

Fighting Terrorism through Liberalism Promotion in the Middle East

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Abstract:

The aim of this work is to shed light on the roots of the widespread of the liberal thought in the Middle East through the focus on the role of the external factor. This lies in the Global War on terrorism led by the United States of America and its allies, based on the link between liberalism promotion and fighting extremism.

This paper concluded that liberalism promotion conducted by many tools such as public diplomacy and cultural exchanges has not been in harmony with the characteristics of the region that has its own vision about the internal and foreign policies.

Keywords: *Liberalism; Terrorism; public diplomacy; cultural exchange; values.*

Introduction:

Recently, Terrorism is considered as one of the major challenges that face both decision-makers and researchers. It has been an important topic in different areas not only politics and international relations, but also in economics, sociology and psychology. This importance stems from the extent of threat to which States and societies are exposed two, since it is a phenomenon that is related directly to security and human being existence; In addition to the consequences of any terrorist attack on human lives and material capabilities.

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With the events of 9/11 the United States of America gained a new conviction that Terrorism is a global challenge that must be confronted using not only military force, but the soft power (the concept created by Joseph Nye) is also a useful means.

The American decision-maker concluded that liberalism is the solution; so that the Middle East has to get more freedom in different domains. This paper aims at exploring the following problematic:

What is the logic that lies behind liberalism promotion in the Middle East?

To answer this question, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- 1- Liberalism promotion has been regarded as the ideology fighter through the global war on terrorism.
- 2- Public diplomacy and cultural exchanges has been used to promote the United States of America as an example to imitate in the region.

I. The Global War on Terrorism

Terrorism is one of the serious challenges that the Middle East is still facing, looking for several alternatives to deal with it in order to achieve the internal stability. This latter is necessary for development in political, economic and social areas. The region has never been far from what happens on the international level; especially when it comes to the American foreign policy which has a strong and direct impact on it because of its strategic importance. This can be illustrated through 11/9 events'. Since that, there is a constant attempt to make change so that the region could be transformed into a place that matches with the international orientation towards liberalism and democracy. In this regard, the Greater Middle East project and the War of Ideas were the two main tools used to achieve that goal.

1- The Greater Middle East Project:

11th September, 2001 events had a crucial impact on the international relations, not only on states but also, people all over the Middle East. Academics and researchers started to use the term « Middle East » after the second world, in the light of Great Britain power decline and the rise of American power. There has been a disagreement about the geographical boundaries and which States are included¹. Historically, its meaning differed according the great powers definitions of it. Under British control, the Middle East meant Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Muscat, Aden protectorate and Yemen, Persia, Israel and Trucial Sheikhdoms, this period has been called « Pax Britannica »².

However, with the Greater Middle East Project, the region constitutes of Arab nations, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, according to the paper that has been published in AL-Hayat Arab newspaper in February 2004. This document has been modified at the Sea Island Georgia meeting of the G 8 in the same year³.

This initiative was based on Arab Human Development Report 2002-2003, which concluded that all the challenges of the region are a result of the lack of three variables: freedom- knowledge and women empowerment. The mentioned report established a relation between lack of freedom and terrorism. Therefore the United States of America called for making reforms in the Middle East in order to improve the political and economic systems performance, and the project focused on civil society and

¹ - Ozalp, Osman Nuri, "Where is the Middle East? teh Definition and Classification Problem of the Middle East as a Regional Sub-System in International Relations". *TJP Turkish Journal of Politics* , 2 (2), (2011), pp. 9-11.

² - Davison, Roderic H, "Where is the Middle East?", *Foreign Affairs* , 38 (04), (July, 1960), pp. 667-673.

³ - Girdner, EDDIEJ, "The Greater Middle East Initiative: Regime Change, Neoliberalism, and US Global Hegemony". *America in the Middle East, the Middle East in America*, (2005), beirut, p 43.

media to promote human rights, in order to create an inappropriate environment for terrorists and extremists¹.

2- The War of Ideas:

A war of ideas is about a conflict of views and conceptions and imaginations. It is a clash between the different interpretations and perceptions. This war may be intellectual, ideological or religious. Power and influence are the essence of this war, and it is not separated from the ordinary conflicts that are guided by material interests, so that this type of war is also about the gain of control and having more access to resources, the fact that stimulates fear and forms a threat. Therefore, ideas are used as weapons to counter it. It is targeted generally to an opposing ideology, mainly to its credibility and influence. In addition, one of its strategies is to render the major proponents of that ideology ineffective and unable to get more support or exert more influence².

