

Promoting Religious Freedom During the Campaign Against Terrorism": Panel 3 Question and Answer

(left to right): R. Richard Newcomb, Patrick Merloe, The Hon. Robert Seiple, Judith Siegel, and Zlatko Kovach (presenting the testimony of Georges Fauriol in his absence).

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Thank you very much to each of our panelists. We now will invite our Commissioners if they have questions. Ambassador Stith?

COMMISSIONER STITH: As I've listened to the testimony today, not just yours but that of the previous panels as well, it seems to me that the nature of the testimony is such as to affirm the notion that we can win this war against terrorism or fanaticism, that religious pluralism and freedom and justice and tolerance can carry the day. Or to say it another way, that it's possible for us to make the case that our way is the better way. One point. My question though is this: why aren't we getting a bigger bounce out of the literal liberation of Afghanistan? I mean, you've got people dancing in the streets, shaving their beards, excited about the possibilities for the future. And yet it seems that we are not getting the bounce out of there that we ought. Are there things that we can be doing differently in order to get that bounce? I mean, what ought we be doing differently?

MR. SEIPLE: I'll just start. Maybe we don't want to get a real big bounce. I mean this is a long conflict, and there are going to be ups and downs and we have been prepared through the verbal exchanges with our President that the rough stuff is yet to come. I think we have to be careful not to celebrate too quickly, and have to be careful as to how that celebration may be viewed in other parts of the world. There may be wisdom in taking the slow way and the long way to having this accrue to the benefit of all peoples who would like to see a more diverse pluralistic, democratic world.

MR. MERLOE: If I could have just a word. Based on communications that I personally have had with our field offices in some 40 countries, first of all, I think it's important to note that we have received some credit. The numbers of expressions of sympathy and support that poured in from around the world from grass roots leaders--I was in Bangladesh just before the event--my e-mail was flooded, from political leaders across the world, both in parties and government, just tremendous, and we've compiled these for Madeline Albright and others on our board. Secondly, in the months that have ensued, we have continually received the same kinds of expressions of support for our government and for the western pluralist ideas, not for the specifics as applied in countries like Bangladesh or Yemen or Mali or so on, because national characteristics and traditions infuse with democracy. The next thing I think is important to note is that there has not been the uprising, uproar throughout the Islamic world that was predicted at the time that we decided to take military action, and I think that's in part because there is an isolation of extremism and terrorism that's accepted, although not spoken about largely in the Islamic world. And the fact that we have respected Afghans and have used the Northern Alliance and other Afghans in our military efforts. I think these things can help us learn some lessons about how to project ourselves through the months ahead, through respect, through moving multilaterally and through looking, as the Ambassador said, in the long term in this work. I think that's how we prevail.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Felice.

COMMISSIONER GAER: Well, I wanted to pursue some of the very interesting recalibrations that were suggested by Ambassador Seiple. Mr. Ambassador, you said, as did, I believe, Under-Secretary Dobriansky in her initial remarks, that we need to focus more on win/win strategies. Now, the most successful--and she also spoke about quiet diplomacy and various others in our panels today spoke about that as well. The experience of both the human rights movement and the movement for greater religious freedom has had a different lesson, if you like, and that has been that it's only by speaking out, and it's only by taking firm action or threatening firm action, that real changes seem to become apparent, or at least they move more quickly. You spoke about win/win strategies, and I'm wondering what elements you would see as being needed in the tool kit in order to bring about those kinds of strategies, and I was wondering if you could specifically suggest to us about any of the countries that have been the subjects of particular concern of the United States or those that haven't made it onto that list that would benefit greater from the kind of win/win strategy you describe? In other words, could you give us an example of a case where we could have done something differently and better or still have that opportunity? And if others want to join in, I'd be very interested as well.

