## Hate Your Policies, Love Your Institutions

by John Waterbury

# "WHY DO THEY HATE US?"

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Two groups have come under examination in the "why do they hate us?" debate that has unfolded since September 11, 2001. One comprises the perpetrators of violence and terrorism -- the Osama bin Ladens, the Mohammad Attas, and some suicide bombers. They are fanatics in every sense of the word. Their interpretations of politics and Islam are so extreme that they disparage the great majority of Muslim Middle Easterners as "unbelievers." They are not going to be deterred by debate, compromise, sanctions, or even the threat of death. The challenge they pose to the United States is a security issue, a matter to be dealt with through careful police work and military action. America's resources are adequate for dealing with this threat.

The vastly larger group of Muslim Middle Easterners who express anger toward the United States and evince some sympathy for bin Laden pose a far more serious challenge. This group's members are afflicted by middle-class frustrations, governed by political systems that give them no voice, and burdened by economies that offer them few opportunities. They are witnessing a conflict over land and sacred places in which they perceive the United States as applying two standards of equity and two standards of measuring violence, each in favor of Israel. That resulting frustration and anger leads to expressions of sympathy for those who resort to violence against the United States.

A Gallup poll last year asked nearly 10,000 respondents in nine predominantly Muslim countries whether they had a favorable or an unfavorable opinion of the United States. The range of unfavorable views ran from a low of 33 percent in Turkey to a high of 68 percent in Pakistan. The poll also found that respondents overwhelmingly described the United States as "ruthless, aggressive, conceited, arrogant, easily provoked, biased." But such opinions tend to be not so much about the American people or their institutions as they are about the U.S. government and its actions. For example, an even more recent poll in Lebanon showed that half of all respondents "like or love" the American people, whereas 81 percent oppose its government. In particular, there is high respect in the Middle East for U.S. institutions of higher learning, a number of which have been successfully transplanted to the region. These U.S. institutions have produced Middle Eastern leaders with whom Americans can hammer out the issues in terms and language they mutually understand and respect.

### DOUBLE STANDARDS

The conflict of interests between the United States and the Muslim Middle East is old. The antecedents of the current crisis go back at least to World War II, and the Palestinians and Israelis have been at its heart. Religion may sometimes provide its rhetoric and emotional underpinning, but it is nonetheless a conflict over real estate. The Muslim Middle East is not uniformly engaged in this question, but no part of the region is indifferent to it. Those who so vehemently deny any linkage between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the broader crisis must pull their heads out of the sand.

After September 11, a spate of analysis claimed that what was at stake was some sort of deep-seated hatred of America's democratic institutions, its free economy, and its wealth. That is a more comforting explanation of Muslim rage than the notion that the United States has violated its own norms, elevated conflicts of interest to crusades against evil, and dismissed entire peoples as hopelessly corrupt, violent, and mired in medieval cant.

Of course, there is a difference between the leaders of the Muslim Middle East and their peoples. With few exceptions, the leaders do not welcome democracy in any form -- and the United States has in most instances endorsed authoritarianism. General Pervez Musharraf's specious popular approval by referendum in Pakistan and a similar fiasco in Tunisia are but the most recent episodes. It would seem that Washington believes that Pakistanis and Tunisians would not welcome free and fair elections.

Some American observers tried to boil the question down to the statement "They hate us for our wealth." Well, the United States is rich, but "they" also question the distribution of wealth in their own societies, not merely in ours. Muslims believe that wealth honestly acquired is good in the eyes of God so long as wealthy Muslims share their wealth with the poor. Similarly, the charge that "They hate us for our free enterprise" does not stick, either. In many parts of the Muslim Middle East, as in Europe, there is great ambivalence about open markets and unfettered enterprise. Few espouse socialism, and in many ways Islam endorses a minimalist state. But the concern for social welfare and safety nets has sustained a badly bruised faith in the state that many Americans might find peculiar or naive.

## INTERESTS OR CULTURE?

Today's crisis is not one of values, let alone civilizations, but one of interests. Western values, to the extent that they are held in common, are widely (albeit not universally) shared and admired in the Muslim Middle East. The same goes for Western institutions. The real problem is that the various sides in the crisis do not understand the "other's" interests or the "other's" politics. Hence they have not found a way to talk intelligibly and intelligently about the nature of their conflicting interests. The only good news is that it is easier to reconcile conflicts of interest than conflicts of values.

