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ENGAGING FAITH:
INTEGRATING RELIGION INTO U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN THE
MIDDLE EAST

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I. Introduction

The diplomatic relationship between the United States and the countries of the Middle East is one that is fraught with challenges and misconceptions, in addition to many successes. American public diplomacy initiatives, specifically, have changed drastically from Cold War propaganda tactics to post-September 11th, 2001 mentalities to the current programs in place around the world. Where traditional diplomacy strategies have often fallen short in building relationships in the Middle East and North Africa, public diplomacy has changed over time to meet the ever-changing challenges of communicating with citizens of the region's countries. Many of the United States' successes in reaching out to the people of the Middle East have in fact stemmed from public diplomacy programs. Over time, the American government has worked to create numerous cultural, linguistic, and academic programs in an attempt to bridge the gap of understanding between the Middle East and the United States, but one subject has remained contentious and often problematic: religion.

In order to engage with people around the world, the U.S. government utilizes public diplomacy activities to “support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics, and by expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and Government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world.”¹ These activities include educational exchange trips, International Visitor Leadership Programs (IVLP) and language training, to mention a few. American diplomats have implemented foreign policy aims through these activities by communicating American values and interests, but since the terrorist attacks of

¹ (U.S Department of State)

September 11th, 2001, there has been a renewed interest in evaluating the effectiveness of these programs in conveying important American beliefs such as democracy and respect for human rights.

America's approach to public diplomacy, however, appears to be changing. Many diplomats and academics point to "new public diplomacy" as the trend of future diplomatic engagement; it is considered a 'new' approach because the emphasis on programming is placed on a proactive attitude towards relationship building instead of a passive, informative experience for the foreign target audience. Connecting with religious leaders and average people on matters of religion, especially matters that encourage pluralistic societies, like tolerance, respect, coexistence, and cooperation, is part of an overall goal of encouraging human rights by the U.S. government. This mindset is based on the assumption that such societies are more likely to be democratic, and are less likely to be a threat to the security of the United States and its foreign policy interests. The contentious nature of religion, in addition to strained relations between the United States and the Muslim-majority nations of the Middle East, however, make activities that overtly engage in forms of religious dialogue highly problematic.

Both the countries of the Middle East and the United States have long and varying histories with religion in politics, and diplomacy specifically. Religion is a tool that, at first glance, appears to be a logical choice for engaging in diplomacy with countries like Saudi Arabia or Israel, whose political histories and narratives revolve around religious themes and doctrines. The history of the separation between church and state in American politics, however, seems to present unique and complex challenges for diplomats in their attempts to connect and engage with foreign governments and their citizens. These challenges have created a large divide between those who wish to utilize religious themes more widely in U.S. public diplomacy

efforts, and those who believe that religion and religious differences are topics that are too confrontational for public diplomacy efforts in the region. Some practitioners and scholars prefer to utilize religion in public diplomacy solely as a means by which to understand underlying contexts and the roles that religious leaders and faith-based organizations play in politics. Others, however, see religion as an integral tool in relationship and trust building exercises between the U.S. government and foreign civil societies that may lead to achievement of specific policy objectives.

Using religious themes in public diplomacy is potentially beneficial for a number of reasons. For the American government and its diplomats, understanding and engaging with religious communities and leaders has the potential to lead to opportunities that may reduce the threat of violent religious extremism, which ultimately furthers the United States' objective of increasing national security. It is an undeniable reality that the ideas and behaviors of people around the world are influenced by religious convictions, and ignoring this fact poses a danger to American interests abroad. Consistently, the United States faces attacks on its diplomats and missions around the world, which are often attributed to religious extremism. Most recently, the September 2012 attacks on U.S. embassies in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and Libya resulted in the deaths of U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other embassy officials. Carried out under the pretext of a response to the YouTube video "Innocence of Muslims," these events are merely one contemporary example of religious extremist violence that the United States has faced in the last few decades. While the investigations into these tragic events continue, diplomats and analysts are once again considering the role of religion in engagement, especially given the rapid and dramatic changes taking place in the Middle East since the uprisings of the "Arab Spring."

The focus of this project is to investigate the public diplomacy tools America is currently utilizing in the Middle East and North Africa region. Specifically, we hope to determine the effectiveness of using religious themes in public diplomacy programming, and explore the questions at the heart of our research: If public diplomacy practitioners and scholars alike believe that religion should be included in the new public diplomacy, how do we know if it is working? To best understand this issue, our paper will first give a broad overview of public diplomacy, and its many manifestations in the Middle East region, but our paper ultimately has a much more limited scope and aim- to analyze and evaluate the effectiveness behind current public diplomacy programs dealing with religion in the Middle East and North Africa.

Methodology

To get a more complete understanding of the role of religion within America's current public diplomacy programs in the Middle East, and to analyze their successes and failures, we utilized a variety of research methods for this project; our research includes numerous methodologies from interviews to a comprehensive literature review of relevant works including books, journals, newspaper articles, blog posts, and official U.S. documents including Congressional hearing testimonies and Department of State program descriptions. Our research is, in part, a product of 13 interviews conducted in Cairo, Egypt and Washington, D.C. during the months of January and February, 2013. Many of the interviews were conducted with individuals, although some, including those with embassy officials and Egyptian citizens, were held in a group setting.

We attempted to get opinions on the use of religion in American public diplomacy in the Middle East from both practitioners and the citizens towards whom the PD programs were

aimed. Thus, we spoke with academics, staff members at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, employees at AMIDEAST, USAID, and the Al-Azhar English Language Resource Center, as well as Egyptian citizens. Some of our contacts were interviewed off the record, while others agreed to have their experiences with public diplomacy programs documented for the purpose of our project.

With this paper, we hope to give a small sample of the variety of public diplomacy programs dealing with the issue of religion in the Middle East region. We recognize that we were unable to schedule extensive interviews, but we believe that the insights we gained from the few interviews we conducted were extremely useful in gaining a better understanding of America's public diplomacy focus in the region, and its impact, or lack thereof, on the citizens of the countries in the Middle East.

II. Public Diplomacy, the Middle East, and Religion

For the purposes of our research, we found it necessary to differentiate between the many types of diplomacy, and diplomatic efforts, in the Middle East region to better understand the reasons behind America's hesitance to increasingly include religion in its public diplomacy programs. Diplomacy, for the purposes of our project, refers to the interaction between nation-states.² There are, however, many different ways for states to interact; these various methods, called "tracks", are best explained by the United States Institute of Peace's definitions. "Track 1 diplomacy" refers to official, state-to-state diplomatic efforts such as peace talks and treaties, while "Track 2 diplomacy" denotes "unofficial dialogue and problem-solving activities aimed at building-relationships and encouraging new thinking that can inform the official [Track 1] process."³ This track may involve non-government organizations, religious leaders, or other actors in civil society whose leadership is recognized and legitimized through their participation in diplomatic activities. "Track 3 diplomacy" refers to "people-to-people diplomacy undertaken by individuals and private groups to encourage interaction and understanding between hostile communities and involving awareness raising and empowerment within these communities."⁴ Finally, "multi-track diplomacy" refers to a breakdown of diplomatic tracks that recognizes official and unofficial efforts in addition to state and non-state actors. In this case, "No track is more important than the other, and no one track is independent from the others."⁵ According to Notter and Diamond, actors who use multi-track diplomacy focus on three key points during peacemaking: bridge building, capacity building, and institution building.⁶ The nine tracks of

² (Endowment of the United States Institute of Peace)

³ (Endowment of the United States Institute of Peace)

⁴ (Endowment of the United States Institute of Peace)

⁵ (Notter and Diamond 2)

⁶ (Notter and Diamond 14)

multi-track diplomacy include: government, non-governmental/professional, business, private citizens, research/training/education, activism, religion, funding and communication, and the media. This understanding of diplomacy recognizes the changing reality of the twenty-first century: it is not only states that make change. Instead, states, corporations, activist organizations, media outlets, and the average citizen all affect outcomes and alter events in transnational interactions.

With that in mind, the practice of public diplomacy should no doubt reflect this reality. According to the U.S. Department of State's website, "the mission of American public diplomacy is to support the achievement of U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, advance national interests, and enhance national security by informing and influencing foreign publics and expanding and strengthening the relationship between the people and the Government of the United States and citizens of the rest of the world."⁷ This comprises a broad range of activities implemented through the State Department's headquarters in Washington, D.C. and the several American embassies and consulates overseas. The significance of public diplomacy (PD) lies in its ability to access actors who are not involved within the normal practice of traditional diplomacy, which is generally a government-to-government interaction. For this reason, PD permits a government to access the average citizen in another country in hopes of affecting their opinion which, in turn, should affect the relations between the two governments. PD, however, must compete with other actors who provide information. "Moreover, because most ideas that people absorb about a country are beyond the control of national governments—books, CDs, films, television programs, or brands and consumer products with national connotations—governments can only have an impact at the margins by seeking to clear paths for the most

⁷ (U.S Department of State)

positive messages to reach mass audiences while working directly to influence opinion of niche audiences.”⁸

For American embassies, especially in host states with a particularly hostile citizenry, these competing narratives can be an ongoing challenge. Public affairs officers—employees within the U.S. Foreign Service track who focuses on public diplomacy activities in American embassies—must evaluate which projects and programs to establish in order to best reach the host nation’s citizens. This evaluation includes determining a target population, a target issue that the United States feels particularly strong about (e.g., democracy, women’s rights, freedom of religion, etc.), and assessing its success upon completion. In essence, public diplomacy is an international public relations effort by governments in order to ‘win the hearts and minds’ of the population in the host nation of the embassy.

