



# PROJECT *on* Middle East Democracy

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The Institute for Middle East Studies (IMES) and the Institute for Global Communications and Public Diplomacy (IGCPD)

## **“Public Diplomacy and the War of Ideas: Agendas for the Next Administration”**

Cloyd Heck Marvin Center, Elliot Room 310, 800 21<sup>st</sup> St., NW, 30 September 2008, 2pm

IMES and IGCPD hosted a discussion featuring **Hady Amr**, Director of the Brookings Doha Center; **Michael Doran**, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Support to Public Diplomacy; and **Kristin Lord**, Fellow at the Brookings Institute Foreign Policy Studies Program. The event was moderated by **Marc Lynch**, Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at GWU.

**Marcy Lynch** described the vital importance of public diplomacy as America’s image has collapsed around the world since 9/11. He said since 9/11 there has been enormous attention as well as the proliferation of many new programs and broadcast entities. **Yet we need to make strategic choices and find a proper balance between undermining the ideas of our adversaries and spreading positive U.S. values.**

**Kristin Lord** said that public diplomacy should be about more than the war of ideas, and instead noted that every disparate national security goal of the U.S. can be buttressed by an effective public diplomacy strategy. She listed four reasons why public diplomacy is important. First, two-thirds of world nations are now democracies, which means states increasingly need to seek the cooperation of their people. Second, technological advances are such that the State is no longer the lone source and arbiter of information, and must compete in a crowded media landscape. Third, most vital security issues are transnational and require international cooperation. Last, we need to confront our enemies’ ideologies, and force alone is not enough.

Lord presented a public diplomacy strategy for the next administration. She said we must inform and persuade foreign populations on specific U.S. policies, using both offensive and defensive messaging. She said negative campaigning works, but the U.S. is not always the best conduit for negative messages. She noted we must also promote an understanding of America, its institutions, and its political culture, as different conflicting voices throughout the political system can seem confusing and contradictory to foreign populations. The U.S. should also focus on long-term exchanges and broadcasting initiatives to advance a climate of respect. Lord said we must encourage support for shared values and challenges such as the environment, rule of law, and anti-terrorism. These are not exclusive American values and yet they align with American interests.

**Hady Amr** largely agreed with Lord’s points. **He noted that we have succeeded in building relationships with the most progressive aspects of society in MENA, yet they are not our problem. We must engage the region’s conservatives, which he called the “swing vote” of public diplomacy.** He also stressed the need for two-way communication initiatives and joint

activities. **He said we must work in partnership from the initial stages of policymaking, across a broad spectrum of views from the Middle East.** Hady agreed that many activities are best done without U.S. involvement. **He called for the creation of an independent non-profit organization, largely but not exclusively funded by the federal government, whose mission it is to build relationships between America and the world. He said there must be a wall of separation between strict policy advocacy, and the fostering of relationships and bridge-building.**

**Michael Doran** agreed with the need for an independent organization that maintains a distance from the government. Yet he also noted the need for a governmental organ directly tied to the immediate policy needs of the U.S. Doran then talked about the DOD strategy for countering support for ideological terrorism. **He said it is paramount that we understand the environment we're working in; how information flows through different societies and how cultures interpret different events and symbols.** He said the vast expansion of the media sphere has allowed al-Qaeda to manage and manipulate their message around the world instantaneously. We need a bureaucratic apparatus to engage with and track this phenomenon.

Doran also stressed the need to empower partners to carry our message for us. The U.S. is not in any way credible when it comes to countering al-Qaeda's particular interpretation of sharia law. **He noted that we do not now have the bureaucratic institutions needed to build and empower third party networks to form and disseminate U.S. messages. He said this should be the top priority for the next administration.**

**Hady Amr** said that the only limit on our diplomacy is that we cannot engage or embrace any organization that undertakes or supports violent acts for social change. **He said America is most admired and most credible when it adheres to its foundational principles at home, which then allows it to promote those abroad.**

**All agreed that the defense budget and the civilian and State budget are out of balance. There was also agreement on the need for the next president to do an early strong symbolic gesture, such as closing Guantanamo or a long trip abroad, to set the stage for a new foreign policy tenor in their administration.**

**Marc Lynch** advised the next president to forego any more reports or commissions on public diplomacy. He urged the next president to choose a strategy and act on it. **Lynch also warned against letting the war of ideas overwhelm and dominate U.S. national security strategy.** He said al-Qaeda is a fringe group with fringe views that should not organize our entire foreign policy or public diplomacy paradigm.