

Comments

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It may be a serious burden for the US that social justice in that country, which is the main subject of today's discussion, is not only a domestic issue, but also a global concern. It is always a matter of concern for the world outside the US whether migrants from these countries who are living in the US are well treated or not. At the same time the US is expected to treat Asian and African countries with justice in international relations. But the justice that non-American people refer to in respect to the US is different from the social justice that Americans discuss. American nationals are concerned about social justice and equality among the citizens of various ethnic, religious, and social origins in the US; on the other hand the non-Americans outside of the US care about US policy toward the non-Western world. It is true that the Arab public blames the US for the lack of justice in the behavior of US soldiers at Abu Ghraib or Samarra during the occupation of Iraq; but their main concern is not a matter of violations of human rights by individual Americans, but the political mistakes and failures that harm the Arab population. This does not mean that the people of the Middle East accept the US occupation in a gentle and humanitarian manner, and they criticize US policy itself no matter whether US soldiers have respect for the social justice of Iraqi detainees or not. The US makes conscious efforts to maintain social justice because this encourages US nationals to be good Americans; but US citizens do not necessarily care about maintaining political justice in US diplomatic policy, which is what the non-US Arabs and Muslims citizens care most about.

As I am not a scholar of American studies but of the Middle East, the region in the world where people talk most frequently about the "injustices" of the US, it is beyond my ability to give any academic comment on the presented papers. Instead, I would like to present my views on the reasons why the US as a state is understood as unjust in its policy toward the Middle East.

It is widely believed that 9/11 and the US "war on terror" aggravated anti-US sentiments among people in the Middle East and other Muslim societies, who criticize the prejudice and racism against Muslims in the West after 9/11. The question is, however, whether the perception of Middle Eastern societies concerning the lack of "justice" in US policy started only after 9/11. Rather, the US has been accused of being "unjust" toward the Arabs and Muslims throughout the last half century.

In this comment, I would like to explain the reasons why the US has been considered “unjust” toward the Arab and Muslim countries. What I call the “injustice” of the US here is often described as a policy “double standard.” That is, the US uses a different gauge by which to judge Arab and Muslim societies in its diplomacy.

It is in regard to the Palestinian issue that the US policy “double standard” is most frequently cited. Needless to say, the US support for Israel is the main cause of anti-American feelings among Arabs and Muslims. In the wake of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq at the time, was widely supported and praised when he raised the issue of the Israeli occupation of Palestine as being parallel to the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, saying that Iraq might withdraw from Kuwait if Israel withdrew from all the territory of Palestine.” Arab incumbent elites insist that it is a great deceit for the US to use military pressure to force Arab governments to follow international law despite the fact that it never forces Israel to implement UN resolutions.

Public opinion in Arab and Muslim societies has seen the US in a harsh light for using different standards when dealing with Israel and with Arabs throughout the period from the 60s to the present. Israel is always understood as being democratic despite its aggressive military policy towards its neighbors, but the Arab states are always understood as being ruled by dictators, radicalists or fundamentalists, even when they are democratically elected with the people’s support (such as Algeria in 1991, Palestine in 2006, and Iran after 1979).

After the late 1970s and especially after 9/11, this double standard can be seen to have been employed along religious lines; between Muslims and Christians. The US attitude toward Hamas and Hizb Allah in Lebanon is an example of this type of “double standard.” Although Hamas won a majority of votes in the election for the Palestinian Legislative Council in 2006 and formed a cabinet consisting of party members in accordance with the law and the democratic process, the US and international society cut off their support for the Palestinian Authority, and supported the PLO, the loser in the election, as a counterpart for the peace negotiations. In Lebanon, the US administration as well as the Western media, consider Hizb Allah to be a terrorist organization, neglecting to recall that it is a legal political party that occupies about 20% of the seats in the parliament.

In other words, US “injustice” was understood as a product of differences in national ideology in the 1960s; Arab nationalism vs. American liberalism, anti-colonialism vs. imperialism, socialist policy vs. US capitalism. On the other hand US “injustice” since the late 70s has been recognized as being based on differences in religion and belief, matters which deny the possibility of political negotiation.

