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Barriers to the Broad Dissemination of Creative Works in the Arab World

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Preface

A great deal of research has examined the media that violent extremists use to communicate their core messages. Far less research has been devoted to works that foster critical thinking and counter violent extremism, such as voices in the creative realm, including literature and film. A growing body of creative works by Arab authors and artists counters the intellectual and ideological underpinnings of violent extremism. Unfortunately, many of these works are not widely disseminated, marginalizing the influence of these alternative voices. This monograph examines the barriers to the broad dissemination of such works, with a focus on Arabic literature, and suggests ways to overcome these barriers.

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The difficulties involved in the production and distribution of creative works in the Middle East cannot be separated from the overall political and social climate of the region. A series of United Nations (UN) reports identified three fundamental deficits in the Arab world: in political rights, in women's rights, and in knowledge. Related to these deficits are three critical sources that pose barriers to the greater dissemination of creative works in the region. This monograph addresses barriers to the broad dissemination of such works as they relate to Arabic literature and other genres of the printed word.

Three major barriers confront the dissemination and consumption of Arabic literature. The first barrier is censorship, which is a significant problem in the Middle East. Nearly all Arab Middle East countries employ government censors. Censorship is often aimed at stopping the publication or distribution of content deemed politically, morally, or religiously sensitive. Religious institutions, such as al-Azhar, Cairo's center of Islamic learning, often assist government censors by recommending books to be banned. A second barrier is the small market for literary material in the Arab world. Book production and, presumably, reader consumption are relatively low in the Middle East in comparison to other regions with similar socioeconomic levels of development. One factor behind this low book-consumption rate is the region's high rates of illiteracy, especially among the generations born before 1970. A final barrier is the poor internal distribution systems for books. This is compounded by the challenge of selling books across a vast number

of countries all with their own censorship requirements, regulations, and tax codes.

During the 45-year Cold War, the U.S. and British governments utilized various forms of media in their ideological conflict against the Soviet Union. While there are significant differences between the U.S. efforts to counter extremism and the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union, key lessons can be learned from this period.

One of these lessons is how to overcome the understandable skepticism that foreign audiences have toward government-sponsored media activities. During the Cold War, this problem was solved through the use of public-private partnerships. These partnerships allowed the U.S. and British governments to distance themselves from their media promotion activities while at the same time ensuring that the private groups they supported adhered to each nation's basic foreign-policy goals. Another lesson from the Cold War is to carefully consider the target audience and identify media sources that are most likely to influence them. As was the case in the Cold War, the *intelligentsia*, broadly defined, in the Arab world are the mostly likely to read and be influenced by printed material. A third lesson is the value of nonpolitical material in combating extremism. The items most valued by Eastern European and Soviet audiences were those that compensated for the intellectual vacuum in their lives, not those that directly combated communism.

To overcome these barriers (censorship, the market, and distribution), we advocate a series of policy recommendations, most of which would involve actions by nongovernmental institutions and other international allies, not overt U.S. government action:

- Make censorship a consistent agenda item in bilateral dialogues with regional allies.
- Work with European interlocutors to promote constructive-themed works, such as through international book fairs.
- Promote Arab literature prizes.
- Assist individuals in obtaining banned works through person-to-person distribution and Internet publishing.
- Support education reform and promote literacy.

- Promote specific authors in the United States and in their native countries.
- Convert or adapt printed material with constructive themes into other media to reach broader audiences.
- Utilize new techniques in Internet technology to overcome censorship and distribution barriers.
- Assist in the expansion of libraries and bookstores.

Acknowledgments

Abbreviations

AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
IOD	International Organizations Division
IRD	Information Research Department
KGB	Komitjet Gosudarstvjennoj Bjezopasnosti, or Committee for State Security
NGO	nongovernmental organization
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Introduction

Many analysts have examined the media that violent extremists use to communicate their core messages. Far less research, however, has been devoted to creative works in the Islamic world. Large bodies of creative works, often unknown in the United States, can play an important role in countering the intellectual and ideological underpinnings of violent extremism.[1] Unfortunately, many of these works are not widely known or disseminated in the Arab world. The central research question of this study is disentangling the *why* behind this state of affairs. What factors prevent the broader production and dissemination of works offering constructive themes and messages that provoke critical thinking and debate and undermine extremist views?

Understanding why barriers exist begins with identifying obstacles to the broad dissemination of creative works in the Arab world, focusing in particular on printed material. Chapter Two reviews the major barriers that creative works face in gaining access to a broad audience across the Middle East, drawing extensively on interviews with writers, publishers, and academics that were conducted in the region and in Europe in the winter and spring of 2008. Chapter Three reviews the book and magazine programs organized by the U.S. and British governments during the Cold War. That chapter focuses on how Cold War policymakers approached many of the same organizational and policy challenges faced by decisionmakers today in the Middle East

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[1] The work of Cynthia P. Schneider at the Brookings Institution highlights the key role that cultural diplomacy can play in improving U.S.-Muslim relations. For further information, see Schneider and Nelson (2008).

context, despite obvious differences in the political and cultural situation. Chapter Four considers policy implications based on lessons from the Cold War experience as well as on the particular circumstances facing publishing in the Arab world today.

Barriers to the Distribution of Media Products in the Middle East

The difficulties involved in the production and distribution of creative works in the Middle East cannot be separated from the overall political and social climate of the region. The challenges facing the Arab world were summarized in the Arab Human Development Report series produced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (UNDP, 2002, 2003a, 2005, 2006). The UNDP's key diagnosis was that the Arab world suffered from three fundamental deficits: in political rights, in women's rights, and in knowledge. According to the UNDP reports, these deficits together are obstacles to human development across the region.

We explore three critical sources that pose barriers to the greater dissemination of creative works in the region:

- censorship
- the market
- distribution challenges.

The lack of freedom and rights in the Arab world produces a political climate of widespread government censorship of creative materials. The market for creative literary works is also limited due to poverty and high rates of illiteracy across the Middle East. Women in the Arab world suffer even more severely from the social and economic environment than men. Women in the region have some of the highest rates of illiteracy in the world and among the lowest rates of enrollment at various levels of education. These economic and social conditions help to produce a narrow market for creative works. Distribution is a final

challenge, as the Middle East has a limited information infrastructure in comparison to other parts of the world, reducing the number of channels through which creative works can flow to Arab society. The remainder of this chapter explores each of these barriers in greater depth.

Censorship

Censorship is a significant problem in the Middle East. Nearly all Arab Middle East countries employ government censors. Censorship is often aimed at stopping the publication or distribution of content deemed politically, morally, or religiously sensitive or that runs counter to regime interest. Religious institutions, such as al-Azhar, Cairo's center of Islamic learning, often assist government censors by recommending books to be banned.[1] Intelligence services also ban content considered to be a national security threat. Beyond matters of content, government censors frequently ban books for reasons related to production and design art (Rayyis, 2007; UNDP, 2005). Advance press coverage of a book can further accelerate censorship. This was the case with Salwá Nu`aymi's *Burhan Al-'Asal* (*The Proof of Honey*) (Nu`aymi, 2007). Advance publicity of the book's seemingly explicit sexual content led to book bans at several Middle East book fairs without the censors having even reviewed the work.[2]

Different nations employ different levels of censorship. Saudi Arabia is routinely cited as the most conservative nation for censorship. For example, publishers recently submitted titles to government screeners for the 2008 Riyadh International Book Fair. One publisher, al Saqi Books, submitted 350 titles, with nearly 90 percent censored

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[1] For example, the banned book *al-Karadib: Atyaf al-Aziqqah al-Mahjurah* (*Phantoms of Deserted Alleyways*) by Turki al-Hamad (Hamad, 1998) criticizes Saudi restrictions on political thought. Also, *al-Shayukh al-Modern wa Sina'at al-Tataruf al-Dini* (*Modern Shaykhs and the Industry of Religious Fanaticism*) by Muhammad Fatuh (2006) challenges the current state in which the religious establishment is endorsed by government regimes and actively denies diversity of thought and opinion through labeling others as apostates (*takfir*).

