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America and Arabia: Where Matters Stand

By John Duke Anthony and M. Scott Bortot

Publisher's Note:

GulfWire is pleased to present a special report drawing on the proceedings of the most recent 13th Annual Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference. The conference title and theme was "Restoring Arab-U.S. Mutual Trust and Confidence: What is Feasible? -- What is Necessary?" The report is by Dr. John Duke Anthony, National Council on U.S. Relations President and CEO; Secretary, U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee; and Publisher of *Gulf Wire* and *Saudi-American Forum*. Mr. M. Scott Bortot, former editor of *Trade Lines*, a publication of the National U.S.-Arab Chamber of Commerce.

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Renowned academics, seasoned diplomats, and veteran intelligence analysts tackled Arab world policy issues at the 13th Annual Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference held on September 12-13 in Washington, D.C.

Organized by the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations and the U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee, the conference brought together some of the brightest minds on Arab affairs to discuss the conference title: "Restoring Arab-U.S. Mutual Trust and Confidence: What is Feasible? -- What is Necessary?"

One of the themes generated at the conference was the necessity of U.S. government policymakers to listen to specialists outside the sphere of the current U.S. administration. Foremost among such authorities, and the Conference's keynote speaker, was Dr. Hanan Ashrawi, Member, Palestine Legislative Council and Secretary General of MIFTAH (Arabic: "Key"), an organization that promotes human rights, democracy, civil society and peace.

Dr. Ashrawi was introduced at the September 12 reception as "a heroine to us all" and "the epitome of an individual who manifests the virtues of every citizen's moral duty and civic obligation."

Against the background of a lifetime dedicated to the cause of Palestinian rights, Dr. Ashrawi was highly critical of U.S. policy not only towards the unending crisis faced by her people but also the region as a whole. As with most conference speakers, she sounded a bleak note on the likely near-term prospects for any major moves by American policymakers towards improving U.S.-Arab relations.

"The U.S., instead of reexamining its policies, seems bent on marketing itself to the Arab world," Dr. Ashrawi said. As context, she highlighted U.S. government and mainstream media attempts to persuade Arabs of the perceived virtues of U.S. policy with a view to inspiring them to follow suit. From a different perspective, she noted that, with the war on terror a major feature of U.S. policy and Washington's parallel rhetorical emphasis on reconfiguring Arab systems of politics and governance, Arab governments are using these features of American policy as an excuse to avoid reform. "The initiative to home-grow democracy in the Arab world is slow-going because of the excuse of security."

The "excuse of security is being put to use not just to avoid or delay the momentum towards reform," she said. Paradoxically, "it is also being used to 'justify' ongoing Israeli violence against Palestinians." Between the U.S.-championed global campaign against terror, on one hand, and, on the other, U.S. calls for political and governmental reform throughout the Arab and Islamic worlds -- but not in Israel -- Israel continues its settlements expansion and land grabs. Simultaneously, the Israeli government proceeds with construction of its "apartheid" wall, effectively and illegally seizing still more Palestinian land and water. In the process, "Israel is destroying the basic requirements of what the United States proclaims it seeks" -- namely, a sovereign, independent, territorially contiguous, and economically viable Palestinian state living alongside a secure and internationally recognized Israel. "Worse, it is getting away with it."

High among the list of issues complicating the imperative of establishing an independent state of Palestine, Dr. Ashrawi noted, is U.S. policy. Along with other speakers that came afterwards, she remarked that U.S. policy towards the Palestinian crisis in the past tended to vacillate between efforts at micro-management and a hands-off approach.

But nowadays more than ever, she said, "U.S. moves in the region seem strangely consistent with Israeli policies." She acknowledged that the close alignments of American and Israeli approaches to Palestinians and the question of Palestine are not new: they have a long history. However, she noted that outside observers are increasingly able to see the phenomenon for what it is. Seldom, if at any previous point, have political and foreign policy consensuses between Israel and the United States been as markedly prominent as in the Bush administration's approach to the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world.

Strategic Overview

How to improve U.S. policies toward the region was the focus of the conference's first session in the all-day meetings on Monday. Moderated by former U.S. Ambassador to Oman Frances D. Cook, President of the Ballard Group, three specialists attempted to analyze the efficacy of key U.S. foreign policy objectives in the Arab world. However, much of what they had to say was,

for the most part, far from positive.

"Empty U.S. calls for instant, region-wide democracy and political reform are producing a dangerous counter-reaction in much of the Arab world," said Dr. Anthony H. Cordesman, Arleigh Burke Chair in Strategy, Center for Strategic and International Studies. "A Western focus on counter-terrorism -- without a balancing focus on creating bridges between the West and Middle East -- is often breeding extremism rather than defeating it." ["Beyond Anger and Counterterrorism: A New Grand Strategy for U.S. and Arab Relations," by Anthony Cordesman]

In remarks titled, "Imperial Over-Reach? How to Lose Friends and Alienate People in the Arab East," Dr. Michael Hudson, Director, Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, echoed many of Dr. Cordesman's sentiments.

