Facebook: A Platform for 21st Century Politics
Winning Hearts and Minds on the World Wide Web

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The world wide web (W3) is a tabula rasa – a blank slate upon which individuals, groups, cultures and nations engage. And because the web is available to anyone with on-line access, we've seen that this essential communications medium can be a very potent platform to engage and influence an increasingly interconnected public audience.

A new widespread shift is underway towards online discourse and an increasing demand for direct communication between leaders and their people; in truth creating a challenge for political leaders and policy-makers that seek to shape public opinion. These leaders are finding it more difficult to promote their public image abroad with a highly informed global audience and equally at home to deal with the Internet as a growing medium for political activism and dissent.

Some countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom and Australia have declared "open government" initiatives to promote transparency and foster more direct political representation with their citizenry by applying social networking and Web 2.0 technologies to the practice of government. The initiative, labeled as Government 2.0 programs, are geared to let people access government information online and collaborate more openly in the making of public policy.

In many places however, web use is banned or controlled at the national level. Certain sites are "off-limits." This type of government censorship led to the recent pullout of Google – the world's most-used search engine – from China after China's political leaders began censoring Google search engine results pages (SERPs). Whether this move was motivated by Google's desire to force China to open access to the web, or a step backward for the Chinese people, remains to be seen. One thing of which we can be sure: governments recognize the power of the web as a tool for communication, information sharing, connectivity with the local populace and, sadly, the broadcast of propaganda and containment of political dissent – restricting Web access to government-sponsored messages that political leaders want constituents to access.

The point? This new medium, the Internet and specifically the 100's of millions who are connected online through social networks, is defining 21st Century politics.

While this transformation will be felt worldwide, it's impact will likely potentiate the political landscape in the Middle East and broader Muslim World. With approximately one-quarter of the world's population (23%) adhering to the principles of Islam, and according to our most recent research a sizeable 225 million Muslims already online, this huge demographic has yet to fully embrace and leverage the World Wide Web.

▶ **Muslim Population Online by Region**

REGION	MUSLIM POPULATION	ONLINE MUSLIM POPULATION	% OF TOTAL ONLINE MUSLIM
Middle East	459,878,950	104,127,683	46%
East Asia	228,599,000	38,631,352	17%
South Asia/Indian Subcontinent	485,970,000	31,448,814	14%
Central Asia	128,639,000	19,912,079	9%
Sub-Saharan Africa	240,333,000	16,964,966	8%
Americas & Europe	24,880,400	14,963,535	7%
	1,568,300,350	226,048,428	100%

Source: World Internet Usage and Population Statistics December 31, 2009; Global Muslim Population, A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population October 2009 by Pew Research Center; U.S. State Department Religious Freedom Act; CIA World Factbook; and Digital Daya Intelligence Databases **Note:** Middle East region comprises the Arab World (the Gulf, Levant, and North Africa regions), Israel, Iran, and Turkey. East Asia includes the Muslim populations in ASEAN and Far East regions. Central Asia includes Muslim populations of CIS (except the Baltic), Russia, Western China, and Afghanistan.

Moreover, the Internet penetration among the global Muslim community has been swelling at a compound annual growth rate of 30% since 2006; projecting forward we will see a total online population of 1 Billion people by 2015.

So, we come to the big question, of great concern at home and across the West, what impact will the use of the World Wide Web by Muslim leaders have on one-quarter of the world's population?

This big question requires an examination of the foundations upon which Muslim cultures are built and the impact of the creation of global interaction at the personal level. Anyone can log on and find news of interest to both Muslims and non-Muslims, and with the phenomenal growth of the web in just 20 years, we have empirical evidence that web reach is expanding at the speed of digital.

Accordingly, who are the leaders within the Islamic community who maintain an active web presence. What are they doing with it? And what are the implications of foreign policy for the U.S. and the rest of the Western world?

The Changing Face of Middle East Leadership

For more than five decades, Middle Eastern countries have been governed by highly-centralized power structures – hereditary monarchies, strongman military governments, highly organized theocracies and other agents that relied on controlling the flow of information to the people.

We see this "old-school" approach today in Iran, a country that has seen regular protests from the Green Movement – protestors made up of the middle class, the educated, the moderate progressives within Iran's hard-line, theocracy-based government. When these brave, progressive protestors take to the streets in reaction to an alleged "rigged" election, broadcast media are prevented from showing these protests.

Reports of Iran's "people voting with their feet" still filtered out. Grainy images from cell phones spread organically across the globe despite Iranian government efforts to keep internal these reports of rebellion. And the West was quick to show its support of the protestors on social media sites.

Over the past few years, we've seen a remarkable growth in the use of the world wide web by national leaders. This is the result, at least in part, of the changing face of Middle Eastern leaders. As the old guard "times out," new leaders, younger more visionary leaders, are taking their places. These leaders recognize the value of employing web assets to engage their peoples and other cultures around the globe. In effect, the tabula rasa that is the W3 is being filled in with a new breed of leader in Muslim nations across the globe.

Many current Middle Eastern leaders, and the rising stars within state governments, are Western educated. His Majesty, Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Sultan of Oman, received his higher education in the UK. So did King Abdullah II of Jordan, President Al Assad of Syria, Prime Minister Saad Hariri of Lebanon, and Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi, son of Libyan leader Moammar Al Qadhafi – all received their educations from U.S. or Great Britain Universities.

