

### 2.2.2 & 2.2.3 Experience of engaging pan-Arab press and news agencies, and facilitating networks between political organisations and media contacts. Describe what you have done and how you did it.

1. **General.** We have extensive experience in engaging Arab and international news media. Key members of InCoStrat have **previously worked as Middle East correspondents** for some of the world's largest news agencies including Reuters. At the same time, we have established political communications capacities for a number of organisations that have required engagement with international and Arab news agencies. Our tried and tested approach to building relationships with the Arab and international news media is based on establishing trust and clear internal lines of authority. Through a combination of Syrian related projects we have established direct access to some of the major regional and international news networks, and have formed relationships with **a network of over 1600 journalists and key influencers** with an interest in Syria. Our team and Syrian network were involved in bespoke media support during the **Geneva II peace talks**.

2. **Supporting evidence.** The following evidence is based on experience gained over the last 2 ½ years of working with different political groups representing the Syrian opposition. Highlights include



- a. A key member of InCoStrat served as an **FCO advisor to the Syrian National Coalition (NC)** between February 2013 and June 2014. On commencement of the NC project in Istanbul there was minimal contact between NC members and journalists from the pan-Arab press; that which did occur was on the basis of personal relationships. There was no guidance or coordination. As a result, the Arab press received contradictory information based on personal views and individual political interest.
- b. The partner identified that the NC Media Office faced a number of internal political obstacles to imposing message discipline on the wider organisation. With the NC Media Office, the partner developed a detailed plan to coordinate pan-Arab and international media. The plan identified the key obstacles and outlined a set of solutions that could be tailored to the wider circumstances. Specifically this included:
  - 1) Press officers prioritising key journalists from the pan-Arab press and news agencies based on their relative influence over Syria coverage.
  - 2) Press officers categorising journalist contacts as “news” or “opinion” specialists.
  - 3) The Media Office had Media Office press officers on hand to answer or return calls to provide news journalists more professionalised contact with the NC. Instead of relying on one contact, the Media Office endeavoured to present journalists with a range of potential interviewees on given topics. This met a core need of deadline-driven coverage.
  - 4) Assisting the Media Office in building a relationship between approved senior management and leadership figures within the NC and President's office which could offer background and off-record briefings tailored to journalists who wrote opinion articles.
- c. We have facilitated and encouraged meetings between staffers and journalists to build trust and advised Syrian colleagues to monitor the interactions of UK and US government press officers and adapt their approaches to their own circumstances. We worked alongside the NC press officers during major political meetings to provide on-the-job mentoring to the press officers on how best to handle face-to-face media requests from Arab and international news journalists.
- d. We worked with the management of the Media Office to engage the interlinked networks of citizen journalists that dominate news media coverage consumed by Syrians living outside of regime control. It was clear that a sense of isolation from the NC was a factor driving negative coverage amongst this vital section of the news media. We persuaded Media Office management to call on staff members to use their pre-existing contacts with citizen journalists to build a relationship between them and the NC, then oversaw and managed interactions to build the relationships.
- e. A member of InCoStrat worked as the media advisor to the President's Office in the NC where she facilitated one of the first international TV interviews between **Ahmad Jarba (President at that time) and the BBC's Jeremy Bowen** (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26573833>). The relationships built from this interview are still in place and will enable Bowen to conduct new interviews with the incumbent.
- f. Due to our own individuals' networks within the Syrian political scene and the Syrian community (in general, journalists have often reached out to us in search of the appropriate people for their programmes. One such scenario was when **BBC Arabic** did a programme on **sexual violence in conflict** and asked if we could find a Syrian who would discuss their experience. Another such occurrence was again BBC Arabic looking to conduct interviews with the organisers of the **#WhereAreThey** campaign. Once making the initial connections we encouraged the Syrians to maintain the relationships with the journalists in the BBC instead of using ourselves as the conduit.

