

Spotlight Country: United Arab Emirates

DEMOGRAPHICS

Geographic area: 83,600 sq. km.
 Population: 9,086,139 (2014)
 Below 24 yrs. old: 27%
 Refugee population: 417
 Urban population: 85.5%
 GDP/capita: \$40,438
 Unemployment: 4.2%
 Below poverty line: -

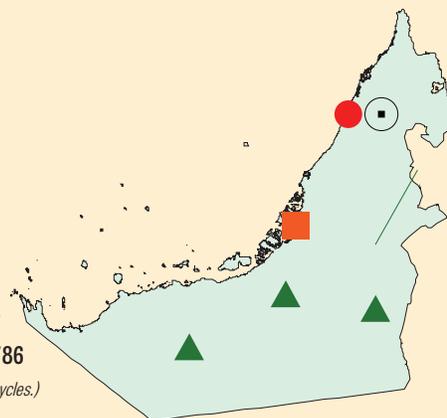
COMMUNICATIONS AND LITERACY

FH Media Freedom: Not Free
 Internet users/100 people: 90 (2014)
 Mobile phones/100 people: 178 (2014)
 Literacy: 90%
 Avg. years of education: Females: -
 Males: -

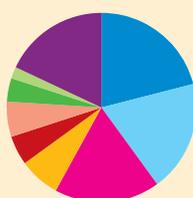
PUBLIC DIPLOMACY SPENDING

D&CP Total FY13 Actual: \$1,630,585 FY14 Actual: \$1,471,583 FY15 Actual: \$1,792,567
Total Reported FY13 Actual: \$2,560,212 FY14 Actual: \$1,593,068 FY15 Actual: \$1,928,786

(Total reported funding for FY13, FY14, and FY15 cannot be compared directly due to delays in reporting from long program cycles.)



Total PD Spending by Theme



Piechart Key: PD Spending by Theme

■ Culture ■ Education ■ Economics ■ Science ■ Military ■ CVE
■ Democracy ■ Civil Society ■ Women ■ Youth ■ Religious ■ Other

Top Spending by Activity

Cultural Programs (Post Generated)	\$285,746
VIP Visits (Press Support)	\$263,646
Media/Press Activities	\$234,331
Digital Outreach	\$217,124
Educational Advising & Promoting	\$197,261
Study in the U.S.	

Map Key

■ Embassy ● Consulate
▲ American Space

RECOMMENDATIONS:

INCREASE STAFF SUPPORT FOR PAS DUBAI: The Public Affairs Sections in Dubai and Abu Dhabi requires increased staffing resources in order to complete their missions of greater engagement in the northern Emirates, while also completing their regional mandates. The missions recently received an additional local employee in Abu Dhabi and gained a temporary EPAP position in Dubai, but additional staffing support is necessary.

INCREASE STAFF SUPPORT FOR EDUCATIONUSA IN THE NEA REGION: The regional director for EducationUSA in Dubai has a portfolio of 19 countries, 28 centers and 32 advisors in the Near East Asia region. This past year, 103,307 students from 19 countries in the Middle East and North Africa studied in American higher education institutions, an 11.5 percent increase from 2014. Given the large volume of students in the NEA region who need advising and support, we strongly recommend adding a second regional NEA director position and splitting the region between them.

CONTINUE SUPPORT FOR SAWAB CENTER: The government of the UAE has been a remarkable partner in countering violent extremism (CVE) through the one-year-old Sawab Center and the Hedayah CVE Center in Abu Dhabi, a center of excellence for countering violent extremism that works mainly to

assist other countries afflicted by violent extremism in systematically addressing CVE issues. It is the first time that a coalition partner has proactively aimed to counter Da'esh's messaging. The U.S. is actively supporting the Sawab Center effort and it will likely continue for at least another two years. The UAE has also invested considerable resources in the center and expanded its staff. ACPD believes it is an example for other such centers with allied partners worldwide.

INCREASE AUDIENCE RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR THE DUBAI MEDIA HUB: The Dubai media hub needs consistent detailed audience research on the various media networks in the region. This research is of value beyond the hub and can support the embassy PAOs in the region to tailor their messages to the various audiences. This cost will be at least \$50,000 a year, which is currently about 15 percent of their budget. We strongly recommend an increase in funding from Washington to support this audience research.

RESTORE THE INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION PROGRAMS BUREAU'S ARABIC TRANSLATION SERVICES: It would benefit Public Affairs Sections in the region tremendously if IIP restored its Arabic translation services, in addition to creating content on commercial issues that would cater more to Gulf audiences.

