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# Ideas Matter

*Restoring the Content of Public Diplomacy*

*By Robert R. Reilly*



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# FOREWORD

## *The Honorable Sam Brownback*

The September 11 terrorist attacks brought an end to post–Cold War business as usual for much of the U.S. government. Intelligence and law enforcement priorities had to change, numerous government agencies had to prioritize the security of the homeland, and the armed forces had to trade an emphasis on high-intensity conflict for new doctrines on counterinsurgency and stability operations. Violent extremism, it seemed, would change everything.

It is therefore surprising that the United States has not fundamentally re-examined public diplomacy in response to today’s challenges from radical Islam. Both sides of the political spectrum agree that military means alone cannot eliminate terrorist threats. Yet other than the creation of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, the state of U.S. public diplomacy in 2009 remains remarkably similar to what it was in the Cold War’s aftermath. In terms of public diplomacy, 9/11 did not change everything.

I supported the effort to dismantle the old United States Information Agency following the end of the Cold War. Its mission seemed complete, and its mandate, with the fall of the Soviet Union, appeared to have expired. In a sense, that judgment was correct: As global communism vanished, the reason for the USIA’s creation faded away. What did not disappear, however, was the need for the United States to advance its ideas across the globe and to defend these ideas from those who would oppose them, particularly those who wish to do us harm because they reject our ideas.

Since 9/11, when we realized we had entered a new era of ideological competition with radical Islam, there has been near-universal agreement that public diplomacy is failing. I continue, therefore, to support the creation of a new USIA to ensure that we have the capacity to engage and win this ideological struggle.

But as Robert Reilly describes below, organizational and structural changes will fail to solve our public diplomacy problems if we do not develop a coherent message to communicate to the rest of the world. We need organizational reforms to make sure our own bureaucracy does not stifle the messages we are trying to convey. We also need some clear thinking about what exactly we are trying to tell the rest of the world.

Despite a dizzying number of studies recommending myriad changes in the structure of U.S. public diplomacy, few have addressed the need to change public diplomacy’s content. And no one, to my knowledge, has taken the time to get the fundamentals right the way Reilly does in the following analysis. In particular, Reilly articulates why some of our best instincts undermine our best efforts at effective public diplomacy. Perhaps out of a motivation to maintain a good relationship with those parts of the Islamic world that do not wish us harm, we have tried to advertise America, to emphasize our popular culture, and to highlight the level of tolerance and diversity in American society.

As Reilly describes, however, these messages are likely to fall on deaf ears. Instead, we must understand the ideas that animate radical Islam and then use the strength of our values and founding principles to trump our ideological opponents. It is not obvious to much of the world that the United States has the moral high ground against the terrorists. If we truly believe in the principles upon which the United States was founded, we owe the world an explanation of why it should choose those ideas over the vision of the terrorists.

As we learned in the fight against communism, defeating hostile ideologies will be hard work—much harder than trying to drown them out with marketing slogans and vague messages about cultural diversity. In this Heritage report, Robert Reilly provides scholars and policymakers with a road map for updating the content of U.S. public diplomacy and lays the intellectual foundation for long-needed reforms.

The war of ideas will be long and hard, but it is the key to winning the war on terrorism. It is time to get our message right.

# PREFACE

**Lt. Gen. John R. Vines (Ret.)**

This assessment of American public diplomacy should be read—slowly—by our senior leadership. Recent studies of U.S. public diplomacy have generated lists of deficiencies including weak leadership, poor inter-agency coordination, lack of resources, and absence of linguistic and cultural expertise. Recommendations include getting the private sector (including Hollywood) more actively involved; exploiting new technologies like cell phones and Twitter; developing social networking, blogging, and Web 2.0; better “branding”; and expanding traditional activities like exchanges.

While there may be truth in the diagnosis and some value in the proposed remedies, the debate has become one of tactics and devoid of what Robert Reilly shows to be most important—content. Endless meetings and debates over the relative merits of one tactic over another deflect attention away from the main issue: Does America have a meaningful message for the rest of the world, and if so, what is it?

There *are* organizational changes that are necessary to engage Islamist ideology effectively. The pillars of influence in the Islamic world are primarily tribal/familial, religious, and governmental. Our construct is designed to engage governments, and many in the United States are intensely uncomfortable dealing with religion due to our framework of separation of church and state. When we fail to address tribal and religious leaders in a political context, we suboptimize any possible outcome and are not using all of our diplomatic tools.

We have leaders at the operational level who know how to do this successfully if given the responsibility and authority. Our most senior leaders must do the things that only they can do: I would argue that they must do *only* the things that only they can do. They must articulate our ideals and delegate clear authorities—and accountability—for what others are to do.

Reilly helps them to answer the big question: America *does* have a powerful and inspiring message, a message of hope and justice based on a belief in inalienable human rights. The United States has engaged in battles of moral principle before—essentially wars of ideas—and has prevailed. Prevailing today over the “ideology of Islamism” requires that we confront its claim to moral legitimacy and reestablish our own. It is that challenge that is the rub, for our policymakers have failed to make the case that American values are more worthy, and many have argued that all values are of equal worth—to include extremist ideologies.

It is important that Robert Reilly succeeds in sparking a debate, not only in a broad philosophical and strategic sense, but in the most human of ways. We are asking our young women and men to fight for these ideals, and many have lost their lives. Our ideals are far more powerful than our military capability, but until we can communicate them to the world, we will not be able to truly engage this enemy, and our soldiers will be left to continue the fight that only our ideals can win.

# Ideas Matter: Restoring the Content of Public Diplomacy

The purpose of this paper is to examine why the ideas that now animate U.S. public diplomacy lead necessarily to its failure and to suggest the principles with which those ideas should be replaced if we are to win the struggle with radical Islamism and to repair the standing of the United States in the world. The emphasis here will be on the content of public diplomacy—the currency of the ideas in which it should deal—rather than on its organizational structure or its programmatic aspects.

The primary purpose of United States public diplomacy is to explain, promote, and defend American principles to audiences abroad. This objective goes well beyond the public affairs function of presenting and explaining specific policies of various Administrations. Policies and Administrations change; principles do not, so long as the United States remains true to itself.

Public diplomacy has a particularly vital mission during war, when the peoples of other countries, whether adversaries or allies, need to know why we fight. What are the ideas so dear to us that we would rather kill and die than live without them? And what antithetical ideas do our enemies embrace, about which they feel the same way? After all, it is a conflict of ideas that is behind the shooting wars, and it is that conflict which must be won to achieve any lasting success.

Yet U.S. public diplomacy is generally acknowledged as a failure—an especially egregious one since 9/11. By all accounts, we have been absent from the battlefield of ideas. This is particularly clear to those fighting the shooting wars. Lieutenant General John R. Vines (Ret.), a ground commander in both Iraq and Afghanistan, wanted very much to see an active U.S. effort in the war of ideas, without which he knew his troops would pay a higher price with their own lives. His frustration at the handicapped American abilities in this regard led him to conclude that “[w]e were given the authority to kill the enemy, but the authority to influence them so that we might not have to was withheld.”<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, those whose very job, one would have thought, is to “influence them” deny that this is their mission. At a strategic communications conference at the National Defense University on October 15, 2008, Jeffrey Trimble, chief of staff of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), said of the more than \$600 million government overseas broadcasting effort, “It is not in our mandate to influence.”<sup>2</sup>

## The Problem

How is it that a country founded upon rational deliberation has been reduced to kinetic means as its primary, perhaps its only, means of communication? One reason for this is that the destruction of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) in 1999 eliminated many of the capabilities for such activities. However, the main reasons for failure stem from intellectual confusion regarding what it is we are defending and against whom we are defending it.

The results of our inability have been made vividly clear not only by the success of Osama bin Laden in galvanizing substantial parts of the Muslim world, but by the increasing unpopularity of the United States almost everywhere. This has made many Americans wonder. Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke captured the general puzzlement with the question he posed before a Senate panel: “How can a man in a cave out-communicate the world’s leading communications society?”<sup>3</sup>

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1. Correspondence with the author, January 24, 2009.

2. As stated to the author by conference participant Yigal Carmon, October 20, 2008.

The “man in a cave” was able to overcome his technological disadvantages through the *content* of his communications. Bin Laden has been staking a claim, however perverted, to justice—the highest kind of appeal. As he asserted in his post-9/11 video, “Our terrorism against America is commendable. It seeks to make the unjust stop making injustice.”<sup>4</sup> This may strike us as absurd, but it is not absurd to the audience to which he is speaking. Animated by moral outrage, Bin Laden and the other radical Islamists offer the most powerful sort of narrative: A gross injustice has been committed, and they are redressing it in order to reestablish justice.

He who wins the argument from justice wins the war of ideas. This is the very substance of such wars. Al-Qaeda understands this. “True victory,” it proclaims, “is the triumph of principles and values. . . . True conquest is the conquest of the hearts of people.” It also understands that its chief vulnerability is “a loss of the justice of our cause.”<sup>5</sup>

The job of U.S. public diplomacy should be to advance the justice of our cause—our “principles and values”—while concomitantly undermining our opponent’s claim to justice. Any activity that is not engaged in doing at least one of these two things is not public diplomacy. Has “the justice of our cause” been persuasively presented? Apparently not. Former Senator Chuck Hagel (R–NE) recently lamented: “Much of the world has lost its trust and confidence in America’s purpose and questions our intentions. The next president will have to reintroduce America to the world in order to regain its trust in our purpose as well as our power.”<sup>6</sup>

In September 2008, Senator Sam Brownback (R–KS) introduced Senate Bill S. 3546, the Strategic Communications Act of 2008, calling for the creation of a new National Center for Strategic Communications that largely replicates the old USIA. It is unclear whether the new Administration will support an effort to recreate such an institution in order to “reintroduce America to the world,” but what if it should, and what if it succeeded in doing so? A new communications agency would only be as good as the content of what it communicated, no matter how updated and sophisticated its technologies and programs might be.

In other words, we first need to address the *content* problem. Implicit in Senator Hagel’s statement about loss of trust in our purpose is the idea that power without a higher purpose does not earn or deserve the trust of others. If the exercise of power is not set within the context of its service to moral principle, it will be seen as an expression of raw self-interest. Because of our failure in public diplomacy, this is the way in which the United States is broadly understood today—a bully pursuing its own interests regardless of others.

This is perhaps why President Barack Obama has called for a return to “moral persuasion.” He also said, “I think we’ve got a unique opportunity to reboot America’s image around the world and also in the Muslim world in particular.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, his election has created an unparalleled chance to do this, as it was a stunning demonstration of what the principle of equality in the Declaration of Independence means in action.

In his famous “I Have a Dream” speech, Martin Luther King spoke of a promissory note from the American Founding that had not yet been met. In this bicentennial year of Abraham Lincoln’s birth, it now has. Clearly, the dream is alive, and it is not only a dream. But by itself, this is not enough.