"We are seriously continuing to lose the war to win hearts and minds," said Dr. Hudson. The context for his conclusion was the lack of any notable recent success in U.S. attempts to bridge the growing divide between much of America and the Arab world. Referring to the transnational appeal of terrorism, he underscored the view that "hearts and minds do matter."

Dr. Hudson explained how the U.S. has been squandering its power. Signs of its "imperial over-reach" are its having resorted to military options before diplomatic and peaceful options have been exhausted; pretending that, by focusing on economic reform, terrorism will somehow diminish if not disappear; administering U.S. Patriot Act security rules and regulations in such a manner as to be counter-productive by, in turns, humiliating and intimidating Arab-American Muslims with links to the Arab world and/or because their physical features -- the hue of their skin pigmentation, the cast of their bone structure, the spelling of their name -- make them suspect as "individuals of interest" and candidates for being ordered by Department of Homeland Security or other U.S. agency officials to step aside for special questioning; and allowing extremist elements among the more ardent pro-Israel advocates and zealous "Israel right-or-wrong" Christians, to hijack U.S. policy.

In contrast, Philo Dibble, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Maghreb Affairs, offered a more upbeat assessment of U.S. policy in a particular Arab world sub-region. Addressing "The Dynamics of Restoring Trust and Confidence in U.S.-Arab North Africa Relations," he conceded that there is a "problem of mutual trust and confidence between the U.S. and the Arab world."

Despite this, Dibble cited such U.S. policy breakthroughs as the U.S.-Morocco Free Trade Agreement and the conclusion of additional agreements between Washington and other Arab governments. U.S. efforts to win "hearts and minds" may indeed lack success on some fronts, but progress, as measured in material terms, has continued apace. The bilateral trade and investment agreements and the formation of joint Arab-U.S. private sector commercial ventures have benefited both sides.

"We are working with the Algerians on a trade and investment framework agreement and aiding the professional development of judges on issues such as intellectual property rights," Dibble said. Turning to Tunisia, he acknowledged that political developments have not kept pace with the momentum of the country's ongoing economic modernization. Even so, he noted that the

Tunisian people have a longer and more deeply rooted tradition than some of their neighbors in successfully administering peaceful change in matters of public policy. Indeed, he said, "Of all the Maghreb countries, Tunisia has the least risk to take in implementing [political] reforms."

Geo-Political: Iraq

No one gainsays the importance to U.S. national interests and relations of Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. Yet, since 9-11, ongoing and multifaceted interest in the dynamics of modernization and development in these five nations has tended to be overshadowed by major challenges to U.S. policies in Arab countries elsewhere.

From the perspective of many Americans and Arabs alike, lands east of North Africa are situated much nearer to where the decline in Arab goodwill towards the United States has been the most pronounced. Iraq and Palestine constitute not only two of the United States' greatest foreign policy concerns, but, also, the regional crises that weigh heaviest on Arab policymakers, too. Chairing the session on Iraq was an American official who has spent the better part of his career in search of ways to enhance America's position, role, and standing in the region: Wayne White, Deputy Director, Office of Analysis for Near East and South Asia, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, U.S. Department of State.

Dr. Phebe Marr, arguably America's foremost authority on Iraq, author, among other works, of *A Modern History of Iraq*, and one of the most in demand of all internationalist specialists on Iraq, was back by popular demand to address this annual forum for the fourth time. Acknowledging the string of uncertainties that continue to dominate the landscape of an embattled and embittered people and their country, Dr. Marr struck a note of forewarning. She cautioned everyone not to lose sight of the possibility of civil war erupting in Iraq should the U.S. and Iraqi forces continue to lose their grip on certain areas of the country.

"If this doesn't work, we'll get a fragile central government and total decomposition," Dr. Marr said, adding that the situation in Iraq could degenerate into the kind of turbulence and chaos that befell Lebanon in the 1970s, when various groups were at swords points for more than a decade and a half.

Dr. Laith Kubba, of the National Endowment for Democracy, shifted the focus to one of Iraq's largest yet least understood challenges: "The Iraqi Shia-Sunni Matrix in Transition." In so doing, he put his finger on an analytical frame of reference that has confused as many outside observers as it has enlightened in their quest to understand Iraq and the Iraqi people: the tendency to categorize Iraq solely or mainly in sectarian terms.

Dr. Kubba stressed that analysts' insistence of viewing Iraqis as Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds tends to ignore the fact that much of Iraqi society is structured along tribal lines.

Only recently have outsiders and coalition forces, Americans chief among them and albeit rather late in the game, begun to concede that tribal and extended-family factors are more central to many Iraqis' identity and loyalties than their ethnic and ancestral origins or religious persuasion. For policymakers to ignore or give insufficient analysis to the position and role of such factors in

Iraqi society is worse than being ill-informed: it is a certain recipe for misunderstanding and miscalculation on a massive scale, as has already repeatedly proven to be the case.

