

The Arab Spring and the U.S. Response: American and Middle Eastern Students Speak Out

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ABSTRACT: The “Arab Spring” galvanized global media attention on political upheaval in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Observers around the world felt the rising tension and tumult of change, especially among the young people of the region, and yet the gulf between cultures continues to threaten understanding and peace. In an era when social networking rivals TV news coverage and when mobile text messages substitute for interpersonal channels of communication, the views held by U.S. and Middle Eastern college students can either unite or divide the cultures. In order to understand how young people view media and current events that frame the conflict, this study uses survey data as a comparative indicator of the level of conflict between students of MENA and the United States. This study examines communication activities and political views on college campuses in Doha, Qatar, Dubai, and Cairo, Egypt, and in Peoria, Illinois and Lafayette, Louisiana. The results show a higher level of engagement in news and public affairs among Middle Eastern students and a contrast in opinion regarding political issues and events.

Keywords: *Arab Spring, American Students, Middle Eastern Students, Social Media, Political Opinion*

INTRODUCTION

This study is based on the observation that ongoing unrest in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region involving threats of terrorism raise important communication issues worthy of continuing investigation. Understanding issues concerning media uses, political views, and cross-cultural attitudes among American and Middle Eastern young people are part of the solution. This comparative study examines key issues from the special vantage point of college students of both regions informed by their online participation on college campuses. Viewpoints expressed by these undergraduate students in Louisiana and Illinois are compared with students in Dubai, UAE, Cairo, Egypt, and Doha, Qatar during the recent season of Arab uprisings. Support for this research came in part from a grant through the Middle Eastern Partnership Initiative (MEPI) first articulated by the U.S. State Department in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, and this paper was researched and written with support from this government sponsored program.

New Generation, New Media

College students, whether living in the Middle East or United States typically have a high need for orientation or NFO. This NFO is provoked when young people confront issues and ideas of personal relevance and uncertainty to their understanding of the political world around them, including regional news coverage that involves acts of terrorism. Perhaps what is leading contemporary college students to diverge in their multitasking use of traditional and new media and the manner in which their channels shape personal views of important events? New media traits of *convergence, ubiquity, interactivity, and transferability* are considered important in intercultural communication habits in the context of young people's lives, especially in terms of global news events.

In gauging political news awareness, Weinstock and Boudreau (2006) interviewed 429 American college students and discovered only 19% actually went online to search for news about the War in Iraq despite the fact that an overwhelming majority considered such news to be of high interest. Compare that level of student activity to the response received by Hussein and Hassanien

(2006) at the American University in Cairo, where two-thirds of the students polled were searching online to find news about the War in Iraq. The AUC students preferred the Internet not only to find news of the war, but also to discuss it with others, sign petitions, and offer prayers for its resolution (Hussein & Hassanien, p. 263).

The reliance of a young person's particular media choices and personal orientation suggests other cultural differences between Middle Eastern and Western students. Valenzuela (2009) measured personal values to determine what issues young people find to be personally relevant and in keeping with their social identity. One's personal values derived from membership in a particular group leads to an alignment with that group's core beliefs and values (Gilmore & Meeks, 2010; Hutcheson et al., 2004; Jones & Sheets, 2009; Rivenburgh, 2000). The key premise is that one's values will become evident through the personal response depending on social identity and the context of the news discovery. For example, material values are more in keeping with the news media's fixation on the coverage of crime and economy than post materialist values covering environment and political reform issues. Would the differences between American and Middle Eastern students show a contrast in their views of the political world around them?

Before the 2008 presidential election, an initial comparison was made between college students in the United States and those in the Middle East to discern their agenda issues of the election. It appeared that the economy, the war in Iraq, national security (including terrorism) and healthcare were driving the global news agenda. Those issues were followed in importance by the war in Afghanistan, energy policy/gas prices, and U.S. foreign policies, the rights of women and minorities, and immigration. After students judged presidential qualifications based on issue competency, we found candidate preference was positively correlated (Agnihotri, Davie, Dinu & Auter, 2010).