OVERVIEW

The bilateral relationship between the United Arab Emirates and the U.S. is strong, especially in defense and security cooperation as we share many national security interests. The UAE has been part of coalition operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. In addition, the U.S. Navy uses Emirati port facilities in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Fujairah, which bring thousands of U.S. sailors and Marines to UAE each year. The economic relationship is also deep. The U.S. runs an annual trade surplus of more than \$22 billion with the UAE and it is one of the top 20 sources of foreign direct investment in the United States. This is larger than the U.S. trading relationship with Saudi Arabia or any other country in the Middle East. In addition, the UAE is also a global hub: two-thirds of the world's population is within 1,500 miles, or a three hour flight. With two major international airports already in a country the size of Idaho, the country is building a third to accommodate the 2020 World Expo in Dubai.

Within this context, the U.S. Mission in the UAE—which consists of a PAS at the embassy in Abu Dhabi and the Consulate in Dubai—aims to reach Emiratis in all seven Emirates through press, educational, cultural, informational and social media engagement. In a country of 9.2 million people, only 1.4 million are Emirati, which makes up 15 percent of the population. The Public Affairs Sections use a variety of PD tools to strengthen the relationship them via exchange programs, cultural engagement, outreach via the press and social media, EducationUSA centers and an American Corners network. Understanding that much of UAE's wealth is concentrated in the Dubai and Abu Dhabi emirates, the PAS's want to conduct outreach beyond elite and urban audiences and into the northern Emirates.

The UAE is increasingly playing a leadership role in the region, which has provided an opportunity for an unprecedented and remarkable partnership in countering violent extremism with the Sawab Center. The U.S. mission is also home to regional resources, such as the Dubai Regional Media Hub and a Regional Educational Advising Coordinator. Regional events, however, have also shrunk the space for the United States to have a dialogue on political and civil society related issues with the Emirati public. To operate within UAE, as a journalist or businessman, means a certain amount of self-censorship. The United States must therefore balance the tension between the openness the UAE desires as a global hub for business and its national security concerns.

Despite these challenges, we found a PD mission working actively to engage Emiratis; capitalize on unique partnerships with U.S. educational and cultural institutions that exist in the UAE; conduct regional educational and media outreach via the consulate in Dubai; and counter violent extremism through the Sawab Center in Abu Dhabi. Given the unique demands put on the sections, they could mainly use more American and local staff support.

U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY MISSION IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The public diplomacy goals for the UAE are to advance the core mission goals, but also highlight U.S. higher education, entrepreneurship, healthcare and technology. To deepen bilateral ties, the PAS focuses on connecting Emirati youth to the United States through EducationUSA and exchanges; amplifying U.S.-UAE trade ties; and increasing positive opinions of the United States through media engagement, exchanges and cultural and educational programming. An objective of the mission is to extend beyond the two richest and most renowned Emirates, Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and into the northern ones. Cultural diplomacy, especially through sports and music, provides an entry point to non-urban, non-elite audiences.

There are many institutions that are predisposed to working with the United States and the upcoming Expo2020 in Dubai provides a strong opportunity for engagement, as does American institutions like New York University, the Cleveland Clinic and the Guggenheim Museum, which are providing exposure to U.S. education, culture and research. They also work independently as soft power assets.

Organizing public diplomacy outreach and alumni networks, however, is increasingly difficult as the government of UAE continues to seek a greater degree of control over public messaging. The UAE government sees political Islam as an existential threat and believes that it was the democratic culture that led to the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. They can therefore sometimes be suspicious of U.S.-funded programs, especially those seen to advance democratic ideals and support civil society development. There also has been increased scrutiny over exchange programs and programming in university spaces. Due to fears of political organizing, the mission cannot do as extensive alumni engagement as other missions can. Finding implementing partners within the UAE to conduct programs at a reasonable cost, which can be easy done in other countries, can be challenging. An example of this is finding an appropriate implementing partner for the English Access program, which the inspector general for the State Department advised the mission to bring back in 2014.

EXCHANGE AND CULTURAL PROGRAMS

UAE is a society where personal contacts and relationship building is essential. A major goal of PAS is to increase the number of Emirati students studying in the United States, which is done through its impressive outreach via EducationUSA (described below). The main exchange programs PAS facilitates in the UAE are Fulbright, Humphrey and the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). IVLP is especially valuable in the UAE as it provides not only professional development skills, but also a different kind of exposure to the United States.

