

Public Diplomacy Case Study on the Growing Muslim Minority in Belgium

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Executive Summary

In the past several months there has been a growing mistrust among the large community of Muslims living in the Molenbeek neighborhood of Brussels, Belgium. Several hundred outspoken members of this community have formed a protest in front of the United States embassy to Belgium. They are denouncing military involvement in Afghanistan in 2001 & in Iraq in 2003 and some non-Muslim critics and academics of U.S. foreign policy have joined their cause.

With the group expanding rapidly, they have taken on new issues such as U.S. support of Israel, the invasion and then failure to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the latent support for India in the Kashmir dispute with Pakistan and the general targeting of Muslims in the war on terror. The opposition group is organizing a conference to address these issues and has invited the U.S. Ambassador to Belgium, Denise Bauer, to attend. This briefing is in preparation for the Ambassador Bauer's address to the opposition group during the conference.

The plan will address the four main issues of the opposition group:

1. The U.S. war on terror unfairly targeting Muslim countries and citizens;
2. The U.S. policy in the Middle East of bias against the Palestinians, Syrians, Iranians and other while favoring Israel;
3. U.S. interests worldwide oppose Islam;
4. U.S. government unfairly persecuted Muslims in the US, limiting their movement in the country and restricting immigration to the country.

The plan is divided into four main sections:

1. What are the objectives of the engagement approach?
2. Who is the target audience?
3. What is the message and talking points?
4. What are the hostile questions to anticipate?

1. What are the objectives of the engagement approach?

With the overall goal of this address being to alleviate the tension being caused by the issues the United States war on terror has caused in unfairly targeting Muslim countries and citizens. The Ambassador must strive to improve the perception that this group holds about the United States role in the discrimination of Muslims and therefore, the objectives must be specific in ensuring the message has efficacy and saliency amongst the appropriate target audiences.

There are specific objectives to this end and that is to raise awareness in this Muslim community of the United States' true motivations and sentiments about Muslims, to gain acceptance of new plan to improve relations between the United States and the Muslim community and finally, to motivate to action the opposition group to seek out more information about the United States and interact with individuals and Muslim-American nongovernmental organizations in cross-cultural dialogue.

2. Who is the target audience?

There are several target audiences that will be listening to this message and affected by it's content. Clearly, the main target audience will be the members of the opposition group that are currently camped out in front of the US embassy in Belgium. However, the audience does not end there. We also must keep in mind the Muslim community at home in the United States as well as the other Muslims living in Belgium. Furthermore, another integral audience is the Muslim community at large that lives abroad in both Muslim and Secular nations worldwide.

3. What is the message and talking points?

To effectively communicate the message of the United States to an opposition group currently demonstrating in Brussels, Belgium the talking points must adhere to the foreign policy

of the United States while also keeping in mind the cultural aspects of both the Muslim community as well as the Belgian community in which these Muslims live.

To begin the Ambassador should speak about how the United States is a nation founded on the ideal that a person of any creed or religion is welcome and has a valued place within our diverse society. That Muslim-Americans have been unfairly targeted by a minority of citizens and government officials within the United States but that the vast majority may not be familiar with Muslims from all over the world but appreciate and are grateful for the presence and contributions made by Muslim-Americans in the United States.

Islamophobia is a very real and very unfortunate form of discrimination. That it is widely practiced in the United States, is horrific and the United States is ashamed of the role it's played in the spread of this unfounded fear and targeting. However, like so many other forms of discrimination, the United States government views this no differently-- it is wrong and our Constitution strives to protect individuals from being unfairly targeted by the government on the basis of demography. Nonetheless, neither the United States nor anyone else in the world has fully explained how to fight back against the discrimination that individuals and groups wage against each other. Though the United States is by no means the most severely discriminatory Western democracy, it will take a lead role in bring a depth of understanding and an ultimate end to this social injustice.

