



## **THE SHOT SEEN AROUND THE WORLD: THE MIDDLE EAST REACTS TO SEPTEMBER 11<sup>TH</sup>**

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*This article examines official and popular reactions in the Arab world, Iran and Pakistan to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center (WTC) and the Pentagon. The article discerns several trends throughout the region, ranging from exuberant support to outright condemnation; from saying that the United States deserved these attacks for its errant foreign policies (especially in the region), to claiming that Israel had actually perpetrated the attack*

In what typifies a world now transformed by instantaneous global communications, within a mere two hours of the time two airliners had crashed into the twin towers of the World Trade Center, not only had millions in the Middle East heard of the attack, but the Associated Press and Reuters had already published stories describing celebrations of the attacks in the West Bank and Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. While the attacks themselves were the work of a few extremists, what is far more instructive about the region's political realities and the attitudes of its people is the manner in which Middle Easterners reacted to those events.

### **THE INITIAL REACTION**

In many respects, those spontaneous outbursts of joy set the scene for the reaction of much of the Middle East to the terror attacks of September 11 which so devastated the United States. While some would later try to downplay these celebrations as having included but a handful of people (these denials are discussed below), multiple news sources reported roughly 3,000 people pouring into the streets of Nablus alone, distributing sweets to passers-by (a traditional gesture of celebration), chanting "God is Great," honking horns, flashing the victory sign, carrying Palestinian flags, and shooting in the air. Similar, though in some cases much

smaller, celebrations were also reported in Gaza, East Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Tulkarm, as well as the Palestinian refugee camps of Balata, Ayn al-Hilwe and Rashidiyah.(1) Capturing sentiments repeated by many interviewed at the time, Mustafa, a 24-year-old gun-toting Palestinian, told a Reuters' reporter, "I feel I am in a dream. I never believed that one day the United States would come to pay a price for its support to Israel."(2)

On an even more radical tone, Mohammad Rashid, another Palestinian demonstrator remarked, "This is the language that the United States understands and this is the way to stop America from helping the Zionist terrorists who are killing our children, men and women everyday."(3)

Palestinians, however, were not the only ones jubilant upon hearing the news. "We're ecstatic. Let America have a taste of what we've tasted," said Ali Mareh, a Lebanese resident of Beirut. Another added, "People are happy. America has always supported terrorism. They see how the innocent Palestinian children are killed and they back the Zionist army that does it. America has never been on the side of justice."(4)

In Bahrain, in one of the harsher assessments published in the semi-independent *Akhbar al-Khalij* on the day after the attacks, Hafedh al-Shaykh wrote, "The

U.S. now is eating a little piece from the bread which she baked and fed to the world for many decades..."(5)

Reports also described how upon hearing news of the attacks many Saudis immediately passed out sweets or slaughtered animals for celebratory feasts. Other Saudi admirers of bin Ladin sent one another congratulatory text messages on their mobile telephones.(6)

Under the headline "America burns" Iraq's official newspaper *al-Iraq* similarly declared, "The myth of America was destroyed with the World Trade Center in New York.... It is the prestige, arrogance and institutions of America that burn." The paper concluded by saying that "whichever party committed these attacks, it has dragged the dignity of the U.S. government into the mud and unveiled its vain arrogance."(7)

A commentary written by the Iranian columnist S. Nawabzadeh in *Keyhan International*, a paper run by the office of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, carried a similar reaction:

The super-terrorist had a taste of its own bitter medicine on Tuesday, when the pride of its financial and military power came crashing down in New York and Washington....[The attack] did not draw any sympathy from oppressed humanity around the globe although political leaders for the sake of diplomatic courtesy expressed verbal condemnation. For world public opinion the mood of the majority... agreed that the United States deserved it. They nevertheless felt pity for the ordinary American citizen who was made to bear the burden of the criminal policies of the successive administrations.(8)

These sentiments did not disappear immediately afterwards either. Especially keen to support bin Ladin were Islamist movements. Three days after the attacks in New York and Washington, about 1,500 Palestinians, mainly supporters of Hamas, marched in a Gaza Strip refugee camp carrying a large poster of Usama bin

Ladin.(9) That same night, an Islamic Jihad official in Gaza, Abdullah Shami, declared, "What happened in the United States made us extremely happy...."(10)

In the Hamas Movement's newspaper published in Gaza, *al-Risala*, Dr. 'Atallah Abu al-Subh put these sentiments into words in "An Open Letter to America," in which he wrote: "We stand in line and beg Allah to give you to drink from the cup of humiliation--and behold, heaven has answered."(11)

A lecturer from the University of Lebanon, Mustafa Juzo, attempted to explain that people were rejoicing:

...because of the penetration of the bastion of American colonialism and the offensive within its home turf. No one thought for a moment about the people who were inside the tallest of the world's towers as they burned; everyone thought of the American administration and rejoiced at its misfortune, while its leaders scrambled to find a place to hide.... Can anyone really believe that a people of whom the United States has killed hundreds and thousands times the number of people killed in New York and in Boston [sic], is sorry, and is not happy, when he witnesses this smack to the face of its most bitter enemy?(12)

It is, of course, critical to note that these sentiments were not created in a vacuum. For years, leaders from nearly every sector of most countries in the region had been fanning the flames of both anti-Americanism and support for the use of terrorism in newspaper articles, speeches, protest marches (where American flags and figures were routinely burned), and in sermons at mosques--many of which are broadcast on state television. One such sermon had been given by the Palestinian Authority's Mufti of Jerusalem Shaykh Ikrima Sabri, who said three weeks earlier that "the White House will turn black, with God's help" and that America, England and Israel should be destroyed.(13)

Even at the beginning of the October 2000 intifada, the umbrella organization coordinating activities in the Gaza Strip, the Monitoring Committee of The National and Islamic Forces, issued an announcement on PA television declaring “a day of confrontations and mass marches” dedicated, among other goals, to convince the Arab and Muslim world to “boycott American products and denounce its policies in the region... [and] to enter into confrontation with American interests using all possible means.”(14)

*Dismay, Shock and Condemnation*

Yet, by no means were all the immediate reactions of Middle Easterners solely ones of celebration. Indeed, many throughout the region expressed shock and disbelief. “Who could believe this is happening in the capitals of the world’s only superpower?” one Beirut resident asked in wonder.(15)

Strong public condemnations were to be found in many newspapers throughout the region, where scores of commentators condemned the event as a barbaric attack on innocent civilians. In his analysis, Rafiq al-Khuri wrote in the moderate Lebanese paper *al-Anwar*, “The crime is so horrendous that it is unacceptable even to the worst enemies of the United States.”(16) Similarly, Dr. Muna Makram Ubayd of Egypt, a former member of the People’s Assembly’s Foreign Relations Committee, described the attack to the paper *al-Akhbar* as “a horrific act that still leaves us in shock.... No words can describe the crime that victimized such a high number of innocent people.”(17)

While in the Palestinian newspaper *al-Quds*, Atallah Mansur called the attack on the United States “horrific,”(18) Ghassan Tuwayni, a Lebanese nationalist, wrote in the influential *al-Nahar*, “A criminal aggression, like the one that took place in the United States, is a crime against humankind, something that distinguishes [it] from the Pearl Harbor attack that was a military... aggression...”(19)

Likewise, the day after the attacks in New York and Washington, the partially government-owned Jordanian daily *al-Dustur* deplored the “unprecedented [attacks

which]... have caused uncountable human and material losses” in its editorial:

These attacks conflict with all the values [Arabs and Muslims] believe in, which caution against harming innocent people and call for tolerance and treating others well.... We strongly denounce harming civilians and innocent people, who are guiltless. We also offer our condolences to the families of the victims of these unjustified and unacceptable attacks.(20)

In one of the strongest denunciations carried in the state-owned Egyptian daily *al-Akhbar*, columnist Mahmud Abd al-Mun’im Murad in his piece “A Black Day in U.S. History” wrote:

There is no doubt that what happened in the United States... is the most terrifying and abominable terrorist incident in history. There is no room for gloating or being vindictive, for it is meaningless. Terrorism is objectionable.

