



CYBERNOTES

Truth Meets the Message

No public-diplomacy related news item received more coverage in blogs and the media in recent months than State Department official Alberto Fernandez' statement in an Oct. 21 interview with Al-Jazeera that U.S. policy in Iraq has displayed "arrogance" and "stupidity" (http://usepublicdiplomacy.com/index.php/newsroom/johnbrown_detail/061023_pdpbr/). The front pages of newspapers throughout the Middle East celebrated this unusual candor from a U.S. spokesman, while conservative commentators back here called for his head.

The Bush administration first asserted the quote was mistranslated, but dropped that claim when the BBC and NPR verified the text.

Fernandez, a member of the Senior Foreign Service, is director of the Office of Press and Public Diplomacy in the Bureau of Near East Affairs and a fluent Arabic speaker. He has been described as "one of America's most potent public diplomacy weapons in the region" (www.csmonitor.com/2006/1024/p10s01-woiq.html). A profile in the Aug. 29 *Newsweek* explained: "By breaking from the stilted style of traditional U.S. diplomats, Fernandez is able to connect with his Arab audiences and at the same time deliver a strong line on foreign policy" (www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14560221/site/newsweek/).

As the Oct. 21 interview transcript shows (www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2006/10/22/africa/ME_GEN_Iraq_Insurgent_Negotiations_Text.php). Fernandez' candor was part of an

We have lost international support not because foreigners hate our values but because they believe we are repudiating them and behaving contrary to them.

— Amb. Chas W. Freeman, Jr.,
Oct. 4, remarks to USIA
Alumni Association,
<http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/71.htm>

impassioned plea to Arabs to engage constructively in solving the region's problems. Indeed, as he himself explained, he was defending American policy in a region where everyone dislikes the U.S., and he was doing so in an aggressive way. "I know what the policy is and what the red lines are, and nothing I said hasn't been said before by senior officials," Fernandez told CNN. Secretary Rice herself had acknowledged publicly in March that the U.S. had made "thousands" of mistakes in Iraq.

Yet the following morning the State Department publicized Fernandez' formal recantation: "I seriously misspoke by using the phrase 'there has been arrogance and stupidity' by the U.S. in Iraq. This represents neither my views nor those of the State Department. I apologize."

The apology apparently gave Under Secretary Karen Hughes the chance to assure everyone of her support for Fernandez in spite of his 'mis-

taken choice of words.' Hughes did not, however, go on the record with an official statement, but conveyed her 'support' through an assistant (see Item D at http://usepublicdiplomacy.com/index.php/newsroom/johnbrown_detail/061027_pdpbr/). Whether this is enough to prevent a further erosion of enthusiasm in PD ranks, as officers absorb the implications of getting the tiniest bit "off-message," remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, the view circulating in the Middle East that America can never admit a mistake has a new life.

— Susan Maitra, Senior Editor

Polls Find Americans Unhappy with U.S. Foreign Policy

Two recent polls indicating that a majority of Americans are unhappy with U.S. foreign policy proved to be accurate gauges of public sentiment going into the Nov. 7 election. According to both reports, Americans believe that the world is becoming an increasingly dangerous place and that Washington's current involvements abroad are only making the situation worse.

In October, New York-based research organization Public Agenda released its third "Confidence in U.S. Foreign Policy Index" in collaboration with *Foreign Affairs*, drawing on the responses of 1,001 adults to over 100 questions regarding current U.S. foreign policy. The Fall 2006 Index featured the first-ever Anxiety Indicator, a tool that "will track the public's overall outlook on world affairs much as the Consumer Confidence Index follows its view of the economy" (www).



CYBERNOTES

publicagenda.org/foreignpolicy/foreignpolicy_intro.htm). Measured on a 200-point scale (200 being the most anxious) the Anxiety Indicator recorded a level of 130, denoting significant public discontent.

Roughly 60 percent of Americans believe international relations are “on the wrong track,” with 69 percent feeling that the government is doing a “fair” or “poor” job of improving international security. Respondents ranked the most pressing issues to be the Middle East, dependence on foreign energy and America’s image abroad (which participants saw as essential to national security). Significantly, the government received failing grades on crucial issues such as curbing nuclear proliferation and achieving our goals in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The report also reveals that certain issues — namely the situation in Iraq and our dependence on foreign oil — are at a “tipping point.” As the Index notes, “public concerns have reached such a high pitch that political leaders avoid [these issues] at their peril.”

A second questionnaire, published by the Program on International Policy Attitudes/Knowledge Networks in October, aims to answer the question, “What kind of foreign policy does the American public want?” (for the full report, see www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/home_page/262.php?nid=&i). The poll reports the opinions of 1,058 participants. The PIPA poll paints a similarly pessimistic picture: 68 percent of Americans are dissatisfied with the U.S. position in the world today, and

over half believe that the Bush administration’s policies have increased the likelihood of terrorist attacks.