All are fluent in English, all have Western friends and colleagues, all have been exposed to Western viewpoints to one degree or another and two of these leaders actually received their military education at the renowned Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in the United Kingdom. These leaders have integrated the best of Western thought into Middle Eastern cultures in a slow, deliberate way.

Nation Building on The World Wide Web: How National Leaders Use Web-Based Assets

THE FIRST ONLINE CAMPAIGN FOR POLITICAL CONTROL WITHIN THE MIDDLE EAST - GAMAL MUBARAK VS. MOHAMED ELBARADEI OF EGYPT

Egypt is the most populace nation in the Middle East with 78 million citizens. Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak has been in the top government post for the past thirty years, rising to power in the wake of the assassination of his predecessor, President Anwar Sadat; to date he has not named a Vice President. Mubarak's advancing age (82) has made the question of succession the top political issue and hence the recurring speculation of who will assume this pivotal post.

The younger of the two sons of Egyptian's current President Hosni Mubarak and heir apparent to his father's power structure, **Gamal Mubarak,** is reputedly being groomed to take the place of his father although both father and son have not publically advocated this move. Nevertheless, authorities both inside Egypt and within the Middle East region believe that, indeed, Gamal Mubarak will attempt to assume his father's position.

Gamal Mubarak is well-versed in Western ways having attended St. George's College in Cairo, before entering American University in Cairo where he earned his business degrees. After graduation, Gamal Mubarak was employed by Bank of America's Egyptian operation before being transferred to the London branch. The young banker quickly rose to prominence for his performance in investment banking.

Subsequently, this youngest son of Hosni Mubarak managed a private equity fund to undertake high-level financial consultation. Gamal is also the Chairperson of the Future Generation Foundation (FGF), a non-government agency with a mission of training young people for employment. He's also an honorary member of the business-service organization, Rotary International.

His professional biography clearly paints a picture of a man whose principles are firmly based in the Western concept of free markets and financial investment. He is a progressive thinker with strong ties to the West, indicated by his extensive use of web-based interconnectivity.

Gamal Mubarak is typical of the Middle East leader of tomorrow – a leader who is open to engagement with the West and who moves with ease among powerful Western interests. His activities on the W3 further demonstrate the man's desire to reach out and communicate with Egyptians and non-Egyptians on a broad array of topics.

To engage this future leader, one can visit his Gamal Mubarak's Facebook page or his Sharek Facebook page. As of this writing, Gamal has a growing following on social media sites with 18,000 fans on multiple Facebook accounts alone.

The website, www.menassat.com, had this to say about the younger Mubarak:

"In what looks like a clear bid to boost his presidential campaigning efforts and credibility among Egypt's youth, Gamal Mubarak or "Jimmy" as he goes by locally, has launched his own Facebook site and his very own online discussion forum for young Egyptians, "Sharek," which means" participate" in Arabic, in

collaboration with the General Secretary of the Policy Committee of the National Democratic Party (NDP).

The open forum, which goes by the slogan "open dialogue for the Egyptian youth with Gamal Mubarak," invites young Egyptians to send in their questions and participate in discussions with the man who might be leading their country in the near future. Gamal discusses topics such as the challenges and opportunities faced by today's youth with show participants. Sharek is being heavily advertised on various social media outlets and viewers can currently follow the show via Facebook and RSS. Soon, fans will also be able to view episodes on Sharek's own YouTube channel and access photos from the program via the photo-sharing site Flickr."

Gamal's forum is open and transparent, covering topics of concern to Egyptians from all segments of society. The forum has addressed such issues as Egypt's rate of inflation (high), difficult and sub-standard living conditions, corruption, National Democratic party corruption and Gamal Mubarak's presumed ascension to power in the future.

Mubarak's outreach to, what is presumed to be his future constituents, is a model of the integration of social media and politics in a meaningful, even personal, manner. However, Mubarak's opposition has also taken to the world wide web.

Mohamed ElBaradei heads the opposition in Egypt opposed to Gamal Mubarak with a solid measure of growing popularity. The principle of presidency by succession has propelled ElBaradei to the forefront of Egyptian politics.

Mohamed brings international experience to the table, serving as former UN Nuclear Chief, which brought him into close contact with the Western scientific and political communities. Indeed, Elbaradei enjoys international support, in part because of his engagement with the West during his years at the UN and through his efforts to put forth his message through social media including maintaining a Facebook page, a Twitter account and uploads of speeches and interviews to YouTube, putting a face to the politics.

Remarkably, Mohamed ElBaradei has built a strong Facebook following rapidly swelling to 225,000 followers as of today.

The race between Mubarak and ElBaradei has been heated at times, but the rhetoric isn't inflammatory. Neither candidate is calling for revolution in the streets, which is one of the things that makes this particular political race so interesting and intriguing. This could be considered the first online campaign for political control within the region of the Middle East.

With Gamal Mubarak and ElBaradei vying for political influence within Egypt demonstrates the power of the world wide web to alter regimes through engagement with constituents.

U.S. President Obama employed the W3 as an excellent means of putting forth his message to the people. Others would point to the half a billion U.S. dollars of campaign funds Mr. Obama raised through his web site. Both are positive, producing connectivity with the people and lessening the control of special interests. Instead, the people are financing the campaign – a truer, purer form of democracy.