American and Middle Eastern college students responded to the U.S. presidential candidates at a personal level expressing feelings of homophily -- identification with a candidate's thoughts, words and actions that tended to

generate support for then Sen. Obama. Social identity theory would suggest that Sen. Obama's Kenyan heritage with Muslim family ties created homophily for students at Qatar University and the American University in Dubai, who favored Sen. Obama's candidacy.

In 2011, the Egyptian revolution presented a new opportunity for drawing a direct comparison between students from the United States and the Middle East. The story's continuing coverage by American and Arab news media influenced views and this study was undertaken to compare the diverse views held among undergraduate students in both regions.

Reactions to President Obama

Past midway into his presidency, Obama's image varied considerably from campus to campus. When students were asked about President Obama's policies in terms of terrorism, protecting energy resources, and Israel, the level of agreement tended to shift according to location. The widest disagreement regarding President Obama's policies came in response to the issue of Israel's role in the region. Less than a fifth of the American students (18.1%) felt that issue was important compared to two-thirds of the Middle Eastern students (67%) viewed protecting Israel as one of the president's chief priorities. The value of protecting energy resources in the region figured higher in the minds of Middle Eastern students (Middle East: 86.4%, USA: 59.1%), although the issue of dealing with terrorists showed closer agreement among student opinions (Middle East: 53.4%, USA: 42.6%).

When asked if Mr. Obama has done a good job as U.S. president, 72.5% of the Middle Eastern students were in agreement compared to only about 52% of the Americans. There was a clear divide between the so-called "Blue State" (Democratic) students in Illinois who appeared to like the president's handling of his office (70.3%) and "Red State" students in Louisiana, who viewed the Obama administration more critically, and only about a third (34.3%) thought he had done a good job as president. In fact, a majority of Middle Eastern students (69.7%) in 2011 felt that President Obama deserved another term in office while only 41.6% of the U.S. students were so inclined. Again, the regional

partisanship was apparent among students favorably responding from the president's home state of Illinois (57.8%) and those students of the Deep South (27%).

Methods

Survey research tends to be more descriptive and anecdotal unless carefully constructed. The case study method (Thomas, 2011) allows scholars to conduct a comparative analysis of events, policies and people without necessarily applying the same statistical techniques of a laboratory experiment or survey design. While classic case studies concentrate on a single organization or person, the logical comparative analysis technique can be effectively applied to attitudes surrounding an event such as the Arab Spring. It affords comparisons of distant views, including viewing habits and views of the events.

Survey data were collected by means of an online questionnaire administered at widely separated campuses in 2011 in Louisiana, Illinois, Lebanon, Qatar, and Egypt. By contrasting results from MENA and United States, researchers are able to understand different perspectives on the events in the events in the MENA. The quoted comments were taken from student comment boxes provided by the SurveyMonkey format design. The particular quotes used were selected as those most articulate ones from the participants commenting. The sampling frame was coincidental in nature relying solely on the convenience of the classes and professors participating on the various campuses. Guiding this investigation were the following research questions.

RQ1: How did United States and Middle East students differ in their use of traditional and new media?

RQ2: How did United States and Middle East students differ in their reactions to the United States after the 9/11 attacks?

RQ3: How did United States and Middle East students differ in their reaction to uprising events in MENA?

RESULTS

The survey instrument was designed to allow participants to express their feelings about recent events in both MENA and the United States. In addition, importance of the key issues, media use, and perceived media effects were measured. The combination allowed researchers to consider the relationship of events and locations. Presented below are the most important results.

American and Middle Eastern Participants

For the American sample, data from undergraduate communication students were drawn at a private university in Peoria, Illinois, Bradley University, and a conservative, state university campus – the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. For the Middle Eastern sample, students from the American University in Dubai, American University in Cairo and Qatar University (Doha) expressed their opinions on current events and reported communication activities. Gender participation in communication classes participating in both regions of the world skewed toward female majority by about two-to-one.

