

An address at the Foreign Service Institute

“WHAT EVERY U.S. GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE SECONDED TO THE ARAB OR ISLAMIC WORLD NEEDS TO KNOW”

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I have been professionally involved in Middle East affairs for over 40 years. As a senior private foundation official for more than a quarter century, I have also worked on the periphery of the U.S. national security community.

Over a career, I have watched the radical deterioration of attitudes among Arabs and Muslims toward the United States, beginning in 1967 but exploding after 2001. Addressing the question, “Why this change?” is really my topic today.

As many of you no doubt know, recent polls of Arab and Muslim public opinion by the pew global attitudes survey paint a stark and enormously worrisome picture. Let me share with you some of the polling data.

APPROVAL OF US IN 2000 AND 2004

	APPROVAL	DISAPPROVAL
	2000 (or 2002*)	2004
TURKEY	52%	30%
MOROCCO	77%	27%
PAKISTAN	23%	21%
JORDAN	25%*	5%

Other questions focused on Muslim views of U.S. motives in Iraq, and whether or not the U.S. is a threat to their own particular countries.

The following were the possible reasons the pollsters offered for the U.S. invasion of Iraq: (1) control of oil, (2) support for Israel, (3) halting terrorism, and (4) promotion of democracy.

Concerning the control of oil, 54% of Pakistanis said controlling the world’s oil supply was the reason for the u.s. occupation of Iraq, 44% said support for Israel was, 6% voted for stopping terrorism, and the promotion of democracy was selected by a minute 5% of Pakistanis.

As far as Turks are concerned, sixty four percent believe that control of oil was the reason for the u.s. invasion of Iraq, 45% voted for support of Israel, 20% said stopping terrorism was the reason, and only 9% chose the promotion of democracy.

As for Moroccans, 63% adduced the control of oil, 54% support of Israel, 17% halting terrorism, and 15% the promotion of democracy.

In Jordan, a longtime American ally, the picture was bleaker yet. Seventy one percent of Jordanians said control of oil was the main reason for the u.s. war against Iraq, 70% adduced support for Israel, 11% chose the stopping of terrorism, and a mere 7% voted for the promotion of democracy.

As to whether or not there is a U.S. military threat to their countries, 73% of Pakistanis said there is, 71% of Turks, and 56% of Jordanians. Data on this question for Moroccans are lacking.

In March 2005, a poll done by the center for strategic studies at the university of Jordan found widespread hostility to the United States as “racist,” “morally decadent,” and “imperialistic.” Interestingly, these opinions were not held about France, which had opposed the invasion of Iraq.

According to this poll by the CSS at the University of Jordan, large majorities in the Arab world do not believe that the United States is serious about supporting democracy. These data are consistent with the findings of the pew polling. In fact, most Arabs believe that the U.S. is itself a major human rights violator. More than 85% of those polled in Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Palestine called the U.S. war in Iraq an act of terrorism. In Lebanon, that view was held by 64%.

All of these data demonstrate that you will have your work cut out for you as representatives of the United States in the Middle East and broader Islamic world. Antipathy to the U.S., and increasingly to individual Americans themselves, has often made my activities, as one working in the interstices of U.S./Arab Muslim relations, close to impossible.

Let me give you one more piece of bad news. As of January 2005, estimates by the Iraqi government of the number of full and part-time insurgents in Iraq had increased to 100,000 from the 20,000 or less that the United States had previously estimated. U.s. government officials have since quietly acknowledged the likely validity of the Iraqi assessment. In cases such as this, the number of sympathizers is typically significantly higher than those under arms in the field. In fact, a recent poll in Iraq commissioned by the U.S. military found that a stunning 45% of the civilian population supports insurgent attacks against American targets. If accurate, that percentage suggests that almost all Sunnis plus perhaps one third of the Shiite population of Iraq support such attacks. Have a good day.

I would propose that you might consider two books to be required reading. The first is by Mr. Anonymous, Imperial Hubris: Why the United States Is Losing the War on Terrorism. The second, by professor Robert A. Pape at the university of Chicago is entitled Dying to Win: the Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism. Together, they capture the magnitude of the problem that confronts the United States today.

These two books demolish such canards as “they hate our values” as to why there is incandescent anger against the United States in the Arab/Muslim world, and why suicide terrorism is metastasizing.

A former senior CIA official who monitored Usama bin Ladin and Al-qaida for several years in the late 1990's, Mr. Anonymous (whom we know today is Michael Schuerer) reminds us that the world, in Thomas Friedman's phrase, really is flat. When misguided Christian ministers describe Muslim treatment of Jews as “worse than that of Hitler” (Pat Robertson), identify the prophet Muhammad as a “terrorist” (Jerry Falwell), and call Muhammad a “demon possessed pedophile” (Jerry Vines), you may be sure that clips of those remarks are shown in every suq between Marrakesh and Manila. As anonymous suggests, this explains why Usama bin Ladin continues to smile broadly.

Anonymous urges us to understand that we are hated by many Muslims for what we do, not for how we live. And he makes clear that increasing majorities of Arabs and Muslims detest us not because they are ignorant of the United States, but because they know us all too well. In particular, it seems to me, these hard truths should be absorbed especially by any official involved in any program in public diplomacy.

