-level measures tapping multiple dimensions of religious commitment. The few studies to

**Figure 1**

Moderating Role of TV News Network on Attention to Coverage of United States

Note: "Low" attention represents the bottom third of the distribution of respondents and "high" attention represents the top third of distribution of respondents.

examine the influence of religion on the political beliefs of Muslims suggest that differences in the personal and political dimensions of religious orientations matter. For example, rather than personal piety shaping opinion, previous research has found that support for "political Islam"—the connection of religious beliefs with Islamic political movements—predicts substantial amounts of variance in opinion relative to foreign affairs (Tessler and Nachtwey 1998). This also provides a possible explanation for why higher degrees of country-level Islamization were negatively related to anti-American attitudes. It is the politicization of Islam, not the degree of cultural influence, religious devotion, or extent of religious practice, that likely promotes anti-American opinions and actions.

Second, the contextual influence of political freedom on anti-American attitudes challenges some commonly held assumptions. More specifically, when examining the criterion mean scores for each country included within the model, some important patterns emerge. Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan all

have a comparatively low degree of political freedom, yet the mean scores for anti-American attitudes are also comparatively low ($M = 7.0, 6.9,$ and $6.8,$ respectively) in relation to Indonesia and Kuwait, which have comparatively higher levels of political freedom yet higher mean scores for anti-American attitudes ($M = 7.7$ for both). Possible explanations are threefold. First, political freedom may not always be positively related with more positive perceptions of the United States, as demonstrated by the strong anti-American sentiment currently exhibited within Europe (Kohut 2003a, 2003b). Second, respondents in more politically restrictive societies may have been less likely to express their “true” opinions when asked in a survey. Third, the media or information environment may be more open or more critical in countries that allow greater political freedom, providing a forum for more critical information about the United States.

Given the substantive effects for TV news viewing found in the current study, the analysis would also clearly benefit from additional measures of media and communication behaviors. For example, in the current analysis, time spent watching television remains significant even after controlling for TV news viewing, suggesting that other forms of television content including entertainment and religious programming are also likely to shape perceptions of the United States. Future research should attempt to further disaggregate television content into its component effects. In addition to television, the effects of newspaper use, Internet use, the frequency and nature of political discussion, and any elite cues from opinion leaders that occur within mosques or other community settings should also be examined.

Finally, any elaboration on limitations needs to acknowledge the possibility of Type I error, especially given the size of the sample used in the analysis. In this article, two precautions were taken to guard against Type I error. First, the hypothesized relationships are based on previously established theorizing, and the significant relationships reported in this study conform to these expectations. Second, the study adhered to a more stringent p -level for accepting a significant relationship, with most of the relationships significant at the .001 level.

Evidence for TV News Influence?

The evidence from our analysis indicates that TV news viewing has an important influence on anti-American attitudes among Muslims, above and beyond any macro-level or sociodemographic factors. TV news coverage in the Muslim world, as is the case in the West, confronts viewers with a torrent of information, and the typical Muslim viewer is unlikely to be able to spend a great deal of time weighing, assessing, and deliberating the content of the news, arriving at carefully considered judgments about the United States and its policy actions. Instead, the extreme anti-American predispositions that are endemic to individuals living in Muslim countries are likely to channel any opinion response, with

these preexisting views of the United States serving as perceptual screens, enabling individuals to select considerations from TV news that only confirm existing anti-American attitudes.

According to our results, as a main effect, attention to TV news coverage of the United States is related to negative perceptions of the United States. To the extent that variations in content across news networks make a difference, the preferred news channel of choice matters, but only to a degree. As discussed in this article, a number of commentators and policymakers have held Al Jazeera and other pan-Arab TV networks responsible for the pervasiveness of anti-American sentiment. Our data provide only very limited support for this claim. According to our analysis, likely content differences at the pan-Arab networks serve to amplify the main effects of news attention on anti-American attitudes, while Western network news use serves to buffer or attenuate the main effects of attention to coverage. Yet still, even among these Western network users, heavy viewers are more negative in their outlook about the United States than lighter viewers. For the Muslim public, the difference in media effects for receiving news through either Al Jazeera or a Western news network is a matter of *degree*, not *direction*. Our analysis of the interaction between preferred network and attention to news coverage of the United States shows that for both types of networks, increasing levels of attention to coverage of the United States leads to stronger anti-American attitudes.