Dr. Kubba recommends creating an additional and in many ways new means of defining and analyzing the dynamics of contemporary Iraqi politics and governance. If only because one is witnessing a rebirth of Iraqi political dynamics on a scale unseen over the past several decades, there is a pressing need to view the domestic environment in different and more relevant ways than before. The newer frame of reference needs to take into consideration the degree of activist participation by Iraqis in the country's national development and civic processes.

Underscoring this point, Dr. Kubba said, "I don't believe that the state of Iraq will be able to rebuild itself unless all state institutions are elevated to a level above sectarian issues. Without an inclusive political process, Iraq cannot move forward."

To this end, Dr. Kubba proposes convening a conference outside Iraq that would include all prospective candidates for national elected office. A desired outcome would be a binding agreement on the modalities and parameters of the country's electoral dynamics and popular representational processes.

In a side reference, Dr. Kubba called attention to a conference in Taif, Saudi Arabia in the late 1980s. The sole focus of that meeting was on Lebanon, which was still in the waning throes of a civil war that had wrecked havoc upon the country's public institutions and its economic and social stability. The conference objective was to persuade the attendees -- deputies who had served in the last popularly elected Lebanese parliament -- to renegotiate the ground rules, in essence to devise a new social contract, for restoring national security and stability to Lebanon.

It took more than a month of meetings of hard bargaining, negotiations, and compromises until an entirely new and different arrangement for governance and popular political representation in Lebanon were satisfactorily hammered out and agreed to by the participants. A key and by all accounts long overdo feature of the new accord was its reflection of the major demographic changes in the overall religious affiliations of the populace -- and hence in the confessional compositions by which the country's electoral and representational dynamics took place -- since Lebanon achieved its independence a generation earlier.

In suggesting that a similarly focused conference be considered in terms of its potential for improving the situation in Iraq, Dr. Kubba was only moderately optimistic about the idea's prospects for success. For example, he warned of possible opposition from the Kurds and the current government in Iraq to the idea of convening such a conference.

Shifting the focus on Iraq in yet another direction, Dr. Edmund Ghareeb, Mustapha Barzani Distinguished Scholar of Kurdish Studies, Center for Global Peace, American University, was keen to emphasize that the role played by Kurds in any future Iraqi government is certain to remain of paramount importance. Drawing on the country's history and bringing the picture up to the present, he emphasized the degree to which, from the very beginning, "the Kurdish issue has been one of the most serious challenges to the emergence of the Iraqi state."

Dr. Ghareeb was keen to make clear that, for a variety of reasons, most of the Kurdish leadership would prefer a loose confederation rather than a restoration of anything approximating the strong central state that had characterized so many previous Iraqi experiments in nation-building. In the meantime, with the eventual outcome of Iraq's domestic political developments far from certain, the status of the country's Kurds is hardly one of suspended animation -- they remain key players in fostering dialogue among Iraqis as a whole, between Iraqis and the United States, and between Iraqis and countries elsewhere. What is more, Dr. Ghareeb noted, while many Kurds remain skeptical about what may lie ahead for them in any future national political and governmental arrangements, "Since the end of the war, a significant number of Kurdish leaders have found they can be leaders in Iraq."

Geo-Political: Palestine

If the specialists agreed on one issue more than any other with respect to which Arab-U.S. trust and confidence is most lacking, it was the seemingly indefinite prolongation of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Leading the effort to explore the possibilities for moving nearer to a satisfactory conclusion to this decades-old quagmire was Dr. Peter Gubser, President, American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA), and a National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations board member.

Dr. Shibley Telhami, Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development, University of Maryland, and author of numerous works delineating the dilemmas of American efforts to set aright its relationships with the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world, addressed "The Iraq War's Consequences on the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict."

When the United States decided to invade and occupy Iraq, many consequences flowed as a result of what it did, and just as important did not do, in support of broader American national security interests and related foreign policy objectives. At the very least, Dr. Telhami noted, the decision "took away an opportunity to work on the Palestine and Israel crisis."

A major region-wide strategic setback that flowed from the Bush administration's determination to topple Saddam Hussein, Telhami stressed, has been that "the Arab-Israeli conflict is no longer the priority issue for the United States. It has fallen from the public discourse. This is why it is not even an issue in the [forthcoming American Presidential and Congressional] elections."

Shifting gears to focus more specifically on the extent to which the issue of Palestine is a factor in the election was Khalil E. Jahshan, former President of the National Association of Arab Americans, and currently Executive Director, Washington, D.C., Internship Program, and Lecturer in International Studies and Languages at Pepperdine University.

Jahshan addressed a question that, since the Democratic and Republic Party's nominations for president and vice-president were confirmed, has perplexed many Arab-U.S. relations specialists: namely, "Bush or Kerry and Palestine: What's the Difference?" Dr. Jahshan noted that both candidates hold comparable positions on the Israel-Palestine issue. To prove his point, he cited a series of quotes from Bush and Kerry.