More than seven out of 10 Americans hope for a candidate who will pursue a new approach to foreign policy. Among respondents, 67 percent believe that there should be a greater emphasis on diplomatic and economic methods, while only 2 percent think that the U.S. has the balance between military and diplomatic approaches about right.

The majority agree that the U.S. should make stronger efforts to work with the United Nations, even if it has to forgo its first choice of policies. Participants also called for greater cooperation on both domestic and international levels, suggesting that Congress overcome bipartisan divisions and that the United States work toward more multilateral strategies.

PIPA is a joint effort of the Center on Policy Attitudes and the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland, dedicated

to increasing the public’s role in foreign policy and international relations. For more information, see www.worldpublicopinion.org/?nid=&id=&lb=hmpg.

— *Lamiya Rahman,*
Editorial Intern

Grameen Bank: Giving Microcredit Where Credit is Due

In October, the Norwegian Nobel Committee chose to honor Bangladeshi “banker to the poor” Muhammad Yunus and his Grameen Bank “for their efforts to create economic and social development from below” (http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prize/peace/laureates/2006/). Through a relatively simple idea, Yunus managed to economically empower millions of poor Bangladeshis who would otherwise have no access to loans or financial services. The accolade has brought microcredit to the general public’s attention.

The seeds of the Grameen Bank

50 Years Ago...

An unprincipled, poker-playing foreign policy can be administered with great effectiveness by a totalitarian nation which can largely ignore public opinion. When the leaders of a democratic government attempt such a policy, they inevitably find themselves drifting out of touch with public and congressional opinion. Unable to discover any clear pattern of principles or objectives, the average citizen becomes first confused, then disillusioned, and finally antagonistic.

— Chester Bowles, Letter to the Editor, *FSJ*, December 1956.



MARKETPLACE



www.fsjournal.org
Click on Marketplace tab
on the marquee

AFSPA

www.afspa.org

BridgeStreet Worldwide

www.bridgestreet.com

Clements International

www.clements.com

Cort Furniture

www.cort1.com

Diplomatic Auto. Sales

www.diplosales.com

J. Kirby Simon Trust

www.kirbysimontrust.org

The Jannette Embassy Plan

www.jannetteintl.com

Hawthorn Suites

www.hawthorn.com

The Hirshorn Company

www.hirshorn.com

International House - Berkeley

<http://ihouse.berkeley.edu>

Korman Communities

www.kormancommunities.com

Long & Foster/Simunek

www.simunekhomes.com

Oakwood

www.oakwood.com

Prudential Carruthers

www.prudentialcarruthers.com

RE/MAX/Piekney

www.movetonorthernvirginia.com

Remington

www.remington-dc.com

State Department FCU

www.sdfcu.org

State Plaza Hotel

www.stateplaza.com

University of Oklahoma

www.ou.edu

W.C. & A.N. Miller

www.wcanmiller.com

WJD Management

www.wjdpm.com

When contacting an advertiser,
kindly mention the
Foreign Service Journal.

were sown in 1974 when, convinced of the entrepreneurial spirit of the poor, Yunus began lending small amounts of money to men and women in rural Bangladesh without requiring collateral. Since then, the bank has grown to serve over 70,000 villages and three million clients who use the loans to set-up small businesses.

Grameen Bank uses innovative methods to make microloans effective. To ensure high recovery rates — currently at 95 percent — members are assigned to groups of five that are collectively responsible for loan repayment, a measure that applies social pressure and incentives. Having discovered early on that men are less productive and more likely to default on loans, the Bank caters primarily to women, who comprise 97 percent of Grameen clients. Because borrowers are the principal owners — clients own 94 percent of the bank and the government the rest — Grameen Bank is a predominantly female-owned institution, highly unusual in a traditionally male-dominated society (www.grameen-info.org/bank/index.html).

But Grameen Bank is not just a financial institution. It has given birth to several spin-off organizations dedicated to promoting development in rural areas, such as an energy program, a phone company and an Internet service, among many other enterprises (www.grameen-info.org/gfamily.html). Last month, in collaboration with French dairy giant Danone, Grameen opened a food plant aimed at providing nutritious products for the poor.

In recent years, hundreds of microcredit institutions have been established to engage poor populations all over the world. The United Nations' Economic and Social Council named 2005 the International Year of Microcredit (www.yearof

microcredit.org/). In November, 2,000 delegates from 100 countries attended the Global Microcredit Summit in Halifax, Canada. They endorsed two main goals: to ensure that 175 million of the world's poorest families, especially the women of those families, are receiving credit for self-employment and other financial and business services; and that 100 million of the world's poorest families move from below \$1 a day to above \$1 a day by the end of 2015 (www.globalmicrocreditsummit2006.org).