In order to ‘win the hearts and minds,’ the United States has had to compete in the perpetual war of ideas. Walid Phares argues that “the audience for [ideas] has vastly increased with globalization and more widespread access to media (especially electronic media) and thus today a great number of individuals influence whether a policy obtains support.”⁹ According to Phares, the notion of the “war of ideas” became prominent after 9/11 when the media, Bush administration and academics discussed the role of ideology in counterterrorism efforts especially in light of the American public’s main question: why do they hate us? The dichotomy of democracy and radical jihadism was put forth: either a citizen of the world could choose to take part in the creation of a robust, pluralistic democracy in his or her home country or they could join the (generally) Islamic fundamentalist fight against Western imperialism that

⁸ (Leonard 50)

⁹ (Phares)

discourages pluralism and prefers the reinstatement of the Islamic caliphate. This dichotomy reflects a rather Huntingtonian approach to international politics that disregards American foreign policy directives in direct contradiction to these values; one in which the reality of the United States' relationship with certain dictators in the Middle East leads the average Arab in the region to question American motives and beliefs.

This particular “war of ideas” became a focal point for national security and intelligence agencies in the United States after 9/11. The approaches varied. For the Department of State, public diplomacy was the path to changing minds about the United States: if people in the Middle East and, more broadly, the Muslim World, know about life in the United States and the values that the nation espouses, they would not choose radicalism. For the Department of Defense, ideology was (and to some extent, still is) viewed cynically. To quote the Director of Research at the U.S. Army War College in a report in reference to public diplomacy, “Winning a popularity contest is far less important than undermining al-Qaeda’s ability to recruit.”¹⁰ Interestingly, recommendations on how to undermine al-Qaeda in that particular report do not reflect on the causes of radicalism, but rather, military strategies on how to neutralize their abilities and access to resources. Such strategies are not entirely efficient since they do not solve the problem: they focus on the symptoms rather than the causes. This, however, is where public diplomacy is most useful.

Unfortunately, America has a public relations problem.¹¹ The Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project reports that, “in Egypt, for example, despite all the tumult of the revolution, America’s image remains roughly where it was four years ago—then 22 percent

¹⁰ (Echevarria II)

¹¹ (Wolf and Rosen 1)

expressed a favorable opinion of the United States; in the 2012 poll, it was 19 percent.”¹² The percentage is even lower for Pakistanis and Jordanians: 12 percent. The Pew Research Center notes that it is important to understand these opinions in a wider context of Muslim distrust over American foreign policy intentions in the Middle East and Southwest Asia. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001, the U.S. government has overhauled its efforts in public diplomacy. Congressional research committees, government agencies, think tanks, contractors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have produced various reports on the state of U.S. public diplomacy with an emphasis on efforts in the Middle East and ability to reach out to Muslim communities around the world, both at home and abroad, to win the ‘war of ideas.’ After 9/11, “the Bush administration rolled out some of the most innovative public diplomacy initiatives in U.S. history.”¹³ These expensive initiatives included the Shared Values campaign of 2002, Radio Sawa, Hi Magazine, and Al-Hurra television station. Despite these initiatives, R.S. Zaharna notes, “U.S. public diplomacy under the Bush administration failed to crack the code for how to effectively communicate with the Arab and Islamic world.”¹⁴

Many have criticized these initiatives for being based on the Cold War style of public diplomacy that included a one-way messaging campaign. Zaharna gives three reasons for the ultimate failure of these attempts at reforming public diplomacy after 9/11. First, the rush to produce materials to counter anti-Americanism “was very much about fighting an information battle rather than communicating with other people.” PD at this time focused on the competition for information in the market of ideas in the Muslim world, which makes the assumption that citizens in the target countries are passive receivers of information instead of actors that should

¹² (Wike)

¹³ (Zaharna 2)

¹⁴ Ibid

be engaged. Second, “U.S. public diplomacy appeared to have little understanding or appreciation for the intended audience.” Zaharna notes that this approach envisions Muslims, and Islam in general, as a monolith or unitary actor that lacks diversity in concerns and actions. And finally, “U.S. credibility suffered from a disconnect between U.S. public diplomacy and U.S. foreign policies.” In many cases, U.S. action abroad does not appear to reflect the rhetoric.

During our research trip to Cairo in January 2013, we spoke with local Egyptians about the topic of using religious themes and actors in U.S. public diplomacy, and inevitably their opinions of the United States emerged. This final issue that Zaharna describes seemed to be the Egyptian interviewees’ main concern. Before we could even address issues of public diplomacy activities by the U.S. Embassy of Cairo, our interviewees mentioned American hypocrisy manifest in the “two-faced” approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Other conflicts, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, were mentioned in addition to U.S. support of dictators such as former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and current President Mohamed Morsi. Explaining the rationale behind U.S. foreign policy decisions seemed to do little to persuade our interviewees to change their opinion of the U.S. government.

In recent years, it appears that the Obama administration has recognized the importance of engagement as a part of public diplomacy instead of using PD as a tool for just providing information in hopes of changing minds about the United States. “The Obama administration is of the opinion that the globalization of information and development within the communications industry has had an immense impact on the attitudes, speech and actions of the global community.”¹⁵ It is undeniable that the rapid speed of information exchange affects public opinion, and for that reason it has become necessary for public diplomacy to reflect this new

¹⁵ (Wenzhong and Baodong)

reality. President Obama's first overseas speech was given at Cairo University in June of 2009. This oft-mentioned speech is indicated as a turning point in U.S. government public diplomacy initiatives. During his speech, President Obama made use of Islamic greetings, Qura'nic terminology, and discussed the importance of Islam for Muslims in America. He called for changing the relationship between the United States and the "Muslim world" and pointed to specific issues of contention which require relationship building in order to solve.¹⁶ Despite the promises, few key points have been achieved since 2009. One of the speech drafters, Dalia Mogahed, discussed with German newspaper *Spiegel Online* how a poll taken after the Cairo speech in Egypt indicated that most Egyptians thought the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the most important issue of the speech. "The impression many Egyptians now have is that the president hasn't done enough to improve the situation...in the Arab world, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a very important issue."¹⁷ This important PD move by the president signaled the need for a new, comprehensive approach to the changing reality of the world at large.

In January 2010, the State Department rolled out its new global strategic framework for public diplomacy. It was developed to address the rise in communication exchange, the global youth population, the increasing prominence of women in politics and civil society around the world, and other over-arching issues that affect the world of the twenty-first century. Five strategic imperatives were identified: to pro-actively shape global narratives; expand and strengthen people-to-people relationships; counter violent extremisms; better inform policy-making; and, redeploy resources in strategic alignment with shifting priorities.¹⁸ Former Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Judith A. McHale noted, "in this information

¹⁶ (The New York Times)

¹⁷ (Mogahed)

¹⁸ (McHale)

saturated age we must do a better job of framing our national narrative. We must become more pro-active and less reactive...”¹⁹ The second prong of this framework—“expand and strengthen people-to-people relationships”—concentrates efforts on the ways in which the State Department connects with citizens at home and abroad through the creation of spaces and forums for engagement.

This approach reflects what academics have called “new public diplomacy.” “New public diplomacy” no doubt has its origins from the phrase “new diplomacy,” or as William R. Moomaw put it, “a complex set of rules of engagement that has evolved to deal with the ever more complex set of issues that face modern national states and their relationships.”²⁰ Moomaw discusses how issues such as human rights, labor rights, and environmentalism make the traditional diplomat feel uncomfortable. He argues that this is because such cross-border issues affect the traditional understanding of national sovereignty and raise more questions about how a state should respond. “New public diplomacy” also makes this update, from focusing on a “narrow state-centric model to reflecting the changing nature brought about by new players and global communication...”²¹ Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph S. Nye says, “in this approach to public diplomacy, government policy is aimed at promoting and participating in, rather than controlling, such cross-border networks.”²² This is not to say, however, that the Department of State did not engage with citizens in the embassies’ host countries until recently. On the contrary, public diplomacy programming has been a popular instrument by which people around the world discover the United States, especially through study abroad, the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), and language training. Rather, the emphasis on “new” refers

¹⁹ (McHale)

²⁰ (Moomaw)

²¹ (Ezell 61)

²² (Nye)

to changing the approaches through which U.S. diplomats communicate American ideals and policy objectives to foreign audiences.

Most recently, former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton mentioned the current challenges of PD when she testified in front of the Senate and House of Representatives in response to the investigation on the attacks on the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya in September 2012. During her Senate testimony, she stated, “We can kill leaders, but until we help establish democratic institutions, until we do a better job communicating our values and building relationships, we’re going to be faced with this level of instability.”²³ During the House of Representatives testimony, Clinton discussed the difficulty of the State Department in competing with narratives replete with anti-Americanism when she said,

You know, I've -- I've said this to this committee before, a lot of new members on it -- you know, we have abdicated the broadcasting arena. You know, yes, we have private stations, CNN, Fox, NBC, all of that. They're out there, they convey information. But we're not doing what we did during the Cold War. Our Broadcasting Board of Governors is practically defunct in terms of its capacity to be able to tell a message around the world. So we're abdicating the ideological arena, and we need to get back into it. We have the best values, we have the best narrative. Most people in the world just want to have a good, decent life that is supported by a good, decent job and raise their families. And we're letting the jihadist narrative fill a void. We need to get in there and compete -- and we can do it successfully.²⁴

The message Clinton describes is clear for diplomats, but the ways in which they get the message across to citizens of all levels of society in foreign countries remains a challenge.

