

MEDIA AND INFLUENTIALS

If we proceed on the rather well-established premise that American public opinion on the Middle East is most seriously shaped by the expressions of pertinent public officials, then certain strategies for mass media fall into place. The following propositions are offered:

A. *Identifying the Influentials*

1. *Congressmen represent the priority factor.*

While the President and his administration are, of course, the most direct policy-makers in foreign affairs, the curbing political influence of Congress on the President is critical. In addition, Congressmen speak directly to their constituencies. It is not the passing statements of the President which shape public opinion, as much as "the position of the United States" as expressed by the President. The expression of a local Representative or Senator can affirm the sanctity of the "national position" by supporting it; or can diminish the sanctity of the "national position" by attacking it. As long as the majority of the population accepts "the government" as the experts in certain esoteric foreign affairs, then the expressions of Congressmen are critical. Furthermore, the Congressmen are generally more accessible than the President or Secretary of State.

2. *Other political influentials become a secondary priority factor.*

In every community, there are political officials or activists who have an influential relationship with the Congressmen, or with the political parties of the Congressmen and the President, or with significant political constituencies. It is not a matter of these people having a direct influence on public opinion; but rather, of their having an influence on the policy-makers, who also make public opinion.

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3. *The media managers themselves must be considered a separate priority factor.*

Once again, this is primarily a matter of influencing the policy-makers who shape public opinion. The news treatment by the media -- that which is likely to influence the public -- will largely reflect the positions expressed by the President and the Congressmen. The editorial and feature commentary of the media are more likely to influence the policy-makers than the public.

B. *Relating to the Influentials*

4. *The informational job is a long-range one requiring continuing relationships.*

There is usually no 24-hour informational fix. Ongoing relationships with, information to and access to the influentials must be established before, after and in between crises. It follows, incidentally, that the most effective relationships are more than one-issue relationships.

5. *The more effective relationships are personal rather than impersonal.*

Printed material sent to influentials is considerably less effective than personal meetings. Printed material sent without the prior basis of personal meetings is even less effective.

C. *Informing the Influentials*

6. *The basic set of values binding the influentials on the Middle East has to do with American national interest.*

National interest includes not just America's prestige abroad, or geopolitical position in the Middle East, but the effect of Middle East foreign policy on oil and jobs in America.

These are the matters which interest the policy-making influentials, not abstract matters of justice or injustice, such as: which land, bounded how, belongs to whom as of when; or, within limits, the mistreatment of prisoners, or even terrorism. The latter are normally ancillary considerations -- in the context of foreign policy -- and are used as trimming on positions already taken.

The considerations surrounding national interest preoccupy the policy-maker because they are the considerations paramount to his job. They are also of paramount interest to his constituency. Indeed, within limits, the constituencies are not interested in the ancillary matters either, but in expert advice as to what stance is in the national interest.

*7. A cohesive perspective of American national interest in the Middle East must be insistently and proactively applied.*

It is not enough to say that Israel is a bastion of democracy; or even that America's credibility is at stake, although that's part of it. There is a cohesive set of relationships involving our national interest with the security of Israel, the ascendancy of the PLO, Soviet aspirations, Saudi security and American access to oil.

These relationships need to be emphasized again and again to the influentials, in every given situation -- and emphasized again and again by the influentials, through the media, to the public.

By the same token, it is necessary to avoid being diverted from this Basic Perspective by dramatic but "ancillary" events which take place from day to day -- with respect to Lebanon, or terrorist raids, or retaliations, or whatever. The Basic Perspective must be reiterated.

And, by the same token, it is a mistake to try to defend every action of the Israeli government. Indeed, some of those actions may be indefensible in tactical terms. Instead, any comment on current affairs should be insistently encased in the Basic Perspective. In that way can we be constantly proactive rather than reactive.

8. *The influentials must be informed about both The Perspective and community feeling.*

There is a belief that the Jews are effective because of their cohesive voting power and political activism. That is partly true -- and therefore, it is important to let influentials know that a strong consensus exists. For example, it is important that consensual community delegations be part of the informational network. Indeed, it is important that on occasion, when a trial balloon is sent aloft, there be an impressive community response.

But, in the long run and in most cases, the ability to shape the ideas about and the basic perspective on American national interest will be more important than any marginal political power. This requires an informational campaign within the Jewish community itself, among Jewish influentials, and, from every source, among the general influentials who have been identified.

D. *The Influentials and the Mass Media*

9. *The most effective media program is one which prepares informed influentials to make policy and expressions of policy which will be reflected in the mass media in the natural process of things.*

It is through this natural process, and not through special-pleading items, that public opinion is most affected.

10. *Regular conferences, meetings and backgrounders with influentials, including media influentials, are more effective than ad hoc reactive sessions.*

11. *Measures should be developed to stimulate and help well-informed influentials to opportunistically use all of the media opportunities available.*

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In summary, these propositions -- from one point of view at least -- fit the role of the influential into the framework of the general draft propositions on mass media which you have received. They seem to have more to say about affecting the influentials than about affecting the media. But that is the reality of the situation. That is the reality of our effectiveness. It would be kidding the Jewish public to suggest otherwise.

On this aspect of the subject, at least, the media are not as magical as we sometimes suppose. In the natural process, the media will reflect what the public influentials say about American national interest in the Middle East -- and the public will be mainly affected by what emerges from that natural process. The main informational job with respect to the media, therefore, is the interpretative job that is done with the policy-making influentials -- which includes, as a marginal dimension, the direct interpretative job that can be done with media influentials. That understanding is important in order to establish priorities, avoid diversions or self-indulgent entertainments, and to prepare the community for maximum effectiveness. There are no gimmicks or communications short cuts.

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