

The continuing
struggle: arabs
perception of
americans after the
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Introduction

The September 11 bombings of the United States became a turning point in American politics and society as well as the Arab nation: on one hand, Americans' disbelief and shock on the degree of hatred of Arabs to commit such act and on the other, it is an exclamation point and a testament of the Arab nation's decades of battles against US foreign policies. Being the bulwark of democracy and freedom, the United States as the symbol of the free world assumed the role of being an international police in preserving democracy. The Arab nations on the other hand, are viewed by the United States to be the utmost contrast of democracy: it is pictured in American society to be reeking in violence, human rights violations and poverty (Hayajneh and Al-Shalabi, 2007). On the other hand, since the prevailing political status quo in most Arab nations is that of an Al-Qaeda rule, Americans are pictured to be oppressors, interventionists and opportunists in Arab media.

This paper evaluates the perception of Arabs on Americans during the post-September 11 attack with particular emphasis on the American government's foreign policies and people. This paper argues that both Americans and Arabs have misconceptions on the societal values of each country. Generally, the Arab nation is not a monolithic country which advocates terrorism and not all have supported the terrorist attack. However, there is a general prevailing negative attitude and perception of the American society because of US' decades of unsuccessful foreign policies in the Arab nation.

The Arabs View of America after September 11

Arab-American conflict arose from the perception of the Arab nation of United States' foreign policy favoring that of Israel. The conflict between Israel and the Arab world stemmed from historical conflict on the division of territories to which none would give way to each other. According to Meyer (2002), even before the September 11 attack, the Arab nations have predominant negative view of the Americans because of the manner by which America have handled the Israel-Arab conflict (which is perceived to be unsuccessful and have divided the nations all the more) and the US foreign policy on war-torn Iraq. Hence, the September 11 attack was a product of a historical conflict between the US and the Arab nations. Suffice it to say; to assume that the September 11 attack arose from current conflicts in Iraq alone would be to provide a narrowed focus of the problem.

After the September 11 attack, there is still a general negative view of Arabs on American foreign policy. First, the intervention of the US on the Palestinian conflict which had divided Israel and the Arab nations is deep-rooted and is still eminent today. According to some scholars, the general resentment on the way the United States have handled the Israel-Arab conflict pervades despite some of the disagreements they had on the September 11 attack (Asila, 2007; Meyer, 2002). This goes to show that the historical conflict that the US policies have created in the Arab world is deep rooted and that the negative perceptions of the Arabs are deeply ingrained. Consequently, according to Asila (2007), the question is no longer if the Arabs hate the US because it is already a given fact- the question is on to what degree it had changed after the September 11. According to the <https://assignbuster.com/the-continuing-struggle-arabs-perception-of-americans-after-the-september-11-attacks-essay-sample/>

author, while not all Arabs consented to the September 11 attack and some would even denounce the means used in order to call for the attention of the US and the world on the prevailing conflict in the Arab nations, countries in Iraq, Egypt, Turkey and other Arab states still resents American policies and the US government.

The next question would be, does the resentment of Arabs on US Foreign Policies extend to Americans as a people? The result of this question has been mixed. According to Arab Insights (2007) the negative perception is not necessarily directed to Americans as a people but rather, it is more focused on the US government and its foreign policies. However, this is not to say that all Arabs would have neutral attitude towards Americans (Hayajneh and Al-Shalabi, 2005).

Second, US foreign policies post-September 11 have yet to improve but rather worsened the case of most Arab nations. The September 11 was viewed by the Bush government with anger and hostility: they could not believe that an attack would be boldly committed to one of the economic centers of the world- New York. The Americans on the other hand, could not grasp the horror of the actions. While public opinion has been divided to supporting and against the attack, the re-election of Bush indicated that the American public supports the war of US on Arab nations. In doing so, the Arab countries were further agitated with the attacks on Iraq, Iran and other Arab countries. With these attacks, the resentment on US policies has now spanned that of the people as well (Hayajneh and Al-Shalabi, 2005).

However, not all Arabs view the intervention of the US as entirely bad. Those who have been rooting for democracy and freedom in Arab countries views <https://assignbuster.com/the-continuing-struggle-arabs-perception-of-americans-after-the-september-11-attacks-essay-sample/>

America as the only country that can save them from the Al-Qaeda rule (Crockatt, 2003).

Suffice it to say, negative attitudes towards American government and society is still predominant in Arab nations. This is further aggravated by the bombings made in Iraq and the death of thousands of Arabs as well as the chaotic and destructive remnants of the US-Iraq war after the September 11. Generally, the waging of the US war on Iraq is perceived as a means to retaliate the hundreds of Americans who have died in September 11. Hence, for most Arabs, it is hard to view American intervention as a noble act with the purpose of freeing the people from Taliban rule and instituting democracy. To a significant extent, the Bush administration's modifications of its policies in Arab nations have led to more hostilities among Arabs. However, it should be noted that this is not the case for all Arabs. A significant number of Arabs have readily accepted American intervention and supported the cause of the United States. Hence, while majority still have the negative perception and attitude against the US, some Arabs views the US positively.

Second, not all Arabs are against the United States. There is a general misconception that Arabs as a people have a deep seated hatred of Americans as evidenced in the September 11 attack which brought Americans to their feet questioning the act and what they have done wrong. The parameters that most Americans and the rest of the world that Arabs are monolithic and largely ignorant of the free world should be corrected. First, Arabians are not a monolithic homogenous society of uniform ideals and a single worldview (Arab Insight, 2007). It should be noted that not all Arabs <https://assignbuster.com/the-continuing-struggle-arabs-perception-of-americans-after-the-september-11-attacks-essay-sample/>

have favored the September 11 attack as a means to castigate the United States. Second, to consider the hatred to be against Americans as a people would be misleading. According to Arab Insight (2007), Arabs' hatred stems not for the American public but rather for certain foreign policies that the US government particularly its interventionist policies that had done more harm than good in the Arab world.