In order to reach more audiences in the northern emirates,

PAS has focused on culture and sports as entry points for relationship building. This includes Bluegrass bands and bringing American artists to the region through the Sharja Art Foundation. Sports Diplomacy programs are also becoming more popular to engage Emiratis.

EDUCATIONUSA

A major goal for the U.S. mission is to increase the number of Emirati students studying in the United States. Currently, Emirati students who study at higher education institutions in the United States contribute \$60 million to the American economy.¹ Those who choose to study in the United States are granted a full scholarship and a generous stipend from the Emirati government. There were concerns after 9/11 that Emirati students would face trouble acquiring visas and experience harassment once they were within the United States since two of the 9/11 hijackers were from northern emirates. Yet there has been an increase of 3.4 percent this past year, and a near tripling of students since 2005. In the 2014–15 academic year, there were 2,878 Emirati students studying in the United States. Of them, the majority were undergraduate students (2,091), followed by graduate students (349), non-degree students (368) and optional practice training (OPT) students, or interns (70). The majority of the students studied in Arizona, Pennsylvania, Florida, California, Indiana, Maryland, Texas and the District of Columbia. There is also the EducationUSA Academy, where Emirati students can go to the United States to improve their English and also to get a sense of the schools and support to help guidance counselors in UAE prepare Emirati youth for education in the United States.

There is an EducationUSA center at the U.S. embassy in Abu Dhabi and another at the U.S. Consulate in Dubai. Due to security concerns, the spaces are restrictive and require appointments, which has led to a large emphasis on outreach in the seven emirates. In 2015, there were more than 55 major outreach events that engaged more than 38,700 Emiratis. They also distributed more than 15,200 marketing materials throughout the country and communicated with more than 1,200 high school counselors, parents, students and advisors via the EducationUSA mailing list, which they expect to double by 2017. Each year there is a large education fair in October that the embassy helps to organize, where more than 20 U.S. universities come to the UAE and participate each year. The fair has roughly 15,000 visitors over its three days.

The regional director for Education USA in Dubai has a portfolio of 19 countries, 28 centers and 32 advisors in the Near East Asia region. This past year, 103,307 students from 19 countries in the Middle East and North Africa studied in American higher education institutions, an 11.5 percent increase from 2014. They make up 10 percent of

¹ Within the UAE, there are three public universities and 75 private ones. Higher education programs are modeled on the U.S. Education system, placing a premium on critical thinking.

the 974,926 international students studying in the United States. Saudi Arabia alone has 93,000 students in the U.S., the fourth largest in the world after China, India and South Korea. According to the latest IIE Open Doors Report, last year Saudi Arabian students in U.S. colleges and universities contributed \$1.7 billion to the U.S. economy. Given the large volume of students in the NEA region needing advising and support, we strongly recommend creating a second Regional NEA Director position and splitting the region between them.

SAWAB CENTER: COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The government of UAE has been a remarkable partner in countering violent extremism through the Sawab Center and the Hedayah CVE Center in Abu Dhabi, a center of excellence for countering violent extremism that works mainly to assist other countries in systematically addressing CVE issues. Its efforts were the first time that a coalition partner had proactively aimed to counter Da'esh's messaging. On July 7, 2015, the center started on Twitter, later on Instagram and then Facebook in spring 2016. An Emirati diplomat serves as its interim director and is supported by a small local staff and two American FSOs. A full time public relations staff also supports them.

The Sawab Center's efforts are solely focused on Da'esh and their three objectives are to create a measurable decrease in online support for the network; empower the silent majority; and support larger coalition CT efforts. The center focuses on positive messages and offering an alternative view, such as a campaign on female role models. Yet their core challenges are to combat hyperactive users that inflate the level of support for Da'esh; access the large pool of Da'esh "fan boys; access encrypted discussion platforms; and create high end publications and videos. The effort will likely continue for at least another two years and the UAE has invested considerable resources in the center, expanding its staff. ACPD believes it is exemplary for other such centers with allied partners worldwide.

GLOBAL AND LOCAL MEDIA OUTREACH

There are three kinds of press in UAE: the Emirati local news media; the pan Arab news networks, like Sky News Arabia, UK-based Sky, Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC) and Al Arabiya; and the international press. "Media Free Zones," like Dubai's Media City and Abu Dhabi's TwoFour54, accommodates hundreds of news agencies. Freedom House has repeatedly reported the UAE's media environment as "not free." Broad and ambiguous wording of local press laws create an atmosphere of restricted speech through self-censorship; the domestic media suffers from both state and self-censorship. The global media based in the UAE avoids certain topics while reporting on their host country and normally do not investigate the ruling families and/or their business interests.