[2] Interview with publisher, Beirut, Lebanon, March 6, 2008.

by the government. Publisher Riad El-Rayyes reported 30 banned titles. Examples of banned books include *Sultanat al-Shashah: Raidat al-Sinima al-Misriyah* (*Queens of the Screen: Pioneers of the Egyptian Cinema*), a history of four pioneering women who started the Egyptian cinema industry (the book was banned because it included a photo of a woman in a nightgown). The Saudi government also banned works by the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish because of his public criticisms of the Saudi government.[3] *Banat al-Riyad* (*Girls of Riyadh*) (Sani`, 2006) was also banned, as it tells a tale of four women's intimate daily lives (Rafei, 2007).

Censorship also exists in Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan, though to lesser degrees. The Egyptian government often practices censorship and removes objectionable passages from books (or, at times, the books themselves) and bans the import of certain publications. This is especially the case with books that are perceived to criticize Islam or the government (Wassmann, 2008). In Kuwait, after reviewing 560 new books, officials planned to ban 230 books at the 2007 Kuwait Book Exhibition ("230 Books Banned," 2007). Lebanon is considered one of the more liberal venues for publishing, though even there, publishers must submit works to the government's Directorate General of the General Security for review.[4] Works that may inflame sectarian tensions reportedly receive increased scrutiny.[5] Other reports suggest that Islamists have recently exerted a greater and negative influence over the censorship process.[6] In Jordan, censorship is concerned mainly with religious titles that include "nonfaithful" language, pornography, and criticisms of the Jordanian political system.[7]

Despite widespread censorship, writers and consumers in the Middle East find many ways to overcome this challenge. Writers who live in more culturally repressive countries, such as Saudi Arabia, often

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[3]   Interview with publisher, Beirut, Lebanon, March 6, 2008.

[4]   Interview with publisher, Beirut, Lebanon, March 6, 2008.

[5]   Interview with publisher, Beirut, Lebanon, March 5 and 7, 2008.

[6]   Interview with publisher, Beirut, Lebanon, March 6, 2008.

[7]   Phone interview with Jordanian book distributor, May 7, 2008.

publish outside their country, particularly in Lebanon or in European publishing houses. Consumers wishing to read banned material also have several options. Individuals can often bring banned books through customs, albeit in quantities useful only for personal consumption. Some locations function as destinations for Arab travelers looking to purchase and read banned material, with wealthy Saudis known to travel for this reason to Egypt, Bahrain, and London. Middle East bookstores may also carry banned works "under the table" that customers can request by name.[8]

Censorship exerts a significant effect on authors, publishers, and retailers. Censorship has the capacity to catapult authors into the limelight. *al-ʿAddamah*, a 1997 novel by the Saudi author Turki al-Hamad, is reportedly a tale of "sedition, sex and alcohol in the conservative kingdom." This work was banned by several countries, including Saudi Arabia, and was the target of four religious fatwas. The book reportedly became a best seller within a month's time (Whitaker, 2004).[9]

More often than not, though, censorship's effect is a stultifying one. To reach and influence a wide audience is ultimately the goal of many authors, and the fame received from censorship cannot overcome the often negative impact on sales. One author interviewed for this study went on a five-year writing hiatus because two of his books were banned for "seemingly trivial" reasons. Other authors practice self-censorship in their work, limiting topics on which they would otherwise write out of fear of having their books banned (Ghazal, 2008).

Even worse than mere book bans, some authors face outright threats to their freedom and their lives. Samir Qasir, an outspoken Lebanese writer of Palestinian origin who criticized Arab dictatorships, was assassinated in 2005 ("Anti-Syria Writer Slain in Beirut," 2005). Another author, Nawal al-Saʿdawi, fled her native Egypt in fear for her life over writings that exposed many of the social and religious

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[8]   Phone interview with Peter Clark, May 6, 2008. The authors' recent visit to a Middle East bookstore confirms this. The store's support staff presented the authors a list of banned books and offered to deliver the books "under the table."

[9]   It should be noted that there are no cross-regional statistics kept with regard to book sales. Consequently, there are no widely accepted "best seller" lists.

problems plaguing Arab society. Furthermore, the number of authors who are imprisoned is sufficiently high that al-Jazeera TV broadcasts a show called "Prison Literature," in which it details the lives and work of the many authors who have been jailed for publishing their opinions ("Adab al-Sujoon," 2004).

Censorship also negatively affects publishers and bookstores. Saudi Arabia, for example, is one of the largest markets for books in the Middle East. Failure to clear government censors in Saudi Arabia poses a large financial burden on publishers. In terms of book outlets, Virgin Megastore, located in Kuwait, was one of the largest bookshops in the Middle East. The government of Kuwait reportedly closed it down for three weeks last year because of a single paragraph in one of its books. The store has since given up 80 percent of its retail space to other businesses.[10]

Market

At an International Book Fair in Lebanon, Beirut's Loqman Salim erected a life-size mock grave and tombstone. The monument read, "The Arab reader is dead" (Del Castillo, 2002, p. 47). Book production and, presumably, reader consumption are relatively low in the Middle East, although accurate and updated data are difficult to obtain. According to the Arab Human Development Report, the number of books published in the Arab world is not greater than 1.1 percent of the world production, even though Arabs in the Middle East make up 5 percent of the world population. According to 1991 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) statistics, Arab countries produced 6,500 books, compared with 102,000 books in North America and 42,000 in Latin America and the Caribbean. This figure may prove an underrepresentation, in part because the year coincided with the first Gulf War and because many books are published without registered numbers, making a complete and accurate

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[10] Phone interview with Arab author, April 21, 2008.

tabulation difficult (Whitaker, 2004). Still, book production in Arab countries, including literary production, is relatively low.[11]

One potential factor behind the low book-consumption rate is literacy. According to 2005–2007 data from UNESCO, the literacy rate across the Arab world is 72.5 percent, with a rate of 82.4 percent for males and 62.2 percent for females. This compares with a total literacy rate of 99.1 percent for Europe, 91.3 percent for Latin America and the Caribbean, and 82.1 percent for Asia (UNESCO, undated). Poor education systems, particularly education systems that fail to foster high and equitable enrollment rates, certainly result in low rates of literacy (UNDP, 2002). Also related to this is that the Arabic language has separate dialects for the written and spoken word. Consequently, to effectively read and write, students must learn an entirely separate language. Beyond this may lay a historical context that has failed to promote reading (Rahim, 2005). One publishing analyst argues that, although the Arabic language is at least 1,500 years old, the printed word did not become commonplace until the 20th century. Poetry was more often memorized than read, and the Arabic novel did not gain common acceptance until the 1950s, when Najib Mahfuz wrote his *Cairo Trilogy*, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1988 (Del Castillo, 2002, p. 48). Although data are not available, illiteracy is more likely restricted to older generations of Arabs and so may not contribute to potential readership gaps among youth.[12] Economic conditions are also a factor, as book prices are often out of reach for the common buyer.[13]

Consumers in the Middle East demonstrate varying degrees of preference for the written word. As illustrated in Figure 2.1, religious books constitute 17 percent of all books published in Arab countries, in comparison with a world average of approximately 5 percent (UNDP, 2003, pp. 77–78). The increased sales of religious books may benefit

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[11] Caution is warranted in identifying statistics on book production in the Middle East. Accurate statistics are difficult to find on publishing, and print runs in the Arab world and unregistered publications and piracy further complicate tabulations.