In the study conducted by Asila (2007) on the question of Americans' " Why do they hate us?" the result indicated that while there has been differences in the opinion of Arabs across countries, the general perception is that there is a prevailing negative perception of the US among Arabs. Consequently, when asked on the cause of such hatred, Asila's (2007) study indicated that it is the interventionist policy of the United States on the Palestine-Iraq conflict that led to such negative image of the US. Thus, while the United States is seen in Arab countries with the image of freedom and democracy, the bloodsheds that splattered on Iraq and Palestine were enough reason for the disparity in the ideals of the United States and that of the reality of their actions in the Arab world. Mohamed (2007) for instance asserted that this negative public image of the United States primarily stems from the interest of Arabs on the foreign policy of the United States which is considered to be the most important determinant of the hatred of the people.

For instance, one of the more interesting responses has been that of Arab Americans living in the United States. The September 11 attack created two tragedies among them: first, Arabs in general were blamed for the attack and second, as Arab Americans they also experienced the trauma due to lost of relatives and attack on the nation they consider being their second home.

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According to Arab American Institute (2006), the September 11 attack does not represent the sentiments and the beliefs of the whole Arab nation but rather only a few minorities who triggered such terrorist activity.

However, while there is still a collective resentment in the Arab world against Americans, the occupation of the US on Iraq as well as its continued foreign policies in the Arab world has also brought reforms and increased political awareness among Arabs (Hayajneh and Al-Shalabi, 2005). For one, the united refusal of the Arabs on American occupation in Arab countries has increased the political activities amongst civilians who are now more critical of the Arab governments. However, while some nations in the Arab countries are openly in contrast with the US after the September 11 attacks, some Arab countries are opting to keep quiet with the fear of the economic and political sanctions that the US may impose upon them. Hence, the US policies on Iraq and the Arab nations both divides and at the same time unites the Arab public (Hayajneh and Al-Shalabi, 2005).

While the US foreign policies in the Arab world which is perceived to be negative by the Arabs, not all Arabs are in favor of terrorist means in order to drive Americans away from their countries. The September 11 attack has also brought forth tremendous political dissents and agreement from the American public. Essentially, the September 11 attack has divided the American public in terms of supporting the war in the Middle East. Generally, most Americans viewed the foreign policies in the Arab as dubious and would not benefit the American public.

Third, after the September 11 attack, there is still a prevailing mistrust and fear on the motives of the US on Arab nations. For instance, the September 11 attack and the war that ensued after have left Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq with weakened governments and people. Consequently, the September 11 showed an innate weakness of the United States- Arabs saw that the US is not the mighty nation that it once was. While there had been rejoicing on the part of the Arabs though, majority of them have felt grief for the victims of the attack (Asila, 2007). This shows that while America is seen as a threat to Arabs, the terrorism that occurred is perceived to be as the triggering factor in aggravating their problems.

Fourth, despite the friendly relationship between Arab countries to the US such as Saudi, Egypt and Jordan, the coalition is confined to protecting their self-interest in the region. Hence, it cannot be said that these countries have a better perception of the US but rather the US serves as a tactical ally in order to contain the power of Iraq and avoid the spill over effect on their countries.

Finally, post-September 11 attack on Arab nations left most of the Arabs fearing that the US would now have the motive to horde their oil, further protect Israel and dominate the region by weakening the Muslim world. This is evident in the Arab Attitudes Surveys from 2003-2005 which further showed that the vast majority of Arabs rejected the idea that the US is after the spread of democracy and human rights protection of the region. This prevailing view was reinforced after the September 11 attack and the subsequent wars that the US has launched among Arab nations.

Analysis

The September 11 attack of the United States has further aggravated the problem of the Arab nation: the US has launched succeeding wars in Iraq and other Arab countries have felt the disastrous impact of the ruins of the continuing war. After six years of the September 11, the growing resentment and distrust of the Arabs on the United States still pervades today. The massive destruction of the nations as well as the economic impact of the US destructive retaliation has left Arabs bleeding economically and morally. Hence, the prevailing attitude of Arabs on the US can still be classified as negative. However, it should be noted that some Arabs have changed their perception of the US after the September 11 to one that is more optimistic that the US can provide the changes in the Arab world: to rid them of the poverty and human rights violations that have haunted them for centuries. However, the US is still viewed as an opportunistic country after the natural resources of the Arab world (oil).

An important lesson to be learned for Americans after the September 11 attack has been to re-examine its foreign policies on the Arab world. For one, the source of the deep seated resentment that resulted in the September 11 bombings have been the interventionalist policies it had on the Israel-Arab conflict of Palestine. Hence, the September 11 attack was not a spontaneous terror act but rather one that had been planned for decades. While indeed, the US is the champion and upholder of democracy, imposing its will on countries with a different cultural background would be a difficult and complex task and one that is not achieved through sanctions and wars. For the Arabs, the September 11 attack cannot be considered as a victory

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because the events after it ensued had resulted to more destruction of their nation. The view however, that the whole Arab world is against the US and its citizens would be a gross underestimation of the Arabs. Similar to citizens of a democratic nation, Arabs have also dissenting views on the terror attacks. Suffice it to say, the will of the September 11 is not the will of the whole Arab world.

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