

American-Arab Relations And International Terrorism*

Mohamed Rabie

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington were not only attacks on the United States; they were also attacks on the freedom and well being of every decent human being in the world. Every one has lost something. Some of us, of course, have lost much more than others; they lost their lives. As a consequence, our freedom to fly without fear is substantially curtailed, and our ability to enjoy travel without worries is undermined.

The tragedy of September 11 raises several important questions, noted among them:

1. Is there a justification for the attacks on the United States?
2. Is there an explanation for what had happened? And
3. How do we prevent this tragedy from being repeated?

In response to the first question, there is no justification for the attacks, regardless of the anger, the injustice and the grievances the perpetrators may claim. But while there is no justification for the September crimes, there ought to be a rational explanation for them. In fact, we owe it to ourselves and to our children to find a convincing explanation for what had happened for such a crime. Otherwise, we will not be able to understand the motives and of the perpetrators, and may therefore fail to prevent such attacks from being repeated. But despite the importance of the question regarding the motives and grievances of the suspected terrorists, it has been ignored, particularly by those whose opinions and actions matter most.

In the wake of the attacks, most politicians and journalists in the United States rushed to raise the question of how to retaliate and punish the perpetrators, even before the identities of

the suspected terrorists had been determined. As a consequence, the question of why the crimes were committed, and what motivated seemingly normal young people to commit such vicious acts, was not seriously raised. Even after the war in Afghanistan has succeeded in destroying the Taliban's political base, only few voices have raised the issue regarding the root causes of international terrorism. By not debating this fundamental issue honestly and publicly, we have thus far failed to place the tragedy in its proper political and socioeconomic contexts and, accordingly, failed to find a convincing explanation for the September 11, 2001 crime.

There is no doubt that the perpetrators are criminals, but they are not irrational; they planned their acts carefully and executed them with precision and determination. Although we cannot and should not accept their justifications regardless of their nature, we must uncover their motives and recognize their grievances in order to deal with the root causes of terrorism.

As the "war against terrorism" was waged, President Bush, the British Prime Minister Tony Blair and the Western media raised a never-asked-before question regarding Muslims and Arabs in general: "Why Do They Hate Us?" This question implies that Muslims and Arabs hate the West and that Arabs and Muslims must therefore be an enemy of the West. And while Bush tried without much success to distinguish between Islam and terrorism, the Italian Prime Minister and many other American politicians, Christian Evangelists and media personalities have raised the question without questioning its validity or honesty. Many of them have in fact asserted that Islam is a wicked religion and a source of terrorism. Lance Morrow, for example, writing in the *Time* magazine on December 10, 2001, stated, "The Rev. Franklin Graham spoke for the American street when he told a television interviewer, 'The God of Islam is not the same God as that of Christianity. It is a different God, and I believe it is a very evil and wicked religion.'"

But do Muslims and Arabs hate the West? The answer is definitely no; there is much anger in the Arab world but there is no hate. In fact, most Arabs admire the West and wish to imitate its lifestyles and attain the same levels of economic progress and political freedom its peoples enjoy. E. J. Dionne Jr. wrote in the *Washington Post* on November 23, 2001, "After the popular response in Afghanistan to the defeat suffered by the Taliban, perhaps we can conclude that it

[Why Do They Hate Us?] was the wrong question. It seems there are many people in the Muslim world, and in the Third World generally, who do not hate us at all.” But before Mr. Dionne reached this conclusion, much damage to the American-Arab relationship had already been done.

Any American or European who has lived or is still living in the Arab world, traveled to Arab countries or conducted business with Arab people must know that Arabs do not hate the West. Indeed, it would be very difficult to find an honest American or European who would say that he or she was hated, was intentionally humiliated, or was discriminated against while living or traveling in Arab countries. And if Arabs and Muslims do hate the West and detest its values to the point of wanting to destroy its way of life, why do hundreds of thousands of Arabs and Muslims try to leave their countries and settle in the United State and Europe, and tens of thousands of Arab students join western universities every year?

While Arabs in general do not hate the West, most Arabs and Muslims do hate American policy in the Middle East. Consequently, the right question that should have been raised in the West is not “Why Do They Hate Us?” but “What Is Wrong with American Policy in the Middle East?” Among those who have asked the right question, Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin seem to think that US foreign policy has failed to deal fairly with the Third World in general, and that its failure may have been responsible for the September 11 tragedy. They wrote on December 12, 2001 in the *Washington Post*, “For half a century our foreign policy establishment complacently assumed that America could act with impunity in the Third World. We fought the Cold War on Third World battlefields; the list of our interventions is staggering: Iran, Korea, Guatemala, Congo, Cuba, Vietnam, Chile, and Nicaragua and, of course, the entire Middle East. Millions died. To our peril in this interdependent world, we are foolishly squandering our first and strongest line of defense: our reputation for fair play. In this sense September 11 was the ultimate of a foreign policy that has systematically sullied our reputation.”

John Duke Anthony, president and CEO of the National Council on US-Arab Relations, said November 2, 2001 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., “Prior to 1947, America had no enemies in the Middle East. Neither did it have any adversaries or critics. In the entire region

from Morocco to Muscat, its image was the land of the free and the home of the brave. Sadly, much of the goodwill has been drained. There are several reasons. The oldest and main reason by far is related to Palestine.” Indeed, America’s foreign policy failures in the Middle East and the resentment it continues to provoke in all Arab and Muslim countries are related primarily to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the US attitude towards Iraq. The lack of political freedom and the spread of poverty in most Arab and Muslim countries are other contributing factors to the worsening situation. But before these issues are reviewed, the relationship between Islam and terrorism should be analyzed.