MR. SEIPLE: Well, I would always be for a win/win strategy as opposed to the alternative. The alternative is to carry the stick and to speak the words verbally, and every other rich way, through sanctions or with periodic reports to unjust people in public. We now have I think four religious freedom reports in the course of a year, at least three of them, one from the Commission and two that emanate from the State Department. And we have the ability to do that. The question would be: does it do any good? I mean, everybody likes to be--and to speak truth to power. The question, is anybody on the powerful side listening? And sometimes it's a lot more effective. It's been my experience that it's been a lot more effective to go into a difficult situation and behind the scenes say those things, behind the scenes make sure that the principles are known, behind the scenes make sure folks know what's at stake, and then give the clear impression, reality that you want to work with that government to foster something better. And my plight was that if a government doesn't see it in their interest to change, they're not going to change. And we continue to yell and rant and rave and all the rest. If there is an outcome of that, it seems to me it appeases the advocates because they got it off their chest, and unfortunately, the blow-back inside the country may make it worse for those that we have been called upon to serve. Now, any country is different. The easiest countries to work with are the most pragmatic. We've got something, you've got something, we work together, we each get something. But there are those countries--and we have done that, we have done that to get people out of jail, we have done that to register churches, we have done that to create a different environment. And in so doing, because it was done privately, we've built a level of trust that gives us a much better platform for doing things in the future. I think we have to be very sure and very discerning when we reach the point where diplomacy no longer works, where there's nothing else we can do, where there are no initiatives forthcoming, when you get to the place where the only tool you have left in your quiver, arrow in the quiver, is

some form of sanction or public undressing, because once you do that, it's like firing your best friend. He's no longer your best friend. There are things you cannot do with that person ever again, and you put back the relationship so far that it's very hard, in changing times, in changing realities, to get back in there with the trust that you need to work on very difficult things.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Dr. Siegel, I wonder if I could ask a question about efforts relating to Voice of America. There have been hearings on the Hill recently, as you well know, regarding the balance of Voice of America and whether it is in fact slightly overbalanced. Can you tell us, "A", what's going on in response to that, and those concerns that have been congressionally expressed; two, if there are plans to increase broadcasts in the Middle East, and if so, the nature of those; third, your opinion on the utility of those, as well as other parts of the world that we've talked about today, and then one final separate question is a little bit about some of the foreign language activities on your publications and your website. If you would just give us some sense of that.

DR. SIEGEL: Sure. I can help with three and four. I'm afraid that in the consolidation of USIA to the State Department, we were severed from our colleagues in VOA, and I can't speak for them. And I know what I read in the press, and I know what I chat with in the corridors with my friends, but I'm afraid this is not the forum to respond. So someone else will have to give you that information.

Third was my opinion, and we'll skip that, I have that. Let me talk about foreign language and speak more broadly about public diplomacy, and by indirection it may answer your questions. Our website and--for information, let me just give you the address. It's kind of silly to dance around. The website address is www.usinfo.state.gov. When you look at the front page you will find an astonishing array of stuff, starting with day-to-day immediate text and transcripts called The Washington File that used to be called The Wireless File historically, going for very deep--let me call them contextual things--any print publication that we'll publish goes up on the site. So for example, one of the things that I'm most excited about in my over 20 years of work with these programs was in the U.S. studies, which I used to direct, we published a book of--those of you who are old enough remember source books from college, primary readings--a book called Basic Readings in U.S. Democracy, where we have maybe 200, 300 pages of primary American democracy text. You can find that on our website. But also our materials are--the day-to-day materials are translated into French, and that's for sub-Saharan Africa primarily; Spanish, Russian, Arabic, and there, within the last two years, into Chinese. So we have those languages going all the time. Also locally, we use some local languages, and you know, they're languages that maybe are not as wide as the languages I just described. Translations are used locally, for example, Portuguese. We have a publication that's really--I guess it's more germane to this hearing than I would have thought, but we've recently published, in the last week or so, an astonishing publication called "The Network of Terrorism", which you find on the site, with a lot of guidance from Under Secretary Charlotte Beers. It's a astonishing publication that addresses the history of terrorism, the recent terrorist incident and U.S. response, including photos and charts and a map of al Qaeda network. I heard this morning that that publication has been translated into 31 languages and we're still going. They're not all up on the net, but we originally had a list of 14 language, Pashtu, Dari, Urdu, you know, the original 13. We're now up to 31. So our translation program is quite extensive, and when we ask for money, we always ask for more money for translations. Let me finally just briefly--and dare I say, unofficially at a setting like this--respond to your question about broadcasting, but we would respond to it in terms of public diplomacy. We talked about it at a staff meeting this morning. We walk a thin and challenging line. We are the U.S. Government, we are the State Department. We are now, in practical terms, at war. At the same time we are a country that respects diverse opinion, open communication, et cetera. So those are the principles we honor in our programs. We have more credibility when we demonstrate that our strength comes from our diversity, and not just our--you know, the multi-culturalism that it is trendy to talk about in academic circles, or was recently. But diversity of opinion, diversity of thought. We grapple in our public diplomacy programs, again not speaking for broadcasting, every day in having to respect that. But we reserved it for electronic journals when we started this enterprise a few years ago. It was--we have a section called Focus, and the Focus section is the U.S. policy section, so we typically have a State Department official, or depending on a topic, a Defense official, in some cases the President, the Secretary of State, writing the articles in the Focus Section. We then have a section called Commentary, where we include a range of responsible views on the topic that don't always heel the administration line, depending on the topic. You know, on topics like the environment, et cetera, we do have it every day. So I guess my answer is you have to show that you respect diverse opinion, but you also need to be cool about what our policies are and why we have them.