The United States now dominates the world militarily and economically. It is obviously not the first world power to do so. Such dominance usually comes about through some form of institutional superiority in the conduct of government, economic life, and military organization. The Romans, the Ottomans, and the British enjoyed institutional superiority over the peoples they subordinated. Arguably the Soviet Union did not, and its hegemony was relatively short-lived. Peoples who bear the brunt of dominant economic and military power have almost always resented, even hated, the subordination they experience while admiring grudgingly the institutions that sustain that subordination. The resentment and anger is all the greater when the dominant power dismisses the subordinate peoples as unworthy of its institutions, perhaps seeing those peoples as so culturally flawed that they could never sustain them on their own.

By contrast, America is admired for its transparent politics, independent judiciary, adherence to due process, encouragement of entrepreneurship, linking of rewards to performance, provision of economic opportunity, and rapid social mobility. Perhaps no single institutional feature of American dominance is more admired than its system of higher education. Even radical Islamists are not shy about sending their children to be educated in the United States. This extensive admiration of American institutions therefore presents an underexploited opportunity for dealing with the current crisis.

That said, any attempt to deal with the widespread rage against Washington in the Muslim Middle East will have to proceed on multiple fronts. It certainly requires a reexamination of some of Washington's policies toward the region, particularly its passive support of regimes that are becoming more, not less, authoritarian. It also requires an aggressive public relations program to explain those U.S. policies that have been misunderstood and to highlight the real opportunities for international collaboration. But just as important, it should include an effort to build on the esteem that American institutions possess in the region, which is perhaps the strongest weapon in Washington's "soft power" arsenal.

## THE FAILURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The American institution that the Muslim Middle East has the greatest familiarity with and greatest respect for is the U.S. educational system. The university of which I am president has been in business since 1866. It has been joined over the years by others such as the American University of Cairo and Roberts College in Istanbul. These institutions had already had a significant impact on higher learning in the Middle East in the

first half of the twentieth century, and the end of the Cold War witnessed an explosion of "American" institutions of learning in the region: high schools, institutes, colleges, and universities. When they can, they proudly bear the adjective "American"; they all advertise their "American" content.

This enthusiasm for "American" schools stands in stark contrast to the despair that hovers around alternative local systems of education. In the Middle East today, most institutions of higher education are overcrowded and underproductive. They are overwhelmed by the rapid growth of school-age populations and undermined by sluggish economic growth, which has led to a collapse of public finance, badly strained budgets, and steadily eroding educational standards. Slow growth has also meant that few jobs are created, while available jobs do not match the poor skills of the graduates of the educational system. Even in Lebanon, which enjoys a relatively flexible and market-responsive educational system, one-third of all engineers are currently unemployed (at least as engineers). The region as a whole has too many physicians and not enough nurses, too many civil engineers and not enough foremen, too many architects and not enough electricians. In many countries, the state has effectively become the employer of last resort, loading up the public bureaucracies with students who cannot find productive work.

In the last 25 years, university enrollment in the Middle East and North Africa (excluding Turkey and Iran) has trebled to around three million students. Three-quarters of these students have been in nonscientific and nontechnical fields. Most are enrolled in vast mills for the production of government employees. Unemployment rates for those between 15 and 25 years of age, the range in which most high school and university graduates are concentrated, are over 40 percent for the entire region. Disguised unemployment is considerably higher. For many years now there has been an inverse relationship between levels of education and employment rates -- that is, the less education one has, the more likely one is to be employed.

There is good evidence that the impressive increases in enrollments have come at the price of declining standards. The great cut-off is still between secondary school and the university. Two-thirds to three-quarters of high school students either fail to graduate from high school or pass their high school exams at levels too low to earn them admission to the university. In Saudi Arabia, for example, 200,000 high school graduates fight for about 40,000 university places each year. Those left behind must compete against the many, and often highly skilled, foreign workers who make up 60 percent of the Saudi labor force. Official Saudi policy is to replace foreign workers with more Saudis. Whether young Saudis will have the stomach for the work carried out by Indians, Sri Lankans, Pakistanis, Filipinos, Palestinians, Yemenis, Sudanese, and Egyptians is not at all clear, but many other Middle Eastern countries do not even have a foreign work force to displace in favor of their own youth.