²³ (Committee on Foreign Relations)

²⁴ (Committee on Foreign Affairs)

When we met with Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) at the U.S. Embassy in Cairo during January 2013, we discussed some of the public diplomacy activities that actively encourage tolerance of religious diversity and participation by religious leaders. It is necessary for FSOs to determine which of America's policy objectives resonate best with Egyptian society while considering how to approach PD programming, in general. From there, FSOs have the challenging task of determining how to incorporate both U.S. policy objectives and the goal of engaging with the community, which is especially difficult given the many limitations from the budget to the size of the target population for a specific project. Since religion is a major part of most Egyptians' lives, it must be taken into consideration but it cannot be the driving force for PD activities.²⁵

As we discussed with the FSOs, effectiveness is a popular catchphrase these days but in many cases, it is difficult to determine. It is necessary to evaluate effectiveness in the long-term outlook and actions of alumni of the programs. Current Under Secretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Tara Sonenshine talked about the challenges of measuring effectiveness in PD programming at the Heritage Foundation in December 2012. She said,

We understand and we continue to address the challenges. The science of evaluation is still evolving and we are building a body of evidence over time. Not only that, public diplomacy is a process whose results work more obviously over the long term than the short term. That requires observation over long periods. You need data against which you can compare. You need people to conduct it. That costs money. And none of this is made easier by a culture and political system in which short term results so often get the attention.²⁶

²⁵ (Anonymous)

²⁶ (Sonenshine)

Here, she emphasizes that the State Department’s diplomatic efforts generally lack long-term, strategic thinking and are instead affected by the events of the day. Since that is the case, measuring effectiveness faces further issues when their results must be shown to lawmakers and taxpayers who want immediate results. However, the fact remains that most of the results of public diplomacy projects—whether administered directly through the embassies or their NGO partners—require time in order to show “effectiveness.” For instance, if, as Tara Sonenshine pointed out, the goal is to encourage the American value of freedom of expression, then the public diplomacy activities that bring together “foreign journalists and media professionals in the United States to experience our open, free media environment” show their results through surveys and follow-ups after time has passed that indicate these participants went on to fight for freedom of information in their home countries.²⁷

In the short-term, the effectiveness might be in the fact that people attend the programs at all. As one of our interviewees suggested, Egyptians or any citizen who takes part in programs of exchange and engagement are part of a self-selective group who already has interest in building bridges of understanding between their own society and the United States.²⁸ Hussein Amin touches upon this issue when he mentions, “Polls have consistently shown that audiences in Egypt and the Middle East already know and understand American values and that they share those values as well as the aspirations of Americans....”²⁹ If the desire for such values as democracy, freedom of religion, and freedom of speech appear to exist in the region already, then the focus on “new public diplomacy” must shift to relationship building through dialogue to

²⁷ (Sonenshine)

²⁸ (Ketterer)

²⁹ (Amin 125)

better assist in the development of these values in the region. Measuring effectiveness is an issue we will revisit again later in this paper.

The various reports, recommendations, and conferences that ensued after 9/11 in the policymaking world all seemed to ask the same two questions: what went wrong and how can we fix it? The recommendations by government agencies, think tanks and NGOs all seemed to suggest that a “new” approach to engagement in public diplomacy was key, but something was missing: religion. The U.S.-Muslim Engagement Project produced a report entitled “Changing Course: A New Direction for U.S. Relations with the Muslim World” in 2008 in which they evaluated the current state of U.S. policy that adversely affects the nation’s relations with the Muslim world, at home and abroad. In it, they suggested a complete overhaul in U.S. government, business and civil society activities that focus on engagement with Muslim-majority countries, such as changing visa processes, encouraging religious leader engagement between the U.S. and Middle Eastern countries, and the creation of more study abroad programming to encourage cross-cultural exchange.³⁰

Another report by the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World commissioned by the House of Representatives, “Changing Minds, Winning Peace,” was published in 2003. In the recommendations section for the State Department, it suggested the creation of a “Public Communications Unit for the Arab and Muslim World” in addition to the need to shift financial resources to current priorities and needs concerning PD in the region.³¹ In the various reports, religious engagement was consistently mentioned as an area of particular concern in public diplomacy activities in the Middle East.

³⁰ (Leadership Group on U.S.-Muslim Engagement)

³¹ (Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World 64)

Undoubtedly, religion is one of the most contentious issues in political and international affairs theories and its applications. This controversy reflects the idea that the world is becoming more secular and that religion is a thing of the past, but this clearly is not the case. Scholars such as contentious political scientist Samuel P. Huntington and his “clash of civilizations theory,” had predicted an event such as 9/11 would occur. Huntington believed that such events occurred, and would continue to do so, due to the changing world order, one in which the Cold War reality of bipolarity is replaced by emphasis on civilizations around the world, those defined in terms of language, ethnic and religious resemblances.³² According to Huntington, while nation states will continue to be the most powerful actors in international affairs, “the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations.”³³ This happens, he says, because economic modernization weakens traditional identities in an attempt to secularize a society. In reaction to this, “fundamentalist” religious groups move in to reestablish identities and boundaries that are diminished through modernization.³⁴

This bleak picture of religion, and religious identities, in the contemporary world is not shared by all scholars wishing to reevaluate religion’s role in international affairs. These other academics note that while religion’s place in international relations is important in order to understand the changes taking place—either at the state or grassroots level—they do not assert that religion itself is a “generator of repression.”³⁵ Rather, since religion at many times is part of the problem, it can also be part of the solution. These scholars, such as Douglas Johnston of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy, contend that the rational-actor model of decision-making is built upon the assumption that church and state must be separated in

³² (Huntington 21)

³³ Ibid., 22

³⁴ Ibid., 26

³⁵ (Petito and Hatzopoulos 1)

discussions on politics which is informed by the assumption of secularism.³⁶ This led academics and policymakers to look to economic or other geopolitical reasons by default as the reason behind state and non-state actors' actions.

Ultimately, it is important for Washington to register that “the United States has entered a postsecular era—a period where the presence of religion in global politics is unprecedented.”³⁷ [No emphasis added] Darrell Ezell, in his book *Beyond Cairo*, notes that the idea of secularism emerged during a time of great social change in Europe. Ezell explains that thinkers such as Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and Karl Marx, who postulated that religion was becoming obsolete, assumed that modernization and urbanization turned the concerns and attentions of the “modern man” away from the divine and towards more “contemporary” intellectual activities, such as rationalization and intellectualization.³⁸ Ezell argues that “this position highlights the fact that the only continent that has ventured far in distancing society from religion, both in practice and in its trust in sacred frameworks, is Europe, and not the United States—*since there has yet to be a dramatic decline in religious practice and beliefs in America.*”³⁹ In other words, the religiosity of the American people is not reflected in the foreign policy directives of the government. Western academics and policymakers seem to assume that the experience of secularism and the decline of religion in Europe reflect a similar history of the United States when this is not the case. For hundreds of years, European nation-states fought religious conflict or religiously induced conflict that led to the need for a separation or the recognition that religion should be a private matter. During this time, some European colonists (in some cases for

³⁶ (Johnston 4)

³⁷ (Ezell 35-36)

³⁸ (Ezell 36)

³⁹ (Ezell 37)

religious reasons) fled to the United States and eventually formed what would ensure a separation between religion and government.

Instead, foreign policy directives of the U.S. government are dictated by a realist understanding of the international system, in which decisions of states (the primary unit of analysis in realism) are based on a cost-benefit analysis that does not include religious or sectarian considerations. This is not a reality that can any longer be sustained. Government leaders who use religious rhetoric or consult a religious body in decision-making should indicate to American policymakers that religion is not yet an insignificant factor in diplomacy. Thus, diplomacy requires a new conceptualization through which American diplomats can reach out to individuals who feel religion is an important part of their lives.

In recent years, the U.S. Department of State has starting working in this area. During our interview with the Foreign Service Officers in Cairo, we discussed whether or not religious freedom, or engagement through religious language and/or dialogue, was somehow a different overall goal in PD activities of the Embassy.⁴⁰ They said that encouraging religious freedom is indeed a goal that is part of an overall strategic mission that fosters stability in Egypt during its transition to democracy. Engaging religious leaders and NGOs with grassroots connections is one such means to this end. The officers discussed the perception by media of sectarianism in Egypt and increased tension and violence between Muslims and Christians following the 2011 revolution, but mentioned the cohesiveness of Egyptian society as a whole. They said that encouraging actors and institutions to promote stability in post-revolution Egypt is a goal of the U.S. Embassy, and this obviously means recognizing the importance of religious leaders and their institutions, and their ability to foster development toward a democratic Egypt. For these

⁴⁰ (Anonymous)

officers, the major questions they asked for programming are: which tools work best in Egypt, given the societal context and foreign policy objectives of the U.S. government, and under what circumstances do they work the best.

III. Current Arguments of Religion in Public Diplomacy Scholarship

Most public diplomacy scholars and practitioners recognize that embracing the “new public diplomacy” is the next logical step in PD’s evolution. Part of this new public diplomacy, though, involves increased interaction with non-state actors, including religious communities and institutions. When confronted with the issue of how religion should be included in PD, scholars and practitioners tend to fall into two camps. First, there are those who feel that religion, along with other cultural practices, should be increasingly taught to diplomats in the field, in order to better prepare them to interact with citizens of that country. They also believe that the U.S. Department of State should continue to use religious envoys and have officers within the Department who focus on religion or religious issues.