Both candidates, he said, espouse the global campaign against terrorism. Each favors a nationally sovereign, politically independent, and territorially contiguous Palestinian state living alongside an Israel who's right to exist, national sovereignty, and security is recognized and respected. Both refuse to talk to the democratically-elected Palestinian leadership (Arafat). There is no perceptible difference between them in their support for the "apartheid" wall that the Israeli government is building on what is overwhelmingly still more illegally expropriated Palestinian land.

For all the talk about enhancing international respect for the rule of law, neither candidate has called attention to the fact that the lands in question have been illegally seized by the Israeli Defense Forces. Nor has there been any discernible propensity on the part of either Bush or Kerry to acknowledge publicly that these lands were and remain occupied in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, to which Israel, the United States, and most other countries are signatories.

Nor has either candidate been willing to point out, let alone debate, the implications for Palestinians, Israelis, and Americans stemming from the fact that the lands in question are occupied by Israeli government-subsidized and -armed settlers from Israel proper. Neither is either Bush or Kerry known to differ with the other in assessing the prospects for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, for the campaign against terrorism, or for Palestinian and broader Arab-U.S. relations of the Sharon-proposed pullout of Israeli settlers from the Gaza Strip. Yet it is possible that would-be voters are aware of one difference between the two: the fact, Mr. Jahshan said, that John Kerry has pledged to be more active in the peace process diplomatically than Bush.

Dr. Marwan Bishara, author of a forthcoming book on American-Israeli relations, and a visiting professor at the American University in Paris, returned the focus to more macro policy-related themes. He argued that it will take far more than U.S. involvement alone to bring about an end to the Israel-Palestine crisis.

Bishara expressed the view that a component currently lacking -- and when previously present was seldom, if ever, sufficient in terms of producing a just, comprehensive and enduring settlement -- is credible regional engagement. Without it, the prospects for dealing with the situation more effectively than in the past likely be less than otherwise.

In this context, it was notable that none of the speakers and conference participants urged reconsideration of Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdallah's March 31, 2001 peace offer to Israel. The proposal, which was agreed to unanimously by all 22 members of the League of Arab States, remains on the negotiating table, albeit still awaiting a serious answer from the Sharon government.

The offer was structured in the time-honored and internationally recognized practice of *quid pro quo* with regard to negotiating and compromising in order to reach an agreement. The proposal's "quid" was in the offer to normalize diplomatic relations and other mutually beneficial ties between the Arab countries and Israel, and vice versa. Such an offer is unprecedented in all the years of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It encompassed practically everything that Israel has

previously asked for as a means of ending its conflict with the Palestinians, Syrians, Lebanese, and broader Arab world.

The proposal's "quo" in exchange for the benefits offered is in substance hardly new. It stipulates merely that the Israeli government comply with the relevant international legal, UN Charter, and UN Security Council resolutions applicable to the conflict that are already on the books. Such compliance would require that Israel withdraw to what were its de facto boundaries as of June 5, 1967.

The citation of June 5, 1967 as the primary date of reference is hardly insignificant. It marks the day Israel embarked upon its invasion and occupation of Egypt. In the fighting that ensued, which pitted the invading Israeli Defense Forces against the attacked armed forces of Egypt, and the troops of Egypt's Arab League defense treaty partners Jordan and Syria, Israeli forces proceeded militarily to occupy Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and two-thirds of Syria's agricultural and water resources-rich Golan Province.

Against this background, Bishara stressed, unless one involves the relevant regional parties, the grounds for optimism among potential peacemakers would likely be few and far between. A reason, he maintained, is there would be little prospect of offsetting the fact that the U.S. government has never been an impartial participant in any peace process to date, notwithstanding its protestations to the contrary of being "balanced," an "honest broker," and "even-handed."

There is a paradox here, Bishara emphasized. "Instead of the United States living up to its position and role as a superpower, on one hand, and its self-image as a standard bearer in support of an occupied people's freedom and elemental human dignity, on the other," what exists is something markedly different. "With regard to the Palestinian people," he said, "it is an American administration that mainly follows Ariel Sharon's plans."

As such, Bishara concluded, "The problem for us is not so much, if to any significant degree at all, a Palestinian problem; rather, it is instead primarily an Israeli problem." Lest anyone question the validity of his contention, many in the audience during the intermission that followed were quick to acknowledge an overarching fact: Israeli armed forces and settlers are in illegal military occupation of the land, water, and other natural resources of Palestinian Arab Christians and Muslims, not the other way around.

The Interface between Policy and Intelligence

Many among the Conference specialists felt that much of the damage that various U.S. policies have done to American national security and other interests in the Arab world has been self-inflicted and, had bolder and more effective leadership been in place, could have been avoided. There appeared to be a consensus that any assessment of the damage to the United States dating from before and after 9-11 would be incomplete and misleading if it did not account for American intelligence failures in the run-up to the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq.

