

Middle Eastern Attitudes and Perceptions

Introduction

This study was the initiative of Jessica Anne Davidson, a graduating senior in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University as well as a Research Associate at the Center for Security and Science.

The objective of Ms. Davidson's study is to make observations regarding popular attitudes toward the United States in several nations of the Middle East. The methodology that Ms. Davidson employed involved the creation of a research instrument that was administered to volunteers recruited through a blog that she had established in 2007 in order to facilitate her research interests. (Selected responses are attached at the end of the observations section.) Over the past year, she has used the blog in the preparation of other presentations relating to the Middle East.

In preparing the questionnaire, Ms. Davidson consulted with US officials whose work involves the study of foreign attitudes toward the United States. Upon completion, these results will be shared with those officials and will be published on the Center for Security and Science web site. (www.c4ss.net)

While most of the respondents in this survey are Muslims, it is important to note that some of them are Christians. Although the focus of the Western effort to counter terrorism focuses on the Islamic populations, the regional population is also a significant factor in any study of attitudes. There were also respondents who indicated that they had no particular religious beliefs.

With her blog as the venue for these interviews, Ms. Davidson was able to enjoy two important research advantages. The first is that, unlike survey research projects which are based on one-time interviews, the blog created a device for facilitating follow-up questions. The result, therefore, was an exchange with the respondent that allowed Ms. Davidson to interact with the respondent. The actual questionnaire was a starting point for the interviews but did not inhibit the expression of ideas beyond the scope of the questions. The second advantage offered by this venue is that respondents could interact with Ms. Davidson with the understanding that their responses but not their identities would be published. The blog facilitated the anonymity needed for a frank expression of respondents' views, something that is not assured by a face to face interview arrangement.

With these advantages, one might think of this work less as survey research and more as a focus group responding to themes associated with the current clash of countervailing ideas between radical Islam and those who reject this radicalism. The group of thirty participants in this project includes thirty individuals who are from ten different states in the region. Their exchanges highlight many of the emerging themes in what we might think of as the current ideological clash of civilizations.

An examination of the varied responses illuminates important aspects of the global war on terror that go far beyond the important military operations. Think of this as a wide ranging discussion and you have an accurate picture of what Ms. Davidson has accomplished with this undertaking.

It is tempting for us to generalize and embrace stereotypes about the current conflict between the West and radical Islam. There are many who conclude, for example, that every Muslim from the Middle East is sympathetic to Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. While it receives little attention in the West, the weakness of this assumption was exposed in 2007 when Sayyid Imam Al Sharif, long regarded as one of the fathers of radical Islam, published a book which rejected Al Qaeda and the ideas of Islamic jihad. In that same year, Noman Benotman, an important Muslim who once led the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, called for a repudiation of the violence of bin Laden's jihad. Sayyid Imam Al Sharif and Noman Benotman are two of the spokesmen for what many see as an expanding rejection of the violence of Al Qaeda and its affiliates.¹

By the end of this year, Islamic scholars based in Ankara, Turkey hope to publish a study that will examine Muhammad's 170,000 narrations. These are the observations and quotations generally referred to as the Hadith which collectively constitute a "supplement" to the Qur'an. While the anecdotes came from a seventh century historical context, that context has been lost over the years. Consequently, something so basic as a caution against women traveling with an escort under the hazardous conditions of that period has been transformed into a modern prohibition against women driving automobiles.² While this work, conceived by Mehmet Aydin when he was Turkey's Minister of State for Religious Affairs, does not constitute an Islamic "reformation", it does suggest that there is a growing desire to "modernize" Islam.

Both of the above themes are reflected in many of the responses elicited by Ms. Davidson's questions. The fact that these ideas can be discerned in the random statements of many members of the focus group is evidence that the perceptions of Middle Easterners are not uniform and that we can not afford to embrace our own perception of the people of this region as a monolithic force bent on the destruction of Western society.

Stephen R. Bowers
Project Supervisor
Professor of Government
Helms School of Government
Liberty University

¹ Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank, "The Unraveling: The jihadist revolt against bin Laden", *The New Republic*, 11 June 2008

² Christopher Dickey and Owen Matthews, "The New Face of Islam", *Newsweek*, 9 June 2008

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Jessica Anne Davidson
Helms School of Government
Liberty University

Observations

1. Religious Orientation and Intensity

The focus group selected for participation in this survey consists of three communities. Most of the participants were Sunni Muslims and, as can be seen from the responses, they have a distinct outlook. The second largest community in the group was Shiite Muslims, a people who also can be characterized on the basis of cultural and attitudinal features. Finally, there were several Christians who were included in the project. The Sunni Muslims were predominately from Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, and Syria. The majority of Shiite Muslims were from Iran and Iraq. Finally, Lebanon and Syria contributed most of the Christian participants.

2. Attitudes about terrorist attacks on September 11

Most Muslim respondents expressed disapproval about the September 11th attacks on New York City and Washington. According to them, taking the lives of innocent people is never justified and the terrorists who attacked America in the name of Islam were not acting in accordance with the tenets of Islam. Islam, those respondents insisted, does not permit the killing of the innocent men and women, even in pursuit of a good cause.

Some respondents were especially emphatic about Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden, denouncing them as “fake Muslims” who want to make all Muslims “look like animals”. For these individuals, the violence of the jihadists is inconsistent with the Islamic faith and detrimental to the interests of Muslims everywhere. While the focus group did contain those who would be classified as radical Islamists, there were no enthusiastic supporters of Osama bin Laden. What was apparent, however, is that there are doctrinal disputes about the jihad and its propriety within the Islamic faith. One respondent observed that Jihad means *sacred fight*. Many people support jihadists who are fighting an occupier to their country, but they do not support jihadists who killing innocent women and children.

Yet, there was a curious variation in some of the responses. Several Muslims from Egypt, Jordan, and Iran argued that the United States itself orchestrated the terrorist attacks. A student from Egypt explained that he had spoken with an engineer who maintained that US authorities must have planted explosives at the foundation of the World Trade Center

or else it would have crumbled side ways not downward. A Jordanian respondent claimed that the United States allowed the attacks to occur in order to provide a pretext for an invasion of Iraq that would enable the United States to take control of that country's vast oil resources. Lastly, an Iranian stated the 2001 attacks were obviously perpetrated by American authorities simply because the White House is run by "fanatical Christians" and President Bush apparently needed an excuse to invade the Middle East as part of an effort to launch some sort of new Christian crusade.