Any person with a live conscience condemns it. Terrorism, bloodshed, and killing innocent people should be condemned whether the victims are Palestinians, Israelis, or Americans. We are all human beings, and we must be distinguished from beasts and animals living in the jungle.(21)

Even in Iran, a country whose government has spent decades demonizing the U.S., numerous writers and politicians alike condemned the attack, and especially the civilian casualties. In the reformist daily *Mellat* in Tehran, for instance, Abdolhoseyn Herati denounced: “The shocking explosions in America... hurt the alert conscience of all of humanity; and one can dare say that this rapacious act was a crime against humanity.”(22)

Somewhat surprisingly, even the hardline *Siyasat-e Ruz* carried a column by Yashar Dadgar rebuking the attack, “Any act

that victimizes innocent people, whatever their race or nationality, for achieving the goals of greedy international powers by their wrong policies, is severely condemned, and is a terrorist and anti-human act.”(23) Mohammad Kazem Anbarlu’i wrote in another conservative paper, *Resalat*, that “The way in which the operations were carried out also could not have been based on idealism since using a kidnapped passenger plane with dozens of innocent children and old people on board in order to destroy hellish targets lack humanitarian and religious justification...”(24) Rajab’ali Mazru’i, a member of the Majles from Isfahan and head of the journalists association, said in an interview with the Iranian Students’ News Agency (ISNA) that “the terrorist attack in America is to be strongly condemned, because those who lost their lives in this incident were mainly ordinary people, [people] who were deprived of their right to live in the blink of an eye.”(25)

In Iran there were even a few examples of public displays condemning the attacks and sympathizing with the victims. The first such demonstration reported occurred when around 200 young Tehranis, supporters of the Iranian reform movement and many wearing black in a sign of mourning, held a silent candle-lit gathering only two days after the attack. A few days later in Tehran’s Azadi Stadium, Iranian and Bahraini soccer players observed a minute of silence in honor of the attacks’ victims before starting their match.(26)

*Yes, but...*

Still, most condemnations were not outright, unqualified condemnations. While obviously there was both a right and need to provide explanations and draw conclusions regarding the attack, there were several aspects permeating the majority of Middle Eastern reactions which distinguished them from the reactions appearing elsewhere.

First, most writers and people interviewed rebuked the attack but then hastened to pin the blame on mistaken U.S. policy rather than on the mistaken claims and doctrines of the terrorists. Moreover, they implied that the conclusion to be drawn from

this experience was that America was the truly guilty party and must make amends by changing its errant policies.

These beliefs had two implications: that many regretted the suffering of individual Americans but not the damage to America; and that some could equate previous U.S. foreign policy decisions with the deliberate attack on civilian targets with the explicit intention to murder thousands of innocents.

Second, many people conceded that large numbers of innocent American civilians had died and that this was terrible, but that as Arabs or Muslims, they understood this better than anyone because it was only a taste of what their people had suffered for many years.

Arguably, part of the reason behind the appearance of these two caveats in so many of the region’s condemnations was that without them, it would be difficult for many to integrate these attacks into their worldviews, and especially their self-image, held before September 11. For many who had grown up on the conception of themselves as the victims of aggression by so many various powers and for so many years (some would say centuries), it seemed beyond reason that Arab Muslims could suddenly be doing the murdering with Americans, citizens of the world’s strongest power, as the innocent victims. For others, it was not even a matter of psychology, so much as the impossibility of changing their rhetoric 180 degrees overnight.

However, in adding these caveats to their condemnations, not only did those reacting publicly reinforce the self-conception of themselves as the eternal victims, but they acted in line with the terrorists’ own objectives and in a way more likely to justify and encourage than to discourage future attacks on Americans.

One typical editorial in the Palestinian daily *al-Quds* stated: “Nobody who has a live conscience and human feelings, whether he is Palestinian or otherwise, could not have been moved by these events and expressed sympathy for the families of the U.S. victims, regardless of the U.S. political stances that are totally biased to Israel and Israel’s use of the

most advanced US weapons to curb the Palestinian intifada.”(27)

The London-based, Iraqi-backed daily *al-Quds al-Arabi* carried a similar message in its September 12 editorial. While regretting the victims and condemning “this terrorist act because such actions cannot serve any cause,” the paper added that the reason for the attack was that “U.S. policy... supports the Israeli aggression against the Arabs unreservedly, and targets the Arab and Islamic countries with its blockade [making] the U.S. administration the most hated one in the whole world.” The piece summarized the paper’s sentiments clearly, saying, “We regret and are pained by the innocent blood of the victims of these operations. We hope that the political experts and decision-makers in Washington share with us the same feelings toward the victims of the unjust U.S. and Israeli policies.”(28)

Other newspapers made parallel calls to differentiate between the “innocent citizenry” and the “misguided government.” In Amman, the most widely circulated (and partially government funded) daily, *al-Ra’y*, editorialized:

A distinction must be made between the U.S. Administration’s policies that are generally biased toward Israel and the American people who aspire to world peace based on justice and development. The American people are misled by the dominant Israeli and Zionist media and by the strong influence of the Jewish lobby in the United States....

Perhaps what happened in the United States yesterday should serve as a reminder of the ongoing acts of oppression, aggression, killing, suppression, and starvation in the land of Palestine.(29)

In Lebanon, this argument was also frequently made. George Hawi in the pro-Syrian, radical-oriented *al-Safir* began an article “Beware of a New Crusade” by condemning the attack and rejecting terrorism. However, Hawi indicated that his disagreement was with the tactics, not the

goal: “It is not in this way that imperialism should be fought. It is not in this way that one can confront ‘the new world order’ and its barbaric onslaught on the nations and countries of the world.” He went on to condemn all aspects of American foreign policy and the society in general: “It [America] is a society of absolute violence, free from any moral restrictions, scruples, or religious and humanitarian values.... Have we not seen such violence against Iraq, Libya, Palestine, and Lebanon, and also against Grenada, Nicaragua, Cuba, Yugoslavia, and Kosovo?”(30)

In the Bahraini publication *Akhbar al-Khalij*, Ali Saleh declared, “What happened yesterday was a tragedy that is greater than the tragedies resulting from the continuous raids by American fighters against Iraq... the attacks on Libya... the F-16s bombarding Palestinian houses and American made Apache helicopters hunting Palestinian leaders. It is a horrible tragedy for which I have to express my sadness and sorrow and give my warmest condolences to President Bush and the American people hoping that they learn something from what happened.”(31)

One member of the Iranian Majles, Seyyed Rajab Hoseyni-Nasab, in an interview with the Persian daily *Siyasat-e Ruz*, said that, “the human aspects of the event are tragic, and we have to sympathize with the American people. But at the same time, the American people have the right to ask their politicians, ‘What was the reason behind so much accumulated hatred?’” The parliamentarian continued, “We hope... this tragedy will also be able to help America correct its internal policies, and maybe even its foreign policies, which have, little by little, drawn the focus of terrorism toward the heart of that country.”(32)

Perhaps the harshest “yes, but” came from Syrian Arab Writers Association chairman Ali ‘Uqleh ‘Ursan, who, in the association’s newspaper *al-Ushbu’ al-Adabi*, described his reaction:

The deaths of the innocent pain me; but the eleventh of September--the day of the fall of the symbol of American

power--reminded me of the many innocents whose funerals we attended and whose wounds we treated... I remembered the funerals that have been held every day in occupied Palestine since 1987... I remembered Tripoli [Libya] on the day of the American-British aggression, and the attempt to destroy its leader's house as he slept; then, his daughter was killed under the ruins.... I remembered the oppression of the peoples in Korea and Vietnam...

My soul was inundated by tremendous bitterness, revulsion, and disgust towards the country that, in the past half-century, has racked up only a black history of oppression and support for aggression and racism...

...I began to say to myself, when I saw the masses fleeing [in] horror in the streets of New York and Washington, 'Let them drink of the cup that their government has given all the peoples [of the world] to drink from, first and foremost our people...' I [felt] that I was being carried in the air above the corpse of the mythological symbol of arrogant American imperialist power, whose administration had prevented the [American] people from knowing the crimes it was committing... My lungs filled with air and I breathed in relief, as I had never breathed before.(33)

One revealing indicator of public opinion in the Arab world was a survey of Palestinian public opinion conducted by Bir Zeit University about three weeks following the attacks. One of the most fascinating findings was the response to the question: "If it is proven that the party responsible for the attacks in New York and Washington is of Arab-Islamic descent, should these groups be seen as representing Arabs and Muslims as a whole?" Fifty percent of the respondents answered yes (54 percent in the Gaza Strip), and only 42 percent said no. Further, only 25 percent of the respondents agreed that "the United States [is] justified in attacking those parties responsible for the attacks on New

York and Washington," while nearly 70 percent disagreed. On the other hand, only 26 percent of those surveyed believed the attack was consistent with Islamic Shari'a, while 64 percent disagreed.