Islam and Terrorism

For a very long time, Islam was considered a passive religion, interested in neither politics nor political violence. Like Catholicism in Europe during the Middle Ages Islamic teachings were largely directed toward convincing the masses to accept their lot in life and be content, despite poverty and injustice, knowing that their true rewards were in the eternal life in the heavens. Throughout most of the 20th century, and despite the many Arab national liberation movements and wars of independence, Islam remained on the sidelines; it never got deeply involved in the wars of independence or even in the popular struggle for freedom and equality in society. In fact, not a single Arab or Muslim leader of the 20th century was a fundamentalist. Islamic revival started in earnest in 1967 after Arabs were badly defeated by the Israeli army, and Islamic fundamentalism as a political movement emerged slowly in the 1970 in reaction to several major developments. Noted among them:

1. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the US reaction to it;
2. The triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in the same year;
3. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982;
4. The outbreak of the first Palestinian uprising or *Intifada* in 1987;
5. The 1991 Gulf War that ended with the defeat of Iraq and the imposition of economic sanctions that caused wide spread poverty and starvation; and

6. The Anglo-American invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 on the one hand, and the US reaction to it on the other, led to the formation of the Mujaheddin as a military force to fight the Soviets in. Muslim men from around the world were recruited, trained and equipped by US agents to wage a holy war against the Soviet 'infidels'. The Saudi, Pakistani and other Muslim governments and rich Muslim individuals were instrumental in providing critical financial and logistical support for the Mujaheddin. At the same time, the Muslim clergy, particularly the Saudi and Pakistani clergy, provided the needed religious justification for the war. So, after several centuries of being a passive religion, Islam was politicized and radicalized to fight a major Cold War battle on behalf of the United States and in defense of Western strategic interests, for which hundreds of thousands of Muslims and Arabs died and millions of Afghans became homeless refugees.

When the war against the Soviets ended in 1989, most of the non-Afghani Mujaheddin returned to their countries. Many of them, however, were unemployed and unemployable; they knew only how to fight a guerrilla war. Inspired by their own success in Afghanistan and the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Mujaheddin began to carry their message to other Muslim societies and offer their services to groups with similar aims and causes. And this in turn gave birth to the al-Qaeda as an umbrella organization to train and finance the ex-Afghani Mujaheddin and help them expand the scope of their operations. Arab governments that were perceived as politically corrupt and religiously immoral were among the first targets of the so-called "Afghani-Arabs." And because of continued US backing of many of these governments, the Afghani-Arabs felt that they had to expand their operations to include the United States, which by then had been labeled by the Iranian clergy as the "Great Satan."

Several Arab and non-Arab intellectuals warned years ago of the impending danger of Islamic fundamentalism. In 1984, for example, I wrote an article in a Jordanian newspaper in which I argued that Arab governments that try to appease fundamentalist forces are playing with fire, extremists, I added tend to see things in black and white only; when they feel strong enough to press their demands, they go for the extreme they believe in. And in 1991, during the "European Conversations" conference held in Sweden, Mr. Amartya Sen, who later won the

Noble Prize in Economics, warned of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, calling it a threat to Europe. And while agreeing with his general assessment, I argued that the radical Islamic forces were more of a threat to the Arab people than they were to the Europeans.

In 1979, an Islamic revolutionary movement in Iran was able to drive the Shah out of power and replace his secular regime with a religious one. Although the movement had strong revolutionary credentials, it was largely peaceful and compassionate; it killed neither the Shah nor his family, nor the corrupt politicians of the old regime. But being deeply religious, fiercely anti-American and strongly opposed to modernization and liberalization, the new regime could tolerate neither political plurality nor social or religious freedom. As a result, the Revolution failed to liberate the Iranian people, to develop the Iranian economy, or institute democracy and respect for human rights. However, the mere victory of the Islamic Revolution inspired millions of Muslims around the world who saw the Iranian triumph as evidence that Islam can win and provide an alternative solution to the acute problems facing them in their countries.

In 1982, the forces of the Jewish State invaded Lebanon, occupied Beirut, killed thousands and forced the evacuation of the political leadership and military forces of the Palestine Liberation Organization from Lebanon. With the invasion coming at a time when the Lebanese were engaged in a sectarian civil war, the departure of the PLO weakened the non-Christian forces in Lebanon and created a military vacuum. As a consequence, Hizbollah, or the party of God, was established by the more active Shiite elements in Lebanon as an organization to care for the needy Shiites and as a military force to fight Israeli occupation. Most of the Hizbollah fighters at the time, it ought to be noted, were trained and closely associated with the PLO before its forced departure from Lebanon. And while Hizbollah provided the fighting forces to liberate Lebanon, the Iranian government provided the financial and military assistance needed to make the Hizbollah experiment a successful one.

In the wake of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and withdrawal from Beirut, the United States dispatched some of its troops to Beirut to clean the mess created by the Israelis. The first Hizbollah suicide attack was carried out in 1983 against the American forces in Beirut whose presence was perceived as a mission to protect the Israeli occupation forces and help the

Jewish state attain its strategic goals in Lebanon. Several such attacks were carried out subsequently in the 1980s and early 1990s against Israeli forces in Southern Lebanon. In 2000, Israel acknowledged defeat and withdrew its forces from most of the Lebanese land.