[12] Written comments by Peter Clark, November 6, 2008.

[13] Author's interview with publisher, London, UK, February 28, 2008.

Figure 2.1
Relative Distribution of Published Books, by Field, in Ten Arab Countries and the World, 1996
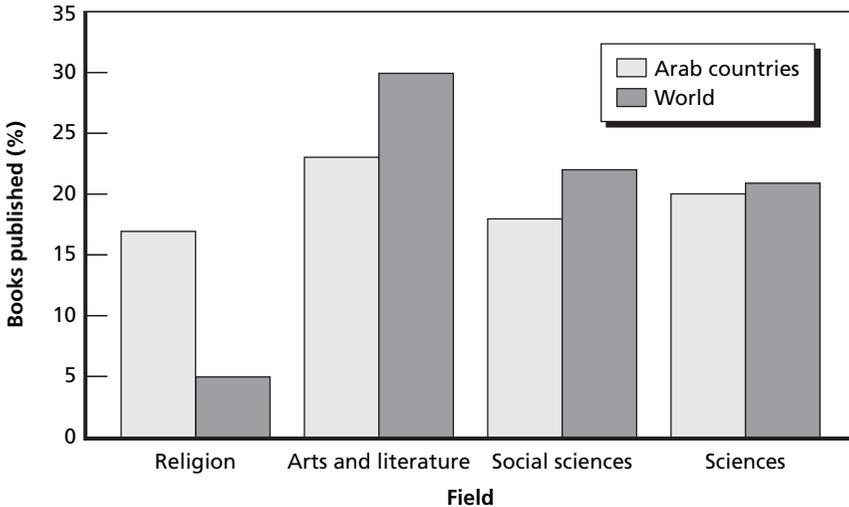
SOURCE: UNESCO Statistics Institute, March 2003.

from sponsorship and subsidy of mosques, Islamic foundations, or religious governments, such as that of Saudi Arabia. This subsidy not only promotes their production but also reduces their price, thus making them more accessible, particularly to low-income individuals (Del Castillo, 2002, p. 48).

Books on literature, social sciences, and the arts constitute a relatively small percentage of Arab publications. For example, there are 270 million Arabic speakers in 22 countries, yet a published novel or short story will typically sell between 1,000 and 3,000 copies, with 5,000 sold copies constituting a best seller (UNDP, 2003, pp. 77–78). Observes one Jordanian book distributor, "The serious works are not being read. Readership is very low for serious types of works that relate to titles related to politics, analysis, economics. These are not widely read here." He further notes that, while the worldwide book industry is

in growth mode, it has remained relatively stable in the Middle East.[14] Within the literature category, many readers in the more literate countries, such as Lebanon, prefer a small handful of modern literary writers, with a vast majority preferring classic novels, like those of Najib Mahfuz. This preference makes it increasingly difficult for new writers to gain prominence (Del Castillo, 2002, p. 49).

There is also a market for Western books that are translated into Arabic. Observes one distributor, "If it is on Oprah it will be popular."[15] *The Da Vinci Code* (Brown, 2003) was a standout seller, producing sales of 5,000 copies in Jordan (a high number by Arab publishing standards).[16] That said, it is important to note that the market for literature in the region may be changing, as many new novels and films tackling challenging issues (e.g., religious debates, political reform, human rights, violent extremism) are emerging from even closed societies like Saudi Arabia. But because we lack accurate statistics on the volume and nature of current literary production, it is difficult to determine the significance of the market barrier.

Another relevant factor for understanding the Middle East book market is regional variations. The Arabic-speaking Middle East is represented by a large number of diverse countries. As one publishing observer explains, "Moroccans and Kuwaitis are ethnically, racially, culturally different from each other [and, as such,] there is no reason why Moroccans and Kuwaitis should share much in common" to include reading preferences. As an example, he notes that last year's Frankfurt Book Fair invited the Arab world as its guest of honor. Many of the participating Arab countries sent their own authors and their own publishers. Instead of a pan-Arab concept of readership, they each held reading events that were populated by audiences of their own nationality.[17] In short, the notion of a pan-Arab audience is a myth.[18]

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[14] Phone interview with Jordanian book distributor, May 7, 2008.

[15] Phone interview with Jordanian book distributor, May 7, 2008.

[16] Phone interview with Jordanian book distributor, May 7, 2008.

[17] Phone interview with Roger Allen, Philadelphia, Pa., May 13, 2008.

[18] Phone interview with Roger Allen, Philadelphia, Pa., May 13, 2008.

Distribution

Challenges related to the international distribution of books further limit their accessibility across the Middle East. As previously noted, the Middle East is not a unified market. Each country imposes its own laws and requirements on publishers and book distributors. From a censorship aspect, authors and publishers are required to submit texts to the censors of each target nation (UNDP, 2003a, p. 4). Because of the idiosyncratic requirements of each nation's censors, a given book may be barred from some countries and not others. Different tax codes in each country as well as variable requirements in shipping methods further limit the ease of regional distribution.[19] Also, because the demand for different types of books varies across the Middle East, distributors are forced to understand the unique aspects of each national market. As one individual noted, this requires "serious local expertise" and the need to become a true supply-chain specialist in the book industry.[20]

Because of this, there is no single publisher or distributor that provides books to the entire Middle East. A book distributor from Jordan noted that "One of the major challenges in the Middle East is currently you have publishers and distributors in each country. You do not have one group, one company that has infrastructure and capability to distribute to all the Middle East."[21] He noted that, for example, a publisher in Jordan would contact a distributor in Lebanon and then "contact someone in Dubai, then Qatar, then Jordan, Egypt, Sudan. What he is dealing with is a mishmash of distributors and publishers."[22] Another publisher agrees, noting that one must hire a distributor on a country-by-country basis.[23] The result of these factors is that books often fail to reach broad audiences. Authors will often submit works

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[19] Phone interview with Arab author, April 21, 2008.

[20] Phone interview with Jordanian book distributor, May 7, 2008.

[21] Phone interview with Jordanian book distributor, May 7, 2008.

[22] Phone interview with Jordanian book distributor, May 7, 2008.

[23] Phone interview with Arab Author, April 21, 2008.

to publishers in their own country and these books will thus not gain broader exposure.[24]

Another issue in book distribution is the individual outlets in which publishers and distributors sell their works. In this regard, there are three main sales outlets: book fairs and exhibitions, bookstores, and libraries. Book fairs and exhibitions provide the most lucrative sales channels. As one publisher noted, book fairs constitute 40 percent of total sales.[25] At the Beirut book fair, this same publisher noted, he could sell more books than in an entire year in Lebanese bookshops.[26] These book fairs provide several sales advantages. For one, the publishers can sell directly to the public and thus remove the distribution intermediary. Often, they are able to sell the books at a discount, promoting sales even further (Rayyis, 2007). They also sell the books for cash, further increasing the liquidity of the transactions.[27]

In addition, some book fairs and exhibitions enable sellers to distribute books that are otherwise banned by the local government. In Syria, for example, publishers can cut deals with the authorities. The sellers will not publicly display a banned book but can provide it if somebody asks for it.[28] In addition, authors frequently attend fairs and exhibitions, thus providing increased marketing exposure for their works.[29] However, exhibition participation fees are on the rise, cutting into publisher profits and customer discounts. An increasing rate of book banning in Saudi Arabia is also limiting the number of books that can be sold, and some exhibition authorities confiscate books at the last moment and do not return them (Rayyis, 2007).

Bookstores constitute a second sales conduit. Unfortunately, there is a general lack of shops and sales outlets. British cultural consultant Peter Clark notes that each capital in the Middle East will typically

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[24] Phone interview with Roger Allen, Philadelphia, Pa., May 13, 2008.