As far as the ramifications for the attacks were concerned, Palestinians seemed quite split, with 43 percent holding the opinion that the attacks "are consistent with Arab interests" while 47 percent disagreed. Similarly, when asked if they thought "the attacks will lead to a change in U.S. policy towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict," 37 percent thought the end result would be "a more balanced approach" while 33 percent held that the attacks would result in more American support for Israel. Another 22 percent believed they would have no effect. In a somewhat contradictory finding, however, only 16 percent believed that "in light of recent events" U.S.-Arab relations were going to improve, while 47 percent thought that they were actually going to get worse.(34)

#### **OFFICIAL CONDEMNATION, DISTANCING AND DAMAGE CONTROL**

The official reaction was nearly identical most everywhere throughout the region. Almost every leader attempted to achieve three things in the immediate aftermath of the attacks: to condemn the attacks, to distance themselves and their countries (or organizations) from direct responsibility, and to engage in damage control if it appeared that the people they were representing had seemed too festive after the attacks.

Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri, for example, was quick in offering condolences to the U.S. president, "These tragic actions contradict all human and religious values," Hariri said in a statement.(35) Jordan's King Abdullah II, who was in American airspace on his way to give a lecture at the University in Texas when the attacks occurred, expressed condolences to the families of victims and condemned the attacks in remarks on CNN.(36)

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami also immediately denounced the attacks. "On behalf of the Iranian government and the

nation, I condemn the hijacking attempts [sic] and terrorist attacks on public centers in American cities which have killed a large number of innocent people.” In addition to sending his condolences to the victims and their families, the reformist leader continued by attacking terrorism in general, “Terrorism is doomed and the international community should stem it and take effective measures in a bid to eradicate it.”(37)

Remarkably, Iranian official condemnation even went beyond the words of the reformist, and generally moderate, President Khatami and included denunciations by much more conservative elements of the Iranian body politic. One instance, whose resonance was felt throughout the country and was even commented on by U.S. officials, was a Friday prayer sermon at Tehran University that was broadcast on the Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran Radio three days after the attack. In this sermon, Ayatollah Mohammad Emami-Kashani began by saying that the attack on the United States “was very worrying and any human being condemns the event.” The ayatollah continued, lamenting, “a large number of defenseless and innocent women, men and children were suddenly engulfed in fire. And one cannot overlook this incident easily. Everyone condemns, denounces and is saddened by it.” Of course, this was not the end of the sermon, which continued to say that the attack was the result of “America’s awe and arrogance” and that a war on terrorism should begin with Israel as “Israel and the usurper Zionist regime are the number one state terrorists.”(38)

Even Expediency Council Chairman, and former president, Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani deplored the attacks on the United States, calling the damage inflicted on the American people “a wide-scale bitter human catastrophe at the international level.” While he cautioned the United States against any “hasty, illogical and miscalculated” reaction and criticized the perceived double standard of the American approach to terrorism (especially regarding the Mujahideen Khalq Organization), Rafsanjani declared that the Islamic Republic of Iran sympathizes with the innocent victims of the terrorist attacks

irrespective of the severance of political ties between the two countries.(39)

In remarks reprinted in *al-Akhbar*, Egypt’s President Husni Mubarak described the attacks as “ugly.”(40) He added in a CNN interview that “the Egyptian people share a sense of grief” over the attacks and claimed that Egypt was cooperating in sharing information that might help.(41)

However, when asked in an interview with United Press International, “What motives lie behind the kind of all-consuming hatred of the United States demonstrated by such acts of barbarism?” even Mubarak—a close American ally and major beneficiary of U.S. foreign aid—hinted that America’s “faulted” policy was the source:

The feeling of injustice... Muslims everywhere see America giving arms to the Israelis to kill Muslims and America not putting any conditions on the arms it gives free to Israel. Muslims see the media taking the side of Israel whatever it does. Public opinion is seething against an America which continues to support Israel irrespective of Sharon’s policies that are designed to prevent the Palestinians from having their own state. Go to all the so-called moderate states in the region, from Jordan to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Oman. Their leaders have told me that their streets are on the verge of boiling over.(42)

The Secretary-General of the Arab League and former Egyptian foreign minister, Amr Mussa, held a similar stance. While his formal statement declared that “Arabs do not approve or accept the crime committed against the American people,”(43) during an interview on CBS, Mussa also tied the attacks to criticism of U.S. policy. Although he claimed that it did not generate any hatred for the United States as such—Mussa said that there was a prevailing disappointment among Arabs because of the U.S. policies, and that “the United States will have to reconsider some of its stances with regard to a plethora

of issues which caused world resentment of some American policies.”(44)

Still, with the televised coverage of celebrations following the attacks in Palestinian areas and his own previous association with terrorism, Yasir Arafat was both the leader who had the most work cut out for him and who could afford least to hint at criticizing American foreign policy. After a high-level meeting at his seaside office in Gaza City, he told Western reporters, “We are completely shocked. It’s unbelievable.” He continued, “We completely condemn this very dangerous attack, and I convey my condolences to the American people, to the American president and to the American administration, not only in my name but on behalf of the Palestinian people.”(45) Arafat also added that he would be willing to help track down the perpetrators of the attack.(46)

Within a few hours, the Palestinian leader ordered that no one show signs of jubilation, had Palestinian reporters (including those working for Western media) warned not to mention any support for the attacks, and told his security forces to block any additional filming of celebrations.(47) In addition, Arafat personally donated blood for those injured in the attacks in a well photographed moment at a Gaza hospital, and then called for a midnight Christian-Muslim mass in Bethlehem to pray for the American dead and injured. The PA also organized an afternoon candlelight march to the US consulate in east Jerusalem to commemorate the victims of the attacks, and a few days later, had all Palestinian school students stand for five minutes of silence.(48)

A statement denouncing the September 11 attacks issued by more than 20 Palestinian intellectuals and activists read, “No matter how long the list of charges or grievances that any one can come up with, the murder of innocent civilians can never be elevated to the status of a legitimate act. Terrorism can never smooth the road to justice; it is the high road to hell.” Yet, even a statement that begins so unequivocally, quickly deteriorated into another version of the “yes, but...” phenomenon: “[Still] the United States [should] ponder its foreign policy, especially in the Middle East region.

In this part of the world and in respect of the Palestinian question in particular, America’s key principles, freedom, democracy, and human rights, have gone out of commission.”(49)

Even Professor Manuel Hassassian, executive vice president of Bethlehem University and one of the most moderate figures in Palestinian society, could not stop from adding to his condemnation the statement that “It is utterly ironic that freedom fighters are called terrorists, while alleged democratic countries are practicing state-sponsored terrorism.”(50)

### *Denying the Pictures*

It appears that many in the Arab world, first and foremost the Palestinians, understood the damage caused by the pictures of Palestinians celebrating. To counter, they alleged that those who celebrated following the attacks were just “a handful of people”—on occasion claiming that most were children.(51) Some claimed that Palestinians were celebrating an Israeli withdrawal; others claimed that cameramen had tricked those filmed into acting like they were happy in exchange for candy. For instance, Hafiz al-Barghuti, the editor of the PA publication *al-Hayat al-Jadida* and previously the most outspokenly anti-American of Palestinian journalists, wrote, “The crew of one of the satellite channels artificially created feelings of joy among the children in occupied Jerusalem. Crew members asked the children to dance for them and [the children], enraptured by the camera, did so...”(52)

Jordanian ambassador to Washington, Marwan al-Mu’ashir told *al-Ra’y*, that the U.S. media was trying to mislead people because those who demonstrated “number less than 20 and are mostly children who were deceived.”(53)

### *Even Terror Organizations Distance Themselves*

Another fascinating aspect of the official reaction to the September 11 attacks was the nearly immediate and total denial of involvement by groups who have sometimes competed to claim responsibility for appallingly bloody terror attacks in the past.