The apparent success that Hizbollah suicide attacks were accomplishing on the ground, and the ability of such attacks to weaken the Israeli resolve and force Israel to end its occupation of Southern Lebanon were instrumental in radicalizing Islamic organizations in Palestine and encouraging them to imitate Hizbollah tactics. Both, Hamas and the Islamic Jihad began in the 1990s to carry out suicide attacks against Israeli targets inside Israel and inside the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. Such attacks, however, receded substantially in the mid-1990s as the promise of peace increased with the signing of the Oslo Accords, but were renewed with intensity when the hope of peace vanished in 2000.

Daniel Williams of the *Washington Post* wrote on December 7, 2001, "In the mid-1990s when Israel withdrew troops from major Palestinian cities, Hamas's following shrunk to the point of insignificance. Many Palestinians were outraged in 1996 and 1997 when Hamas militants killed scores of civilians in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Hamas officials could not appear on the streets of the West Bank and Gaza without fear of verbal, if not physical assault. Then Israeli withdrawal ended under former Prime ministers Binyamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak. Construction of Jewish settlements soared. Support for Hamas grew." Subsequently, Hamas resumed its suicide attacks on Israeli military and civilian targets.

It must be noted that Hamas was founded in the late 1980s as a social service organization and was encouraged by Israel to challenge the PLO and counter its political influence in the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel, like most western governments at the time, believed that Islam was a largely passive religion and that encouraging its followers to organize into social services organizations would help undermine the influence of the nationalist forces. Arab nationalists were generally seen by the West as more opposed to Western presence in the region than the Islamic fundamentalists were. But fundamentalists, whether they are Jews, Christians or Muslims, tend to see things in black and white only. Once their forces are activated and gain confidence, they go after the absolute they believe in without much regard

to the consequences of their actions. Today, there are Christian fundamentalists in the United States who attack abortion clinics and kill doctors; Jewish settlers who attack and kill Palestinian children and farmers and burn their orchards and homes; Muslims who attack and kill Israelis, Americans and other Muslims; and Hindus who attack and destroy mosques and burn churches in India.

In December 1987 the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza began a peaceful uprising against Israeli occupation, hoping to free themselves and gain independence. The Israeli response to the *Intifada* was harsh; the Rabin government adopted a policy of “beating and breaking the bones of stone-throwing” children. By the time the Israelis and Palestinians signed the Declaration of Principles negotiated in Oslo in 1993, hundreds of Palestinian children were killed and thousands were either maimed or severely injured. Hundreds of thousands more lost years of schooling due to Israeli policies of collective punishment and curfews, which resulted in closing most Palestinian schools and universities for months and sometimes years.

In August 1990, Iraqi forces invaded and occupied Kuwait. Intense international pressure failed to convince the Iraqi regime to withdraw its forces and abandon its expansionist policy. Consequently, an international coalition, with substantial Arab participation, was formed under the leadership of the United States to fight the Iraqi army and liberate Kuwait. Within months, the military campaign ended and Kuwait was liberated. It was, however, a bloody campaign, during which an estimated 250,000 Iraqis lost their lives. And to prevent the Iraqi regime from developing weapons of mass destruction, the UN imposed on Iraq a comprehensive regime of economic sanctions that claimed the lives of millions of Iraqis, most of whom were children.

As Kuwait was being liberated, thousands of Iraqi soldiers and innocent non-Kuwaitis, fearing Kuwaiti retaliation, began to flee the country with their families and meager belongings. American pilots saw such people traveling in caravans of cars as easy targets to be trapped and indiscriminately eliminated. The sight of American pilots targeting innocent people and killing thousands of children inflamed the passions of millions of Arabs and Muslims everywhere. And because the US government did not withdraw its forces from the Gulf region after the war had ended, the anti-American forces in the Arab world, particularly the Islamic ones saw the

continued American presence in the Gulf as a force of foreign occupation. The goal of such presence, they concluded, was to control the Arab oil resources, protect US allies and Israel.

Despite Arab tendency to support Islamic causes, neither the Afghani-Arabs nor bin Laden had ever received tangible support or even much sympathy in most Arab countries. But as a consequence of the Gulf War against Iraq, continued Israeli occupation of Arab land and humiliation of Palestinians and American unconditional support of Israeli expansionist and even criminal policies, the Arab masses began to show sympathy for bin Laden and support for his message. The pictures of Iraqi children dying daily of malnutrition and disease, and Palestinian children being beaten, maimed and killed by Israeli forces, cause anti-American sentiment to spread in the Arab and Muslim world.

It is estimated that Iraq has lost about 5% of its population to the war and the harsh sanctions subsequently imposed on it, and that Palestinians have suffered tens of thousands of casualties at the hands of the Israeli forces since 1987. American support of Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories, US refusal to end the sanctions imposed on Iraq for more than 12 years, and continued American backing of its supposedly corrupt Arab allies gave bin Laden a larger pool of sympathizers and a growing number of supporters. And after the Anglo-American invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, the pool seems to have deepened and the number of Muslims inspired by the bin Laden's message to have increased.