Table 1: Student Estimate of Media Use (Hours per week)

Media Use – Estimated Hours Per Week	ME	US	Total
Watching television news	4.1	4.1	4.1
Watching entertainment programs on television	6.1	6.7	6.3
Listening to music	8.7	10.2	9.3
Discussing news with family and friends	4.5	2.7	3.7
Listening to news on the radio	1.5	1.4	1.5
% of sample who listen to radio news	42%	38%	
Reading the newspaper	2.6	1.5	2.2
% of sample who read the newspaper	52%	43%	
N	216	150	366

RQ1: How did United States and Middle East students differ in their use of traditional and new media?

Cross-cultural contrasts were noted by the present study in the time spent with entertainment and information media. Table 1 indicates that Middle Eastern and American students spent about the same time viewing TV news coverage (4.1 hrs), but Middle Eastern students reported viewing news online an average of about 4.3 hours per week compared to only 3.9 hours for American students (See Table 2). The reverse ratio reflected the time spent with entertainment media. U.S. students preferred to watch on average an hour and a half more entertainment programming (USA: 6.7 hours, Middle East: 6.1 hours). American students also spent far more time listening to music than their counter parts in the Middle East. University students in the United States reported 10.2 hours per week of music listening compared to 8.7 hours for the Middle Eastern campuses.

An even more stark contrast was noted in the average time spent discussing news items. Middle Eastern students estimated they spent about 4.5 hours per week in such conversations as compared to only 2.7 hours per week for American students. This finding echoed a similar percentage reported by Agnihotri et al. (2010) that showed a comparative reticence on the part of U.S. college students to make political news a subject of conversation with family and friends.

Table 2: Student Estimate of Online Media Use (Hours per week)

Media Use/Internet – Estimated Hours Per			
Week	ME	US	Total
Viewing news on the Internet	4.3	3.9	4.2
Using the Internet for other activities - email, shopping, videos	9.1	7.9	8.6
Viewing and posting on Facebook	6.4	8.5	7.3
Texting friends and family	12.1	11.5	11.8
Viewing and posting on Twitter	3.8	2.7	3.3
% of Twitter users	40%	44%	
N	216	150	366

Interpersonal communication habits converge; however, when students are asked how much time they spend texting messages. Students in the Middle East said they text messages about 12.1 hours per week while in the United States, the average time thumbing messages was around 11.5 hours per week (See Table 2). American students spend about two hours more time per week viewing and posting on Facebook (8.5 hrs. v. 6.4 hrs.), while Middle Eastern students spent about an hour more interacting with their Twitter accounts (3.8 hrs. v. 2.7 hrs.). These data measuring communication habits and political opinions among American and Middle Eastern college students show remarkable similarities and striking contrasts. To a certain extent social media engaged student responses to political upheaval and global events. There were noticeably similar in their use of social media and hence a similar impact for Facebook and Twitter use emerged in

the study. A student at American University in Cairo was animated about it: “I believe in Egypt, and now we somehow (have) freedom! Such as having access to the Internet and having international TV channels.”

RQ2: How did United States and Middle East students differ in their reactions to the United States after the 9/11 attacks?

Five opinion questions were used to gauge political views from students groups in both regions regarding political controversies following the attacks of 9/11, including the issue of U.S. troops killing Osama bin Laden, the division between Israel and Palestinians, and the impact on stability and understanding of the American military intervention in the region (See Table 3). These data show that students in both regions felt that there had been unnecessary warfare in the Middle East (Middle East: 3.8, USA: 3.5) since the terrorist acts of 2001. There was a slight tendency to agree with the U.S. justification for the slaying of Osama bin Laden for both groups (Middle East: 3.2, USA: 3.4). However, when asked if students felt the United States was a safer nation for people of all beliefs (Middle East: 2.6, USA: 2.8), they generally disagreed with that statement. Likewise they did not feel there was greater understanding of the Muslim faith (Middle East: 2.8, USA: 2.7). A score lower than 3.0 indicated a level of disagreement, and the highest level of disagreement in both regions registered in response to the statement, “Israel and the Palestinians are closer to agreement” (Middle East: 2.6, USA: 2.8).