Some of the respondents were ambivalent and unable to embrace either a conspiracy theory or an unqualified rejection of the terrorist attacks. Muslims from Egypt, Iraq, and Syria usually fell into this category. While they said they felt bad America was attacked, they also believed the United States deserved the attacks because of the war in Afghanistan. One Islamist from Egypt said it was revenge by Al-Qaeda for the war in Afghanistan. Neither respondent seemed aware of the fact that the US military actions in Afghanistan came after the attacks on New York City and Washington. Some members of this group expanded their justification for the attacks by claiming that America is a terrorist country and that US forces are the ones killing women and children.

3. Views on the war in Iraq

With a few exceptions, Middle Eastern views on the war in Iraq are consistently negative. When questioned if they support US military operations in Iraq, almost all respondents said they do not support the war. The majority felt that there was no legitimacy for the US entry into Iraq because of the failure to locate weapons of mass destruction. They also fervently reject the idea of creating a democracy in Iraq if the Iraqis do not want it. Many participants in the survey group suggested that America entered Iraq on false pretenses and used weapons of mass destruction as a pretext for gaining petroleum from Iraq. An Egyptian respondent argued that America is using guns to "promote democracy" and "it is not America's place to give democracy to others". Many non-Iraqi respondents, even though they live in the region, do not profess to follow Iraqi developments very closely. Yet, they do characterize the United States as an occupying power responsible for the deaths women and children. They do note whenever U.S. troops have inadvertently killed innocent people during military operations and are aware of reports of misdirected bombs or other military mishaps.

Those who supported the Allied war efforts were primarily Christians from Lebanon, Iraq, and "Kurdistan". All agreed America should have entered into Iraq to remove Saddam. They stated it was best to tackle terrorism at its source and viewed Saddam as a significant supporter of terrorism. A student from Lebanon explained that "America made the right choice by invading Iraq because it toppled a dictator and tyrant, second, it put Iraq on a democracy track, and, third, it sent a clear message to similar regimes that the international community has the strength, ability, and determination to fight terror and force democracy". A Shiite Muslim from Iraq said that under Saddam they had reached a point of "no life" and the only solution was to "remove Saddam's regime from power".

When questioned whether Iraq is safer with Saddam out of power the answers varied. A trend throughout the survey was that Sunnis from all over the region tend to favor Saddam's regime by suggesting Iraq was safer during his reign. A Sunni Muslim from Syria had this to say about the people of Iraq: "Iraqi people are uncivilized, ignorant, and the variety of cult makes them against each others, so they deserve someone like Saddam to rule them. At least they used to be secured inside Iraq. So, I'm against Iraqis but they still don't deserve to die." When asked if they agreed with Saddam's tactics for retaining power the majority of Sunnis interviewed believed Saddam kept Iraq safer than the U.S. has been able to do. A student from Pakistan stated there was no freedom under Saddam but at least there was security and that under the US there is neither freedom nor security.

4. View of Iran

Arabs from the Middle East had a common view in that they supported Iran's right to develop nuclear arms. Many stated that the United States did not have the right to limit Iran's nuclear ambitions because the United States has its own nuclear stock pile. They also felt it was hypocritical for the US not to condemn Israel for having nuclear weapons and that the United States is biased in favor of Israel. A respondent from Jordan stated that Iran and America are fighting each other for control of the Middle East. In contrast with other respondents, an Egyptian believed Iran was a bigger threat to the Middle East than Israel is to the Arabs.

Perceptions, of course, are not always consistent. An Iranian respondent suggested Iran must have no nuclear ambitions, citing as evidence a US intelligence report which indicated the Iranians might have abandoned them even though he previously indicated that US officials could never be believed. Even more interesting was the fact that the respondent has a degree in physics, said that he was working in an Iranian nuclear facility and maintained that Iran had every justification to develop of nuclear weapons.

It is important to note that the participants interviewed from Iraq all said that Iranian influence in Iraq is not welcome. Those participants regard Iran as a major cause of terrorism in Iraq and believe that Iran, by supporting terrorist groups operating in Iraq, is attempting to destroy their country.

With regard to the respondents' feelings towards Iranian leader Ahmadinejad, it is clear that the participants from Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Jordan, Kurdistan and Lebanon are most disdainful of him and regard him as a dangerous religious Islamic fanatic. It is interesting to note Iranian respondents all said that Ahmadinejad was doing a poor job and should not be reelected. One Iranian who proudly portrays himself as an Islamist fanatic had this to say: "Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is a great man and a wonderful leader, however sometimes it's like he cares more about the Lebanese and Palestinians than our own people, for this he cannot be forgiven and must leave office during the next elections."

Respondents from Syria were, at a minimum, indifferent or neutral about Ahmadinejad

or, more frequently, actually had a high regard for the Iranian leader. No Syrians expressed opposition to Ahmadinejad. They believe he is trying to make Iran a powerful country and regard this as a laudable objective. This attitude is not surprising considering that Iran is a major financial supporter of the Syrian based terrorist organization Hezbollah.

As for the sanctions placed on Iran, there was a mixed reaction. Some felt the sanctions were justified and necessary. Others felt that the U.S. did not have a right to punish Iran for its' nuclear ambitions and that US actions were hypocritical. One person from Iraq said the following based on having experienced the U.S.'s previous sanctions on Iraq: "It is not a solution; Iraqis experienced the sanctions and the only victims of the sanctions were the poor people, while Saddam and his family were getting richer and richer; I believe in dialogue and in searching for alternative politicians in Iran like Khatami and Rafsanjani and to give them the support and specially the international support, then people Iran will feel angry about the politicians in the regime now. Iran is adopting kind of democratic system by electing the president and Parliament; in this case we can change through ballots not through sanctions."

