

## Globalist: Paying a deadly price for U.S. global hubris

By Roger Cohen International Herald Tribune  
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**SOLO, Indonesia** Sholeh Ibrahim is a teacher, a slight man of intense gaze. His ardor contrasts with the languor of the Indonesian tropics. "I am angry with your President Bush, who sees Islam as an enemy," he says in an even voice. "The Bali bombing was a justified reaction by Muslims to American policies."

This measured man of 47 shapes the outlook of 1,704 young Indonesians in one of the country's Islamic religious boarding schools, or Pesantren. I struggle with the notion that a man entrusted with the malleable minds of youth should see in the 202 people killed by the Bali nightclub bombings of October 2002 an act justified by what he sees as greater American outrages in Afghanistan or elsewhere.

How can a man of such cool anger be granted such influence in this, the world's largest Muslim nation, a place traditionally known more for religious tolerance than zealotry? But as I have found in recent travels from Africa to Asia, Ibrahim is far from alone. For America, it is blowback time.

The blowback stems from a victory. Sixteen years ago the cold war ended and an age of globalization dawned, of which America is the driving force and emblem. This age has lifted tens of millions of people from poverty. But it has also proved divisive and dangerous in ways the United States never imagined when the Berlin Wall fell.

America, with its certitudes, its movie stars and Starbucks, has never loomed larger on television screens or in individual psyches, where it lures but also repels. The United States sees itself spreading its gifts, inspiring a global tide of liberty, but often it is seen as the symbol not of opportunity but of a threatening modernity: trampler of tradition, mouther of hypocrisies, poor listener, bully, robber baron disguising its intent in a cloak of noble convictions.

Look at fanatical Islamic jihadism one way, and it is no more than the crazed apocalyptic vision of a bunch of totalitarian loonies bent on turning back the clock more than 1,000 years to the age of the Caliphate.

But perhaps it is more instructive to see it as the repugnant apotheosis of a broader rebellion: that of certain cultures, particularly those rooted in Islam, at the advance of what are seen as American-imposed ideas - of politics and trade and law and religion and relations between the sexes.

Globalization, by its very impersonality, demands a face. That face, right or wrong, is America's. Its gaze, right or wrong, is not always trusted. After all, the jihadists themselves were largely a creation of the CIA in the 1980s - a force marshaled, financed and armed to undermine the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Blowback indeed: America reaps the bitter harvest of its inattention.

Ibrahim has been teaching for more than 20 years. He once studied with Abu Bakar Bashir, an Islamic cleric whom the U.S. views as the spiritual leader of Jemaah Islamiyah, an Indonesian-based terrorist organization. Bashir was convicted in March in connection with the Bali bombing, but on peripheral charges that carried only 30 months in prison. This short sentence was a disappointment to the Bush administration.

As a dozen teachers nod approvingly, Ibrahim describes even this conviction as "really insulting." The teachers are convinced that Bush is driven by "the energy of delivering revenge against Islam." They see Americans as warmongers. They express solidarity with the bombers of Bali because, as Ibrahim puts it, "We have to show that Muslims can do something, can react."

There is nothing fanatical in Ibrahim's tone. His is the quiet language of an absolute certainty. It is only more disquieting for that.

"Fundamentalists," he says, "are people who believe in the Koran completely, so, yes, I am one. Islam means peace. But there is also a teaching that when we are attacked, we must fight back."

Indonesia remains a land of "Islam lite," in the words of one American official. The Arabian desert produces the hard lines of Wahhabism; an Islam bred in the tropics has softer contours. Ibrahim's Islamic fervor lies far from the Indonesian mainstream. But its toehold is growing, and in a country new to democracy, it cannot be ignored.

The United States has responded here with revived public diplomacy, opening "American corners" at several universities that offer free computer links to a wide range of U.S. periodicals and publications. It has also tried to expedite the visa-application process: A huge backlog had caused anger.

Such efforts may have some impact. But the global forces stimulating anti-Americanism remain broad: Islamic anger; broader ideological anger (at Bush's brand of conservatism); anti-war anger (driven by Afghanistan and Iraq); cultural anger (at the advance of American values and lifestyle); economic anger (as America prods, economies open and competition stiffens); anger at fortress America (of which heavily guarded, impenetrable embassies are a symbol); and the envy-tinged anger of a world protected by American garrisons but made uneasy by them.

Perhaps the time has come for Washington to realize that the collapse of its public diplomacy after 1989 was a costly error. And to understand that double standards do not go unnoticed - not at Abu Ghraib, not at Guantánamo Bay, and not in Indonesia when America criticizes the short sentence for Bashir but denies Indonesian police access to key witnesses, including the captured Al Qaeda operative known as Hambali.

To be so powerful is to be blamed for everything - even the polarizing forces of globalization, which now lie outside any one country's control. It is no use America lamenting this phenomenon, however unjust. Rather, it may want to listen better, even to Ibrahim in his Indonesian classroom, who complains of "the false image of Muslims."

A global world is full of false images: no longer the mind-bending inventions of totalitarian societies but the cascading inflections of ideas and images endlessly retransmitted by the latest advances of technology. America, in this sense, is trapped in a web of its own creation.

E-mail: rcohen@iht.com

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