The PAS in Abu Dhabi covers local and global news media

on the U.S.-UAE bilateral relationship. The regional media hub in Dubai, which reports to the Public Affairs Bureau in Washington and described more below, covers the pan-Arab news networks. The PAS also communicates via social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) and would benefit tremendously if the International Information Programs Bureau re-started its Arabic translation services, in addition to creating content on commercial issues that would cater to a Persian Gulf audiences. Extra staffing at the U.S. Embassy in Abu Dhabi is critical to stepping up social media engagement with a very tech savvy Emirati population.

REGIONAL MEDIA OUTREACH: THE DUBAI REGIONAL MEDIA HUB

Launched in September 2006, the hub was created to strengthen the U.S. government’s “presence and advocacy capabilities in the region” and ensure that the 65 million Arabic-speaking audiences who tune into pan-Arab news networks hear directly from the U.S. government. Its mission is to be more consistently present on pan-Arab news networks and directly represent the Department of State’s policies and priorities, while also engaging in an active dialogue with Arabic-speaking publics. In fiscal year 2015, the Dubai hub spent roughly \$749, 653.

In the last year, the hub has conducted 130 interviews with 40 outlets, averaging two to three interviews a week. The hub director messages to pan Arab audiences on different issues, helps to prepare other U.S. government officials to go on the air, and partners with Embassies in the Near East Asia region to communicate to their local audiences on cross-cutting regional and global issues. The U.S. Military Central Command, based in Tampa, Florida and the spokesperson for the Combined Joint Task Force overseeing anti-Daesh military operations in Baghdad, Iraq also work with the hub to help with messaging as the pan-Arab network audiences are very interested in details of U.S. military operations in the region.

The director position requires a very talented spokesperson with the highest fluency in Arabic. In addition to engaging the press, s/he also conducts trainings twice a year for other spokespeople, which take place at the Middle East

Broadcasting Network’s Al Hurra studios in Dubai. They train State Department spokespeople through the region who engage with local networks. The embassies pay for their flights and the hub absorb their costs once they are in Dubai. The hub also has supported NEA-led training for foreign government spokespeople who represent the coalition to counter Daesh, which is an excellent diplomacy measure to build unity between purpose.

In addition to engaging directly with the news media, the hub also works through Twitter, Facebook and YouTube platforms and creates content through a local contractor, which works as the hub’s creative office for visuals—i.e. infographics, videos, animations—to digitally distribute. The hub approves all content and spends \$164,000 a year on the contract. The content has a ripple effect in the sense that the embassies also relay the global foreign policy messages and retweet it. With nearly half a million followers, the @USAbilAraby Twitter account is the most popular foreign-language social media account representing the U.S. government worldwide. With nearly half a million followers, the @USAbilAraby Twitter account is the most popular foreign-language social media account representing the U.S. government worldwide.

The hub is hoping to increase its level of audience research for more targeted, data-driven and efficient engagement, which ACPD strongly supports. Audience market research provides the level of granularity that they need to create a strategic outreach plan and the hub needs consistent detailed audience research on the various media networks in the region. This research is of value beyond the hub and can support the embassy PAOs in the region. It would be best to do this research locally, using an agency that can understand the local context. This helps the spokespeople tailor their messages to the various audiences. This cost will be at least \$50,000, which is currently about 15 percent of their budget. We therefore recommend that additional funds be resourced to support greater audience research for more strategic planning.

OFFICIAL AND UNOFFICIAL AMERICAN SPACES:

There are three official American Spaces in UAE: two in Al Ain, and one in Al Hosn. New York University’s Abu Dhabi campus also provides an unofficial platform for embassy cultural and educational programming. The embassy has created a strong partnership with NYU in Abu Dhabi, which graduated its first class on May 25, 2014 and moved into its new campus in summer 2014. It caters to roughly 1,200 undergraduates, with a goal of raising it to 2,200 by 2020. The student body represents more than 70 nationalities. The campus places a high emphasis on the arts, engineering and policy, encouraging the students to build an interdisciplinary experience touching all three. In addition to NYU, the Cleveland Clinic Abu Dhabi, the largest American branded hospital outside of the United States, opened in early 2015; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi is expected to be the largest Guggenheim in the world and will be completed in 2017. NYU, the Cleveland Clinic and Guggenheim are largely acknowledged to be additional soft power assets in the country and the region, providing opportunities for greater engagement.