5. Views of the United States

The results from the interviews are definitive in that they all said they do not hate Americans as a people but that they do strongly disagree with America's foreign policies. One student from Iran said he would never consider moving to the United States because he feared he would be detained for having an Iranian passport. Like so many participants, it was clear that he had a wealth of disinformation about the United States. The fact that relatively well-educated Middle Easterners accept so much of the anti-US propaganda directed at the region is an indication of a US failure to address this audience. The same Iranian student spoke glowingly of Hezbollah and proclaimed that he had "worked for them for a while a year ago."

An Iraqi who is a Shia Muslim expressed reservations about both US policy in Iraq and the leadership of the Iraqi government. "You must know," he explained, "the current government in Iraq is not representing Iraqi people. It contains many Islamic parties, each of which has a militia and the militias make them to reach to the government, not the voice of people in the elections. The militias used force to make people elect their list." He is suspicious and believes the Iraqi government is being supported by Iran and, as a result, would be likely to indulge even more official corruption in Iraq.

By a large margin, the participants argued that the United States needs to stay out of Middle Eastern affairs because "the US is a culture without religion". Some also said they feel like the US is trying to control the Middle East and that the US is an occupier to their region.

However, the Christians and people from Iraq had positive remarks about the United States. They acknowledged that they needed freedom from a dictator who oppressed them for years. The Christians, mainly from Lebanon, expressed an awareness of the dangers of radical Islam and believe the US is correct being involved in the region. A Christian from Lebanon said he wished the US would support “open-minded” Arabs, just as we support Israel. He said they (the open-minded Arabs) deserve support more because they can do more to promote creation of a modern civilization in the Middle East.

Some respondents indicated they would welcome America’s involvement in the Middle East if it came in the form of economic investment and/or education. One respondent stated, “America, being the major power in the world today can solve all problems in the area by imposing peace, proper education and prosperity and encouraging investment to lift the standards of living. Terrorists are using ignorant hopeless youth that have nothing to live for, to die for them.”

Even among those participants who indicated hostility toward the United States there was a grudging admiration for American accomplishments. An Iranian respondent, in discussing his service with the Iranian military, explained that Iranian service members used American military training films to bolster some of the deficiencies in their training programs.

When asked who they would like to see as US President in the upcoming election, an overwhelming number of Arabs stated that they support Obama. Many expressed support for Obama because they said he was anti-war and not Islam-phobic. A moderate Muslim from Egypt explained that he favored Obama because he felt that Obama could restore the credibility and reputation of the United States in the Middle East. The Christians and some Iraqis preferred John McCain and one Kurd indicated support for Hilary Clinton because he regarded her as friendly towards the Kurds.

6. Views of Israel

In general, members of the focus group were hostile about American policies toward Israel. Many of them denounced the US as “biased and unfair” in its unwavering support for the Jewish nation. Several respondents insisted that “America is controlled by Israel” and described America as “Israel’s dog”. An Egyptian respondent argued that Israel is the “root of the problems” in the Middle East and is preventing the completion of an Arab Union. He stated that the US supports Israel in order to give America the upper hand in the region and to keep the Arab states from assuming their rightful place of superiority to the West.

There were, however, respondents whose bitterness toward the US was tempered with an understanding of American strategic requirements and who wanted to help the US in moderating its policies. An Iraqi respondent offered this advice: America should be more supportive of Arab governments which are combating terrorist organizations. He referred

to the example of the Israeli-Lebanese war and suggested that the US should have provided more assistance to the Lebanese government. With significant US support for the government, Hezbollah would not have been able to assume control of southern Lebanon and thereby enhance its power. Many Arabs, according to several focus group participants, feel neglected by the West and are helpless in the struggle with local terrorist organizations. Not surprisingly, this generates Arab hostility toward both the United States and Israel.

7. Views of Russia

While many recent observers have suggested that an objective of Russian foreign policy under Putin is the establishment of a major role for Russia in the Middle East, among the members of the focus group there was only limited support for a larger regional role for Moscow. The majority of respondents argued that Russia should stay out of their affairs. Speaking of Russia, one Arab respondent exclaimed that there was no need for a Russian intervention. The general assumption expressed with regard to Russia's possible role was that an enlarged Russian presence would only create more problems in the region and would cause more needless deaths of the innocents who are only trying to live.

Respondents made several consistent observations about Russia and their region. They agreed that Russia should not have a major influence in the region. In fact, most respondents wanted both the US and Russia to stay out of the Middle East. Only a few saw a need for Russia and the United States to create a regional balance of power or to promote stability in the region. In general, the respondents felt Arabs felt that there is no need for any major superpower in their region.

Only one respondent could be viewed as a Russian loyalist. He insisted that he "loved the mighty and proud nation of Russia" and suggested that only Russia can put an end to the Western "threat" to his nation. These effusive remarks seemed to be based largely on Russia's support of Iran's ambitions for nuclear weapons. According to this respondent, Russia is welcome anytime in the region as long as that presence would create problems for the United States.

8. Attitudes towards democracy as a system

A major theme of the Bush Administration policy toward the Middle East has been the promotion of democracy. If this survey group reflects regional perceptions, we are justified in assuming that democracy is welcome in the Middle East. Most of the survey group participants claim that they want to see a democracy in Iraq as well as the rest of the Middle East. For them, democracy is synonymous with stability and democratic success in Iraq will transform that nation into a force for regional stability. As Iraq becomes more stable, they believe, the more people living under dictatorships will want a democracy as an alternative government.

Respondents were enthusiastic about democracy but complained that Americans did not recognize their support for democracy. This misunderstanding, as the focus group members saw it, was based on an incorrect assumption about the US military presence in Iraq. The fact that they did not want American soldiers in Iraq, they explained, did not mean that they don't want democracy. They explained that the reality of the situation is that the people of the Middle East are very receptive to the idea of a democratic system. All the Iraqi respondents, especially the Shia Muslims, described democracy as a dream they have for their nation.

While most respondents endorsed the concept of democracy, there were some exceptions. Several respondents from Egypt, Iran, Jordan, and Syria dismissed democracy as a disguise for dictatorship. One Iranian Islamist sees democracy in Iraq as nothing more than a prelude to more violence. An Egyptian respondent said that Americans and Iraqis are being deceived about the prospects for democracy in the region. These respondents believed that democracy will never survive in the Middle East because the people of the region are not ready for such a system.