Few if any other topics examined at this year's conference riveted the attention of as many

specialists and generalists. Pursuant to examining the interplay between intelligence and policy, Dr. Max Gross, Senior Research Fellow, Center for Strategic Intelligence Research, Joint Military Intelligence College, U.S. Department of Defense, chaired a session that included two former career intelligence analysts and operatives in the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

According to Frank Anderson, Vice President of *Foreign Report* and former Chief of the CIA's Operations Directorate for the Near East, the Iraq situation is as good an example as any of an out-sized American failure in three key areas of strategic and tactical intelligence: collection, analysis, and application.

Anderson made a point of indicating that, in his view, the CIA's record at the lower levels of gathering and analyzing intelligence on the whole has been good. "The history of intelligence," Anderson said, "is where the tactical lower level intelligence collected has been consistently correct [in its assessments] but the wider, integrated intelligence has often been wrong." Without indicating which intelligence failure or failures he was referring to, many inferred that Iraq is the prime candidate. Certainly Iraq is where that country is one in which the intelligence community overall failed to foresee the degree of insecurity and chaos that erupted soon after the invasion and has continued to this day.

Anderson said what tends to pose major difficulties for U.S. intelligence analysis and application is when other countries' intelligence networks become involved. He did not name those frequently cited by the media as having either pre-cooked or deliberately omitted or downplayed uncertainties and key data from various "intelligence" shared with the Bush administration when the latter was building its case for invading Iraq. The foreign intelligence sources most often mentioned in this case have included various agents, analysts, and liaison representatives of Iran, Israel, the United Kingdom, and Iraqi exiled groups.

Neither did Anderson single out the role of citizens partial to the interests of countries other than their own. Nor did he mention media and other sources that purported to validate alleged nuclear weapons-related transactions in Niger that were subsequently revealed to have been bogus. And he did not highlight, as a growing body of literature has done, the nexus of collaboration between prominent exiled Iraqis and high-ranking officials in the Likudnik wing of Israeli intelligence, on one hand, and their counterparts in the U.S. Department of Defense's specially created Office of Special Plans, additional executive branch offices, and other U.S. agencies in the run-up to the invasion and occupation of Iraq, on the other.

Even so, it was clear to nearly everyone that Iraq stands out as the most recent and dramatic example of what can, and in this case did, go awry when the United States lowers the bar of verification and authentication in building its case for launching a war. Conference participants were left to ponder the implications of high-ranking U.S. policymakers selectively using unverifiable intelligence provided by foreign agents to rationalize and justify the launching of a war declared to be in support of U.S. national security and related interests.

Raymond Close, a former career intelligence officer with the CIA, offered no dissenting opinion of this analysis and assessment. However, he said he would add "asking the wrong questions" to Anderson's three kinds of intelligence failures. Focusing on the topic of "Intelligence and Policy

Formulation, Implementation, and Linkage," Close shared observations and lessons learned from his life as an intelligence representative in the Arab and Islamic world.

Much of Close's career was one long extended course in earning the trust and confidence of some of America's most important Arab and Muslim allies. His service as an intelligence officer spanned more than a quarter century, during which he served at posts in Egypt, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. Pursuant to offering suggestions for how the interface between the intelligence and policymaking communities can be improved, he emphasized in ways different than Anderson how the failure to apply insightful intelligence regarding Iraq -- not only beforehand but to this day -- is part of the reason for the country's deteriorating situation.

Speaking to a hushed audience, Close put the question, "Why is it that no one seems to have asked what the Iraqi people [as opposed to Iraqi exiles] were going to think about this? Or how millions in the Muslim world would think about this? Or how the rest of the world would think about this?"

When it was clear that there were no takers for his questions, Close offered two answers of his own. He first singled out the intelligence community for the mistakes that happened in the events leading up to the American-led invasion and occupation of Iraq. He then chastised those with a deep knowledge of the region in general, and of Iraq in particular. He faulted these specialists, few as they were, for not speaking up sooner, louder, and more forcefully.

Media and Islam

The need to improve poor channels of communication has been borne out repeatedly in the testimonies submitted to the 9-11 Commission in the Congress. The topic continues to receive high priority in the continuing stream of investigations and recommendations by numerous officially sanctioned bodies. But the need to repair the damage from ineffective sharing of sensitive information related to national security interests is an issue of ongoing importance not only among intelligence communities.

The media, too, bear their share of blame on the information and communications fronts. In many instances, managing editors, journalists, fact-checkers, producers, broadcasters, and researchers alike abdicated their responsibility. They were too quick to accept the veracity of reports and analyses that have subsequently been proven wrong. But playing an additional role by often misleading the American people was the U.S. media's misperception and misrepresentation of Arabs, Islam, and Muslims with regard to American and Arab interests, and their respective legitimate foreign policy objectives.

Islamic Free Market Institute Chairman and Founder Khaled Saffuri chaired a session that tackled the issue of how Islam is represented by media in the West. To this end, Khaled Al-Maena, Editor-in-Chief, *Arab News*, the Arab world's largest English language daily, focused his remarks on "The Media, Terrorism, and Reality."