## THE POLITICS OF SURVIVAL

There are exceptions to this trend, but they are very rare. In only one country did the educational system really deliver on its promise to become the tool for molding a new society and inculcating the values of equality, solidarity, and national identity. In Turkey, Mustafa Kemal AtatUrk's revolution after World War I used the educational system to embed firmly the values of secularism, republicanism, and Turkish nationalism -- not only in his own generation, but in every generation since then. AtatUrk arguably had the greatest intergenerational impact of any revolutionary leader of the twentieth century, and the Turkish republic's schools were critical to his success.

Other Middle Eastern states tried to emulate this achievement by nationalizing private and religious schools and bringing the religious establishment under tight state control. Egypt's president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, absorbed the ancient and revered Islamic university al-Azhar into the state educational system, and other regimes followed suit. (Some exceptions were Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Morocco, and post-1979 Iran, where the governing establishments identified themselves as Islamic.) In the mid-1970s, when fundamentalist Islam was allowed to take root in some provincial Egyptian universities, especially in Assiut, President Anwar Sadat saw these incursions as useful counterweights to the leftist remnants of the Nasserist era. Moreover, Saudi Arabia, flush with the earnings of the post-1973 oil boom, was in a position to buy influence with regional states in fiscal crisis and promote the House of Saud's religious values. The temptation to fight the ideological left with the religious right was strong everywhere -- and endorsed by the United States. But

fiscal crises and the waning of revolutionary ardour neutralized the capacity of the school systems to produce the right kind of students for the right jobs. This trend was part and parcel of the general failure of state-led growth. As the revolutionary transformation petered out, beleaguered rulers had to learn merely how to survive. These regimes' drive for ideological control eventually slacked off as their embrace of expediency grew tighter.

Thus as religious activism developed momentum, several leaders tried to co-opt new religious movements by borrowing and banalizing their rhetoric. More ominously, they tried to concede to these movements ever more control over educational institutions, from primary schools to universities. Leaders who had been unable to use the schools to produce new citizens thought it generally harmless to concede such a blunt instrument to their Islamic adversaries. Even in Saudi Arabia, where the royal establishment had distanced itself from its Wahhabi roots, the guardians of the Wahhabi flame were granted strong influence over all stages of education -- an idea that seemed the better part of wisdom. Only under the region's most repressive regimes, Syria and Iraq, was a tight state grip kept on the educational establishment.

Pieces of the educational infrastructure drifted under the control of assertive new religious groups just as whole pieces of the economy were ceded to the private sector. It was inevitable that fiscally strapped regimes would take the next step and allow the private sector to begin to finance education at all levels and, in many instances, for profit. There are now four private universities in Egypt, fourteen in Jordan, seven in the Palestinian territories, four in Sudan, and eight in Yemen. In Lebanon, there are almost as many private primary and secondary schools as there are public, and 20 out of the country's 21 universities are private.

In the United States too there has been a growth in the involvement of the private sector in education. But in the Middle East this trend exhibits fewer of the advantages and many more of the dangers than does its U.S. counterpart. Private institutions tend to be self-financing, able to raise funds from sectarian, ideological, or programmatic supporters, and they are generally staffed with highly motivated personnel. But it is difficult for public authorities to control the curriculum or to monitor what goes on in the classroom. In Lebanon, the Shi`ite group Hezbollah (designated by the State Department as a terrorist organization with global reach) now spends about $3.5 million a year to educate some 23,000 students at all levels. It has a generous financial-aid budget, allowing it to reach students in Lebanon's most deprived regions. The Islamic Association, funded by Saudi Arabia, is also active at a somewhat more modest level. In short, states in the region feel they must call on the nongovernmental sector to help save their educational systems. That gambit is very risky, for those who answer the call will range from zealots to hucksters, along with everyone in between.

## SOLD AMERICAN

In recent years, "American" schools and universities have been established in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Jordan, and Sharjah and Dubai of the United Arab Emirates. They have long been present in Egypt, Palestine, and Lebanon, and in the latter country there has been a surge in new American institutions in recent years. Now that Syria has legalized the establishment of private schools and universities, private Syrian investors will inevitably seek partnerships with U.S. institutions. Similarly, in Saudi Arabia the private sector has been encouraged to invest in primary through university education, and there again ties with U.S. institutions are being sought. In one of the most spectacular partnerships, Qatar has contracted with Cornell's Weill School of Medicine to set up a fully accredited medical school that will graduate its first doctors in about five years.