Thus, the monster of terrorism associated with Islam was essentially created by the United States to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan, and came in response to US backing of Israel and invasion of Iraq in 2003. Meanwhile, Israeli invasion of Lebanon and its colonialist policies in Palestine enabled this monster to grow and expand its territory and targets. Today, terrorism is nurtured by an American policy that continues to wage war in Afghanistan, to defend Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people and to occupy many parts of the Arab world; and is sustained by the spread of poverty and hopelessness and elite corruption in most Arab and Muslim countries. Terrorism associated with Islam, therefore, was the result of both American and Israeli actions and was justified as a reaction to American and Israeli policies.

Today, terrorism continues to be invigorated by the forces of globalism that seem to exacerbate poverty, deepen socioeconomic and sociocultural divides within and among states, and foster alienation in Third World countries in general. These are some of the hard facts that must be acknowledged and seriously considered if the war on terrorism is to succeed. On September 25, 2003, Thomas Friedman argued that the US and EU failure to address the grievances of Third World nations during the World Trade Organization negotiation in Cancun regarding their agricultural policies are destined to give an added incentive to international terrorism.

In order to defeat terrorism, the new generations to be born in the Middle East must find themselves in a very different environment--one that provides hope and economic opportunity, nurtures cultural diversity and political plurality, and tolerates neither violence nor injustice. For such an environment to become a reality, the roots of the current political and economic crisis in the Arab world must be addressed with honesty and urgency. Such roots include:

1. The Arab-Israeli conflict;
2. The Iraqi impasse;
3. Life conditions in the Arab world; and
4. Poverty and globalization.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

This conflict started years before the creation of the Jewish State more than 56 years ago; and, since then, it has caused several wars and led to the death of tens of thousands of Arabs and Jews alike. The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon alone resulted in the death of approximately 17,500 Palestinians and Lebanese. The Sabra and Shatila massacres committed by the Israeli army and its Lebanese Christian allies during the occupation of Beirut claimed the lives of an estimated 1,800 Palestinian. In addition, Israeli-Palestinian violence since September 2000 and through May 2004 has claimed the lives of more than 850 Israelis and over 3,200 Palestinians, about 950 of them are children. Since the Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza is

only about one percent of the American population, the killing of some 75 Palestinians each month amounts to approximately 8,000 Americans, which means that Palestinians have to endure a September-size massacre at the hands of Israel every two weeks.

Despite this heavy toll, the United States used its veto power on December 15, 2001 to prevent the United Nations from sending an international force of observers to enforce a cease-fire in Palestine and protect the lives of innocent civilians on both sides of the conflict. Around the middle of September 2003, the Bush administration vetoed again a UN Security Council resolution to denounce Israeli plans to expel Mr. Arafat, the democratically elected president of the Palestinian people, from his homeland. In fact, the US government has used its veto power at the UN Security Council six of every seven times to protect Israel from international criticism, defend its expansionist policies in the occupied Palestinian territories, and prevent the United Nations from addressing the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

Indeed, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza has entered its 38th year, which makes it the longest foreign occupation since the beginning of the twentieth century. Senior British Rabbi David Goldberg, recognizing the cruel nature of Israeli colonial policy in the West Bank and Gaza, made a political statement for which he was harshly criticized by his fellow Jews in Britain. He said that Israel is the “last colonial power in the world.” Rabbi John Rayner, Rabbi Goldberg’s predecessor at the synagogue, said in an attempt to answer the critics, “It is a misplaced sense of solidarity that leads people to stifle debate, but stifling debate is a totalitarian tactic.”

While the Israeli conflict with both Egypt and Jordan was resolved in 1979 and 1994, respectively, the conflict with the Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese remains unresolved. A political solution to this conflict needs to be found, and it can be easily found if UN resolutions 242 and 338 and the US-coined “land for peace” formula were to be implemented, and the principles that governed the Egyptian-Israeli and the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaties were to be applied. The United States and Israel are the only states in the world that, despite recognizing the validity of both UN resolutions continue to oppose their implementation. John Duke Anthony said in his speech at the National Press Club, “Much of the regional anger against

America remains deeply rooted in Washington's role in shielding Israel from international censure, responsibility, and accountability for its failure to end the occupation." As long as the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza continues, there will be no peace in Palestine, and consequently neither the United States nor Israel will enjoy peace.

The "Road Map," which the US, the EU, Russia and the UN had developed to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is no doubt a good start. However, it has no chance of succeeding as is. The plan lacks a detailed outline of steps to be taken, a clear conception of the two states it calls for, and a procedure to address all other sensitive issues of the conflict. In fact, the concept of a "Provisional State," which the plan envisions for Palestinian statehood by 2005 is something never heard of in political literature or in literature dealing with international relations. For the "Road Map" to work, the parties that developed it should explain in detail what each step entails and what are the borders of the future Palestinian and Israeli states ought to be; it should also develop a clear conception of how other issues would be resolved.

Now, 18 months after the formulation of the Road Map plan, no progress has been made. In fact, President Bush seems to have abandoned his own plan in favor of an Israeli plan articulated by Mr. Sharon. The Sharon plan calls for military disengagement from Gaza and the dismantling of all Jewish settlements in the Strip. Sharon, however, wants the Gaza settlers to be resettled in the occupied territories of the West Bank, which means that the proposed withdrawal from Gaza is intended to perpetuate the occupation of the West Bank. Mr. Bush lauded Mr. Sharon, however, calling him a courageous man. But Sharon's plan ran into trouble when his party rejected it, leaving his political future hanging in a thin air.