[25] Interview with publisher, Beirut, Lebanon, March 6, 2008.

[26] Interview with publisher, Beirut, Lebanon, March 6, 2008.

[27] Interview with publisher, Beirut, Lebanon, March 6, 2008.

[28] Phone interview with Arab author, April 21, 2008.

[29] Interview with publisher, Beirut, Lebanon, March 5 and 7, 2008.

have one good bookshop with a range of books.[30] Beyond this, books are often sold in major discount shopping stores. There are also many small local bookstores and street stalls as well as Islamic bookshops. Many of these shops and stalls carry limited, if any, constructive-themed works. And even those shops that may be inclined to carry such works find it difficult to survive. According to Lucy Koons, associate director of the American University of Beirut Press, some bookstores are "here one day and then two months later they're gone" (Del Castillo, 2002, p. 48). A significant problem is that these sales outlets do not make enough money selling books, magazines, and newspapers to make a significant profit.[31] It has also been noted that Beirut bookstores, for example, stock only a limited number of books because sellers do not want to purchase the book from a publisher and risk not making a sale. Consequently, customers must request the book in advance of a purchase (Del Castillo, 2002, p. 48). Bookshops must often offset their potential losses in the book market by selling popular periodicals, stationery, gifts, and other items (UNDP, 2003a, p. 79). For example, a recent visit by one of this monograph's authors to Qatar's largest bookstore in Doha showed that less than half of the store's shelf space was devoted to books, which was, in turn, split evenly between English- and Arabic-language titles.[32]

Finally, libraries provide only a limited outlet for book sales. In the West, library sales can account for as much as 70 percent of a book's total sales. However, there is a general lack of libraries in the Middle East. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions conducts a biannual international survey of library infrastructure. Six Middle East nations responded to this survey: Jordan, Lebanon, Algeria, Egypt, Kuwait, and Oman. The number of public libraries in Egypt was 1,257, and, in Jordan, it was 135. In comparison, Germany, which has a population similar in size to that of Egypt, had 10,339 public libraries, and Denmark, which has a population similar

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[30] Phone interview with Peter Clark, May 6, 2008.

[31] Phone interview with Jordanian book distributor, May 7, 2008.

[32] This visit occurred on August 14, 2008.

in size to that of Jordan, had 575 (Bothma, 2007).[33] While universi-
ties have libraries, these collections often avoid controversial books that
spark debate and critical thinking (Whitaker, 2004).

A related distribution challenge involves book marketing. Peter
Clark notes that publishing in the Arab world is not unlike print-
ing was in the United Kingdom 150 years ago: An author submits a
book to a publisher, which, in turn, prints it but otherwise exercises
few responsibilities for editing or promotion.[34] A Jordanian publisher
agrees, explaining that, while Arab publishers print good works, they
have neither the budget nor the experience and know-how to properly
market the works.[35] He says that what is missing are book launches,
newspaper ads, and exposure on TV and satellite channels.[36] Also
missing are market-research endeavors that seek to characterize public
reading habits so that books can be more carefully targeted to con-
sumer needs and interests (Meiering, undated, p. 3).

One area of improvement relates to the potentially increasing
role of literature festivals, where authors interact with customers and
actively promote their works. In May 2008, the West Bank held its first
literature festival, "Palestinian Festival of Literature: The Power of Cul-
ture Versus the Culture of Power" (Addley, 2008). This event was spon-
sored, in part, by the British Council and UNESCO (Addley, 2008).
In February 2009, Dubai also played host to the inaugural Emirates
Airline International Festival of Literature. In addition to public read-
ings by authors and author-hosted workshops, the festival devoted a
day to promoting children's literacy (Florian, 2008).

The popular press and TV also do not support readership through
book promotion. Arabic TV channels reportedly do not provide a
single show devoted to books, unlike, for example, programs offered

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[33] The West European average includes Denmark, Italy, Luxemberg, Switzerland, Ireland,
Norway, United Kingdom, Belgium, and Sweden.

[34] Phone interview with Peter Clark, May 6, 2008.

[35] Phone interview with Jordanian book distributor, May 7, 2008.

[36] Phone interview with Jordanian book distributor, May 7, 2008.

Box 2.1
The Challenge of Publication

Madbouly Books, named after its owner, Muhammad Madbouly, is one of the largest bookstores in Egypt. It is well-known for its battles against censorship and its publication of controversial books. The owner used to sell newspapers in a kiosk before he became one of the most reputable publishers in the Arab world. He is admired by many Arab intellectuals who applaud his audacity in resisting censorship. When he visited Madbouly Books, the legendary Arabic poet Nizar Qabbani wrote, "We love Madbouly because he handles books like a human being" (Saddiq Diyab, 2007). Other famous clients included Najib Mahfuz, the Egyptian Nobel Prize winner.

Throughout his five decades in business, Madbouly has faced many challenges. He stated to the Arabic newspaper *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, "I almost got imprisoned for 8 years for publishing banned books, but I am against censorship and believe in freedom of opinion for all" (Suleiman, 2007). In this particular incident, when he faced jail time, an uproar by a huge number of intellectuals resulted in the cancellation of his sentence. The harassment of the owner, however, led him to cancel the celebration of the bookstore's 50th anniversary.

On several occasions, the Egyptian security forces have stormed Madbouly Books to physically remove books from the shelves, threatening its workers with more severe consequences if they republish or sell the books in question. On one of these occasions, the security forces confiscated a book written by a former Ministry of Interior official, who, after 20 years of service, started to work as a lawyer for a human rights organization. The author protested and told al-Arabiya television,

> [T]he speed with which the book was confiscated from the market indicates that whoever issued this order has not even bothered to read one letter from the book. Confiscating a book that simply tries to educate people about their rights and what to do to protect these rights is an illegal action. (Mu'tasism, 2007)

On another occasion, the security forces removed a book titled *Modern Shaykhs and the Industry of Religious Extremism* (Fatuh, 2006), which criticizes the role of the religious establishment in deepening sectarian divisions. The book argues that the religious establishment should preach tolerance and acceptance of others regardless of faith.

by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC).[37] Al-Jazeera attempted a book show but terminated the broadcast due to poor profits (Rayyis, 2007). One major exception is Beirut television stations, which offer several book-related shows. The Lebanese newspaper *al-Nahar* also has a daily column addressing recently released books. The London- and Beirut-based Al Saqi publishers has also undertaken an extensive outreach program to the press through an advance information sheet,

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[37] Rayyis (2007).

which is a one-page synopsis of a book that is sent out before a book is released.[38] Also, some small publishing companies are beginning to experiment with publishing literary magazines, book reviews, and academic journals online (Del Castillo, 2002, p. 48).

A final barrier to greater distribution is copyright infringement. A single book, for example, can be published in as many as four different versions. Some publishers preparing to issue a text find out that the book has already been published without the permission of the author or original publisher.[39] One report noted that the most-forged books are dictionaries, scientific references, novels, and poems from Nizar Qabbani and Mahmoud Darwish (Rayyis, 2007). Laws designed to protect the intellectual rights of authors and publishers are either entirely absent or are not enforced (UNDP, 2003a, p. 79). In Egypt, publisher Al Saqi determined that one of its books, *Banat al-Riyadh* (*Girls of Riyadh*) (Sani`, 2006)*,* was illegally pirated. Their efforts to take the offending publisher to court have so far not succeeded.[40] At the most recent Riyadh book fair, publisher Al-Waraq complained that other companies were illegally exhibiting some of its books. Little was done to prosecute the publisher despite Al-Waraq's complaints to authorities (Dosary, 2008).

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[38] Interview with publisher, Beirut, Lebanon, March 5 and 7, 2008.