Table 3. Student Opinion of Post-9/11 Results

Region	ME	US	All
USA is a safer nation for people of all beliefs.	2.6	2.8	2.7
USA was justified in killing Osama bin Laden.	3.2	3.4	3.3
USA more understanding of the Muslim faith	2.8	2.7	2.8
There has been unnecessary warfare in the Middle East.	3.8	3.5	3.7
Israel and the Palestinians are closer to agreement.	2.2	2.6	2.4
N	216	151	367

We next compared our student samples on ten political issues to determine which ones were most important to them (See Table 4). The scores indicate a semantic differential scale of importance with seven registering the highest level. Economic conditions (Middle East: 5.7, USA: 5.9) and security and terrorism (Middle East: 5.7, USA: 5.8) ranked highest for both regions, but religious tolerance was also viewed as one of the most important (Middle East: 5.7, USA: 5.6). Next in rank would be Freedom of Information (Middle East: 5.5, USA: 5.7), followed by political leadership (Middle East: 5.5, USA: 5.5) and democratic government (Middle East: 5.4, USA: 5.8), which showed a slightly higher ranking among American students. The rights of women and minorities are next (Middle East: 5.3, USA: 5.5) with the tilt toward American students, followed by oil and energy resources that is slightly more important to the Middle Eastern students (5.3) than Americans (5.1).

Again, the widest gap in terms of what is considered to be an important issue was the response to “Israel & The Middle East,” which saw more than a point difference between the significance that issue held to Middle Eastern students (5.2) versus (4.1) for American students, which was the lowest score registered. On the other hand, both groups of students were in agreement regarding the importance of American and Western leadership in the world, which measured 4.4 on a scale of seven. An interesting difference was noted when students groups were divided by the age demographic. Older Middle

Eastern students, 22 years and up, considered “religious tolerance” to be most important at a level of 6.1 compared to 5.5 for younger students.

Table 4: Student Opinion of Issue Importance

Values	ME	US	All
Security and terrorism	5.7	5.8	5.8
Political leadership	5.5	5.5	5.5
Freedom of information	5.5	5.7	5.6
Rights of women/minorities	5.3	5.5	5.4
Israel & the Middle East	5.2	4.1	4.7
Democratic government	5.4	5.8	5.5
Economic conditions	5.7	5.9	5.8
USA/Western leadership in the world	4.4	4.4	4.4
Religious tolerance	5.7	5.6	5.7
Oil and energy resources	5.3	5.1	5.3
N	216	150	366

RQ3: How did United States and Middle East students differ in their reaction to uprising events in MENA?

The premise that young people draw similar causes for specific problems based on consonant news coverage was accepted as a function of the news framing process. In citing factors leading to the unrest particularly in Egypt, student responses showed similar views. Between 98% and 99% of the college students on U.S. and Middle East campuses cited government oppression as a principal cause. Similarly, the students recognized political corruption as a factor, but Egyptian students also drew attention to the economic situation. “I believe the revolution was due to general unrest ...being unsatisfied with their personal way of life, rather than the political state of the country ... a large

number of protesters in Tahrir Square were asking for jobs or increased pay, rather than democracy,” said an American University in Cairo student.