9. Perceptions of Western perceptions of themselves

As noted above, Middle Easterners often feel that they are misjudged by Americans. Members of the survey group, whether they are Sunni, Shia Muslims, or Christian Arabs, believe Westerners have a negative view of them because of the terrorist attacks on September 11th. Most of them believe Western citizens associate all Muslims with the terrorist hijackers and Islamic fundamentalism. One respondent suggested that Americans perceive them "as animals, rapists, terrorists, people who eat children." Numerous respondents base this assumption on their reading of the Western press and have concluded that anti-Islamic prejudice is pervasive and will continue to color American policy toward their region. Some argued that anti-Islamic hostility was especially intense because there were "fanatical Christians in the White House".

Another respondent claimed that Arabs living in the United States endure constant hostility, especially in airports and that young Arabs who happen to be named Osama have resorted to suicide rather than face ridicule and hostility because of their name. The Western news media, he observed, refuse to print such stories because it might undermine the negative popular view of Arabs and Muslims.

There are other respondents who recognize that Western attitudes toward the Islamic world are not monolithic and that many Americans are able to differentiate between fundamentalist terrorists and Muslims who want to live in peace. An Egyptian who had traveled in the United States said that he had both Republican and Jewish friends who were very rational and tolerant toward Muslims while he met liberals who embraced only negative stereotypes. One even suggested that he "did not blame the Americans" for holding a negative view of Islam because Osama bin Laden proclaimed that the attacks were conducted in the name of Jihad. "I would," he continued, "feel the same if Christians had launched such an attack on my country."

Contributors



Jessica Anne Davidson is a graduating senior in the Helms School of Government at Liberty University. As part of her program in the Helms School, she has conducted studies of numerous topics relating to national security concerns. Ms. Davidson has been a participant in the School's intelligence studies program and has toured key US intelligence agencies in connection with her studies. She is currently in the early stages of a study of the perceptions of Muslims in Russia's Caucasus region.



Elizabeth Blackwell Garnett is a political scientist and a 1998 graduate of James Madison University. She assisted in editing this study, preparing the manuscript, and developing respondents' statements. She has traveled in East Europe and the former Soviet Union in connection with her studies. Mrs. Garnett resides in Richmond, VA.

Selected Responses

1. Egypt

1. I am from Egypt
2. I was born to a Muslim Sunni family (as for the vast majority of Egyptian Muslims, regardless of the Shiite origins of Egyptian Islam) I am personally non religious though..
3. No I do not agree with the war in Iraq nor with other wars.. for one, I am a pacifist, Furthermore:
 - a. There is no legitimacy in interfering in another country's internal affairs regardless of the presence of any business or commercial interests in this country and its region
 - b. The allegations advanced earlier (re nuclear power and so) were all proven false.. and still the US being the super nuclear power has no right to demand other countries not to aim at developing nuclear power (provided that the moral rightness of the US has been repeatedly challenged)
 - c. In practice it proved to be a disaster to all parties involved: Iraqi people are suffering possibly even more than during Saddam's darkest days; Arab people are now more and more regarding the US as an anti Arab, anti Muslim country; the ideals of democracy that are mostly represented by the US are strongly challenged in the region leaving space for extremism, xenophobic trends of all kinds, and for propositions of various dictatorship types to flourish in the area (this gives Arab liberals and democrats a real hard time)
 - d. The repeated acts of many of the army members (doubled with the Guantanamo stories) need no explanation on how bad are they hurting the image of the US and again influencing the image of what democracy is offering.. This particular question triggers lots of thoughts that may require more than just this answer, however for the sake of this exercise, enough for now
4. No, America shouldn't have invaded Iraq
5. Apparently Iraq is not safer today.. Saddam was a dictator who ensured the safety of some people on the expense of other ones.. currently, all society segments are endangered on daily basis.. (It is also bad that Iraqis are not exactly struggling for their freedom and rights for a better living that involves democracy and development, but rather than that they are struggling to keep themselves alive.. Bigger possibilities now are that either Iraq is gonna be divided into fighting smaller nations (Balkan type) or otherwise end up with a new dictator who is going to repeat the Saddam pattern in order to keep the country in order and people are potentially going to welcome whoever ensures any slight level of daily safety for them and their children
6. Yes, probably America should leave Iraq, however, I am strongly concerned about what'd happen when America leaves after all the mess that is already there because of the stupid intervention orchestrated by the stupid administration currently in charge
7. Of course I'd like to see democracy in Iraq as well as I'd like to see it in Egypt and everywhere else
8. I am not sure I am getting the question.. but if so, yes I believe the 4 groups are clear terrorist groups.. I normally single out Hizbollah in certain ways but nevertheless it is also a terrorist group
9. If America leaves Iraq this has nothing to do with terrorism around the world this is again simple misconception the current administration wanted the world to deduce.. I am positive though that outside the US and outside of the circles that may be having common interests with the military Junta that is driving the US foreign politics there is no body that takes this any serious..
If US leaves Iraq, it is Iraq that is probably going to suffer a surge in terrorism
10. Not at all, the war on Iraq (or the other wars America launched/s) are not changing my perception of the US.. I still sincerely believe that America is a great nation advancing further lots of the greatest ideals yet it is suffering of many negative syndromes that are maybe driven by the isolationism, the educational system that fails to teach about other cultures and countries regardless of the great diversity present in most of the US)..
No my perception of the US is also still of a great country with great people who were repeatedly manipulated by a minority of people belonging to the military and energy industries..
11. Who would you like to see as America's next President (Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, or John McCain)?