[39] Interview with publisher, London, UK, February 28, 2008.

[40] Interview with publisher, London, UK, February 28, 2008.

Learning from History: The Cold War Experience

During the 45-year Cold War, the U.S. and British governments utilized various forms of media in their ideological conflict with the Soviet Union. While there are significant differences between the U.S. efforts to counter extremism and the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union, key lessons can be learned from this period.[1]

The Cold War was the last time the U.S. and British governments conducted large-scale political warfare. The point of comparison for this chapter is how Western governments organized themselves and executed policy during this Cold War era and what lessons can be drawn from these efforts today. This chapter should not be read as a judgment by the authors that there are strong similarities between the Arab world and the West today and the East-West divisions of the Cold War. Nor should it be viewed as an endorsement for particular methods or approaches for disseminating creative material. Some of the methods, as well as the organization of Cold War efforts, may or may not be appropriate for the Middle East today.

Rather, the goals of this chapter are both to provide historical information about how Western governments tackled various policy issues and challenges in the past and to foster new thinking about how to formulate policy today. The material draws on U.S. and British Cold War political warfare efforts over a long period of time and across a wide and diverse geographical area. It is not meant as a historical overview of these efforts. Instead, it seeks to highlight the pieces of Cold

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[1] For a further discussion of the parallels and differences between the Cold War and the challenges in the Muslim world today, see Rabasa et al. (2007, pp. 35–39).

War history that seem the most relevant to the challenges faced in the Middle East context today.

Organization of Government Efforts

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) conducted the U.S. Cold War book and magazine distribution program to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. It was set up under the International Organizations Division (IOD), which encompassed all of the CIA propaganda and influence activities (Montague, 1992, pp. 224–225). The IOD was an entire division of the CIA devoted to funding activities designed to influence European intelligentsia, students, and workers on both sides of the Iron Curtain (Braden, 1967). Among the best-known organizations supported by the IOD were the Congress for Cultural Freedom, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, the Free Trade Union Committee, and the National Student Association, all of which were part of what Peter Coleman (1989) called the CIA's "liberal conspiracy."

One important feature of this effort was the linkage between the public and private sectors. As historian Scott Lucas has noted, these were "state-private networks," in which often the impetus for the actions against communism came from the private side of the equation (Lucas, 2003). Within the United States and Europe, there already was an intellectual movement against communism, particularly among the noncommunist left. What was needed was money and organization to turn individual efforts into a coherent campaign against the Kremlin. The CIA did not create these networks out of thin air; they came out of wider cultural and political realms that the U.S. and other governments quietly fostered.

The book and magazine exchange programs for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were funded and organized under the National Committee for a Free Europe (NCFE, later the Free Europe Committee) and the Radio Liberty Committee (RL). The NCFE and RL were known as liberation committees. U.S. Cold War strategist George Kennan envisioned them as public American organizations designed around "resistance to tyranny in foreign countries" (Policy Planning

Staff, 1948). The most famous activities of the NCFE and RL were their radio broadcasts, Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, which were beamed behind the Iron Curtain. The book and magazine programs of the NCFE (Free Europe Press) and RL (Bedford Publications) were smaller subactivities under the direction of the liberation communities. These programs were well hidden even within the NCFE and RL organizations.

The purposes of the NCFE and RL were threefold: to "act as foci of national hope" for political refugees from the Soviet world, to "provide an inspiration for continuing popular resistance within the countries of the Soviet World," and to "serve as a potential nucleus for all-out liberation movements in the event of war" (Policy Planning Staff, 1948). These efforts were "primarily an overt operation" that, however, "should receive covert guidance and possibly assistance from the Government" (Policy Planning Staff, 1948). The job of organizing these committees was given to "trusted private American citizens" in order to mobilize selected "refugee leaders." These refugee leaders living abroad were to be given "access to printing and microphones" to keep them alive as public figures in their home countries.

With the liberation committees and its other propaganda endeavors, the CIA IOD office acted more like a foundation than an intelligence agency. It evaluated projects to determine whether they promoted CIA objectives, provided funding for them, and then adopted a hands-off approach, allowing the organizations it supported to fulfill their objectives without interference. Like any foundation, the CIA set out guidelines on how its money was to be spent. But in general, it realized that the more distance there was between it and the sponsored organization, the more likely it was that these activities would succeed.

The U.S. government assisted the efforts of the NCFE and RL in four areas. First, it provided the bulk of the funding for their operations. Initially, the NCFE tried to raise some of its funding through public donation, but this was never enough to sustain the operation. Second, the CIA and the State Department provided general policy guidance. This guidance was kept to a minimum. Each organization was given a great deal of latitude in deciding what the appropriate strategy was for its particular task and how it conducted its operations. The

U.S. government did, however, periodically review the organizations' efforts in order to ensure that their strategies matched with overall U.S. foreign policy objectives and that the government's money was being spent appropriately.

The third area of assistance was the small number of government personnel who worked directly for the organizations. For example, a CIA employee was the personal assistant of Howland Sargeant, the president of RL. He kept the agency fully informed about RL efforts through memoranda, letters, and transcripts sent to Washington. The CIA also sent a small number of employees to help in the accounting, engineering, and personnel departments. Another avenue of CIA influence was critical staff appointments. Sargeant and the head of IOD, Cord Meyer, chose them jointly.

The final area of assistance was security. The CIA administered the security staff of both the NCFE and RL. Security involved both the physical security of the offices and its employees and checking employees' background to make sure they were not Komitjet Gosudarstvjennoj Bjezopasnosti (KGB, the Committee for State Security) plants. The threat to employees was not an idle one. The KGB likely killed two staff members in the early 1950s, and the Romanian secret police physically attacked Radio Free Europe in the 1980s.

Targeted Audience

Early in the Cold War, both the British and U.S. governments decided that intellectuals were the key target group for influence operations. The belief of the British government was that public opinion, such as there was in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, was informed by "educated people," including students, intellectuals, technicians, and executives. British influence operations were shaped principally to appeal to this audience that the government believed could be influenced. The goal was to provide "food for thought" to this educated class, which,

> from the viewpoint of Britain in particular and of the West in general, seem to be the most useful recipients of such food—to

provide it, moreover in, as "un-repellent" a form as is compatible with a full and accurate statement of the British and Western case or attitude. ("Purpose and Methods of the BBC Broadcasts in Russian," 1958)

The hope was that, over the long term, these efforts could undermine ideas and tendencies hostile to British interests and correct distortions of the British policies and society made in the communist media.

George Kennan and most other U.S. officials shared this point of view. Kennan dismissed the utility of propaganda directed at the key government officials and the Communist party, writing that "the fate of these groups is both morally and materially so irrevocably tied to that of their masters that repudiation of the Cause is well near impossible." Kennan also discounted the laboring and peasant classes as unable to exert much pressure on the regime and highly unlikely to pay attention to material from foreign sources. On the other hand, Kennan believed, the intelligentsia, or the neobourgeoisie, might be affected by U.S. propaganda.

According to Kennan, the intelligentsia was made up of writers, journalists, artists, musicians, scientists, engineers, managers of industrial trusts, and army officers. They were somewhat removed from the power structure, but their ideas, according to Kennan, had an overall effect on the direction of society, and, therefore, they might, in subtle ways, impose restrictions on Soviet and Eastern European policies. It is this group, Kennan wrote, that should be targeted. By the nature of their professions, he thought, they are taught to think independently, and their economic status makes it possible for them to buy books and radios that can receive foreign broadcasts. Due to their isolation, they are curious about the outside world, in terms of both the latest fashions and the views of foreigners on world events. Kennan also believed that they had a built-up skepticism regarding the accuracy of party statements and therefore might be susceptible to foreign influence.