This will be an interesting race to follow in the months and years ahead. With Gamal Mubarak and ElBaradei vying for political influence within Egypt demonstrates the power of the world wide web to alter regimes through engagement with constituents.

BUILDING POLITICAL COALITIONS - PRIME MINISTER SAAD HARIRI OF LEBANON

The second son of Rafiq Hariri, Saad, took over the leadership of Lebanon upon his father's death and after a long, internal struggle, Saad Hariri became the country's prime Minister in November, 2009.

Saad also took the lead of the "Future Movement," which was founded by his father. He also led the "March 14 Alliance" responsible for the "March Revolution." This revolution forced Syrian troops to leave Lebanese territory that it had occupied since the country's civil war that took place in the mid-1970s. The Forces of the 14th of March maintains a Facebook account with over 7,000 fans.

The current Prime Minister of Lebanon was educated at the McDonough School of Business, part of Georgetown University located in Washington, D.C. After graduation, Saad managed a significant part of the family's financial empire, placing him in the middle of an expanding global economy based on free market principles – principles Saad Hariri learned during his years at Georgetown University.

The young leader faced stiff opposition within Lebanon, taking several months to form a coalition cabinet. His willingness to reach out and embrace differing views enabled Hariri to build a solid coalition within the government, creating stability among the country's political, business and financial communities.

Further, Hariri has reached out to Syria, long-time occupiers of parts of Lebanon, traveling to Damascus to meet with Syrian President Basher Assad. Reconciliation soon followed. Finally, because of strong business ties, the country's leader maintains strong ties with the Saudis and has the solid backing of the United States and many other Western democracies.

Once again, Saad Hariri is an example of how government connectivity with constituents creates stability and, even more, makes citizens a part of daily governance. Prime Minister Hariri's popularity with the people is, in part due, to his on-going dialogue with the Lebanese people through his web site at www.saadhariri.com.

Hariri's political party also maintains an active website at Future Movement.

It should be noted that these leaders recognize that **political legitimacy is the foundation of a stable government** and as a consequence a growing gross national product (GNP) – the total output of a nation in the delivery of goods and services.

This recognition of the importance of a stable government among the coming generation of Middle East leaders bodes well for the national economies of the region. Currently highly dependent on oil and gas revenues, we can anticipate an economic diversification in oil-dependent nations as the countries move to establish a knowledge economy, similar to the West, instituted on a world-class university system and enterprise grade, 21st century businesses working and thriving in every sector of the economy, from computer coding to innovative Islamic financial services companies. A more progressive Middle East holds great promise.

Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Prime Minister and Vice-president of the United Arab Emirates, is given much credit for turning Dubai into the financial and business capital of the Middle East

ENGAGING THE POPULATION - HH SHEIKH MOHAMMED, RULER OF DUBAI

Many other progressive leaders, either in place or soon to assume leadership roles, are active on the web. Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Prime Minister and Vice-president of the United Arab Emirates, is given much credit for turning Dubai into the financial and business capital of the Middle East – the place where Western and Eastern businesspeople, entrepreneurs and established companies in broad-based industries – meet in the spirit of common goals.

This has made Dubai one of the most important centers of commerce in the Middle East, creating wealth and prosperity across the complete population spectrum. Dubai is a thriving, destination city in which businesses from around the world establish headquarters in the region, employing and expanding the middle class.

The popular ruler of Dubai actively employs special media to engage the people of the United Arab Emirates. No longer a distant, remote figure, the Ruler of Dubai maintains his own page on Facebook, one of the most popular social media experiments currently underway on the world wide web. You can follow the Sheik's posts on your computer. His Facebook pages is: http://www. facebook.com/HHSheikhMohammed. He currently has over 150,000 followers on Facebook and the leader's profile page provides open access to the Sheik's biographical data presented in terms that people understand and, therefore, appreciate.

Sheik Mohammed serves as another excellent example of how the web is an important tool of communication, interaction and personalization of leaders. Those who follow the Premier's posts recognize the humanity behind the position, the man behind the title, creating an accessible, engaged, contemporary and pro-active approach to government and connectivity with the public.

In all of these cases, the web is being put to mutually beneficial use. The public develops a personal relationship with leadership. Government leaders create an informed, engaged population – stakeholders in the country's growth and success.

Qaboos bin Said has turned Oman from a isolated, centralized nation into a modern, thriving economy using the country's small oil revenues to finance these improvements to benefit the people.

PLACING TECHNOLOGY ON THE NATIONAL AGENDA - HIS MAJESTY, SULTAN QABOOS BIN SAID OF OMAN

Oman's 70-year-old Sultan Qaboos bin Said has lifted Oman to new levels of internal openness, engagement with "outside" societies and has turned Oman into a model of the modern Islamic state. The country boasts a highway system, artistic monuments and architecture, Western-style shopping malls, quality, 5-star accommodations and modern office buildings that symbolize a growing, thriving, expansive economy.

In addition to these surface changes, internal changes in government tell an even more revealing story. While the Sultan maintains absolute authority within Oman's government structure, Qaboos bin Said has instituted parliamentary elections in which woman vote and seek office. Power sharing and gender equality.