The second “injustice” that the people of the Middle East point to is the inconsistency of US policy toward its alliance partners in the Middle East. In 1979, the Carter administration declined to make all-out efforts to save its long-

term pro-US ally, the Shah of Iran, in the Islamic revolution. Iraq was a close friend of the US during the last years of the Iran-Iraq war, but it is the same US that brought an end to the Iraqi regime in 2003. It was none other than former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld who shook hands with Saddam Hussein in 1983, when the US was preparing to resume diplomatic relations with Iraq. Iraq was at the time considered to be “the country with the most Western value system and technology among all the Middle Eastern countries except Israel” (*Wall Street Journal*, May 1980), and was therefore a possible counterpart of the US in securing the West’s interests in the Persian Gulf. Saddam was a useful partner against the Islamist regime in Iran, which was hostile to the US during the 1980s.

Osama Bin Laden was another example of a person who worked for US interests against the US enemy, that is, the Soviet occupation forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Both Saddam and Bin Laden were supported and strengthened under the US security strategy during the Cold War, then lost their importance as political assets for the US when the Cold War came to a close. Fred Halliday [2001] rightly points out that the problems now in the 21st century are caused by two dustbins remaining over from the Cold War: one is the unofficial exports of technology or the materials for WMDs, mainly from the Soviet Union. The other is the “gangs” that the US employed to fight its proxy wars, such as dictators in Africa, Saddam against Iran, and also Islamist gangs who were encouraged to fight against the Soviet Army, recruited by Saudi Arabia and trained by the Pakistani Army. Rashid Khalidi also emphasizes the impact the Cold War system had in distorting the relations between the US and the Arab/Muslim countries in the Middle East [Khalidi 2009].

Inconsistency in US policy appears especially obvious toward Islamist regimes. As I noted above, the US attitude toward the Islamists has been negative since the Islamist Revolution took place in Iran in 1979, and the US does not admit the possibility of democracy under Islamist regimes, no matter whether such regimes have electoral systems, parliaments, or multi-party systems or not. But this does not mean that the US is always hostile to Islamist regimes in the Middle East. This reveals another inconsistency of US policy toward Muslim countries. The Islamists, like the current Iranian political elites, came to dominate the Iraqi regime based on the result of the 2005 election, which the US claimed was a “liberation” and a “democratization” of Iraq achieved by the Iraqi War. Actually there is no great difference in political stance between Khamenei in Iran and Abdul Aziz al-Hakim in the ISCI of Iraq, the latter having perhaps a rather more militant tendency. US support for Saudi Arabia has been taken for granted for more than half a century, although it has been an “undemocratic” Islamist Sunni monarchy similar to the Taliban of Afghanistan.

When people say “the US is not just” in the Middle East, it mainly means that US policy is not just and fair, and it does not mean that the nature of American society is to be unjust toward Arabs and Muslims. Popular opinion in the Middle East sees the problem as a political issue that has caused friction between the US

and the Arabs/Muslims. On the other hand, however, the US view on the Middle East is deeply influenced by Orientalist ideas, or the Christian concern for the biblical sites in the Near East, according to McAlister [2001] and Little [2002]. Prejudice against the Arabs in Hollywood and in *National Geographic* magazine has been often seen since WWI. This image of the “Bad Arab” has become prevalent among Americans especially after 9/11 [Shaheen 2001], when emotional and religious rhetoric started to be used to denounce Arab/Muslim society, both inside and outside the US. In responding to the religious terms used by the Bush administration toward the “terrorists,” such as “Crusaders” and “Islamic Fascists,” Arabs and Muslims started to criticize the US not only with respect to policy but also its “injustice” toward their religion. Religious and sectarian discourse has been introduced into politics in the Middle East, and this has encouraged a dichotomous framework of conflict based on religion in the disputes that used to be dealt with as purely political issues.

If the contention between the US and the Arab and Muslim societies in the Middle East were only caused by an Orientalist bias concerning the Middle East on the part of the Americans, it could be solved through achieving social justice in domestic society, sowing a sense of respect and equality with Arabs and Muslims among US citizens, which would then influence policymakers. The question is how the US concern for minority communities can be reflected in US foreign policy. There are some minority groups in the US that represent the interest of their countries of origin. In that case, achieving full rights for ethnic minorities in the US can contribute to changing US diplomatic policy toward the same ethnic groups outside the US. A typical example is the case of Israel and the Israel Lobby in the US. Jewish communities reflect Israeli policy and try to influence US policy in favor of Israel.

