Not everyone accepted the critique of Orientalism, of course. A good many scholars of Islam or the Middle East rejected it outright and lamented the fact that “Orientalist” had come to be widely used in a pejorative sense. Others found the whole controversy largely irrelevant to their work, continued much as they had always done, or embraced different ways of making sense of things. These included non-Marxist variants of political economy, for example John Waterbury’s 1983 book *The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes* or Alan Richards and John Waterbury’s 1990 *A Political Economy of the Middle East: State, Class, and Economic Development*, but also one or another of the new games in town. For example, residuum theory proliferated in American political science in this same period, sporting premises and methods that could not be more incommensurate with those of colonial discourse analysis, postcolonial theory, poststructuralism, mainstream social science or even plain old Marxism—though perhaps it had somewhat less of an impact on political science work on the Middle East than it did elsewhere.

Nonetheless, the critique of Orientalism gradually won widespread (if never universal) acceptance among students of the Middle East and Islam, and the rejection of cultural essentialism and of the radical dichotomy of East and West which lay at its heart eventually came to be taken as plain common sense by many in the field. In 1998 the Middle East Studies Association organized a special plenary session at its annual meeting to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. The praise heaped on Said on this occasion for his contribution to the field of Middle East studies was in sharp contrast to the dismay or disdain with which many senior scholars in Middle East and Islamic studies had greeted his book when it first appeared. This acclaim indicated the extent to which the field had changed, with a great many scholars who were broadly sympathetic to the intellectual thrust (if not to every aspect or detail) of the critiques advanced by Said and others—and in some cases to their politics as well—now holding leadership positions within MESA and in the field as a whole.

**Islam and Islamism... again**

Despite the widespread acceptance of the critiques of Orientalism and modernization theory, however, the question of how to understand and study Islam and predominantly Muslim societies continued to arouse controversy into the early twenty-first century, in large measure because of developments in the Middle East and the wider Muslim world which bore directly on contemporary intellectual, political and policy concerns. Among other things, scholars had to grapple with the continuing importance of Islam in contemporary Middle Eastern and other predominantly Muslim societies, and more specifically with how best to explain the ability of parties, movements and regimes which rejected secularism and instead called for the creation of what they deemed a properly Islamic society and state to win the support of, and mobilize, substantial numbers of people. In short, they had to explain the emergence and continuing strength of Islamism, the derivation of a political ideology and practice from the Islamic faith. Whole forests were sacrificed for the paper needed to produce the hundreds of books and thousands of articles and conference papers that were produced on Islam and Islamism from the 1970s onward, amidst ongoing debates about how to interpret and explain this phenomenon—indeed, if it could be characterized as a single phenomenon. This is not the place to attempt a comprehensive survey of this vast literature, but I will try to outline at least a few key issues.

As I noted toward the end of Chapter 5, the “resurgence” of Islam did not pose any great intellectual problem to those who, like Bernard Lewis, regarded Islam as a more or less unchanging and monolithic civilization which continued to govern the minds of its adherents. In an article in the September 1990 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* Lewis restated, but also elaborated on, his explanation of “The Roots of Muslim Rage” which he saw as fueling Islamist movements worldwide. The issue’s cover was adorned with an illustration of a stereotypically bearded, turbaned, hook-nosed and scowling Muslim, with the bloodshot reflection of an American flag in each eyeball to show how enraged he was at the United States; another lurid illustration appeared in the middle of Lewis’ essay. It was, presumably, the editors of *The Atlantic Monthly* rather than Lewis himself who commissioned and approved these illustrations, but such crude depictions of the angry, threatening, irrational Muslim—portrayals of a kind which would be deemed racist or antisemitic if done of
African-Americans or Jews — actually fit the thrust of Lewis’ analysis quite well.

Part of the Muslim world, Lewis asserted, was currently going through a period in which Islam “inspired in some of its followers a mood of hatred and violence.” Though he began by insisting that “we [i.e., Westerners] share certain basic cultural and moral, social and political, beliefs and aspirations” with many, perhaps even most, Muslims, this qualification disappeared as Lewis began to speak of a “struggle between these rival systems [of Christendom, today Europe, and Islam] that has now lasted for some fourteen centuries.” In this struggle, he argued, Lewis now switched to the third-person singular form to denote all Muslims everywhere — “has suffered [three] successive stages of defeat” at the hands of the West over the past three centuries or so. First “he” — Lewis’ representative Muslim now became male — lost to the advancing power of Russia and the West; then there was “the undermining of his authority in his own country, through an invasion of foreign ideas and laws and ways of life and sometimes even foreign rulers or settlers, and the enfranchisement of native non-Muslim elements.”

The third — the last straw — was the challenge to his mastery in his own house, from emancipated women and rebellious children. It was too much to endure, and the outbreak of rage against these alien, infidel, and incomprehensible forces that had subverted his dominance, disrupted his society, and finally violated the sanctity of his home was inevitable.

This produced “a feeling of humiliation — a growing awareness, among the heirs of an old, proud, and long dominant civilization, of having been overtaken, overborne, and overwhelmed by those whom they regarded as their inferiors.” Eventually, this rage came to be directed primarily against the United States. This had little to do, Lewis insisted, with US support for authoritarian and oppressive regimes in the Muslim world, US support for authoritarian and oppressive regimes in the Muslim world, US support for authoritarian and oppressive regimes in the Muslim world, US support for authoritarian and oppressive regimes in the Muslim world, or any other thing except the United States had done or was now doing. It did perhaps have a bit to do with the kind of people who went to war with us, but primarily it was the aggression, the arrogance, the disrespect, the condescension, the superiority it reflected, the manner in which it was done which was so infuriating.

The main source of “Muslim rage” was simply Muslims’ inability to tolerate “the domination of infidels over true believers.” This was the real source of the “current troubles” in such places as Eritrea, Kashmir, Chinese-ruled Sinkiang and Kosovo.

Islamic fundamentalism,” Lewis went on, “has given an aim and a form to the otherwise aimless and formless resentment and anger of the Muslim masses at the forces which have devalued their traditional values and loyalties and, in the final analysis, robbed them of their beliefs, their aspirations, their dignity, and to an increasing extent even their livelihood,” channeling them against the secularism and modernity represented by the United States. “This is,” Lewis summed up, “no less than a clash of civilizations — the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both.” Given this, there was not much the West could do other than to try to achieve a better understanding of Islamic civilization and hope that more moderate, tolerant and open strains of Islam would eventually win out.

As I have noted, Lewis was nothing if not consistent: this 1990 article manifested more or less the same premises that had informed Lewis’ writing going back to the 1950s. Yet it is surely inaccurate and misleading to explain the Eritrean struggle for independence from Ethiopia, waged by both Christians and Muslims on a thoroughly secular nationalist platform, or Albanian Kosovar demands for the restoration of the autonomy which Slobodan Milosevic’s regime took from them to bolster his own postcommunist credentials as a Serbian nationalist, or Kashmiri opposition to that region’s forcible inclusion within India, and so on, simply as manifestations of the rage which “the Muslim” feels about Islam’s inferiority to Western civilization. To do so is to utterly ignore (or to distort) history, politics and complex local, regional and global contexts in the most reductionistic and simplistic way.

Nonetheless, articles such as this — in this case published just as the military forces of the United States and its allies were massing for the campaign that would expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait — offered Americans an accessible and satisfying explanation for why there was so much anger and resentment against the United States among Arabs and Muslims. It was not, at bottom, because of anything “we” in the West might have done or were doing, or even because of how our actions and policies were mistakenly perceived by others; it was due largely or even solely to a profound defect in Islamic civilization, a wound which remained unhealed and indeed could not really heal unless, apparently, Muslims stopped being Muslims.

Bernard Lewis had his even less subtle emulators. One was Thomas Friedman, at the time a New York Times correspondent but within a decade that newspaper’s chief foreign affairs commentator and something of a media star. An op-ed piece he published in the Times in October 1990, during the run-up to the Gulf War, provides a good illustration of how, despite all the critiques to which it had been subjected, the kind of cultural essentialism which critics argued was central to the Orientalist tradition continued to be pressed into service, especially at moments of crisis.

In this essay Friedman boldly asserted that the profound differences between the West and the Arab world could be highlighted by looking
at the symbols that, he claimed, represented each. "The symbol of the West," Friedman declared, "is the cross—full of sharp right angles that begin and end. But the symbol of the Arab East is the crescent moon—a wide ambiguous arc, where there are curves, but no corners." What Westerners failed to understand, according to Friedman, was that Arabs just don't think like "we" do; whereas we are rational and say what we really mean; for Arabs things are often not what they seem; they say one thing but mean and do another. In the Middle East truth and reality are always relative, even dreamlike, just like the desert landscape. Unfortunately, the United States lacked enough trained and experienced foreign service and intelligence personnel who really understood how the Arabs think, leaving it at a disadvantage in its confrontation with the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

Friedman's dichotomization of the West and the Arab world, each neatly equipped with a symbol that purportedly expressed its essence, its core cultural attributes and fixed mentality, was no doubt crude and simplistic, even laughable; but at a critical moment it offers Americans an easy way both to make sense of a complicated and confusing world and to reassure themselves about their innocence, righteousness and rationality.

While this perspective—sometimes termed "neo-Orientalist"—because it recapitulated key elements of Orientalism in a contemporary setting—certainly had its adherents, many scholars offered a very different understanding of the spread of Islamism. For one, they insisted that the emergence of Islamist ideology and movements should not be seen as a "resurgence" of tradition or as an essentially reactionary "throwback" to premodern times, a manifestation of something antithetical inherent in an Islam which had not yet properly modernized itself. Rather, Islamism was, despite its claim to be a "return" to a pristine original Islam, actually very much a product of the modern world, a thoroughly modern-development.

