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Forum examines why world loves, hates U.S.

By **Jennifer Charney**, OU Staff Writer

Americans should learn more about Arabs and Muslims, consider their points of view, and try to understand why U.S. government policies have spurred terrorist attacks.

These were the opinions shared by Oakland University panelists who discussed world views of America at a campus forum Tuesday, Oct. 2. The program, "Why is the U.S.A. the Most Loved and Most Hated Country in the World?" was the third in a series offered by the **Center for Student Activities (CSA)** in response to the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

The event featured Paul Kubicek, assistant professor for the **Department of Political Science**; Steve Roberts, associate vice president for the Division of Finance and Administration; and Shea Howell, professor for the **Department of Rhetoric, Communication and Journalism**.

Paul Kubicek teaches Middle East politics. He lived in Turkey for three years and lived overseas for 4 1/2 out of the last nine years.

"The American government is respected for our economic prosperity, our technological progress, our optimism, our freedoms," Kubicek said.

America is resented, he said, for its ignorance, arrogance and hypocrisy. "The notion that this battle (against terrorists) is one of good versus evil - we can say that the act itself was evil, but to say that we are good and have no self-reflection about things seems rather misguided," Kubicek said, asserting that the U.S. government should consider how its actions motivated the attacks.

America is resented for its hypocrisy, he said, because while the government says it supports democracy worldwide, it has backed repressive regimes.

"Our closest friends in the Middle East, Israel excepted, are non-democratic authoritarian corrupt governments: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the (Persian) Gulf states," he said. "The United States encouraged a jihad (holy war) against the Soviets in Afghanistan."

Kubicek and Howell said that Osama bin Laden and Afghanistan's ruling Taliban were at one point backed by the United States government to fight global communism.

Kubicek said he is not suggesting that the Sept. 11 attacks were justified, but that at least the United States should "rethink the notion that we are innocents."

"I don't mean to sound callous," he said. "But 6,000 Americans died in New York; it was a tragedy. Five hundred thousand Afghans this year may die of hunger."

Roberts shared his experiences of living in several Muslim cultures, including five years in the **United Arab Emirates** where he was a university finance and administration consultant.

"My impression is that they don't hate us. I think they have some concerns about our culture, especially with respect to family values and divorce," he said. "Those don't drive them to hate us."

Actually, Roberts said, many Arab nations recognize the importance of getting along with the Western world and their Arab neighbors. They oppose extremists.

"I know when I was there, they went to great lengths to screen out radical Islamic terrorists at customs and immigration stations," he said.

Americans should avoid making generalizations about Muslims and Arabs because of the actions of small, radical groups, Roberts said. The Arab world is not homogeneous - its nations vary widely in their perspectives, he said.

Shea Howell is an expert in social movements. America is disliked because its culture does not respect other points of view, she said.

"For roughly 30 years, people around the world who feel victimized by U.S. government policies are angry," she said. "It is precisely that anger that fed the Iranian revolution. It is precisely that anger which is feeding what is going on now. The United States simply has not learned anything about why these policies are creating anger."

Two American government policies are drawing hatred, she said. The first is development of economic relationships that support an international global economy - at poorer nations' expense.

"In the last 20 years, under U.S.-led global policy, three-fifths of the world has experienced a decline in life expectancy, levels of mortality, basic health, education and literacy," Howell said. "We are simply going to have to address the fact that as a country, we are 6 percent of the world's population and consume roughly 36 percent of the world's natural resources."

The second U.S. policy that draws fire is identifying certain nations as friends and others as enemies, Howell said. "I think this is very dangerous because (it's) part of how we get into this mess."

Another American policy that infuriates the rest of the world, Howell said, is acting without the cooperation of other nations.

"There is no question that in (George W. Bush's) first year in office, his primary actions were to remove us from global consensus on the environment, to remove us from an international conference on racism because we refuse to deal honestly with the question of Israel and the Palestinians," she said.

What's the solution to the current crisis? Howell said it is not military action, but in working with multinational organizations such as the **United Nations**. Roberts said he backs a military response because, according to his experience, Arabs would not respect the United States otherwise.

Retiree and OU alumna Lois Brookshire of Troy was among the forum's 14 audience members.

"I had to come back to campus for this," Brookshire said. "I think we're making dreadful mistakes. I think that what we really need to do is know what motivates these countries. Bin Laden is not evil in his own mind."

Stephanie Schneider, an undecided OU sophomore, came to the forum because she knew Kubicek would have opinions that vary from those of most people.

"I thought that the forum raised a lot of good points, especially (Kubicek's and Howell's)," Schneider said. She added that a military offensive wouldn't accomplish anything.

SUMMARY

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