

# The War on Terror, Next Phases: The Middle East Dimension

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In-Depth Reports

**\*M**r. Pillar's remarks represent his own views and not necessarily those of the U.S. government.

[Due to an unfortunate technical problem, the panelists' opening presentations were not recorded. An edited transcription of the panel's question-and-answer session follows.]

Matthew Levitt, The Washington Institute: One of the more important elements driving the war on terror is political will. For example, Washington is now taking action against certain radical Islamist groups that it refused to target before the September 11 attacks for political reasons (e.g., fears that such action would be perceived as Muslim bashing). The laws justifying this action were in place well before September 11, but the requisite political will to enforce them simply did not exist.

At times, however, this surplus of current political will has approached overkill. Although President George W. Bush and other members of the administration have made admirably powerful statements regarding their commitment to the war on terror, these statements will lose much of their potency if Washington fails to stand by them. For example, the president has said that America will not rest until every terrorist group of global reach is destroyed. That is a very high threshold. He has also stated that America will no longer tolerate terrorist training camps in Iran, Syria, and Lebanon. That, too, is a very high threshold; indeed, nothing has been done about such camps. Hence, there is a certain tension between rhetoric and reality.

If you ask me what the chief terrorist threat is today, I would not point to any one organization, not even to al-Qaeda. Rather, the principal threat today is rooted in the structure of such organizations. Al-Qaeda is a loosely affiliated network of likeminded radical Islamic extremists. These sorts of networks, and the matrix of relationships they comprise, are what should give Washington pause.

Counterterrorism is conflict management, not conflict resolution. We cannot solve the problem of terrorism. I guarantee that in a fraction of the time it takes us to break down the infrastructure of terrorism, the bad guys will build it back up. For instance, the amount of terrorist money that we have frozen since the September 11 attacks, while infinitely more than we had ever frozen before, is still only a drop in the bucket. Successful counterterrorism is not so much a question of how much money we can freeze, but rather how effectively we can deny the terrorists their operating environment, whether by cracking down on cells, making it more difficult to cross borders, or making it more difficult to move money from point A to point B. If we crack down on the right cell, we can disrupt the activity of an entire network.

Disrupting the matrix is key. There are disturbing links at different levels between al-Qaeda and Iran, between al-Qaeda and Hizballah, and between Hizballah and Iran. For example, all three sets have links to Palestinian groups, and most of the major Palestinian terrorist groups have stated that they believe the United States is now a fair target. This marks a significant shift in their traditional modus operandi and has led to a shift in their connections, whether operational or not.

Take the al-Taqwa banking network, which was one of the first targets of U.S. financial blocking orders. When President Bush announced the order, his statement detailed al-Taqwa's connections to al-Qaeda. Since then, in two different testimonies before Congress, senior members of the Treasury Department have explained that al-Taqwa, in fact, started with seed money from Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, an "equal-opportunity" financier that has provided funds to Hamas and a host of other terrorist groups from Tunisia, Algeria, and elsewhere.

Indeed, there are many relationships between the logistical and financial networks that support terrorism. For example, federal authorities recently broke up a cell in Portland, Oregon. The cell is alleged to have been founded by, among others, one individual who was convicted of providing money to Hamas. This man had received operational training from a variety of terrorist groups in Lebanon. Another of the cell's alleged founders is a man who cofounded the Global Relief Foundation, which has been subject to financial blocking orders because of its direct links to and funding of al-Qaeda.

The situation is serious, and although we have done a tremendous deal of good and made the world a much safer place since the September 11 attacks, there is a long way to go. I am not yet convinced that every part of the U.S. government is aware that the enemy is larger than al-Qaeda. This has so far been a war on al-Qaeda, not a war on terrorism.

With these comments in mind, I would like to pose a general question to the panel. If you had five minutes of President Bush's time, what would be the one major point that you would make to him with regard to the war on terror?