This is a pure internal American matter, it is way better though for America's reputation in the world to see Obama (now that lady H is out) It'd simply help a lot wipe the negative effects of the stupid bigotted aspiring ignorant current administration :-)

12. Do you think America's next President will affect the current conflict in the Middle East?

No I hardly think it will.. America's position regarding the region is long decided and it is based on factuals interests and a multitude of political, economic, cultural, and other internal and external factors that makes it hard to foresee a change (I understand your question here fcusses on the Palestine-Israel story not on Iraq and other issues)

13. Would you consider America imperialistic?

America is cruising the world to "defend", "ensure", "foster" its interests.. by te way it forces its politics on week peti dictators in different poles of the earth. the answer probably must be: YES it is :-)

14. Do you think America should stay out of the Middle Eastern affairs?

To a larger extent, and provided America's administration iunderstanding of staying in the ME is forcing the American agenda, then: YES it should

15. Do you believe America has a major influence in the world on foreign policy?

Do you mean America's influence on other countries' foreign policies!? It sure has some considerable influence

16. How do you feel about America isolating Iran and the sanctions put on Iran?

I do not like Iran, hate its political system and despise all forms of religious dictatorships (along with other forms of religious or of dictatorships) more over I consider Iran as a truer threat to the surrounding ME countries than what Israel may represent.. I agree on that the Iranian system has to be reversed upside down.. however What is America doing here!? and again the same Sh*&^ about nuclear power.. America is OK to force any positions that suit its interests, but it has no moral nor a legal standard to lean upon in raising the nuclear power issue..

17. Do you believe Iran is developing nukes?

Have no idea.. and I believe neither does the CIA :-) unless they have some school buses pictures or something of the kind :-)

18. What are your current feelings toward Ahmadinejad?

Guess it is clear.. I am a secular who consider a militarized bigoted religious leader (not to mention stupid) as the ultimate peril to humanity (but that's the same way as how I see the young G. Bush too.. what am not sure about is whose IQ is higher among the 2)

19. What do you think of the US/Saudi alliance, should they be allies?

I see it as a very logical and thus normal alliance.. it is something based on pure interests.. no principles or ideals involced at all.. I have no say in wether they be alliances or not, but it is for sure one dangerous alliance that helped big deal to enforce fanaticism and wahabi Islam allover the region instead of both being represented by an isolated small group of beduines confined to their desert homes.. the US provided those bigots with all the means to go regional and global.. (P.S. what is said about the Qaeda and Ben Laden's previous ties with the CIA are no myths nor are they rumors.. they are all supported incidents)

20. Do you think America is right in trying for a two-state solution between Palestine and Israel?

I am for the 2 state solution, is America for it!? really!?

21. How do you feel about America's support for Israel?

This is a pure internal American affair and I also see it based on logical reasons

22. Do you support the actions of the "Jihadists"? Please explain why you support or do not support Jihadist.

I believe I do not need (just because I am Egyptian, Arab, Muslim, "which I am not" or because I belong to a Muslim society to explain why am I not supporting the actions of the Jihadists? I believe your formulation of the question is pretty much prejudiced and not giving enough space for making a fair scientific judgment. Any ways I hope it is clear by now that NO I DO NOT SUPPORT JIHADISTS OF ANY KIND and from ANY RELIGION

A small linguistic note here jihad means sacred fight. In this sense you can easily tell that Bush is a much bigger jihadist (one with nukes and smoking out weapons) and so are many of the Israeli politicians

23. What do you think of Russia's current involvement in the Middle East? Do you think they should stay out of Middle Eastern affairs?

What do you think of it!? Russia is a large country with interests all over the world, normally it is trying to exert some influence.. especially that one day they "under the USSR" had a much bigger minfluence here than the US..

They have their stakes and they are trying to protect them or increase them.. Do I think they have to stay out of the region. Apparently I believe that no foreign entity has to dictate its wills on the local people.. if it is just an education, mediation, pacifist support issue.. then everyone is sure welcomed to advance their help.. again the people are capable of deciding what and when to accept or refuse

24. How do you feel about the attacks on September 11, 2001? Were the attacks on America justified?

Of course it was not justified in any possible way.. it is something that is totally and absolutely and by all means representing the ugliest possible port you can find in any human..

All acts of killing are unjustified.. mass killing is horrible

No effort is even accepted towards justifying mass killing acts

Correct me please, but is this question based or driven by the televised scenes of Gazan Palestinians celebrating the attacks!?

25. How do you think Americans view Arabs or Muslims after September 11, 2001?

It strongly varies.. some republican friends from the DC area had a very rational attitude of what happened and how to view Arabs and Muslims

On the other hand, some liberals from the mid west had a very irrational stereotyping attitude

Few weeks after 9/11 I was in the US.. And while in NYC and other places hostility was somehow felt and in cases reaching the level of lynching, in DC people were much more tolerant to Muslims having a strict Muslim uniform than I was.. the same I found from a Jewish friend teaching in Columbia (no not Chomsky :-)) and despite his Zionist leanings he was quiet rational in this aspect!!

26. Have you been to America or considered moving there permanently?

Yes, came to the US, toured several States, loved my visit.. enjoyed some cities (DC, NYC,Portland) did not like some other other places, I do not think I have a chance to permanently live in the US, but I'd love to have chances for longer stays... I also wouldn't mind working there if I ever have the chance to.

2. Iran

1. I am from Qom Iran

2 . My religion is Islam and I am a Shiite muslim

3. No I don't agree with the war in Iraq. It has reduced Iraq to nothing but violence and wastelands. Nothing good will come out of Iraq until the United states removes all of their soldiers from Iraqi soil. We must let the Iraqis solve their own problems without american bloodshed and their violence.

5. Yes it is much safer to everyone living there with that evil man, however the Americans also need to get out of that country for it to remain peaceful and stable.