These general thoughts on the proper audience for Western influence operations were even more pronounced in the book and magazine program. The belief was that Soviet and Eastern European intellectu-

als and thinkers were the proper target audiences for the book-mail program. They were the most likely to appreciate and be influenced by Western materials that provided a "'spiritual' understanding of Western values" (Matthews, 2003).

Strategy and Themes

After the failure of U.S. efforts in the mid-1950s to roll back communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the United States' overall propaganda effort and the book and magazine program adopted a new strategy. The strategy was known as *cultural infiltration* (Hixson, 1997, p. xiv). The Dwight D. Eisenhower administration identified the strategy of cultural infiltration as a method to exploit communist societies' ideological and cultural vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities included the desire of their intelligentsia to be part of a world cultural community and the alienation of Eastern European and Soviet youth from communist ideology. The Eisenhower administration sought to use cultural contacts between the West and the Soviet Union, both to break down the isolation of the communist peoples and to correct the distorted image of the West presented in communist propaganda. It was hoped that contact with the West would introduce modern concepts and reform ideas to key social groups, spurring an open discussion of liberal ideas inside the communist bloc. The hope was that these more open discussions would shift Soviet policies in a direction favorable to the United States.

In 1957, George Minden, the head of the Free Europe Press for more than 30 years, identified the strategy and themes of the book program that closely followed the idea of cultural infiltration (Matthews, 2003, quoting Minden, 1957). These themes, for the most part, were carried forward to the end of the Cold War. Minden wrote in a 1957 memo that, "little by little," he had come to realize that the main thing "we are up against is not Marxist obstacles, but a vacuum." Eastern European publics, he wrote, did not need arguments to fight back against a communist regime. This could be left to their common sense,

as they were well equipped to understand the deficiencies of the communist system through their daily contact with communist practices.

Instead, what was needed was "something to compensate for the sterility of satellite cultural life, for the artificial type of existence which in that part of the world displaced real life . . . in short . . . something against frustration and stultification, against a life full of omissions." According to Minden, "the Free World's style of life due to our freedom, our means of information, and our independence to fulfill our self-made destinies, [was] a source of real fascination for 'our target' audience." Thus the challenge for the book program was to help fill this spiritual void with thoughts and information from the free world.

Thus, Minden (1957, quoted in Matthews, 2003) said, the program should concentrate on four areas:

> (1) Correct thinking, from intelligent speculation about the meaning of ultimate things to simply logic . . . down to factual information. (2) [A] minimum basis for spiritual understanding of Western values, which we hope to supply through literature, the theater, and visual arts. (3) Sheer linguistic understanding, which we will try to achieve by increasing the proportion of French and German material and translations or anthologies in native languages, as well as sending the means to learn English. (4) Putting at their disposal certain publications of current paramount interest, unavailable in their countries.

Minden concluded by saying,

> Our aim: to give proof of continual Western interest . . . not arguments for fighting communism . . . but the feeling of communion in this world, integration into the spiritual life of our age, and the knowledge that they have not been abandoned.

Minden summarized his philosophy as providing materials that gave a "spiritual understanding of Western values" to communist audiences.

The book program to the Soviet Union, Bedford Publishing Company, started by Isaac Patch, followed a similar strategy. The pur-

pose of the book program, Patch (1996, p. 256, in Richmond, 2003, p. 137) wrote in his own book, *Closing the Circle*, "was to communicate Western ideas to Soviet citizens by providing them with books—on politics, economics, philosophy, arts, and technology—not available in the Soviet Union." One of RL's key themes was the suppression of (1) Russian culture by the communist regime and (2) the Russian cultural connection with the West. In this vein, the impact that Russian writers, such as Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Leo Tolstoy, had on Western writers and thinkers was highlighted.

In the late 1960s, the Bedford Publishing Company also started publishing *samizdat*, or dissident work. RL, on the radio and in print, believed that it had an obligation to publicize the ongoing intellectual dissident movement inside the Soviet Union. This fit in with one of RL's themes: *glasnost*. *Glasnost*, in Russian, means openness, and it was under this rubric that "blank spots" in Soviet history were to be filled in. RL did this by putting writers on the air and publishing authors who had been banned by Soviet censors or by discussing pieces of Russian history the Communist party tried to cover up. For example, the RL serialized Boris Pasternak's (1958) *Doctor Zhivago* when it came out in the West. It also translated into Russian and published Robert Conquest's (1968) famous book, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties*, which was, of course, banned in the Soviet Union.

Selection of Works

Free Europe Press and Bedford Publishing had a variety of ways of selecting works. The first and most straightforward were requests from Eastern European and Soviet intellectuals. Early on in the program, staff members realized that nonpolitical books mailed from an actual publisher were likely to get past Communist party censors. This was a far better method than mailing packages of material from bogus cover organizations in Europe, which were often stopped.

Capitalizing on this idea, Free Europe Press began mailing to promising individuals a publisher's catalog and an offer on the publisher's stationery of one or two books of the recipient's choice to be

sent free of charge. In return, the recipient was requested to send some books, to make it appear to be a legitimate exchange. These mailings were targeted to individuals with specific interests. For example, the Medial Emergency Institute in Sofia was sent *Blackstone's Medical Dictionary*, and a graphic artist in Czechoslovakia was sent a subscription to the German magazine *Graphis*. These, in turn, spurred more requests, which Free Europe Press fulfilled.

Generally, what was requested was nonpolitical. Among the items requested were English dictionaries and women's magazines, such as *Marie Claire* and *Madame*, a German publication. Eastern European intellectuals were most interested in reference materials and catching up with the main literary and political trends abroad. They were not especially interested in works criticizing communism.

Free Europe Press and Bedford kept very detailed information on the titles of the books distributed and the names of the people who had taken them. Each of the people who received books had a folder that included correspondence with the publisher, articles by or about them, and other pertinent information. Like online publishers today, Free European Press would make suggestions to its readers about books they might find of interest, given their previous selections.

One example of how Free Europe Press operated was its cooperation with the Whitney Museum of American Art. In November 1957, the Whitney agreed to mail 300 copies of its catalog, *Three Hundred Years of American Painting*, to art departments, museums, and individual artists in Eastern Europe. The Whitney's gift produced an outpouring of response from museums and artists behind the Iron Curtain. According to a *Time* story in 1958, "streams of letters, catalogues, books, and even original drawings and engravings from artists" were sent to the Whitney in "reciprocity for its gesture" (Linden, 1958).

In addition to requests from Eastern European participants, both the U.S. and British governments bought the second rights to materials that conformed to their main themes. This meant that these materials could be translated into languages other than English and then distributed abroad by various government organizations. The most famous example of this was the acquisition of the right to publish George Orwell's famous novels *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

(1949) in languages other than English. Orwell, along with major authors, such as Graham Greene and J. B. Priestley, agreed to be republished by foreign publishers free of charge.

Of special interest for translation and distribution were works that were either banned or unavailable in the local language in the communist bloc. Among the translated books Bedford supplied to the Soviet Union were classics, such as James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1928), Vladimir Nabokov's *Pnin* (1957), and George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. All of these fit under the idea of communicating Western ideas to Soviet citizens by providing them with books—on politics, economics, philosophy, arts, and technology— normally unavailable to them. These selections were generally chosen by the staff of Free Europe Press and Bedford, who were knowledgeable about the culture and dynamics of the society they covered.

To review their work, the broader organizations, Free Europe Committee and Radio Liberty, held frequent seminars and meetings with some of the world's leading experts on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. These meetings were used to check the direction and strategy of their broadcasts and activities, to immerse the staff in the latest developments of the academic community, and to build support for their program in the scholarly community. A broad range of subjects would be discussed at the meetings, including the image of the organizations in the targeted country, the current nature of communist society, the potential audience, and the content of each organization's programs. These meetings in addition gave the CIA confidence that the Free Europe Committee and Radio Liberty were properly performing their missions.

