

Feeling Betrayed: The Roots of Muslim Anger at America

Steven Kull

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Steven Kull's *Feeling Betrayed* is a great addition to the literature on what motivated the 9/11 attacks. His critical analysis is based upon hundreds of interviews conducted by international polling agencies in Egypt, Pakistan, Jordan, Turkey, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. Participants were Sunni and Shi'i, men and women, as well as Islamists, modernists, and secularists. The nine-chapter book contains charts designed to facilitate reader comprehension of the data presented. Among his findings are the following: (1) Muslims perceive the United States as dominant, exploitive, oppressive, and undermining of their values and cultures; (2) Washington talks about promoting democracy in the Muslim world but supports military regimes and monarchies; (3) it undercuts democracy and social justice by telling Arab leaders what to do; and (4) it does not live up to its ideal values. Unfortunately, he bases his very frequent sweeping generalizations (viz., "Muslims in . . . say") on the words of a minute fraction of the global Muslim population. In fact, many other polls reveal that millions of Muslims hold a positive image of the United States.

Chapter 1 suggests that Muslim hostility is due to biased American foreign policies and that the ensuing terrible relationship fuels the growth of terrorism. Kull uses several charts to point out that the United States had a negative image before 9/11 and that Muslim anger intensified after the attack. After

making this attitude crystal clear, the question is whether Washington cares about this or not. Nevertheless, the participants assert that they are proud of their religious identity and strive to protect their culture against foreign invasion. Chapter 2 posits two basic causes for why these negative feelings are so pervasive and deep-rooted: The United States oppresses Muslims and betrays them by flouting the same international laws that it requests others to follow (p. 24). Consequently, it is seen as an imperialist power that has initiated an anti-Muslim crusade. Even though many educated Muslims admire the West's liberal ideals of freedom and human rights, they think that the United States does not live up to them, as evidenced in the Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib detentions.

Chapter 3 deals with why Muslims think that the United States is dominating their countries by controlling their oil sector and establishing military and naval bases in Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and elsewhere in the Persian Gulf. This military presence undermines Islam and provokes fear. The polls suggest that Washington dictates its demands and then pressures Muslim leaders to obey. Countries that do not capitulate (e.g., Iran, Pakistan, and the Palestinian Authority) are projected as enemies of peace and progress. Chapter 4 relates that the United States is seen as imposing its culture upon Muslims and undermining their values by suspecting those who adhere to tradition as potential terrorists (p. 79). In addition, the Muslim majority thinks that the United States is trying to weaken and divide the ummah (the Muslim community) and is indirectly spreading Christianity among Afghani and Iraqi Muslims (pp. 79-81).

In chapter 5, Kull makes the case that Washington's unconditional military support of and financial aid to Israel is the major cause of tension. Muslims believe that the Israeli lobby controls Washington and thus the latter supports Israel's continuous annexation of Palestinian land. As such, neither country supports the two-state solution. Muslims assume that the United States does not pressure Israel in this regard because the ongoing status quo serves its regional interests. As a result, Muslims view both of them as threats (p. 95). Chapter 6 elaborates on how Muslims perceive the United States as undermining democracy by providing unwavering support to authoritarian and monarchical Arab regimes. The country is also seen as a force of repression, for when Palestinians and Algerians democratically elected governments of which Washington did not approve, it immediately made its displeasure known. The Muslim majority is convinced that Washington has no interest in establishing democracy in the Arab world (p. 113).

Chapter 7 focuses on the radical Islamists' opposition to liberalism, rejection of democracy as a governing system, and their hostility toward what

the West claims to be universally based principles of human rights (p. 114). The polls depict al-Qaeda and many other Islamic movements as radical. Kull talks extensively about al-Qaeda and then reveals something quite surprising: Many Muslims consider it less threatening than the United States because it is defending Islam against the American threat and its expansion in the Muslim world. Muslims believe that Washington created this group in the 1980s to fight the Soviets in Afghanistan and that it is now suffering the consequences (p. 132). Chapter 8 argues that Muslims want to be left alone to practice Islam and aspire to practice democracy so that they can select their own leaders, forge their own ways of life, and escape American domination and military/monarchical rule. He states that the majority of Muslims believe that Islam and democracy are compatible, but that applying the Shari'ah should be part of democracy if the people desired it (p. 156).

In chapter 9, the author offers several ways by which the United States could reduce the existing tension, anger, and suspicion: reduce its military presence, minimize actual and implied threats, boldly state that it has no right to the region's oil, differentiate its own policy from that of Israel (i.e., stating that the United States is not Israel, [p. 197]), recognize the existence of moderate Islamists, and stop labeling all Muslim movements as potential terrorists (p. 217). After giving several examples of how such undertakings could be applied and their potential results, he insists that Washington has to renew and improve its image of being committed to liberal principles and avoid unpredictable actions and utterances.

Overall, Kull does a great job of explaining this long-standing reality. Policymakers would certainly benefit from reading it. Unfortunately, Washington considers all Muslim countries and their leaders as handkerchiefs to be used until they are so dirty that they need to be tossed aside and replaced. In other words, Muslim leaders and their resources are no more than means to attaining American interests. Moreover, true democracy cannot be allowed because then Washington would be unable to control or exploit them. Given that the country will not live up to its ideal principles, Muslims cannot help but feel betrayed.

Yet this book provides almost no information on what the United States is actually doing to make Muslims so angry. The cover page, which shows Muslims burning the American flag, is obviously going to anger Americans. Why could the author not have used a photo of Abu Ghraib or an incident of desecrating the Qur'an and then inform Americans why such disrespectful actions anger Muslims? By reading this book, one will automatically side and unconsciously sympathize with the United States. Muslims do not hate Americans, as so many non-Muslims proclaim; rather, they hate Washington's hostile policies. This book does not promote peace, but provokes anger against

Muslims. Any American policymaker who reads it may feel proud that our government is in control and that we are the superpower. But why do we need to control others and exploit their resources? Are they not human beings like us? All of Kull's beautiful solutions are genuine solutions, but would our government listen to and apply them? I doubt it.

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