Al-Maena expressed disappointment with the general direction of certain Western media towards Islam and Muslims. He said, for decades on end, "We always looked to media

professionals in the West as the people who would call a spade a spade -- not demonize us, which is profoundly upsetting."

No less a matter of concern, Al-Maena said, is the ongoing use of certain Western media terminology regarding terrorism. Particularly objectionable and defaming, he stressed, is the seldom challenged use of the term 'Islamic terrorism.' Even though there are Jewish and Christian terrorists, one almost never hears or reads of 'Jewish terrorism' or 'Christian terrorism.' "Terrorism, in any case," he stressed, "has no religion."

Continuing with the theme of media misrepresentation of Islam was Nihad Awad, Executive Director, Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). Focusing on "The Media's Role in Restoring Arab-U.S. Trust and Confidence," he underscored many American Muslims' frustration at how they have been portrayed by much of the media in the past few years.

Awad emphasized how the media's inaccurate depictions of Islam, Muslims, and the position and role of Islam in America have set back years of inter-faith efforts to promote mutual knowledge and understanding. Particularly unfortunate, he said, is the idea "that American Muslims did not condemn the actions on 9/11." Awad said, "This is a lie." In fact, as he pointed out, American Muslims have repeatedly condemned the attacks of September 11.

In so doing, Awad noted, CAIR and numerous other American Muslim organizations could hardly have acted faster in sending announcements to major newspapers expressing their condemnation. Yet, although the media received the announcements, the number that broadcast or published them was very limited. In failing to do so, much of the media squandered an opportunity to enhance public knowledge and understanding of Islam and Muslims. The example he cited illustrated what can happen when the truth about an important national issue is communicated, but media outlets -- using the lame excuse that it is "old news," referring to reader fatigue, and/or claiming insufficient public interest in the topic -- refuse to report the story.

As an illustration of efforts to overcome challenges American Muslims face in having their voices heard in the American media, Awad spoke about what CAIR and other organizations have been doing. CAIR's media service is distributed to thousands of media professionals in news organizations across the United States. Moreover, 7,000 American Muslims have participated in CAIR's media workshops. "In addition," Awad said, "beyond teaching how to work more effectively with the media, we grant scholarships to American Muslims who are eager to pursue media careers."

Dealing with the other side of the coin -- the need to improve Arab media -- is the Center for International Media Education (CIME) at Georgia State University in Atlanta, headed by Dr. Leonard Ray Teel. Focusing on "Enhancing Media Professionalism and Lessening Published Misinformation," Dr. Teel spoke of his extensive experience in administering media workshops throughout the Arab world.

Teel said that his Center's workshops try to build on the fact that "Arabs are great story tellers." Underscoring that facts are stubborn things -- they have implications for policies -- he stated,

"we emphasize how effective one can be merely by publishing key facts about an issue that most readers would otherwise find hard to come by."

Dr. Teel pointed out how American efforts to enhance Arab media training received a boost this past decade upon the formation of the Arab-U.S. Association for Communication Educators (AUSACE), for which he was a co-founder and is a former president. AUSACE administers student scholarship programs and workshops in Arab countries year-round to develop the skills of local journalists.

Economic/Energy/Commercial

Mr. Brian Malnak, Vice President, Shell Oil Company, chaired a session that illustrated it is not only training, standards, and practices related to the media that need to be improved in the United States and the Arab world. H.E. Eng. Usamah M. Al-Kurdi, Member, Majlis Ash-Shura (National Consultative Council), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, zeroed in on what, for several years now, has been the most important reform issue in his country. He focused on the imperative of overhauling key segments of the country's educational system. The inability to do so, he emphasized, would result in a failure to ensure that increasing numbers of Saudi Arabian youth acquire the necessary knowledge and skills demanded in the modern workplace.

Al-Kurdi was frank in admitting what Arab countries can no longer afford. They cannot continue, he said, to produce an abundance of graduates in the liberal arts at the expense of adequately educated and trained professionals in the hard sciences. Acknowledging the continuing demographic pressures stemming from the country's burgeoning ranks of youth in particular, Al-Kurdi linked the goal of meaningful employment to the country's need for constantly growing its economy. In no other way could he foresee the possibility of Saudi Arabia being able to maintain its citizens' relatively high rate of material well being in light of the rate at which the population is increasing. He urged that policymakers continue to "assign the highest priority to reforming the country's educational institutions, including the necessity to continuously upgrade teaching methodologies, academic curricula, and materials if the country's future graduates are to have any realistic hope of meeting the exacting requirements of the labor market."

Al-Kurdi also spoke about Saudi Arabia's ongoing reforms in the realm of governance. He noted that these were given a boost upon the formation in 1993 of the National Shura [Consultative] Council, of which he is a member and serves on a committee concerned with issues related to trade and investment. Since then, he remarked, additional reform measures have been launched in nearly a dozen different sectors of national economic, political, and social life.