6. After what i've previously said, yes :)
7. NO forcing a democracy on a country that simply doesn't want one isn't the way to go. As you can see it has only led to violence and more violence.
- 8.
9. Terrorism would decrease all around the world if the united States would stop bullying everyone around. They started this terror and would be foolish if they thought it wouldn't come back to them.
10. No I always knew the American government was nothing but bad news. They have messed around with my country long before the Iraq war.
11. I think Barrack Obama would be a great choice. America needs and wants a change from this regular violence and terror that America has spread in the past.
14. By every means available they should stay out of everyones affairs that do NOT concern them.
16. America has nothing to gain from doing these sanctions. We would like them to know that we will never stop producing nuclear power, it is our right!
17. A report by ALL American intelligence agencies verified that we had stopped making Nuclear weapons four years ago. Therefore I think we aren't producing any.
18. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is a great man and a wonderful leader, however sometimes its like he cares more about the Lebanese and Palestinians than our own people, for this he cannot be forgiven and must leave office during the next elections.
19. No they shouldn't. Once Saudi Arabia runs out of oil American will show to the world their true colors my friend, betrayal.
20. They will only ever be peace within that conflict when they tear down the racist terrorist state of Israel, until then all peace talks are a waste of time as Israel has shown us they don't want peace. have you seen their growth of settlements into Palestine lately? 25 million dollars worth of them. Is that showing that you wish peace for the Palestinians?
21. Its unsurprising America is simply using Israel for its own benefits and its one of Americas only friends in the world. I don't support it obviously but i dislike both countries.
22. Jihadists are disgusting groups of fake muslims who attempt to make all muslims look like animals by using the Quran to attempt to Justify murder on Innocent people. Islam prohibits the killing of Innocents to the extreme levels.
23. I personally love the mighty and proud nation of Russia. I think they can help the middle from its western problems. President Putin is a wonderful charismatic man who should continue to intervene in Middle east politics if only to cause problems to America.
24. The attack on 9/11 was horrifying to the fullest and shows the true extent of just how far people will go to destroy Islam and butcher its name. Most muslims do not even consider Bin laden to be a muslim. Currently in Iran there is a fatwah to hunt him down and kill him. I would hope someone completes the fatwa for the good of the world.
25. The Americans viewed them as animals, rapists, terrorist, people who eat children. Think of every worst insult you can imagine and that is what they would have thought of an Arab at the point. They were even several cases where Arab teenagers killed themselves because they first name was Osama and they could not take the verbal abuse and the excessive bullying. Of course the media never printed those stories.

26. I have never even considered moving to that awful country. I love the American people but I cannot go somewhere where they will detain me because I have an Iranian passport.

3. Iraq

1. Do you agree with the War in Iraq, please explain your answer?

A / I hate Wars everywhere; but concerning 2003 War on Saddam regime, yes I do agree; because this was the only solution to remove Saddam regime from the power, and Iraqi people reached to the level of "no life" at that time with Saddam regime.

2. Do you think America should have invaded Iraq?

If I am US citizen, I would thin twice before answering "yes, I do"; but since I am Iraqi citizen then for sure I will answer "Yes, I do"

3. Is Iraq safer now that Saddam is out of power?

I cannot answer yes or no; but I think Iraq was not safe during Saddam regime and now it is not safe too; but the difference is, during Saddam regime there was no future, but now we have future; for sure the situation is very bad, but Iraqi are moving on the right path and the road of Democracy needs sacrifices; I always say that "during Saddam regime I hated tomorrow because tomorrow there will be Saddam, but now I say I hope that tomorrow is better than today" I hop you understand what I mean.

4. Do you think America should leave Iraq?

In he future, yes I do.

5. Do you think any of the following are terrorist organizations?

- Al Qaeda? I do
- Hizbullah? I don't
- Hamas? I do
- Taliban ? I do

6. Would like you to see a "democracy" in Iraq?

Yes

7. If America left Iraq do you believe terrorism would increase around the world?

Yes, I do

8. Who would you like to see as America's next President (Hilary Clinton, Barack Obama, or John McCain)?

I would like to see a Republican as next president; and the only candidate now is McCain

9. Do you think America's next President will affect the current conflict in the Middle East?

Yes I do

10. Do you think America should stay out of the Middle Eastern affairs?

No I don't.

11. How do you feel about America's support for Israel?

I am not against any ally for the US, but they should deal with all in equal way because US now is the major power in the world; for example, the August War between Israel and Lebanon was the result of the bad policy of the US forward Lebanon, the US didn't give any real support for the Lebanese government and then the Lebanese government became very weak that gave more power and influence for the Militias like Hizbullah and for other countries like Saudi, Syria and Iran to involve in the internal issues of Lebanon; Hizbullah militias kidnapped Israeli soldiers and the Lebanese government had no power to prevent them or to release them and US badly involved in this issue by supporting Israel without giving the same amount of support to the Lebanese government. Such kind of unbalanced equation in dealing with Middle East countries and Israel doesn't make me feel good.

12. Do you believe America has a major influence in the world on foreign policy?

Yes, I do.

13. How do you feel about America isolating Iran and the sanctions put on Iran?

It is not a solution; Iraqis experienced the sanctions and the only victim of this sanction was the poor people, while Saddam and his family were getting richer and richer; I believe in dialogue and in searching for alternative

politicians in Iran like Khatami and Rafsanjani and to give them the support and specially the international support, then people Iran will feel angry about the politicians in the regime now. Iran is adopting kind of democratic system by electing the president and Parliament; in this case we can change through ballots not through sanctions.

14. Do you believe Iran is developing nukes?
Yes I do.

15. What are your current feelings toward Ahmadinejad?
Nejad is elected president, I don't have specific feeling forward him; but I don't like his statements like "throwing Israel in the see" or "American is the major Devil".

16. Would you consider America imperialistic?
Yes;

17. What do you think of the US/Saudi alliance, should they be allies?
Very strange; you know that Saudi regime is the only Autocratic regime in the world and this is totally against democracy; I don't understand how US is keeping support this regime;

18. Do you think America is right in trying for a two-state solution between Palestine and Israel?
I think it is the only solution

19. Do you support the actions of the "Jihadists"? Please explain why you support or do not support Jihadist.
I am totally against it; in fact I am against violence in general; and specially the Jihadi one because they only spreading fear and terror among people.

20. What do you think of Russia's current involvement in the Middle East? Do you think they should stay out of Middle Eastern affairs?
Russia's current involvement in the Middle East is normal, but I don't think they have big chance in have big influence; no one has the right to prevent Russia from having relationships with Middle East countries, but they should not make ME region a conflict region with US.

21. How do you feel about the attacks on September 11, 2001? Were the attacks on America justified?
It was awful; no way to justify any attack against civilians.