For example, Ayatollah Khomeini's argument that the Shi'i 'ulama' should exercise political power directly, for which he claimed unchallengable support in Shi'i theology and jurisprudence, was often characterized as a throwback to the premodern era; yet in fact it constituted a radical break with virtually all prior Shi'i political thought and could have been developed and won significant support only in the historical context of Iran in the second half of the twentieth century. In other words, this was an innovation in Shi'i thought that portrayed itself as a return to tradition. Similarly, though Sunni Islamists sincerely saw themselves as seeking to realize a Muslim society modeled on the first Muslim community, that of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions and followers, in many respects their vision actually constituted a sharp break with, and rejection of, much of what most Muslims had for centuries taken to be normative Islam.

Moreover, these political and social visions, the terms in which they were put forth and the efforts to realize them would not only not have made sense to earlier generations of Muslims but reflected the appropriation and incorporation of many thoroughly modern concepts (like the nation-state, democracy, popular sovereignty, constitutionalism, social justice, and imperialism, science, etc.) and modern modes of political organization, propaganda and action (including the political party, the mass movement, mass protests, journalism, the audio cassette and the video tape). At the same time, much of this scholarly viewpoint argued, most of the thinkers, leaders and activists of Islamist movements had been educated in institutions of a kind which had not even existed a century earlier and had been shaped by the ideas, discourses and practices characteristic of modernity. Many scholars therefore argued that it was necessary to abandon the view, rooted in both Orientalism and modernization theory, that Islamist ideologies and movements were in any useful sense "traditional," even when they invoked (a certain vision of) Islamic tradition. They were in fact quite modern, very much products of the twentieth century, just as nationalisms which claimed ancient roots and used powerful language and symbols drawn from religious tradition (including Zionism and Arab nationalism, among others) were actually quite new and the forms of identity they advocated constituted a radical break with the past. I don't disagree with this._0

More broadly, adherents of this school argued the time was past when one could simply treat "modern" and "Western" (or modernization and Westernization) as synonyms or see modernity as one single thing. Modernity meant different things to different people in different places; it therefore did not make sense to assume, as much of social and political theory did, that there was only one modernity, that of the West, which should be regarded as the proper goal of all human social evolution and the norm against which everything else should be measured (and always found lacking). There were in fact many modernities, many different paths along which societies had developed in the modern era, with much complex mutual borrowing and interaction of ideas, practices and institutions among them.

From this perspective, though each claimed ancient roots and sought legitimation in an appeal to tradition, Islamism, Hindu nationalism, Sikh nationalism, messianic religious Zionism and right-wing evangelical Protestant Christianity in the United States in the last third of the twentieth century were all in fact thoroughly modern phenomena. Even...
was the product of complex political, social, economic and cultural forces operating in specific historical contexts and conjunctures, and none was usefully viewed as a throwback to some earlier, premodern time or as a vestige of tradition which had pervasively persisted into the modern age. So Islamism could not usefully be seen as the “resurgence” or “revival” or “return” of a single thing called Islam, rather, it was a label for a heterogeneous set of phenomena, meaning many different things in different places. While there were certainly important links, affinities, commonalities and interactions among Islamist ideologies and movements (especially within distinctive Sunni and Shi'i spheres, but across sectarian lines as well), there were also significant differences rooted in local histories, cultures and politics, and in any case they could not all be reduced to a single “Islam.”

A related question that also attracted the attention of scholars studying Islamism, especially in the 1990s, was whether at least certain versions of Islamism, and certain Islamist parties, movements or groups, might be compatible with democracy, an issue of obvious importance to policymakers in the United States and elsewhere. Authoritarian regimes in the Arab countries had by the mid to late 1990s apparently crushed, or at least contained, efforts by radical Islamist groups to violently overthrow them, while in Iran a growing reformist movement had emerged, with support among prominent Shi'i clerics as well as among lay people, advocating a more tolerant, open and democratic path for the Islamic Republic. What did the existence of relatively moderate strains of Islamism signify, and how should the United States and its local allies deal with them?

On this issue two distinct camps might be discerned. Advocates of what might be called the hard-line position followed Bernard Lewis in seeing Islam as a wounded civilization and Islamism in all its forms as a pathology and a potential threat to the West. I will discuss this perspective in more detail later; for now I will say only that in various books, articles, op-ed pieces, public lectures and media appearances, its advocates argued through the 1990s that Islamism had replaced communism as the grassest threat facing the West (and Israel) and that only a firm, even aggressive stance, including the use of military force, could eradicate that threat. Attention to the political and social grievances that led people in the Arab and Muslim world to join or support Islamist groups was pointless, nor was it reasonable to expect that such groups would ever be willing or able to abide by the rules of democracy, since Islam was by its very nature autocratic and intolerant. Islamism was totalitarianism, plain and simple; there were no moderate or potentially democratic Islamists worth talking about.

This hard-line position was opposed by what might be called the liberal camp, one of whose leading figures was John L. Esposito, founding director of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University, established in 1993. One of Esposito’s many books on Islam and Islamism, the 1996 Islam and Democracy (co-authored with the Center’s associate director John Voll), used case studies of six Muslim countries to argue that Islamism was a diverse and multifaceted phenomenon. Esposito and Voll highlighted efforts by Muslim democrats to draw on elements within the Islamic tradition to develop an authentically Islamic version of democracy and argued that despite widespread Western images of Muslims as uniformly violent and radical, there were a significant number of Islamist activists and movements who eschewed revolution and violence and wanted to take their place in mainstream society and the democratic-political process.

The relatively optimistic stance of Esposito, Voll and others in this camp tended to coincide with arguments being made in these same years about the contribution which at least some of the more moderate Islamist groups might make to the flourishing of civil society in Arab and Muslim lands, an issue which had attracted the attention of a number of social scientists in Middle East studies (and other fields as well). The concept of “civil society” has long and complex roots in social and political theory, but in this context it was generally used to refer to the mass of voluntary associations, parties, clubs, trade unions and similar organizations which operated above the level of the individual, family or clan but were not part of the state either. US political scientists, sociologists and other scholars interested in this question deemed civil society to be a necessary buffer between citizen and state, fostering civility, popular participation and democracy, and its absence or weakness in Arab and Muslim lands was regarded as one of the prime causes of persistent authoritarianism, lack of respect for the rule of law, and weak loyalty to the nation-state.

Hence the importance of determining whether Islamist groups, with their parties, publishing houses and media outlets, social and cultural associations, and social service organizations should be reckoned as part of civil society or not. The answer to this question would bear on predictions about whether the democratization which had affected post-communist eastern Europe and other parts of the world might also ultimately transform the Middle East. It also had a bearing on policy questions, for example whether the US government should back the efforts of client-states like Egypt to crush or marginalize even moderate and nonviolent Islamist movements, or whether it should instead initiate contacts with them and encourage democratization, even if that might
The question of terrorism

In the 1990s the much-debated issue of whether Islam or Islamism was a threat to the West or not came to be increasingly bound up with the problem of terrorism. The term in something like its modern political sense goes back to the French Revolution, when it was used with reference to the campaign of the French revolutionary government to crush opposition by executing large numbers of those it deemed to be counterrevolutionaries (the “Reign of Terror” of 1793–94). By extension, it came to mean (as the Oxford English Dictionary puts it) “a policy intended to strike terror those against whom it is adopted; the employment of methods of intimidation; the fact of terrorizing or condition of being terrorized.”

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the term was sometimes used to denote the strategy pursued by some European revolutionaries and nationalists to undermine regimes or exact revenge by assassinating royalty and government officials. Later still, British officials came to use the term widely to describe anticolonial violence, whether directed against military and civilian agents of colonial rule or against civilians, in Ireland, India, Cyprus, Kenya and elsewhere. Similarly, the French depicted the anticolonial violence perpetrated during Algeria’s struggle for independence (1954–62) as terrorism. Along the same lines the Russian government, from the 1990s into the twenty-first century, insisted on portraying its effort to crush secessionist rebels in largely Muslim Chechnya as a struggle against terrorism, exploiting the fact that some Chechens had used terrorism as a means of struggle to delegitimize Chechen nationalism altogether and perpetuate Russian domination.

In classifying anticolonial violence as terrorism plain and simple, as acts disconnected from any rational, comprehensible and possibly even legitimate grievances about oppressive conditions, colonial officials drew on the same discourse which led them to use terms like “riots,” “disturbances,” or “troubles” to denote the actions of anti-colonial collective action. This had the effect of portraying such acts and episodes as irrational eruptions against peace and order, allegedly “initiated” or perpetrated by a small minority of “agitators” and “outside agitators,” against the wishes of the purportedly docile and largely happy majority of subjects, rather than as “revolts” or “rebellions,” which might have implied recognition that such actions were essentially responses to perceived oppression and enjoyed some degree of popular support.

The Zionist movement in Palestine, and later the State of Israel, adopted much the same discourse with regard to Palestinian opposition to Zionism and, after 1967, to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. In mainstream Israeli historiography, for example, the 1936–39 Palestinian Arab revolt against British colonial rule and the Zionist state-building enterprise it protected and fostered was usually referred to as “the events” (ḥamārāḥidim), which made the revolt seem like a motley set of irrational eruptions rather than a popular nationalist insurrection. Similarly, into the early 1990s Israeli officials and nearly all of the Israeli media insisted on referring to all Palestinian nationalist militants and the organizations to which they belonged as terrorists (muhābīlim). They thereby lumped together all violent (and even some nonviolent) acts by Palestinians against Israelis—whether civilians within Israel, Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, or military personnel—as terrorism.