For instance, while Palestinian Islamic Jihad leader Nafiz Azzam was telling the media that his organization was not involved in the attacks and that, “the Islamic Jihad war will continue against the Zionist enemy because they are our enemy, no one else,” Hamas spokesman Abd al-Aziz al-Rantisi, had almost identical remarks: “Our jihad is against the Zionist enemy and not against American civilians, or American targets.” Speaking on behalf of an organization that has sent dozens of suicide bombers for missions against Israelis that have killed hundreds of civilians, including several American citizens, Rantisi continued, “We are against the policy of the United States but we are not against the American people.”(54)

Two other radical Palestinian groups, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)-- both PLO member groups--also denied any connection to the attacks. DFLP spokesman Qais Abd al-Rahim, in reacting to reports that two Arab satellite stations in the Gulf had received anonymous claims of responsibility on behalf of the organization, actually condemned the attacks.(55) Most incredible, however, was when a spokesman for the PFLP--a group that in 1970 hijacked three planes simultaneously and two more in the two days that followed--even went so far as to claim that the attacks were too complex and demanding to be the work of a single group.(56)

Hizballah, which in the past carried out suicide bomb attacks against U.S. targets in Lebanon and kidnapped (and sometimes killed) U.S. citizens there, was the only group to wait several days before denying involvement. In a statement eventually faxed to the Associated Press, the organization said that it regretted the loss of innocent life, but that the reason for “this level of hate” against the United States was America’s “oppressive” policies all over the world.(57)

#### *One Official Endorsement*

With all of this condemnation and dissociation, it is important to point out that there was one significant Arab leader who openly celebrated the attacks on the United

States: Saddam Husayn. On the Republic of Iraq television station, the Iraqi dictator told his countrymen that, “Regardless of the conflicting human feelings about what happened in the United States yesterday, the United States reaps the thorns that its rulers have planted in the world.”

After citing American actions in Japan, Vietnam, and Iraq (and even accusing the United States of sinking the Russian nuclear submarine *Kursk*, which went down as a result of an internal mishap) as reasons for why his nemesis deserved the attacks that befell it, he went on to say:

The American peoples should remember that, throughout history, no one crossed the Atlantic to come to them, carrying weapons against them. They are the ones who crossed the Atlantic carrying with them death, destruction, and ugly exploitation to the whole world.... The one who does not want to reap evil must not plant evil. Those who consider the lives of their people as precious and dear must remember that the lives of people in the world are also precious and dear to their families. The United States exports evil, in terms of corruption and criminality, not only to any place to which its armies travel, but also to any place where its movies go.(58)

#### **PLACING THE BLAME**

##### *US Mistaken Policies*

One theme that resonates throughout the vast majority of the Middle Eastern reactions to the attacks of September 11 is that--while no one wanted to say that they approved of the killing of innocent civilians--this attack was the “just deserts” of American foreign policy. While support for Israel might be the first issue that comes to mind, it is far from the only reason that many in the region used to pin the blame for the attacks primarily on U.S. foreign policy itself.(59) In fact, of all groups, it seemed that the Islamists were those quickest to vilify American foreign policy in general, and point to it as the root cause of the attacks.

The editor of *al-Risala*, Dr. Ghazi Hamad, charged in his weekly column:

The United States, which encouraged the Iranian Shah to massacre his people; the United States, which stood by the blood-letter Haile Sellassie, the despot Idi Amin, and dozens of dictators and tyrants in South America, in Africa, and in Southeast Asia; the United States, which sowed death at Hiroshima, anguish in Vietnam, bitterness in Iraq, famine and siege in the Sudan and in Libya-- what did this United States, with the ugly face, expect the repressed and the oppressed peoples to do?(60)

In an article published in *al-Quds*, Hamas spokesman Abd al-Aziz al-Rantisi saw the attack's cause in these terms:

All of us know that the US foreign policy is based on very wrong foundations. The United States does not respect the poor and oppressed nations or recognize their right to a dignified life. Indeed, the United States does not recognize the right of these nations to sovereignty over their own natural resources. It hinders their development so that they would remain a market for Western commodities. It maintains their backwardness and subservience. All this is done to serve the interests of the United States and keep it rich.

These nations, therefore, hate the United States and view it as an enemy. This applies to almost all nations on earth, especially the poor ones.... Wherever one turns his face in this world he sees the American flag on fire.(61)

Rif'at Sayid Ahmad, an Egyptian Islamist writing in the Lebanese publication *al-Safir* similarly held American policy throughout the world to be at fault, "What happened in the United States is that the death of these innocent civilians, some of them Muslims, has come as a result of the U.S.

arrogance, follies, and racism. The joy felt by some ordinary people in Palestine, Korea, or Southeast Asia is nothing but an instinctive expression of hatred of the U.S. aggression and arrogance." Claiming that the attacks had struck at America's "three major pillars (globalism, political hegemony, and military hegemony)" Ahmad concluded, "The United States, the arch Satan, must realize the major significance behind these bombings.... It must rethink its policy toward the world in general and the Arabs and Muslims in particular or else learn to live with the outcome of its biases and satanic choices, which will earn it nothing but bitterness and humiliation."(62)

Even many mainstream intellectuals throughout the Arab world found U.S. policy as a whole to be in disrepute and hoped that this attack might induce an overhaul in its foreign policy. Hasan Nafi'ah, chairman of the Political Science department at Cairo University, commented on the attacks, "What happened... [will] push the United States to reconsider and reflect on why it is being the object of all that violence and antipathy. That kind of violence has its roots and causes. It is necessary to look for the causes."(63)

In the Jordanian *al-Ra'y*, Dr. Muhammad Naji Amayirah likewise claimed that "this will be a good opportunity for reviewing US foreign policy and discovering the reasons for the rising hostility toward it all over the world."(64) Also in its editorial, the Jordanian *al-Aswaq* asserted, "U.S. institutions should come to the conclusion that societies will always be threatened by killings and destruction as long as power comes first, at the expense of dialogue.... we think that this [attack] will prompt U.S. policymakers to adopt more humane policies, less biased in favor of aggressors and occupiers."(65)

In the Jordanian paper *al-Duster*, Urayb al-Rantawi wrote, "The probable perpetrators of the heinous terrorist acts are not at all concerned with resisting the alleged US system of values," but rather, Rantawi argued, "are hostile to the United States for completely different reasons, most importantly the injustice and oppression cloaked in the arrogance of power and global

domination.... The common denominator among all these parties is their deep sense of being victims of inequity resulting from the U.S. domestic or global policy.”(66)

The London-based, Iraqi-backed daily *al-Quds al-Arabi* ran a front-page article by its editor, Abd al-Bari Atwan, claiming that:

U.S. support for dictatorial regimes that ban freedoms, violate human rights, and squander their peoples’ resources have made several persons and groups resort to religious and left-wing extremism. Most of these regimes were not elected. They do not have their people’s support but have U.S. support, protection, or financial aid.... U.S. policy... has created enemies for the United States and threatened its interests all over the world.(67)

Iraqi newspapers also believed that the problem was the fundamental essence of American foreign policy. An article in ‘Uday Husayn’s newspaper *Babil* said, “The attack on vital U.S. targets... was actually a faithful reflection of the flawed structure of the imperialist U.S. establishment. Judging by the imperialist nature and composition of this state, its flawed structure affects not only the outside world but to a large extent, it harms U.S. society itself.”(68)

Many papers on both sides of the reformist-conservative divide in Iran were also quick to criticize American foreign policy in general as the cause for the attacks. One article in the Persian daily *Noruz*, a paper linked with the reformist Islamic Iran Participation Party, accused:

The occupation of Panama, the bombardment of Sudan, Libya, and Iraq, and the military and trade sanctions imposed on every country that was in some way against America and her interests, are only examples of this empire-building spirit by the United States of America.... Unfortunately, the performance of the United States, both in the sphere of democracy and despotism, as well as

terrorism and security, has so far been a sort of selective and dual performance, and instead of realizing democracy and security... has led to the violation of democracy and security all over the world, including inside U.S. territory.(69)

In a parallel front-page editorial, the hardline *Siyasat-e Ruz* maintained, “Although [the American system] has achieved great progress in the scientific and technological fields and given certain services to humanity, numerous black points can be seen in the performance of the American government.” The editorial began by pointing to “America’s atrocities in Latin America, especially the toppling of the popular government of Allende in Chile” and its support of the shah’s regime. The paper then cited its nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; “the slaughter of the Vietnamese people in a long and unequal war”; and “unquestioned support for the usurper, criminal Israel.” It even went so far as to blame the United States for, “The promotion of the culture of violence and immorality among the young people throughout the world through the visual and written media” and “efforts by cartels and trusts and multi-national companies to exploit the Third World countries.”(70)