We asked students to indicate in online questionnaire what they considered to be the causes and disseminating factors for the Arab uprisings in the Middle East. The list of prominent causes given for students was gauged by a five-point Likert scale from strong disagreement to strong agreement. We discovered relative agreement in both regions of the world. The agreement cells were collapsed and the score indicated greater agreement based on higher scores. Consequently, corrupt leaders received the highest level of agreement among students in the USA and in the Middle East as a cause for the popular revolutions. The highest level of disagreement was seen in the response to the desire for democracy as a cause, which more Middle Eastern students cited than Americans. There was also a distinction in the low level of agreement regarding American intervention as a cause for the Arab Spring (Middle East: 3.4, USA: 3.2). Higher levels of agreement were noted for both regions in citing the causes of economic hardship (3.9) and corruption (4.1).

Table 5: Student Opinion of Arab Spring Causes

Region	ME	US	All
Government			
Oppression	4.1	3.9	4.0
Corrupt Leaders	4.1	4.1	4.1
Economic Hardship	3.9	3.9	3.9
American Intervention	3.4	3.2	3.3
Desire for Democracy	3.9	3.6	3.8
N	216	151	367

Because the sample invited responses from both typical college age groups of 21 and under in addition to students 22 and older, we decided to compare opinion by the age demographic and noticed the older students in the Middle East exhibited a higher level of certainty citing the causes of the Arab awakening than younger students (See Table 6). Yet the trend in the United

States was more of a mixed bag. The highest level of agreement was displayed among older Middle Eastern students where government oppression and corruption were viewed as the two principal causes (4.3), while economic hardship (4.2), desire for democracy (4.0), and American intervention (3.3) fell behind as cited factors. This degree of certainty among older Middle Eastern students was higher than the conviction displayed by younger or older Americans.

Table 6: Student Opinion of Arab Spring Causes by Age

Region Age	ME		US	
	<22	Older	<22	Older
Government Oppression	3.9	4.3	3.9	3.7
Corrupt Leaders	4.0	4.3	4.1	4.2
Economic Hardship	3.8	4.2	3.8	3.9
American Intervention	3.3	3.3	3.2	3.2
Desire for Democracy	3.8	4.0	3.7	3.4
N	117	44	86	39

What role would students find for new media in the Egyptian revolution? The influence of social networks was felt among students in Cairo where 99% agreed that Facebook and Twitter helped spread the revolt, but the dynamics of the situation also played a part. “The social networks in Egypt’s case were only a medium of communication and they helped groups to gather at first but when they cut off the Internet, people found other ways to communicate and most of them did not have Internet access to begin with so the role of social networks to me is unclear,” wrote one AUC student. When it came to predicting the viral impact of the Arab Spring, an overwhelming majority (98%) of the Middle Eastern students predicted that it would spread to other Arab countries. A majority of the American students felt that way, but some harbored doubts about its viral potential.

There was a noticeable divide (See Table 7) between Middle Eastern and American students with a score of 3.8 from Middle Eastern students in agreement that Facebook and Twitter helped contribute to the unrest, where students in the United States were virtually undecided with a score indicating the middle point between agreement and disagreement. The lowest level of agreement was in response to the question about its benefit for political stability, where Middle Eastern students were at a midpoint (3.0) and American students even lower (2.8) in their belief that social media could be a steadying factor in politics rather than an inflammatory channel.

Social media responses also indicated a level of skepticism with regard to its quality and accuracy of information as conveyed by its ability to “keep all governments open and transparent,” with Middle Eastern students slightly leaning toward agreement on that item and U.S. students leaning slightly toward disagreement (Middle East: 3.3, USA: 2.8). Almost neutral scores were registered in response to social media’s capacity for letting citizens know “what’s going on in the government” with Middle Eastern and American students (Middle East: 3.3, USA: 3.1) again leaning slightly toward agreement. Those two questions combined suggest that student participants were not at all convinced that social media were going to help them act as informed citizens. The college students were in agreement (3.7) concerning the statement that social media is an “easy way to get involved in politics,” and to a lesser extent saw social media channels facilitating democracy (Middle East: 3.6, USA: 3.4). There was a general belief overall that social media will be important in the future with a score of 4.3 for Middle Eastern students and 4.4 for American students, which was the highest level of agreement on the social media scale.