Ely Karmon: Terrorism has emerged as one of the primary tactics of strategic warfare. We now live with the kinds of scenarios we saw only in science fiction films ten or fifteen years ago. Although the threat of weapons of mass destruction is perhaps not as immediate as depicted in the media, it could become a huge problem in the very near future.

Moreover, the threshold of terrorism has risen considerably. For example, we are already seeing the copycat phenomena in the West Bank and Gaza, where plots to carry out mega-attacks on the scale of September 11 are being uncovered.

Terrorism has become a threat that will affect everyone. Unfortunately, many countries, especially those in Europe, have not yet come to this realization. Contrary to what is often considered "politically correct," we must consider this war on terror as a war of civilizations, even a war of religions. The other side already views it in these terms, looking beyond just the United States and the West. To the Islamists, the enemy is everywhere: the Chinese are a threat, the Russians are a threat, the Buddhists with their statues in Afghanistan are a threat, and the Christians in Indonesia are a threat.

So, the United States must build a coalition. It must be willing to share strategic assets with Russia, China, India -- the great powers that are involved directly in this war.

Barton Gellman: If I had five minutes with the president, I would not be answering questions. I would be asking them. The only point I would want to make is that terrorism has become the pivot for our whole interaction with the world -- global and domestic -- and it is important to step back and take stock from time to time of what other important interests are being overlooked.

In the past, U.S. foreign policy has given great weight to regional conflict, to proliferation of certain weapons, to trade, and to human rights. If you add up everything that is being done today -- every deal made, every inducement offered around the world -- to insist on terrorism as a new priority, it collectively constitutes a new foreign policy and, from time to time, it bears examination.

Paul Pillar: My one point to the president would be that in virtually all aspects of counterterrorism, other than domestic security, we are highly dependent on foreign partners. I would differ from my copanelist, Ely Karmon, in saying that we should not just seek partners in this civilization or that, but we should seek partners around the world -- at least as much within the Muslim world as outside of it. We need the cooperation of dozens of other governments and their security, police, military, and intelligence services to collect information and disrupt terrorist infrastructures. Even on that one dimension of power in which the United States is so preeminent, the military, America depends on cooperation for things like access rights. Given our dependence in all of these areas of counterterrorism, what we can accomplish will in part be determined by the willingness and capability of dozens of foreign partners to do what we need them to do.

To some extent, counterterrorism cooperation can be insulated from the larger aspects of a bilateral relationship. I have discussed counterterrorism cooperation with some pretty strange bedfellows -- governments you might be surprised to learn about. Yet, this war cannot be completely insulated; therefore, the overall health of these relationships will be one of the main determinants of how successful our counterterrorism efforts are in the years ahead.

Participant: What would be the effect on international terrorism if the current governments of Syria and Iran were terminated in one way or another, and if these countries were to stop sponsoring terrorism? How would this alter the international Islamist terrorist network?

Pillar: The nature and extent of the relationship between the Taliban and international terrorists, particularly Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, is of a different magnitude than the support relationships that we have seen over the last several years with other state sponsors, including the ones you named. The relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaeda was far tighter, more ideologically driven, and more based on mutual need -- before Operation Enduring Freedom broke up the Taliban regime -- than any we have yet seen. Other relationships between terrorists and state sponsors are more like marriages of convenience and manipulations by the patron of the client for the sake of achieving other ends.

Take Iran, which, now that the Taliban is out of the way, is justifiably called the principal state sponsor of terrorism. Before September 11, the Khobar Towers bombing was the big data point for Iranian-sponsored terrorism. Beyond that, Iran was assassinating dissident Iranians in Europe and other countries at a pretty formidable rate. This has tapered off. Most of the bad news from Tehran is now related to the current intifada; the Iranians have been stoking that fire vigorously -- not just through its client Hizballah, but through its direct relationships with a whole host of Palestinian groups, both secular and Islamist.

So, if all of that were to end -- a regime change would make a difference -- there would be an appreciable reduction in support for terrorism in the Levant. How big a proportion of the overall terrorist picture in that part of the world would be affected is hard to say. There are groups like Hamas, with ample financial resources of their own, that do not depend in a major way on Iran, but which do benefit from Iranian support.