This characterization certainly had some basis in reality: from the 1960s onward some Palestinian nationalist (and later Islamist) organizations did carry out terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians as well as others, including Jews in other countries. But as with British, French and other colonialisms earlier on, official Israeli insistence on depicting the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian nationalist movement it led as about nothing but terrorism was a way of deflecting attention away from the deeply rooted grievances and aspirations that motivated the Palestinians, including even those who perpetrated clearly immoral and reprehensible acts of terrorist violence, and from the conditions which had led them to adopt such a repugnant tactic. This portrayal thus served to bolster both Israel’s self-image as the victim of irrational hatred and mindless violence and its campaign for international sympathy and support.
There is perhaps something particularly ironic about the Israeli case, because in the years just before Israel was established in 1948 the British colonial government of Palestine regarded some of those who would later be among Israeli pre-eminent political leaders as vicious terrorists. For example, two future prime ministers, Menahem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, had in those years been hunted men, wanted by the British authorities for leading clandestine Jewish paramilitary organizations which had carried out what the British saw as brutal acts of terrorism: the assassination of British officials, the kidnapping and hanging of British soldiers, the bombing of British installations which led to civilian casualties, bomb attacks on innocent Arab civilians, and so on. Of course, many Jews in Palestine, and later in the State of Israel, regarded these men and their comrades-in-arms not as terrorists but as freedom fighters and patriots. The same is true of the Israeli intelligence agents who in 1954 planted bombs at US and British facilities in Egypt in an effort to disrupt that country’s improving relations with the West and of the Israeli officials who in that same year ordered the seizure of a Soviet airliner in order to take hostages who could be traded for captured Israeli soldiers. 4

When the shoe was on the other foot, of course, few Israelis would find it possible to understand how Palestinians whom they saw as vicious terrorists could be hailed by fellow Palestinians as freedom fighters; nor was there much comprehension that terrorism is a tactic, a means that many people (including Jews) have used when they felt they lacked more effective opinions or strikes at a militarily superior enemy. Down to the present day, Israeli officials (especially those on the right) have sought to reduce the entire Palestinian struggle to terrorism, depicting Israel as a peace-loving state compelled to use drastic means to deter or suppress hate-filled, bloodthirsty “Arab” terrorists mindlessly bent on its destruction. (The term “Palestinian” did not win a place in the official Israeli political lexicon until the 1990s, since its use was long deemed to imply some recognition of the existence of a distinct Palestinian people with national rights in its own homeland; instead the generic “Arabs” was usually used.) That terrorism by Palestinians against Israeli civilians has its roots in ongoing occupation and dispossession—and is likely to end only when Palestinians see some other way to realize their national aspirations remains difficult for many Israelis to grasp. Instead they have tended to accept Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s repeated assertion that “Israel has been fighting terrorism for a hundred years,” thereby once again reducing all Palestinian opposition to Zionism—a comprehensible response; however one judges it politically, morally or otherwise—to irrational, fanatical hatred. 5

My point here is not to single out Israel, which has by no means been unique in defining and explaining terrorism in self-serving ways. Such behavior has in fact been typical of most if not all states, which brings us back to the larger question of what terrorism is, an issue that would be of concern to many scholars and others engaged with the Middle East in the 1990s and beyond. If one wanted to be as neutral and objective as possible, one might today define terrorism as the use or threat of violence directed primarily against civilians in order to achieve some political aim. This definition is useful because it is based not on the identity, politics or motives of those who perpetrate terrorist acts but on the character of the acts themselves and of their victims—i.e., politically motivated violence against civilians. This definition also encourages us to condemn all terrorist acts as morally unacceptable, for if one starts to pick and choose, justifying or ignoring certain acts or forms of terrorism while condemning others, the inevitable result is a morally untenable double standard.

By this definition, terrorism has indeed been used by many organizations and movements, including the Palestinian organizations which carried out airplane hijackings, attacks on Israeli civilians and since the mid-1990s suicide bombings, as well as Zionist groups in pre-1948 Palestine, the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, some European ultraleft groups, Chechen rebels against Russian rule and, unfortunately, many others. However, this definition also prohibits us from ignoring the many governments that have used terrorist means against their own people or others; hence the term “state terrorism,” as opposed to terrorism carried out by political groups and movements challenging existing regimes. The long list of states which have practiced state terrorism would include such obvious candidates as Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union, but also (for example) Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, where for decades military regimes backed by the United States used murder, massacres and torture to crush even the most moderate and lawful efforts to seek social and political reform.

Unfortunately, tendentious definitions of terrorism and politically motivated double standards have characterized much of the work in what by the 1980s was the burgeoning field some facetiously called “terrorology” or the study of terrorism as a political, social, cultural and psychological phenomenon. One of the pioneers in this field was Yonah Alexander, who in 1977 was the founding editor of _Journal of International Terrorism_, which devoted itself to the study of terrorism. When he launched his journal Alexander was based at the Institute for Studies in International Terrorism at the State University of New York in out-of-the-way Oneonta, but he would eventually make it into the world of...
Washington DC think tanks by becoming senior fellow at the right-wing Potomac Institute for Policy Studies and director of its International Center for Terrorism Studies, founded in 1998.

Alexander's journal, and the work of most other self-proclaimed terrorism specialists, focused on terrorism by what might be called "the usual suspects," i.e. nonstate groups. State terrorism, which by any plausible count has claimed many more innocent lives than terrorism carried out by nonstate groups, was generally left out of the picture. Hence the irony of the second issue of Terrorism, which featured an article by Fereydoun Hoveyda, at the time ambassador to the United Nations from Iran, a country whose ruler, the shah, had won a well-earned international reputation for deploying a particularly brutal secret police to crush every demand for democracy and social justice and who regularly condemned armed attacks on his dictatorship by clandestine revolutionary groups as terrorism.

The same tendentious perspective informed Claire Sterling's influential 1981 book The Terror Network, which focused on alleged European and Middle Eastern terrorist groups and charged that the Soviet Union (along with Cuba and Libya) was behind most of them. Though critics questioned Sterling's claims, which some felt were largely the product of CIA disinformation efforts, officials of the new Reagan administration hailed her book and cited it to support their hard-line anti-Soviet stance. Early on the Reagan administration had declared that the fight against "international terrorism" (meaning alleged terrorist groups and networks purportedly backed by the Soviets) would be "the soul of our foreign policy," replacing former President Jimmy Carter's avowed (but always rather selective) concern with human rights. Official rhetoric now characterized terrorism as an evil scourge spread by depraved opponents of civilization itself, a return to barbarism in the modern age.

This new official US stance had a lot to do with the fact that by the early 1980s, in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution and the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, US institutions and personnel, especially but not exclusively in the Middle East, had increasingly become prime targets of violent attacks. Government officials usually portrayed such attacks as disconnected from any historical, political or other context, rather than looking at why certain groups opposed to what they saw the United States doing used violent means to strike at US power, they depicted international terrorism as an expression of mindless, baseless hatred of the United States, part of the global communist conspiracy run from Moscow, or both.

What happened in Lebanon in 1983 is a case in point. US Marines had been sent to Lebanon the previous year as part of a multinational force charged with protecting the Palestinian civilian population after the massacres at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, perpetrated by right-wing Christian militiamen while their Israeli patrons who had occupied much of the country stood by and watched. But the US forces soon took sides in Lebanon's ongoing civil war, supporting the right-wing Christian government which had been installed by Israel during its invasion but which many Lebanese regarded as illegitimate. As a result, the United States became a prime target for the Lebanese Shi'i Hizbullah movement and associated groups, whose operatives are widely believed to have carried out both the April 1983 suicide bombing of the US embassy in Beirut, which killed 63 people (including most of the CIA personnel stationed there), and the October 1983 suicide bombings that killed some 241 Marines (as well as 58 French soldiers). The attacks led President Reagan to withdraw US forces from Lebanon, which is exactly what those who planned the attacks hoped to achieve.

Nonetheless, in this case as in others, US government officials treated violence of this kind not as a tactic, a morally questionable but often effective means of achieving some political goal, but as an inexplicable eruption of madness and hatred having nothing to do with anything "we" had done or were perceived to have done. This made it impossible to really understand why individuals and groups who lacked the tanks, helicopter gunships, warplanes and cruise missiles available to their much more powerful adversaries deemed it acceptable and expedient to use terrorism as a tactic or a strategy. Hence the common resort to pop psychology and crude cultural stereotypes, resulting in endless articles and television programs purporting to explain "the terrorist mindset" or why Arabs or Muslims embraced a "culture of death."

The politics which underpinned and sustained widespread and influential depictions of the threat allegedly posed by international terrorism were laid out clearly in one of the key texts of this period. This was the 1986 book Terrorism: How the West Can Win, edited by Benjamin Netanyahu. Contributors to the volume included Bernard Lewis and various luminaries of the US neoconservative movement and of the European and Israeli right, and it can be seen as a visualization of what I pointed to in Chapter 5 as the convergence of the (Jewish and non-Jewish) American right and the Israeli right around an anti-Soviet, anti-Palestinian, anti-Islamic and antiterrorist-agenda.

Netanyahu had first gained public attention in Israel as the brother of Jonathan Netanyahu, who led the Israeli commandos who had rescued hijacked hostages held at Entebbe, Uganda, in 1976 and was killed during the operation; he would go on to a political career that would lead him to the prime ministership of Israel in 1996–1999, and again beginning
in 2009. The Jonathan Institute which Netanyahu established soon after his brother's death sought to attract attention to the problem of terrorism, which Netanyahu depicted as "part of a much larger struggle, one between the forces of civilization and the forces of barbarism."

International terrorism for Netanyahu was "not a sporadic phenomenon born of social misery and frustration. It is rooted in the political ambitions and designs of expansionist states [like the Soviet Union and radical Arab states like Syria and Libya] and the groups that serve them [like the PLO]." In Terrorism: How the West Can Win, Netanyahu offered a definition of terrorism not very different from the one I proposed earlier, and he insisted that guerrillas and other irregular fighters were not the same as terrorists, who were to be distinguished by their deliberate targeting of civilians. But his real agenda was to discredit the PLO, which in that period was winning international recognition as sole representative of the Palestinians, by painting it as nothing but a terrorist organization and Soviet proxy. He sought thereby to combat a growing sense in Europe and elsewhere that Palestinian terrorism was a symptom rather than a root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and that no durable peace was possible without addressing Palestinian grievances and aspirations.

At the same time, Netanyahu hoped to win Western support for a hardline Israeli policy toward Palestinian nationalism and the Arab world by weaving the PLO, Islam, Arab nationalism, Libya, Syria, Iran and Soviet communism into one seamless web of "international terrorism."