22. How do you think Americans view Arabs or Muslims after September 11, 2001?
They look to them as timed bombs

23. What is your religion and, if Muslim, are you a Sunni or Shiite?
Muslim, Shiite

24. What country are you from?
Iraq

25. Have you been to America or considered moving there permanently?
No; no

4. Jordan

1- am Palestinian living in Jordan.

2- am Muslim, Sunni

3- i dont agree with the war, America just was looking for a cover for the war and its only aims for the petrol and the control and reshaping for the middle east. America has no right to do so.

4- well, America really did invade Iraq!!!

5-Iraq now suffers because Saddam is out of power. Saddam was a good person and a good leader, may he is not for America, but he is for Iraqis and for arabs in general. Iraqis who dont like Saddam, they dont like him because they give loyalty to Iran not to Iraq. Saddam was ruling Iraq in a very good manner. and he was the best who knows how to rule Iraq.

6- America should leave Iraq.

7-sure i like to see democracy in Iraq.

8- well AlQaeda produce terror. but hamas and hizballah do not produce terror. and i dont know about taliban. i always wonder why do America deal the person who fight for his freedom and his life as terror???

Hamas and hizbuallah fight to free their their country, and its the right for any occupied people to fight for their freedom!!! i say that although i dont like hizballah and hamas.

9- if americal left iraq, iraq will be more stable and it will not export terrorism to the world. and if u believe me, Iran and america is the reoson of terrorism in iraq!!

10- to tell the truth i hate america before that!!! dont take personal...i hate the american sytem not the american people.

11- my opinion well depend on what they will do for the middle east..and i think for the middle east they will be the same.

12-it will act the same.

13- sure i think that.

14- yes it should stay out of that.

15-yes it has.

16-yes.

16-america and iran are fighting to have the power in the middle east.

both are trying to have control on the middle east. so its not a matter of nuclear...its a matter of control...both are trying to rule the middle east...for me both dont have the right to do so.

saddam was blocking iran from arabs, and was providing arabs the great wall to avoid any iranian danger, after saddam is gone, iran is trying to rule arabs countrys. america wants the same. this is the problem between america and iran.

17-yes i think that iran has that.

18-i dont like ahmdinjad, for me hi working good for his country, but he is very bad for our country, and he is developing fights beteen arabs themselves.

as i told u, i dont consider hamas and hizbullah producing terror, but they did bad for palestine and lebanon...and take their support from him to make damage the Palestinian and lebanon systems, so ahmdinjad is trying to rule paletine and lebanon through them.

19-its ok for saudi to make alliances with any country, but this alliance should not be to betray arabs...and this is the case for this alliance...its an alliance against iran...and sadui and arabs are paying too much for this alliance...and the saudi decesion is not free coz america is controlling it.

20-well, its right about that...its the only solution for the Palestinian case...but america is lying about that...its only give promises about that and its not making any real thing to achieve that...america has to push israel to do that...and its not doing so...Palestinians are killed every day by israel, and america is not doing any thing toward that.

21-its a very bad support...israel is killing palestinians..every day..taking their lands..making their life a disaster, cutting the trees, killing children..and alot of terrible things...the life of palesinians is unbelievable!!! and america is doing anything for that..but supporting israel to continoue doing that...its such that america like what is israel doing...its only such that america is doing that itself..

22-i supprort jihad....our religion tells us that when your country is occupied u have to fight to make it free...and this is aljihad..so its a right for any population..so if your country is occupied i think u will fight to make it free...then u r in jihad...aljihad is good thing..and it exists in all cultures but with different name...so for sure i will support aljihad as soon as my country is occupied.

23-russia is supporing iran in getting into the middle east...ofcourse i dont agree with any one who want to rule the decision in the middle east...so...every body should stay out of the middle east..russia and every body should out of the middle east.

24- the attacks was very bad...and the attacks has no relation with islam...people who made the attacks made it by the name of islam...but in real islam is telling us not to kill civilian people..so islam is innocent from them...and it was a very very bad thing...

25-they view them very bad...although muslims and arabs has no fault with what happened on September.

26-i have never moved to america...and i think that it will be a great chance for me if i visit america..i think that american people are very nice..u really dont know the actual events happeining every day her..so...i wish that u can get a better idea about what is happening her...

well...am sorry if talked too much...but i tried as much as i can to make what am saying clear...what i think about america...that america should leave us alone...and if people hate america her...it doesnt mean that they hate american people...they have nothing to do with what is america doing.

5. Lebanon

- 1-I definitely agree with war in Iraq because terrorism should be tackled directly at its source. Saddam's regime has brought its people nothing but pain, misery, fear, and ignorance
- 2- America made the right choice by invading Iraq, because it toppled a dictator and tyrant, second it put Iraq on democracy track, and third it sent a clear message to similar regimes that the international community has the strength, ability, and determination to fight terror and force democracy.
- 3-Iraq is safer without Saddam, but unfortunately removing Saddam is not enough as long as Syria and Iran keep sending terrorists and supporting religious groups and militias in order to keep the civil war running, destabilize the government and the blackmail the free world.
- 4-America should not leave Iraq in the short run at least before the Iraq government can be able to take over and become able to enforce law and order, and before implementing and peace process that include Iran, Syria, Israel, Palestine, and Lebanon.
- 5-all these groups are terrorist organizations.
- 6- I would like very much to see democracy in Iraq, and I believe it is inevitable, in spite the challenges and the hardships.
- 7-if America leaves Iraq now terrorism will increase around the world, because that means leaving the vulnerable Iraq an open ground for Syria and Iran take control over, and exploit its resources and especially oil, and then the situation will be worse than it was during Saddam's regime. If America withdraws its troops now, it will be a big failure and defeat for America and the free world.
- 8- Sorry, I am not familiar with those candidates' political vision and strategy, but I support any candidate who follows President Bush's steps and continue what he has started.
- 9-yes I think the next president will affect the current conflict in the Middle East.
- 10-no I don't think America should stay out of the Middle East affairs.
- 11- Israel is an important democratic experience and figure in the Middle East and it should be always supported; otherwise it will be vulnerable in a jungle of beasts.
- 12- Yes, I believe America has a major influence in foreign policy.
- 13-the isolation and sanctions are good but not enough, people in Washington should realize that what they should do is seeking to change the regimes in Syria and Iran instead of trying to change the behavior of the current regimes by forcing sanctions and isolating them.
- 14- Yes I believe so.
- 15-He is Hetler of the 21 century.
- 16-I believe America has its interests in the world but it is not imperialistic.
- 17-This alliance is essential and important in order to encounter terror and cooperate on joint issues and build trust and establish channels of communication between Arabic countries and the free world.
- 18-Yes I believe America is right in trying for two-state solution, because in my opinion it will be a fair solution for both sides, plus it is the perfect solution to end the crisis.
- 19-I don't support the actions of Jihadists because they kill innocent people in the name of God and religion, they have no cause, they are just mercenary used by tyrants like Basher Alasad and Ahmadinagad to accomplish their regimes' ambitions and objectives in opposition of Israel , America , and the free world.
- 20-Russia need to play a more positive role in the Middle East through the influence it has on some of its conventional allies like Syria; they must use their influence to encourage Syria to stop supporting Hamas and Hezbollah, plus they must stop supporting Iran's nuclear program.
- 21-I feel very sorry for the people who lost their lives on sept 11, may they rest in peace and God bless their souls. Killing innocent people is never justified, taking a life is never right.
- 22- I think there are some feelings of hatred and blame among some Americans against Arabs and especially Muslims
- 23-My religion is Druze.
- 24- I'm from Lebanon.
- 25- I haven't been to America, but I may go there in the future for my Masters and PhD degrees.