COMMISSIONER TAHIR-KHELI: Thank you. I would certainly very much like to have a copy of the--

DR. SIEGEL: Sure, I brought some.

COMMISSIONER TAHIR-KHELI: I'm sure other Commissioners would too.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Commissioner Shea?

COMMISSIONER SHEA: Yes. In addition to elections and preparing for party building, are the party institutes involved in civic education as well, and can you just briefly describe that if you are in these parts of the world, the Middle East right now?

MR. KOVACH: The International Republican Institute is involved both in political party building and in civil society building, and we have a couple of projects in Oman right now, through what I read in the testimony by Dr. Fauriol, but we call those democratic beachheads. We have actively engaged Islamist parties, as I mentioned, in Turkey, and as well as in other countries like in Indonesia or in East Timor. In other words, in parts of the world where there was recently conflict or some sort of religious tension. So we do work at the grass roots on civil society. In East Timor, in Indonesia, in Burma, for example, we have worked with NGOs and with organizations that deal with education of youth at a grass roots level.

COMMISSIONER SHEA: Do you do that in the Middle East?

MR. KOVACH: Only in Oman.

COMMISSIONER SHEA: In Oman?

MR. KOVACH: Yes.

COMMISSIONER SHEA: Do you know why that is?

MR. KOVACH: Well, as you know, the Islamic society is a very tight political species, and they're very integral, and we certainly are looking in other places as well. But there are a variety, a lot of factors that maybe applies to that decision.

CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Mr. Merloe.

MR. MERLOE: Like our republican counterpart, we're involved in quite a variety of programs in a large number of places around the world, so to go more directly to the heart of your question, in Middle Eastern countries and also Islamic countries found in Africa and in Asia, the Institute is involved in a myriad of programs. Of course what we get the headlines for or the note in the "New York Times" or "Washington Post" are

election observation with President Carter or something, and the watch dog voice of the Institute. What makes us unique is the party building activities that we and IRI share together, but with the bulk of the programming that takes place at NDI is in the area of civil society promotion, and also, of course, parliamentary strength. In each of these areas it's the political nexus, that grew into civic life of the country, where we concentrate. And that includes working with religious-based organizations in quite a number of countries. And political parties that are also religious based in quite a number of countries. In Yemen, for example, all of the political parties are Islamic parties. All of the civil organizations are Islamic identified, and many of them were Islamic based. In Morocco, in Algeria, in Jordan, in Lebanon, there are programs. But just importantly, I think, in countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia, countries in Africa where we work, and in each of these, I think to go back to Commissioner Gaer's question, the win/win message is if this country, as a world leader, and through our work in multilateral and intergovernmental organizations and with our allies, sends a message that is forceful and is consistent, that there are rewards for those who will come together to promote a more open society, and thereby combat and isolate terrorism. And that this is a sustained multifaceted commitment. Then the encouragement that's given to those who already believe that this is the way, is the most critical and most important thing that we can do. The material assistance that we can provide, the incentives and disincentives that can be provided reinforce that, that it's not really a substitute. You can't buy political will. And the work at the grass roots by organizations like ourselves, and so many human rights organizations promote this, is reinforce this lesson over and over again. CHAIRMAN YOUNG: Thank you very much. We have gone beyond the time that we asked you to stay with us, but we very much appreciate all of you and the extraordinarily helpful comments that you made. Thank you.