The war of idea is the one of the American counter-terrorism strategy elements, and it is constituted of³:

- Attacks on the places from where they command, communicate and manage their affairs especially the financial ones, in order to defeat terrorists.
- Urging States to assume their responsibilities and take the necessary measures against this threat, in order to deprive them from support and sponsorship.
- pushing the international community to focus on areas most at risk, in order to reduce factors that enable terrorists to recruit more member

¹- Ottaway, Maria, Carothers, Thomas, " The Graeter Middle East Initiative: off to a False Start". *Policy Brief* , (March 29, 2004), p. 2.

²- Echevarria II, Antonio J, "*Wars of Ideas and the War of Ideas*", (June, 2008), (<https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/1960.pdf>), Accessed March 05, 2021, p Vii-3.

³- Tellis, Ashley J, "Assessing America's War on Terror: Confronting Insurgency Cementing Primacy", *NBR Analysis* , 15 (04), (December, 2004), p. 13.

- Enhancing the defense capabilities the United States and its allies, in order to identify and neutralize the threat.

The "War of Ideas" was one of the mechanisms aimed at denying terrorists the ability to recruit and attract more members. Its importance is evident in the third pillar of the American counter-terrorism strategy. As the US strategy in 2003 stipulated that this war would achieve its goal through¹:

- Clarifying the illegality of terrorist acts.
- Ensure that ideologies that promote terrorism are not able to create a fertile environment in all countries.
- Reducing the conditions that terrorist groups exploit in the recruitment process.
- Encouraging aspirations for freedom in societies governed by regimes sponsoring terrorism.

Hence, the American administration has taken a number of decisions related to combating ideology, which it considers one of the main reasons for the spread of extremism and the increase in terrorist operations, as it announced commitment to the following²:

- The use of means of influence to delegitimize terrorist acts, and the formation of a vision similar to that of other phenomena such as slavery, piracy and extermination, thus making the behaviors of groups classified as terrorist, behaviors unacceptable by respectable governments and everyone should oppose them. Thus, establishing a new international norm based on three elements, namely: non-support-non-tolerance-active opposition.

¹- The White House, " *National Strategy For Combating Terrorism* ", (February, 2003), (https://www.cia.gov/news-information/cia-the-war-on-terrorism/Counter_Terrorism_Strategy.pdf), Accessed september 12, 2020, p23

²- *Ibid*, p-p 23-24.

- Encouraging moderate governments in the Islamic world in particular, and emphasizing that American values do not conflict with the Islamic religion.

II. Liberalism Promotion in the Middle East:

Liberalism is considered as the winner ideology at the end of the cold war, since communism has been defeated by the western bloc. Since then, many argued that liberalism is the most appropriate ideology for the entire world, so that it has to be applied in its many areas: in politics through *democracy* and in economics through *capitalism*. Then, according to this conclusion, the Middle East has been considered as a place of terror and extremism because of the absence of liberalism indicators.

1- Definition of Liberalism:

Liberalism can be defined as a political doctrine that considers individual freedom as the aim subject of politics. Liberals believe that protecting this freedom is the role of governments, and it is necessary to establish a system that provides governments with the necessary power. However, this system must be based on a mechanism that protects the individual freedom from the abuse of power that can be exerted by governments. It is about the emancipation of individuals either from subjection to the group or the strictness of different constraints such as customs¹.

The main features of liberalism may be summarized in the following points²:

¹-Dagger, Richard, "Liberalism", Britannica, (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/liberalism>), Accessed March 05, 2021, p1

²- Freeman, Samuel, "Liberalism", Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics, (April, 2017), (https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/web.sas.upenn.edu/dist/e/483/files/2018/07/liberalism_oup_encyclopedia_politics-1o2lwvr.pdf), Accessed March 05, 2021, p-p 1-18

- Liberty of the individual: the individual is free unless there are appropriate reasons to impose limits. In other words, the reasons must be legitimate i.e. either in relation to self-protection or harm prevention to others.
- Government's role is to protect individuals' rights and to secure the public goods that are beneficial for everyone such as national defense-public health-...ext.
- Limited power for governments and tolerance of differences in society whether in religious or political matters.
- Freedom of expression and opinions and convictions. It can be restricted only in case of representing a danger to others, and not because the disapproval of the majority.
- Provision of equal opportunities for all society members.
- Free competitive markets.

2- Promoting Liberalism in the Middle East:

Before describing how the Middle East has witnessed an attempt of Liberalism Internalization, it is necessary to mention that the region has been subject of democracy promotion since 2001. The George W. Bush administration adopted it as an approach to foreign policy because he concluded that the Attack which occurred on 11th September 2001 was due to the lack of democracy and political freedom, the fact that made modernity, prosperity and peace as difficult goals to reach¹.