The US government also resorted to defining terrorism selectively and tendentiously. A good example of this can be found in Terrorist Group Profiles, published by the United States government in 1989. Though in his preface Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci pointed out that "terrorism is essentially a tactic - a form of political warfare designed to achieve political ends," the report featured short profiles of a very wide range of groups, parties and movements which the US government declared to be terrorist organizations. These included almost all the Palestinian armed organizations, Hizbullah, the Irish Republican Army, the Armenian nationalist ASALA, the Basque separatist ETA, the Italian Red Brigades, the communist-led New People's Army of the Philippines, the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, the Japanese Red Army and Sikh separatists in India as well as all the left-led guerrilla movements of Central America.

It may come as a surprise to some that the list also included the African National Congress, the main movement fighting for democracy and majority rule against South Africa's apartheid regime. For a period during the 1980s the ANC had in fact authorized bombings which took the lives of black and white civilians, but this tactic was soon abandoned.

In any case it was always obvious that the ANC was a mass movement which enjoyed the support of most black South Africans, a reality demonstrated a few months after Terrorist Group Profiles was published when the white minority regime released ANC leader Nelson Mandela after twenty-eight years of imprisonment and entered into negotiations with the ANC that would lead to a nonracial, democratic constitution and Mandela's election as the first president of a free South Africa.

As the case of the ANC illustrates, some of the organizations on the US government's terrorist list had indeed used terrorist means, but many could not reasonably be deemed nothing but terrorist organizations. While groups like the Red Brigades and Japanese Red Army were tiny, politically isolated, ultraleftist sects, many of the others had at least some popular support and terrorism was only one of the tactics they used, and often not the most important one. It would therefore seem that what got the ANC and many of the others onto this list was not so much the fact that they were sometimes guilty of targeting civilians as the perception that they posed a threat to US interests or had links to the Soviet Union - which did in fact extend support to the ANC, the PLO and some of the other "terrorist" organizations. The US also defined terrorism rather broadly, so that (for example) attacks by guerrilla movements in El Salvador on US military and intelligence personnel dispatched to assist local counterinsurgency campaigns were deemed terrorist acts.

Equally striking was who was left off the list: the brutal regimes in Central America which, armed and financed by the United States, had over decades killed vastly greater numbers of their own citizens than the guerrillas challenging them - the dictatorship of General Pinochet in Chile, which was installed with US support and went so far as to murder its opponents in the heart of Washington, D.C., the regime of General Suharto in Indonesia, which engaged in brutal repression and mass murder in that country as well as in occupied East Timor; outfits like UNITA in Angola and RENAMO in Mozambique, which with US backing (and in the latter case, that of South Africa as well) used terrorism rather freely in their campaigns to topple governments the US saw as pro-Soviet; the Nicaraguan contras who, with funding and weapons supplied by the United States, sometimes used terrorist means in their campaign to overthrow the revolutionary Sandinista government; and, one might argue, even the Central Intelligence Agency itself, which is known to have carried out or facilitated its share of assassinations and bombings, probably including a 1985 car bombing in Beirut which missed its intended target, Hizbullah's spiritual leader Muhammad Husayn Fadlullah, but did kill seventy-five Lebanese civilians.
In the 1990s, as the Soviet Union and its client regimes ceased to exist, the use of terrorism by Europeans against other Europeans seemed to subside, and the PLO recognized and entered into negotiations with Israel, the specter of Soviet-sponsored "international terrorism" gave way to the specter of "Islamic terrorism." Ironically, US support for the resistance to the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan that began in 1979 helped create this new and much more serious menace. Many Arab nationalists went to Afghanistan in the 1980s to help the Afghan resistance (massively armed and financed by the CIA) expect the godless communists. After the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, these trained and often radicalized volunteers hoped to return home and renew the struggle to topple their own corrupt and authoritarian regimes and install what they saw as a properly Islamic state and society. However, those regimes proved able to crush or contain the Islamist challenge, leading some of the most extreme groups to decide to target the United States instead.  

In fact, the most radical among them came to regard the United States as their main enemy. As they saw it, it was US political, military, and financial support which propped up the local regimes they hated. In Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and elsewhere, the 1991 Persian Gulf war and its aftermath further fueled the anger and hatred which extremist Islamist groups felt toward the United States. While Islamists had no love for the secularist and nationalist Ba'th party regime led by Saddam Husayn which ruled Iraq and which had occupied Kuwait in the summer of 1990, they opposed the US-led war which forced the Iraqis out of Kuwait as aggression against the Muslim world and saw the stationing of US forces on the sacred soil of Saudi Arabia for more than a decade after the end of that war as an abomination. The suffering of the largely Muslim people of Iraq under United Nations-imposed sanctions and, last but not least, the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict also fostered resentment among many Muslims and rendered them sympathetic, or at least receptive, to radical Islamist denunciations of the United States as the prime enemy of Islam.

The result was a series of attacks from the later 1990s onward that targeted US embassies and the US military in Africa and the Middle East and culminated in the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington DC. Beyond the symbolic and political dimensions of these attacks, and particularly September 11, it seems likely that the radical Islamists who perpetrated them hoped that they would provoke the kind of US response that would turn Muslim opinion against the United States, undermine pro-US governments in predominantly Muslim countries and eventually enable the Islamists to win power.

The threat of terrorism perpetrated by radical Islamist groups naturally came to loom increasingly large for policymakers and scholars alike by the late 1990s. Governments as well as nonstate groups had proven all too willing to kill, injure, mutilate and rape civilians to achieve their political and military ends, and now extremist Muslim groups -- a tiny minority of the world's more than one billion Muslims, but all too effective and deadly -- had targeted the United States in particular. As a result the question of how to understand "Islamic terrorism" and terrorism in general, and how to respond to them effectively, remained a subject of vigorous, sometimes rancorous, debate.

Those we might term hard-liners -- generally on the political right -- tended to argue that terrorism perpetrated by Muslims had strong roots in Islam as such, deemed attention to the motives and grievances expressed by the perpetrators irrelevant or even harmful, and emphasized the use of force to eradicate it, in part by attacking what they called "rogue states" (like Afghanistan under the Taliban, Iraq, Iran and Syria) which allegedly supported terrorism or harbored terrorists. The hard-liners argued that Muslim extremists hated the United States (and by extension the West as a whole), essentially because of what it was -- that is, because of the values of democracy, tolerance and secularism which it espoused -- and that there was therefore little the United States could do other than try to eradicate the terrorists by force.

In contrast, others -- mainly on the liberal and left side of the political spectrum -- argued that the problem of terrorism could not be dealt with effectively by purely military or police methods. They generally agreed that it was necessary to apprehend or deter those who had launched or were planning terrorist attacks -- though that would require a sustained commitment to multilateral consultation and international cooperation, a commitment to which the Bush administration seemed allergic. But a long-term solution to the problem also required attention to the factors which in this specific historical period had prompted a tiny minority of Muslims to engage in terrorism, and many more to them it morally acceptable or even praiseworthy. These factors included the tyrannical, corrupt and/or ineffective regimes, often propped up by the United States, under which so many Muslims lived, endemic poverty, under-development and lack of opportunity, and foreign economic and political domination. Only by addressing the legitimate grievances and aspirations of the vast majority of Muslims could their sympathies and support be enlisted and the extremist minority be politically isolated, marginalized and eventually neutralized.

Liberal and leftist scholars and observers thus pointed to the gap many Muslims (and others) saw between what the United States-preached and what it practiced as a key factor in explaining why the extremists had
targeted the United States and why they enjoyed a degree of popular understanding and sympathy. They argued that the policies the United States had pursued in the Arab and Muslim worlds—including unequivocal support for Israel, perceived by Arabs and Muslims as the oppressor of the Palestinians, and more broadly American hegemony over much of this part of the world, manifested in various ways—actually had a great deal to do with the widespread perception among Muslims (but also among many non-Muslims around the globe) that the United States was a swaggering bully intent on using its massive military and economic power to impose its will on the world. These policies, they suggested, apart from being misguided, counterproductive and wrong, gave ammunition to extremist groups like al-Qaeda and bolstered their claim that the United States was the prime enemy of Islam and hence a legitimate target. So if some Muslims displayed approval, or at least understanding, of extremist Islamist attacks on the United States, it was not so much because of what the United States was or stood for (as the right claimed) but because of what the United States actually did in that part of the world, both its current policies and the bitter legacy left by much of its long engagement in the region since the Second World War.  

The clash of civilizations

The ongoing debates over Islam, Islamism and terrorism in the 1990s and beyond fed into, and were often fueled by, wider debates among scholars, journalists and policymakers over how to think about the post-Cold War world. In his 1990 article “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” Bernard Lewis had characterized the conflict between Islam and the West, allegedly dating back to the emergence of Islam fourteen centuries ago, as a “clash of civilizations.” Such images were very much in the air in the last decade of the twentieth century. In the late 1980s the communist-ruled countries of central and eastern Europe had broken free of Soviet control and established new, more or less capitalist, formally democratic and pro-Western regimes, and in 1991 the Soviet Union itself ceased to exist. The end of communist rule in Russia and elsewhere also meant the end of the Cold War, since the United States—no longer had a rival for global hegemony. This led observers to seek new ways of understanding the fault lines and potential sources of conflict in the post-Cold War world, and one of those ways involved a reversion to the old but still powerful notion that the world was divided into fundamentally different and clashing civilizations. Though Bernard Lewis and others had long relied on this model, it was Samuel Huntington who in the 1990s probably did most to generalize and popularize this conception of the world.

After Orientalism?

We last met Huntington in Chapter 5, where we saw that during the 1960s this prominent but controversial Harvard professor was a leading advocate of the US war in Vietnam and a vigorous opponent of massive bombardment of the countryside; this, he predicted, would drive the peasants into government-controlled territory and deprive the communist-led insurgents of their mass base. The advice which some of his former students offered the shah of Iran in the 1970s was equally effective: drawing on Huntington’s theories about social change and political order, they advised the shah to establish a political party (the only one allowed) which could be used to mediate between the masses and the state and mobilize the former to better implement the latter’s programs. What followed only deepened popular alienation from, and opposition to, the shah’s regime and contributed to the onset of the crisis—that ultimately toppled the shah in 1979. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, by the early 1990s Huntington was the Eaton Professor of the Science of Government at Harvard and director of its John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, named for (and funded by) a right-wing industrialist.