One article in the Iranian *Keyhan International* asserted that what Americans experienced on September 11, is what people around the world “frequently experience with much more cruelty... because of U.S. policies.” The paper went on list many of the examples given in the previous article, adding the “carpet-bombing” of Iraqis during the 1991 Gulf War.(71)

Similar assertions were made by the English language daily, the *Tehran Times*. In the “Politics” column, for example, Abbas Salimi Namin claimed “Indeed, whether the dissident forces in the United States were behind the attacks, or the U.S. bullying and domineering attitude on the international arena prompted the attacks, the U.S. officials should in both cases be held accountable for the incident.”(72)

In his column published in the same paper, A. Manzarpour wrote a piece entitled, "America's 'friends,'" in which he wrote:

The world, including America, will be a safer place if its rulers manage to discard the naivety that lets them prop up killers like Suharto [in Indonesia], [Manuel] Noriega [in Nicaragua], [Augusto] Pinochet [in Chile], the Taleban [in Afghanistan], bin-Ladin, Saddam Husayn, and to this day, the Zionist Israel, in the mistaken belief that they are trustworthy--or even just worthy--friends, when clearly they are neither.(73)

Lastly, it appears that the comprehensive criticism of U.S. policy represented the views of the mass of Arab society. Even Palestinians, 90 percent of whom (according to the previously mentioned Bir Zeit survey) cited "U.S. bias in favor of Israel" as a factor behind anti-Americanism in the Arab world, did not see it as the sole cause. Almost as important for the Palestinians surveyed was "perceived animosity by [the] U.S. government towards Islam" (88 percent), U.S. actions against Iraq (87 percent), and "perceived U.S. exploitation of Arab resources for its own benefit" (79 percent). Additionally, 54 percent held that "support by the United States of undemocratic regimes in the region" was an important factor, as was the "perceived lack of reliable information on the United States" (52 percent).

When asked their impressions of the United States, only 22 percent believed that it supports democracy around the world and only 18 percent believed that the United States supports human rights around the world. On the other hand, 87 percent did agree that the United States "Is rich at the expense of the poor around the world" and another 71 percent thought that it "encourages militarism and war."(74)

#### *A Different Take Outside the Middle East*

Although many Middle Easterners were so equivocal in their condemnations of the attack, and in many instances even rushed

to fault American foreign policy in general, many in the Third World--on whose behalf numerous Middle Easterners claimed to speak--reacted in exactly the opposite manner. Even in several Muslim countries outside the Middle East, the tone of the response to the terror attacks was totally different. The largest Bengali daily in Bangladesh, for instance, the independent *Dainik Janakantha*, was absolute in its condemnation of the attacks and made no remarks about American foreign policy being to blame. In its editorial on September 12 entitled "We are Hurt; We are Outraged," the paper wrote:

Dastardly cowards, the most deplorable and cruelest of human species, the terrorists, have hit the United States of America.... Thousands upon thousands of innocent people were killed as a result of the attacks of these beastly cowards.... We condemn it in the strongest possible terms....(75)

The Turkish media was also outspoken in siding with the United States. In a typical response, Ertugrul Ozkok argued in his column in the country's most popular *Hurriyet* against those "who were trying to find extenuating circumstances for terrorism and trying to justify terrorists' actions even forgiving them...." The author concluded with statements largely unmatched by his Middle Eastern counterparts: "There are no longer any reasons to justify terrorism anywhere in the world.... Those planes fell on all our houses yesterday."(76)

In addition to questioning the political wisdom of the terrorist attack, Thai Muslim Chaiwat Satha-Anand, director of the Peace Information Center at Thammasat University, wrote, "As a Muslim... I find the taking of innocent lives such as this morally unacceptable on the religious grounds." The researcher then went on to cite the Quranic verse that teaches, "whoever killed a human being... should be looked upon as though he had killed all humankind."(77)

In Malaysia, the government influenced, English language *Star* published a

commentary calling the attacks “premeditated mass murders [committed by] bloody minded psychopaths.”(78) Meanwhile, when the country’s Chinese language (but also government influenced) *Nanyang Siang Pau* said that “The attacks should be a lesson to the Americans,” the paper referred not to American foreign policy, but rather its perceived sense of invulnerability, asserting that now “The terrorists have also proven they are capable of anything.”(79)

While many non-Middle Eastern Muslim publications did urge the United States to go slow before accusing Muslims in the attack and cautioned against bloody reprisals, the only parallel to this trend of squarely placing the blame for the attack on the United States was the sensationalist and hardline Islamist *Akit* in Turkey, which cited America’s support for Israel and claimed that the U.S. “murders Iraqi children with bombs.”(80)

#### *Conspiracy Theory Number 1: The U.S. Government or Opposition Did It*

For a remarkable number of Arabs, Iranians, and Pakistanis--even in some of the most respectable publications--the idea that U.S. foreign policy was indirectly to blame seemed to leave too much extra blame to go around. In response, these writers constructed all sorts of fantastic plots concerning ‘who was really behind the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>,’(81) many of them claiming that American domestic opposition groups or even the United States government itself were the actual perpetrators of the crime.

For instance, a column by Samir Atallah in the London-based, Saudi-backed *al-Sharq al-Awsat* hypothesized:

I have a sneaking suspicion that George W. Bush was involved in the operation of September 11, as was Colin Powell.... The reasons for this are as follows: George W. Bush was the president who has garnered the least support of all U.S. presidents throughout history. He won the election by a miniscule majority.... His presidency was in doubt from the beginning....

[But] after September 11, George W. Bush is the first president since Roosevelt with both parties behind him, with no one opposing him. He is the first president in the history of the US to have received an unprecedented amount of financial, political, and military support, and to have it approved so quickly. He continues the line of the Bush family: losers at peace, but leaders at war....(82)

Yashar Dadgar, in an article for the Iranian *Siyasat-e Ruz*, claims, “As the White House’s military strategists and terrorists have... led deadly attacks on the defenseless people of Iraq, and the innocent people of Sudan, Somalia, Libya, Afghanistan... they are also capable of committing such self-willed and horrible crimes against their innocent citizens.”(83)

Such theories were also described by Abdolhoseyn Herati in an analysis for the reformist paper Mellat, which alleged that the attacks benefited “the American militarists” and would bring financing for missile defense. “And this incident is a very good pretext for world public opinion, Europe, and the Americans who opposed this project to prepare themselves for its implementation and thus to start the flow of thousands of billions of dollars into the pockets of the American militarists.” He also raised the possibility that oil companies were to blame since “This incident will boost the price of oil and also increase the possibility of a clash in the Middle East.” Somehow, he claims, these attacks will “Once again direct the money toward America and the militarists and oil barons will once again profit from the situation.”(84)

A piece written by George Hawi and appearing in Lebanon’s *al-Safir* said the attack was “American violence, moved by American morality, and carried out by an American method.” It might have been done by a faction of U.S. leaders, criminals “or even by opposition forces that have become infected with the disease of the regime, its mentality, and criminal methods.... When absolute violence becomes a means to amuse

children, can we be surprised when the same occurs in reality?" He ended with the thought that this attack might be like the 1995 bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, carried out by American extremists.(85)

In fact, Hawi was far from the only one to recall the 1995 bombing. The Bahraini mouthpiece *al-Ayyam* also intimated that "there are many suspected organizations and we must not forget what radical rightists in the United States did in Oklahoma..."(86) A day later, the Urdu language *Nawa-i-Waqt*, Pakistan's widely respected and second largest daily, published an editorial insinuating that because "Only a person with thorough knowledge of U.S. aviation and communication systems... [and with] extraordinary intelligence and skill to penetrate a sophisticated system" could execute the attack, "It is likely that some freak US citizen (citizens) was behind this terrorism." The editorial continued, "When the Oklahoma City bombing took place, the United States promptly accused Usama Bin Ladin and the Palestinians. But, the investigations revealed that a young US citizen, Timothy, had masterminded the bombing--he was tried, found guilty and sentenced."(87)

