

## FALAFEL IN BALI?

At the end of June, the Malaysian minister of culture, arts, and tourism traveled to Saudi Arabia to allay SARS fears. Why the effort for a country that represents a mere 0.3 percent of Malaysia's tourists?

First off, Arab tourists spend money. While Arabs as a whole represent only 1 percent of tourists to Malaysia, they represent a whopping 44 percent of tourist revenue. Unlike Western back-packers, pursuing "Asia on \$5 a day," Arabs travel as families, stay for weeks, and don't seek out bargains. Moreover, sharply higher numbers of Arabs are now visiting Malaysia—more than three times as many in 2002 as in 2000.

None of this is coincidence. In years past, annual vacations to Europe and the United States were commonplace for Arab tourists. But with Arabs facing a chillier reception in those locations, and often being unable to obtain visas, their plans are shifting eastward.

Southeast Asian nations are making efforts to ensure that shift is permanent. The travel industry is rapidly adding Arabic-speaking guides, Arab restaurants are cropping up, and tour companies are promoting programs designed for Arab customers. In addition, many countries are playing up their Muslim identities, marketing themselves as family-friendly locales actively seeking, rather than shunning, Arab tourists.

Not all is going smoothly, however. Indonesia announced last month that it would require Saudi visitors to obtain visas, a clear nod to increased security measures as their courts continue to move through cases surrounding last year's deadly bombing in Bali. Southeast Asia's doors remain open for the time being, but signs of lingering concern remain. ■

— JBA, GM 10/15/03

## US, THEM, AND THE KNOWLEDGE GAP

On Monday, October 20, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) will issue a new report on what it calls "the knowledge gap" in the Arab world. The report is a follow-on to the comprehensive *Arab Human Development Report 2002* issued a year ago.

Next week's report has a narrower focus, looking specifically at the relatively small role that the acquisition, dissemination, and development of knowledge plays in Arab economies, and the political and social obstacles to having it play a larger one.

It is not pleasant reading, and some statistics are shocking. For example, Greece alone translates five times as many books in a year as the entire Arab world combined. The report not only presents exhaustive evidence of how inward looking many Arab societies have become, it also indicates how hard it will be to turn things around.

Much of the importance of these particular development reports comes from the fact that they are very much intended to be "Arab documents." That is, Arab academics deliberate on the contents and write the prose, and non-Arabs are virtually invisible in the production of the document.

Yet herein lies a conundrum. On the one hand, the reports talk about the need for Arabs to open up to the rest of the world, sharing ideas freely without fear of compromise, corruption, or subjugation. But on the other, the reports are generally silent on the role Arabs wish non-Arabs to play in this opening.

One might argue that the battle for openness must be won internally, before expanding to include partnerships with others. But such reasoning has two flaws. First, successful partnerships with the West can help the reformers win their battles. Even more significant, however, is the fact that outsiders are going to be involved in this process whether they are wanted or not.

Motivated by sizeable Arab immigration and a need to promote economic development and more open political systems in the region, the European Union has for eight years pursued the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. But almost a decade in, the so-called Euro-Med Partnership feels undefined even to participants and can point to few areas in which the partnership has made a difference. Skeptics in Europe and the Middle East suggest that the

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## ISLAM AND PHILANTHROPY

The Middle East Program recently held a series of seminars in cooperation with the CSIS Islam Program and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to explore "The Idea of Philanthropy in the Arab and Muslim Worlds." The first seminar, held September 23, focused on historical foundations and regional variations of philanthropy. A second seminar convened on October 10 to discuss "Adaptation, Creativity, and Dynamism in Contemporary Muslim Philanthropy." Participants discussed such issues as religious obligation in regional philanthropism, state constraints and regulation, and the emergence of new forms of philanthropic organizations, with the larger objective of presenting USAID with actionable suggestions for engaging extant organizations in the region. Seminar conclusions and summaries will shortly be available on the program Web site: [www.csis.org/mideast](http://www.csis.org/mideast). ■

partnership is designed more to keep Arabs in their countries of origin and out of Europe, rather than build linkages across the Mediterranean.

The United States has been pursuing its own Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) for the last year, a multi-hundred-million-dollar program to advance moderation and reform in the Arab world. A broad program to promote civil society, women's rights, and economic development in Arab countries, MEPI is still mostly in the conceptual, rather than execution, phase.

Not only does there appear to be little coordination between the EU and U.S. efforts, they often appear poorly coordinated with efforts for change in the Arab world. Indeed, with rising levels of Arab hostility toward the West in general, and the United States in particular, it can be hard to find partners for new initiatives. An American friend traveling in Egypt recently sought a meeting with a U.S.-educated IMF veteran who had been active in political reform a decade ago. The word came back—he no longer welcomes meetings with American researchers.

In addition, it is hard for the United States to promote reform in many of these countries through investment or aid. In part, this is because Arab publics are suspicious of or downright hostile to Western meddling. Equally important, many Arab governments maintain a keen interest in controlling the nongovernmental sectors in their societies, funneling money to favored (yet often ineffectual) causes while seeking to isolate those antagonistic to them.

The result is a tendency for Western donors to follow well-worn paths, favoring established organizations headed by Western-educated elites whose accounting practices can stand up to an auditor's scrutiny. There is certainly merit in this. But there is also the danger that well-meaning Western efforts to promote change might further isolate Western-oriented elites from increasingly antagonistic publics, while doing little to reach the center of gravity in the Arab world—a center that has been drifting further and further toward opposition to the West.

The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of new elites in the Arab world. Liberal Westernizers were swept away, and a combination of young army officers and Gulf sheikhs came to the fore. What Western powers saw as positive modernizing trends, new elites saw as depravity. But these elites have had their run, and the young now see themselves facing tired systems offering little hope. Some feel drawn to the millenarian rhetoric of bin Laden, and even more respect his willingness to challenge an unsatisfactory status quo.

The new *Arab Human Development Report* seeks to chart a vision of an alternative future, one that has its own deep grounding in Arab history. It is an authentically Arab vision, even if it is deeply rooted in interaction and exchange with the West.

The reports' authors and their supporters in Western capitals agree on many of the changes they wish to see in the Arab world. They appear to agree less on how they might work together to realize them. Were the stakes lower, such differences might be easier to stomach. Western nations want to help, but their capacity to harm inadvertently is significant as well; agreement in principle is not enough. A vital part of the authors' responsibility is to guide not only opinion in their own society, but the actions of the donor community as well. Failure to do so effectively could handicap their entire project. ■

—JBA 10/17/2003

To read the 2003 *Arab Human Development Report* after it is released on Monday, October 20, please visit <http://www.undp.org/rbas/>

## Links of Interest

<http://www.arabiastrends.com/Special%20Report%200403.htm>

An article on challenges facing Egypt by Program Director Jon Alterman.

[http://csis.org/mideast/MEN\\_0308.pdf](http://csis.org/mideast/MEN_0308.pdf)

Recommendations for strengthening the U.S.-Egyptian bilateral relationship.

<http://csis.org/islam/briefingnotes.htm>

Briefing Notes on Islam, Society, and Politics from the CSIS Islam Program.

<http://www.csis.org/isp/pcr/IraqTrip.pdf>

CSIS Post Conflict Reconstruction Report on Iraq, a Field Review July 2003.

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