In the case of Syria, it really all revolves around the conflict with Israel and the issue of the Golan Heights. That support will end when there is an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement.

Karmon: I disagree with Paul. The Taliban were not the real sponsors of al-Qaeda. In a sense, they were the clients in the relationship. The Taliban gave safe haven and permitted al-Qaeda to act with the support of the Pakistani government and its security and military establishments. The Taliban, which never controlled all of their own territory, just cannot be compared with Iran and Syria. Both have strongly centralized governments and exercise effective control over their own territories, and both have at least three decades of experience supporting terrorist organizations.

The Taliban must be punished for what they did, but the Iranians and the Syrians are much more important players. For example, Iranian support for terrorism extends beyond the Palestinian organizations; in the last month, it was found to support even the Turkish Islamists. Tehran almost provoked a Turkish military intervention when it convinced the Syrians to expel the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Iran, through Hizballah, has also trained various Sunni organizations.

Levitt: Maybe the term "axis of evil" is more accurate than some are willing to admit.

Participant: I am basically convinced by Mr. Levitt's presentation of the importance of political will in giving new emphasis to counterterrorism. There are so many things left undone in the war against al-Qaeda. I would like to ask the other panelists to what extent the United States is taking its eye off the ball when the primary recipient of political energy within the Bush administration for the coming months will be Iraq.

Gellman: Your concerns are well founded. It is inevitable that, when you have more than one major initiative going, there will be tradeoffs in resources and attention, be they military resources, intelligence resources, and that most precious resource of all, top-level political attention.

I see the transition to Iraq as a transition from the focus on terrorism to a focus on vital regional interests. It was interesting that, in his remarks earlier in these proceedings, Zalmay Khalilzad barely mentioned terrorism in connection with Iraq. Instead he focused on the threat posed by Iraq in a region that is of vital importance to the United States.

After the September 11 attacks, there was a laser-like focus on terrorism for perfectly understandable and necessary reasons. It would be historically unique if that focus were not cyclical, if that focus did not perhaps exaggerate the priority of terrorism compared to all other national interests, and if that focus were not corrected over time. It is also quite possible that the pendulum will swing too far in the other direction.

Levitt: I think it is fantastic that Mr. Khalilzad did not mention terrorism with regard to Iraq. I have been suggesting to people in government that they stop trying to tie Iraq to the September 11 attacks or to terrorism. Whatever connection may have existed is not the main reason to deal with Iraq. We cannot wait for the next 3,000 people to be killed to realize that there is a threat and that we should deal with it. It is less an issue of regional interest than an issue of threat and vulnerability. These threats and vulnerabilities were there before; only now are we awake to just how real they are. We are now going to be more proactive in trying to eliminate those threats.

Paul is being modest; the part of the government that will be most strained is the intelligence community. The war on terrorism does not require as many military resources as we may have once thought. These things work in tandem. Iraq will not be put on hold so that we can prosecute the war on terrorism. Sometimes there will be multiple threats and we will be in the uncomfortable position of having to deal with them simultaneously.

Gellman: A brief data point to support your intelligence point: there are formal written guidelines that establish orders of priority for deployment of intelligence assets, and the top priority is always support for ongoing military operations. So, to the extent that we have an ongoing military operation in Iraq, it will necessarily take resources away from the war on terrorism.

Participant: Mr. Karmon, how many members or fighters constitute Hizballah, a group that seems to act so independently? Hizballah is supposed to have 8,000 to 9,000 missiles, several hundred of which are capable of reaching Haifa. Who will deal with the problem of Hizballah beyond the Palestinian-Israeli arena?