## Advertising and Diversity

Before considering how to get this right, we should examine how and why we got it wrong. What is the reason we have neglected to present a higher purpose as the aim of our actions? Why have we misrepresented ourselves? Or have we?

One place to look for answers is the recent emphasis on advertising and pop entertainment in U.S. public diplomacy, and another is the general thematic stress on tolerance and diversity as the preeminent American virtues in

3. Richard Holbrooke, “Get the Message Out,” *The Washington Post*, October 28, 2001, p. B7.

4. Transcript of Osama bin Laden broadcast, December 27, 2001.

5. Captured al-Qaeda letter to Ayman al-Zawahiri, Iraq, 2005.

6. Ann Scott Tyson, “For Nation at War, Gates Seeks Smooth Transition: Pentagon Chief Breaks from Past with Leaner Approach,” *The Washington Post*, November 16, 2008, p. A9.

7. Associated Press, “Obama Wants to ‘Reboot America’s Image,’” December 10, 2008.



lieu of the deeper moral principles on which the United States was founded. As a result, the means have overcome the message, and the message, to the extent one remains, is superficial and even self-defeating.

In a 9/11 commemorative column, British author Frank Furedi discerned a deeper problem in the “lack of clarity about what the West stands for,” which has been made excruciatingly evident by the reaction to 9/11.<sup>8</sup> That reaction “exposed and brought to the surface the difficulty Western society has in giving meaning to its way of life.” In other words, we may not be explaining our moral principles because we have none. Furedi wrote:

For a brief moment, many observers believed that 9/11 would represent a rallying point and provide the West with a sense of mission. However, in the absence of a coherent system of meaning, the West struggles to promote its own values; instead, it relies on tawdry advertising and marketing.... This focus on improving “the image” indicated that the US was not prepared to engage in a serious battle of ideas.

Furedi is right about the reliance on advertising and marketing. In response to radical Islamist ideology, the United States has been playing pop music to the Middle East and trying to run advertising campaigns about how tolerant Americans are. The very way in which Holbrooke asked his “man in a cave” question makes this impulse to turn for a solution to the leaders of the “communications society” understandable.

This is what the Bush Administration did at the outset. In 2001, it enlisted Charlotte Beers, the former head of the world’s two largest advertising agencies, as the new Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs. Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Secretary of State Colin Powell averred that “[s]he got me to buy Uncle Ben’s rice and so there is nothing wrong with getting somebody who knows how to sell something.”<sup>9</sup>

But what sort of “something” is the United States? The November 14, 2001, issue of *Time* put the problem in similar terms: “Can Charlotte Beers sell Uncle Sam?” What exactly is Uncle Sam, or what does he have that can be sold? Chiming in on December 17, *Business Week* asked, “Can she market America to hostile Muslims abroad?”<sup>10</sup> Thus, the problem was seen principally as an image issue that could be addressed by better marketing. If only they knew about Uncle Ben’s rice, they would like it—just like Secretary Powell. Advertising was the answer.

Beers’s first initiative was a \$15 million television ad campaign on “shared values” with the Muslim world, which every Arab country, with the exception of Kuwait, refused to broadcast. Apparently, they did not “share” the “values.”

### Why Advertising Is Not the Answer

Here is where the problem of “it” comes in: the problem of content. What if the goal of the United States is to promote democracy? Democracy assumes that citizens treat each other as equals, who deal with one another through rational persuasion rather than force, and hence that men form free governments through rational deliberation. In other words, promoting, practicing, and defending democracy requires the primacy of reason over passion.

Can advertising achieve this? Certainly, advertising can contribute to public diplomacy at a certain level and in certain situations. However, since advertising is not about reason, using it in an attempt to manipulate the masses’ passions, inducing them to embrace democracy, is, to say the least, an oxymoronic endeavor. Advertising is a tool that automatically limits its subject matter and demotes it to its own level—the level of slogans. This is why the very idea that it should lead in America’s representation of itself undermined the goal even before starting.

There is, however, a certain provenance to the idea of “selling” America, which goes back to the Committee on Public Information, begun by President Woodrow Wilson to generate domestic support during World War I. It was run by George Creel, who called it “The World’s Greatest Adventure in Advertising.” He employed young Edward Bernays, Sigmund Freud’s nephew, whose reflections on his experiences show how clearly the effort was intermixed

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8. Frank Furedi, “Five Years After 9/11: The Search for Meaning Goes On,” *Spiked*, September 5, 2006, at <http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php?site/earticle/1603/>.

9. Margaret Carlson, “Can Charlotte Beers Sell Uncle Sam?” *Time*, November 14, 2001, at <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,184536,00.html>.

10. “Charlotte Beers’ Toughest Sell,” *Business Week*, December 17, 2001, at [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/01\\_51/b3762098.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/01_51/b3762098.htm).

with Freud's concept of the unconscious, as well as with notions of behaviorism and the ideas of Ivan Pavlov. In his 1928 book, *Propaganda*, Bernays wrote:

If we understand the mechanism and motives of the group mind, is it not possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will without their knowing about it? The recent practice of propaganda has proved that it is possible, at least up to a certain point and within certain limits.<sup>11</sup>

Bernays labeled his scientific technique of opinion-molding the “engineering of consent.” In *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (1923), he wrote that “human nature is readily subject to modification.”<sup>12</sup> Joseph Goebbels agreed. Bernays said that, according to Karl von Weigand, foreign correspondent of the Hearst newspapers, Goebbels “was using my book *Crystallizing Public Opinion* as a basis for his destructive campaign against the Jews of Germany.”<sup>13</sup>

Bernays was shocked by this, but he should not have been surprised. Engineering works anywhere, building anything. Bernays went on to become the most renowned man in public relations, called by many its “father,” and was widely lauded for his successful effort to get women to smoke Lucky Strike cigarettes in his famous “torches of freedom” campaign.

In *Inventing Public Diplomacy*, Wilson P. Dizard reports that the Office of War Information, begun in 1942, drew from the same well for a similar effort in World War II, which was also aimed at overseas audiences. He writes of the staff:

Coming from a consumer-marketing background, they brought with them an insouciant belief that U.S. advertising techniques would work in the wider world; if you could sell it in Kalamazoo, you could sell it in Karachi, Kuala Lumpur and Kyoto.<sup>14</sup>

The “it” of what was being sold really did not matter; content does not matter. Emotional engineering, after all, is the same everywhere. Just as advertising manipulates the passions for economic purposes, public diplomacy/advertising can manipulate the passions for political purposes, whatever those purposes might be.

This bias toward advertising, infused at its origin with a confusing mix of behavioral and Freudian notions, is worth mentioning because it comes with certain assumptions concerning human nature that are considerably at odds with the view of man contained in the American Founding documents—the very thing it is purportedly supposed to “sell.” If this is true, then the tendency to reduce public diplomacy to advertising may actually do more harm than good in terms of promoting the principles of the United States. The whole endeavor of the American Founding is based upon an appeal to reason rather than to the passions of mankind. The principal assumption of advertising, according to its own progenitors, is that man is a creature of passion, not reason. The unconscious drives people to behave the way they do; man is fundamentally subrational.

To the extent to which it is based upon these assumptions, advertising operates as a form of manipulation designed to elicit certain responses in its target audience. It generates impulses psychologically by methods of indirection that associate qualities or satisfactions that do not necessarily inhere in the product itself.

Advertising does not appeal to reason, but to desire. (Even for computers, this is apparently true. Michael Dell said of his new consumer products that they were intended to generate “product lust.”<sup>15</sup>) Its ideal outcome is not rational calculation, but emotional compulsion. It wishes to condition behavior, not elicit it through deliberative choice. The boast of advertising is that it can do this for any product or its competitor. Thus, Goebbels could use the value-free “engineering of consent” to prepare for the destruction of the Jews, while Bernays could use it to promote Lucky Strike “torches of freedom.” To the ancients, this was known as the art of sophistry.

11. Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Ig Publishing, 2005; orig. pub. New York: Liveright, 1928), p. 71.

12. Edward Bernays, *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1923), p. 150.

13. Edward Bernays, *Biography of an Idea: Memoirs of Public Relations Counsel Edward L. Bernays* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1965), p. 652.

14. Wilson P. Dizard, Jr., *Inventing Public Diplomacy* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), p. 19.

15. Justin Scheck and Christopher Lawton, “As Holidays Approach, Dell Lags in New Products,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 10, 2008, p. B1.

### Why Pop Culture Is Not the Answer

After 9/11, the Broadcasting Board of Governors also turned to leaders in the “communications society.” This bipartisan board was composed mainly of media executives who had made fortunes in radio and TV in American domestic markets. Like those whom Wilson Dizard described from World War II, they naturally thought to replicate their huge commercial success by using the same techniques to reach overseas audiences. They therefore revamped the Arabic and Farsi broadcasting services of the Voice of America (VOA) into mainly pop music stations, Radio Sawa and Radio Farda. They knew from experience that pop music could attract large youth audiences.

Large audiences are the “metrics” of success in commercial broadcasting because the size of the audience dictates the advertising rates the broadcaster can charge, but why attract large overseas audiences with pop music on non-commercial radio that does not offer advertising? To the extent that there was a theory behind this, it was expressed by the chairman of the board, Marc Nathanson, and the chairman of the Middle East subcommittee, Norman Pattiz, both of whom said on separate occasions, “MTV brought down the Berlin Wall.”<sup>16</sup>

However historically ill-informed and naïve this view may be, it touches upon a truth well known to the ancients. Socrates approvingly quoted Damon of Athens as saying that he would rather control the modes of music of a city than its laws because music would be more influential in forming the character of its citizens, particularly its youth. Music could form or deform character. For this reason, Socrates thought that certain modes of music should be forbidden, as it led to behavior that was incompatible with self-rule. The inference from this might be that Nathanson and Pattiz thought that MTV, given the nature of the music it played, had corrupted East German and Soviet youth and brought down the regime.

If this were true, did this music prepare these same youths for democracy, the transition to which was the aim of U.S. policy? One would hardly think so; it could not do both, and it is unclear what wall the BBG was aiming to tear down with the export of Britney Spears and Eminem to the Middle East. The wall of the authoritarian Arab regimes? Or the wall of family and custom in these traditional societies?

It may come as no surprise to learn that some Arab religious leaders, though not versed in Damon of Athens, wondered whether this was not a subversive attempt by the U.S. to corrupt their youth and attack their religion. Other adults think our youth radios are superfluous to serious political concerns. Senior Jordanian journalist Jamil Nimri said that “Radio Sawa is fun, but it’s irrelevant.”<sup>17</sup> In any case, how does playing pop music prepare the Arabs for a transition to democracy, the purported goal of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, or provide an accurate picture of the United States? As Sam Hilmy, former chief of the VOA Arabic service, has said:

Pop is a major successful commercial enterprise that targets a wide youthful common denominator. But it is not America, with its rich, multifaceted culture, or its revolutionary ideals, history-making values, ever-renewed vitality, and, yes, even America’s chronic problems and weaknesses.<sup>18</sup>

By officially promoting pop culture, the U.S. has inadvertently embraced the image of itself as an adolescent, and an adolescent superpower is not a source of comfort to U.S. allies, much less a magnet for those seeking their way out of a crisis in the Muslim world. While it is hardly strange that the U.S., when feeling misunderstood, should turn to what it is good at—entertainment—it cannot entertain or advertise its way out of a war of ideas. So long as it tries, it will not be taken seriously.