Secondly, Ambassador Bauer must address all of the specific concerns brought up by the community, including: The U.S. war on terror unfairly targeting Muslim countries and citizens; The U.S. policy in the Middle East of bias against the Palestinians, Syrians, Iranians and others while favoring Israel; U.S. interests worldwide oppose Islam, including its initial invasion of

Afghanistan and Iraq; and lastly, U.S. government unfairly persecuted Muslims in the US, limiting their movement in the country and restricting immigration to the country.

The “war on terror” is something that has never had a proper amount of definition and focus attributed to it, and has therefore served as a scapegoat for so many frightened Americans and ethnocentric citizens from all over. They have taken to unfairly targeting individuals that are Muslim, based solely on what they look like in association with what they believe members of the Taliban, Al Qaeda, Hezbollah and ISIS also look like. This racist association is something that must be stopped with improved education about diversity and the horrors of discrimination for our children and young adults as well as people-to-people contact and reflexive conversations about our similarities and differences between members of different races, ethnicities, cultures, religions and genders as well.

The citizens of the United States, as well as citizens from other democracies around the world, including Israel, which is the only true representative democracy in the Arab region, must be empowered through education and interaction to change the face of their governments by electing representative officials that will continue to change domestic and foreign policy to work towards compromise and mutual understanding with peoples and nations of Islam currently being opposed by the United States and others Western democracies.

After the attacks of September 11th, 2001 the United States fell victim to an intense fear response and rally-around-the-flag mentality that was based mostly on emotions instead of on the facts. Though we were aware that the violent perpetrators of the attack and their leader Osama bin Laden were hiding in Afghanistan and we had the support of the international community to intervene on the ground, it was not until much later that the United States finally addressed the

actual needs of the Afghani people, and that was our first grave mistake. Our second mistake, was the execution of the entire war on Iraq, which had no support from the international community, no true justification and no end plan aside from removing Saddam Hussein from power, which did happen but also created a power vacuum in the region allowing more terrorist organizations, like ISIS, to spark and grow. These are the mistakes of our past administrations, but they serve as important lessons learned for our current, and hopefully future, leadership.

The past decisions made by the United States government should not be defended and cannot be changed. The focus must rather be on what we work we can do moving forward that will have a positive impact on the relationship between the Arab world and the West, and can begin to heal the wounds caused by the mismanagements of past American foreign policy. As far as domestic policy is concerned, the United States must work to uphold the ideals of it's Constitution and elect public officials that will repeal and ban all systematically and explicitly racist national security measures it currently employs in its screening of migrants and citizen movement. The United States utmost priority is national security and strict scrutiny will always be applied to anyone entering our nation, but we will work to ensure our procedure is free of ethnic profiling.

4. What are the hostile questions to anticipate?

In any situation of addressing the opposition, one must anticipate hostile questioning. The following are potential questions that Ambassador Bauer may face and effective responses to those questions.

1. Does the United States plan on taking more Syrian refugees in? What will the screening process be if so?

The United States will be increasing the number of Syrian refugees from its current total of about 11,000 by 500% or roughly 65,000 refugees total in 2017 (Diaz, 2016). The United States commends nations like Germany for being a leader in humanitarianism in the midst of this crisis. The United States will continue to use tough scrutiny of all immigrants entering the United States from any nation or background, but we will vehemently oppose the use of profiling in these screenings and plan on implementing a retraining program of our current and future patrol and TSA officers.

2. Will the United States intervene in the Syrian war to stop the intense violence being waged on citizens by their own government with the help of the Russian Federation?

The United States is actively involved in surveillance of the Syrian region and has been since 2014 (Landler, 2014). To address the violence on the ground in Syria the United States has been engaged in and will continue its constant negotiations with the Russian Federation to establish a peace, a ceasefire and a no fly zone in the region.

3. What will happen to Muslims in America and around the world, should Donald Trump become the next President of the United States?

No Comment.

References:

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Landler, M. (2014). Obama Authorizes Air Surveillance of ISIS in Syria. New York Times. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/26/world/middleeast/obama-syria-ISIS.html?_r=0