Implications for Public Diplomacy

Although the current study is not meant as a direct evaluation of U.S. public diplomacy efforts in the Muslim world, our findings do underscore the complex nature of such initiatives. The limited amount of variance our media model explains, the nature of the media interactions we have identified, and the overall relationship between attention to television news and anti-American attitudes highlight some of the challenges a new U.S.-sponsored Arabic-language television news station may face. Direct benefits from investment in such public diplomacy efforts are unclear or questionable. In terms of anti-American sentiment, a U.S.-sponsored news channel is only likely to have the same slight buffering effect that our study demonstrates for Western news networks such as CNN or BBC, with the Muslim public selecting and sampling that portion of the “balanced” news that only conforms to their anti-American predispositions.

Al Jazeera and other emerging pan-Arab television news stations are powerful communication channels within the Muslim world. A more cost-effective strategy for the American government may be to continue to employ the previously mentioned media agenda-building strategies designed to influence pan-Arab television portrayals of the United States and its policies. Increasing the amount of positive coverage of the United States reduces the “space” available within Al Jazeera broadcasts for critical content and, thus, the availability of negative

considerations Muslim viewers can use to reinforce or bolster preexisting anti-American attitudes. The Bush administration can enhance this strategy by continuing to provide the same recognition and access to Al Jazeera that is provided to U.S. news outlets as well as encouraging coverage of the United States by Al Jazeera that is not overtly political, promoting coverage of cultural, economic, and social aspects of American life. However, the contemporary political and security climate poses several obstacles for this strategy. For example, the temporary closing of both the New York Stock Exchange and NASDAQ to Al Jazeera financial reporters in spring 2003 should be viewed as counterproductive to U.S. public diplomacy efforts.

Mass-mediated public diplomacy—whether it takes the form of U.S.-sponsored television news networks, music stations, teen magazines, or Web sites—should only be one part of U.S. communication efforts. It is likely that the United States needs to invest in educational and cultural exchange centers in Muslim countries, with U.S. representatives playing an important role in Muslim communities, complementing mass communication campaigns with person-to-person interaction. Investing in American cultural centers abroad, as Finn (2003) notes, creates local contexts where Muslim community members and local journalists can interact directly with American representatives on a range of issues and ideas. When security allows, sending high-level administration officials on “listening tours” within Muslim countries (Marquis 2003) should also be viewed as an effective style of “retail” public diplomacy, perhaps generating more favorable local, national, and international media coverage and further engendering direct community-level interaction.

Nevertheless, we regret that we are not able to offer more compelling and powerful answers to the problem of anti-Americanism. Public diplomacy initiatives and media lobbying efforts do not address the root causes of anti-Americanism endemic to Muslim countries and instead are likely to only lead to small gains in “winning the hearts and minds” of the Muslim public. Short of substantial changes in U.S. political, economic, and foreign policy, widespread hatred and loathing of the United States in the Muslim world is likely to continue.

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Notes

1. The Human Development Index (HDI) is designed to measure a country's progress in three areas of human development that include lifespan, aggregate education, and standard of living.

Lifespan is measured by life expectancy at birth. Aggregate education is measured by a combination of the adult literacy rate and the combined gross primary, secondary, and tertiary enrollment ratio. The standard of living is measured by GDP per capita (purchasing power parity [PPP] U.S.\$). The latest HDI figures available for each country were based on year 2000 estimates. More information on the HDI is available through the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Web site at <http://www.undp.org>.

2. The CIA *World Factbook* is compiled and published by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. Data were compiled from each country's profile. More information and complete country profiles may be found at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>.

3. The Freedom House organization (www.freedomhouse.org) compiles an annual rating of political rights and civil liberties for each country worldwide. For complete information on the ratings and methodology, see <http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2003/methodology.htm>.

4. The key advantage of using standardized coefficients is that they indicate the relative strength and direction of an independent variable's influence on the dependent variable, enabling an interpretation of which of the predictor variables has the stronger influence and by how much. Use of standardized coefficients are especially important when in the current study several independent variables are standardized for index construction, and all of the independent variables are measured using different metrics (Cohen and Cohen 1983; Hunter and Hamilton 2002).

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