In its front-page editorial "A Blow from Within," *Siyasat-e Ruz* deduced that because the attacks were carried out according to "a complicated methodical, technical and intelligence plan, [it] must have been [done] by a group or organization that has precise intelligence, access to America's vital and sensitive center, access to high quality weapons and explosives and infiltrators in those organs." The most likely suspect were "dissident elements in the American community, especially the American military, who played the main role in the explosion at the Oklahoma federal center."(88)

The conservative Tehran daily *Resalat* ran a similar commentary by Mohammad Kazem Anbarlu'i, headlined "Terror or Coup d'Etat?" in which the author reasoned that:

...given the extent of the operations, the precision with which they were carried out, the targets that were hit,

and the large volume of information [required], the incident cannot be attributed to [those] outside the American borders. The so-called terrorist groups... in the world--be it in the Middle East or anywhere else--are not so capable of being able to stop the alert nervous system of the management of an extensive empire like America from functioning.(89)

*Al-Sharq al-Awsat* columnist Abd al-Jabbar Adwan concluded, "Perhaps everyone will be surprised to find that, once again, the operation was 'Made in the USA,' as American society is filled with extremist religious groups who consider themselves enemies of the state, its mechanisms and its liberal society...."(90)

*Conspiracy Theory Number 2: The Zionists (or the Mossad) Did It*

The most popular conspiracy theory however, repeated countless times by the media and average citizens alike, was that the Israelis planned and executed the attacks. This is especially ironic, of course, since many of the same individuals simultaneously claimed that the attacks resulted from popular anger at American mistreatment of Muslims or of the whole world, thus requiring the United States to change its policy.

The Jordanian columnist Ahmad al-Muslih, for example, wrote in the respected *al-Dustur*, "What happened is, in my opinion, the product of Jewish, Israeli, and American Zionism, and the act of the great Jewish Zionist mastermind that controls the world's economy, media, and politics..." Al-Muslih developed his rational further:

The goal of the suicide operations in New York was, in my opinion, to push the American people, President Bush, and NATO to submit even more to the Jewish Zionist ideology and the historical goals [it has held] since the Basel Congress in 1897, under the Zionist-Jewish slogan of 'Islamic terror'... Jewish-Israeli-American Zionism is... trying to lead the

Americans and its worldwide allies to world disaster.(91)

Rakan al-Majali, another columnist for the same partially government-funded paper, wrote, "Israel is the one to benefit greatly from the bloody, loathsome terror operation... it seeks to benefit still more by accusing the Arabs and Muslims of perpetrating this loathsome attack.... They, more than anyone, are capable of hiding a criminal act they perpetrate, and they can be certain that no one will ask them about what they do."(92)

Several Iranians were also quick to point their finger in the same direction. Abdolhoseyn Herati raised the possibility that because "International efforts are currently aimed at putting [Israeli Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon on trial as a war criminal and at exposing the illegitimate rule of Israel in international courts... it will be a blessing for Israel to show that it is facing a bunch of terrorists who perpetrate major crimes so that the official terrorism perpetrated by the Israeli government will stay out of sight and so that the use of more violence against the Palestinians can be justified between world and American public opinion."(93)

More extensively, in its analysis piece "All fingers point to Israel," *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* surmised that due to the attack's "immensity," "complexity," and the incredible coordination required, "There is no reason to believe that the Zionist regime--exploiting its extensive diabolical network and also its presence and influence deep down in the governmental system of America--has not committed these activities, taking into account the record of savage massacres by that regime."

"The Zionists... are actually the principal decisionmakers and directors of the [U.S.] government but "the Israeli government must act to shore up American assistance and support from time to time" because "the unrestricted support of the government of America for the Zionist regime annoys the general conscience of the people of America.... The Israeli regime knows that only by inflicting such a wound and blaming it on 'Islamic terror' could it wipe out any dissent to current American policy."(94)

Arab academics also circulated a huge numbers of such claims, for example, e-mails claiming the footage of the Palestinian celebrations was really 10 years old or that "4000 Israelis did not report to their offices at the WTC on the day of the attack."(95)

An example of someone who claimed both that the attack represented revenge for American mistreatment of Arabs and an Israeli plot was University of Lebanon lecturer Mustafa Juzo. In the same piece quoted earlier, in which he states that "most Arabs... did rejoice" at the "penetration of the bastion of American colonialism," he also claims that Israel did it. He bases this claim on alleged Israeli benefits from the attack and states, "One of the suspects mentioned by the media lived in occupied Palestine and could very possibly have been used by Israel..."(96)

Dr. Rif'at Sayid Ahmad, director of the Yafo Center for Research and Studies told the Egyptian paper *al-Akhbar*, "I don't rule out the involvement of highly efficient intelligence agencies, such as [the] Mossad, in the event." He added, "The perpetrators may have Arab or Islamic features or accent, but the Mossad may be behind them."(97)

The Iranian academic, former politician, and generally well-spoken conservative ideologue Dr. Mohammad Javad Larijani was the most certain of Israeli complicity, stating that his "first guess regarding who is responsible for the explosions in America is the agents of Mossad and the Zionists." Pointing to "the extensiveness of the recent operations" Larijani surmised that the "perpetrators of this move had considerable access to facilities and information inside the American system." Yet this Iranian was most convinced that the attacks were perpetrated by Mossad agents "because this incident is actually in favor, to a large extent, of the Zionist regime."(98)

#### *The Perpetrators of the Attacks were not Arabs or Muslims: We're Incapable*

Another trend pertaining to who was responsible for these attacks also appears to illustrate a deeper notion about how many in the Arab world perceive themselves. While scores of writers in the Muslim Middle East attributed to Israelis extreme cunning,

competence, and skill (in addition to unmatched wickedness), they also believed that no one in the Arab or Muslim world was capable of performing such a colossal feat.

Egyptian Strategic expert Tal'at Muslim, for example, asserted in *al-Akhbar* that that the resources available to Arab and Islamic organizations are "well below" what it would take to carry out such an operation.(99) Likewise, in an article entitled "Why were Arabs and Muslims Accused of Terrorism?" Hatim Abu Sha'ban, a member of the Palestinian National Council, wrote that U.S. officials were looking in the wrong direction. "They accused... the least likely to be the perpetrators in light of this operation's nature, which requires great planning capabilities, knowledge of information, and mobility on the part of the criminals who committed this terrorist operation."(100)

One Pakistani military affairs expert, General (ret.) Mirza Aslam Beg, also insisted that the attacks seemed to be the work of experts "who used high technology for destruction," the former military man stressed that this mission could not have been done by an ordinary pilot. "Are Palestinians, Iraqis, or Afghans capable of doing this?" he asked.(101)

Even Palestinian terrorist organizations claimed that this attack was beyond them. In addition to the PFLP spokesman mentioned above who claimed that the attacks were too complex and demanding, the chief spokesperson for Hamas declared in the Palestinian daily *al-Quds* that "Palestinian factions... do not have the resources to carry out operations of this kind."(102)

Yashar Dadgar in a column written in *Siyasat-e Ruz* went further, suggesting that even Usama bin Ladin was incapable:

Given the dimensions and the complexity of this operation on the one hand, and America's advanced intelligence and security systems on the other, is it possible that bin Ladin's... group, with [its] limited financial resources, could be responsible for such a precise and coordinated operation, during which

eight [sic] passenger planes were hijacked from New York's airport within 60 minutes? Are they capable of carrying out such a large-scale operation?(103)

#### *Reacting to the Reaction*

In what might be the most intriguing aspect of the reaction to the events of September 11th, there did appear a small number of brave Arab thinkers who sought not to shift the blame of the attack, nor to say what it showed about America--but rather, dared to suggest what it might show about the Arab world. Most of these intellectuals even pointed to the reactions of their compatriots as additional evidence of the problems they depicted.