One needs ideas to fight ideas—ideas about justice. The audience wonders: Is the U.S. silent on this subject because it is without such ideas?

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16. Said to author in 2001 while he was director of the Voice of America.

17. Said to author in 2003.

18. Mamoun Fandy, *(Un)civil War of Words* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Security International, 2007), p. 113.

## Why “Tolerance” Is Not the Answer

The U.S. has been leading its other public diplomacy dealings with a message of tolerance and diversity that creates the appearance of indifference to higher things. Tolerance was the paramount value behind the State Department’s ill-fated “Shared Values” ad campaign. Look, it seemed to exclaim, there are happy Muslims in the United States who are free to choose Islam and practice it freely.

Certainly, this is a laudable message, but it may not be persuasive to people who consider Islam an obligation instead of an option. The fact that Americans allow free choice of religion can strike Muslim audiences as nothing more than indifference to the truth of what they believe. “Freedom of conscience is actually freedom to leave Islam!” complains Abou Hammaad Sulaiman Dameus Al-Hayiti in *Islam or Fundamentalism? In Light of the Qur’an and the Sunna*.<sup>19</sup> Millions believe that there should be no such freedom.

Unless American tolerance is situated within a teaching about the moral imperative of freedom of conscience, it will appear to much of the world as a form of decadence. Why does the U.S. government not present freedom of conscience as a moral imperative? Perhaps because freedom of conscience is a largely alien notion within Islam and would exacerbate the very antipathy toward democracy that the ads are supposed to overcome. In other words, for this kind of effort to succeed, work must first be done at a deeper level to establish the “values” that we wish to share.

This is not happening. In fact, U.S. policy seems to suppose that moral and religious considerations are of secondary importance, if not to be shunned altogether. On March 15, 2007, Karen Hughes, then the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, appeared before the Washington ambassadors representing countries in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Her speech to this key audience was another expression of the mistaken form of tolerance and diversity:

The vast majority of people in our world, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist or those of no faith at all—want to live secure lives of opportunity— this is not a goal owned by any country, but a shared human goal—despite differences of language or culture or skin color, so much more unites us as human beings than divides us. Yet we live in a world where misunderstanding and mistrust are spreading, often being fanned by extremists....<sup>20</sup>

The clear implication here is that faith is not central in directing these people’s lives. Hughes minimizes and subordinates the substance of the faiths and civilizations that she mentions to the desire for material security and opportunity, though she never says opportunity for what. Not only is there no decisive difference among faiths that would affect the ordering of their adherents’ lives to this same goal, but there is no distinction between believers and unbelievers in this regard either. Is this not what everyone wants, except for a few crazy radicals?

Actually, this is decidedly not true of the vast majority of the human race, especially people in the countries represented by the Islamic Conference, who are motivated primarily by their Muslim faith and therefore have substantive differences with Jews, Christians, and Hindus, to say nothing of those “of no faith at all.” There is a way to appeal to Muslims on common ground, but it is not by demoting the defining importance of their faith by suggesting that security and opportunity are more important.

The notion implicit in Hughes’s remarks is that tolerance is based upon either a lack of belief or at least a diminution of its importance. In other words, tolerance is based on a kind of relativism. The idea of progress behind this kind of tolerance requires the displacement of religion from the center of people’s lives: It would be so much better if they concentrate on their opportunities instead of their dividing differences. Needless to say, a seeming indifference to what they hold most dear is not an attractive message to people of faith, and it also seriously misrepresents the American people, making it a double liability. This is a formula that is bound to lose.

19. Abou Hammaad Sulaiman Al-Hayiti, *L’Islam ou l’Intégrisme? À la lumière du Qor’an et de la Sounnah (Islam or Fundamentalism? In Light of the Qur’an and the Sunna)*, 3rd edition, corrected, ©Tous les droits sont réservés à l’auteur, 2006/2007, at [http://pointdebasculecanada.ca/IMG/pdf/L\\_Islam\\_ou\\_l\\_Integrisme\\_3ieme\\_edition\\_.pdf](http://pointdebasculecanada.ca/IMG/pdf/L_Islam_ou_l_Integrisme_3ieme_edition_.pdf) (in French).

20. “Speech of HE Ms. Karen P. Hughes, U.S. Under Secretary of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs,” in “Statements from the Launching Ceremony of the OIC Group in Washington DC,” March 15, 2007, at <http://www.oicun.org/articles/38/1/OIC-Group-in-Washington-DC/1.html>.

### Truth and Tolerance

Tolerance can mean condescension, as in allowing something out of one's generosity that might not otherwise be permitted. Another view, and one consistent with our history, is that toleration is a subsidiary virtue based upon a larger truth concerning God-given inalienable rights inhering in human nature. As George Washington wrote to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, "All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights."<sup>21</sup>

In other words, tolerance is not a gracious concession by the state or someone else. For Washington, it is a moral *obligation* because it *must* be practiced within the context of the larger truth of man's inviolable natural rights. Otherwise, there would be no justification for it.

At no point can tolerance extend to the denial of this larger truth—which is exactly the problem in some Muslim countries. Otherwise, toleration would be required to accept the denial of its own ground, and this would be absurd. Tolerance is a product of the primacy of reason and of faith in reason's ability to know things in their reality. Tolerance, truly understood, is not the equality of cultures. It is the superiority of the culture that embraces the principle of tolerance.

Why did Hughes not say this? If the answer is that she did not wish to upset her Muslim audience, it would have been much better for them to know what the United States is fighting *for* than to be left with an impression of American moral anemia. The intended audience interprets tolerance, as presented by the State Department, as a sign of weakness, and the problem with weakness is that it provokes.

This misguided kind of tolerance can also disable its practitioners from recognizing potential danger in the intolerant beliefs of others. In the same speech to the OIC, Hughes told her audience the "good news" story of her meeting with a Turkish woman in Germany who complained of the isolation of the Muslim community there.

Hughes asked whether she could visit her community. The Turkish woman "told me quite bluntly, 'no.'" "We're not interested in meeting with our own government," she said. "Why would we want to meet with yours?"

Hughes's hapless response was: "Could I send some Muslim American citizens?" The Turkish woman responded, "That would be wonderful." Hughes understood this as victory over "isolation."

However, this was an elementary and dangerous misunderstanding. The Turkish woman was "isolated" because she did not recognize the moral legitimacy of the U.S. or German governments. The "isolation" of which she spoke was clearly self-imposed according to Islamist criteria. Indeed, she was delighted with Hughes's offer because it tacitly acknowledged the Turkish woman's implicit claim that only Islam could relieve her isolation because only Islam is the source of moral legitimacy.

Through her misguided sense of tolerance, Hughes had just capitulated to intolerance. No doubt, the Islamization of Europe would overcome the "isolation" of the Turkish woman's community. Why, however, should the United States help in this endeavor?

Having conceded the legitimacy of the notion of citizenship, Hughes then ironically announced that her encounter had inspired the State Department's "Citizen Dialogue" program. What kind of dialogue could there be if one side refuses to acknowledge the citizenship on which it is based, rather than one's Islamic identity? Radical Islamists are only too happy to begin an asymmetrical "dialogue" based upon the self-inflicted delegitimization of the principles upon which democratic government is based. Hughes lost before she had even started.

During his brief tenure, James Glassman, Hughes's replacement, demonstrated a far greater grasp of the war of ideas, but even he made statements that betrayed some serious fault lines. In calling for "a full range of productive alternatives to violent extremism," Glassman espoused a policy of:

*diversion—powerful and lasting diversion, the channeling of potential recruits away from violence with the attractions of entertainment, culture, literature, music, technology, sports, education, and entrepreneurship, in addition to politics and religion.*

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21. George Washington, Letter to the Hebrew Congregation at Newport, August 1790, at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=21>.

While winning hearts and minds would be an admirable feat, the war of ideas adopts the more immediate and realistic goal of diverting impressionable segments of the population from the recruitment process. The war of ideas is really a battle of alternative visions, and our goal is to divert recruits from the violent extremist vision.<sup>22</sup>

People animated principally by religion are not going to be “diverted” by entertainment, sports, or music technology, because they are interested primarily in saving their souls. No one animated by moral concerns is likely to be diverted by amoral ones.

Islamism is fueled by a sense of moral outrage that is widely shared in the Muslim world, and music will not soothe this savage beast. Islamist recruits are inspired by *theological* hope, perverted as it may be. As the joint commissioner of the Mumbai police, Rakesh Maria, said of the captured terrorist Mohammed Ajmal Kasab, “He was led to believe that he was doing something holy.”<sup>23</sup> Without a replacement for this hope, they will not be diverted. In fact, they are more likely to be infuriated by the condescension implicit in the attempt to divert them. Certainly, they will not be driven to respect the source of the diversion. As Raymond Ibrahim, author of the *Al Qaeda Reader*, points out, “Many Western critics fail to appreciate that to disempower radical Islam, something theocentric and spiritually satisfying—not secularism, democracy, capitalism, feminism, etc.—must be offered in its place.”<sup>24</sup>

Through its embrace and export of pop culture and its promotion of tolerance based upon moral relativism, U.S. public diplomacy has succeeded in cementing the equation of democracy with unbelief in the minds of many Muslims—a feat that would have astonished the American Founders. In short, the U.S. has not addressed the struggle at the level at which it is taking place, preferring instead to pretend it is something else that is easier to deal with. It has failed because it has seriously neglected the larger issue of moral legitimacy—its own and the enemy’s—which is the real nub of the conflict. If we have nothing to say about justice or the ultimate good of man, we will lose. If we appear indifferent to these concerns, we will be dismissed and, in fact, despised.

## The Purpose Problem

In other words, in order to fight a war of ideas, one has to have an idea. As I have written elsewhere:

This is not as simple as it may sound. A war of ideas is a struggle over the very nature of reality for which people are willing to die. Therefore, the first thing one must do is formulate the ideas that are so central to one’s life that one is not willing to live without them. For a nation successfully to project such ideas, there must be a broad consensus within it as to what those ideas are.<sup>25</sup>

Have we failed so far because this broad consensus in the United States has eroded to the point that public diplomacy has become impossible? Is that why we have only a lame “tolerance” to offer the world? Is America’s inability to express its purpose the result of its being unsure of that purpose? If this is true, it would seem that the greatest danger to the United States is not from Islamism, but is internal.