Others, though, feel that religion should be included in diplomacy to a much greater extent than it is in current practice. The arguments in place that promote the use of religion and religious themes in public diplomacy stem primarily from scholars and practitioners of “faith diplomacy,” or “faith-based diplomacy”, which “involves the incorporation of religious concerns into the practice of international politics.”⁴¹ Brian Cox and Daniel Philpott, members of the CFIA Task Force on Faith-Based Diplomacy, define faith-based diplomacy by its orientation “towards the divine” and “its motivating vision of politics, its assumptions about human nature and the political order, and the norms that govern its conduct [which] all arise from an understanding of the nature and activity of the divine- understood in some traditions as a personal God and in other traditions as the source and meaning of existence.”⁴² Advocates of this paradigm, which has gained popularity in recent years, praise the use of faith in diplomacy for its

⁴¹ (Johnston, Faith-based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik)

⁴² (Cox and Philpott)

ability to blend traditional diplomatic efforts with a deep understanding of religious tradition. Specifically, the religious themes of reconciliation through healing of historic wounds, apology, and forgiveness play an important role in the practices of faith-based diplomacy.⁴³ Perhaps just as important, the religious dimensions of conflict, especially those in the Middle East, seem to call for a solution to conflict that involves an equal amount of dialogue with religion.

In 1999, the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy was formed, with the mission of using faith-based diplomacy to serve as

a bridge between the political and religious communities in support of peacemaking, deploying inter-religious action teams to trouble spots where conflict threatens security or has already broken out, training religious clergy and laity in the tasks of peacemaking, and providing feedback to the theologians and clergy on interpretations of their teaching that are contributing to strife and misunderstanding.⁴⁴

By focusing on identity-based conflicts, specifically those rooted in religion, the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy champions building relationships with religious-based, non-profit organizations in countries experiencing conflict. Chaplains work with individuals in those countries to start dialogue and work out diplomatic solutions to conflict. Though the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy is not directly affiliated with the United States government, the U.S. Department of State, and official American public diplomacy efforts, its understanding of faith diplomacy is echoed in the words of other scholars, who advocate including religion in official diplomatic efforts. Its president, Douglas Johnston, published *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, in 1994. The text, which includes case studies

⁴³ (Cox and Philpott)

⁴⁴ (Johnston, *Faith-based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik*)

about how religious or spiritual factors can help to prevent and resolve conflict, is still required reading by the U.S. Foreign Service.

Thomas Farr, author and professor at Georgetown University, is another member of the foreign affairs community actively engaging in and promoting the use of religion in public diplomacy. In his 2008 book *World of Faith and Freedom*, Farr actively critiques what he calls America's "secularist diplomatic culture," or its "reticence about addressing the religious factor in other cultures and indeed in seeing culture as an expression of religion at all."⁴⁵ Arguing that religion has, and will continue to have, a significant role on public matters around the world, Farr believes that American diplomats are presently "ill-prepared, both philosophically and bureaucratically, to address a world of public faith."⁴⁶

As a major proponent of making the defense and expansion of religious freedom around the globe a core component of U.S. diplomacy, Farr argues that utilizing the power of religion to its fullest extent would "give the United States a powerful new tool for advancing ordered liberty and for undermining religion-based extremism at a time when other strategies have proved inadequate."⁴⁷ Highlighting America's approach to interacting with Islam specifically, he believes that U.S. diplomacy programs have been incoherent and inconsistent, and "have not addressed the main drivers of culture, politics, and civil society [in the Middle East since 9/11]: Muslim religious communities and Islamic political parties."⁴⁸

At an event for the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life titled "Religion and International Diplomacy: A Ten- Year Progress Report", held in May 2007, Farr argued that the

⁴⁵ (Farr 11)

⁴⁶ (Farr 9-11)

⁴⁷ (Farr, "Diplomacy in an Age of Faith: Religious Freedom and National Security")

⁴⁸ (Farr, "Diplomacy in an Age of Faith: Religious Freedom and National Security")

public diplomacy practitioners in the United States need to move beyond interest in religion in public diplomacy stemming from their own religious convictions, but, rather, religion should be viewed as “a policy problem for our country, a national interest problem.”⁴⁹ While advocating for increased understanding about religious traditions abroad, Farr believes that training at the Foreign Service Institute must better incorporate training on religion. He states

We do not have the training at the Foreign Service Institute we need. It is ad-hoc at best. We need to move from the current situation, in which we have some excellent people in the Foreign Service who happen to be interested in religion because they are Mormons or Muslims or Holy Rollers or whatever they are. That is not how we ought to be engaging the world of public religion in the 21st century. We should incorporate it into our training. We should, in my view, have a sub-specialty under political and economic training for Foreign Service officers that engages religion.⁵⁰

According to Farr, public diplomacy practitioners should be well-versed in religious traditions and faith dialogue to ultimately achieve policy goals, not because they come from specific religious traditions and are eager to draw from their own personal religious dogma.

Philip Seib, the Director of University of Southern California’s Center on Public Diplomacy, has also highlighted faith diplomacy’s rising importance in the diplomatic community. In March 2011, the Center organized a conference to examine the growing discussion about faith diplomacy titled “Faith Diplomacy: Religion and Global Publics.” Mainly, the event explored the ways in which faith can strengthen foreign policy and how America’s religious communities can add to public diplomacy programs around the world.⁵¹ Seib feels that the world is becoming more religious, and thus, foreign policy can only become more effective

⁴⁹ (Pew Research Center)

⁵⁰ (Pew Research Center)

⁵¹ (Seib)

in recognizing the importance of faith. Seib notes that the United States will specifically have difficulty maintaining a presence in the Middle East if it is “unprepared to address the heightened significance of religion” in the region, where America could “be relegated to the status of outsider.”⁵²

Most supporters of the use of religion in public diplomacy believe it would be a positive addition to the United States’ interactions with foreign populations because, in part, they feel that religious understanding and similarities in faith can bridge gaps that are otherwise fraught with misunderstanding and conflict. Incorporating faith into diplomacy allows America to show respect for other cultures, rather than just preaching tolerance and “othering” the peoples with whom the U.S. wishes to interact. Though it may not be a conscious effort, the standard for most diplomats has been to avoid discussing religious convictions and steer clear of religious themes in diplomatic dialogue, unless prompted by the host country’s citizens to engage in such discourse. This is especially true in regions such as the Middle East where U.S. Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) may feel uncomfortable talking about religion due to the prevailing opinion in the area that the U.S. government unfairly treats Muslims around the world. For instance, FSOs in Egypt may have to be very careful in talking about religion with the public, because their credibility and sensitivity could be questioned, and it remains important to address religion at the right times. Religion, though, has always remained a secondary factor in U.S. foreign policy. Those interested in increasing the role of religious faith in PD, however, hope to change that norm.

Advocates of faith-based diplomacy, including former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, believe that ignoring religion does not make religious motivations disappear; instead,

⁵² (Seib)

as Albright notes in *Faith and Diplomacy*, “more often they lie dormant only to rise up again at the least convenient moment.”⁵³ Albright sees using religion as a way to capitalize on its ability to use core, shared values to bring people together in harmony, and to ignore those benefits in foreign policy is wasting the immense power of religion over how people feel and act.

Ultimately, like Farr, Albright recommends that faith-diplomacy is best practiced when diplomats have developed a deep understanding of the faiths commonly practiced where they are stationed, and when they can communicate and cooperate effectively with local religious leaders.

Other scholars and public diplomacy practitioners, though, feel that the separation of church and state in the United States presents an insurmountable challenge to including religious discourse in public diplomacy abroad. Although they recognize that religion is an important issue in public diplomacy, among pieces of a country’s culture, they believe that the focus should be on teaching diplomats more about the religions in the regions in which they are stationed, but not using religion as a public diplomacy tool. Thus, the key difference between supporters of faith diplomacy and its critics is the level with which diplomats engage in religion.

Finally, there are those scholars and practitioners who feel that isolating the issue of religion within PD, or diplomacy in general, is ineffective in America’s efforts to achieve peace in regions around the world. Amartya Sen, in his essay “Violence, Identity and Poverty,” reminds his readers that “no matter how momentous the religious differences may appear in the context of warfare today, there are other divisions that also have the potential for creating strife and carnage.”⁵⁴ Sen argues that when people choose to explain differences between groups using one lens- whether it is religion, economics, or politics- they cannot provide “an adequate

⁵³ (Albright)

⁵⁴ (Sen 14)

understanding of the causation of widespread violence and the absence of societal peace.”⁵⁵ A firm believer in moving beyond focusing on just one identifier, like religion, Sen is one of many scholars who feel that interactions across cultures must use a variety of sources. Though his essay focuses primarily on the sources behind conflict and violence around the world, we can easily expand upon Sen’s thesis and apply it to diplomatic techniques used by the United States to quell violence and conflict.

Across the spectrum, scholars and practitioners of public diplomacy recognize that religion has a place in America’s diplomatic interactions with countries abroad, especially in the “Muslim world” and the Middle East. The extent to which religion plays a role in those interactions, however, continues to be cause for debate. In our research, we have attempted to determine how these different theories are ultimately put into practice by the United States Department of State and its partners in the region. Some programs, like the Al-Azhar English Language Resource Center in Cairo, Egypt, engage in religious dialogue indirectly. Other initiatives, like Georgetown Professor Paul Heck’s SORAC (The Study of Religions Across Civilizations) program, engage in religion directly. In the following section we will explore these case studies, and analyze their effectiveness within the United States’ overarching public diplomacy goals.