Abd Al-Hamid Al-Ansari, dean of the Faculty of Islamic Law at the University of Qatar, began the article he wrote in the London-based *al-Hayat* by challenging the religious leaders who "call for Jihad against the crusade against Islam," asking, "Will we leave the Jihad to the hysterical preachers and politicians, who are declaring a war that will destroy everything... Do they have the right to incite the public to become involved in acts of sabotage, that victimize innocents and damage state interests?" From this criticism, however, he moves on to what he considers to be the "root causes" of terrorism:

In my opinion, the human soul, and primarily the Muslim soul, is repelled by terrorism. But terrorist ideas fall on fertile ground when societies are ruled by a fanatic culture that the people absorb in doses. Opponents are blamed of religious heresy; opposition is blamed of political treason. This is a culture of terrorism, which is [easily] absorbed by those who have been exposed to inappropriate education. This culture is rooted in the minds of those who suffered from a closed education that leaves no room for pluralism.(104)

One of the boldest articles to appear along this vein was a piece penned by Kuwaiti university professor Ahmad al-

Baghdadi, entitled, "Sharon is a Terrorist--And You?" which was first published in Kuwait and then was later reprinted in the Egyptian weekly *Akhbar al-Yom*. In his biting commentary, Baghdadi charges that while Sharon might be a terrorist, at least he does not terrorize the citizens of the country that elected him, imprisoning its writers and intellectuals. On the other hand, Baghdadi asks, "didn't the Arab [rulers] carry out terrorism against their [own] citizens within their [own] countries? Persecuting intellectuals in the courtrooms [of Arab countries], trials [of intellectuals] for heresy, destruction of families, rulings that marriages must be broken up [because one spouse is charged with apostasy]--all exist only in the Islamic world. Is this not terrorism? The [Arab] intelligence apparatuses that killed hundreds of intellectuals and politicians from the religious stream itself... Isn't this terrorism?"

Pushing the envelope even further, Baghdadi probes, "Iraq alone is a never-ending story of terrorism of the state against its own citizens and neighbors. Isn't this terrorism?... The Palestinian Arabs were the first to invent airplane hijacking and the scaring of passengers. Isn't this terrorism?"(105)

Lastly, one of the most eloquent and critical Arab expatriates, Lebanese-born Fouad Ajami in an op-ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal*, "Arabs Have Nobody To Blame but Themselves," ties the perpetrators of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack to the broader the problems in the Arab world:

We were "walk-ons" in this political and generational struggle playing out in Araby. America and Americans have a hard time coming to terms with those unfathomable furies of a distant, impenetrable world. In truth, Atta struck at us because he could not take down Mr. Mubarak's world, because in the burdened, crowded land of the Egyptian dictator there is very little offered younger Egyptians save for the steady narcotic of anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism. The attack on the North

Tower of the World Trade Center was Atta's 'rite of passage.'...

Something is amiss in an Arab world that besieges American embassies for visas and at the same time celebrates America's calamities. Something has gone terribly wrong in a world where young men strap themselves with explosives, only to be hailed as "martyrs" and avengers. No military campaign by a foreign power can give modern-day Arabs a way out of the cruel, blind alley of their own history.(106)

## CONCLUSION

In examining the reactions of Middle Easterners to the attacks on the World Trade Center (WTC) and the Pentagon on September 11<sup>th</sup>, this article has discussed several dominant trends. While the official reaction was almost unanimous condemnation, the region included many who either celebrated the attack or justified it in some way. The most common reaction, it seems therefore, was a mix of the two: to denounce the killing of innocent civilians, while in some fashion claim that American foreign policy--especially in the region--was ultimately to blame for the tragedy (although these sentiments were not widely shared by Muslims outside the region).

In addition, this article discussed how few in the region were even willing to accept that Arabs or Muslims were behind the attacks; in part, because some felt that they were too incompetent to pull off such a feat, and in part, because they apparently feared American retribution. As a result, many rushed to craft all manner of conspiracy theories, blaming anyone from American domestic extremists, to Israel, to the US government itself.

Lastly, this article touched on the small, but significant group of Arab intellectuals who wrote publicly the thoughts that many even fear to share in private: thoughts on what has led so many to believe in the legitimacy of terrorism, thoughts of how their governments have failed and have repressed their own people in order to cover

up that failure, and the connection between the two.

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#### NOTES

1. AP, September 11, 2001; BBC, September 11, 2001.
2. Reuters, September 11, 2001. While it is usually quite easy to find quotations to support one's arguments, and empirical evidence does not prove anything, throughout this piece I have attempted to find statements that were representative of the various reactions that could be found throughout the region.
3. Reuters, September 11, 2001.
4. Reuters, September 11, 2001.
5. *Akhbar al-Khalij* (Arabic), September 12, 2001, found in Murray Kahl, "Terror Strikes U.S.: 'An Act of War,' How Will Americans Respond," September 12, 2001. <[http://www.chretiens-et-juifs.org/Geopolitique/US\\_attack\\_survey.htm](http://www.chretiens-et-juifs.org/Geopolitique/US_attack_survey.htm)>
6. "The Prince" segment on *60 minutes*, CBS, October 28, 2001; "Saudi Arabia: The Double-Act Wears Thin," *The Economist*, September 27, 2001.
7. BBC, September 12, 2001.
8. *Keyhan International* (English), September 13, 2001, transcribed by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS).
9. *Jerusalem Post* and AP, September 17, 2001.
10. *Jerusalem Post*, September 16, 2001.
11. *Al-Risala* (Arabic), September 13, 2001, translated in Middle East Media and Research Institute (MEMRI) <<http://www.memri.org>>, Special Dispatch 268, September 17, 2001.
12. *Al-Hayat* (Arabic), September 17, 2001, translated in MEMRI Special Dispatch 272, September 20, 2001.
13. Despite admitting he had made these remarks, the mufti strongly denied any involvement in the attacks that did eventually take place. *Jerusalem Post*, September 16, 2001. For an example of the popular support and celebrations which followed previous terror attacks, see Fahmi Huwaydi, *al-Ahram* (Arabic), August 14, 2001, translated in MEMRI Special Dispatch 265, August 31, 2001.
14. Special announcement on Palestinian Authority TV (Ramallah), broadcast on Nov. 20, 2000 at 12:20pm. Palestinian Media Watch <<http://www.pmw.org.il/advisory-201100.html>>.
15. Reuters, September 11, 2001.
16. *Al-Anwar* (Arabic), September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
17. *Al-Akhbar* (Arabic), September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
18. *Al-Quds* <<http://www.alquds.com>> (Arabic), September 15, 2001, translated by FBIS.
19. *Al-Nahar* <<http://www.annahar.com.lb>> (Arabic), September 12, 2001, translated by FBIS.
20. *Al-Dustur* (Arabic), September 12, 2001, translated by FBIS.
21. *Al-Akhbar*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
22. *Mellat* (Persian), September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
23. *Siyasat-e Ruz* (Persian), September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
24. *Resalat* (Persian), September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
25. *Siyasat-e Ruz* (Persian), September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
26. Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) <<http://www.irna.com>> (Persian), September 14, 2001, translated by FBIS.
27. *Al-Quds*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS. Another example of sentiments along these lines by a moderate Palestinian can be found in an interview with Dr. Zakariya al-Agha in *al-Quds*, September 16, 2001.
28. *Al-Quds al-Arabi* (Arabic), September 12, 2001, translated by FBIS.
29. *Al-Ra'y* (Arabic), September 12, 2001, translated by FBIS. The following day, the same paper carried a similar article by Dr. Muhammad Naji Amayirah, entitled: "Let Us Condemn Terrorism and Sympathize with the American People, and on September 12, the independent *Jordan Times* ran an editorial along nearly the same lines.