The main objectives of this approach have been to maintain a stable region whether for States or societies and the realization of hegemony according to Antonio Gramsci thought. This can be achieved through ideology promotion i.e. liberal norms. The logic behind the two aims lies in the relation between hegemony and societies consent. The internalization of

¹- Gibson, Irene K, "Improving US State Department Cultural Exchanges with the Middle East: A Case Study Comparison of Iraq and Jordan". *Political Science Honors Projects*, (49), (April 22, 2015), p. 14.

the liberal norms through social, economic and cultural policies means the construction of a state of consideration that those norms are natural to accept and starting to establish behaviors according to them. This process is based on civil society at first, so that it is not targeted directly to states, in the Gramscian sense; it is society penetration in order to exercise control¹. In this context, cultural exchanges have been used as a tool to reach the societies at large².

A) Public Diplomacy:

Public diplomacy can be defined as³:

"A term to describe the efforts by nations to win support and a favorable image among the general public of other countries, usually by way of news management and carefully planned initiatives designed to foster positive impressions "

This definition shows the meaning of the term and its objectives. Public diplomacy relates to foreign policy, and it is concerned with the type of image that a country can have through the perceptions of others. Its aim generally lies in the creation of a positive image in order to gain the support of the targeted people.

Concerning the Middle East, the American public diplomacy is a concept that involves engagement and dialogue to delegitimize extremists who use violence and their ideology⁴, especially after the 9/11 attack, when

¹- Markakis Dionysius, " US Democracy Promotion in the Middle East The Pursuit of Hegemony?" . *A Thesis submitted to the department of Intenational Relations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*, London: London School of Economics, (October, 2012), p-p: 11-12.

²-Gibson, Irene K, Op.Cit, p. 14.

³- Bean, Hamilton, Comor, Edward, "America's "engagement" delusion: Critiquing a public diplomacy consensus". *the International Communication Gazette* , 74 (03), , (2012), p204.

⁴- Ibidm.

the United States of America started to focus on the minds and hearts of the Muslim populations through promoting its values of freedom and democracy in order to attack extremism and Islamic jihad according to the American vision¹. If public diplomacy is done properly, the potential for conflicts can be reduced as well as the negative perception about the United States².

It is necessary to mention that giving importance to this process is not new. The year 1948 witnessed the signature of the United States Information and Educational Exchange Act so called the Smith-Mundt Act by which the American information and cultural programs directed overseas have been established³, and since then they have been considered as a mechanism for foreign policy⁴. The essence of such strategy has been set clear with the American President Harry Truman who explained that it is important for the United States of America to promote freedom and to show that its values are the most aspired all over the world, he said⁵:

" We must pool our efforts with those of the other free peoples in a sustained, intensified program to promote the cause of freedom against the propaganda of slavery. We must make ourselves heard around the world in a great campaign of truth"

In 1953, the United States Information Agency USAI was founded⁶. Its main role is to support and explain the values and the interests of the

¹- Al-Rawi, Ahmed, "US Public Diplomacy in the Middle East and Public Diplomacy". *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, (March, 2020), p5

²- Zhaohui, Y. U, "Citizen Diplomacy-New US Public Diplomacy Strategy in the Middle East under the Obama Administration". *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)* , 9 (04), (2015), p38.

³- Snow, Nancy, "The Smith-Mundt Act of 1948". *Peace Review* , 10 (04), (1998), p 1

⁴- Gibson, Irene K, Op.Cit, p. 14.

⁵- Kennedy, Liam, Lucas, Scott, "Enduring Freedom: Public Diplomacy and U.S.Foreign Policy". *American Quarterly*, (June, 2005), p311

⁶- Chodkowski, William M, "*The United States Information Agency*", American Security Project, (2012),

United States abroad through exchange activities like the Fullbright and program and the International Visitor¹.

Walter Douglas and Jeanne Neal argued that such programs and other professional exchange ones are the most important element in public diplomacy because they are admired by the people of the region. Through the Alumni and English teaching, those programs get influence increasingly².

B) Cultural Exchanges:

An important role has been played by culture in the international relations since the nineteenth century. Usually, it is used to promote mutual trust in addition to enhancing the values and the heritage of a country in other nations³.