The Kingdom's economic reforms, according to Al-Kurdi, have registered significant progress since he attended at last year's conference. They have been taking place along three axes: the rewriting of financial, insurance, and judicial laws, rules, and regulations; the creation of high-profile organizations to facilitate and support development, such as the Saudi Economic Council and the Saudi Tourism Council; and the enhancement of investment opportunities in electric power generation, desalinization plants, mining, private education, and centers for applied

technology and training.

For the immediately foreseeable future, Al-Kurdi opined, job creation is likely to remain uppermost among the objectives of Saudi Arabia's economic reforms. Meanwhile, the process of "Saudizing" the workforce continues apace. Currently, expatriates compose 27 percent of the population. They also form as much as 90% of the work force in certain sectors of the economy. As guest workers, they send billions of dollars in labor remittances out of the country annually to their families back home. For these and other reasons, the policy implications of this issue are clear. If nothing else, the country's reformist efforts in terms of employment and education will likely remain interconnected for quite some time into the future.

Al-Kurdi also discussed some of the Kingdom's latest political reforms. He pointed out that the scheduling of municipal elections will be deliberately staggered. They are likely to take place in successive regions during the winter and spring of 2005. According to Al-Kurdi, among the reasons for holding the elections sequentially is the objective of learning from each one how subsequent elections might be improved. Additionally, more time than was originally anticipated will be necessary in order to provide an adequately trained cadre of election monitors and officials to inspire public confidence that the balloting is administered properly.

There is little doubt that, in many of the country's more remote regions, modern-style elections -- as opposed to the time-honored processes of consultation and consensus -- will represent something quite new and different from the traditional ways of choosing one's leaders. With the Kingdom likely to be placed under a national and global microscope to a greater extent than in recent memory, the stakes are high. Accordingly, no one is unmindful of the extraordinary care and attention to detail that will have to go into the advance preparations. In no other way would it be likely that the overall process will succeed in meeting not only the expectations of the citizens who will participate and observe, but various criteria within international standards, too.

As of now, it has not been determined who will be allowed to vote in terms of what restrictions as to age, gender or length of citizenship will apply. Beyond these considerations, also at issue are matters pertaining to voter, campaign, and candidate registration, as well as election balloting, monitoring, and the role of the media. Further, many will be looking to gauge the degree to which proven methodologies are adhered to for determining whether the elections, and the tabulation of the results, are truly free and fair, or their close cousin: open and transparent.

Complementing this series of reforms in one of the largest and most economically and commercially important Arab countries is a situation that all countries would like to have: the financial windfall created by revenues from record-breaking oil prices. The likely repercussions this will have on the major Arab oil producing economies in general were addressed by Brad Bourland, Chief Economist, Samba Financial Group. "For the purpose of certain kinds of economic analyses," Bourland said, "it can be helpful to divide the economies of the Arab world into those of the oil-producing countries and those that are not oil-producing countries." Keying his remarks off the theme of "Arab World Economies: Prosperity against Political Uncertainty," he pointed out that last year the growth in Egypt's and Lebanon's economies was 2-3 percent.

In contrast, Qatar and the UAE Emirate of Dubai registered growth rates of 10 percent. The

posting of such divergent economic rates of growth, Bourland emphasized, is not new. In essence, it merely illuminates the ongoing and in numerous instances extraordinary and long-standing disparities in the regional economies.

Bourland cited Qatar as an example of a country that has extensively liberalized various sectors of its economy. He noted that Saudi Arabia, too, continues to register positive steps toward the further opening up of its economy to its own private sector as well as to inward flows of foreign direct investment. Such steps are likely to have proved especially prudent and timely en route the Kingdom's expected accession to the World Trade Organization, which is believed likely to occur in the near term.

Clyde V. Prestowitz, Jr., President of the Economic Strategy Institute, focused on what, to many, is a somewhat more macro issue: "The Policy Interface between Strategy and Economics." More than any of the other specialists, and using the United States as his foil, he was quick to emphasize the deleterious affects of debt and deficit spending as though there is no tomorrow on an otherwise seemingly vibrant economy. In particular, he challenged the audience to imagine ways in which a series of fiscal parameters could impact the American economy. Underscoring the need to remain vigilant with regard to certain economic indicators, he concluded with a somber prospect: unless corrective fiscal and monetary steps are taken in time, Americans risk witnessing in the foreseeable future the collapse of the dollar in world markets.

How might such a bleak prognosis, if it were to transpire, affect the objective of restoring Arab-U.S. mutual trust and confidence? To some, the following perspective seemed to bear some relevance. Not all Americans or Arabs are aware that the U.S. dollar is the unit of currency in which oil, gas, cotton, copper, coffee, and numerous other commodities have long been traded internationally.

As a result, for tens of millions of people worldwide, the dollar's strength or weakness in comparison to other currencies over time is hardly a matter of small moment. Among those who follow such matters closely are treasury agencies, investors, bank depositors, savings and loan institutions, credit agencies, senior citizens living on fixed retirement incomes, purchasers or borrowers of capital, and consumers of durable and perishable goods, to name but a few.