Distribution of Works

The British and U.S. governments developed a variety of methods for distributing books and magazines. The British government in particular utilized book publishing as a means of distributing information. British officials believed that propaganda was more effective when it was attributable to authoritative or prominent authors rather than official

government sources (Defty, 2004, p. 165). The Information Research Department (IRD), a secret organization in Britain's Foreign Office in charge of organizing and coordinating Britain's Cold War propaganda efforts, set up its own publishing house (Smith, 1980). The IRD commissioned nonfiction works, which allowed it to make local arrangements to print, translate, and distribute the books.

The book series was known as Background Books, which ran until 1970 and was comprised of almost 100 titles. In most cases, the IRD commissioned trusted confidential sources, often with an intelligence background, to write on topics the British government wanted to highlight. These included such topics as the nature of communism, Soviet policy in Eastern Europe, and Soviet social and economic policies. The authors were given access to covertly gathered source materials while they were conducting their research on the topic. Once the publication was finished, the IRD would buy up large quantities of each title for distribution abroad.

The series was not intended for sophisticated audiences but instead was targeted at a general audience that might read something by a prominent author. The purpose of the series was to ensure that Soviet tactics and policies were known as widely as possible. Copies of the books were distributed to British embassies and colonial offices throughout the world. Each embassy, in turn, was supposed to use its local contacts to promote wide local distribution of the work. The United States, through its embassies, worked very closely with its British counterparts to promote additional distribution of the books.

Free Europe Press had a different model of distribution. The first step was to approach top publishing executives to see whether they were willing to assist the program. What Free Europe Press was hoping for were trade discounts from the publisher to keep the cost down and for the purchase of the large quantities of books to be kept quiet. Free Europe Press masked its role in the program by funneling all business through the International Advisory Council, a dummy organization established for this purpose. Once the publisher had agreed to participate, Free Europe Press could offer to its Eastern European targets the publication catalog of the organization it had contacted. By the 1960s, the number of publishers, institutions, and individuals associated with

sending books to Eastern Europe had grown to 300 in Europe and 200 in the United States (Matthews, 2003). Among the groups were the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), Architecture Forum, Barnes and Noble, Brookings Institution, *Ebony*, Harper and Row, Harvard University Press, Macmillan and Co., Centre de Documentation Universitaire, *Le Figaro*, and Bertelsmann.

The main form of distribution was through the mail, with the Free Europe Press staff addressing the labels and paying the postage. To the Eastern European recipients and communist censors, the packages seemed to be coming from Western publishers and Western organizations. In general, this arrangement was successful and did not raise the suspicions of communist security officials. Another method of distribution was through cultural centers and bookstores. By the 1960s and 1970s, communist governments were allowing more contact between their people and the people of Western Europe as long as it was nonpolitical. Free Europe Press assisted this by selling books at a discount to these organizations, which were already organizing their own exchanges with people behind the Iron Curtain. A final method was a person-to-person distribution system parallel to the mailing operations. When Eastern European intellectuals were allowed to travel abroad, the program would arrange to have a person of similar interests meet them in the West. At the meeting, the Westerners would personally pass on books that the Eastern European visitor had requested.

Unlike the book program in Eastern Europe, the Soviet book program relied heavily on personal contacts for book distribution. Isaac Patch (1996, quoted in Richmond, 2003, p. 139) estimated that 35 percent of his books were given to Soviet travelers in the West, 40 percent were given to Western travelers to the Soviet Union to give away, and only 10 percent were mailed to people in the Soviet Union with special permission to receive book packages from the West. The remaining 15 percent were distributed through "special routes," such as the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.

The number of books supplied by Free Europe Press and Bedford Press in their 35 years of operations is astounding. They estimated that more than 1 million books were distributed to Soviet citizens and

around 10 million Western books and magazines infiltrated the communist half of Europe (Matthews, 2003). There are also approximately 100,000 files on former Soviet and Eastern European individuals containing their communications with the program. These include the titles of the books they received, their letters and requests to the program, clippings from local publications on their work and activities, and notes on the people they met while traveling abroad.

Relevant Lessons for the Middle East

As noted in the introduction, U.S. and British Cold War efforts in the ideological arena provide a number of useful lessons for formulating policy in the Middle East today, even if the political and cultural context is vastly distinct. One of these lessons that appears salient is how to overcome the understandable skepticism foreign audiences have toward government-sponsored media activities. During the Cold War, this problem was solved through the use of public-private partnerships, an approach that can easily be applied to the Middle East. These partnerships allowed the U.S. and British governments to distance themselves from their media promotion activities while ensuring that the private groups they supported adhered to each nation's basic foreign policy goals. For the private groups, government assistance provided them with the financial backing and security to conduct activities in areas they otherwise could not have.

Another lesson from the Cold War is to carefully consider the target audience and which media sources are most likely to influence it. As was the case in the Cold War, the intelligentsia, broadly defined, in the Arab world are the mostly likely to read and be influenced by printed material. Other, less educated audiences need to be reached through more accessible media outlets, such as movies, television programming, Internet sites, cartoons, and music. It is important to note that, unlike intellectuals in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Arab intellectuals today are marginalized and lack strong grassroots support in their communities, making these accessible media outlets even more critical.

A third lesson is the value of nonpolitical material in combating extremism. The creative works that Eastern European and Russian audiences requested were not those that directly combated communism. Instead, they most valued items that compensated for the intellectual vacuum in their lives. The printed materials that communist bloc citizens requested ranged from books and magazines banned in their countries to reference materials that were simply unavailable. The U.S. and British governments did not view the provision of these materials as a sideshow but as a central plank in their strategy to break down misconceptions about the West and to spark debate inside communist societies. A similar approach can be taken in the Middle East by improving the distribution of nonpolitical works that could help fill the intellectual vacuum imposed by authoritarian governments and religious extremists in the region.

A final lesson is the importance of promoting creative works produced in the targeted region or country that reinforce a particular strategic message. One of the key themes of all Cold War media operations was the suppression of history and culture by communist governments. The U.S. and British governments promoted works by local authors that corrected the historical record put forward by communist authorities and cultural works suppressed by the government. Books by famous Russian and Eastern European authors that displayed the cultural connections and commonalities between Western and Eastern cultures were also valued.

Policy Recommendations

Our research indicates that there are three major barriers to the greater dissemination of creative works in the Middle East region: censorship, the market, and distribution channels. This chapter offers a series of policy recommendations for overcoming these barriers. It is important to note that most of these recommendations include the involvement of nongovernmental actors or international allies (supported by the U.S. government) more than direct or overt actions by the U.S. government.

Overcoming Censorship

Make Censorship a Consistent Agenda Item in Bilateral Dialogue with Regional Allies

The United States, through its economic, military, and political power, retains significant influence in the Middle East. The United States could use some of its influence to raise censorship issues with regional allies. One potential way to do this would be making censorship a consistent agenda item in the many bilateral dialogues the United States holds with regional allies. The U.S. government could argue to regional governments that censorship of creative works offering constructive themes and messages (e.g., tolerance, nonviolence) only assists extremists who threaten both Arab governments and the West. In addition, the United States could help facilitate, perhaps through European partners, an international conference on the censorship challenge in

the Arab world. This would help raise the issue's profile as an important regional concern.

Pressure on regional governments to limit their censorship efforts obviously needs to be traded off against other key U.S. priorities, particularly countering terrorism. Policymakers are understandably reluctant to press an issue that may cause friction in bilateral relations and jeopardize other important areas of cooperation. Despite these concerns, allowing the wide distribution of constructive-themed works has many long-term benefits in countering extremism. These long-term approaches should not always be overshadowed by short-term concerns.