Before delving into specific case studies, it is worth discussing opinions of people in the Arab world on this particular matter. While our research trip in Cairo highlighted opinions of Egyptians concerning U.S. public diplomacy activities, it is not difficult to extrapolate such opinions to the rest of the Arab world. When asked whether or not they had attended public diplomacy events by the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, all of our respondents said “no.” When asked

⁵⁵ (Sen 15)

why, they generally gave answers indicative of a lack of inclusiveness, awareness of activities communicated by the Embassy, or because of fear they might be hassled by security at the Embassy or further investigated after taking part in events.⁵⁶⁵⁷ Our Egyptian respondents were in their late twenties and early thirties and so they generally felt unwelcome by Embassy activities because they assumed they were targeted toward high school or younger college aged students. One respondent, a doctor, indicated he might attend events held by the Embassy if they offered or communicated opportunities that might benefit his career, such as study or training programs. When asked whether or not they believed religion should be an issue discussed or addressed during PD activities by the U.S. Embassy, all said “no.” While Egyptians might agree that there are internal problems or issues they are working through, they did not believe these should be addressed by other countries, especially the United States. One respondent said that Egyptians generally do not focus on solving these issues anyway since Al Azhar and the Coptic Church and other such religious organizations tend to take the lead in solving the problems or try to create opportunities for reconciliation.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ (Alsayed)

⁵⁷ (Mansour)

⁵⁸ (Alsayed)

IV. Case Studies: Public Diplomacy Programs in the Middle East

The United States is currently using a variety of public diplomacy (PD) tactics in the Middle East to engage and communicate with citizens of the countries in the region. Programs range from educational exchange programs for scholars, students and visitor programs to language training and cultural events. All of these activities are utilized in American public diplomacy to improve the United States' image and reputation abroad through communicating American values and goals. The PD activities take place in a variety of ways. In many cases, U.S. embassies will directly host cultural events and activities in the host country and invite a specific target audience, such as youth or business leaders depending on the specific policy objectives of the strategic plan of the embassy. Another method is in partnership with U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The embassy may work with USAID in order to assist in grant making opportunities to fund projects and local NGOs that are able to reach out to local or grassroots targets since they are already well-established and held as credible within the society of the host country. And yet another method is for the embassies to partner with American NGOs who wish to do work in the host country, such as AMIDEAST or SORAC (mentioned below).

The enormous range of programs currently at the disposal of United States embassies and the U.S. Department of State prevent us from analyzing each program individually, but for this project we will explore two specific examples of public diplomacy programs in the region: the Al-Azhar English Language Resource Center in Cairo, Egypt and the Study of Religions Across Civilization program based in Washington, D.C. and Rabat, Morocco. Each of these programs

provides a valuable insight into the individual successes and failures of the U.S. government's public diplomacy programs that focus on religion in some capacity, both directly and indirectly.

Specifically, we chose these case studies because they are representative of two common forms of public diplomacy in the region: language learning centers and student exchanges. Though not all are funded by the U.S. government, language learning centers around the Middle East and North Africa are managed by a variety of groups, from embassies to non-profit organizations to private firms. Student exchanges, like the SORAC program, are also incredibly popular, although the number of students studying abroad in the region is considerably lower than the amount of students studying in other areas around the world.

As both the ELRC and the SORAC program receive at least partial funding from U.S. embassies, they are directly connected to U.S. public diplomacy efforts. However, though they represent popular forms of public diplomacy, we discovered that they are in fact incredibly unique in their ability to effectively navigate and engage with religion in a way that we believe could potentially be replicated in other areas in the Middle East.

The Al-Azhar English Language Resource Center (ELRC)

One of the many programs sponsored by the U.S. State Department in Cairo is the English Language Resource Center (ELRC) at Al-Azhar University. Founded in 2007 at the university's Naser City campus, the ELRC is a prime example of American public diplomacy mixing with the religious beliefs of the people of Egypt. As a collaboration between the U.S. Embassy and Al-Azhar the ELRC is run by 2-4 American English Language Fellows chosen by the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and Georgetown University, and overseen by the U.S. Embassy in Cairo's Regional English Language Officer

(RELO). The ELRC is an interesting case study in the ways in which the U.S. Department of State relies on the assistance of both its embassies and its non-profit partners to carry out public diplomacy missions abroad. For instance, the U.S. Department of State provides a grant to Georgetown University, which is then used to recruit potential teachers, place teachers in the correct region, and pay the American English Language Fellows during their 10-month fellowship.⁵⁹ Though the State Department becomes the point of contact for Fellows once they are placed in various countries, fellows at the ELRC ultimately work with three different organizations to carry out the program: the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, Georgetown University, and Al-Azhar University.

As its name suggests, the main focus of the ELRC is to train junior faculty and graduate student teaching assistants at Al-Azhar in the English language. Most students and faculty are from the Islamic or Arabic Studies departments, and are provided with up to 2 years' worth of instruction. The remaining students, often from department such as commerce, agriculture, and the sciences, are allowed to study at the ELRC for up to one year. Classes meet four days a week, typically Monday through Thursday, for three hours a day. The ELRC offers varying levels of English language instruction, starting with beginner through advanced study. The center also exists to "serve as a resource for Al-Azhar University students, alumni, faculty, and staff, as well as Egyptian educators interested in enhancing dialogue and understanding between Egypt and the United States."⁶⁰

Though Al-Azhar had used a similar program funded by the British Council before establishing the American ELRC, many faculty members at the university felt that the English

⁵⁹ (Arruda)

⁶⁰ (English Language Resource Center)

language learning provided by the British Council's program was unsatisfactory. A spokesperson at Al-Azhar, Omar Al-Deeb, explained "what initiated the establishment of the centre is that we made an English assessment of the lecturers and the assisting professors teaching at four of Al-Azhar's theological faculties at the British Council. The result was not satisfactory at all. Only four reached the pre-intermediate level. Al-Azhar's administration found that each one will cost the university a minimum of LE50,000 if enrolled in courses at the British Council."⁶¹ Increased amounts of funding from the American Embassy and additional levels of coursework ultimately led to a more successful program.

While some faculty members welcomed the new program, the opening of the ELRC caused some controversy among others in 2007. In an article from the Egyptian newspaper Al-Ahram Weekly, published shortly after the ELRC's opening, one Al-Azhar professor is quoted as saying

Most of the professors at the university oppose the opening of the centre because we abhor the brutal U.S. foreign policies in the Middle East. Al-Azhar played a significant role throughout history in resisting French and British occupation and we view this American centre as a gradual cultural occupation which will eventually lead to American hegemony over Al-Azhar curricula.⁶²

Concerns over accepting U.S. funding for the program, employing U.S. citizens to teach English to Al-Azhar faculty and students, and questions about what would be taught within the classes made many Egyptians skeptical of the program. Some Egyptians felt that the center would be used for indoctrination or to hide some hidden American agenda. Azza Korayem, sociologist at the National Social Studies Research Centre, was quoted as saying "He who receives a gift loses

⁶¹ (Ahmed)

⁶² Ibid

his liberty. I am dubious of U.S. intentions for many reasons. After 9/11 the U.S. regarded Islam as the enemy and sought to limit its prevalence in the world, so I find it perplexing that the U.S. opens a centre to help Muslims communicate with others in order to serve Islam. It is a paradox."⁶³ Others questioned the practicality of the Center, arguing that many Egyptian professors at Al-Azhar obtained their PhDs abroad, and are thus able to speak the English language at a highly advanced level.⁶⁴

In speaking with one current English Language Fellow employed at the ELRC, Maria Arruda, it is clear that some students in the program continue to feel some skepticism and concern upon entering the program. She said,

Some of [the students] have come to me and told me that they were hesitant about signing up for classes at the center or continuing their studies because the U.S. Embassy is involved. So they wanted to hear from me- why is the U.S. embassy involved here at Al-Azhar, and what do they have at stake? Is there another agenda behind this? They think very critically when it comes to the U.S. government and the U.S. embassy, so they've been kind of more hesitant about even coming to the center itself.⁶⁵

Over time, though, she said they came to realize that the top priority of those teaching English at the ELRC is to promote understanding of the English language in the hopes that it will eventually foster increased understanding about the United States, in general.

Beyond English language instruction, the ERLC at Al-Azhar has provided a unique and effective way to foster dialogue between Americans and the Muslim community in Egypt. The U.S. Embassy in Cairo has not always been willing to embrace religious and inter-faith dialogue programming, yet the ELRC and its English Language Fellows remain one of the most effective

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ (Arruda)

means for creating dialogue between the Muslim community in Cairo and American citizens. By focusing on English language learning, the ELRC is able to appease those in the United States who feel that American public diplomacy should stay away from religious programming and focus instead on issues like language, but it also allows for more natural interaction between members of a prestigious center of Sunni Islamic learning and American citizens. By planning cultural events and exchange programs outside of the classroom, American English Language Fellows and their Muslim students are able to form relationships outside of the classroom, and engage in honest dialogue about religion, politics, and the relationship between the United States and the global Muslim community.⁶⁶

Most recently, the Center has brought speakers into the classroom like Imam Mohammad Bashar Arafat, who spoke to Al-Azhar students about the importance of inter-faith dialogue and hosted a discussion about the benefits of cultural exchanges for Muslims. Tim Sebastian, television journalist and moderator of *The Doha Debates*, was another recent speaker who talked with students at the ELRC about the benefits of debating. Although neither of these conversations were marketed as promoting religious and interfaith discussion, both ultimately led to conversations about religion: for Imam Bashar Arafat's talk, students talked about the potential benefits of global exchanges as tools for learning more about how Muslims live abroad in Europe and America. Mr. Sebastian's discussion raised questions about who had the authority to debate within Islamic culture, and while some students agreed that debate can be beneficial, others stated that they were not qualified to debate because debating should be left to imams and other qualified scholars.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ (English Language Resource Center)

⁶⁷ (Arruda)

Beyond the experience of the Al-Azhar students, the ELRC also plays an important part in the dialogue between the United States and Egypt for the American English Language Fellows. Ms. Arruda stated “I think [the ELRC is] important because the students have access to people like me from the States, and others, to ask questions about things they would have asked their fellow Egyptians about, and they might not understand the right answer.”⁶⁸ Through daily interaction and cultural experiences, the end result is a learning experience for both the teacher and the student.