Other deeper changes within Omani society include: engagement with Western and non-Muslim nations at the highest levels, expanded access to uncensored print media, the development of a secondary level school system (an investment in the country's future, no doubt), and an expanded system of health care for Omani citizens. In short, this Western-educated monarch has turned Oman from a wind-swept, desolate, isolated, centralized nation into a modern, thriving economy using the country's small oil revenues to finance these improvements to benefit the people.

Further, Sultan Qaboos bin Said is on Facebook and a strong advocate of the use of information technology, seeing the W3 as the important tool that it is. Speaking at the annual session of the Council of Oman, the country's leader made clear his views on the world wide web and its use in nation building and middle class evolution and growth:

"Information technology and communications have now become the main elements that move forward the development process in this third millennium," His Majesty said.

"Therefore, we have accorded our attention to finding a national strategy to develop the skills and abilities of citizens in this domain with the aim of further developing e-government services. We are closely following the important steps that we have made in this regard. We call upon all government institutions to speedily enhance their performance, and to facilitate their services, by applying digital technology in order to usher the Sultanate into the constantly evolving spheres for applying knowledge."

Political Activism In the Broader Muslim World

Western media and Western governments have often viewed the web as "hotbeds" of extremism – sites designed to recruit radicals as well as to spread anti-Western sentiment. This conception has lead to sanctions against the export of web-based assets from the U.S. and other Western nations.

But, is this the true picture? Is the World Wide Web merely a tool being manipulated, monitored, sanctioned, censored and otherwise misused by radical political groups putting forth an anti-social agenda and by national leaders disseminating dis-information for the benefit of a country's power structure?

A central finding of a report called "The Berkman Center for Internet and Society, Mapping the Arabic Blogosphere: Politics, Culture and Dissent," published in June, 2009, provides clear evidence that radical Islamic groups have not exploited the W3 successfully. The study identified a base network of approximately 35,000 active blogs, and produced a baseline assessment concluding that "...Arabic language blogs are not to any significant degree used to support extremism, preach hate, or organize terrorist activities. In fact, support for terrorism or violent confrontation with the West appears to be rare."

If we go beyond the blogosphere and examine the most popular social media venues, and in particular the largest platform - Facebook, we find numerous political activist and advocacy groups that employ web technology to call for change – change to a more open, more inclusive and even democratic society.

Looking at the online Muslim populations at a national level, we see a diverse geographic make up with only two Arab countries in the top ten. Iran, Turkey, and Indonesia have the largest online populations today. While Facebook is censored in Iran, it is no coincidence that Indonesia and Turkey also rank #3 and #4 globally among top countries by number of active Facebook users right behind the U.S. and U.K.

▶ Top 10 Nations By Muslim Population Online

	REGION	MUSLIM POPULATION	ONLINE MUSLIM POPULATION
1	Iran	73,777,000	35,781,845
2	Turkey	73,619,000	25,398,555
3	Indonesia	202,867,000	25,358,375
4	Pakistan	174,082,000	18,452,692
5	Egypt	78,513,000	16,566,243
6	Nigeria	78,056,000	12,567,016
7	India	160,945,000	11,266,150
8	Malaysia	16,581,000	10,893,717
9	Saudi Arabia	24,949,000	6,761,179
10	China	21,667,000	6,218,429

Here are a few potent examples across the Muslim world of political advocacy leaders, groups, and campaigns that employ web-based assets:

NATIONAL UNITY PROGRAMS

An innovative government program initiated by the Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Najib Razak, the **1Malaysia Program,** has a goal to preserve and enhance racial unity in the predominantly Muslim nation of Malaysia among the ethnic Malay, Chinese, and Indian groups that make up it's population. The 1Malaysia website is intended "...to initiate an open and vital dialogue exploring our Malaysian identity, purpose, and direction." The 1Malaysia Facebook profile has attracted over 50,000 fans.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on two luxury hotels in Jakarta, the global online community and especially Indonesians united to show their support to fight against terrorism through the **#IndonesiaUnite Movement**. By using Twitter, people expressed themselves by twittering the word #indonesiaunite with their personal messages to pass on their support that everyone is united against terrorism. The #indonesiaunite hash tag became the TOP TRENDING TOPIC in Twitter at the time and the movement continues on Facebook through IndonesiaUnite! page with a whopping 480,000 fans!

THEOCRATIC ADVOCACY

Theocracy is a form of government in which a state is governed by officials who are regarded as divinely guided or where prevailing state laws are based on religious laws. Iran is considered a Muslim theocracy and the Vatican a Christian theocracy as both are ruled by religious laws and figures, the Grand Ayatollah and the Pope, respectfully. Some critics point to Israel as a Jewish theocracy as some of its state laws are based on Jewish law albeit that their leaders are chosen through a democratic process. Egypt's largest theocratic advocacy group, The Muslim Brotherhood, in on Facebook. Though officially banned by the Egyptian government, **the Muslim Brotherhood** still garners substantial popular support.

According to the Brotherhood's web site, located at http://www.ikhwanweb.com/, the mission of the Muslim Brotherhood – Egypt is: "…to install "Islamic" governments in the Muslim world through the establishment of Sharia as the legal system of these new governments and are also interested in human rights. With branches in several Arab and Muslim countries, the Brotherhood portrays itself as a more authentic alternative to secular authoritarian rulers and religious extremists of the al-Qaida variety. The main mission of ikwanweb is to present the Muslim Brotherhood vision right from the source and rebut misconceptions about the movement in Western nations. The two Ikhwan profiles on Facebook have approximately 1,700 fans in total.