The Iraqi Situation

The situation in Iraq is the second most important piece of the Middle East puzzle that needs to be resolved with fairness and without delay. When sanctions were imposed on Iraq following its defeat in 1991, no one thought that they would last 12 years. No one seems to dispute that the sanctions have led to the death of millions of Iraqi children and to undermining Iraq's ability to provide needed medicine, food and education for its fast-growing population. The United

States wanted to make sure that Iraq does not develop weapons of mass destruction and, therefore, it insisted that Iraq must allow UN weapons monitors, who were expelled in 1998, to return and resume their work. But when Iraq accepted the US demands and complied with UN resolution 1441 of 2002, the US declared that it does not trust the Iraqi regime and, therefore, it began to prepare for war against Iraq saying that the regime in Baghdad must be changed.

In March 2003, and without UN sanctions, the United States with the help of Britain formed a coalition and launched war against Iraq. During the military campaign to oust President Saddam Hussein, a substantial portion of Iraq's decaying infrastructure was destroyed and all social services were interrupted. Consequently, the suffering of the Iraqi people was deepened, anti-American sentiment in all Muslim and Arab countries was heightened and resistance to occupation increased gradually and became more violent and indiscriminate. Resistance to occupation is not limited to the Iraqi or Arab peoples today, the world's peace movement and many other European and non-European nations also oppose American occupation of Iraq, causing anti-American sentiments to become a universal phenomenon. In late 2003, a public opinion survey conducted in Europe found that a majority of Europeans consider Israel and the United States the first and second most dangerous nations in the world that threaten world peace and security.

Today, nearly every state in the world supports US efforts to fight international terrorism but very few states see American occupation of Iraq as legitimate or effective in fighting terrorism. In fact, the situation in both Iraq and Afghanistan seem to indicate that the American occupation of Iraq has harmed, not helped the fight against terrorism. Furthermore, the terrorist attacks carried out by extremists in Morocco and Saudi Arabia in May 2003 and others carried out in Spain and Saudi Arabia in 2004 are indications that US Middle East policy may have given terrorists and Islamic extremists an added incentive to fight America and its allies. A wide perception in the Arab world, in Europe and in the US itself, including Congress, seem to think that the Bush administration's war against Iraq was meant, first and for most, to protect Israel. The failure of the occupation forces to find weapons of mass destruction has reinforced such a perception and therefore inflamed the passions of most Muslims and Arabs worldwide.

In fact, *A Pretext for War* written by James Bamford confirms these suspicions. The author says that three Jewish Americans, Richard Pearle, Douglas Feith and David Wormser drafted the outline for the Bush plan to invade Iraq and oust Saddam Hussein, including the doctrine of preemption, back in the mid-1990s, when they were advising Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. However, Netanyahu rejected the plan and thus it began to gather dust until the election of George W. Bush. With the election of Bush, Pearle, Feith and Wormser returned to the corridors of power in Washington giving the plan a new life; and as it was being revived, preparations for war against Iraq began to take shape.

Today, the Bush administration seems unable to develop a plan to get out of Iraq without losing face, while retaining the strategic gains it attained from the destruction of the old Iraqi regime. Unhappiness with US policy in the Middle East and American unilateral approach to dealing with Middle Eastern problems is complicating America's plans in both Iraq and Palestine. The US desire to get the international community to help manage the deteriorating security, economic and human situation in Iraq has not so far gotten the support the Bush administration hoped for. The only way to resolve the Iraqi crisis is to transfer political and security authority in Iraq to the Iraqi people and to hasten the departure of the Anglo-American occupation forces. The formation of a transitional government and the appointment of a president in early June 2004 are good steps on the road to normalcy and Iraqi sovereignty. A new international peace keeping force, with Arab backing and active participation, should replace the Anglo-American force; otherwise, the returning of partial sovereignty under continued Anglo-American occupation will be perceived as a ploy and resistance will continue causing more damage and claiming the lives of more victims and inspiring more terrorists to join the crusade against the Americans and their Arab and non-Arab allies.

Poverty and Globalization

According to a report presented by the Director General of the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development on November 4, 2001, the Arab population grew from 100 million in 1970 to 240 million in 1993 and 280 million in 2000. If current rates of population growth were

to continue, the Arab population would reach 506 million by 2025. And while more than 25% of the Arab population is still illiterate, about 9 million children remain out of school. In addition, about 22% of the Arab population, or some 62 million people, live on a daily income of \$1 or less, and about 52%, or 145 million Arabs, live on a daily income of \$2-5 only. Accordingly, about 75% of the Arab people live under or around the poverty line. And despite the fact that about 80% of Arab women remain outside the labor market, the overall unemployment rate in the Arab world exceeds 20%.

Meanwhile, Arab exports of food products have declined to \$5 billion annually, while imports have climbed to \$35 billion per year. Industrial exports are only about 28% of imports. Arab economies are hardly growing and, due to high population growth rates, the per capita income is either declining or not growing at all. Today, the GDP of the 22 Arab countries is only slightly larger than the market value of Microsoft or the budget of the US military and intelligence activities. All of this economic stagnation and social misery is coupled with lack of political freedom and jobs and increasing greed and corruption by the wealthy and powerful.