Though it has a great deal of positive impact, we feel that the ELRC is not an ideal program for fostering increased dialogue and understanding about religion in Egypt. For one thing, the very structure of the program poses some flaws. English Language Fellows, for instance, are not required to have knowledge of the Arabic language, or even take Arabic classes while stationed in Cairo. As Ms. Arruda mentioned in our interview, “I live in Maadi [an area of Cairo frequented by expatriates], I’m an English teacher at Al-Azhar; so I’m speaking English all day with my colleagues and the staff. I come here and I speak English. So I really haven’t had an opportunity-or a need-to use it. Except for in taxis, so I know ‘taxi Arabic.’”⁶⁹ We feel this severely limits the ability of the American fellows to communicate and understand their students at the fullest level, thus leading to an interesting power dynamic in conversations. The language barrier, we believe, severely hinders legitimate dialogue. While Al-Azhar students gain some new understanding about America and its language, can the same be said for the American English Language Fellows and their understanding about Islam and the Middle East?

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Ibid

Additionally, this program is limited in its scope because it exists as a unique partnership with one religious university. It is unclear if this program could be replicated in different locations in the Middle East, especially considering the different degrees of willingness of religious institutions across the region to work so directly with U.S. embassies. Given that Al-Azhar agreed to start this program in the years after 9/11 when the university was interested in improving its reputation, and as Ms. Arruda mentioned “so that people weren’t thinking that they’re close-minded, and that they’re completely adverse to anything Western.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, recent unrest in Cairo has caused the cancellation of some activities at the ERLC, leading the U.S. to wonder about the effectiveness of PD initiatives such as English language learning centers when the very teachers at the center feel unsafe or are unable to attend programs.⁷¹

Ultimately, the English Language Resource Center at Al-Azhar University stands as one of the most effective tools of American public diplomacy in Cairo, and has proven to increase dialogue about both religion and America’s relationship with the global Muslim community. It is limited, however, by its potential inability for replication in other locations and the problematic nature of the linguistic barriers between American teachers and Al-Azhar students.

The Study of Religions Across Civilizations (SORAC)

The Study of Religions Across Civilizations (SORAC) program is an academic exchange program based in Georgetown University and Muhammad V University in Rabat, Morocco. Established by Dr. Paul Heck, SORAC “effectively strengthens the bonds of knowledge between the Arabic and American civilizations around the study of religion, offering programs and resources in Arabic and English for scholars and leaders of religion to acquire exact knowledge

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ (English Language Resource Center)

of the religious other.”⁷² This innovative program brings together graduate students from the United States and Morocco to participate in conferences aimed at studying religion in companionship with other believers. During these conferences, students build trust between each other so that they may discuss important subject matters within religious studies in a comfortable space of dialogue. The SORAC website highlights some of the topics discussed, which include perceptions of believers and non-believers, the purpose of suffering, and the role of Abraham in the Abrahamic faiths.

A “scholarly project” developed from an idea Dr. Heck had as a graduate student, the SORAC program was created as a means “to connect American graduate students and Arab, Muslim graduate students, and get them to study together and learn from- not only the same texts, but get them to see and be exposed to how they think differently about the same texts.”⁷³ After receiving a Fulbright grant in 2008 to begin working on developing a program that would effectively answer Heck’s question of why different groups study religion in different ways, Heck searched for a country to house the project. An unsuccessful bid to establish SORAC in Syria, due to what Heck says “when it came down to it, no one wanted to collaborate with an American,” led Heck to establish the program in Morocco at Muhammad V University, where he had developed a good relationship with the dean, Dr. Mohammed Amine Smaili, a former participant in the Department of State’s International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP).⁷⁴ Dr. Heck became the first non-Muslim U.S. lecturer of comparative religions in the Islamic Studies Department at Muhammad V University.⁷⁵ From its initial founding, the SORAC program has

⁷² (The Study of Religions Across Civilizations)

⁷³ (Heck)

⁷⁴ (U.S. Department of State)

⁷⁵ (U.S. Department of State, Demonstrating the Power of People-to-People Exchanges)

receiving funding from a variety of sources, including the U.S. Embassy in Morocco, but also many private grants.

The SORAC program takes place between three to six weeks at either Muhammad V University or Georgetown University, depending on the year. Each program's course objectives reflect the society in which the program takes place. For the program in Morocco, students "focused on methods of reading scripture and the role of reason in faith."⁷⁶ The course in Morocco takes place completely in Arabic, which requires that the American students who participate have obtained a high-level of Arabic fluency. Dr. Heck emphasizes the importance of the Arabic language component so that the American students may use and understand Arabic as a living language in order to understand the religious discussion on the same terms as their Moroccan counterparts. As one of his requirements for acceptance into the program, Heck explained that students "have to have a decent level of Arabic. We do it all in Arabic when we're over there [in Morocco].... they don't have to have a perfect level, but enough to swim along and follow things" Heck emphasized that language learning was an important by-product of the SORAC program when talking about this element, as students are forced to "live" the language, and not remain isolated in a language classroom, as is the case in other study abroad programs.⁷⁷

When the program takes place in Washington, D.C., it focuses mainly on "religion in American history with special attention to the role of religion in U.S. society in distinction from its role in lawmaking and politics."⁷⁸ Though SORAC is housed at Georgetown University and has approval from the President of the University, it is a completely independent 401-C3 non-profit organization and receives no funding from Georgetown. During their time here, Moroccan

⁷⁶ (The Study of Religions Across Civilizations)

⁷⁷ (Heck)

⁷⁸ (The Study of Religions Across Civilizations)

students attend classes on religion at Georgetown, attend lectures at Catholic University, and visit local religious sites like the National Cathedral and various mosques in D.C. Heck emphasizes that the focus on knowledge is in what part helps Moroccan visitors to gain a better understanding of the U.S. during their time here; he says, “It’s not just ‘oh, bring them to America.’ But, when they’re here, we give them a really intense knowledge experience.”⁷⁹ By showcasing the similarities in thinking about religion between the Moroccans and groups like the Dominicans at Catholic University, Heck notes that Moroccan students ultimately “realize American society is a lot more complex than they thought.”⁸⁰

As with most public diplomacy activities supported by the State Department, effectiveness is difficult to measure. The case of the SORAC program is especially complicated given that it is only partially funded by the U.S. government. Since much of SORAC’s funding, especially funding for U.S. students travelling to Morocco, does not come from the U.S. Department of State, Heck must provide reports to both private and public donors. For instance, students fill out a survey before and after participation in the program. Heck’s analysis of the survey results indicates that Moroccan-student participants illustrate changed perceptions about America; often, students arrive with “this idea of Orientalists studying Islam for Orientalist purposes,” but leave with a far more complex understanding of religion in the United States.⁸¹ Recognizing that there is only so much that can be accomplished during the three-week program, Heck notes, “it’s more like getting them to let go [of previous perceptions of America].”⁸²

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Ibid

SORAC appears to be a very effective program that fosters respectful dialogue between Americans and Moroccans alike. Mary Jeffers, a former Public Affairs Counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Rabat who first supported Dr. Heck's project, agreed with this success when she said

SORAC's two-way exchange model, considered more broadly, is a plus: it multiplies the opportunities for direct face-to-face cultural exchange among peers, which is a powerful way to transmit ideas, and it adds credibility (no one has to ask, why are you only teaching Moroccans about the US, and not vice versa?) From the Embassy's point of view, this two-way exchange was a reason to work with SORAC, although the travel of the Moroccans had to be our funding priority.⁸³

Though it is certainly rewarding and allows for the building of strong friendships that recognize and accept differences in social perceptions, it is limited in scope. As of now, SORAC specifically targets advanced college students specializing theology or religious studies, and these students must also have the appropriate language skills in order to participate in the program's host countries. Additionally, Heck selects American participants, specifically, who do not have negative feelings towards religion. He says, students "can't have a negative attitude towards religion, and especially towards Islam. Which might seem like a no brainer, but there are plenty of people who study religion who hate religion."⁸⁴

As was mentioned previously when discussing public diplomacy programs that encourage active engagement, participants are already considered part of a self-selective group that chooses to put themselves into a situation in which they are already prepared to learn more about the elusive "other." And as such, the effectiveness of this program in its ability to reach large groups of individuals who may actually "need" the exposure to the other culture may be restricted.

