



To: General Kip Ward, USA - Deputy Commander, USEUCOM
From: General Chuck Boyd, USAF (Ret), President and CEO, BENS
Date: October 5, 2006
Subject: September 2006 EUCOM Trip - Turkey, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco

Dear Kip,

What follows is a summary of impressions, and a few implied recommendations, accumulated by the BENS travelers during subject trip. Many of these observations you've already heard from the oral debrief on the evening of our return. In addition, some of the travelers forwarded their personal notes to you under separate cover. So the particular observations contained herein, while duplicative, seem to capture something of a consensus view of this group.

Unlike most previous EUCOM/BENS trips which generally focus on issues and events peculiar to your command, this trip took on the flavor of the great struggles under way in the Middle East, and the global war on terror. In a certain sense, it may seem more akin to a CENTCOM trip than that of EUCOM, yet the issues identified go to the heart of what affects all matters relating to the nation's security.

Speaking for myself, and not necessarily from that of the group for I probably look through a different lens, I would call your attention to two things.

- 1) The request to meet with the CHOD, which slipped to the DCHOD (apparently unnoticed by him) then on to the J-5 and ultimately scrubbed, even after personal intervention by General Jones, had to have been deliberate. The exact reason for this was unclear, and, knowing the Turks, they are not likely to tell you. Still, they are getting even for some perceived slight, or they are demonstrating their independence, or, as they often say, their sovereignty.
- 2) The three North African countries in a wide variety of ways told us how much they valued their relationship with the U.S. and how much they shared our objectives in the Global War on Terror. Yet when asked what they were doing in cooperation with their neighbors to assist in this effort, we got mostly blank stares. My impression was that they were far more interested in the bilateral relationship than in a multilateral one. Not surprising, for that is often the case especially with small nations, but worrisome nonetheless. There is great value to be gained by working together regionally, and that is something you can emphasize in many different ways.

Warmest regards,

GROUP IMPRESSIONS FOLLOW BY GENERAL TOPIC IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER.

Iraq

Wherever possible, we opened our discussions with questions regarding Iraq. Inevitably, when asked what the U.S. should do there, the first answers were always in the past tense: we should have had greater international backing before invading; we shouldn't have invaded until we had a plan to win the peace; we shouldn't have disbanded the army; and we shouldn't have committed to such a broad de-Bathification program. When we stipulated to these concerns for the sake of argument, and asked what to do now, we were met mostly with silence.

There was widespread agreement on one point: that we should not pull our troops from the country precipitously. We also heard more than once that a partitioned Iraq would just further exacerbate religious tensions in the region. This was, of course, of particular concern in Turkey.

It's important to remember, however, that despite Iraq being our single dominate focus, other countries do not want it to define their relations with us. At one point, while meeting with a Moroccan minister, we were asked to remember that "Iraq is very far away from us."

The Global War on Terror

We heard from officials in each of the four countries that their country had been the first to warn the United States and Europe about the increasing threat of terrorism, well before the September 11 attacks. These countries felt we had done little to help with their fights against terrorism until *we* joined the Global War on Terror. In Turkey, the perception that we are being hypocritical over our treatment of the PKK makes this an even hotter topic. As we were told there, "the West shows a dangerous tendency to tolerate terrorist organizations as interlocutors." In general, they felt we define terrorists as those who attack the US or its interests.

Their resentment that we are seeking their support in the War on Terror, but not helping them fight those they believe to be terrorists, is further enflamed by our support of Israel as it pursues Hezbollah into Lebanon. Ironically, there is widespread condemnation of Israel in Turkey - hypocritical in its own way in a country wanting to cross the Iraqi border to pursue the PKK.

All the countries we visited recognized that a military solution alone will not defeat terrorism, a concept that is not discussed enough in the United States. Fighting poverty, improving education, and increasing the rights of women, in particular, were priorities. In Algeria, they were proud to point out that 52% of those in post-secondary education are women. In Tunisia, that number is even higher: 59%. 55% of Tunisia's budget is

spent on social services (human development). As the Tunisian secretary of state said, "If you own your own home, send your kids to school, and have a good life, you don't

think about blowing yourself up at a café." But these countries still have looming social problems. Their economies are not keeping pace with their educational improvements. So while they are churning out more university degrees, they're not able to provide jobs for all of these graduates. We were cautioned by some with whom we met that the "unemployed educated are the most dangerous."

It's worth noting, too, that we were struck by the repeated and sincere expressions of sorrow for the 9/11 attacks, prompted largely by the fact that our trip occurred during the fifth anniversary. This occurred in each of the countries we visited.

Iran

It was suggested, starting in Turkey, that our actions in Iraq created the ideal environment of instability for Iran to assert itself as a regional power. This, in turn, is part of what has fueled Iran's aggressive nuclear program. Nobody expressed support of a nuclear armed Iran. The Tunisian secretary of state's feeling best summed up the attitude we encountered, "we have enough problems in the Middle East." It was clear, however, that these countries do not see Iran as the grave threat that we do. We were told that Iran is more of an issue in the US, and largely dropped from view again once Israel invaded Lebanon. It is clear, however, that these four Sunni nations are very weary of Shia dominance – it was even suggested that increasing struggles between Sunnis and Shias will be the dominate issue in the Arab world over the next decade.

Israel/Palestine

We were told often – a message we've heard on previous trips to other Arab countries – that none of the other problems in the region, including Iraq, can be settled until the Israel/Palestine problem is solved. So strongly is this felt that it is suggested merely by solving this issue, the rest will follow. Of course this is not true. The Iran-Iraq War and the huge death tolls on both sides had nothing to do with Israel. The rampant sectarian violence in Iraq has nothing to do with Israel. The half million black Christians who have been murdered in Darfur by Arab Muslims would have occurred whether or not the Israelis and Palestinians settled their differences. Yet this seems to escape virtually every Arab we meet. The Israeli issue is simply a convenient and very popular target to blame for dysfunction of the various Arab societies.