Is Furedi right about a loss of meaning? If so, he would not be the first to discern it. In the days of the Cold War, Leo Strauss wrote:

However much the power of the West may have declined, however great the dangers to the West may be, that decline, that danger, nay, the defeat, even the destruction of the West would not necessarily prove that the West is in a crisis: the West could go down in honor, certain of its purpose. The crisis of the West consists in the West’s having become uncertain of its purpose. The West was

22. James K. Glassman, “Winning the War of Ideas,” speech to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, July 8, 2008. See also James Glassman, “Winning the War of Ideas,” *The New York Sun*, July 23, 2008, at <http://www.nysun.com/opinion/winning-the-war-of-ideas/82438/?print=0224157121>. Emphasis added.

23. Peter Wonacott and Geeta Anand, “Sole Captured Suspect Offers Grim Insights into Massacre,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 4, 2008, at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122834446748477265.html>.

24. Raymond Ibrahim, “Islam’s ‘Public Enemy #1,’” *National Review*, March 25, 2008, at <http://article.nationalreview.com/print/?q=NTUwY2QyNjA0NjcwMjExMzI2ZmJiZTEzN2U1YjYyZjE>.

25. Robert R. Reilly, “Winning the War of Ideas,” *Claremont Review of Books*, Summer 2007, p. 35.

once certain of its purpose—of a purpose in which all men could be united, and hence it had a clear vision of its future as the future of mankind. We do no longer have that certainty and that clarity. Some among us even despair of the future, and this despair explains many forms of contemporary Western degradation.<sup>26</sup>

Since the United States won the Cold War, there may be a temptation to dismiss Strauss's diagnosis. Did we not win because of the West's confidence in its purpose? Everyone now celebrates "our" victory over Communism, conveniently forgetting that the struggle was not only with Communism, but within the West as to what the West and Communism meant.

During the Cold War, the West was afflicted by self-doubt to the extent that some thinkers, like Whittaker Chambers, thought we would lose. Communism was a form of absolutism fighting a form of relativism. As such, Communism had the clear advantage and lost it only after the moral recovery of the West under the leadership of John Paul II, President Ronald Reagan, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and others who spoke unequivocally about the inviolability of each human being endowed by God with inalienable rights.

In the darkest days of the Cold War, Whittaker Chambers wrote: "for the West, the struggle is its own solution. Out of the struggle itself, the thesis goes, the West may rediscover in itself, or otherwise develop, forces that can justify its survival."<sup>27</sup> Do these words pertain to us in this new struggle? Perhaps we should rephrase Joseph Cropsey's famous question from the Cold War by substituting "radical Islamism" for "sovietization" and ask: "Do we have any reason for believing that the radical Islamicization of the world is an evil commensurate with the peril created by opposing it?"<sup>28</sup>

It seems, then, that for public diplomacy to function, there must be a recovery of purpose and that this purpose must be related to justice. We need to restore moral vocabulary to our thinking and communications if we are to have an impact on others.

As we know from the Cold War, this will not be easy, because it reveals fissures in our own society. When Ronald Reagan called the Soviet Union an "evil empire," he was denounced in the United States and Western Europe as an irresponsible cowboy. The anti-anti-Communists in the West were frightened by Reagan's vocabulary for the Soviet Union because they feared it might lead to war, but also because the use of the word "evil" had implications for themselves with which they were extremely uncomfortable.

If we can know what "evil" is, how then does that apply to our own lives? Rather than face up to the answer to that question, many preferred to attack the people using it and to explain the Cold War away as just another variation of power politics and *realpolitik*.

This problem remains today. However squeamish American elites are in using a moral concept like evil, the fact remains that their discomfort makes it very difficult to talk with the people of other cultures who take good and evil seriously. Indeed, it is even worse when much of the campaign against us is based on defining us as evil. To fight this new war of ideas, we must understand the justice of our own cause and then explain it to our enemies and to friends. We need to recover our own civilization in order to defend it.

## The Loss of Purpose

The rifts in the broad consensus that is necessary for a successful public diplomacy arise from the fact that the fundamental teachings of our civilization are widely disputed in American society, especially in academia and the media. These disputes have taken various forms, all of which in one way or another deny the existence of an objective moral order.

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26. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978; orig. pub. 1964), p. 3.

27. Whittaker Chambers to William F. Buckley, Jr., in *Odyssey of a Friend: Whittaker Chambers' Letters to William F. Buckley, Jr.* (New York: Putnam, 1970), p. 212.

28. Joseph Cropsey, "The Moral Basis of International Action," in Robert A. Goldwin, ed., *America Armed* (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1963), p. 83.

One expression of this point of view came in the 1992 *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* Supreme Court ruling: “At the heart of liberty,” the justices opined, “is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life.”<sup>29</sup> In other words, we are not a polity formed around universal truths that we hold in common concerning the ultimate meaning of life. Rather, each of us can conjure up a “meaning” of the universe that suits us individually.

This “meaning” is not the product of reason, but of will. Our freedom is no longer dependent upon conforming ourselves to a reality that exists independent of our desires—the very “Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God” on which the Declaration declares the United States into existence. Rather, each of us will conform reality to his or her desires. The ideal of liberty has changed from the freedom to do what one ought to the license to do whatever one wishes. Whereas Lincoln said in his debates with Douglas that one “cannot logically say that anybody has a right to do wrong,” today many claim that there is neither right nor wrong. Everything is relative to one’s desires at any given moment.

Moral relativism is inimical to the idea of justice, as it removes the epistemological ground for knowing the good. As Max Planck, the founder of quantum theory, wrote, “everything that is relative presupposes the existence of something that is absolute, and is meaningful only when juxtaposed to something absolute.”<sup>30</sup> What happens if the absolute is absent? If what is good is relative to something other than itself, then it is not the good but the expression of some other interest that only claims to be the good. Claims of “good” then become transparent masks for self-interest. This is the surest path back to barbarism and the brutal doctrine of “right is the rule of the stronger.”

The regression is not accidental. Relativism inevitably concludes in nihilism, and the ultimate expression of nihilism is the supremacy of the will. Those who promote “multiculturalism,” another form of relativism, have chosen the surest way to the destruction of diversity, the very thing they claim to celebrate. The extent to which America has changed in this way is the extent to which it has lost its moral authority, both at home and abroad. Radical Islam has not done this to us; we have done it to ourselves. This is the real, internal crisis of public diplomacy.

The impact of this crisis on public diplomacy is manifested in the remarks of the publisher of *Public Diplomacy Press and Blog Review*, former USIA foreign service officer John Brown:

To seek to define America through certain principles (“life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”) is all well and good, but to reduce the United States to a fixed set of ideas it “fights for” simplifies the complexity and changeability of the United States. In fact, what perhaps most characterizes the U.S. is that it contains a multitude of differing and evolving ideas, rather than permanent ideas everyone agrees upon. The notion of an American “war of ideas” is, therefore, an attack on ideas in the United States, as it implicitly limits their infinite variety.<sup>31</sup>

The confusion in this statement is almost amusing in its doublethink: Defending ourselves is actually attacking ourselves. It places the American Founding on its head. In other words, we stand for nothing permanent except the idea that there is nothing permanent. This is manifestly absurd because it holds the self-contradictory position that the idea that there is nothing permanent is permanent and inherently worthier than its contrary. This leaves our military in the interesting situation of fighting and dying to defend the idea that there is nothing to defend—no “fixed set of ideas it ‘fights for.’”

No wonder Lieutenant General Vines discovered that we cannot influence the enemy. We have nothing to influence them with since we are evolving in infinite variety.

If the formulation were true—that there is no fixed set of ideas at our foundation—the United States could not have come into existence more than 220 years ago. Liberty and constitutional order are not the product of simply any conception of the universe, but of only one. If all men can make up their own meaning, then there is no one meaning that should rule them. If there is no common good—no “good” in common, shared by all—then democracy makes no sense. “Infinite variety” leads not to openness but to emptiness. As G. K. Chesterton wrote, “Men will more

29. *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, 851 (1992).

30. Max Planck, *Scientific Autobiography, and Other Papers* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), pp. 46–48.

31. John Brown, “Thoughts on the So-Called ‘War of Ideas,’” December 21, 2008, Commondreams.org, at <http://www.commondreams.org/view/2008/12/21>.



and more realize that there is no meaning in democracy if there is no meaning in anything.”<sup>32</sup> If we are, as Brown suggests, without “permanent ideas everyone agrees upon,” we are in the process of self-dissolution and need look no further for why we have no effective public diplomacy.

This would have amazed John Adams, who, reflecting upon the principles of the American Founding, affirmed that “those principles of liberty are as unalterable as human nature and our terrestrial, mundane system” and that he “could, therefore safely say, consistently with all my then and present information, that I believed they would never make discoveries in contradiction to these general principles.”<sup>33</sup> How is that for a “fixed set of ideas”?

### The Recovery of Purpose

As the vigor of Adams’s statement suggests, the certainty of the West’s purpose was never more confidently professed than in the founding of the United States. It was at that time that the United States first addressed itself to the world concerning its “purpose.” If, as Senator Hagel suggests, we are going to have “to reintroduce America to the world,” we could do no better than to consider the terms of the original introduction and to see whether they pertain to our own times.

In the Declaration of Independence, America’s first public diplomacy document, the introduction was made in terms of justice and was spoken out of “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind.” The first thing to consider is why the representatives of the 13 colonies thought their grievances deserved the attention of the world. Politics is rooted in the particular, as we know from the long list of specific grievances against Great Britain itemized in the Declaration. Why not simply secure your own independence and have done with it?

The answer is that the standard of justice to which the Founders were appealing was, according to them, universal: true for everyone, everywhere, at all times. As such, it is available to the apprehension of men through their reason. It was with confidence in the primacy of reason that the Founders appealed to the “opinions of mankind.” This was not simply a rhetorical flourish, cunningly contrived to gain the aid of foreign powers.

At the outset, the Founders claimed that their cause was mankind’s cause. If it were not true for everyone, then it was not true for them, and they had no moral basis for their revolution. The Declaration’s proclamation of equality takes it beyond what any previous political document had proposed. The Declaration purported to be of significance not just for Americans, but for all people who by virtue of their equality must be treated as beings of intrinsic worth and not as the means of some despotic design.

This is the truly revolutionary character of the Declaration, which Jefferson hoped would be “to the world . . . the signal of arousing men to burst the chains . . . and to assume the blessings of self-government.”<sup>34</sup> It was Samuel Adams’s prayer, when governor of Massachusetts, that “every Nation and Society of Men may be inspired with the knowledge and feeling of their natural and just rights” and “that Tyranny and Usurpation may everywhere come to an end.”<sup>35</sup>

By what standard could the Founders possibly have said that something was morally right or wrong for everyone? It is easy to say that something is against one’s interests. It is quite another to identify one’s interests with the true and the good. Their basis for doing so was in “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God,” according to which “all men are created equal.” The Founders asserted that Great Britain had behaved in a way that violated their integrity as human beings—in other words, unjustly. It did this precisely by denying the citizens of the colonies their right to consent in their rule.