Karmon: Hizballah is not exactly on its own. Its guerrilla forces consist of no more than 1,200 members. Hizballah won a strategic victory because of Israel's political decision to pull out of the security zone in Lebanon. My criticism of the Israeli government (particularly since Turkey's strategic move in 1998, which practically dismantled the PKK

in Syria and Lebanon) is that it was not dealing with the root of Hizballah's strength, which is Syria, not Iran. For many years, Iran was considered Hizballah's main sponsor because it provided financial, logistical, and training support; but without the Syrian strategic umbrella, Hizballah could not have survived. Because of the intifada, among other political and military exigencies, the Israeli government is showing restraint in dealing with Syria's clear and obvious support of Hizballah. In the last three months, Syria has even upgraded its support of the organization. For the first time, the regime in Damascus has given Hizballah heavy weapons -- katyusha mortars. Why? Because Damascus uses the organization as a strategic weapon against Israel. Hizballah supports the intifada and is committed to driving Israel out of the Golan Heights.

The U.S. campaign against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan was quick and successful. It is also a good example of what may happen in Iraq and, perhaps later, in Iran and Syria. Iraqi army generals and colonels now have before them a picture of what happened to the Taliban. They will think twice before using weapons of mass destruction or continuing to support Saddam Husayn's regime. I hope that what happened in Afghanistan will strongly influence the behavior of the Iraqi military and civil elite.

The problem is that with the reconstruction of infrastructure in Afghanistan a new generation of Islamist terrorism will be born. Sometime before the war, Iman al-Zawahiri, who was or is Osama bin Laden's deputy (he may have been killed in Afghanistan), wrote that when al-Qaeda suffers a setback, it must cut its losses; it must forget its prisoners and their families and it must look for a new safe haven. So, now the organization is trying to find that new haven. This continues the trend, which began in the 1990s, of terrorist havens shifting from the Middle East to Southeast Asia. Two countries that can become such havens are Pakistan and Indonesia. Both are large Islamic countries. Pakistan has a huge Islamist movement; Indonesia suffers from growing instability that could ferment rebellion in a jungle-filled area with 200 million Muslims on 17,000 islands. For this reason, both Pakistan and Indonesia should be high priorities for the United States.

Participant: In the 1980s and 1990s, you could not talk about Iranian-Syrian-Hizballah terrorism without making ample reference to drug-running and the counterfeiting of U.S. currency (as well as European and Russian currency in the 1990s). In the early 1990s, the House Task Force on Terrorism held hearings on this issue and published a number of reports; it was a major topic of discussion. In fact, the United States eventually changed its currency, ostensibly because so much of it was being counterfeited. That conversation seems to have been quieted, however. Is it the panel's understanding, from your intimate knowledge of Hizballah and Iran, that the counterfeiting of U.S. currency continues? Is it significant, and is it a threat to the stability of the dollar?

Levitt: I have held some of these counterfeit bills in my hands. They are extremely sophisticated and take expensive equipment to create. Even a group like Hizballah, which is extremely professional in every way, cannot do it on their own. There is a level of state sponsorship here. But it is not on an order of magnitude that threatens our economy. The level of support that Hizballah and other groups receive from Iran and elsewhere likely precludes the need for them to engage in their own counterfeiting.

I once served as an expert witness for the government in a case against two Hizballah operatives who headed a cell that provided material support to Hizballah. The cell supplied cash and also had a dual-use procurement wing. They were procuring night-vision goggles and sophisticated computers and avionics equipment, among other things. In order for me to prepare my testimony, they gave me about 1,000 pages of declassified Federal Bureau of Investigation wiretaps and about 100 pages of declassified Canadian wiretaps from the Canadian branch of the cell. (I will be writing a case study of Hizballah's logistical financial procurement support cells based on this material.) There is an instance in which they are at least talking about smuggling some of these counterfeit "super bills" into the United States and Canada to procure equipment. The tapes are unclear as to whether they actually carried out the smuggling. In addition, they were already running credit-card scams and things like that.

Participant: Were these counterfeits of the new U.S. bills or the old ones?

Levitt: I don't know. I would have to check again, but they were most likely the old bills. I don't know of any evidence that they have the capability to counterfeit the new bills. I would be surprised if they did.

