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Islamaphobia: A Positive Feedback Loop

Samuel Schoening



A sophomore in Seton Hall's School of Diplomacy, he is double-major in International Relations and Economics. His hometown is Lake Ozark, MO. He is nineteen years old, and has spent many of those years learning about his interests' – politics, geography, and economy. He is a firm believer in an individual's ability to change the world. This belief has been the driving force of his life, and has put him in the never-ending pursuit of bettering the plight of humanity.

In the past few decades, the International community has shifted its focus to the horrific and widespread terrorist phenomenon. Terrorism has emerged from the background of national foreign policies to the very forefront of governmental concerns. After the annihilation of entire nations in World War II and following the Cold War that threatened the very survival of our species, the 21st century world is in a state of relative peace. Only as the Cold War came to a gradual close, did terrorism begin to emerge as a publicly-recognized international crisis. After countless attacks and the events of September 11, 2001, terrorism is generally perceived to be the greatest threat to all nations' homeland security.

Despite its brutality, terrorism is primarily an extreme instrument of political influence. A militant group instills fear in a victim society until the society's far larger population gives in to or negotiates with their demands. Terrorism is often explained away as the vengeance of an extremist group for a perceived injustice. One does not require a comprehensive understanding of history to be aware of the deplorable history of U.S. relations with the Middle East. The list of interventions, coups, and wars among Arab nations that involve the United States is lengthy and probably includes more failures than successes.

In the all-too-recent past, the world was plagued by the proxy wars and international power plays of the United States and the Soviet Union. The effects of the ideological struggle were felt

around the world and even beyond. The Middle East was a hotspot of Cold War hostilities as nations were created out of former Ottoman, French, and British territories.²⁶³ The foreign ideologies of Democracy and Communism were heavily promoted by the superpowers with little compromise, leading to the international factions offering heavy military support to their perceived domestic allies. This support brought millions of military firearms, explosives, and vehicles to many undeveloped regions with remarkably unstable governments. The traditional governments of the Middle East were particularly dissimilar to those of the superpowers. With an overwhelming majority of people in the Arabic world being Muslim, their governments had long been strict adherents to the Sharia code of law mandated by their own belief system.⁵

The formation of Israel received huge American support in the hopes of making the new nation a bastion of democracy in a region dominated by autocracies.² The Arab world was strongly opposed to the creation of this new state due to Israel's displacement of its Arabic Palestinian members. From this point, a deep divide grew between the majority Muslim Arab world and the Jewish state of Israel. Multiple wars pitting Arab nations against Israel saw the United States repeatedly support Israeli sovereignty.¹⁰ The creation of an Israeli – American alliance led to the Soviet Union forging diplomatic relationships with Israel's newly anti-American Arab world enemies. Many of the Arab nations geographically further

²⁶³ "1922 World Political Map." NG Maps Print Collection - 1922 World Political Map, National Geographic, 2015,

maps.nationalgeographic.com/maps/print-collection/world-map-1922.html.

from the situation in Israel/Palestine began to see their countries polarized. The superpowers made no exception in meddling with these nation's internal affairs as well to encourage the expansion of their ideologies and the eradication of each other's.³ Countries throughout the Arab world tentatively aligned themselves with one of the Cold War factions but increasing domestic instability often led to changes in national affiliation. Desperate to secure diplomatic influence, the United States and the Soviet Union launched coups in many Arab nations and even started destructive civil wars in an absolute refusal to compromise. The wars were intensified and often facilitated by military and economic support pouring in from either the United States or the Soviet Union to the faction each was affiliated with.^{3,6} The resulting decades of conflict and power vacuums simply bred more instability and chaos that resulted in the collapse of governments. American assistance to Afghani rebels against the Soviet-led government ensured decades of civil war.¹² It was in this Afghani conflict that the United States unknowingly supported the most notorious of all terrorists, Osama bin Laden.¹¹

The Soviet Union received considerable contempt from Arab states for its ruthless attempts to create fellow socialist states. The specific demonization of the United States or "the West" came with the increasing demand for oil that is extraordinarily abundant in many Middle Eastern countries.¹³ Companies from the West found and extracted the valuable oil, taking much of the profit in doing so. A democratically elected leader of Iran pushed legislation to nationalize the Iranian oil and revoke the rights of foreign companies to the land. The United States reacted with its Western ally, the United Kingdom, overthrowing the Iranian president and reestablishing a monarchy.⁷ From the Iranian coup and support for Israel, pessimism towards American involvement grew throughout the Arab world. Further, many grew in their understandable hatred for the U.S. in Iran. American foreign policy appeared to shift during the Cold War from promoting democracy and freedom to securing and profiting from oil at any cost. To many in the Arab world, the United States lost its merit as a protector of liberty and instead became a symbol

of capitalist greed. Governments that gave into American oil demands were made American allies no matter how oppressive or brutal their regimes.

The foreign policy of the United States and its allies towards the Middle East has undoubtedly served as the origin of radical Islamic terrorism, yet it no longer appears to be the primary motivator. Nearly two decades after 9/11 and six years since the death of Osama bin Laden, the Extremist Islamic State wreaks havoc on large swathes of war-torn Syria and Iraq while claiming attacks across the globe. The terrorists have declared their intention to restore the old Islamic caliphates, including all of the Middle East, North Africa and parts of the Balkans as their territory. The rogue state spends the majority of its efforts recruiting through the internet.¹¹ At first glance, a terror organization recruiting online sounds both pointless and ridiculous. Unfortunately, the number of new terrorists flocking in from around the globe tells another story. The new recruits continue to arrive, even in the face of universal condemnation by all members of the international community. Perhaps most perplexing is that even women are heading to the terrorist occupied territory, where guidelines have been written on how one should treat his sex slaves.⁸ How considerate.

The Islamic State has discovered the ultimate recruiting tool for attracting extremists. Distorting a religion whose followers number in the hundreds of millions, the Islamic State is attempting to villainize Muslims around the world with every atrocity they commit. With its attacks across Europe, the Islamic State successfully forced Muslims outside of the Arab world to face the persecution of their xenophobic peers. Thankfully, their attempts to ostracize Muslims in the West have not yet resulted in any form of ethnic cleansing, however actions by the Trump administration are far from reassuring. Europe has also become more fearful, with many of its member states allowing far fewer refugees and more xenophobes viewing Muslim citizens with increased suspicion and dislike.⁴ The Islamic State would be delighted to see the United States or any other Western nation persecute its Muslim citizens. If they succeeded in convincing Americans to turn against their Muslim friends

due to their fear of the Islamic State, they have won. American Muslims would begin to hate their own country for ostracizing them and would realize that the terrorists were right to call the United States the enemy of Islam. They will have destroyed the United States of America and left in its place an intolerant society of cowards.

Contrary to what the Islamic State believes, the United States is not a nation of cowardly bigots. We will not give up our national identity for fear of pathetic terrorist organizations. American Muslims do not need to move anywhere because they are already home. The Islamic State and radical Islamic extremists may continue their efforts to force us into abandoning the great American experiment, but we will not back down from upholding human rights and religious freedom. America is the land of the free because it is the home of the brave. It is this bravery that has made American freedom victorious over oppression, and it is this bravery that will keep our society alive today in the face of racial bigotry.

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