However, as many experts hasten to point out, microcredit is no panacea. These development practitioners fear that the hope of microcredit is turning to hype as proponents embrace unrealistic expectations of its developmental effects. "It helps with cash flow smoothing, and can also boost the confidence of women," states Thomas Dichter in a critical look at the microcredit movement. "These are good things, but they are considerably less than the serious long-term economic changes that are claimed for the movement. They are not the same as credit used for productivity, job creation and enterprise growth in an increasingly competitive and global economy" (<http://microfinancgateway.org/content/article/detail/31747>).

Bangladesh is a case in point: the birthplace of the model microcredit institution remains a Least Developed Country. Microfinance has a vital role to play, but not as a substitute for much-needed political and economic reforms.

— *Lamiya Rahman,*
Editorial Intern

Afghanistan at A Turning Point?

A sharply rising tide of violence in Afghanistan, as the southern insurgency gathers momentum, and the



call by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer for a “radical overhaul” of policy in Afghanistan have once again put the spotlight on this critical front in the Bush administration’s war on terrorism. NATO took over command of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan over the summer (<http://www.jfcs.nato.int/ISAF/index.htm>).

De Hoop Scheffer laid out the need for a strategy change at a Nov. 2 meeting in Brussels, where for the first time major donors — namely the U.N., the World Bank and the European Union — sat down with the military alliance to coordinate assistance activities (www.iht.com/articles/2006/11/05/news/nato.php). A well-functioning Afghan police force and judiciary are essential for NATO, De Hoop Scheffer states. He wants the military alliance to concentrate on training the Afghan army, and have the E.U. take over entirely the training of police forces. There is no military solution, per se, De Hoop Scheffer stresses; coordination between the reconstruction side and the military side is essential.

In early October, ISAF Commander British Lieutenant General David Richards had sounded the alarm, warning that without visible improvements in the daily lives of ordinary Afghans in the next six months, up to 70 percent of Afghans could shift their allegiance to the Taliban-led insurgency that is steadily gaining ground in the south and east (www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp101406.shtml).

A new report from the International Crisis Group titled “Countering Afghanistan’s Insurgency: No Quick Fixes” pinpoints the issues: a resurgent Taliban and other anti-government elements from previous eras; a crisis of government legitimacy; constantly expanding drug production

and trade; and failure to meet popular expectations of development and improved lives (see the full report at www.crisisgroup.org).

The group urges a rethinking of policies by both the Karzai government — whose writ remains for the most part confined to Kabul — and its Western backers and advocates, in particular, a substantial increase in international forces deployed to the battle zones. The ICG also warns that without putting real, sustained diplomatic pressure on Pakistan to reverse policies that feed extremism, it will be impossible to stabilize Afghanistan.

There are several online resources that are useful in following develop-

ments and policy in Afghanistan. The ICG monitors the country, and the Afghanistan page of the organization’s Web site contains links to other helpful sites, crucial documents and studies, and a history of the problem as well as its own analyses (www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3071&l=1). Another valuable resource is the Afghanistan page of EurasiaNet, operated by the Central Eurasia Project of the Open Society Institute; it features news developments and analysis (www.eurasianet.org/resource/afghanistan/index.shtml). To monitor daily news, see *South Asia News* (<http://southasia.net/news/afghanistan/index.php>). ■

— Susan Maitra, Senior Editor

Site of the Month: www.globalmuseum.org

Whether culture is your passion or you’re just looking for an interesting outing in Cairo, you’ll want to check out *Global Museum*. This award-winning Webzine is a required read for museum enthusiasts of all varieties. As *List-A-Day.com* describes it, “From bizarre and unbelievable news to noteworthy historical facts, this newsletter will plug you into information that is just slightly off the beaten media track.”

Since its 1998 launch by New Zealand Web-developer Roger Smith, *Global Museum* has become an essential resource for museum aficionados worldwide. It is an excellent source for the scoop on the museum world, with details on new museums and exhibits, job openings, museum studies courses and recent scientific discoveries. The home page features headlines on museum-related news from various international publications, from the BBC to Al-Jazeera. Users can browse links to virtual libraries and research databases on the Resources page to access a wealth of information on topics like artifact analysis, archaeology and anthropology.

If you’re looking for a museum in your town, the Museum Links page is an invaluable resource. A list of international links includes Web sites such as the Virtual Library Museums Pages, an extensive directory of museums in over 90 countries. A section dedicated exclusively to unusual museums around the world is sure to delight the less conventional user. The site also provides podcast subscriptions to audio tours from several museums and a catalogue of museology books and publications.

For updates on *Global Museum*, you can sign up for its free weekly subscription.

— Lamiya Rahman, Editorial Intern