Huntington laid out his vision of the postcommunist world in an article, “The Clash of Civilizations?,” published in the summer 1993 issue of Foreign Affairs, the influential journal of the Council on Foreign Relations and a key link between scholars and policymakers. Huntington argued starkly that in the period ahead, the fundamental sources of conflict in the world would not be “primarily ideological or primarily economic.” The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. The principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future.

During the Cold War the world had been divided along geopolitical lines, into the First, Second and Third Worlds—that is, the West, the communist bloc, and everyone else. But now, Huntington argued, it was more useful to see the world as divided into distinct civilizations, defined by such things as language, history and religion but also by how people identified themselves. “The people of different civilizations,” Huntington explained, “have different views on the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife, as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and authority, equality and hierarchy.” These differences, “the product of centuries,” were much more deeply rooted and important than ideology, and despite facile talk of globalization, regionalism along civilizational lines was growing.
Huntington identified seven or eight major civilizations: the West (including western Europe and the United States); Slavio-Orthodox civilization, encompassing Russia and much of eastern and southeastern Europe; Islam, with its Arab, Turkic and Malay subdivisions; Confucian civilization, meaning largely China; Japan; Hindu civilization; Latin America; and "possibly African civilizations," to which Huntington did seem to not attribute much importance. It was precisely where these civilizations rubbed up against one another, Huntington argued, that conflict was most likely: hence the turmoil and violence in the Balkans, where the West, Slavio-Orthodox and Islam were all in conflict; in the Caucasus, where Orthodoxy and Islam clashed; and in South Asia, where the Hindu and Islamic civilizations contended for dominance. Huntington also predicted the emergence of a Confucian-Islamic alliance, opposed to the West. In the long run, the West should maintain its economic and military superiority and perhaps try to incorporate part or all of Latin America, as long as it sought to achieve a better understanding of the other civilizations with which it would have to co-exist.

Huntington's "clash of civilizations" thesis aroused a great deal of controversy. One of the many rebuttals came from the Harvard historian of Islam, Roy Mottahedeh, writing in The New York Times. "Not only," Mottahedeh argued, "is the 'empirical' basis of [Huntington's thesis] a matter of dispute, but the theoretical structure proposed to explain the relation between 'culture' and political behavior seems to the present author very much open to question." He rejected Huntington's assertion that all Muslims belonged to a single civilization, Muslims in South Asia, the Arab lands, Turkey and Indonesia all had very different political cultures. Mottahedeh showed that civilization as a category simply did not work as an explanation either for conflict or for the identities, views and actions of its purported members. For example, Mottahedeh noted,

The end of area studies?

After Orientalism?

Mottahedeh went on to point out that "it was once commonly said...that democracy could only live fully in Protestant countries...It was 'self-evident' to many Protestants that Catholics were obedient to the Pope and could not be truly democratic participants...To distrust the ability of sincere Catholics to be true democrats seems quaint and fanciful to us at the end of the twentieth century as well, and, in a generation, our present distrust of the ability of sincere Muslims to be true democrats."

For Mottahedeh Huntington's thesis also ignored differences among Muslims. There was certainly a minority which sought the imposition of a rigid interpretation of Islamic law and regarded the West as an alien civilization, but there were many more who did not share either the Islamists' vision or their political and social agenda. For Mottahedeh the "clash of civilizations" hypothesis seemed "far more a description (and prescription) than an explanatory system. It offers a long list of things that the West is - the bearer of individualism, liberalism, democracy, free markets and the like...but, by and large, just tells us that the non-Western, in great American language of the multiple-choice test, is 'none of the above.'" However, it was an "extraordinary assumption" that Muslims' normative religious beliefs (which were in reality quite diverse) determined the behavior of those who formally adhered to them. As a Christian, Mottahedeh noted, "in order for me to believe that Christians when abused are supposed to turn the other cheek, I must forget the example of almost all the Christians I have ever met." Huntington's claims thus lacked any solid empirical basis and recalled the "mania for order" which had led "theorists like Toynbee [see Chapter 3] to strain the evidence in order to discover lists of traits that 'essentially' characterize the units they call 'civilizations.'"

Even as Huntington and others were arguing that humanity was fundamentally divided into essentially different and clashing civilizations, a significant number of scholars, journalists and writers were coming to the opposite conclusion...They saw the post-Cold War world as undergoing what came to be called "globalization" - an increasing degree of economic, political and even cultural integration which was breaking down old barriers and fostering new forms of openness, exchange and interaction. Globalization came to be one of the buzz-words of the 1990s, the subject of numerous books and scholarly and popular articles and op-ed pieces discussing whether, and if so how, the world was becoming more
integrated, as well as the possible consequences of this process or set of processes.

Some of the prophets made by enthusiasts of globalization were hardly
worth the paper they were printed on; for example, that the entire world
would inexorably meld into a liberal democratic capitalist utopia; that
the nation-state would disappear as beneficent transnational corporations
assumed ever greater power; that the global spread of McDonald's would
ensure world peace; or that the "digital revolution" and the Internet
would somehow alleviate poverty and promote good will and mutual
understanding everywhere. Other analyses were more sober and sought
to figure out what, if anything, was actually going on. Some pointed out
that overly-rosy visions of the future were nothing new and no more
likely to be realized now than they had been in the past. In the late
nineteenth century, for example, global economic integration reached
unprecedented proportions and many were convinced that an era of
permanent peace, prosperity and social progress was at hand. Yet this
era culminated in the catastrophic First World War, followed by decades
which witnessed devastating warfare in many parts of the globe, genocide,
new forms of tyranny, and social turmoil.

The end of the Cold War and growing interest in globalization
inevitably led to a reconsideration of area studies as a framework for
organizing (and funding) the production of knowledge. As we saw in
Chapter 4, area studies (including Middle East studies) had emerged
during and after the Second World War in large measure as a way of
providing US policymakers with the kind of knowledge they needed to
successfully conduct American foreign policy in the Cold War. Hence
the large-scale funding which foundations, and then the taxpayers,
provided to universities and other institutions to facilitate the study of
"strategic" languages (including Arabic, Persian and Turkish) but also
of the politics, cultures and histories of places which few Americans
could actually locate on a map. Now, with the Cold War over and a
new focus on problems and processes that seemed to transcend national
and regional boundaries, some asked whether the time had come to
abandon area studies, predicated as it was on the existence of distinct
world areas, and instead develop new ways of producing and
organizing knowledge that would help make sense of the dynamics of
globalization.

It was this kind of thinking which in 1993 led the Ford and Mellon
foundations to reduce funding for regionally focused research and training
and instead launch a joint globalization project. A year later the
president of the Social Science Research Council—one of the midwives
of area studies after the Second World War—proposed (and partially
implemented) the dismantling of many of its regional committees, which
for decades had overseen the disbursement of funding for dissertation
and postdoctoral research and had sought (with limited success) to set
research agendas for their fields. Instead, the SSRC created a new disser-
tation research fellowship program to which graduate students planning
research on any part of the world could apply, which meant that those
specializing in the Middle East would be competing for all too limited
funding with others specializing in East Asia or Africa or even Eastern
Europe. Selection of awardees would be made not by specialists in one
area studies field but by scholars drawn from a range of fields. Along
similar lines, the SSRC launched new committees and projects which
fostered research on broad themes of global import, for example inter-
national migration and sexuality. Needless to say, these moves aroused
considerable controversy within the SSRC and across the area studies
fields.

But area studies proved more resilient than some had expected early
in the 1990s. The federal funds originally allocated under Title VI of the
1958 National Defense Education Act continued to flow to area studies
centers at various universities, supporting research, language training and
courses on specific world regions as well as public outreach and teacher
training, and while foundation funding for area studies declined it did
not altogether cease. (In the 2000-02 funding cycle, the sixteen Middle
East national resource centers received a total of $2.6 million to sup-
port language and other teaching, outreach and teacher training, plus
another $1.5 million for what were originally called National Defense
Foreign Language fellowships but which in the late 1970s were given the
more benign name of Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowships.)
Recognizing that "local knowledge" remained essential, the SSRC event-
ually created smaller (and less well-funded) "regional advisory panels"
to replace the defunct regional committees. 18

At the same time, the various area studies organizations, including the
Middle East Studies Association, remained relevant by providing scholars
increasingly well trained and well grounded in their disciplines with a
venue for intellectual as well as social interaction with others interested
in the same part of the world. The continued viability of area studies was
perhaps also sustained by its interdisciplinary character, which seemed
to resonate with a widespread intellectual (if not always institutional)
interest in American academia in fields and endeavors that crossed con-
ventional disciplinary boundaries—for example, the study of women,
gender and sexuality, cultural studies, and urban studies—along with a
renewed commitment to empirical and theoretical work that was strongly
comparative.
The growing attention at many US colleges and universities to controversial issues of diversity and to multiculturalism, a product of the continuing salience of racial and ethnic divisions and conflicts in American society, along with worries that Americans remained poorly informed about the rest of the world, the need to offer "world civilization" courses and a burgeoning "world history" movement, may also have bolstered the standing of area studies, though its relation with the expanding field of international studies on college campuses remained uncertain. Last but not least, the ongoing and often troubled involvement of the United States in many parts of the world outside the West highlighted the continuing need for people who had some solid knowledge of those places. Facile talk of globalization was all very well, but in a crunch one needed to know about the politics, histories and cultures of specific locales, and over the previous half-century area studies had to a large extent provided the institutional framework for producing people equipped with such knowledge.