But what is justice? The classical definition, shared by the Founders, is that justice is giving to things what is their due according to what they are. Therefore, in order to act justly, one must know what things are. If one claims that

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32. G. K. Chesterton, *What I Saw in America* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1923), p. 296.

33. John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, June 28, 1813, in Lester J. Capon, ed., *The Adams–Jefferson Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), Vol. 2, pp. 339–340.

34. Thomas Jefferson to Robert C. Weightman, June 24, 1826, at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=5>.

35. Samuel Adams, Proclamation for a Day of Public Thanksgiving, October 6, 1796, cited in Ira Stoll, “A Day of Thanksgiving,” *The Wall Street Journal*, November 26, 2008, p. A15.

one cannot know what things are, then one cannot act justly. If one purports that things are what they are only as a matter of convention rather than of Nature, then the idea of justice evaporates. In both cases, right becomes the rule of the stronger, and the stronger gets to define and form convention.

In other words, justice will be whatever the powerful say it is, and the good is reduced to only a point of view. The Founders explicitly rejected this. Jefferson deplored what he called “the principle of Hobbes, that justice is founded in contract solely, and does not result from the construction of man.”<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, if one knows what man is, and he is what he is by Nature, it is perforce clear that it is unjust to treat him as an animal or to behave toward him as if one were God—i.e., tyrannically. Treating a man as if he were a dog is manifestly unjust to anyone who knows the distinction between the two. The doctrine in the Declaration of Independence that all people are created equal is, in fact, a statement that we *do* know what man is. Being equal does not mean that all men are the same in all respects; it does mean that there is no difference among them that is so great that some may rule others without their consent. By virtue of this knowledge, the Declaration accuses George III of committing acts “totally unworthy of the Head of a *civilized* nation” (my emphasis), meaning exactly that the King had withdrawn his recognition of American colonists as fellow human beings—the very definition of barbarism.

Concomitantly, the definition of civilization inherent in the Declaration is the act of acknowledging another person as a human being. This act of recognition is the basis of civilization. A barbarian is someone who cannot perform this act because he has either come from or chosen a universe of meaning that does not contain the term “human being.” It is hard to overstate the catastrophe resulting from this incapacity or refusal. If one is unable or refuses to recognize another person as a human being, then one does not know the difference between the animal and the human, or the human and the divine. Confusion over these matters leads to slavery, human sacrifice, cannibalism, abortion, and other horrors, for all of which there are many historical and some recent examples.

## “The Moral Sense or Conscience”

Our understanding of what a human being is largely decides everything else: how man ought to live, how he should be governed, and whether he ought to govern himself. In turn, that understanding is informed most decisively by whether man is or is not made in the image of God. If he is, the source of his dignity is secure in the transcendent and is not revocable.

This notion is clearly rooted in the *Genesis* teaching that man is made in the image of God and in the Socratic intimation of the divine in man. In other words, man is sacred; he is inviolable. The source of his dignity is divine. If it is not, it is ephemeral. As political scientist Paul Eidelberg said, “Unless there is a being superior to man, nothing in theory prevents some men from degrading other men to the level of subhuman.”<sup>37</sup> The 20th century’s charnel houses stand witness to the truth of this statement.

But more needs to be said. Sounding very much like an American Founder, Chesterton averred that “[t]here is no meaning in anything if the universe has not a center of significance and an authority that is the author of our rights. . . . [T]here is no basis for democracy except in a dogma about the divine origin of man.”<sup>38</sup> Man has worshiped many gods and has lived in many different political orders, most of them tyrannical. Not just any god will do as the ultimate source of constitutional order: not Moloch, not Baal, not Thor, not Quetzalcoatl or Kali. It is only within a form of worship that can accommodate or, even better, mandate a concept of ordered liberty in which the individual is inviolable that this can happen and historically has happened. The primacy of the person defines the very order of the Constitution and ultimately needs theological support for its sustenance.

Those who do not believe in God are the beneficiaries of those who do, because no theory of natural law (and therefore of natural rights) is tenable without “Nature’s God” to support it. (Of course, as Chesterton pointed out,

36. Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, October 14, 1816, cited in Paul Eidelberg, *On the Silence of the Declaration of Independence* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976), p. 6.

37. Paul Eidelberg, *Beyond Detente* (La Salle, Ill.: Sherwood Sugden, 1977), p. 70.

38. Chesterton, *What I Saw in America*, pp. 296, 293.

they are beneficiaries of much more: “If there were not God, there would be no atheists.”<sup>39</sup>) Constitutional, democratic government is unthinkable without the presupposition of God, for without Him there is no basis for the restraint that is the essence of such government.

The Declaration of Independence announced these dogmas in a rather magisterial way: We have a Creator who endows us with unalienable rights. We do not get to invent these rights; they are given to us. They have meaning only in reference to their Author. As John Adams wrote of the idea of equality, “there is no such thing without a supposition of a God. There is no right or wrong in the universe without the supposition of a moral government and an intellectual and moral Governor.”<sup>40</sup> And Thomas Jefferson wondered: “[C]an the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God?”<sup>41</sup>

What, then, is man within this perspective? He is a creature endowed by his Creator with reason and free will (these being the very image of God in man), through which capacities he is expected to seek his transcendent end. That every person’s soul is ordered to the *same* transcendent good or end is what we mean by human nature in the first place. The good is not whatever we say it is—i.e., something we get to make up for ourselves; it is embedded in our very being as the end toward which we are ineluctably ordered.

If this is not true, then there really is no common human nature to speak of, in the name of which one would be morally justified in rising to overthrow tyranny. As Jefferson said, man “was endowed with a sense of right and wrong . . . The moral sense or conscience . . . is as much a part of our constitution as that of feeling, seeing, or hearing.”<sup>42</sup> George Washington stated that no nation can prosper that “disregards the eternal rules of order and right which Heaven itself has ordained.”<sup>43</sup>

Freedom, rather than being the basis for a smorgasbord of immorality, is thus founded on acknowledgment of an objective moral order, without which free political order could not come into being. This is because, as Harry Jaffa has written, “the great principles of right and wrong must govern the people, for the people to be able to govern themselves.”<sup>44</sup>

In other words, freedom is first of all a function of man’s moral condition. If freedom is God’s intention for man, then the ground of freedom is virtue so as to prevent enslavement by vice—which means that freedom is intended to be used in a certain way and that only in that way can it bring happiness. Every other use is an abuse of freedom. The Founders had a deep appreciation of the fact that if there is disorder in the souls of American citizens, there will be disorder in the political realm.

This does not mean that everyone must be morally perfect for a republic to function. Acknowledgment of a certain amount of inevitable moral imperfection in man is, in fact, the inspiration for the constitutional separation of powers. However, there is a certain level of virtue without which republican government will fail. It is thus that George Washington declared in his first inaugural address that “the foundations of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality . . .”<sup>45</sup>

If this, then, is who man is, man ought to govern himself through choice and deliberation rather than be ruled by accident and force. Constitutional government is exactly the form of government that attempts to direct people to behave reasonably, and it can exist only to the extent that they do so.

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39. G. K. Chesterton, “The Case for Complexity,” in George Marlin, ed., *The Collected Works of G. K. Chesterton* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), Vol. III, p. 38.

40. Adams wrote this in the margin on p. 156 of Condorcet’s *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind*; see [http://www.librarything.com/wiki/index.php/Outlines\\_of\\_an\\_Historical\\_View\\_of\\_the\\_Progress\\_of\\_the\\_Human\\_Mind](http://www.librarything.com/wiki/index.php/Outlines_of_an_Historical_View_of_the_Progress_of_the_Human_Mind).

41. Thomas Jefferson, “Notes on the State of Virginia, Query XVIII: Manners,” 1781, at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=529>.

42. Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, October 14, 1816.

43. George Washington, First Inaugural Address, April 30, 1789, at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=19>.

44. Harry V. Jaffa, “The False Prophets of American Conservatism,” posted February 12, 1998, at [http://www.claremont.org/publications/pubid.670/pub\\_detail.asp](http://www.claremont.org/publications/pubid.670/pub_detail.asp).

45. George Washington, First Inaugural Address.

## “The Father of All Moral Principle”

The exercise of reason and free will requires life and liberty. Liberty is demanded by the principle of equality, which Lincoln called “the father of all moral principle.”<sup>46</sup> To be fully human, one must be free. This is why Jefferson said that “the God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time.”<sup>47</sup> A cascade of ancillary rights naturally flows from the principle of equality. That man must be ruled with his consent is a corollary to it. The condition of man’s free consent is, in turn, his freedom of conscience, without which consent would be constrained. The external expression of freedom of conscience is freedom of speech, without which freedom of conscience would be mute. Freedom of conscience also inheres in the right to religious freedom.

The political result of the principle of equality, correctly understood, is precisely limited government. The need for limited government gives rise to constitutionalism, which enshrines the rule of law. The rule of law derives directly from the principle of equality and requires that all persons be equal before the law. The rule of law is the necessary condition not only of liberty, but also of excellence, because by removing the artificial constraints upon man, it leaves, as Lincoln said, “an open field and a fair chance for [man’s] industry, enterprise and intelligence.”<sup>48</sup>

Because of man’s imperfections and propensities to evil, constitutional order must be arranged so as to prevent a concentration of power from falling into the hands of a single individual or group of individuals who could then misuse it. As Jefferson warned, such a concentration of power defines tyranny because the holders of such power could rule over other men as if they, the rulers, were gods. The constitutional division of the government into the three branches—executive, legislative, and judicial—and the checks and balances set up among them were emplaced to prevent such a concentration from ever occurring.

It is also important to note that limited government does not—and because of its limited nature cannot—usurp man’s destiny or grant itself salvific aims. It acknowledges the need for salvation and its own impotence before this need. Socrates’ great discovery, to which the Founders were heirs, was that man’s soul cannot be satisfied through political means. Politics cannot meet the needs of the human soul, for it cannot achieve perfect justice. Therefore, the Greek philosophers (and the Founders) realized that one must look beyond politics for the fulfillment for which man hungers. Socrates showed that any attempt to fulfill the soul’s ultimate desires through politics—by trying to achieve perfect justice here—would transform the state into a totalitarian enterprise.

As Father James Schall has written in *The Politics of Heaven and Hell*, the promise of “the Kingdom of God suggested both that man’s deepest desires would be fulfilled and that politics could, consequently, pursue a temporal good in a human, finite fashion.”<sup>49</sup> Since man’s ultimate happiness lies outside of history in a transcendent God, man cannot make his home in this world. Thus, politics is not the salvific engine for the transformation of mankind and the elimination of evil.

This is what ultimately limits (and therefore makes possible) politics. Without this limiting view of politics, constitutional thinking is not possible. Only such a vision as this supports the effort to restrain political power. (It is also this view that should restrain any impulses to democratic millenarianism.) If man has no transcendent end, politics will consume him completely in some form of totalitarianism. The proper role of government is to maintain a temporal order sufficient for the pursuit of man’s higher ends, most especially by securing man’s fundamental rights.