30. *Al-Safir* (Arabic), September 15, 2001, translated by FBIS. See also Salman Faysal's article entitled "Regrettable," also in *al-Safir*, September 12, 2001.
31. *Akhbar al-Khalij*, September 12, 2001, found in Murray Kahl, "Terror Strikes U.S."
32. *Siyasat-e Ruz*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
33. *Al-Ushbu' al-Adabi* (Arabic), September 15, 2001, translated in MEMRI, Special Dispatch 275, September 25, 2001.
34. Bir Zeit University, Development Studies Program, "Survey # 5: The Intifada, & America's Relations with the Arab World," October 11, 2001. <<http://home.birzeit.edu/dsp/surv5/index.html>>
35. Reuters, September 11, 2001.
36. *Al-Ra'y*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
37. AFP, September 11, 2001.
38. Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran Radio 1 (Persian), September 14, 2001, 10:30 GMT, translated by FBIS.
39. IRNA (English), September 17, 2001, transcribed by FBIS.
40. *Al-Akhbar*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
41. *MENA* (English), September 16, 2001, transcribed by FBIS. See also President Mubarak's interview with Arnaud de Borchgrave, United Press International, *MENA*, September 17, 2001, transcribed by FBIS.
42. *MENA*, September 17, 2001, transcribed by FBIS.
43. *MENA*, September 15, 2001, transcribed by FBIS.
44. *MENA*, September 16, 2001, transcribed by FBIS. A number of other officials were also eager to cite American policy as the cause of the terror attacks. A similar statement was given by Raja Zafarul Haq, chair of the Pakistan Muslim League and secretary-general of the World Islamic League, *Nawa-i-Waqt* (Urdu), September 12, 2001, translated by FBIS. For Palestinian statements along these lines, see comments by Dr. Zakariya al-Agha (PLO Executive Committee member) in *Al-Quds*, September 16, 2001, Major General Amin al-Hindi (chief of general intelligence for the PA) in *Al-Quds*, September 17, 2001, and Hatim Abu-Sha'ban (a member of the Palestinian National Council) in *Al-Quds*, September 18, 2001, all of which were translated by FBIS.
45. AP, September 11, 2001.
46. BBC, September 11, 2001.
47. Regarding the PA's attempts to block the broadcasting of celebrations, one foreign correspondent told the *Jerusalem Post* that PA cabinet secretary Abd al-Ahmad Rahman had threatened AP producers that if they broadcast their pictures, "they would not be able to guarantee their safety." Rahman was not available for comment. The PA used similar practices when dealing with reporters covering the pro-bin Ladin demonstration that occurred in Gaza three days later. *Jerusalem Post*, September 12, 2001; *Jerusalem Post* Staff and AP, September 16, 2001; BBC, September 11, 2001.
48. *Jerusalem Post*, September 13, 2001. A hint of this comprehension of the dangers of these attacks and subsequent celebrations to the Palestinian cause, and the PA's latter intention to spin the event can be found in an interview in the Palestinian daily *al-Quds*, where Major General Amin al-Hindi, the chief of general intelligence for the PA, said "There is now a consensus among the Palestinian organizations that there has been a change in the world following the recent act of aggression on the United States. The Palestinians are now acting based on a heightened sense of responsibility given the gravity of the situation... in order to forestall Israel's attempt to make political capital out of this thing" Hindi added that this point in particular came up in the course of a meeting between President Yasir Arafat and the Palestinian factions. *Al-Quds*, September 17, 2001, translated by FBIS.
49. *Al-Quds*, September 17, 2001, translated by FBIS.
50. Open Letter by Professor Manuel Hassassian. The author received this letter from a student of Bethlehem University.
51. *Jerusalem Post*, September 13, 2001. *Al-Nahar*, September 12, 2001, translated by FBIS.
52. *Al-Ayyam* (Arabic), September 13, 2001, translated in MEMRI Special Dispatch 272, September 20, 2001. Another denial along

similar grounds came in open letter by Professor Manuel Hassassian, op-cit.

53. *Al-Ra'y*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.

54. AP, September 12, 2001.

55. AP, September 11, 2001; BBC, September 11, 2001.

56. AP, September 12, 2001.

57. AP, September 16, 2001.

58. Republic of Iraq Television (Arabic), September 12, 2001, translated by FBIS.

59. While many government officials and commentators said in very general terms that US support for Israel was not the only issue that created this conflict, one person who clearly spelled out the other grievances that really fuel the anti-Americanism of many in the region has been Barry Rubin, especially in his column in the *Jerusalem Post* of October 16, 2001.

60. *Al-Risala*, September 13, 2001, translated in MEMRI, Special Dispatch 268, September 17, 2001.

61. *Al-Quds*, September 14, 2001, translated by FBIS.

62. *Al-Safir*, September 14, 2001, translated by FBIS.

63. *Al-Akhbar*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.

64. *Al-Ra'y*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.

65. As translated by Jordan Times, September 13, 2001.

66. *Al-Dustur*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.

67. *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.

68. *Babil* <<http://www.iraq2000.com/babil/>> (Arabic), September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.

69. *Noruz* (Persian), September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.

70. *Siyasat-e Ruz*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS. "Cartels" and "trusts" are in English.

71. *Keyhan International*, September 13, 2001, transcribed by FBIS.

72. *Tehran Times* <<http://www.tehrantimes.com>> (English), September 16, 2001, transcribed by FBIS.

73. *Tehran Times*, September 16, 2001, transcribed by FBIS. See also, Majlis member

Rajab'ali Mazru'i comments in *Mellat*, September 13, 2001.

74. Bir Zeit University, Development Studies Program, "Survey # 5: The Intifada, & America's Relations with the Arab World," October 11, 2001.

<<http://home.birzeit.edu/dsp/surv5/index.html>>

75. *Dainik Janakantha* (Bengali) September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.

76. *Hurriyet* (Turkish) September 12, 2001, translated by FBIS.

77. *Bangkok Post* (English) September 18, 2001, transcribed by FBIS.

78. *Star* (English), September 12, 2001, found in Murray Kahl, "Terror Strikes U.S." See Malaysian official reaction in the Chinese *Xinhua* (English), September 12, 2001, transcribed by FBIS.

79. *Nanyang Siang Pau* (Chinese), September 12, 2001, found in Murray Kahl, "Terror Strikes U.S." For the Indonesian response, see *The Jakarta Post* (English), September 14, 2001, transcribed by FBIS, and see *Antara* (Indonesian), September 12, 2001, translated by FBIS.

80. AFP (North European Service--English), September 12, 2001, transcribed by FBIS.

81. One of the more original conspiracy theories, based on an early report that they had claimed responsibility, was that the Japanese Red Army executed the attack. A few instances can be found in *Al-Ayyam*, September 13, 2001 and *Tishrin* (Arabic), September 13, 2001, both found in MEMRI Special Dispatch 270, September 20, 2001; and *Siyasat-e Ruz*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.

82. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (Arabic), September 14, 2001, translated in MEMRI Special Dispatch 270, September 20, 2001.

83. *Siyasat-e Ruz*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS. Ellipses as published.

84. *Mellat*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.

85. *Al-Safir*, September 15, 2001, translated by FBIS. Ironically, oil prices actually fell steeply in the months immediately following the attacks. See also the article in *al-Safir* by columnist Nur al-Din Sat'e in *Al-Safir*, September 12, 2001, translated in MEMRI Special Dispatch 270, September 20, 2001.

86. *Al-Ayyam* (Arabic), September 12, 2001, found in Murray Kahl, "Terror Strikes U.S."
87. *Nawa-i-Waqt*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS. Also see the article by Dr Jassim Taqui in *Pakistan Observer* (English) September 13, 2001, transcribed by FBIS.
88. *Siyasat-e Ruz*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
89. *Resalat*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
90. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 13, 2001, translated in MEMRI Special Dispatch 270, September 20, 2001.
91. [Al-Dustur, September 13, 2001, MEMRI Special Dispatch 270, September 20, 2001.](#)
92. *Al-Dustur*, September 13, 2001, MEMRI Special Dispatch 270, September 20, 2001. See also columnist Mussa Hawamdeh's piece in the same addition of *al-Dustur*; *al-Ra'y*, September 13, 2001, MEMRI Special Dispatch 270, September 20, 2001.
93. *Mellat*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS. See also, *Siyasat-e Ruz*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
94. *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* (Persian), September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
95. This quotation was taken from one of a few such e-mails the author received personally (some of which appeared to have been forwarded several times previously).
96. *Al-Hayat*, September 17, 2001, translated in MEMRI Special Dispatch 272, September 20, 2001.
97. *Al-Akhbar*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
98. *Siyasat-e Ruz*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS. Also see the editorial in *Nawa-i-Waqt* cited above.
99. *Al-Akhbar*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
100. *Al-Quds*, September 18, 2001, translated by FBIS.
101. *Nawa-i-Waqt*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS. An editorial in the same issue made the exact same claim.
102. AP, September 12, 2001; *al-Quds*, September 14, 2001, translated by FBIS.
103. *Siyasat-e Ruz*, September 13, 2001, translated by FBIS.
104. *Al-Hayat*, November 29, 2001, translated in MEMRI Special Dispatch 307, December 4, 2001
105. *Al-Anbaa* and later *Akhbar al-Yom*, November 3, 2001, translated in MEMRI Special Dispatch 302, November 20, 2001. Another noteworthy example is a letter to the editor sent by Sudanese reader Hashem Hassan, a self identified pan-Arabist, entitled "We, not the U.S., are the lawful parents of bin Laden" *al-Quds al-Arabi*, October 7, 2001, MEMRI Special Dispatch 285, October 12, 2001.
106. Wall Street Journal, October 16, 2001.