Globalization, moreover, is causing this situation to worsen by widening the gap between the rich and poor and weakening national governments to the point where they can no longer keep their economic promises or maintain already social service. In such an environment of hopelessness and helplessness, one must not be surprised to see more people resorting to violence, feel that they have nothing to lose except, as Marx once wrote, their chains. For the overwhelming majority of the Arabs, there is no light at the end of the tunnel; life has been a never-ending tunnel from start to finish. Many seem to believe, as some religious leaders are telling them, that their only hope is awaiting them in the afterlife in the heavens, and that the quickest way to reach heaven is to fight their oppressors and the perceived enemies of Islam.

Desperation is driving more and more people to become increasingly religious. And since many believe that martyrdom is the quickest way to reach the heavens, a growing number of the deeply religious and the utterly poor and hopeless exhibit eagerness to fight and die for a cause sanctioned by their religious leaders. And since martyrdom cannot be accomplished except while fighting the enemy, the lives of such an enemy become not only worthless but also

an obstacle to be overcome by the believer on the way to heaven. The roots of terrorism therefore run deeper than both bin Laden and Islam. The Arab masses, generally speaking, are angry. They have neither political freedom, nor economic opportunity, nor hope in the future; they also lack the power to participate in the political process and even to criticize political and economic corruption that has become endemic in their countries.

The first Arab Human Development Report, issued in July 2002, warns that Arab societies are being crippled by lack of political freedom, the repression of women and isolation from the world of ideas that stifles creativity and forces intellectuals to flee a repressive political and social environment. Meanwhile, "Per capita income growth has shrunk in the last 20 years to a level just above that of sub-Saharan Africa. Productivity is declining. Research and development are weak or nonexistent. Science and technology are dormant." Most Arab governments today are politically corrupt and economically and intellectually bankrupt; they have no vision, no plan for change, and no program for political or socioeconomic transformation. Arabs in general--the masses, the radicals and the liberals--see the miserable conditions under which they live as connected to and partially caused by US policy in the Middle East. Islamic fundamentalists and nationalist forces, in particular, also blame the United States for the negative impact that globalization is having on Arabic culture and Muslim society.

Arab liberals and western educated intellectuals are convinced that only the United States can help change this situation by pressuring Israel to end its occupation of Arab lands, moving to resolve the Iraq crisis quickly and fairly, and pressing Arab governments to initiate genuine processes of socioeconomic and sociopolitical transformation. Lack of US action along these lines, therefore, makes Arab intellectuals in general feel frustrated and bewildered; it forces them to criticize US policy in the Middle East and turn a blind eye when radicals commit certain actions they do not usually condone or approve.

Arab intellectuals today are unable to either defend American actions in the world or convince the US government to change its misguided Middle East policy. American unilateralism is making things worse because the current US administration in particular lacks both a vision to build a new Middle East and the knowledge and moral capacity to distinguish

between what is right and what is wrong in the Middle East. A mixture of arrogance and ignorance characterizes the state of mind of most people in charge of Middle East policy making in Washington today, both in the White House, in the State Department and in the Department of Defense. Former President Jimmy Carter criticized American unilateralism regarding the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. He wrote in The Washington Post on September 24, 2003 “the United States have failed to control violence, and the other three sponsors (of the Road Map) are effectively excluded from any role in the relatively dormant process.”

War on Terrorism

Immediately after the September 11 attacks on the United States, President Bush declared war on terrorism. But a war on terrorism cannot be won unless socioeconomic injustice and political oppression are contained and the root causes that underpin radicalism and fanaticism are addressed fairly and comprehensively. Terrorism has been with us since the dawn of history. People who are desperate and have nothing to lose will never stop fighting to regain what they think is theirs. People who believe that their lives can and should be sacrificed for a cause have no problem seeing the lives of others being sacrificed for the same cause. And people who believe that dying while fighting the enemy guarantees them an eternal life in the heavens cannot be defeated. Only when the ideology that underpins radicalism and fanaticism is defeated and the grievances that feed anger are eliminated that the persuasive power of extremists begins to decrease and their strength to wane.

In the 1960s, the United States declared war on poverty. Because of the elusive nature of poverty and the government’s failure to address the root causes of poverty the war was lost and subsequently abandoned. A decade or so later the United States declared war on drugs. Yet after more than two decades of fighting drug lords, the war on drugs is still being waged with no end in sight. In fact, drugs in the United States today are cheaper and more readily available than they were 20 years ago. The war on terrorism is destined to face the same fate unless the root causes of terrorism are eradicated.

While international terrorism is the issue today, most of what is called terrorism has become national rather than international. Serious acts of terrorism claiming the lives of hundreds of innocent people are being committed daily in countries like Algeria, Burma, Cambodia, Colombia, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Palestine, the Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Uzbekistan and several other African, Asian and Latin American countries. FBI records indicate that 2,600 acts of terrorism were committed in the United States in 1996 alone, most of which, however, were minor acts and hate crimes. But if the US government cannot win the war on terrorism on its soil, then one must wonder how could it defeat the more elusive international terrorism.