⁸³ Jeffers interview

⁸⁴ Ibid

The SORAC program, especially, is potentially problematic as it expands upon this notion of self-selection, and limits the selection of participants to one person: Dr. Paul Heck. While this process has worked thus far, and has provided a relatively smooth and effective learning experience for all involved, the criteria for selection are somewhat problematic and could potentially limit dialogue between the Americans and Moroccans. Additionally, it ensures that this program would be difficult to replicate, as it relies on the knowledge and experience of Dr. Heck. When asked, Ms. Jeffers agreed that replication of the program could be a potential difficulty. She said

While I feel sure the concept itself could be adapted to work well in some other countries, it's hard to overstate the importance of the expert organizer and interlocutor, in this case Dr. Heck. There aren't so many Arabic-speaking U.S. professors of comparative religion, and even fewer of them doing Fulbright teaching fellowships in the Middle East, and even fewer being welcomed to teach in a host-country department of comparative religion.⁸⁵

Yet, Dr. Heck's SORAC program does raise an interesting notion that echoes the success found with the ELRC program in Cairo: using existing institutions in country to develop public diplomacy programming. Much like the ELRC's cooperation with Al-Azhar University, the SORAC program relies on Mohammad V University in Morocco to find Moroccan participants, host classes for American students, and provide support for Paul Heck as a faculty member. Heck states that the success of the program is based on the principle that it is best to "enter their institutions and just be a presence there."⁸⁶ He notes that this programming works best "where

⁸⁵ (Jeffers)

⁸⁶ Ibid

it's small groups of Americans that are on the institutional terms of these countries. Rather than saying we'll set up an institution and we'll run it, and you guys can help out. It's just being a presence, being a leaven, within the existing realities."⁸⁷ Ultimately, only the future will tell if the current model for the SORAC program will remain the same, or if it will become a model for similar programs throughout the country.

While it is difficult to cover the large swathe of programming that the State Department supports, it is clear from the strengths and weaknesses of each program mentioned in this section that utilizing the assistance of non-governmental organization (NGO) partners in PD programming is an effective way of addressing religion and interfaith issues. U.S. diplomats encounter resistance and pushback from citizens in embassy host countries when religion or the need for religious freedom is an overtly discussed issue. Indeed, because trust of the U.S. government is lacking among citizens in the Middle East, NGOs essentially become the Track 2 diplomats capable of engaging and brokering relations between the United States and the target audiences' country. Perhaps most importantly, NGOs do not have the same constraints that governments face and, as such, are able to reach a wider audience than a government entity. "NGOs are said to work with grassroots organizations that are often comprised of poor and marginalized groups. In this respect they both widen and deepen possibilities for citizen participation."⁸⁸

Non-governmental organizations can also fill an institutional void that is left when the government cannot provide for the specific needs of the citizens. Georgetown University's

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸ (Mercer 8)

Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs conducted interviews with members of the foreign affairs community, government, and non-government in 2011 concerning religion's role in foreign policy initiatives of the U.S. government. The study found that

over ninety percent of respondents agreed that Track Two diplomacy 'will play a wider role in the future.' This finding was true both for the governmental as well as NGO participants...this suggests a continuing relevance of Track Two actors, particularly when it comes to long-term conflict prevention and conflict transformation.⁸⁹

This increased role of NGO participants in Track 2 diplomacy is illustrated well in the difference in the effectiveness of programs between those held by U.S. embassies and those held by their NGO partners, especially programs on the topic of religion. The Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) we spoke with in Cairo discussed how careful they must be when they talk about religion because of Egyptians' concern with FSOs' credibility on such sensitive issues. When American religious leaders are involved in PD activities at the request of the American embassies, however, they garner much attention because citizens in the region are curious about religion and specifically Muslims in the United States. These religious leaders are able to utilize language and terminology to create a context for dialogue because of their authority as religious experts. Thus, these religious leaders and their organizations are able to bridge the gap that the U.S. government cannot do alone and in a roundabout way, they are able convey the "American story" concerning religious freedom and pluralism in a way that will be accepted and understood. For American diplomats, using religion as a form of engagement can make a huge difference when connecting with specific audiences in the Middle East. It remains important, though, to approach the use of religious themes, as one employee at the U.S. Agency for International

⁸⁹ (2010-2011 Undergraduate Report at Georgetown Uni. 16)

Development (USAID) in Cairo put it, by utilizing “diplomacy by stealth” or, religious programming that is not so “in your face.”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ (Anonymous, USAID in Cairo Interview)

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

President Obama's 2009 speech in Cairo sought a new beginning for dialogue between the United States and the "Muslim World", one that recognized a challenging history of Western-Islamic relations.

The relationship between Islam and the West includes centuries of co-existence and cooperation, but also conflict and religious wars. More recently, tension has been fed by colonialism that denied the rights and opportunities of many Muslims, and a Cold War in which Muslim-majority countries were too often treated as proxies without regard to their own aspirations. Moreover, the sweeping change brought by modernity and globalization led many Muslims to view the West as hostile to the traditions of Islam.⁹¹

Despite this recognition, President Obama admitted that change would not and could not come overnight and that "no single speech can eradicate years of mistrust..."⁹² But he mentioned important features in relationships that are now being emphasized in trends in the "new public diplomacy" efforts by the U.S. Department of State: "There must be a sustained effort to *listen* to each other; to *learn* from each other; to *respect* one another; and to *seek* common ground."⁹³

Just as President Obama acknowledged four years ago, change has not come quickly in the Middle East. The United States remains a begrudgingly powerful influence in the region: economically, militarily, and culturally. Although many Americans believed that the upheaval during the events of the "Arab Spring" would bring about democratic societies more favorable to the liberal ideals and values espoused by the United States, the "Arab Spring" has done little to change opinion about the U.S. Rather, the liberal and Islamist factions currently prominent in politics within countries such as Egypt, Syria, and Tunisia continue to use the United States as

⁹¹ (Obama)

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Ibid

the ‘whipping boy’ in political debate. Thus far, the revolutions of the “Arab Spring” have actually contributed to the rise of very organized Islamist political parties in regional politics that used to be banned or oppressed by the previous dictatorial regimes. This trend of Islamism in state politics is unlikely to change for some time: the Muslim Brotherhood’s Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) remains the most cohesive and organized political party in Egypt, and their attempt to govern through all government ministries is in the works. Whether or not parties such as the FJP are considered legitimate in the eyes of religious institutions like Al-Azhar is irrelevant: they won the elections and they will continue to exercise their influence on institutions and society, from top to bottom and bottom to top.

Working with religiously-motivated political parties in the Middle East and North Africa region has become a reality, and will probably continue to be so for years to come; thus, it is imperative that U.S. government initiatives address their existence in terms that will promote dialogue rather than hinder it. Politicians and diplomats uncomfortable with admitting religion as a determinant factor in political behavior should look inward and accept statistics: 83% of Americans follow a religion and “every major religious group is simultaneously gaining and losing adherents” reflecting a very competitive religious marketplace.⁹⁴ It is not unheard of for Americans to vote or support specific politicians and political agendas because of their own religious beliefs or behaviors; one need look no further than the era of the “Moral Majority” in American politics to see that “US policymakers failed to uphold the US Establishment Clause, thereby compromising its secularity to the Christian Right in exchange for access to its growing evangelical bloc.”⁹⁵ Denying that religion determines behavior is imprudent, and should thus

⁹⁴ (The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life)

⁹⁵ (Ezell 45)

continue to be a consideration when creating opportunities for increased dialogue between the United States and Muslim-majority countries.

Keeping the ever-changing regional political climate in mind, we feel that the most effective space for increased dialogue that utilizes religious themes and actors is within American public diplomacy (PD). Given the push from many scholars and practitioners to move towards implementing “new public diplomacy” tactics, we believe that the importance of understanding religion, and faith-based motives, in diplomacy is becoming increasingly popular in the diplomatic community, although there is still much resistance to change. The ‘new public diplomacy’ is, in essence, what public diplomacy was meant to be from the start- a method of communicating and creating dialogue with foreign publics. In the past, that communication has taken on a much more traditional, Track 1-style of diplomacy that has alienated certain portions of Middle East populations, especially those for whom religion plays a large role in their lives.

The problem, though, is that ‘new public diplomacy’ has not yet become an effective means of engagement in the Middle East. Issues like budgetary restrictions, difficulties in establishing the correct target audiences for PD programming and events abroad, and problems creating a more unified method of dialogue because of the multitude of NGO and non-profit partners with whom the U.S. Department of State works to carry out public diplomacy initiatives, all limit the extent to which the ‘new public diplomacy’ can expand and flourish in the Middle East.

Additionally, as with any effort to change bureaucratic processes that have been in place for a long period of time, attempts at practicing ‘new public diplomacy,’ including using religious themes and actors in PD dialogue, are discounted by practitioners and politicians whose

security-focused motivations in the Middle East prevent them from understanding that establishing a more secure region does not have to stem from reactive policies. In fact, the belief that security can only be achieved through military or defensive means, either by providing a military presence in the region or in focusing all behind-the-scenes efforts on counter-terrorism and defense, is incredibly harmful to the overall well-being of the region. While this mentality continues to exist within the United States government, it will remain difficult to promote the ‘new public diplomacy’ as a means for establishing security in the Middle East and North Africa. As aforementioned, this separation in approaches by the Defense and State Departments reflects different approaches to handling the “war of ideas” notion that attempts to lead to the triumph of democracy over radical Islamism. Budget priorities will continue to be given to the United States military and the Department of Defense, while Department of State-run PD programs will be left to work with budgets that are tiny by comparison.

