



FORWARD BY CONGRESSMAN BRAD SHERMAN

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In order to fully understand a country's true intentions, you need to hear what its leaders say in their own language, to their own people. In order to understand the mindset of people around the world and their beliefs and perceptions, you have to learn about what they hear on their radios, watch on their televisions, and read in their newspapers.

Imagine trying to understand American political culture without sampling talk radio or the Sunday morning political shows. In order to find out how a group of people thinks, you need access to their media, which both affects and is informed by that thought.

The Middle East is no different, of course. But the importance of the region to the United States is only now coming into focus for most Americans – including our political establishment. As a result of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the war in Iraq, the crisis over Iran's nuclear program, and our discovery of a supposedly "new" phenomenon – the appeal of radical Islamist ideology and violent anti-Americanism in segments of the Muslim world – Americans have begun to pay attention.

We are at an extreme disadvantage in dealing with the Middle East due to cultural and linguistic barriers. Unlike the great "isms" the U.S. confronted in the 20th century, "Radical Islamism" is not readily accessible to Americans. Communism and Fascism were Western phenomena. During the Cold War, elite American institutions churned out experts who could understand the Russian language and Soviet thinking – "Sovietology" was a popular sub-major in its own right. No such cadre of Middle East professionals existed on September 11, 2001, and five years later we are scarcely better off.

Since MEMRI's inception eight years ago, Americans and others in the West have had at least one outstanding source for information on the media of the Arab world, Iran, and Turkey. MEMRI provides timely translations of materials that you will find nowhere else. As a Member of Congress on the House International Relations Committee, and the top Democratic member of its Terrorism Subcommittee, I have utilized MEMRI.org in order to better understand the Middle East and its political culture.

What you read on the pages that follow concerns the Arab and Iranian reaction to the September 11 terrorist attacks – not what foreign ministers

said in English to American reporters, but what those speaking Arabic and Farsi said to each other. MEMRI has uncovered and compiled herein a wealth of information about this subset of anti-Americanism and anti-Semitism – the 9/11 conspiracy theories. Among other "proof" of Zionist involvement in the attacks is a new canard against Jews – that they were warned ahead of time of the planned attacks and told not to come to the Twin Towers that day.

It should not surprise you that some commentators see the attack in a positive light or that many saw CIA and/or Zionist conspiracy theories behind the attacks. What may surprise you is the sheer volume of materials that are available. In report after report, article after article, you see the demonization of America, Jews, and Israel. This is the sad reality that the United States must confront in the Middle East.

What the reader should know is that many Middle Easterners are subjected to similar conspiracy theories regarding America, Israel, Christians, and Jews from their earliest years – in their schools and in the textbooks that inform their worldview. Last year, I was saddened (but not surprised) that supposedly "reformed" Palestinian textbooks, drafted well before the advent of a HAMAS government, referenced the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

All of the traditional "public diplomacy" that America could possibly undertake in the Muslim world cannot hope to reverse the damage done by these hate-filled materials. Even if the United States adopted all of the policy changes that have been proposed to mollify Muslim opinion, we would not be able to counter the effects of the pervasive anti-American sentiment in the Middle Eastern media. It is going to take recognition on the part of our diplomats and politicians that, if we are going to be able to defeat these trends over the long term, the voices of hate must be confronted head-on. Just as important, the voices of moderate Muslims and those of reformers in the Middle East need to be amplified.

I hope that you find these materials as enlightening as I did. As depressing as this compilation may seem on the whole, there is hope to be found in the voices of those who understand that the propagation of the conspiracy theories, and the theories that blame others for all that plagues the peoples of the Middle East, victimize the Arab and Muslim world first and most of all.