While the phenomenon of terrorism is primarily national, most acts of international terrorism come in response to the failure of national governments to address domestic problems. Foreign powers perceived as wholly or partially responsible for national crises are often blamed and targeted, especially when such powers ally themselves with corrupt national governments. David Ignatius, criticizing US policy in the Middle East, wrote in the *Washington Post* on September 30, 2001, "Too often, America has allied with corrupt and authoritarian regimes in what many Muslims see as a cynical attempt to protect the West's oil supplies. It has often seemed oblivious to the lives of ordinary people in that part of the world. America even seems afraid to utter its basic creed of democracy and human rights in the Arab world."

A successful campaign against terrorism has to start with a campaign against ideological extremism, religious fanaticism and socioeconomic injustice, not only against individual fanatics who, if eliminated, can be replaced easily. Such a campaign has to come in the context of a new American Middle East policy that addresses the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, ends the Iraqi impasse, and respects Arab dignity and culture. In an editorial published on December 2, 2001, the *Washington Post* noted, "The greater danger in the debate over the war's larger agenda is that the energy and ambition needed to change the politico-economic conditions, ideologies and regimes that underlie terrorism will dissipate. Something like that happened following the Persian Gulf War, when schemes for transforming the politics of the Middle East devolved into a narrow Arab-Israeli peace process. A decade later, the failure to

bring about deeper change has multiplied the threat posed by Osama bin Laden.” In fact, the US campaign against international terrorism, the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq, and US failure to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and address the issue of socioeconomic injustice in the Middle East, have caused acts of terrorism in several countries to increase. It also caused human rights to suffer a set back, not only in countries experiencing a rise in terrorism but in the United States as well.

Can the West win the fight against ideological radicalism, religious fanaticism and social and economic injustice by itself? The simple answer is no. Only the secular and politically moderate forces in the Arab world can lead the fight against political corruption and ideological radicalism and help defeat terrorism in the long run. But since the 1950s Arab secular and national forces have been subjected to intimidation, suppression and even persecution in their home countries. The West in general and the traditional colonialist European powers in particular have often acted on the assumption that the nationalist forces were more of a threat to the West’s interests than the religious forces were. Consequently, while providing refuge to many Muslim fundamentalists, the West aided most authoritarian Arab and Muslim regimes to suppress and oppress the secularist and nationalist forces. Today, Arab governments in general, fearing a popular backlash, are working hard to appease the religiously conservative forces, while limiting the freedom of the secular ones. Arab nationalists and enlightened intellectuals are often denied the opportunity to reach the masses through the mass media, which remains wholly or partially owned and controlled by governments.

To have a fighting chance of winning the war against extremism and injustice, the moderate and secular forces in the Arab world must have the freedom to fully participate in the political process and the socio-cultural life of society. They must have the freedom to write and publish, to organize and be recognized, to debate and challenge the radical and conservative forces, to criticize government performance and hold government officials accountable, and to propose and lead change. And their freedom to do so has to be guaranteed by the law and protected by the government. The United States, meanwhile, has to develop a new Middle East policy based on moral principles and respect for international law and existing UN resolutions.

Such a policy is required if the United States were to deal fairly and comprehensively with the Arab-Israel conflict and address other political and economic problems in the region. Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin wrote in the *Washington Post* on December 12, 2001, "America needs a radically new foreign policy. No foreign policy devoid of sound moral principles is realistic today. Even a 'victory' in Afghanistan will do little to protect us from terrorism if we once again become complicit with authoritarian regimes that abuse their own people."

Where to Go From Here

Today, the United States stands strongly against international terrorism; and every decent man and woman in the world stands in solidarity with the United States in the fight against terrorism. But for the United States to win the support of the desperate and poverty-stricken masses, and to gain the respect of the politically suppressed and intellectually frustrated Arabs, it must commit itself to achieving peace and genuine socioeconomic and sociopolitical change in the Middle East region. Change, in our opinion, must proceed along three major tracks at the same time:

1. A military track to fight terrorism and contain its threat;
2. A political track to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict in its entirety and end the Iraqi impasse; and
3. A socioeconomic track to initiate a genuine process of socio-cultural transformation that takes into consideration the need to promote freedom and democracy, alleviate poverty and injustice, and limit the negative consequences of globalization.

Liberals and conservatives in the Arab world have been fighting a war of ideas since the mid-1960s, with the conservatives winning most of the battles, particularly among the religiously minded and the hopelessly poor Arab masses. If current social, economic and political trends were to continue for another decade or two, the religiously and culturally conservative forces would most likely win a decisive victory. And if this were to happen, any further talk about genuine social transformation in Arab countries would become an exercise in futility.

I believe that the current socioeconomic and sociopolitical conditions prevailing in the Arab world and the current US Middle East policy are causing the Arab mind to be gradually closed. The mind is being closed as a result of five major factors: First, an outdated educational system that lacks dynamism and creativity and labors hard to reinforce traditional ways of thinking and rigid beliefs. Second, repressive regimes that oppose democracy, suffocate freedom of speech, and tolerate neither criticism nor dissent. Third, a voluntary movement toward Islamic conservatism that wants to transform the Arab society along a fading yet revered image of a past that may have never existed as imagined. Fourth, a compulsory movement toward cultural particularism that claims that Arab culture is great and has what it takes to lead the Arab masses toward political unity, socioeconomic and scientific progress and military strength. And fifth, a misguided American policy that gives more ammunition to all of the above-mentioned forces while denying the rational ones the opportunity to raise their voice and challenge the others. While fundamentalists and nationalists are demanding that the Arabic-Islamic culture and heritage be respected and accepted without debate, the educational and political systems intentionally and unintentionally reinforce such demand.