One of those rights, which it is the role of government to secure, is the right to property, so often thought to be simply a matter of economic efficiency. It is exactly the right to private property that insulates the individual from the caprices of state power and creates a protected legal and material space within which he can exercise his freedom. The right to private property stems directly from, and is a requirement of, the spiritual inviolability of the human person. Without this right, man is naked before the state. Without economic freedom, there is no political freedom. What can happen under these conditions was made horrifically clear in the 20th century by the depre-

46. Abraham Lincoln, Speech at Chicago, Illinois, July 10, 1858, at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=153>.

47. Thomas Jefferson, “A Summary View of the Rights of British America,” 1774, at <http://etext.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=JefSumm.sgm&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=all>.

48. Abraham Lincoln, Speech to the 166th Ohio Volunteers, August 22, 1864.

49. James V. Schall, *The Politics of Heaven and Hell: Christian Themes from Classical, Medieval, and Modern Political Philosophy* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984), p. 287.

dations of totalitarian regimes that denied this right and imprisoned or slaughtered their defenseless subjects in the scores of millions.

In fact, the profound implications of the other propositions mentioned above, all of which flow from the Declaration, can also be illustrated by examining the consequences of their opposites. If, for instance, man is not a political creature endowed with reason in a world accessible to his mind, why attempt to order political life based upon deliberation and representation? If man cannot know the truth, what meaning is left to free will? Man would have no basis of judgment with which to exercise his free will. He cannot choose unless he knows true from false, good from evil.

If man lives in a world of which he can make no sense, a world that is a plaything of the gods, an irrational world, he can choose only to surrender to fate or to despair. In such a state and in such circumstances, he will not go about writing constitutions, for constitutions by their very nature imply a belief in order, in man's reasonability, and in his ability to formulate and establish a rational mode of government grounded in a rational creation.

Likewise, if man does not have free will, deliberating over what he ought to do is superfluous. If reason is simply an excrescence of material or physiological forces, then deliberations are meaningless. Freedom, obviously, is a hollow idea if free will and reason do not exist. These faculties themselves make sense only in an order of Nature that directs man toward ends that make man fully human. This is the perspective that formed our Founders and infuses the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Founding Fathers' ancillary writings. The American Constitution makes no sense divorced from these presuppositions, and anything that undermines these premises ultimately undermines the Founding.

The United States, then, is not some indefinite entity floating in a welter of infinite possibilities. It is defined—limited if you will—by the apprehension of the “Laws of Nature and of Nature's God.” Only within that “fixed set of ideas” can the “infinite variety” celebrated by Brown find the moral and political conditions to flourish. The one precedes and makes possible the other. This is how and why the United States has the marvelous ability to change and adapt while not forsaking itself.

As Calvin Coolidge said in his salute to the Declaration on its 150th anniversary, “We live in an age of science and of abounding accumulation of material things. These did not create our *Declaration*. Our *Declaration* created them. The things of the spirit come first.” Echoing John Adams, President Coolidge also wrote:

It is often asserted that the world has made a great deal of progress since 1776, that we have had new thoughts and new experiences which have given us a great advance over the people of that day, and that we may therefore very well discard their conclusion for something more modern. But that reasoning cannot be applied to [the Declaration of Independence]. If all men are created equal, that is final. If governments derive their just power from the consent of the governed, that is final. No advance, no progress can be made beyond these propositions. If anyone wishes to deny their truth or their soundness, the only direction in which he can proceed historically is not forward, but backward.<sup>50</sup>

### The New War of Ideas

How might a restored sense of purpose be applied in the new war of ideas? Every challenge that has threatened the existence of the United States has come at the level of moral principle with a competing claim to a universal truth that is inimical to our own. The Nazis proclaimed their doctrine of racial superiority, and the Soviets proclaimed their dogma of class superiority. Both explicitly rejected the truth of human equality as enunciated in the Declaration of Independence. That was their reason for seeking the destruction of the United States.

Now we are in another struggle, this time against Muslim radicals who assert a perverted standard of faith as the litmus test for life or death: Share it or die. They serve an angry god who demands human sacrifice, first from other

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50. Calvin Coolidge, “Speech on the Occasion of the One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence,” Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July 5, 1926, at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=41>.

Muslims who do not subscribe to their darkness and then from us. Islamism uses its deformed theology to elevate the “believer” and dehumanize those who do not share its ideology. Whatever disables someone from recognizing another person as a human being is the enemy of the Declaration of Independence and of civilization.

It is at the level of principle that the United States must first defend itself against the new barbarians. In his inaugural address, President Obama said that “our security emanates from the justness of our cause.”<sup>51</sup> This is true only if we present it persuasively within an understanding of what justice is, not simply for ourselves—i.e., an “American” justice—but as it is or should be for everyone, everywhere, according to the intrinsic worth of each human being. In other words, to take on this new form of evil, the United States needs to raise the standard by which it first fought for its existence. The recovery of that standard, as suggested above, is the first step: the reestablishment of our moral legitimacy. The second is to understand the nature of the enemy and to undermine its claim to moral legitimacy.

The direct relevance of this approach to actual battlefield conditions is reflected in the remarks of a Marine officer and veteran of two tours in the roughest part of Iraq, al-Anbar province. Gabriel Ledeen writes:

Our Islamist enemies can't win when confronted directly with the truth because they are essentially hollow. As in Iraq, they will eventually wither. Their false jihad often relies on deception, bribery, and drugs to gain recruits and compel attacks. Their movement is founded on lies, as seen in the propaganda used to indoctrinate new followers to the culture of hatred. They oppose freedom and individual liberty, and reject the value of each human life, and therefore are at odds with the self-evident Truths that govern our existence. It is imperative to recognize the central characteristics of our enemy's ideology in order to expose its ontologically false foundation. As Americans observed in our struggles against the Soviet Communists and the Nazis, with the understanding of the threat comes an understanding of the necessity of a sufficient response. While such a response can be costly and difficult, such efforts can be powerfully exerted when fueled by the truth. Our enemy knows this, and strives to cloud our understanding and prevent us from exposing the reality. It is our reluctance to confront such enemies that emboldens them, allows them to perpetrate evil on the world, and causes extraordinary suffering. This is not merely a philosophical point.<sup>52</sup>

In other words, the principles outlined in this paper are not too abstract or ethereal to relate to real concerns at the fighting level. Another report from the field confirms the relevance of this approach—in fact, its indispensability. Nate Slate, an Army colonel who commanded a brigade in al-Anbar province, writes:

As a soldier who served on the ground in Iraq, I can relate to the issue of what we are fighting for and against. Launching into a war without clearly articulating the moral justice of what you are doing is a grave error. How can you ask people to kill and to die without purpose? On the ground, I saw the justice of our cause. What I found in Iraq was that the notion that Americans believed in inalienable rights was very powerful. It communicated easily. The notion that we were sacrificing for the ultimate good of man (our brothers and sisters) made sense to the Iraqis (our lives had meaning). Life must have meaning. If we do not describe the meaning it has to us, we will be overcome by those who are willing to make a stand (however risible their perspective may be) against us. I am confident that truth eventually prevails.<sup>53</sup>

We should never go into battle, especially not into battles of ideas, without the armor that Colonel Slate wore. The understanding of public diplomacy's importance reflected in these two statements is noticeably deeper than the one that currently exists in the U.S. State Department.

51. Barack Hussein Obama, Inaugural Address, January 20, 2009, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address>.

52. Gabriel Ledeen, “Be Not Afraid,” *National Review Online*, January 30, 2009, at <http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=YYTxcMjlyMGE3MDhjMGNiZWVrMjg5Nzc0OGI4OWIxNTE>.

53. Nate Slate, e-mail to the author, February 9, 2009.

### Islamist Ideology

Islamist ideas must be identified and defined correctly before they can be defeated. As Dr. M. Zuhdi Jasser, president of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, has warned, “Unless the President can articulate the harm of the Islamist movement distinct from the ability of Muslims to practice their faith of Islam in freedom, he cannot make any progress in this war.”<sup>54</sup> There is a great hesitancy in doing this because of the sensitivity of dealing with what is thought to be a religion. The consequence of this reluctance has been to give al-Qaeda, in the words of Robert Andrews, “a theological safe haven.”<sup>55</sup>

However, Islamism is not a religion in the traditional sense. Most religions—in fact, all monotheistic ones—put before man a revelation from God that is similar in certain essential respects. The revelation contains a moral code by which man is expected to live if he wishes to achieve eternal life in paradise. Paradise is located in the hereafter, never on this earth. So is the hell to which man will be sent if he is disobedient. The terrestrial and the transcendent are distinct—the city of man and the city of God, as St. Augustine put it. Life here is a test. The ultimate resolution of the problem of justice is not in this vale of tears, but before the throne of God in the next world. Man’s ultimate destiny is in the transcendent. This general view is shared by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all of which see perfect justice as being established by God’s final judgment.

Islamism is an ideology in the classic sense in that it offers, or rather insists upon, an alternative “reality” that collapses the separate realms of the divine and the human and arrogates to itself the means for achieving perfect justice here in this world. It places alongside reality its false version and insists that reality conform to its demands. Its adherents live in the magical world of this second reality and obey its laws. They may seem to live and move in the realm of the real world, but they are already transposed into the second, false reality. When they behave according to its laws—for example, by slaughtering innocent people without remorse—others are surprised and disturbed because they do not know the contours of this second reality, which has just been so shockingly imposed on them.

Jessica Stern, in *Terror in the Name of God*, has written of the puzzlement that initially strikes almost everyone encountering Islamist terrorism until they come to understand its ideology as a pseudo-religion rather than as a political movement:

I have come to see that apocalyptic violence intended to “cleanse” the world of “impurities” can create a transcendent state. All the terrorist groups examined in this book believe—or at least started out believing—that they are creating a more perfect world. From their perspective, they are purifying the world of injustice, cruelty, and all that is antihuman. When I began this project, I could not understand why the killers I met seemed spiritually intoxicated. Now, I think I understand. They seem that way because they are.<sup>56</sup>

The means for the transformation of reality into the alternative reality is, as in all ideologies, force based upon absolute power. While most ideologies are secular attempts to displace religion as the main obstacle to fulfillment, Islamism is based upon a deformed theology that nonetheless shares in the classical ideological conflation of heaven and earth. It is exactly in these terms that its chief ideologue, Sayyid Qutb, spoke: “[Islam] chose to unite earth and heaven in a single system.” This means that transcendent ends will be achieved by earthly means “to reestablish the Kingdom of God upon earth.”<sup>57</sup> This is obviously not a political objective, but a metaphysical one.