PLIGHT OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

Advocacy groups use the W3 to put forth an agenda of self-determination such as the Muslim Uyghurs in Central Asia, in an area known as East Turkestan or Xinjiang, an autonomous region in the People's Republic of China.. The group's public face, **Rebiya Kadeer,** remains the most effective civil rights leader among the Uyghurs seeking more freedom from the Chinese government. After deadly ethnic riots in this region, Chinese authorities have shut off the Internet there, local residents are still barred from sending text messages and getting online. The organization's web site is located at http://www.uhrp.org/ and Rabiya Kadeer maintains a Facebook account with about 1,000 fans.

The Indian and Pakistani governments both lay claim to Kashmir and, on at least two occasions, the world stood on the brink of nuclear war between those enemy states. As the Indian government tightens control of web usage, **the Kashmiri separatists** have taken their struggle to the web, an effective tool for creating broad-based support for the organization's goal of a free state of Kashmir, controlled not by India or Pakistan, but rather a new state that may serve to defuse the struggle for control of this region between two nuclear powers. The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) now on Facebook is positioned as a political front "...formed as an alliance of 26 political, social and religious organizations in Kashmir to achieve the right of self-determination according to United Nations Security Council Resolution 47. "Hurriyat" in Urdu means freedom.

MUSLIM WOMEN AS POLITICAL ADVOCATES

Married to King Abdullah II of Jordan, **Queen Rania** is a strong online advocate supporting many programs to improve the livelihoods of Jordan's citizens and the nation's prospects. Queen Rania's Facebook account enjoys over 170,000 fans and is a platform for her 1Goal campaign to make education a reality for the millions of boys and girls who remain out of school across the world.

Dubbed by the local press as "the Iranian Michelle Obama", **Zahra Rahnavard**, is married to Mir Hossein Mousavi, who was President Ahmadinejad's strongest challenger in Iran's recent presidential election. The 64-year-old diminutive grandmother, a political scientist and sculptress who heads a university, has been making a big impact on Iranian politics. She is a key asset in her husband's campaign for reform and a strong women's rights activists in Iran. Zahra's Facebook account is home to about 43,000 ardent fans.

The consort of the Emir of Qatar, **HH Sheikha Mozah** bint Nasser Al Missned, is the chairperson of the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development. She plays a leading role in education and social reforms in Qatar, and is often a spokesperson showcasing Qatar's ambitious development programs. She is also a celebrity advocate as UNESCO's Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education. HH Sheikha Mozah's Facebook account has 26,000 fans.

POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING

A growing political movement on Facebook with over 45,000 fans, We Want Imran Khan To Be The Next Prime Minster Of Pakistan!, is organized to have Pakistan's former cricket hero **Imran Khan** elected into office. Imran Khan maintains his own Facebook account with more than 75,000 fans and strives to bridge the gap between Pakistan and the West - "They (Westerners) do not understand Islam, and I think that is one area where perhaps I hope one day I will play a role in actually making people understand what we perceive Islam to be."

The Fan page, Saif al-Islam al-Gaddafi, is devoted to about 4,500 followers of the son of Libyan leader Moammar Al Qadhafi who may one day play a part in the Libyan government. About five years ago, the Libyan government surprised the world when it was announced it would dismantle its nuclear, chemical and ballistic missile programs. Since that time, according to U.S. Congressional records, American, British, and international officials have inspected and removed or destroyed key components of those programs. The events leading up to this dramatic change had taken place behind the scenes. The man who initiated the contacts with the U.S. was not the Libyan leader himself but his son, **Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi.** U.S. Congressional records showed that Saiful Islam met in London with American House Representatives. Saiful Islam at the time was attending school in London, working on his Ph.D. in Economics. This was but another example of how western-educated leaders were reaching out to the U.S.

A secular Shiite, **Ayad Allawi,** has returned to the center of Iraqi politics after receiving millions of votes from Sunni Arabs, a minority that has felt marginalized since Sunni dictator Saddam Hussein was toppled in 2003. Former prime minister Ayad Allawi's political bloc recently won the most seats in Iraq's parliamentary election. Allawi and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki are now vying to get a majority of parliamentarians on their side in order to be appointed prime minister for the next four years. Ayad Allawi is on Facebook with over 6,000 fans running on a secular campaign of "Our Future Together" and "Iraq for every Iraqi".

The Green Movement is a series of actions after the 2009 Iranian presidential election, in which protesters have demanded the removal of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from office. Green was first the symbol of **Mir Hossein Mousavi's campaign** but after the election, it became the symbol of unity and hope for those asking for annulment of what they regarded as a fraudulent election. Supporters used Twitter and Facebook to spread the word. Moussavi campaign managers organized supporters, planned gatherings and garnered support of 126,000 fans through Mossavi's Facebook pages dedicated to the Reformist candidate.

Turkey is entering a new battle between the religiously conservative government (the ruling Justice and Development Party or AKP) and the strictly secular opposition party (the Republican People's Party, or CHP). As the government plans for a constitutional overhaul, the reform is aimed according to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan "...at strengthening democracy and bringing Turkey closer to standards of the European Union (which the country wants to join)". The fight is about who gets to decide important changes in the country from civilian oversight of the military, strengthening of woman's right, and level of separation of religion and state. Kemal Kılıçdaroglu, the deputy president of the CHP opposition party, plays a key role in the debate and is a popular figure in Turkey evidenced by a gathering of 190,000 fans on Kemal's Facebook page.

