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# PERSPECTIVES

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## Muslim student shares perspective on Saddam, Eugene

Columnist Hannah Dillon interviews Waleed Al-Aghbari for a view from the place she once taught in

I sought out Waleed Al-Aghbari, president of the Muslim Student Association, not to talk with him about the controversy over whether or not the ASUO should give money to the group, though it did edge its way into our conversation toward the end. Instead, I wanted to find out his thoughts on Saddam Hussein and how it is for him as an Arab here as we seemed to be unwilling to stop the thrust toward bombing Iraq despite the outcome of Kofi Anan's 11th-hour negotiations.

Waleed is a senior in economics. He is thinking about getting an MBA, coming from a business family. He is one of 40 Arab students on this campus. The others hail from Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Tunisia.

**OPINION**



Hannah Dillon

About being here, Waleed said he could have studied back home in Yemen, but school is more advanced in the United States as we have the latest methods, books and technology. Also, he was looking for a challenge. He wanted to learn about other cultures, get new ideas, meet new people, see how others

think and behave, which would serve him well in business.

He has made friends with people from Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and other Arab countries. "I've learned so much from my friendships both in and outside of school," he said. His English is impressive, especially for having studied it for what I think is a short time. When I tell him so, he shrugs and claims it should be better for what he thinks is a long time of study.

Waleed finds Eugene to be a nice place to be and to go to school. "I feel free to go out and talk with people, meet people and form new friendships." I ask him if he's ever felt discriminated against. He is diplomatic and tells me that he feels Americans are friendlier than Europeans. I instinctively nod while he considers my question further, and then he replies, "The government and media immediately thought that the Oklahoma bombing had been done by an Arab group. But the [government and media] are different from the

people. The people are still human beings. But if I go to a grocery store and I feel that a person is discriminating against me, I won't give them my money. I'll go to another store. It's just like that. If someplace is not good, you learn that there are plenty of other places that are."

About Saddam: "He is a dictator and is being stubborn

their suffering and dying. Saddam's power satisfies him. He's living in a paradise for himself."

Waleed emphasized the fact that he, the Iraqis, Kuwaitis, etc., are all Arabs. They have the same history, ancestors, language and share so much in common. They are one people, which is why it is so hard for him to

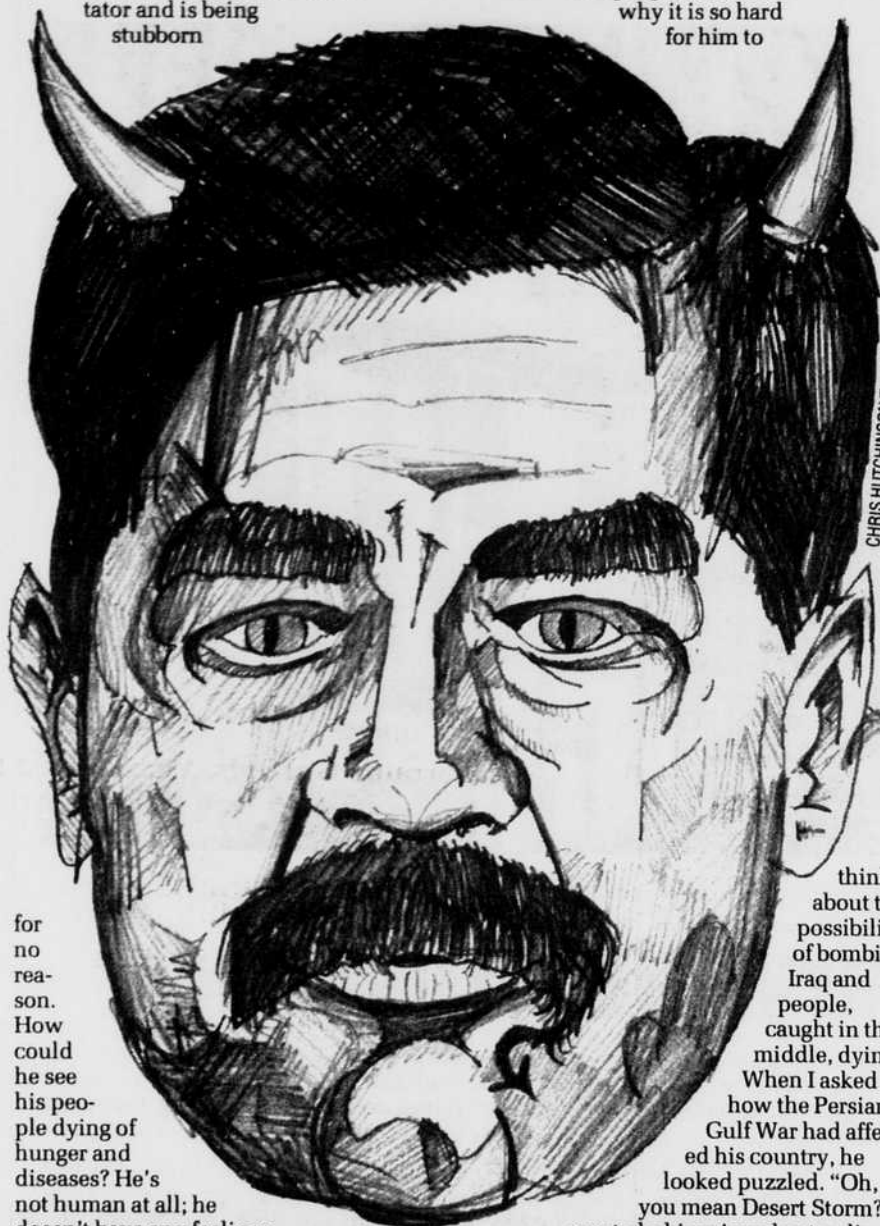
fallout of suddenly having to accommodate more people returning to it than the number of its inhabitants.