It should be no surprise that in its political manifestation, Qutb’s “single system” duplicates the features of the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century’s secular ideologies and of Socrates’ proto-totalitarian city in Plato’s *The Republic*. “In such a state,” said Qutb’s ideological soul mate Maulana Maududi, “no one can regard any field of his affairs as personal and private. Considered from this aspect the Islamic state bears a kind of resemblance to the Fas-

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54. M. Zuhdi Jasser, “A Post-‘Muslim World’, Muslim World,” *The Huffington Post*, February 17, 2009, at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/m-zuhdi-jasser/a-post-muslim-world-musli\\_b\\_166885.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/m-zuhdi-jasser/a-post-muslim-world-musli_b_166885.html).

55. Robert Andrews, conversation with the author, 2009.

56. Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004), p. 281.

57. Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam*, revised edition, trans. John B. Hardie, trans. rev. and intro. Hamid Algar (Oneonta, N.Y.: Islamic Publications International, 2000).

cist and Communist states.”<sup>58</sup> It is, he remarked, “the very antithesis of secular Western democracy.” Hassan al-Banna, Qutb’s hero and the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, regarded the Soviet Union under Stalin as the model of a successful one-party system, which the Islamists were seeking. In a line worthy of Robespierre, Qutb said that this “just dictatorship” would “grant political liberties to the virtuous alone.”<sup>59</sup>

Although the Islamist ideological endeavor to transform existence through violence will founder on the shores of reality as has every similar attempt, reality being very resilient, there is no saying how much damage it will cause in the interim. The excuse for not having achieved the utopia of God’s kingdom on earth, or of the Thousand Year Reich, or of the classless society is always the same and roughly analogous: An infidel has escaped our grasp, a Jew has escaped, or a capitalist has eluded us. Thus, paradise is forever postponed, always receding just over the horizon, and the war continues as part of a permanent revolution. That is why this is going to be a long war. As Hassan al-Banna, said, “What I mean with jihad is the duty that will last until the Day of Resurrection. . . .”<sup>60</sup> And Qutb proclaimed, “This struggle is not a temporary phase but a perpetual and permanent war.”<sup>61</sup>

As already intimated by Maududi, democracy is antithetical to the Islamist project, as the primacy of reason is antithetical to the primacy of force. Al-Qaeda spokesman Suleiman Abu Gheith has said that:

America is the head of heresy in our modern world, and it leads an infidel democratic regime that is based upon separation of religion and state and on ruling the people by the people via legislating laws that contradict the way of Allah and permit what Allah has prohibited.<sup>62</sup>

For radical Islamists, democracy itself is an act of impiety and must be destroyed. Al-Qaeda author Yussuf al-Ayyeri (killed in June 2003, in a gun battle in Riyadh) wrote in his last book, *The Future of Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula After the Fall of Baghdad*: “It is not the American war machine that should be of the utmost concern to Muslims. What threatens the future of Islam, in fact its very survival, is American Democracy.”<sup>63</sup>

The United States needs to fight this form of totalitarianism as it has all previous forms. It does not need to remain silent before Islamism because it masks itself as a religion. We should not grant it that status. In fact, it should be unmasked so that its true contours are clear to us and to those whom it attempts to seduce in the Muslim world. By seeing Islamist Jihad for what it is—an expression of a pseudo-religion and false reality—we can both ascertain the sources of its strength and divine its vulnerabilities. Although Muslims who practice Islam as a faith rather than an ideology may not be naturally attuned to democracy, they are certainly not congenitally disposed to totalitarian tyranny and will fight to escape its embrace if given the chance. They are natural allies if we can assure them that we make the distinction between Islam and Islamism and if they can make it as well.

This is a delicate task. For most Muslims, loss of faith would make life meaningless and therefore unendurable. We have to understand the extent to which the Islamic world feels under assault from what it sees as anti-religious, secular modernity. This threat from the incursion of secular influences, exacerbated by multiple nonstop satellite TV channels, is interpreted by the majority of Muslims as “an attack on Islam.” That is why it has produced such vociferous responses.

Here is where the damage from our public diplomacy comes in. In the West, we seem unaware that much of the Muslim world sees our presentation of freedom as morally empty. In a prescient short story published before 9/11, *My Son the Fanatic*, written by British Pakistani author Hanif Kureishi, there is a scene in which the immigrant father

58. Sayyid Abul Ala Maududi, *The Islamic Law and Constitution*, trans. and ed. Khurshid Ahmad, 2nd edition (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1960), p. 154.

59. Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 73.

60. Laurent Murawiec, *The Mind of Jihad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 36.

61. Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, trans. S. Badrul Hasan (Karachi, Pakistan: International Islamic Publishers, 1981), p. 112.

62. “Why We Fight America’: Al-Qa’ida Spokesman Explains September 11 and Declares Intentions to Kill 4 Million Americans with Weapons of Mass Destruction,” Middle East Media Research Institute *Special Dispatch* No. 388, June 12, 2002, at <http://www.memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?ID=sp38802>.

63. Yussuf al-Ayyeri, *The Future of Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula After the Fall of Baghdad* (New York and London: Centre for Islamic Research and Studies, 2003). See also Amir Taheri, “Al-Qaeda’s Agenda in Iraq,” *New York Post*, online edition, September 4, 2003, at [http://www.magitsurplus.com/PDF%20Files/Soapbox/AQ\\_agenda.pdf](http://www.magitsurplus.com/PDF%20Files/Soapbox/AQ_agenda.pdf).



says to his son, “I love England. . . . [T]hey let you do almost anything here.” The radicalized son responds, “That is the problem.” The problem is freedom with no moral orientation—freedom as inimical to moral order.<sup>64</sup>

This problem is epitomized in the life of Saad al-Houssaini, a native of Morocco who was given a scholarship in chemistry for graduate study at the University of Valencia in Spain. According to *The Washington Post*, al-Houssaini became one of al-Qaeda’s foremost explosive experts. His story is instructively familiar. Like many other terrorists, he came from a technical, scientific background with little religious education. According to the *Post*, his academic mentor said that when Houssaini arrived in Valencia, “He was not visibly religious and would occasionally join students or faculty for drinks.”

Then something changed. Houssaini “became radicalized in Spain after meeting a Tunisian friend,” reported the *Post*. “Our principal subjects of discussion were around the jihad,” said Houssaini. “He made me understand the importance of religion and faith, providing me with religious books and audiotapes of the great sheiks’ speeches.” So Houssaini abandoned his research into the anti-cancer properties of certain chemicals and began to make bombs.<sup>65</sup>

What was the need in al-Houssaini’s life that was met by his recruitment? Did not this young man have the very freedom and educational opportunities for which many Muslims long? Do not many, in fact, believe that providing these opportunities is the solution to the problem of terrorism?

The mantra of freedom untethered to any higher purpose translates as a form of materialism to most Muslims—and to many others as well. Therefore, al-Houssaini decided upon submission to a higher purpose as it was on offer to him from the Islamists. Were there any competing offers at this level? Apparently not. While there are some people, like Solzhenitsyn or Aung San Suu Kyi, who can survive without freedom because they have meaning in their lives, others cannot survive freedom because they have no meaning in their lives. Al-Houssaini had freedom in Spain but no meaning, so he chose meaning over freedom. His story had been replicated many times by Muslims in Europe and elsewhere.

Like al-Houssaini, many other Muslims are disoriented by the forces of globalization and face the following choice: greater freedom with no purpose (the West) or personal submission to a higher purpose (the Islamists). So long as Islamists successfully frame the question in these terms, we will lose, and it is why we *are* losing.

Iranian philosopher (in exile) Abdolkarim Soroush has said that “Muslims would like to live in a democratic milieu, and at the same time they would like to keep their faith as well. They do not want to live in a democratic atmosphere at the expense of their beliefs and convictions.”<sup>66</sup> The United States should not go out of its way to convince them that this is impossible. Rather it ought to demonstrate that this is, in fact, what can be done and is what we strive to do. Faith and freedom are not mutually exclusive; they require each other. If we can present ourselves in this manner, we can help to refute the widely held Muslim equation of democracy with unbelief. By itself, that would be a major achievement.

As Egyptian Jesuit Samir Khalil Samir has written, “Muslims are not offended by religious symbols, but by secularized culture, by the fact that God and the values that they associate with God are absent from this [Western] civilization.”<sup>67</sup> He adds: “If modernity means the denial of religion, and if this is the message Europe and the West send out, it is difficult for the more-enlightened positions proposed in the Islamic countries to prevail.”<sup>68</sup> In other words, this image of ourselves, often unwittingly promoted by our public diplomacy, undercuts the very people in Islamic countries who are seeking a more democratic life.

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64. Hanif Kureishi, *My Son the Fanatic* (Hueber Verlag, 2008), p. 12.

65. Craig Whitlock, “In Morocco’s ‘Chemist,’ A Glimpse of Al-Qaeda: Bombmaker Typified Resilient Network,” *The Washington Post*, July 7, 2007, p. A1.

66. Abdolkarim Soroush, “Rationalist Traditions in Islam,” paper presented at Deutsch–Amerikanisches Institut, International Conference on Islam—Religion and Democracy, Heidelberg, Germany, November 12–13, 2004, p. 2, at [http://www.dr.soroush.com/PDF/E-CMB-20041113-%20Rationalist\\_Traditions\\_in\\_Islam-Soroush\\_in\\_Heidelberg.pdf](http://www.dr.soroush.com/PDF/E-CMB-20041113-%20Rationalist_Traditions_in_Islam-Soroush_in_Heidelberg.pdf).

67. Samir Khalil Samir, S.J., “When Civilizations Meet: How Joseph Ratzinger Sees Islam,” 2006, at <http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/53826?&eng=y>.

68. Giorgio Paolucci and Camille Eid, *111 Questions on Islam: Samir Khalil Samir, S.J. on Islam and the West*, trans. Wafik Nasry and Claudia Castellani (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), p. 89.

In 2007, a national security document on public diplomacy advised that “Government officials should...avoid using religious language, because it can mean different things and is easily misconstrued.”<sup>69</sup> *Not* using religious language can also be misconstrued in an even more damaging way as it creates the impression that Americans are without faith.

It is a supreme irony that our Islamist adversaries, with our help, have depicted the United States as the world’s center of unbelief while the vast majority of Americans have answered the above question concerning submission to a higher purpose through their practice of religion. The usual response to the accusation that America is secular is that the American people are in fact very religious. We have simply failed to communicate this fact. This is true, but it also misses something deeper that needs to be conveyed.

Public diplomacy should be able to show that our so-called secular position, so vehemently criticized by Abu Gheith, is finally not secular at all. As shown above in regard to the Founding, it is based upon a transcendent perspective and a hierarchy of good according to the nature of things from their Creator. It is ultimately grounded in a profound theological view that sees all things in their relationship to God. It comes from a God who wants us to be free so that we can freely choose Him.

## How to Win the War of Ideas

In its short history, the United States has always been on the winning side of the wars of ideas in which it has been engaged because it has understood what it is fighting for and what it is fighting against. With renewed understanding on these two fronts, it can do it again.

