



## Academic Module:

# A New Beginning: Strategies for a More Fruitful Dialogue with the Muslim World

Author: [Craig Charney](#), President, Charney Research □ Updated: February 2007

<http://www.cfr.org/religion/academic-module-new-beginning-strategies-more-fruitful-dialogue-muslim-world/p9424>

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## Teaching Notes

By Craig Charney

The Council on Foreign Relations’ Special Report on U.S. public diplomacy in the Muslim world can be a useful resource for a

variety of undergraduate or graduate courses. These notes offer some suggestions for using the report in four types of courses:

1. General courses on international relations
2. Specialized courses on U.S. foreign policy or public diplomacy
3. Specialized area studies courses on the Middle East or Southeast Asia
4. Specialized courses on Islam and politics

## **GENERAL COURSES ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

## **SPECIALIZED COURSES ON US FOREIGN POLICY OR PUBLIC DIPLOMACY**

The issue of anti-Americanism in the Muslim world offers an ideal case study of the issue of “soft power.” This involves the aspects of international relations and foreign policy that focus on leadership through prestige, persuasion, and cultural and economic power, rather than hard power, the “bombs and rockets” that make up much of the traditional introductory international relations course or specialized course on US foreign policy. On the one hand, the loss of American prestige and increased anti-Americanism in Muslim countries is increasingly regarded as a serious problem for U.S. international relations and foreign policy. On the other, a superpower which also uses the instruments of hard power, as America has in Iraq and Afghanistan, may face serious tensions between its uses of hard and soft power. These issues are well illustrated by the report and its analyses of focus group reactions of Muslims in Morocco, Egypt, and Indonesia to American policies and information about America.

### *Discussion Questions*

- “It does not matter if we are loved as long as we are feared.” How true is this statement in international relations generally? How well does it apply to America’s dealings with the Arab world and Muslim Southeast Asia in

particular?

- What is the evidence that U.S. soft power is in decline in the Muslim world? Does it matter, and if so, why? Where does the issue rate in comparison to the other foreign policy challenges that America faces?
- Speaking of the Muslim world's views of the United States, some people say, "They hate us for what we are, free, rich, and democratic," while others say, "They hate us for what we do, for our policies towards Muslim countries." Are either of these views correct? Why or why not?
- As the world's leading power, the United States in some cases deals with problems with hard power, while others respond better to the use of soft. Given America's exercise of hard power in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere since 9/11, as well as its connection to its use by Israel, what, if anything, can be done to restore America's soft power elsewhere in the Muslim world?
- The Council Special Report argues for a strategy to improve America's image in the Muslim world, based on evidence from research and recent developments. How persuasive is this evidence, and why? How would you further test, evaluate, and develop or modify the recommendations?

## **SPECIALIZED AREA STUDIES COURSES ON THE MIDDLE EAST OR SOUTHEAST ASIA**

### **SPECIALIZED COURSES ON ISLAM AND POLITICS**

1. The Council report also offers useful insights on public opinion in Egypt, Indonesia, and Morocco, particularly with regard to their citizens' political culture, aspirations, and expectations of the outside world. Part I of the report discusses their views of their own countries, their principal and secondary aspirations for them, their views of economic and political reform, and

their perceptions of Islamists and political Islam. Reliable public opinion data from Muslim countries has until recently been scarce. Please see the Additional Readings section of this module for other valuable sources.

### *Discussion Questions*

- What are the things that people in Morocco, Egypt, and Indonesia want for their countries? What do they want foreigners, and in particular the United States, to do about it?
- Do people in Muslim countries want democracy? Why? Do they appear to have developed a civic culture?
- What is the meaning of Islam in popular political discourse? When people in the countries in the study talk about Islam in politics, what are they talking about?
- What conclusions can be drawn from the Council Special Report, the work of Brian Katulis, and any other studies examined regarding the views of Muslims on the roles and positions appropriate for women in society, economy, and polity?
- Samuel Huntington has written of an impending “clash of civilizations” between the Islamic World and the West. Does the evidence on public opinion in the Muslim world support this view? Consider both the material on anti-Americanism and public aspirations in the context of broader American foreign policy requirements and challenges in answering this.
- If the United States promotes democracy in Muslim countries like Egypt, Morocco, and Indonesia, is this likely to improve their public perceptions of America? Why or why not? Does it matter?

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

Any of the discussion questions above could be used as an essay topic instead. Other possible assignments for students in any of the above types of classes would include:

### **1. Public Debate**

Assign students to argue publicly the case for and against the United States from the perspective of citizens of one of the countries in the study and a representative of the United States government. To prepare they should draw both on the Council Special Report and other sources of information. To maximize learning you may wish to assign students to defend the opposite of the viewpoint they actually hold.

### **2. Content and/or Discourse Analysis**

Assign students to take a week or month's worth of a Muslim news medium and analyze all references to the United States. Content analysis would involve rating them as positive, negative, or neutral. Discourse analysis involves analysis of their meaning, tone, metaphors, and context.

English-speaking students can look at *Al-Ahram* English weekly, the English section of [aljazeera.net](http://aljazeera.net), or the *Jakarta Post*. French-speakers can look at the Moroccan weeklies *Le Journal* and *Telquel*. Speakers of Arabic or Indonesian should be encouraged to look at major dailies in those languages. All these are available on the web.

An alternative way to set up the assignment would be to base it on a particular event rather than a time period and compare coverage in the Muslim medium and a major U.S. paper.

### **3. Public Opinion and Aspirations**

Students should take one of the three countries in the Council Special Report (Egypt, Morocco, Indonesia) and review as much as possible of the other reports and information available on the opinions and aspirations of citizens there, reporting on their findings regarding the society in general or a particular aspect

(economic development, women, democracy, Islam). Topline findings from the Pew surveys are available on the Pew website, in addition to the Pew reports. Numerate advanced students can also download and run the dataset from the large 2002 to 2003 Pew study.

#### **4. Policy Memo**

Students should take one or more of the countries in the Council Special Report as a basis and write a memo to Karen Hughes, the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, on how the image of the United States could be improved there, drawing on the Council Special Report and other recommended readings and surveys.