It may be too soon to tell, but from the vantage point of the first years of the twenty-first century it would seem that area studies had weathered the storms of the immediate post-Cold War period. In large part this may have been because these fields, including Middle East studies as practiced in the United States, were by the 1990s not what they had been thirty years earlier. The sharp decline (within academia, at least) of once dominant paradigms like a cultural-essentialist Orientalism and modernization theory resulted in the dissipation of the intellectual consensus which had characterized the field in its first decades. But the kind of intellectual fragmentation that had come to characterize Middle East studies was the norm across a great many other fields and disciplines and was counter-balanced, probably even outweighed, by the fact that many Middle East specialists, perhaps especially younger scholars, were now not only well versed in the theoretical and methodological issues and debates of their own disciplines but also routinely engaged with innovative work that cut across or transcended disciplinary boundaries. They could thus increasingly manage, without any great difficulty, to participate in productive scholarly conversations with their disciplinary colleagues (fellow historians, political scientists, anthropologists, literature specialists, etc.) but also with scholars from other disciplines interested in this part of the world and in others as well. At the same time, even as getting revised doctoral dissertations and scholarly monographs published by financially strapped university presses grew more difficult, numerous Internet-based listservs as well as journals and websites enabled scholars to share information, exchange opinions and disseminate book reviews and articles more effectively. A number of new print journals also appeared, for example the Arab Studies Journal, founded and run by graduate students at Georgetown University (and later New York-University as well).

Moreover, because so many scholars working on the Middle East were participants in the scholarly conversations and debates that had transformed broad segments of the humanities and the social sciences in recent decades, Middle East studies had to a considerable extent overcome its insular and rather backward character and was now much more open, and engaged with, the wider intellectual world than had once been the case. The developments of the last two or three decades, including the critiques of Orientalism and modernization theory, the broad range of new work on colonialism, innovative approaches to historical, social and cultural analysis influenced by anthropology, and more broadly heightened interaction among disciplines and fields, had given many within Middle East studies a new set of common languages that facilitated productive intellectual exchange. This was also a much more intellectually and politically self-aware and self-critical field than was once the case.

As a result the best of the new work in this field was by the beginning of the twenty-first century very much on a par with the best produced in other area studies fields, and scholars specializing in the Middle East were being read and listened to by scholars specializing in other parts of the world as never before.

That this was the case also owed something to two other factors. Thirty years ago the academic study of the Middle East was conducted in the United States largely by American-born white males. Over the decades since, the gender balance in this field as in many other domains shifted dramatically, a shift that also certainly contributed to increased scholarly attention to gender as a key analytical category. And although statistics are hard to come by, it would also seem that a significantly higher proportion of the faculty and graduate students in Middle East studies was now of Middle Eastern background or origin than had been the case earlier on. Among them were native speakers of Middle Eastern languages who may also already have had a deep familiarity with one or more societies in the region.

Of course, American-born students with no Middle Eastern roots whatsoever had long shown themselves to be perfectly capable of mastering the languages of the region and achieving important insights into its societies and cultures; indeed, it can be argued that while foreigners must work hard to understand local ways, they have the advantage of not being so steeped in those ways that they find it difficult to achieve the critical distance necessary for scholarly analysis. In any case, the demographic contours of the field had certainly changed over the last quarter of the twentieth century, with growing numbers of students and faculty with
roots in, and personal as well as scholarly links with, the region they were studying. This development had largely positive effects on the quality of knowledge produced—though as we will see this was not an assessment accepted by all.

In conjunction with a generally higher level of mastery of relevant languages and the use of innovative theoretical and methodological approaches, scholars in the field were by the late twentieth century also making use of a broader range of sources than in the past. A case in point is work on the history of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman empire. Students and scholars with a command of both Arabic and Ottoman Turkish made increasing use not only of the vast Ottoman imperial archives in Istanbul but also of local Islamic court records and family papers, along with more traditional sources like the writings of European consuls and travelers, to produce unprecedentedly in-depth and complex portraits of social, political, economic, and cultural life in these lands in the last four hundred years of Ottoman rule.

These studies helped to undermine what was once conventional wisdom in late Ottoman history, that these lands were economically, socially, and culturally stagnant before Napoleon's army landed in Egypt in 1798, that they were uniformly characterized by despotism, the oppressive and retrograde imposition of Islamic law, and the rigorous subjugation and subordination of non-Muslims, and that all real change was induced by contact with the West. Instead, the newer scholarship began to elucidate indigenous sources and dynamics of change while also showing how this region was part of the broader sweep of world history long before the nineteenth century and the onset of Westernization or modernization as conventionally understood. As a result of these scholarly advances, Ottoman historians often came to have much broader and more fully comparative perspectives than historians of early modern Europe, many of whom had only recently come to understand that they needed to overcome their own provincialism by addressing the ways in which developments in Europe were not utterly sui generis but were often bound up with larger patterns and dynamics of change that affected large stretches of Eurasia.

Scholars and the state

If the preceding assessment is accurate, it would be fair to say that the changes which had transformed Middle East studies in the United States over the last several decades of the twentieth century had made it a more intellectually productive and interesting scholarly field. However, as I noted briefly at the end of Chapter 5, this development was accompanied by a growing gap between academics studying the Middle East and the officials, agencies, and institutions of the United States government, and a corresponding decline in the influence of university-based scholars on the shaping of foreign policy and on the media, the main purveyors of information, images, and attitudes about the region in the broader public.

For one, a good many (though by no means all) students and scholars in this field were less than happy with US government policies toward the Middle East in the 1980s and beyond. Hard evidence is lacking, but it is probably safe to suggest that much of the membership of the Middle East Studies Association, the field's main professional organization, was not enthusiastic about US support for Saddam Hussein's regime in its war against Iran in the 1980s, the US-led Gulf War of 1991, the sanctions regime imposed on Iraq thereafter, the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 or, more broadly, the extent to which successive US administrations counseled censured Israel's ongoing occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, its continuing implantation of Jewish settlements there, and its rejection of a Palestinian state in those territories as endorsed by virtually the entire international community. There was a widespread (though never universal) sense that the policies pursued by the United States in the Middle East were hindering, rather than contributing to, peace, democracy, human rights, development, and progress in the region.

This disaffection from official policy and the premises which underpinned it did not mean that US-based scholars studying the Middle East were unwilling to share their perspectives on, and try to influence, US policy toward the region. In fact, many devoted a great deal of time and effort to trying to educate the broader public, through informal meetings, lectures, articles, op-ed pieces, radio and television interviews and the like, and to convey their views to elected officials; not a few were also quite willing to meet with State Department and intelligence agency personnel. It is rather that the shared vision of the world, and of the place of the United States within it, that had once linked the world of academia with the world of policymaking had faded, and many scholars no longer spoke the same language as policymakers.

Adding to this sense of distance and alienation was a new and much more critical understanding of the proper relationship between scholars and the state—not a surprising development in the aftermath of a period in which the permissive ends to which scholarly knowledge could be put had been made all too visible, in Vietnam but elsewhere as well. As we saw in Chapter 4, in the 1960s and 1970s many scholars in this as in other areas of the academy, especially social scientists working on contemporary issues, saw no problem with conducting research on behalf
of the government and cooperating with intelligence agencies, because they were all part of the good fight against communism. By the 1980s, those who were assuming leadership in US Middle East studies were wary by and large of more wary about their sources of funding and the ends to which their training and research, and that of their students, might be put. Fewer scholars were willing to allow what they knew about the region to be used in the service of a state about whose policies they were often at least dubious, for example by conducting research for agencies like the CIA or by encouraging promising students to enter government service. There developed a widespread sense that to allow one’s research agenda to be determined by the needs of the state or serve potentially pernicious ends was not only a betrayal of one’s integrity as a scholar but might also compromise one’s ability to conduct research in the Middle East, where by the 1980s real or alleged CIA connections had gotten Americans and others denounced, kidnapped or worse.

At issue was not government funding per se: since the passage of the National Defense Education Act in 1958 (see Chapter 4), a great many students and scholars working on the Middle East had happily made use of NDEA/FLAS and other government fellowships for language training, graduate study, and research. A large proportion of the budgets of the centers for Middle East studies at universities around the country also came from the federal government. But because this individual and institutional funding came through the US Department of Education it was deemed morally and politically acceptable even by those who most vociferously disagreed with US government policies in the Middle East. Similarly, additional government funding for graduate student and faculty research on the Middle East first made available by the 1992 Near and Middle East Research and Training Act – originally channeled through the Social Science Research Council and later through the Council of American Overseas Research Centers – was not seen as posing a problem, because the funding was allocated first through the US Information Agency and then through the State Department budget. The real issue was much part of the US government was supplying the funding, for what ends, with what conditions. As early as 1985 the Middle East Studies Association had asked “university-based international studies-programs to refrain from responding to requests for research contract proposals from the Defense Academic Research Support Program [established by the Defense Department to fund academic research on issues of interest to the military] or from other intelligence entities and calls upon its members to reflect carefully upon their responsibilities to the academic profession prior to seeking or accepting funding from intelligence sources.”

Some years later MESA also criticized the new National Security Education Program, created by the National Security Education Act of 1991, The NSEP sought to bolster the teaching of “less commonly taught” languages (including Arabic, Persian and Turkish), thereby enabling (as the program’s website put it) “the nation to remain integrally involved in global issues related to US National Security” as well as to “develop a cadre of professionals with more than the traditional knowledge of language and culture who can use this ability to help the US make sound decisions on and deal effectively with global issues related to US National Security.” Unlike other programs funding research and training on the Middle East, the NSEP was housed in the Department of Defense, intelligence agency officials sat on its oversight board, and recipients of the funding it offered were required to work for a government agency involved in national security affairs after their fellowship or scholarship was completed.

In a 1993 resolution endorsed by a referendum of its membership, MESA joined with the African Studies Association and the Latin American Studies Association to “deplore the location of responsibility in the US defense and intelligence community for a major foreign area research, education, and training program.” This connection can only increase the existing difficulties of gaining foreign governmental permissions to carry out research and to develop overseas instructional programs. It can also create dangers for students and scholars by fostering the perception of involvement in military or intelligence activities, and may limit academic freedom.” MESA called on the government to establish a peer and merit review process for funding applications that would be independent of military, intelligence and foreign policy agencies and to broaden the service requirement so that it would include a much wider range of jobs, including those outside government service.