Participant: For the past year, the Saudi government has made it clear that it feels U.S. press coverage of Saudi Arabia has been unfair. I would like to ask Mr. Pillar, as an intelligence officer, and Mr. Gellman, as a journalist, whether they agree.

Pillar: Most of the coverage I have seen is not unfair. It has been healthy for our country's public consciousness. Previously, we saw very little of this kind of coverage and commentary.

Gellman: When, from time to time, the Saudis complain to us that we misrepresent their country or the views of their citizens, we politely try to note that it would help us if they would grant our reporters visas to enter their country. They have seldom granted visas over the past decade, and they have never granted one to a Washington Post reporter who is fluent in Arabic. It is impossible to travel in the country without being watched or, in many cases, escorted directly.

They are unhappy with coverage that mentions financial sources for the madrasas and the most radical forms of jihadist Islam. They are unhappy with reporting on cases of terrorist recruiting in Saudi Arabia. They are unhappy with discussions of the way that the government deliberately deflects anger at itself onto Israel and the United States. Yet, all of these are legitimate subjects.

Participant: Are you certain that we are getting the full cooperation of some of our Arab allies in the war on terrorism? Has any thought been given to building coalitions with another brand of Islam or moderate Muslims?

Pillar: This point has received a great deal of attention in the U.S. government, particularly in the State Department and the National Security Council. We have to forge those sorts of relationships if we are to have any realistic hope of encouraging the kind of social, economic, educational, and political evolution that will lower the chances that the next big terrorist incident will include fifteen operatives from Saudi Arabia. This is a long road, but there are some very smart people in the U.S. government who are looking at the issue, bearing in mind all of the difficulties inherent in the United States telling even more modern Muslims how to handle their own internal governance.

Karmon: I consider Saudi Arabia to be one of the major responsible parties for the wave of Islamism sweeping the world, although its responsibility is perhaps not direct. It began with the oil crisis in 1972, when various Gulf countries -- but mainly Saudi Arabia -- became so rich that they could invest a lot of money in the development of mosques and Islamic centers all over the world. Many of these centers were taken over by the Islamists or even by the Libyans, who were much more radical. But this did not stop Saudi financing.

We also have the example of the Taliban. Although al-Qaeda fought from Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia gave the Taliban financial support and diplomatic assistance until the last moment, although the Saudis eventually cut their diplomatic ties with the Taliban under U.S. pressure. Previously Saudi Arabia had been one of only three countries that recognized the Taliban regime.

Let me give you an example of how the Saudi mind works. In 1969, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) bombed the oil pipeline that passes through the Golan Heights (which were in Israeli hands) and published various victory communiqués in the Beirut press saying, "We attacked the reactionary regime of the Saudi Arabians. This is a coup against the imperialists and their reactionary regimes." One week later, the PFLP leadership published a statement denying that the operation had been theirs or that they even knew who was behind it. So, what happened? At the time, Saudi Arabia was the main financial sponsor of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which was already in the hands of Yasir Arafat. The Saudis threatened to halt funding to the PLO until the

organization promised not to attack anymore Saudi assets; indeed, from then on, the PFLP, a Marxist organization that fought against reactionary regimes in the Arab world, never again attacked Saudi assets. Why? Because all the money they received through the PLO came from Saudi pockets.

Participant: Mr. Karmon, you have suggested that Hizballah might actually assassinate leaders in the Gulf as a policy. What is the basis for your suspicions and what is the philosophical reasoning they might use to actually go through with such assassinations?

Also, you mentioned that this should be a war of civilizations, even a war of religions. I wonder if this definition might be a little too broad and whether we should narrow it by calling this a war against radical Islam, not against the world's 1.2 billion Muslims. The latter might be a difficult war to win.

Karmon: You are right. But I also said that this is a war of civilizations or religions from the other side's perspective. We must recognize this truth and understand how the enemy thinks. We do not have to fight Islam itself, but we must look at how the other side sees this fight. One of the problems is that moderate Muslims, who are the great majority, do not speak out for fear of the radicals. Some people are afraid to speak freely even at this very conference because they know that the other side is listening and ready to assassinate them.