During this time of economic crisis, a new agency dedicated to this task, as sorely as it is needed, may not be politically feasible. This will make the job much harder, as is evident from the organizational incoherence of our public diplomacy since the USIA’s abolition. Whatever effort is undertaken in the interim, however, would be wise to consider for its statement of purpose the language in Section 3 of the proposed Strategic Communications Act of 2008:

It is the Sense of Congress that—(1) the founding principles of the United States...must be advanced and defended against those who—(A) deny the truth of such principles; and (B) seek to overthrow such principles; (2) those who support free and open societies, out of a decent respect to the opinions of mankind, owe an explanation of the moral principles and purposes of democratic, constitutional, and political order; (3) radical Islamists deny these moral principles and use terrorism to achieve their ideological ends; (4) radical Islamists seek to (A) morally delegitimize democracy; and (B) forcefully impose a universal political order that denies and suppresses the unalienable rights of human beings; (5) although military force may sometimes be necessary, military force alone cannot defeat the threat posed by Islamist extremists; and (6) the United States Government needs an organization whose mission is to—(A) successfully advance an understanding of, and an appreciation for, the founding principles of the United States; and (B) defeat the ideas inimical to democracy, including the ideas of radical Islamism.<sup>70</sup>

As should be clear from the foregoing, the first step on the way to winning is to restore serious content to U.S. public diplomacy. As stated at the outset, this paper is not about the programmatic side of public diplomacy. However, a few remarks may indicate the general direction such programming should take.

First of all, the target audience should be changed from the consumers of mass culture in foreign countries to those who think and influence their own societies. One recent anecdote is telling in this respect and helps to illustrate the difference. One of the more important princes of Saudi Arabia recalled that his late father, King Faisal, had

69. Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy Policy Coordinating Committee, *U.S. National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication*, released June 2007, p. 25, at <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/87427.pdf>.

70. Draft of S. 3546, Strategic Communications Act of 2008, on file with the author. The act, as introduced in the second session of the 110th Congress, was amended and is available at <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=s110-3546>.

been an avid listener to the VOA's Arabic service, which at that time was rich in news reports, substantive discussion programs, information on U.S. policies, and other features. In fact, King Faisal had memorized the VOA's broadcast times so that he could tune in and not miss his favorite programs when he was in the desert, as he often was, with his shortwave radio. The prince related that he also had been a fan of VOA Arabic but that he did not, of course, listen to Radio Sawa, which had replaced it.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the damage that has been done from the embrace of pop culture and the promotion of anemic themes, the restoration of substance in U.S. government broadcasting can once again attract serious audiences in the countries that the U.S. most needs to reach. The U.S. should utilize all the means that members of this audience themselves take seriously: books, journals, films, plays, press, TV and radio discussion programs, and substantive exchanges.

There have also been calls for the restoration of U.S. centers and libraries abroad and for increased exchanges, most recently by Vice President Joseph Biden. All of these did great good during the Cold War when they existed under the USIA, and they could do so again. However, as this paper has repeatedly stressed, it all depends on *what* is in the libraries and *what* is exchanged in the exchange programs.

One program from the early 1980s, funded by the USIA and run by the Claremont Institute for the Study of Statesmanship, serves as a good example of what can be accomplished. It brought young leaders from the journalistic, academic, and political professions from foreign countries to Claremont for several weeks of seminars on the American Founding. At the end of one seminar for young leaders from Latin America, the participants spontaneously banded together, wrote their own declaration modeled on the American Declaration, and pledged to dedicate the rest of their lives to the implementation of its principles in their own countries. This represents the best of what public diplomacy can hope to achieve.

Of course, many public diplomacy programs are not didactic in nature; they endeavor to “show rather than tell.” These efforts, which can and should include a broad range of the arts, other kinds of education, medical aid programs, journalism, etc., can also be very effective so long as the connections to the principles they are supposed to illustrate are not lost.

In the Islamic world, the U.S. should facilitate the creation and reinforcement of an anti-totalitarian social and intellectual network. We must help the people whose ideas we wish to see prevail in the contest for the future of that world. That we have not done so yet is one of the most puzzling aspects of the past eight years.

The former president of Indonesia, Abdurrahman Wahid, who remains the spiritual leader of the world's largest Muslim organization, has called for a counterstrategy that would include offering “a compelling alternative vision of Islam, one that banishes the fanatical ideology of hatred to the darkness from which it emerged.”<sup>72</sup> He advocates a partnership with the non-Muslim world, an alliance of civilizations, in a massively resourced effort to uphold human dignity, freedom of conscience, religious freedom, and the benefits of modernity before the juggernaut of Islamist ideology swamps the Muslim world. It is a compelling summons. It should be answered.

In May 2008, I had the chance to talk with President Wahid. When I asked him about the significance of the suppression of the Mu'tazilites in the 9th century, he was somewhat elusive and would not respond directly, which is not surprising considering the regard in which Mu'tazilism is held. However, he found another way to answer that said a great deal. Wahid told me the story of his going into a mosque in Fez, Morocco. There, under a glass case, he saw a copy of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. At the sight of it, he said, he burst into tears. Then he remarked: “If there had not been such a book, I would have been a fundamentalist.”

I asked Wahid how it was that he knew Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in the first place. He told me that he had first read it at his father's boarding school in Indonesia. No doubt that was only one of a number of formative influences on Wahid, but it was an important—even decisive—one that could also be employed in this new war of ideas that is taking place within Islam.

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71. Comment to author, 2008.

72. Abdurrahman Wahid, “Right Islam vs. Wrong Islam,” *The Wall Street Journal*, December 30, 2005, p. A16, at <http://www.opinionjournal.com/extra/?id=110007743>.

There is tremendous irony in this story when its lesson is applied to the U.S. response to radical Islamism, which can be captured in the following vignette—a true story related to me by a participant. An American interrogator at Guantanamo, who has extensive knowledge of Islamic history and the Arabic language, told me about discussing Aristotle with a fairly high-profile Arab detainee during a conversation about the importance of critical thinking and its role in the works of some Muslim theologians. The detainee was keenly interested in this and said that he had heard mention of Aristotle during his schooling but that, in his country, students do not have access to the texts of Aristotle. He asked whether the interrogator would please provide him with some of the works of Aristotle in Arabic.

However, when the interrogator tried to get the detainee library to order these works, the librarians, who were more focused on the Qur'an and light reading such as nature books with lots of pictures, could not see the relevance of Aristotle or believe that a detainee would be interested in him. (This interrogator pointed out to me that “the detainee was far more intellectually engaged than the library staff: No one should make the mistake of thinking these detainees are just violent thugs.”) The library did not order any Aristotle, and yet another opportunity to address the problem at the level at which it exists was lost.

This is a perfect illustration of how to lose a war of ideas because you do not even know what it is about.

## How to Know When We Have Won

How will we know when we have won the war of ideas? What are the “metrics” for success? It is easy to tell if more people are smoking Lucky Strikes. Just count the cigarettes, and Edward Bernays wins. Sales figures in the war of ideas are harder to obtain. As Edward R. Murrow, the first director of the USIA, said, “[n]o cash register rings when somebody changes his mind.”<sup>73</sup>

Perhaps we can use victory in the Cold War as a template. Recall President Reagan's previously mentioned use of “evil empire” to describe the Soviet Union. Since Reagan's language spoke directly to the injustice of the Soviet regime, nothing could have set the terms of the debate more clearly. The Soviets and their allies in the West were furious over the accusation, yet victory came in the very terms that Reagan set forth.

The article of surrender first appeared in the Soviet press in 1990, less than a decade after Reagan's remarks. In it, Alexander Yakovlev, the Politburo chief of Soviet ideology, the erstwhile “pope” of Communism, stated that he had finally come to understand that Leninism was based upon class struggle and class hatred and that this was evil. He adopted Reagan's very rhetoric to describe the same reality. By doing so, he acquiesced in admitting to the Soviet Union's moral illegitimacy, thus undermining the ideological foundations of the Soviet regime, which collapsed the following year.

This provides the definition of victory: When one side adopts its opponent's rhetoric to describe the same moral reality, the opponent will have won the war of ideas. This does not obviate the importance of military strength, but it shows what can be done without firing a shot. It is the ultimate victory, and the one for which we should aim.

A microcosmic example of what can be accomplished has been offered by Judge Hamoud al-Hitar in Yemen. He and four other Islamic scholars challenged Yemen's al-Qaeda prisoners to a theological contest and Qur'anic duel. If the al-Qaeda members could convince al-Hitar that their actions were in conformity with the Qur'an, he would join them. If, however, he convinced them that their behavior was anti-Qur'anic, they would renounce terrorism and leave al-Qaeda. “If you study terrorism in the world, you will see that it has an intellectual theory behind it,” said al-Hitar. “And any kind of intellectual idea can be defeated by intellect.”<sup>74</sup> Al-Hitar won the debate, and the terrorists renounced al-Qaeda. Since December 2002, Yemen has used this approach successfully with more than 360 young men.

73. Arthur A. Bardos, “Public Diplomacy: An Old Art, a New Profession,” *Virginia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (Summer 2001), pp. 424–437, esp. p. 428.

74. James Brandon, “Koranic Duels Ease Terror,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 4, 2005, at <http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0204/p01s04-wome.html>.

Another foreshadowing of what victory might look like is provided by the recent publication of Sayyed Imam Al-Sharif's book *The Document of Right Guidance for Jihad Activity in Egypt and the World*. Al-Sharif (known as Dr. Fadl) was the author of the 1988 book *Foundations of Preparation for Holy War*, which was considered the Islamist jihadi bible.<sup>75</sup> That al-Sharif should renounce his former views and declare al-Qaeda's jihad to be morally illegitimate so stunned his former subordinate, Ayman al-Zawahiri, the number two in al-Qaeda, that Zawahiri felt it necessary to write a 215-page rebuttal. Al-Sharif's book shows that al-Qaeda can be defeated on its home turf.

We also need to realize that, despite our neglect of them, the truths of the Declaration still resonate throughout the world. In the recent Chinese *Charter 08*, thousands of Chinese citizens, at great peril to themselves, declared that "the ruling elite continues with impunity to crush and to strip away the rights of citizens to freedom, to property, and to the pursuit of happiness...."<sup>76</sup> What does that sound like?

Last January, President Obama said that "the dream of the Founders will live on in our time." If this is so, we will know how to restore our public diplomacy and advance the cause of freedom. Wherever it is possible to acknowledge the principle of equality of all human beings, democratic, constitutional order becomes a possibility. It is the mission of U.S. public diplomacy to promote that acknowledgment and all that flows from it.

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75. Bret Stephens, "How al-Qaeda Will Perish," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 25, 2008, p. A22, at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB120640588050061101.html>.

76. "China's Democratic 'Charter,'" *The Wall Street Journal*, December 12, 2008, p. A18, at <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122904186671200179.html>.



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