On the contrary, the Arab and Muslim migrant communities in the US are less positive in putting pressure on US policymaking. In the wake of 9/11, the Arab American organization asked one member of the royal family of Saudi Arabia to make more efforts to lobby for the Arab and Muslim communities in the US; the answer was no, and the Saudi monarchy expressed a negative stance toward interference in domestic US politics.

One of the reasons for the indifference of the Arab countries to increase pressure on the US through their communities in that country is that the number of Arab migrants is limited due to a shorter history of immigration. Arabs began immigrating to the US as early as 1890, but the majority were Christians mainly from Lebanon and Syria, or Assyrians and Armenians from Ottoman territories [Maclister 2001]. The majority of migrants from the Middle East migrated to Europe, and established large minority communities in France (from North Africa), in Britain (from Iraq and other Gulf countries, as well as from Pakistan), and in Germany (from Turkey). The number of immigrants to the US from the Middle East has been relatively small, and most of them are concentrated in Detroit or other regional cities, not in the policymaking centers.

The low numbers of people and the weakness of the network among the migrant community from the Middle East stand in stark contrast to those of Jewish Americans. But a greater difference with the Jewish community is the contradiction between the political purposes of the Arab and Muslim immigrant communities and those of their countries of origin. Some minorities of Middle East origin are active in lobbying US policymakers, but they generally do so not in favor of their countries of origin but rather against them. This is because the immigrants have come to the US mainly as political refugees or to flee from the control of existing regimes; Iranians after the Revolution in 1979, and Afghans after the invasion of the USSR or after the emergence of the Taliban. Though small in number, Iraqis also acted as a political opposition against the existing regime, and attempted to encourage the US to overthrow the regime of Saddam Hussein.

When the US administration plans diplomatic policy concerning Middle Eastern countries, it often relies on information and reactions from the immigrant community. A typical case can be seen in the US administration decision to launch the military attack against Iraq. The Bush administration relied on several Iraqi expatriates living in the US, notably Kanan Makkiya and Ahmad Chalabi, for the strategic information required for the War. It is now recognized with regret that the misinformation that they supplied to the policymakers was the major reason for the failure of post-war rehabilitation in Iraq. The same can be said for Iranians in the US. Iranians living in the US are, in general, opposed to the Islamist regime in Iran and their views on the current Iranian regime is reflected in US policy toward Iran. This might reduce the necessity for the US administration to have direct contact with the Iranian government in policymaking.

If they neglect the demands of these pro-US expatriates, however, the US administration will be easily criticized for being “unfair” to them. In 1996, a number of Kurdish CIA collaborators in North Iraq fled from Iraq after being attacked by Saddam Hussein’s Army. They were kept on Guam Island, as the US administration was reluctant to offer them the right to live on the mainland. This measure resulted in the collaborators harboring a bad impression of the US, which was criticized as not being “humanitarian.” The same applies to Iraqis who failed in toppling the Iraqi regime and ended as refugees in Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War. They expressed their support for US involvement in the fight inside Iraqi territory, encouraged by the US troops in Kuwait, and rose in revolt against the Iraqi regime. They then fled to the Saudi desert when they saw that the US would not support their uprising. Some were allowed to move to the US as political refugees, but many remained in Saudi Arabia for a long time in quite inhumane circumstances.

If the Americans respect social justice toward citizens from the Middle East who have expressed loyalty to the US, no matter whether they are American citizens or collaborators for US policy, the US administration might be

encouraged to respond to their demands to take military action against their country of origin, and this might be seen as an “unjust” policy toward Arab and Muslim countries in the Middle East.

This is not only a dilemma between the promotion of social justice in the “undemocratic” countries of the Middle East and the pursuit of political justice in US diplomatic policy in the Middle East, but also a dilemma between the pursuit of social justice toward expatriate communities in the US and its policy on the Middle East.

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