And so, the images of destruction in these countries, from Iraq to Lebanon, are always linked in some way in the Muslim perception and attitudes to the United States and Israel. Reality is one thing, perception another. As one Tunisian minister put it, "Arabs care more about dignity than success."

With that said, there is serious disappointment in how the United States handled this summer's war in Lebanon. Right or wrong, the president of Algeria claims we have made a hero of Hezbollah. The Arabs believe we can deliver Israel, so the fact that there is not peace there is seen in large part as a lack of resolve on our part. "Moderate" Arab states, while professing agreement with, and support of, US objectives will not do anything overt to lend that support when it runs counter to the hostility felt in the "Arab street."

Islamic Extremists

All of our meetings turned, at one point or another, to the question of Islamic extremism. It's clear that these governments are quite defensive about the West's view of Islam, and believe their religion is misunderstood and unfairly maligned because of the action of a small and militant minority. There is no radical Islam, we were told, just extremist Muslims. The Algerian minister of state, that country's most senior ranking Islamist, said that all religions "and the law" ban violence. "No prophets in history have espoused violence." He claimed that only a fraction of the world's 1.4 billion Muslims believe in violence. But even if the number he quoted is true - 5 million - it's still a significant population. He cautioned us to distinguish between the religion and its practitioners, as well as between terrorists and liberators.

All four governments are on paths to further secularize their countries. In North Africa, secular schools with modernized textbooks have replaced the traditional religious schools. We were also introduced to various forms of "mosque management" these countries are using to help prevent extremism. In Tunisia, mosques are only open for the five daily prayers. At all other times, nobody is allowed inside. In Morocco, the all important Friday prayer is centrally written and broadcast into mosques by the government. Even the government-picked and trained imams are not trusted to give this weekly prayer.

Communication/Public Relations

Everywhere we went, we noticed a proliferation of satellite dishes. Even in the small towns between Rabat and Casablanca they seemed to pop out of every roof, including corrugated roofs held down by rocks. Everyone we asked - from EUCOM, to our Embassies, to the host nationals - told us that these dishes are tuned into Al-Jazeera. It is painfully clear that the United States is not succeeding in its public diplomacy strategy.

This is particularly important at a time when foreign governments worry that our foreign policy increasingly isolates us at the governmental level. It is critical that we do something to get out an alternative viewpoint.

Democracy and Human Rights

The United States' record on human rights is widely admired, as is our emphasis on such rights in our foreign policy. But, we were also reminded that "human rights" is a broad term, covering many different rights. Our current emphasis on democracy, it was suggested in many meetings, even if obliquely, may not be the best way to go about improving human rights as a whole. In Algeria and Tunisia, in particular, we were told that there is an important tradition and role of a strong state in that part of the world. Imposing democratic principles too quickly might result in what we've seen in Lebanon and Palestine. These countries prefer to focus on other areas first, such as increasing education and fighting poverty. They believe an authoritative government is the best form to deliver these changes, and that these changes are necessary before the citizenry will be ready to vote.

Even in meetings with private citizens in Tunisia, for example, we heard more calls for increased openness of the press than we did for increased democracy. The Jewish community's senior representative there even insisted he didn't want a democracy like the United States, saying that, "a good authoritarian leader is best." In Algeria, the desire is to build a strong industry first, then focus on opening up and further integrating the society, as well as completely privatizing industry.

It was often very gently suggested that the United States is hypocritical in its foreign policy - from how we fight terrorism to how we define democracy. Here, too, we have to be careful in how to claim to promote human rights while simultaneously applauding measures which wouldn't pass muster in the United States. For example, the various forms of "mosque management" we encountered seemed very promising in helping to stem the tide of Islamic extremism. These measures, however, would clearly run counter to religious freedom and the separation of church and state that we take so seriously at home.

US Relations

In all four countries, we were told that any differences with the US were tactical in nature, not strategic. Even in Turkey we were told that when relations between the two countries were strained, they still moved forward. When pushed on the increase of Islamic extremism, the increasing bilateral relations with China, and the Arab world's criticism of our foreign policy, we more than once heard an exasperated, "look, we have chosen, we are looking West." It would be hard, however, to understate the frustration with our foreign policy: "we love America, but we hate your foreign policy."

The Myth of the "Arab World"

In the United States, we often think of the "Arab world" as being monolithic. This trip, along with other BENS visits, reminds us this community is richly diverse culturally,

historically, geographically, economically, politically, demographically, and even religiously. There were endless examples of this even during our very brief stops.

These differences, however, are rarely communicated in any detailed or broad way to Americans, either through the media or by our government. Doing a better job at this might very well help ease the political climate somewhat in the U.S. While Iraq, Iran and Israel/Palestine are clearly our dominate foreign policy issues in this region, by failing to focus on the differences between these countries, instead of what unites them (Islam), we are losing opportunities to strengthen relationships with countries that are eager to be closer to the United States. Despite our differences with Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, and most especially Turkey, we were repeatedly told that these countries looked toward the West and the United States in particular. By not directing more resources and attention to countries such as these, we are passing up opportunities to show how the United States can be a constructive partner in ways that our image in Iraq is not currently conveying. Tunisia is a perfect example. What little foreign aid we gave them has largely been cut off because they've been declared a "success." However, this seems just the time to keep the aid focused there, so as to further exploit and grow that success. As one of our travelers pointed out, the stick of our foreign policy is more easily accepted when the carrot is there as well.

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