Table 7: Student Opinion of Social Media Effects

Social Media	ME	US	All
Contributed to Unrest	3.8	3.0	3.5
Important tools for political change	3.7	3.5	3.6
Beneficial for political stability	3.0	2.8	2.9
Good for democracy	3.6	3.4	3.5
Easy way to get involved in politics	3.7	3.7	3.7
Help keep all governments open and transparent	3.3	2.8	3.1
Will be used more in the future	4.3	4.4	4.4
Important way to know what's going on in the government	3.3	3.1	3.2
N	216	151	367

Delineating groups by an age demographic that divided younger and older students (Table 8) revealed a contrast in responses between the two regions: older Middle Eastern students displaying a higher level of certainty regarding the role of social media than those 21 years old or younger with only one exception on our social media scale (“Will be used more in the future”). The younger students in the USA demonstrated higher levels of agreement regarding social media’s influence than older ones.

Table 8: Student Opinion of Social Media Effects by Age

Region and Age Social Media	ME		US	
	<22	Older	<22	Older
Contributed to Unrest	3.7	4.0	3.1	2.8
Important tools for political change	3.6	4.0	3.6	3.1
Beneficial for political stability	2.9	3.3	2.9	2.7
Good for democracy	3.5	3.8	3.6	3.1
Easy way to get involved in politics	3.7	4.0	3.8	3.6
Help keep all governments open and transparent	3.2	3.5	2.9	2.6
Will be used more in the future	4.2	4.5	4.4	4.5
Important way to know what's up in the government	3.3	3.5	3.2	2.9
N	117	44	86	39

Impact of Social Media

Research on media effects repeatedly has reported channel differences in term of cognitive and affective responses. In their study contrasting TV and newspaper coverage of the terror acts on Sept. 11th, Cho et al. (2003) measured the effect of television news in terms of eliciting emotional responses as compared to newspaper coverage. The visual elements of TV news create stronger negative and positive emotions than print coverage with even the networks' TV news transcripts containing "stronger emotional cues than newspaper stories" (Cho et al., p. 323). Internet news consumption, in contrast, was not significantly related to positive or negative emotions in response to the 9/11 attacks, leading to some speculation that online news produces primarily cognitive effects (2003, p. 326).

As we determined in recent contexts, the role of new media in assessing positive or negative feelings toward political leaders and U.S. policies in the Middle East during the Arab uprisings, we found some remarkable similarities. In drawing comparisons of news sources, we asked students if they had a favorite channel for radio or television news, a select newspaper or radio station, a

special news website, and how they used social networks for news. Social media figured prominently as a source of news for both Western and Middle Eastern students, where the vast majority of the students gathered news from their Facebook and Twitter accounts.

An earlier survey of Middle Eastern students reported a favorite channel for television news (Middle East: 90% USA: 77%). And also cited a favorite news website almost -- 76% of the students in the Middle East and 72% in the United States. More than 80% of the students at Bradley University in Peoria identified a favorite news website, and so did 71% at AUD. Smaller percentages identified a favorite news website at the University of Louisiana in Lafayette (61%) and Qatar University (60%). Legacy news sources of print and broadcast were diminishing among students in the Middle East but not as fast as in the United States. About 43% of the American college students identified newspapers as a source of news compared to 52% in the Middle East. Radio news outlets were least frequently mentioned (USA: 38%, Middle Eastern: 42%).

CONCLUSIONS

This study discovered that the key difference between American and Middle Eastern students was the time spent gathering news and discussing political issues. American students appeared far less likely to engage in controversial conversations in contrast to Arab students who seem to be energized by political discussions. The time spent with news media of all sorts – digital and traditional – indicates Middle Eastern students are politically engaged perhaps more so than American students, who seemed to prefer entertainment media.