Regarding Hizballah, in the 1980s, there were several attempts in Kuwait, Bahrain, and even Saudi Arabia to assassinate the emir of Kuwait. Most of those attempts were carried out by Shi'i groups that had been trained by or were cooperating with Hizballah. (Incidentally, these would-be assassins were liberated from prison by the Iraqis when they occupied Kuwait.) Because of historical links, there remain connections between Hizballah and groups that are active in the Gulf. We saw this in the Khobar Towers attack, where Hizballah had a role in training the operatives. Hizballah counts very clever people among its ranks. They understand that if they want to commit sabotage or other provocative operations, the Gulf is a good target. It is a very sensitive region now because of the large U.S. military presence, which will become even more important in the near future.

Pillar: If I had another five minutes with President Bush beyond the five minutes that Matt granted me, I would tell him that one of the biggest mistakes he could make would be doing or saying anything that could be construed as defining this conflict as a clash of civilizations. He must avoid portraying, or giving others cause to portray, this as a battle between the Muslim world and the Judeo-Christian West. Such rhetoric encourages all the wrong reactions and attitudes in the Muslim world; it plays right into the hands of people like bin Laden who want to portray it in exactly those terms.

Gellman: President Bush used the word "crusade" exactly one time after September 11 before someone leaped to correct him with a written note or the equivalent. Moreover, the Islamist indictment against many Arab states is that they are corrupt, impious, and in bed with the United States. From an analytical perspective, you cannot argue with any of these three observations.

Karmon: I am not saying that we should talk about this as a war of civilizations or religions. But when we discuss strategy, we must be clear about how the other side defines the war. One strategic tool the West could use is propaganda. There is not enough effort in this area. The Israeli government does not produce sufficient propaganda and does not speak to the Palestinian population over the heads of their leaders.

Levitt: The Washington Institute's own Robert Satloff and Martin Kramer have noted articulately that there are shortcomings in the U.S. government's use of the media.

Participant: Mr. Gellman, you talked about classified information and the difficulty that you sometimes have with the military. You work for a reputable organization, and you said there is some information that you would not consider publishing. But what about some of the less diligent print media outlets (and possibly even internet sources such as Matt Drudge) who seem to have less scruples about what they will publish? Is there any real threat to national

security when sensitive information is reported?

Gellman: Potentially, there is. This is an interesting question. On the surface, it seems analogous to the least-common-denominator effect, where, for example, we at the Washington Post will say that our standards do not permit us to print a story about Gennifer Flowers based on the current state of evidence -- but then the National Enquirer reports it, it becomes a giant brouhaha, and we end up writing about it anyway. So, the bottom-feeders drive the market on scandal and sensationalism. But that is not true with classified information. One reason may be that you would have to go to the lowest of the bottom-feeders to find organizations that would give no weight to issues of national security in deciding whether to publish information. These sorts of conversations take place not only at my newspaper, but at many other news organizations. Moreover, the number of news organizations with the resources, personnel, time, credibility, and sources to get within a mile of sensitive information is relatively small. One reason why we get such information is that the circles in which we work consist of people who believe that we will try to be responsible with it.

Pillar: I would second that. In my experience, the good stuff, the accurate stuff, is collected by the likes of the Washington Post, not the bottom-feeders.

Participant: Mr. Karmon mentioned that the United States, Israel, and the West seem not to focus enough on positive propaganda and on helping moderates in the Middle East. It is as if the war on terror is the war on drugs. We focus on the supply-interdiction side rather than on the demand-prevention side. Why is that? What can we do now to help in the battle for hearts and minds -- a battle that will ultimately prevent more new terrorists from being created?

Karmon: We know that much of the war is a media war, psychological warfare. We saw how bin Laden used three or four videos to pass messages not only to the United States and the West but also to his own constituency. I am not sure that the messages the United States sends are adequately designed to reach the people of the Middle East in their own language, or that their mentality is taken into consideration.