The following are the major factors that appear to have been responsible for giving the religiously and culturally conservative forces the upper hand in the fight for sociocultural and political dominance in the Arab world:

1. Failure of the moderate and secular Arab states both economically and politically;
2. The tendency of Arab states to suppress the liberal forces that call for political freedom and democracy and, at the same time, appease the religiously and culturally conservative ones that call for preserving what is old and rejecting what is new;
3. The tendency of the religious forces to direct their anger toward the United States and Israel rather than toward the fearful and largely corrupt Arab regimes; and
4. Failure of both the national and liberal forces in the Arab world to articulate a vision for a promising future capable of inspiring the young and giving hope to the hopeless.

The message of the religious forces has also contributed to their ability to win the battle of ideas. While secular governments and national forces can and do often fail when they disappoint their constituents and appear unable to live up to popular expectations, religious forces do not fail; they seldom promise people much in life on earth. The true promises such forces usually make and swear to deliver are those that supposedly await the believers in the afterlife. To find out how real such promises are, one must die without sin and, in the current political climate, often accept death as a result of killing a perceived enemy of God in war.

Fifty years ago, certain European powers, particularly Britain and France, were hated in the Arab world, while the United States was very much admired and loved. Arabs, for example, seem unable to forget the honorable stand taken by President Eisenhower in 1956 that resulted in forcing the British, French and Israeli military forces to stop their campaign against Egypt and withdraw from the Sinai. Today, Arab attitudes have been reversed. While Arabs in general admire the Europeans, particularly the Germans, French and Italians and to some extent the British as well, most Arabs fear rather than respect the United States and hate its Middle East policy.

When the old colonialist European powers began to liquidate their colonial enterprise in the Middle East and change their attitudes toward the Arabs, Arabs welcomed the change, began to forget the past and forge closer ties with the Europeans to advance mutual interests. The United States, in contrast, moved in the early 1960s to ally itself with an expansionist Israel and thus began to lose Arab love and respect. The United States continues today to support Israel's settlement policy and provide the Jewish state with the financial and military resources to continue its occupation and colonization of Arab lands and to commit one massacre after another against the Palestinian people. On July 8, 2002, after the Israeli forces committed a heinous massacre in Jenin, President Bush declared in words and in deeds that he approves Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories; he called Mr. Sharon "a man of peace," and gave Israel a new loan to support its ailing economy. In fact, almost every American veto in the UN Security Council has been an American act to protect Israeli and defend its gross violations of international law and human rights in Palestine.

The United States loves to claim that it is an honest broker that wishes and tries to achieve peace in the Middle East. But when the United States committed itself to maintaining Israel's military edge over its Arab neighbors and to guaranteeing Israel's security without conditions, the United States ceased to be an honest broker; it became a party to the Middle East conflict. The United States provides Israel today, as it has for the past 20 years, an average of \$1,000 per minute, \$60,000 per hour, and close to \$14 million per day in economic and military aid. It is estimated that Israel has received more than \$200 billion in American military and economic aid since the creation of the Jewish state in 1948.

In view of the tremendous endured by the suffering Palestinian people over the last 56 years, it would be impossible to find a rationale for the continuation of current US Middle East policy. Why an America that stood fast to end the apartheid system in South Africa continues to defend Israeli apartheid policies in Palestine, why an America that launched a major war to fight international terrorism allows state-sponsored terrorism to be carried out daily by Israel in Palestine, and why an America that stood fast to force the full implementation of UN resolutions regarding Iraq in 1991 continues to block the implementation of UN resolutions regarding Palestine. For the increased Arab anger, popular disaffection with the United States, and heightened anti-Americanism in Arab and Islamic countries, the United States has no one to blame but itself and its misguided Middle East policy.

What the Arab masses and enlightened intellectuals are asking the Americans to do is very simple: to be true to their own ideas and ideals as enunciated in the US Constitution and practiced by their government within the borders of the United States. They ask the United States to stand for democracy, respect for human rights, fairness, national self-determination, freedom, and economic development everywhere, not just in a small, selective number of countries. They also ask the United States to abandon its double standard regarding the implementation of UN resolutions and to work with honesty and honor to end the inhumane, unjust and illegal Israeli occupation and colonization of Arab lands. Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin say, "We need a smart policy that addresses the underlying grievances that foster suicidal rage. We desperately need to engage the world--not just dominate it." Robert Wright, writing in

Slate.msn.com said November 19, 2001, “It is in America’s interest to address grievances before they fester into terrorism.”

E. J. Dionne Jr. wrote in the *Washington Post* on November 23, 2001 “America’s mistakes in the world usually grow from a failure to live up to our values, not from an effort to practice them.” David Ignatius added in the same paper on September 30, 2001, “To succeed, the new war against terrorism must be also a war for liberation. America is fighting a war of liberation— not simply from terrorism but from the conditions that breed it.” But is America really fighting a war for liberation?

Dr. Rabie is professor of International political economy. He has lived and studied in four continents and has published 40 books and more than 70 academic papers. He has taught or lectured at more than 80 universities and research institutes; and has participated in over 70 conferences worldwide. His writings, interests and professional associations reflect a deep commitment to peace, freedom, social and economic development, and dialogue among different peoples and cultures.

rabiem@hotmail.com

www.yazour.com

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