Even though the Arab Spring is a rebellion directed at indigenous political oppression, corruption, and economic hardship the role of the United States in the region also provoked feelings of resentment. One student at AUD said, “The people have the right to start a revolution in their own country, but it doesn’t give the Americans any right to say or do anything in a country that is not their own... problems start when the Americans show up.”

Another notable finding was student responses to the issue of Israel and

the Palestinians – judged to be substantially more important to Middle Eastern students. These case study opinions indicated a shift in feelings toward President Obama from 2008 when students were largely enthusiastic about his candidacy to 2011-12 when after his years in office attitudes toward him have cooled considerably.

We also saw that the participation of women in political affairs tends to dispel gender stereotypes. Both male and female students in the Middle East were equally engaged in news viewing and discussions with their friends and family, while Arab women in particular showed a special interest in the news; listened and watched and reported events, and gathered information to form personal convictions. Lingering stereotypes of complacent Arab women occupying a subservient role saw little support in the data.

Limitations

One point should be made about the range of participants and the balance between public and private institutions represented by this case study in the United States and the Middle East. The University of Louisiana at Lafayette is a state-supported school whereas Bradley is a private institution, and although student media habits appear to be similar their political views diverge in ways that reflect those differences. Similarly, Qatar University students participated in a public institution catering to a cross-section of native Qataris whereas the American Universities of Dubai and Cairo are private schools and their enrollments also reflect those differences. Nonetheless, student media habits were comparable in some respects and so were some political opinions, but the contrast in terms of entertainment media consumption and news conversations bears further study, as do misapprehensions students harbor toward political events. The fact that Arab students largely felt that U.S. foreign policies had little to do with their revolt, while students at Bradley University were unanimous in thinking just the opposite is intriguing.

Finally, in the context of the uprisings of September 11, 2012 it was noted that a strategic implementation plan (SIP) designed to counter violent extremism (CVE) in 2011 and impede the radicalizing process of young Muslims was

underway. The president defined his priorities countering terrorism in terms of stopping the spread of nuclear weapons, guarding Israel's security, and pursuing an Arab-Israeli peace (Bjelopera, 2012). His administration's strategy drew upon reports from a number of agencies including the Dept. of Homeland Security (DHS), the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), and the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC). In order to proactively remedy Islamic radicalization, Muslim disaffection in communities where seeds of radicalization are sewn must be countered, and his administration's goal was to navigate the linguistic and cultural complexities of Islam and maintain channels of conversation in those key communities. The SIP was designed to counter violent extremist propaganda, which is "the most challenging area of work, requiring careful consideration of a number of legal issues, especially those related to the First Amendment" (Bartlett & Miller, 2010).

U.S. diplomacy to defeat radicalization in Arab countries has shaped messages opposing extremist propaganda well focused on American unity, but it cannot counter freedom of expression on the home front. Muslims living in the United States naturally are disinclined to embrace viewpoints unsympathetic to the role of their culture and religion; hence the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) seeks to forge trust through community activists and create a dialogue with Muslims through American and foreign CVE experts. The administration's watchwords are "community engagement" and "law enforcement expertise" (SIP, 2011, p. 19). Threatening this success is inherent contradictions due to counterterrorism crime fighting objectives and the fragile formation of alliances with Muslim groups.

Future research should consider more closely how controversial issues that divide peoples of the two regions based on accepted levels of freedom of expression and religion. Recent protests and acts of violence in response to an anti-Islamic video posted online underscores a key issue dividing MENA and Western ideology regarding tolerance and freedom of expression even when it represents a desecration and insult to particular faiths. American jurisprudence has long permitted direct and implicit insults to the images and iconography of

Christianity since the early 1950s, while people of Islamic faith are willing to put to death perpetrators of such offenses. How this seemingly irreconcilable difference can be resolved is a question of supreme importance in the Internet age when volatile messages easily ignore boundaries of governance and law along with sacred traditions of religious faith.

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