Most of this American involvement in Middle Eastern education is highly constructive, but it has been mirrored by another trend that is potentially harmful. Many private institutions in the Middle East now claim to offer an "American education," but some of them offer only the name and not the content. Some of these new American institutions may well earn the adjective a bad reputation. They are simply marketing the name itself, offering some business and computer courses, but providing little of the real curriculum and content that makes the model distinctive. Because there are no credible national or regional accreditation bodies, almost any group of private investors can enter the market. Parents are sufficiently desperate or gullible to grab what appears to be a life buoy called "American."

The new "American" schools address an audience that by and large may have little real knowledge of what American higher education is all about. What they do know is that the U.S. system has been hugely successful and has had global impact. They know that it has not only helped make the United States the economic and military superpower that it is, but that it has produced the scientific, business, and educational leadership for many other countries. This audience also recognizes English as the key to technology and business, and as their children's ladder to success. They do not know much or care about the real keys to this success -- flexibility and choice, critical thinking and problem solving, academic freedom, and broad-based, general education. But they do see that something happens at MIT or Berkeley or the American University of Beirut that does not happen in their public institutions, and they desperately want that something for their children.

This market is made up of the growing middle class composed of graduates of the public institutions established in the state-led experiments of the 1960s and 1970s. They sense the slow tectonic shift in their economies in favor of the domestic and international private sectors. They are fully aware of the technological and information revolution sweeping the world, and they do not want their children to be left behind. For this market, the word "American" is to education what "Swiss" is to watches.

## NO SILVER BULLET

It is tempting for someone like myself to piggyback onto the war against terrorism by claiming that higher education, American and otherwise, is the universal solvent that reduces to manageable proportions the frustrations and anger of ill-trained and unemployable youth who feed into radical movements. But the evidence does not unambiguously point in that direction. In their study of Lebanon's Hezbollah, the scholars Alan Krueger and Jitka Maleckova have shown that neither relative poverty nor low levels of education correlate with the resort to violence and terror. To the contrary, the relatively well educated and the better off are more likely to embrace violence. Mohammed Atta is probably paradigmatic in this sense. It could be that these more privileged individuals are fueled by outrage at the poverty and illiteracy they see around them, but there is no solid evidence for this theory. No educator could guarantee that all students all of the time will go forth to be productive, reasonable citizens, and no rational person should expect that. It is true, however, that education provides broad pictures of deprivation and injustice because it is the obligation of higher education to help people understand broad historical trends and broad patterns in the distribution of economic and political power.

To say that some recipients of higher education may become politically extreme, professionally dishonest, or criminal obviously does not mean that education should be done away with. The probability is that all forms of education generally spread important values of work and reward for performance, broaden world views, and provide skills with which individuals can earn a decent livelihood and contribute to their societies. The few bad apples that are graduated unfortunately can have a destructive impact out of all proportion to their tiny numbers.

Higher education cannot erase clashing interests or inimical policies. But it can have a role in shaping the way conflicts are conducted, the rhetoric of the debate itself, and the analysis of what is at stake. It can promote a broader understanding of the route to certain impasses and of alternative roads past them. When conflict itself appears inevitable, people can learn to enter battle more in sorrow than in anger, to maintain a minimum respect for their opponents, and to keep at least a thread of contact with their enemies. But most of the institutions of higher education in the Muslim Middle East are not designed to play this role. They act as degree mills, not centers of analysis and debate. Students may graduate with some skills, but they tend to either keep the values they brought with them or imbibe those of the religious groups to whom university politics have been ceded.

In contrast, the American institutions in the region help provide an education that encourages the open debate of issues, the cultivation of a skeptical attitude toward received wisdom, and habits of weighing and assessing evidence in an effort to solve real problems. Those institutions do not train large numbers, but they also have a far-reaching impact because they train leaders in all walks of life. Those leaders may continue to resent U.S. policies and criticize U.S. leadership, but they want to import its institutional successes in governance, legal arrangements, and business organization.

These universities are private and relatively expensive. They are all struggling to increase financial aid to make their education available to less advantaged students from the region. Congress is now in a role to help. It has been considering a new, federally funded Middle East Partnership Initiative, which, if passed, would allocate modest funding from an initial appropriation of $20 million for scholarships to bring students from the Islamic world to American schools in the Middle East. No matter how small these initial sums are, such money would be well spent.

These American institutions are not islands; they are thoroughly enmeshed in their regions' societies through their faculty, students, staff, and trustees. But their American roots are strong and nurtured by constant contact with U.S. academia. They are points of vibrant contact and exchange between our societies. What these institutions do, one hopes, will become contagious.¶