Mr. Anonymous argues that U.S. policy over many years has put many Muslims in a mood to credit the six primary charges that Usama bin Ladin makes against the United States. Those charges are: (1) apparent U.S. support for the Israeli occupation in Palestine; (2) the presence of u.s. troops in the Arabian peninsula; (3) the u.s. occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq; (4) u.s. support for Russia, India and china against their respective Muslim militants; (5) u.s. pressure on Arab oil producers to keep prices low; and (6) u.s. support for (in bin Ladin's words) “apostate, corrupt, and tyrannical Muslim governments.”

The greatest weakness of the current American approach to the Islamic world may be that the U.S. has failed to provide convincing refutations of these accusations. In fact, by its own action (or inaction), it has often seemed to confirm them. Until such refutations begin to be convincingly made, and validated by American actions on the ground, the chances of making serious progress in the war against terrorism are probably not high.

Imperial hubris suffers from bouts of rhetorical overkill, and lacks copious quantitative data to back up its arguments. These flaws are most definitely absent from professor Robert Pape's new book, *dying to win: the strategic logic of suicide terrorism*. This volume is based on quantitative data drawn from the university of Chicago's major research project on suicide bombing. Pape's book is definitive, and should forever put to rest arguments that "fundamentalist Muslim terrorists" hate the United States for what it is, rather than for what it does.

Let me be specific. Suicide bombers do not fly commercial airplanes into buildings because they are irritated that Wellesley coeds wear bikinis on cape cod beaches during the summer. On the contrary, the reasons suicide operations are undertaken result from some combination of the six items that Mr. Anonymous lists as the bases of Arab and Muslim rage against the United States.

In fact, Pape convincingly demonstrates that contemporary suicide terrorism is not primarily a product of something called "fundamentalist Islam." On the contrary, he shows that the world's leading practitioners of suicide terrorism are the secular, Marxist-Leninist Tamil tigers in Sri Lanka. In the case of Muslims who adopt this tactic, Pape maintains that the religious language with which they justify their actions is in fact a cloak for objectives that are eminently modern, secular, and political: namely, to compel a democracy to withdraw military forces from an area that the perpetrators of suicide terrorism considers to be their national homeland.

Professor Pape invites us to radically rethink the nature of the threat that we confront. In Pape's opinion, we are currently witnessing the explosion of modern, fundamentally secular nationalisms outfitted in religious garb for purposes of popular mobilization and recruitment. Pape's causal chain is:

nationalism

rebellion

suicide terrorism

Certainly, for Pape, "Islamic fundamentalism," as related to suicide bombing, is merely a straw man.

Nevertheless, Pape does argue that religion itself, as distinct from any particularistic interpretation thereof, is in fact one explanatory variable of an increased possibility of suicide terrorism. "Religious difference," Pape says, "significantly increases the risk that a nationalist rebellion against foreign occupation will escalate to the use of suicide terrorism." In other words, a Muslim population occupied by a non-Muslim power (think Palestinians and Israel, or Iraqis and the u.s.) is more likely to rise in nationalist rebellion than is a Muslim

population occupied by a Muslim state. ‘Fundamentalism,’ Pape argues, is not the critical problem, but religious difference is.

Pape’s data show that most suicide bombers come from countries where there is the largest American military presence (the Arabian peninsula), not from the five countries with the world’s largest Salafi-oriented populations (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Egypt, and Nigeria).

And Pape is candid: “The longer American combat forces remain in Iraq,” he writes, “the greater is the risk that Iraqi suicide terrorists will seek to mount operations in the United States.” To prevent that, and to discourage further radicalization of the Islamic Middle East, Pape recommends that U.S. combat forces be withdrawn from Iraq “expeditiously.” Expeditious withdrawal, I submit, should begin as early as possible in 2006.

That is not all. Pape maintains that the U.S. response to 9/11 has been misguided. The apparent American effort to “conquer Muslim countries,” and to “remake” Muslim societies in the Persian gulf, is in his opinion, only likely to make terrorism worse.

Finally, Pape demolishes the common American stereotype that terrorists professing to be Muslim are poor, uneducated, fanatically religious, or simply criminals. In fact, Pape’s data indicate that precisely the opposite is most often the case.

Pape adduces the case of Muhammad Atta, leader of the operation on 9/11, as representative of a larger universe. A good student at both Cairo University and Hamburg Technical University in Hamburg, Germany, Atta came from a moderately wealthy Cairo family that possesses a second, vacation home on the Mediterranean. Atta’s two sisters are today university professors. Atta, like the majority of suicide bombers in the Islamic world and elsewhere, represents a social elite. In other words: a solution to the problem of suicide terrorism is more challenging than one often thinks.

Unprecedented challenges today confront the United States in the Arab and Islamic world. Realism, and policy reassessments, should be the order of the day. The good news is that the demand for democracy has in fact never been greater in Arab and Muslim countries. However, the key question remains: does an intrusive American presence promote or obstruct the realization of that democratic goal?

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