I asked why he thought Saddam was so intractable. It seemed to mystify him, too. He reminded me that Saddam had had his own uncle, cousin and nephew killed because he was suspicious of their loyalty to him. "I've never been married, so I don't have children, but I have a nephew here who is like my own son. I could never kill him. That shows you the mentality of Saddam Hussein."

Why then, I asked, hadn't his own people tried to get rid of him if he's so bad? "They have," Waleed emphasized. "Of course there are people around him who would like to see him dead, but they fear him to such a degree that they can't do anything toward him." Waleed knows of at least two attempts within to kill Saddam, but he got information about it and "slaughtered the guys who were having the plan." I asked him if he thought the United States should kill Saddam. "You can't kill Saddam Hussein," he pronounced, shaking his head.

One of the underlying reasons I wanted to talk with a student about Saddam was because I spent a number of years teaching English to Arab students on their way to college, and I just wanted to chat. I miss those students now and again and am still delightfully amused remembering the frequent occasions for belly laughs and accompanying tears we had in my classroom, as well as the passionate debates about the burning social and political issues of our day. There were painful times then as well. When the U.S. Marines were blown up in Lebanon, I remember entering my class and none of the students would make eye contact with me and were extraordinarily subdued. It was the time of the massacres in the Sabra and Shatilla Palestinian refugee camps and the makeup of my classroom was a microcosm of the contending groups and complex alliances of the Middle East. I had the next best thing of being in my homeland but spending my time with a gamut of new and wonderful flavors offered by those from places I had never been and might not ever get to. (There are those of us who will always seek out "the other," but that's another column). Suffice to say, Waleed Al-Aghbari proved as friendly, humorous and heartfelt as I had the fortune to come to know in another place, at another time.

Hannah Dillon is a columnist for the Emerald. Her work appears on alternate Fridays. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

for no reason. How could he see his people dying of hunger and diseases? He's not human at all; he doesn't have any feelings. If he really cared about his people, he'd resign and make them and other nations happy. He has enough food and medical care, but the common people suffer. The embargo doesn't do anything. What's the point of making an embargo? The head of the people doesn't care about

think about the possibility of bombing Iraq and people, caught in the middle, dying. When I asked how the Persian Gulf War had affected his country, he looked puzzled. "Oh, you mean Desert Storm?" It created a big misunderstanding and division among Arabs. Because Yemen didn't take a strong enough stand against Saddam, they were accused of standing with him. As a consequence, 2 million Yemenis were expelled from residency in other Gulf countries. To this day, Yemen is still dealing with the economic

**READERS' VOICES**

*Is it time to switch to a semester system?*



"No, I think it's kind of nice to be able to change your classes three times in a year instead of twice a year."

**Pat McCarthy**  
Computer and information sciences



"A lot of abroad programs have semester systems. It's hard to transfer credits because of it."

**Karen Ikegami**  
Biology



"Yeah, I think so. I think the quarter system is too short, and it doesn't allow you to get to know your instructor or your people in your classes."

**Mike Thierfelder**  
Fine and applied arts



"No, it's nice to have a break; you get new classes and a change of scenery."

**Amy Nickolisen**  
Pre-education



"No, it gives you a chance to learn more things, get a wider range of experiences. I like the shorter terms."

**Dylan Byrnes**  
Environmental Studies



"No, actually, I like the trimester system because of the breaks between each term. I think 10 weeks is a good length."

**Ryan Suvoy**  
Undeclared



"No, I teach here, and I think the students get just really, really tired by the end of the term. I think the breaks between terms are really important for focus and energy."

**Janine Sepulveda**  
Instructor



"No, I like the opportunity of having more classes and having one more quarter."

**Matthew Myers**  
Graduate student