That is not to say that public diplomacy has been ignored completely, even with the focus on defense in the region. Indeed, as we have highlighted in this paper, the Bush-era changes made to public diplomacy certainly increased its exposure around the world. Unfortunately, those changes ultimately hindered public diplomacy in the region. Its focus on “branding” created a thought process that evolved into a kind of public diplomacy that more closely resembled propaganda than dialogue. As R.S Zaharna states, this ‘old’ approach, which was “tied to the Cold War era, [was] primarily one-way, message-based strategies that rely on mass media.”⁹⁶ It is no wonder, then, that many citizens of the Middle East currently distrust American public diplomacy efforts for their concerns about ulterior motives and hypocrisy. In order to

⁹⁶ (Zaharna, *The Cultural Awakening in Public Diplomacy* 48)

regain trust in the region, the United States requires a new public diplomacy that is truly ‘new’, and with that, innovative and improved ways at focusing on religion.

Recommendations

Based on our review of applicable literature, current foreign policy goals of the Obama administration, in addition to our interviews with American diplomats, non-governmental organization leaders and discussion with average Egyptians on these matters, we recommend the following with an understanding that institutional reform is much more difficult than making recommendations. As of now, institutional capacity at the State Department to deal with issues such as religion, religious freedom and religious engagement is lacking. The Department of State has many special envoys tasked with religious engagement, such as the Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism; the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues; the Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC); the Special Representative to Muslim Communities. In addition, the Office of International Religious Freedom is tasked with the annual International Religious Freedom Report and the designation of countries of particular concern (CPC) for possible sanctioning or other recommendations issued to the Secretary of State for action, which is rarely followed.

This rather piecemeal approach seems to lack direction and is reactive to the issues of the day as opposed to proactive in long-term strategic thinking. Religion, as a sensitive and disputed subject, requires a particular understanding and compassion in dialogue that secular political dialogue does not provide. Those who engage in dialogue during cross-cultural relationship building opportunities which are devoid of religion or religious understanding may miss opportunities of connection. This requires a particular understanding of the social context and

politics of the target audience or host country of the U.S. Embassy that diplomats are already aware of, but may also necessitate the need for particular strategies of engagement as part of the overall Strategic Plan on the embassy. This ensures that each country's contexts and needs continue to be evaluated on a case by case basis.

In order for the United States to best evaluate whether or not its religious-based public diplomacy programs are working in the Middle East, we believe that changes must be made to the ways in which the United States approaches each of these programs. Starting with the training of Foreign Services Officers, and including increased engagement with religious leaders in the region, as well as the creation of new methods for evaluating the successes and failures of public diplomacy programs, we believe that the United States must change its focus in order to best determine whether or not such programs can be successful. This is especially important if the United States wishes to ultimately achieve widespread success in its public diplomacy efforts in the region. Thus, we recommend the following changes be implemented in the short-term, and long-term, future:

Increasing Training Opportunities for Foreign Service Officers

It is a habit of some academics, politicians and diplomats to view religion as divisive, and a driver for conflict, which without a doubt reflects the assumption of religion's decline in secular, modern societies. There is evidence, however, that faith-based engagement and diplomacy is conducive to conflict resolution and transformation. The United States Institute of Peace regularly embraces religion as a tool of peacemaking in seemingly intractable conflict such as Burma, Nigeria and Pakistan. This is carried out through analysis of religion, religious institutions and the roles of religious leaders in society so that they may be engaged during the

peacemaking process. Thus, we recommend that training and education opportunities focusing on religion, religious institutions, and the role of religious leaders as tools of peacemaking should be increasingly offered at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). As of now, there are a handful of courses at FSI that teach about the history of Islam and its role in Iraq and Eurasia. There is also a Religion and Foreign Policy course that teaches tools for interfaith outreach and religious engagement that is offered twice a year.⁹⁷ We recognize that this recalls the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group's recommendation that these courses be mandatory so that they may begin to institutionalize the recognition of religion as an important facet of society beyond its ability to cause conflict, and we would like to reemphasize the importance of moving in this direction.

Increased Engagement with Religious Leaders, at home and abroad

We recommend that U.S. embassies, consulates, and missions increase their efforts to engage religious leaders in the "Muslim world," particularly on foreign policy initiatives supporting democratic and civic responsibility. We recognize that religious leaders and institutions have influence in the region, and that they possess specific skills and legitimacy because of their positions and respect in their community. Increased engagement and understanding can only help make public diplomacy efforts more meaningful and effective.

Increased Engagement with NGOs and other Civil Society Actors

The State Department should increase its efforts to engage with NGOs working on issues related to religious freedom, tolerance and co-existence. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have capabilities that governments do not. Their political affiliations do not change with

⁹⁷ (State)

the ebb and flow of election season, which allows for longer term, strategic thinking and direction by their board of directors and leadership. Additionally, their Track 2 diplomatic capabilities permit them to reach out to societal leaders of all levels and average citizens, which culminate in longer-term relationships. When NGOs begin work, they are in it for the long-haul. Organizations like the ICRD, Institute for Global Engagement, and Search for Common Ground, provide the foundational atmosphere, knowledge and acceptance of religion's ability to provide solutions that is useful to public diplomacy, especially in the Middle East.

Similarly, the U.S. government should continue to utilize the strength of local institutions when creating new public diplomacy programming abroad, especially when dealing with the sensitive topic of religion. In our case studies of the Al-Azhar English Language Resource Center and the SORAC program, a key element in their successes was their establishment within existing local academic institutions. As Paul Heck stated, utilizing local institutional framework provided legitimacy and support for the programs that might otherwise be lacking, in addition to local knowledge and assistance when selected participants that are more likely to benefit from the program.⁹⁸ We believe that using this strategy in other programming will help increase success rates.

It would also be beneficial for the State Department to return to the white paper agreement signed in October of 2011 during the Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group with a particular emphasis on ways in which the Department may further engage civil society organizations, both abroad and state-side, to improve engagement with religion.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ (Heck)

⁹⁹ (Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group)

Increased Emphasis on Reforming Evaluation Techniques

We recommend that the U.S. government create a means for reevaluating how the successes of its public diplomacy programs are measured. Although non-profit partners are required to submit detailed reports to the U.S. Embassy in order to obtain or continue funding for their programs, there is no clear and effective way to measure the effectiveness of long-term public diplomacy programs overall. By creating a system that justly accounts for the long-term positive effects of public diplomacy programs, perhaps we can also change how funding is justified and distributed, as well as how public diplomacy is viewed overall by the U.S. government.

For evaluation techniques to be effective, there are a few obstacles that must first be overcome by the U.S. government. Additional support, both financial and with regards to providing additional manpower, must be allotted to the task of measuring effectiveness of programming. We recognize, though, that funding- especially for public diplomacy- is not necessarily readily available at this time. Thus, we feel that evaluation techniques can be improved on a case-by-case basis, rather than establishing an overarching policy. For instance, for PD initiatives such as exchange programs, we believe that a central, on-line system can be created to track program alumni and their experiences in the long-term. Though many programs already have such a system in place, especially those run by NGOS, we feel that a centralized system could better monitor changing perceptions and the influence of public diplomacy overall. The system currently utilized by the U.S. Department of State is antiquated and only includes alumni from government-sponsored programs, whereas we envision a system created to track exchanges across sectors, and beyond those funded by the government.

For shorter, or one-time, programs, we feel that measuring success over time is much more difficult. For example, a one-time religious speaker event may attract participants that are very different than a jazz concert. Furthermore, these events are created in the anticipation that they will change a wide-range of opinions over a very long period of time- it is not expected that a participant's ideas about America or religion will be altered in one sitting. However, it is possible to gauge a program's effectiveness based on increased participation in later programs, discussion about programs over social media, or simple techniques like surveys distributed after a program. While some of these techniques are used currently, they must be used in a uniform manner, for every public diplomacy program.

Increased Awareness of the Importance of Citizen Diplomacy

During our literature review and interviews, we began to understand the importance of people to people engagement, or what is now being termed "citizen diplomacy." On more than one occasion, our Egyptian interviewees discussed how they would like to take part in conversations on religion and cross-cultural exchange but they would prefer to do that with Americans and not U.S. government officials.¹⁰⁰ Of course, this is in part due to the prevailing distrust by Egyptians of the U.S. government. But, our interviewees made sure to point out that they made a distinction between the American government and the American people while still accepting that Americans probably did support most U.S. foreign policy initiatives.

The success of the aforementioned NGOs and programs that put the average American in contact with people in the Middle East (SORAC, the English Language Resource Center) stems from the emphasis on people to people engagement. Indeed, the researchers of this paper felt at

¹⁰⁰ (Egyptian Interviewees)

times the need to explain, support or defend U.S. foreign policy initiatives during our interviews with Egyptians. The fact that we are Americans put us in an incredibly interesting position to be “citizen diplomats”, and revealed much about Egyptian opinion that may have not been possible if these interviews took part at an official or government level. The Institute of International Education (IIE) published a report in 2011 measuring the impact of 11 citizen diplomacy programs, such as the Fulbright Program, the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program, and the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). In the summary of their findings, they evaluated 13 indicators through surveys, interviews and questionnaires and found that international participants on the whole reported increased understanding of the United States and Americans on the whole, an increased interest in civic engagement and an interest in joining or establishing NGOs.¹⁰¹ Thus, while citizen diplomacy is only one part of public diplomacy initiatives overall, we feel that the U.S. government should continue to support and promote citizen diplomacy programs, for the benefit of all involved.

¹⁰¹ (Bhandari and Belyavina 14-15)

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