

II. Perceptions of the War Against Terrorism:

Background: The Influence of Islam:

There are over one billion Moslems in the world, making up a fifth of the world's population. The practice of Islam is an important aspect of daily life for residents of dozens of countries in the "Islamic Crescent" stretching from West Africa to Eastern Indonesia. There is now also a significant Islamic population in Europe and North America, and although statistics are unreliable, there could be as many as one million Moslem Canadians.

The influence of the Islamic factor on the foreign policies of countries with significant Islamic populations varies enormously. For Saudi Arabia and many of the Gulf states, Islam, its defence and promotion, is ostensibly at the heart of both domestic and foreign policies. It is much less of a factor in those Moslem countries with secular constitutions and governance structures. Care should be taken in drawing direct links between the influence of religion on specific national policies. All countries, whatever their religious makeup, pursue their national interests - however they chose to justify them. This caveat notwithstanding, and in comparison to secular Western states, religion is clearly a major factor in the international relations of many Moslem countries, especially those in the Arabian Gulf.

Impact of September 11 on the Arab and Islamic World:

Based on interviews with policy-makers and opinion-influencers in the Gulf there is a clear bifurcation of opinion on the desirability and efficacy of the Western campaign against terrorism. At the official level, there is strong condemnation of the September 11 terrorist attacks, and general endorsement of the need to combat terrorism. However, in terms of general public opinion, there are varying degrees of hostility towards the West in general, and the United States specifically. Based on responses in interviews, the following themes recur:

- 1) The West is selective in its definition of terrorism, and discriminatory against Arabs and Moslems in this definition.
- 2) Despite repeated denials by Western leaders, the "War on Terrorism" is perceived by many as a war against Islam.
- 3) Arabs and Moslems feel "humiliated" in their treatment by the West. Reports of harassment of Moslems and Arabs in the West have are the subject of many rumours on the street and receive substantial media coverage.
- 4) Western handling of the Palestinian-Isreali dispute remains the key image "driver" in determining attitudes toward the West.