YOUTH MOVEMENTS

An independent media outlet that is youth-orientated and Jordanian-based, 7iber.com, is a place for citizen-generated content to flourish, fostering a critical and informed civil society through an independent and participatory new media. The organization offers a model for free speech in Jordan and successfully launched a viral Gaza conflict campaign. Their website and 7iber's Facebook page with 1,400 fans was the place where a donation drive for Gaza was announced, as well as new volunteer opportunities and accomplishments; pictures and video from the campaign disseminating these on other platforms.

The above findings clearly indicate that the world wide web is not a tool that fosters extremism. Instead, the broad and diverse activity today makes a compelling case that the W3 is more effective as a tool that promotes moderation, reform and increased connectivity among Muslims across the globe.

Greater interaction among Muslim cultures and nation states will augment and increase the role of moderate and progressive Islam, creating bonds among believers in faith and cultural values. Indeed, Muslim radicals will continue to utilize the web as a tool of recruitment but the web is a reflection of the people who utilize it. Within the global Muslim population, the vast majority of adherents hold moderate views which will only be re-enforced through engagement of like-minded people on a global scale. The web reaffirms moderation among Muslim populations and poses limited danger as a tool for recruitment for extremist groups.

The W3 is more effective as a tool that promotes moderation, reform and increased connectivity among Muslims across the globe.

Digital Policy for the World Wide Web

If the W3 is, indeed, a blank slate, it will assuredly be written upon by political groups such as those highlighted attempting to affect change.

These Walls on Facebook are, in essence, recruitment centers, frequented by citizenry who believe that engagement and debate is inevitable and beneficial.

Wise, enlightened government leaders recognize the importance of keeping Facebook and other political sites open to the population, thus shining the light of rational thought on differing agendas. Were governments to shut down or ban websites, several negative outcomes would occur:

▼

• **Web sites of radical organizations would be elevated in importance.**

• **The government would show fear that extremists and/or advocates might create turmoil within the country.**

• **The messages put forth on some of these web sites would gain credence, though the information contained on these sites serves the sole purpose of any propaganda – to convert believers to a cause, be it religious, political or a combination of the two.**

• **Moderate Muslims would be denied access to the views put forth on web sites and, would therefore, be less aware of the dangers extremists present, and the opportunities progressive advocates afford.**

• **Moderate Muslims would be less likely to turn to their legitimate national and local government leaders to dis-band groups that spread hateful rhetoric in the name of Islam. Moderate Muslims realize that part of their religion has been "hijacked" by political extremists and exploited in regional conflicts.**

• **An open exchange of views is not a threat to an open government with a stable economic base. Citizens will turn to legitimate government outlets to address extremism in any form.**

• **The majority tends to be moderate and forward-thinking in its views, a positive for the maintenance of a stable government and an expanding economic base.**

For numerous reasons, it is wise to enable access to a variety of views and philosophies, religious tenets and political intentions. In this way, people recognize the options before them.

Muslim radicalism and advocacy on the web serves many positive purposes for progressive governments in this region of the world.

The Role of the U.S. In Creating Open Web Access

It is clearly in the best interests of Western democratic states to encourage uncensored, unfettered access to the world wide web among Muslim nations. And indeed, America recognizes that it is in their country's best interests to encourage and facilitate uncensored access to the web as a tool of engagement – a means of reaching out to Muslims in a non-military fashion for the benefit of all parties and equally for Muslim citizenry to engage their own governments.

The Western world must provide assistance in spreading web use as a tool to support political leaders and political advocacy groups exercising open engagement. Often these groups put forth moderate platforms. They are supported by the moderate middle class within Muslim countries – the very people the West must engage. However, the U.S. and Western nations have only recently recognized the value of providing the technology – blogging software, forum software, email clients, VoIP services and other means of social interaction to build support for moderate Muslim opinion and, more importantly, engagement.

The West would be well advised to take a closer look at the so-called "radical" agendas put forth by some Muslim groups. The leaders of the West will quickly discover that, by lifting the sanctions on the export of web technology, these Western states help themselves by aiding in the creation of a moderate Islamic community opposed to the radicalism of religious and quasi-military groups that also populate the web with their anti-Western sentiment.

To this end, the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control, the OFAC, amended licenses to facilitate web access in countries deemed as hostile states to America.

The document addresses the Iranian Transaction Regulations, the Sudanese Sanctions Regulations and the long-established Cuban Assets Control Regulations to strengthen access to web-based assets within these countries, and to encourage freedom of speech and dissemination of information to the widest audience world wide.

A spokesperson for the Treasury Department, Deputy Secretary Neal Wolin, on the easing of licensing restrictions in these three countries stated:

"Consistent with the Administration's deep commitment to the universal rights of all the world's citizens, the issuance of these general licenses will make it easier for individuals in Iran, Sudan and Cuba to use the Internet to communicate with each other and with the outside world. Today's actions will enable Iranian, Sudanese and Cuban citizens to exercise their most basic rights."