America is the land of liberty; it is the spring of democracy and human rights. God bless America and its allies' troops fighting terror around the world. God bless the members of the American embassy operating in my country Lebanon, in spite of security threats and terrorist attacks they have faced they still hold their ground , they are men and women we admire and respect.

6. Syria

1-I'm a Palestinian, half Syrian, my family lives In Syria since 1948.

2-I'm a Muslim, Sunni.

3-I'm against the war in Iraq, innocent people die every day, 1.5 million died since 2003, most are citizens. I might be there, or Syria is next in the American war series.

4-I think they shouldn't invade Iraq.

5-Iraqi people are uncivilized, ignorant, and the variety of cult makes them against each others, so they deserve someone like Saddam to rule them. At least they used to be secured inside Iraq. So, I'm Against Iraqis but they still don't deserve to die.

6-Yes, I think America should have left Iraq, Afghanistan too.

7-According to reasons in my answer no.5, people there can't deal with democracy. They are not ready yet.

8-Each one of those have their own goals, some are reasonable and some aren't. Al-Qaeda: considered as terrorists because they attack citizen's targets in the name of Islam (Jihad). Hizbullah: not considered as terrorists because they attack military targets to free the Lebanese land form the Israelis. Hamas: don't really know that much about them, but their main goal is to start "Palestine" as an independent country, I don't think they are terrorists because they try to defend the unarmed Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. Taliban: they used to support Al-Qaeda and trying to build the perfect Islamic nation which doesn't exist or going to.

9-Terrorism didn't start from Iraq, I never heard of an Iraqi member in Al-Qaeda for example.

10-Obama, I think.

11-Yes, there will be some changes according to political views of the next president.

12-Yes, definitely.

13-Yes, America should be neutral, more like Europe.

14-Yes it has. Every country in the middle east decide something after the American approval.

15-Every country in the world have the rights to have a peaceful nuclear program including Iran. America is trying to decrease the Iranian threat on Israel.

16-Probably.

17-I think he is trying to make Iran a powerful nation and apply the pure Islamic judgment in Iran. He is a simple man living a simple life, I've seen a website about his life, house, family, what he eats,, this man dedicated his self to his people.

18-.

19-Obviously the US is making some benefits of this alliance such as the Saudi Oil, and never forget that the Saudis are investing in the US markets as they hold about 8% of the US economy. On the other hand, Saudis are more interested from this alliance, the US is providing the martial and political support. I lived in Saudi Arabia for12 years, and I know if this alliance ended the Saudis will go a 100 years backward, because they depend on the US products in everything.

20-The two-state solution will not be the best. There will still be conflict. I think the best solution for the both Palestinians and Israelis is to have one state ruled by a congress.

21-I feel bad when America support Israel unconditionally, then the American president say in his speech: lets spread the peace. Israel considered as an enemy for us, invaded us and took our land, took our home and farms. We used to be wealthy back then. The last time I checked the map there was no Palestine. I believe there are some Israelis who want to live in peace with us, and I'm ok with that, but they can't rule us with guns pointed to our heads.

22-I support those actions when they are taken in war against military targets. But they shouldn't refer it to the religion such as Islam. Because innocent people might die.

23-I think the Russian attitude is reasonable, they don't get involved unless some country asked them to. Otherwise they are involved in the commercial relations with the middle east which is a good thing.

24-The attacks can be described in one word, "TERROR". It could be me in those towers. My cousin was in the WTC the day before the strike. And most of the people who died in the strike are normal people just like you or me, the strike can be considered as a revenge by Al-Qaeda because the American war on Afghanistan, the American forces destroyed every village in Afghanistan people buried alive, even the news reporters didn't make it through all the shooting and bombing. So the Sep11 strike somehow can be justified. It's confusing..

25-No doubt Arab and Muslims became so hated in America after Sep11. I don't blame the Americans for that because the Qaeda announced that all their attacks are in the name if Islam (Jihad). I would feel the same IF some Christian group did the same attacks in my country. (I'm not saying I hate people from other religions, most of my friends believe in other religions). My cousins are Canadians so when they go to the

US they treated so bad in airports or borders as they are named Arabic names, becoming a suspect because of your name is what happening.

26-I used to think of America as the greatest place in the world, but not anymore. If I considered going there it will be for studying. But sure I'm considering moving out of Middle east permanently, Canada or Australia.

Finally, I just want to make it clear that I don't have any political partiality and not a member of any political group, I don't even watch the news, and as a person who has no country to belong to, I hope sometime in the future I live in a world where there is no borders or wars going on or people getting killed every second. I wish I turn on the TV and don't watch the suicidal people blowing their selves up in the market killing innocent women and children for something they believe in. Live all in peace, and spread the love.