If the dollar crashes, what would happen to what remains of Arab-U.S. mutual trust and confidence? Would it plummet further than it already has? And what would be the fate of the reported hundreds of billions of dollars that Arab countries' governments, corporations, and citizens have invested in the American stock market, in U.S. Treasury bills, and/or deposited in U.S. monetary markets, mutual funds, and banks?

Where Do We Go From Here?

The conference's final session, which addressed the theme of "Where Do We Go from Here?," was chaired by Dr. Daoud Khairallah, Chairman, Policy Committee, and Board Member, American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. He and two other renowned specialists tackled aspects of various issues discussed in the preceding sessions in addition to introducing some challenges and points of their own that they argued are relevant.

Stripping away any remaining fig leaves, Dr. Khairallah was straightforward in stating that, "U.S. policy on the ground is perceived as unfair by Arabs, a perception that is shared by a great many others worldwide." In so doing, he underscored the degree to which this region-wide viewpoint continues to tear the fabric of what was previously an abundance of American goodwill in the Arab world. He said, "Our decision makers appear to have insufficiently realized the extent that a people's perceived sense of injustice [at the receiving end of various American policies] plays right into the hands of terrorists."

Ambassador Chas W. Freeman, President, Middle East Policy Council and former Assistant Secretary of Defense and U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, agreed. In addition, he stated clearly that he is more pessimistic this year than in others about the region's future, especially where it concerns the conflict in Iraq.

"Neither candidate is saying much about how he would address the conflict. Both are instead involved in an infantile debate about Kerry's silver star and whether George Bush turned up [for National Guard service] in Alabama," Freeman said. He further emphasized an overall bleak outlook for the near term by sharing his view of the situation on the ground in Iraq.

"Despite the President's having proclaimed 'mission accomplished' a little more than a month following the invasion we led to topple Saddam Hussein, it now seems we may have to hang out in Iraq for the next four, or five, or twenty years." Regarding the war on terrorism, he asked whether "there is an end game, or is this to be a 'forever' war?"

Bringing the Conference to a close was H.E. Dr. Clovis Maksoud, Director, Center for the Study of the Global South, American University. Like Freeman, he was distraught not only by the situation in Iraq, but with U.S. policy as a whole as it pertains to the Arab world.

Amb. Maksoud noted the media-generated mantra of "Why do they hate us?" and offered an enlightened understanding of the issue. "The question of why do Arabs and Muslims 'hate us,'" he said, "reveals a profound American knowledge deficit about the Arab world and the Islamic world's situation. Arabs are angry for a legitimate and specific reason. They are angry because of what they see as a de-coupling of American policy from stated American values."

Maksoud said Arabs, for as long as anyone could remember, have wanted to feel as if they are partners with the United States. A sense of genuine partnership -- with respect to which leaders on both sides have always acknowledged as encompassing vast potential for mutual benefit -- would go a long ways. At the very least, it would help to alleviate many of the grounds for the region wide frustration and feelings of hatred towards U.S. policy.

At the end of the day, Amb. Maksoud said, "Arabs feel they are being spoken at, not spoken to. This is a situation that must be rectified." Judged by the thunderous applause that accompanied his remarks, few, if any, who addressed and attended this year's annual conference, seemed to disagree.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. John Duke Anthony is the founding President and CEO of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations; Secretary, U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee; and Publisher of *GulfWire* and *Saudi-American Forum*. All three are Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit and nongovernmental institutions. Each is dedicated to enhancing awareness among Americans and others of U.S. interests and involvement in the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world. For the past 31 years, Dr. Anthony has been a consultant and regular lecturer on the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf countries for the U.S. Departments of Defense and State. He is also an Adjunct Professor of Middle East Studies at the Defense Institute for Security Assistance Management. The author of four books and nearly 150 articles, essays, and chapters in edited works, his best-known work is *Arab States of the Lower Gulf: People, Politics, and Petroleum*. His most recent book is *The United Arab Emirates: Dynamics of State Formation* (2002).

In 1983, Dr. Anthony received the Distinguished Achievement Award of the Department of Defense's Institute for Security Assistance Management, one of three granted to Middle East specialists in the Institute's history. In 1993, he received the Department of States' Distinguished Visiting Lecturer Award, one of three awarded to Middle East specialists over a period of 25 years in recognition of his preparation of American diplomatic and defense personnel assigned to the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf states. In 1994, he received the Janet Stevens Award for Outstanding Contributions to American-Arab Understanding. On June 21, 2000, H.M. Mohammad VI of Morocco, on the occasion of his first official visit to the United States, personally knighted Dr. Anthony, bestowing upon him the medal of the *Order of Ouissam Alaouite*, the nation of Morocco's highest award for excellence.

A member of the Council on Foreign Relations and co-founder and board member of the National Commission to Commemorate the 14th Centennial of Islam, Dr. Anthony is the only American to have served as an international observer in each of the parliamentary elections in Yemen and the only American to have been invited to each of the Gulf Cooperation Council's heads of State Summits since the GCC's inception in 1981.

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