Culture is present as an important variable within the post-positivist international relations theories; according to which, Hassan Khodaverdi summarizes the role of culture as follow⁴:

- Culture is constructed and used by the ruling class to preserve its dominance over others according to Marxist theory. It is not separated

(<https://www.americansecurityproject.org/ASP%20Reports/Ref%200097%20-%20The%20United%20States%20Information%20Agency.pdf>), Accessed March 23, 2021, p4.

¹ - Snow, Nancy, "United States Information Agency", Consulté le Mars 2021, 23, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327013337_United_States_Information_Agency, Accessed March 23, 2021, p 1

²- Douglas, Walter, Neal, Jeann, Engaging the Muslim World Public Diplomacy after 9/11 in the Arab Middle East, Afghanistan, and Pakistan,(Washington: Center for Strategic International Studies, 2013), p-p: 17-19.

³- Shin, Hyesun, "Post-9/11 International Artist Exchanges Between the United States and the Middle East". *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, (2013), p 203.

⁴- Khodaverdi, Hassan, "The Role of Culture in International Relations Theories". *International Journal of Political Science* , 7 (3), (2017),p-p: 53-57.

from the historical context and the interests of the dominating social group that uses it to gain legitimacy.

- Critical theory tries to explain the power of the modern capitalism and its ability to confront many obstacles through culture. Critical theorists argue that cultural elements are the means by which dominance is achieved. On the other hand, they think that global politics can be better understood through dialogue between cultures.
- Constructivism explains the behavior of different actors by culture. Constructivists say that culture is the variable that determines the interests because it contains how the actor sees himself and others. This mental vision defines the orientations and the foreign policy.
- The English School stresses on the fact that the international system has both a formal and an informal aspect. The latter consists of norms, unwritten rules and cultures that are accepted to the existing actors at the international level.

Those theories consider that culture can be used to explain behaviors and foreign policies. Then, there is an assumption that culture can be used by States to gain or to protect its interests. Therefore, cultural interactions have their impact on the international relations whether in the direction of peace or conflict.

Concerning the cultural exchanges, they are considered as a kind of cultural diplomacy because they are generally programmed to build good relationships with other nations. A cultural exchange means the art, literature, publications and other elements exchange. It is a learning experience where people learn about each other and develop a mutual understanding¹.

¹- Han Bin Sang, Ryun Cho Kyung., Ju Na Hong., Hee Park young, "Correlation between Cultural Diplomacy and Cultural Exchange in Cases of the British Council and the Korean Cultural Center". *the International Symposium on Cultural Diplomacy*. United Kingdom, (2013), p-p: 3-4

The participants of an American exchange program directed to the Middle East develop their own knowledge about the United States of America according to the knowledge they acquire through their experience there, so that they understand its values in a way that can contribute in enhancing its image¹.

The significance of this kind of exchanges stems from the fact that they are based on information transferring in a modern world that considers it as power, especially with the recent technological advancement which enables people to have easy and rapid access to it. The large amount of information made attention a crucial element; that is to say the ability to identify the most important piece of information becomes an essential determinant in decision making and those who show what is to focus on are the powerful ones because they are story tellers. At this point, credibility is what governments are competing for, not only with other States but also organizations and media. Then, the success of public diplomacy depends on how much the State can be honest and able to change the other minds².

The United States of America moved to this strategy towards the Middle East because of two main reasons: trust and credibility, Philip Seib explains³:

« Academic Exchanges directed exclusively by universities, even if at the behest of government, might meet with less suspicion than purely governmental efforts to wield influence. To a considerable degree, credibility depends on the eye of the beholder, but as a general proposition an exchange program organized by Harvard University or a film production workshop directed by Disney might

¹ - "Diplomacy Cultural Diplomacy the Linchpin of Public", *Report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy*. US Department of State, (2005), p-p: 7-8.

² - Nye, Joseph, "Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy", *Public Diplomacy Magazine*, (2010), p-p: 121-122

³ - Seib, Philip, *Public Diplomacy and the Media in the Middle East*, (Los Angeles : Figueroa Press, 2013), p11.

have a better chance by being accepted by a public that is suspicious of the United States government intentions ».

Conclusion:

The Middle East is an important strategic region, and this is the main reason of its being a target for the great powers especially the United States of America. The latter put hegemony as the main goal of its foreign policy. Promoting liberalism is one of the tools used to maintain the American Hegemony all over the world and over the region. Public policy and cultural exchanges aim at promoting the American image and values so that they are being internalized in the minds and hearts of the people of the region as the universal and the most accepted ideology. However, the region has its own characteristics and values which are embodied in the internal and external policies. Those differences remain an obstacle in the success of the American policy though the propaganda is established to create an atmosphere of fighting terrorism.