Work with European Interlocutors to Promote Constructive-Themed Works, Such as Through International Book Fairs

As discussed in Chapter Two, book fairs and exhibitions account for upwards of 40 percent of all sales. European nations and publishers are often involved in hosting these events, and all parties are interested in making them a success. This gives European governments a degree of leverage in their efforts to sell books that have been banned for sale in other venues.

Assist Individuals in Obtaining Banned Works Through Person-to-Person Distribution and Internet Publishing

One method to increase the exposure of constructive-themed works and their authors would be to post material on influential and popular Web sites. Several online publishers currently exist, including Zinio™ and Kotob Arabia. Zinio is a digital magazine publisher utilizing software that allows the purchase of electronic material without enabling users to reproduce or forward it. Kotob Arabia is an Arabic-language e-book publisher that, in part, seeks to use the Internet to overcome censorship restrictions.[1] Other initiatives may aim to purchase the rights of selected books and place them on the Internet to be accessed free of charge.

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[1] Phone interview with Arab author, April 21, 2008. See also Zinio (undated) and Kotob Arabia (undated). For a description of Kotob Arabia, see Habeeb (undated).

Another method would be assisting nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to set up person-to-person networks. The goal would be to link professional associations in Europe and the United States with similar associations in the Middle East. Once these connections are established, they can provide a private distribution channel for materials of similar interest.

Expanding the Market

Support Education Reform and Promote Literacy
To increase the size of the regional reading public, the U.S. government can work with European partners as well as local and international NGOs to expand educational opportunities in Arab countries. This could involve assistance for school construction or education and training for educators at all levels. One particular area of focus could be promoting literacy and a reading culture, encouraging young people and students to read and discuss books critically. This could involve promoting school curricula that emphasize the importance of reading at an early age. For adults, citywide reading clubs could be initiated, as well as English-language community courses to increase the types of material available to broader audiences.

Promote Specific Authors Abroad and in Their Native Countries
People in the Arab world pay attention to what is going on in the United States and Europe. An author's or artist's success in the West raises his or her profile and prospects of success in the Middle East. In addition, breaking into Western markets provides financial rewards for both publishers and Arab authors, allowing them to continue their creative endeavors.[2] Arab literary expert Roger Allen observed, "We don't understand the power of recognition from outside. They all crave outside recognition."[3]

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[2]   Phone interview with Jordanian book distributor, May 7, 2008.

[3]   Phone interview with Roger Allen, Philadelphia, Pa., May 13, 2008.

There are a number of steps the United States can take—again, in coordination with other governments and private institutions—to promote authors and artists. First, selected works produced in Arabic could be translated into English. This would greatly expand the potential audience for Arab artists while generating attention in the Middle East. Second, publishers, perhaps assisted by other organizations, could sponsor book tours abroad so authors can discuss their works with broader audiences and gain more exposure. Third, U.S. libraries could be encouraged to hold translated works. Within Arab states, European cultural centers could hold receptions and discussions for Arab writers.

Promote Arab Literature Prizes

Arab literature prizes have proven to be excellent avenues to promote quality works with constructive themes.[4] The competitions have attracted significant attention in the Middle East and have provided the winners and runners-up a great deal of publicity and exposure. The monetary prizes offered provide financial assistance to writers, allowing them to continue their work. Finally, the regional and international attention drawn to the authors makes censoring them more difficult. Once an author's work becomes well known outside his or her native country, attempts to censor often spark the types of international incidents governments want to avoid. The United States should assist in expanding the number of literary prizes and increasing the monetary compensation to the authors.

Convert or Adapt Printed Material with Constructive Themes into Other Media with Broader Audiences

As is the case in the United States, cross-marketing increases the visibility of artistic works. It also provides an opportunity for people who either are unable to or cannot afford printed materials to gain exposure to different types of material. Potential avenues for adaptation include

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[4]   For example, the International Prize for Arabic Fiction, which is awarded to the best original full-length Arabic novel. First-place authors win $50,000 and receive free translation of their novel into English. Winners of the prize gain widespread media attention. Phone interview with Peter Clark, May 6, 2008.

films based on books, audio books, television series, and perhaps even video games. This will greatly increase the audience that is aware of such works and might inspire more people to read the original book.

Improving Distribution

Assist in the Expansion of Libraries and Bookstores

Our research indicates that relatively few libraries and bookstores exist in key Arab states. The limited number of outlets for published materials reduces the market and the ability of publishers to distribute their products. In other parts of the world, publishers can break even on their investment by selling only to libraries.

To correct this problem, a major effort to build and improve regional libraries could be initiated. This can be done through aid grants or by encouraging foundations, or even wealthy individuals, to invest in libraries in the Middle East. As an added benefit, these libraries could offer free Internet access and broader cultural programming. Another avenue for expanding libraries is the increasing number of U.S. universities building campuses in the Middle East. All of these university libraries should be encouraged to buy and promote Arab literature.

One other way to expand distribution would be providing subsidies for international or local booksellers to open stores in the Middle East. The goal would be to bring a reading culture to the Middle East by creating a positive modern atmosphere around reading. This would be done by assisting booksellers who might not otherwise profit from bookstore expansion in the Middle East.

Use the Internet to Increase Access to Books

The Internet may afford new opportunities for authors and publishers to overcome not only the many hurdles to international distribution but also restrictions imposed by government censorship.[5] First, some publishers and distributors are in the business of selling written works in

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5   Interview with Jordanian artists, Amman, Jordan, February 21, 2008.

digitized format. As mentioned earlier, Zinio is a distributor of e-magazines and e-textbooks. While most titles are in the English language, the firm is also willing to distribute Arabic-language works.[6] One Arab author interviewed for this study stated that he is presently looking into using this format to distribute his line of Arab-language comic books.[7] Kotob Arabia is an Egyptian publisher that specializes in digitizing books and selling those works over the Internet. It currently sells 4,000 titles in 27 different genres (Habeeb, undated). Though Internet access is presently limited in the Arab world, business models such as these will increasingly enable Arab consumers to gain quick and easy access to creative works (Ghazal, 2008). Efforts that promote the availability and utilization of such publishing and distribution options should be explored. Also to be explored is the possibility of purchasing the rights to select Arabic works, digitizing their content and then making them freely available through NGO-sponsored Web portals.[8]

The Internet can also be used to as a platform to sell hard-copy books. This is, of course, the business model for Amazon. However, while Amazon offers Chinese-, French-, and Japanese-language portals, it (at present) sells only English-language works.[9] The United States should consider mechanisms by which it can promote current Web-based booksellers or new entrepreneurs to use the Internet to sell and distribute hard-copy Arabic-language works to the Middle East.[10]

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[6]   Phone interview with Zinio representative, September 30, 2008.

[7]   Phone interview with Arab author, April 21, 2008.

[8]   Intraregional variation in Internet use should be considered in implementing these recommendations. Internet penetration rates vary considerably from country to country, from a low (excluding Iraq) of 1.4 percent in Yemen to a high of 49.8 percent in the United Arab Emirates (Miniwatts Marketing Group, undated).

[9]   Phone interview with Amazon representative, September 30, 2008.

[10] Of course, limited Internet access throughout the Middle East may limit the success of this approach. According to Miniwatts Marketing Group (undated), Internet penetration in the Middle East reaches only 21.3 percent of the population. However, while this rate is less than half that for Europe (48.1 percent) and North America (73.6 percent), it is on par with developing regions, such as Latin America (24.1 percent) and Asia (15.3 percent). Importantly, Internet use is growing in the Middle East at a very high rate. As such, this may be an important medium for promoting future and enhanced access to the written word.

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