I can only speak of the Israeli experience. In the context of the Oslo agreement, Israel ended its Arabic-language radio and television broadcasts. Until then, Israel had the best Arabic radio and television. Afterward, Israel had no real tool to disseminate its propaganda. Finally, there was a decision to create a satellite television network. It took one year of intifada to put it on the air because of bureaucratic problems between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the prime minister's office. Even now, I am not sure that there is a real policy on how to present the issues -- first to the Palestinians and then to the Arab world.

In 2000, I attended an international conference in Vienna on human rights, and there I visited the office of Mujahedin-e Khalq, a terrorist group opposed to the Iranian regime. When he saw me, the head of the office said to me, "I would like you to pass a message to the Israeli government. We would like you not to speak negatively of the Mujahedin-e Khalq in your Persian-language radio broadcasts. They are so influential in Iran they are disturbing us."

The internet is another important medium. If you get your message out in the right manner, you can influence people.

Pillar: The State Department has taken a number of initiatives, but I cannot speak of them in detail. Undersecretary of state Charlotte Beers is in charge of this effort, which ranges from having fluent Arabists like Christopher Ross appear on al-Jazeera to discuss matters of the day to setting up an Arabic-language radio station. The radio station has the Western news perspective, combined with popular music and other elements likely to build an audience with young people who might otherwise become terrorists.

In any of these efforts, you have to be careful not to be seen as broadcasting blatant propaganda, even though that is what you really are doing; otherwise, your impact will be reduced.

Gellman: Public diplomacy can be helpful on the margins, but there may be an analogy here to the billions of dollars that corporations waste paying public-relations agencies to send faxes that are immediately thrown away. No marketing campaign can persuade the Arab world that the U.S. role in the Middle East is salutary as long as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is left unresolved. No marketing campaign can persuade wahhabists that it is acceptable for thousands of Christian soldiers to set foot in the Islamic Holy Land. We should not expect miracles.

Participant: Mr. Gellman, you spoke eloquently of your frustration with the U.S. government and not having access to information that you feel should be in the public domain. But the flipside is, of course, when the media uses erroneous information. The most notorious example in the past year was the reporting done by the Washington Post and its sister newspapers about the incident in Jenin, where the number of casualties was highly inflated. It took many months before the slightest mea culpa was issued acknowledging that, in fact, the numbers were false and without foundation. What is the media's responsibility to ensure that its facts are correct?

Gellman: Our fundamental responsibility is accuracy. Equally important is context and the overall fairness or completeness of the picture that we present. I strongly doubt that there were statements in the Washington Post endorsing the Palestinian claim, although we did air the Palestinian claim. Washington Post correspondents in Jenin did not say that the Palestinian claim was factual -- that there were massacres in Jenin, that there was a mass burial, or that there were casualties in the hundreds. You will not see such assertions if you go back and read the coverage. What the Post's coverage did was report that Palestinians were saying those things; that there was clearly a whole new level of force being employed in an area that was, in fact, primarily civilian; and that efforts by nongovernmental organizations, international agencies, and reporters to get in were being repelled by force, so there was no independent means of examining the evidence. I would not take back a word of that coverage.

Levitt: Interestingly, this brings us back to terrorism. The first notable report from Jenin was a CNN interview with a Palestinian Islamic Jihad terrorist arrested by the Israelis. According to his explanation, the body count would almost certainly be much lower than some were expecting. They asked him how he could be so sure. He said that first of all, the Israelis went through with megaphones when they were about to knock down a building. Then, in case you did not hear the megaphones, there were three knocks; that is to say, they knocked the building three times with a bulldozer. So if you were in a building and it shook once, you knew you could continue hanging out near the window and shooting. If it shook a second time, you knew to move to a window closer to an exit. And if it shook a third time, you got the hell out of there. Everyone knew it, he said, and no one was looking to get crushed under a building, so he did not think we would find as many bodies as had been claimed. ❖

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