The essence of this easing of restrictions is intended to authorize U.S. companies to export to Iran, the Sudan and Cuba both services and software to encourage the growth of personal

communications using web resources including browser software, blogging applications, email clients, instant messaging technology and chat functions that are routinely a part of Western business and personal activities.

Deputy Secretary Wolin explained further, "As recent events in Iran have shown, personal Internet-based communications like email, instant messaging and social networking are powerful tools. This software will foster and support the free flow of information – a basic human right– for all Iranians.

At the same time, as we take these steps, the [Obama] Administration will continue aggressively to enforce existing sanctions and to work with our international partners to increase the pressure on the Government of Iran to meet its international obligations."

This news, while encouraging, still places the implementation of web access squarely on the shoulders of national leaders. Indeed, the U.S. has freed up both the technology and methodology to increase web access among all peoples. But to go further in attempting to force national leaders to grant access to web communications would be seen as attempting to influence internal activities within sovereign nations.

While the easing of sanctions is certainly a positive step, the hard truth is that it does not go far enough. The West benefits through the exportation of web-based assets – the tools needed to engage moderate Muslims seeking a more enlightened approach to governance. And while the lifting of sanctions against Iran, the Sudan and Cuban indicates a change in U.S. policy, more must be done.

The U.S., the de facto leader in the West (despite its recent financial declines) must issue clear, unambiguous statements presenting qualified arguments against censorship of web access among, not just Muslims, but of all world communities. Indeed, search engine powerhouse, Google, has withdrawn from engagement with China because of perceived censorship on the part of the Chinese government. The results of this pull-out will be known in the future, but at this stage we have no firm data on the impact of Google's retreat.

However, Google is a public company, not a government agency and, therefore acts with different motives and objectives than the national governments of Western nations. Google is a for-profit company. It has shareholders to whom it must answer. It must remain profitable while establishing policies that benefit the company and its ownership – the millions of individuals, mutual funds, pension plans and other financial entities that invest in Google stock. The objectives of Google may be seen as noble, advocating unfettered access to the web, but let's keep in mind that unfettered web access is the key to Google's success.

This is not necessarily the case with governments. The U.S. government is not a for-profit entity. Its objectives are different, and while pundits compare Google's pull-out from the Chinese search market as evidence that the West wants open access to the W3, it's a false analogy to compare the actions of a publicly-held enterprise in the private sector and the actions of state governments – the U.S federal government, the governments that form the EU and other governments allied with Western beliefs.

The issue goes beyond censorship as political opposition websites are becoming a primary target of hackers. This new phenomenon of defacing dissident and opposition websites seems to be spreading across the world in attempts to suppress political activism. Even though it is not always clear who is behind these cyber attacks, threatened governments are being accused of organizing campaigns as new means of cracking down on oppositional activities online.

If we examine the activities on the highlighted websites we discover people using the Web to express religious beliefs radical or otherwise, to join forums that engender debate on opposing views, to act as citizen journalists publicizing their points of view, and to call for reform or express dissent towards established governments and their policies. Any attempts to curtail this platform whether by the withholding of enabling technology, acts of censorship, or organized cyber attacks is much akin to "...prohibiting the free exercise of religion; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

What is the U.S. to do when the World Wide Web is likened to a platform used to exercise the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, part of the Bill of Rights guaranteeing civil liberties? The U.S. government has yet to take a clear, firm stand on the issue of open access of the Web as a matter of foreign policy.

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Critics of America's covert operations in Afghanistan were quick to point out that despite the stunning military victories against the Soviet Union, not enough was done to manage the peace. The War left the country's civil and central governance infrastructure decimated. With no forthcoming funds from the U.S. Congress to rebuild the country in a new image, the blank slate was quickly painted over by the Taliban covering the country with a radical theocratic form of governance and anti-Western sentiments.

With a current online population of a quarter of a billion Muslims and anticipating another 750 million brothers and sisters to join them over the next five years, the Web is a tabula rasa that the U.S. and the West can ill-afford to leave unattended.

The Future of the Web in the Muslim World

Looking forward, the question becomes, will current leadership in Muslim countries, and their incumbents in waiting, show the political courage to provide clear access to the world wide web and the promise it holds.

The wave of fundamentalism that has taken hold in the Muslim world places a genuine stumbling block on the road to the democratization of the Middle East and the far-flung Muslim world that extends into the Far East and northward into Russia. And U.S. influence is of ambiguous value under current conditions.

However, by taking the position of loosening sanctions and authorizing the exportation of web-based communications software, America assumes a more benign posture in the view of moderate Muslims.

Instead, the U.S. and Western democracies must make clear that access to the Internet by Muslims serves the internal best interests of all nations. The West recognizes that the web is a tool of unity and organization, with numerous studies to support this position. The Greens in Iran, the movement toward racial harmony currently underway in Malaysia and the growth of the opposition movement, put forth by Saad ElBaradei in Egypt, clearly indicate that web access has the ability to unify schools of thought, especially among a growing moderate middle class.

The future of web communications in the Middle East, and within the entire Muslim world, relies on government leaders to recognize that this accessibility is self-serving. Web access builds unity of purpose and view, national pride, freedom of speech and thought and engagement with new ideas and new views.

Prudent leaders of Muslim countries who see the value of engagement in building a strong base of political legitimacy and government stability also recognize that this solid base fosters economic growth that leads to an expanding middle class, made up of moderates. These leaders also recognize that it is in their own best interests to

encourage the use of the web to facilitate open communication with the West. This will grow national economies. This will encourage innovation, application of new technology and a more expansive view of the place of Islam in a world that is moving at the speed of digital.