Until its concerns were met, MESA urged that “its members and their institutions not seek or accept program or research funding from NSEA….” Three years later MESA adopted yet another resolution reiterating its rejection of NSEP because of “the law appropriating funding for the program now required that all recipients of fellowships agree to work for the Defense Department or some intelligence agency for at least two years, or else repay the cost of their fellowship.” (The last requirement was later relaxed somewhat so that recipients who could not find employment with a national security agency despite a "good faith efforts" to do so could still fulfill the service requirement by working if higher education.) MESA would voice the same concerns about other outgrowths of the NSEP, for example the 2002 National Flagship Language Initiative Pilot Program (NFLIP), launched to address what were seen
as "America's extraordinary deficiencies in languages critical to national security."23 Many (though by no means all) Middle East studies faculties adopted MESA's perspective on this issue, declining to seek NSEP funding for themselves or their institutions.

The disinclination by MESA and many of its individual and institutional members to cooperate with the government in ways that had been common in the 1950s and 1960s was certainly not shared by everyone in the field. Yet it is instructive that when in the 1980s reports surfaced of questionable links between academics and intelligence agencies, the most vocal response among scholars in the field was condemnation. A case in point is the scandal surrounding Nadav Safran, whom we met in Chapter 4 as a young political scientist whose first book set forth an analysis of modern Egyptian history informed by modernization theory and who by the mid-1980s was director of Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies. The scandal erupted when it became known that Safran had taken $45,700 from the Central Intelligence Agency to fund a major international conference he was hosting at Harvard on "Islam and Politics in the Contemporary Muslim World" - a hot topic at the time and one of obvious interest to the CIA. Not only had Safran secretly used CIA funding for this conference, he had not told the invitees, a number of whom were coming from the Middle East, that the CIA was picking up the tab - a decision that could have gotten some of them into very hot water back home. It then came out that Safran had also received a $107,430 grant from the CIA for the research project that led to his 1985 book Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Request for Security.24 Safran's contract with the CIA stipulated that the agency had the right to review and approve the manuscript before publication and that its role in funding the book "should not be disclosed." And indeed, the book as published made no mention of the fact that the research for it had been partially funded by the CIA.

When the scandal broke, about half of the invitees to Safran's conference withdrew, and many of the faculty and students associated with Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies publicly expressed their unhappiness with what Safran had done. A month later the Middle East Studies Association censured Safran, on the grounds that his actions had violated its 1982-resolution calling on scholars to disclose their sources of research funding. Safran informed his critics that their motivations were driven by "narrow-minded" and "antisemitic" hostility, but after an internal investigation at Harvard he agreed to step down as center director at the end of the academic year.25 Safran was surely not the only academic to have secretly or openly solicited or accepted funding from an intelligence agency for his research in this period, and no doubt such relationships persisted long after this scandal,

but the reaction to it - unimaginable in the early decades of US Middle East studies - does indicate how the relationship between academia and the state had changed.

Think tanks and talking heads

But there was a price to be paid for the gap that had opened up between the world of Middle East scholarship and the world of policymaking. If many college- and university-based academics no longer entirely shared the worldview that prevailed in Washington or no longer felt the need to shape their research agenda so that it was relevant to the policies that flowed from that worldview, there were others who stood ready to meet the demand for knowledge that would serve the state. Many of these were based not in institutions of higher education but in the host of think tanks that had proliferated from the 1970s onwards - privately funded institutions oriented toward the production and dissemination of knowledge designed to inform and influence public policy, for our purposes mainly the foreign policy of the United States.

Some of these institutions and organizations went back a long way. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, for example, was founded in 1910 to advance international cooperation, while the Council on Foreign Relations, publisher of the influential journal Foreign Affairs, was established in 1921, originally as a sort of elite dinner club. The liberal Brookings Institution was established in 1927, supported by Carnegie and Rockefeller funding; while the conservative American Enterprise Institute was founded in 1943 to promote "limited government," "free enterprise" and a "strong foreign policy and national defense." After the Second World War contractors like the huge RAND Corporation entered the field to produce or fund research for the military and intelligence and other government agencies concerned with foreign policy (see Chapter 4). Another wave beginning in the 1960s had witnessed the establishment of a large number of what one observer called "advocacy" think tanks, like the Center for Strategic and International Studies (1962), the Heritage Foundation (1973) and the Cato Institute (1977), which combined "policy research with aggressive marketing techniques" as they struggled to secure funding and influence in an increasingly competitive marketplace. There are now also many "legacy-based" institutions, like the Carter Center in Atlanta and the Nixon Center for Peace and Freedom in Washington, DC. By the end of the twentieth century there were an estimated 2,000 organizations engaged in policy analysis based in the US, a substantial proportion of them focused on foreign policy and international relations.26 The 1970s
also witnessed the establishment of what Lisa Anderson called "a new generation of professional graduate schools of public policy," many of whose graduates went on to work for policy-oriented think tanks rather than in colleges and universities.  

The Middle East was a relative backwater for the think tank industry until the 1980s. The Middle East Institute, which as I mentioned in Chapter 4 had been founded in 1946, published a journal and organized conferences but exercised relatively little political clout. By contrast, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINP), founded in 1985, quickly achieved a much higher profile and much greater influence. Describing itself as "a public educational foundation dedicated to scholarly research and informed debate on US interests in the Middle East," WINP emerged as the leading pro-Israel think tank in Washington. Its founding director, Martin Indyk, had previously worked at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), founded in 1959 and by the 1970s by far the most well-funded, visible and effective pro-Israel lobbying organization.  

Indyk and his colleagues at WINP worked hard to strengthen Israel's standing in Washington as the key US ally in the Middle East and to ensure that US policy in the region coincided with the policies and strategies of the Israeli government. During the late 1980s and early 1990s this meant trying to foil US recognition of the PLO and US pressure on Israel to halt settlement activity in the West Bank and Gaza and enter serious negotiations. In the 1990s WINP expanded its purview to encompass the entire Middle East, but its focus always remained on Israel, for which it tried to build support by arguing that Israel and the United States faced a common threat from Islamic radicalism and terrorism, defined rather broadly to encompass virtually all of Israel's enemies, state and non-state. Various other think tanks also began or stepped up research and advocacy on Middle East issues in the late 1990s and early 2000s. These included the Haïm Saban Center for Middle East Policy, launched by the Brookings Institution in 2002, and the conservative American Enterprise Institute, but also several new right-wing think tanks.  

During the Clinton administration a substantial number of WINP alumni served in key foreign policy positions, including Martin Indyk himself, appointed as Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs at the National Security Council and, later, as US Ambassador to Israel. They and other Clinton administration officials promulgated the policy of "dual containment," whereby the United States would seek to isolate, and if possible eliminate, the governments of both Iraq and Iran, not coincidentally perceived as two of Israel's most serious enemies. By the late 1990s, however,

WINP would itself be outflanked by newer rivals which unlike WINP openly aligned themselves with the stances of the Israeli right (or even far right) and argued for aggressive US action against Israel's enemies, including the overthrow of the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq.  

The policies these and other explicitly right-wing think tanks advocated during the Clinton years, when they were in the political wilderness, were initially regarded as extreme and outlandish. But many of them would eventually be adopted by the George W. Bush administration, in which their architects assumed key posts. Among them were Vice President Dick Cheney; Defense Policy Board member (and for a time chair) Richard Perle, a key advocate of war against Iraq; Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz; Undersecretary of State John Bolton; and Under-secretary of Defense Douglas Feith. Before assuming power these men and their colleagues had, through such right-wing organizations as the Project for a New American Century and the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, called for the use of US military power to dominate the world, massive increases in military spending, and unequivocal support for the policies of the Israeli right. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush openly embraced much of their agenda, tacitly supporting Israel's effort to crush the Palestinian uprising by force and in March-April 2003 invading and occupying Iraq.  

The first years of the twenty-first century thus witnessed an unprecedented convergence in positions of supreme power in Washington of right-wing (and in some cases Christian-fundamentalist) zealots and neo-conservative American Jews united by a common vision of securing permanent and unchallengeable US global hegemony, with a strong focus on the Middle East and a close embrace of Israel, a vision to be achieved by military force if necessary. The war against Iraq was in a sense the pilot project for this radical vision. As Michael Ledeen, in 2003 "resident scholar in the Freedom Chair" at the American Enterprise Institute and long a fixture among right-wing foreign-policy activists, was reported to have put it, crudely but not inaccurately: "Every ten years or so, the United States needs to pick up some small crappy little country and throw it against the wall, just to show the world we mean business."

More specifically, a reconstructed, oil-rich Iraq was seen as a valuable new base for US power in the Middle East, enabling the United States to terminate its problematic relationship with Saudi Arabia and compel the Arabs (including the Palestinians) to make peace with Israel on the latter's terms. That the vast majority of the international community, including a great many Americans, vehemently rejected the use of military force to achieve this vision made no difference whatsoever to its advocates.
There were certainly voices raised, in academia, the think tank world and elsewhere, in opposition to this agenda and the understanding of the world which underpinned it, as there had been voices offering alternative views about US policy toward the Middle East at other critical junctures. But during the 1980s, 1990s and early years of the twenty-first century these voices received relatively little attention, and university-based scholars seemed to play a decreasing role in influencing foreign policy. Critics of US foreign policy also found it difficult to make themselves heard through the mass media. It is striking that the great bulk of the “talking heads” who appeared on television to offer their opinions on the 1990–91 Gulf crisis, on the 2003 Iraq war and on other issues relating to the Middle East and US policy toward it seemed to come from not from academia but from among professional pundits, from people associated with think tanks or with one of the public policy schools, and from retired military personnel. Whatever their knowledge (or lack thereof) of the languages, politics, histories and cultures of the Middle East, these people spoke the language and shared the mind-set of the Washington foreign policy world in a way few university-based scholars did. They were also used to communicating their perspective in effective sound bites, whereas academics were often put off by the ignorance and political conformism of much (though by no means all) of American mass-media journalism and its tendency to cruelly oversimplify complex issues and transform everything (even war) into a form of entertainment.