Government leaders must recognize the importance of a thriving, growing middle class – a large group of merchants, educators, business leaders, financiers and innovators. These people comprise the center that holds against the extremes, who will make use of the world wide web as a tool of propaganda and recruitment.

The Western democracies must take a role in changing attitudes of leaders in the Middle East. However, the role these democracies take must be one of proactive facilitation – providing the means to access the web. The recent lifting of sanctions against the export of web assets to Iran serve as an example of non-intrusive engagement in the Middle East. The U.S. and its allies must not appear to be attempting to change the cultural values of the region or of Islam.

The upcoming gathering of a billion Muslims on the World Wide Web can usher in a storm of fundamental reforms that will propel the Middle East forward.

Government leaders who continue to control and/or censor access to the web must recognize the disservice this leadership does to both the growth of the country's economy and in the development of an increasing number of stakeholders that make up a strong middle class. These are the people with something to lose to extremists. These are also the people with much to gain through engagement with countries and tribes outside the Muslim sphere of influence.

Finally, changes must come swiftly. They must be broad-based changes of perspective, values and attitudes. The W3 has, indeed, created a global economy. Limiting access to this vital communications resource will only cause these countries to fall further and further behind the technology curve.

The role of the world wide web in growing economies and providing stability among the governed can not be denied. There's ample evidence that services like email, instant messaging, payment gateways and social networking serve, not only the interests of the people, these web assets serve the interests of the government leaders who hold power throughout the Muslim world.

Only through engagement with other countries, other people, businesses and investment capital will the economies of the Middle East grow beyond revenues derived from natural resources, primarily oil and gas. The web offers the opportunity to foster entrepreneurship, technological innovation and access to information available no where else.

Indeed, the future of the Middle East and the world-wide Muslim community can be bright. With prudent Muslim leaders and active facilitation of the West, the upcoming gathering of a billion Muslims on the World Wide Web can usher in a storm of fundamental reforms that will propel the Middle East forward.

The genie is out of the bottle and wise leaders recognize that there's no way to get that genie back into the bottle.

COUNTRY	POLITICAL LEADER	FAN BASE	FACEBOOK URL
Nation Building			
Egypt	Campaign for Mohamed ElBaradei	225,000	http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=123551066565&ref=nf
Egypt	Campaign for Gamal Mubarak	18,000*	http://www.facebook.com/Sharek.eg#!/Sharek.eg?v=wall
UAE	HH Sheik Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum	159,000	http://www.facebook.com/HHSheikhMohammed
Lebanon	Saad Hariri's March 14 Alliance	7,000	http://www.facebook.com/14march.org
Oman	His Majesty, Sultan Qaboos Bin Said	13,000	http://www.facebook.com/pages/His-Majesty-Sultan-Qaboos-Bin-Said-Al-Said/10537412805?v=wall
National Unity Campaigns			
Malaysia	1Malaysia	50,000	http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=166361410463&v=info
Indonesia	#IndonesiaUnite! Movement	480,000	http://www.facebook.com/indonesiaunite?v=wall#!/indonesiaunite?v=wall
Theocratic Advocacy			
Egypt	Muslim Brotherhood	1,700*	http://www.facebook.com/pages/IkhwanWiki/245113582082
Plight of Ethnic Minorities			
China	Uyghur civil rights in China	1,000	http://www.facebook.com/RebiyaKadeer#!/RebiyaKadeer?v=wall
India	Kashmiri separatists	1,100*	http://www.facebook.com/pages/Mirwaiz-Muhammad-Omar-Farooq/26638257972?v=info
Muslim Women as Political			
Jordan	Quen Rania	175,000	http://www.facebook.com/QueenRania?v=wall
Iran	Zahra Rahnavard	43,000	Zahra's Facebook account
Qatar	HH Sheikha Mozah	26,000	http://www.facebook.com/pages/HH-Sheikha-Mozah-Bint-Nasser-Al-Missned/10208116846
Political Campaigning			
Pakistan	Imran Khan for Next Prime Minister of Pakistan	77,000	http://www.facebook.com/pages/Imran-Khan/22596907359#!/pages/Imran-Khan/22596907359?v=wall
Libya	Campaign for Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi	4,500	http://www.facebook.com/pages/Saif-al-Islam-al-Gaddafi/10917256698?v=wall
Turkey	Kemal Kılıçdaroglu CHP	190,000	http://www.facebook.com/pages/Kemal-Kilicdaroglu/76599755300
Iran	Iran's Green Movement	127,000	http://www.facebook.com/mousavi
Iraq	Ayad Allawi's "Iraq for every Iraqi"	6,300	http://www.facebook.com/pages/Ayad-Allawi/186377731761?
Youth Movements			
Jordan	7iber Youth Movement	1,400	http://www.facebook.com/7iber

Source: Facebook.com, Digital Daya Intelligence Databases
Note: Representative sample from approximately 125 indentified Facebook accounts. Applied criteria require active accounts in above political categories and over 1,000 fans. Additional major categories of online activism include Human Rights Advocacy not outlined here.
*Fan base totals from multiple accounts. Fan base is non-unique and total may overstate size of fan base.