Of course, this helped bring about a considerable narrowing of the perspectives available to the public and the consolidation of a powerful, indeed almost impenetrable, consensus about the Middle East that encompassed most of the political class and the punditocracy. Republicans and Democrats argued mainly over how best to maintain US hegemony in the region, leaving very little room for those who envisioned a fundamentally different foreign policy founded on peace, democracy, human rights, mutual security, multilateral disarmament, nonintervention and respect for international law. It is, however, worth noting that despite the virtual absence of such views in the mass media, they were embraced by a good many Americans, as evidenced by the massive demonstrations that preceded the US attack on Iraq in March 2003 and the polls which indicated substantial public opposition to war, partly because of the new modes and channels of communication and organizing made possible by the Internet.

Nonetheless, with much of the American public reeling in shock in the aftermath of September 11, critical (and even moderate) voices were largely drowned out by the right, which quickly and effectively moved to implement its global agenda by exploiting public outrage against the

Islamist extremists who had perpetrated the September 11 attacks. They succeeded in “selling” first military intervention in Afghanistan justified by the fact that the Taliban regime had allowed al-Qaeda to operate in that country and refused to hand over those responsible for organizing the September 11 attacks) and then war against Iraq, despite the fact that no one was able to produce any credible evidence that the regime of Saddam Hussein had had anything to do with the September 11 attacks or still possessed weapons of mass destruction. In this effort conservative scholars like Bernard Lewis played a significant part, graphically illustrating their continuing, even enhanced, clout in right-wing policymaking circles long after their standing in scholarly circles had declined, as well as the durability and power of some very old Orientalist notions many had mistakenly thought dead as a doormat.

Soon after September 11 Lewis was invited to meetings with President Bush, Vice President Cheney, and members of the Defense Department’s key Defense Policy Board, to whom he offered his understanding of the Middle East and the Muslim world and of the role that the United States could and should play in them. Lewis now endorsed the use of US military power to overthrow Saddam Hussein’s regime and assured his listeners that after that was accomplished, the United States could without any great difficulty remold Iraq into a democracy which would serve as a beacon and model for the entire region. His larger vision of Islamic history was laid out in his book What Went Wrong?: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response. Through the book was written before the September 11 attacks, it offered a distressed and perplexed American public an explanation for those attacks and Bush administration policymakers a rationale for their response.

As in most of his other work going back half a century, in this book Lewis painted with a very broad brush writing of “the Islamic world” and “the West” as if they were self-evidently distinct and monolithic entities. Indeed, the book was replete with the kinds of sweeping generalizations and unsupported assertions that scholarship on Islam and the Middle East had moved away from long before, in favor of careful, nuanced, fine-grained analyses well grounded in local histories and contexts. Islam as portrayed by Lewis was always and everywhere introverted, uninterested in other cultures, and imbued with a sense of superiority that would in the nineteenth century be rudely challenged by the superior technology, weaponry and ideas of the West. Virtually ignoring the impact of colonialism, various Muslim societies’ complex and quite different engagements with the transformations of the modern era, and unpleasant aspects of Western history, Lewis concluded that Muslims had essentially failed to respond properly to the challenges of modernity.
Instead they had remained religious, inclined to authoritarianism, and full of irrational resentment and anger. A postscript added to the book after the September 11 attacks described them as "the latest phase in a struggle [between Islam and Christendom/the West] that has been going on for more than fourteen centuries." 33

In yet another book, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror*, written after September 11 and published early in 2003, Lewis once again rehashed the arguments and material he had used in so many of his publications over the previous half-century. Here too his basic argument was that Islam and the Middle East had failed to modernize; hence Islamism and terrorism. Though he faulted the United States for its ties with unpleasant and undemocratic regimes in the Middle East, he also insisted that US policy had been basically successful. One might reasonably conclude from Lewis's analysis that there was really not much the United States or other Western powers could do to fix the problems of the Middle East or Muslim world, since they had had so little to do with creating them in the first place. But despite the essentially pessimistic assessment of the state of the Arab and Muslim worlds manifested in these books, Lewis had by this time become a leading academic advocate of the view that by occupying and reshaping Iraq the United States could lead the Arabs toward democracy, progress, and modernity, and the book argued for a vigorous Western military response to the threat posed by "Muslim rage." Since Lewis never really engaged with his critics, he was never compelled to reconcile his apparent contradiction, nor did it much bother those in government and the media whose favorite Middle East expert he had become. As one reviewer put it in 2003, these two books "are well on their way to becoming the standard accounts of the us-and-them/war-of-the-worlds, believers-and-infidels conception of the Muslim mind." 34

Lewis was not alone in his views, of course, though his age, much trumpeted erudition, magisterial style and very British air of authority enhanced his stature. There were others whose perspective on the Middle East also coincided neatly with, and bolstered, the neoconservative foreign policy agenda in the 1990s and early 2000s. Notable among them was the Lebanese-born political scientist Fouad Ajami, of the School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, DC, which boasted one of the country's premier graduate programs in foreign and military policy. Though Ajami's later scholarly work had been roundly criticized within academia because of his sweeping and 'questionable assertions about what he saw as the self-induced pathologies of Arab culture and politics, his Arab origins and his endorsement of the agenda of the US and Israeli right opened doors in Washington and made him a media star.

someone whose role it was (as the author of one magazine profile put it) "to unpack the unfathomable mysteries of the Arab and Muslim world and to help sell America's wars in the region."

Ajami's pronouncements, like those of Bernard Lewis, were solicited and cited by high officials of the Bush administration. For example, in an August 2002 speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars laying out the case for war against Iraq and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, Vice President Dick Cheney declared that, "as for the reaction in the Arab street, the Middle East expert Professor Fuad Ajami predicts that after liberation, the streets in Basra and Baghdad are sure to erupt in joy in the same way throngs in Kabul greeted the Americans." 35

**Rough politics: blacklisting and the silencing of dissent**

Luminaries like Ajami and Lewis were seconded by a number of less well-known but more vociferous bulldogs of the right who, in the aftermath of September 11, seized the opportunity to try to delegitimize and silence those who disagreed with them. They were by no means the first to go after their opponents in this manner. As political divisions within the field of Middle East studies had become more intense from the 1970s onward, especially over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, various unpleasant accusations about anti-Arab or anti-Israel (or even antisemitic) bias had been bandied about, particularly by nonacademic organizations which sought to influence the academic study of the Middle East by narrowing the range of opinions deemed legitimate.

Especially vocal and effective were organizations that defined themselves as pro-Israel, including AIPAC and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), founded by the Jewish fraternal organization B'nai B'rith in 1913 to combat antisemitism and other forms of bigotry. Among other things, these organizations claimed that Saudi and other Arab money was being used to fund new programs and programs at US universities and thereby insinuate an unduly critical pro-Arab bias into Middle East studies. These concerns were not inherently invalid: many colleges and universities have faced legitimate questions about whether large donations come with strings attached, visible or invisible, that might affect faculty appointments, curriculum and programming, and several US universities did in fact accept donations from wealthy Arabs, including members of some of the ruling families of the Arab Gulf states, to fund chairs or programs in Arab studies but (it is not clear that) these donations had any untoward influence on scholarship or teaching at those institutions, and in any case American universities also accepted, without much controversy,
large donations for Jewish and Israeli studies programs from people (Jews and non-Jews) strongly supportive of Israel.

Such controversies did not always involve Arabs and Jews. For example, in the 1990s Armenian-Americans and others in the United States sounded the alarm when the Turkish government offered to fund new chairs in Ottoman and Turkish studies at leading American universities. Their fears seemed to be borne out when evidence surfaced that the scholar appointed to a Turkish-funded chair at Princeton University had advised the Turkish ambassador to the United States on how to combat Armenian demands that Turkey acknowledge that hundreds of thousands of Armenians had been massacred in the Ottoman empire during the First World War. Bernard Lewis would also get caught up in this issue: in June 1995, following lawsuits filed by Armenian and antiracist organizations, a French court found that Lewis had "failed in his duty of prudence and objectivity" by making "erroneous" statements that denied or downplayed the Armenian genocide. Lewis was required to pay a symbolic one franc in damages.

In the 1980s AIPAC and the ADL compiled and circulated material accusing various scholars of being anti-Israel propagandists and pro-Arab apologists, and there is evidence that efforts were also made to try to prevent otherwise qualified scholars (some of them Jews) from securing academic positions because they were deemed critical of Israeli policies. There were also claims that antisemitism was rampant in Middle East studies. Some of these organizations' targets, as well as other critics, responded by pointing out that these organizations defined antisemitism so broadly as to encompass virtually all criticism of Israel, and that in fact a good many American and Israeli Jews held views these organizations denounced as antisemitic. They argued that the real threat to academic freedom came from efforts by AIPAC, the ADL and similar organizations intent on defending the official Israeli line to suppress open debate about Israeli policies and the "special relationship" between Israel and the United States by intimidating and silencing those perceived as critical of Israel. The compilation and circulation by these organizations of "blacklists" reminded many of the tactics used during the McCarthy-era anticommunist "Red Scare" and led to the ADL and AIPAC being censured by the Middle East Studies Association.

This does not seem to have deterred the ADL, because in 1993 a police raid on the ADL's San Francisco office revealed that, with the help of a member of the San Francisco Police Department's Intelligence unit who had access to police and FBI files, the ADL had for years been collecting information on Palestine solidarity groups and Jewish critics of Israel in the San Francisco area, as well as on local activists in the campaign against South Africa's apartheid regime and on many other organizations and individuals. Subsequent investigations and lawsuits revealed that some of the data on anti-apartheid organizing collected for the ADL had been made available to the South African government. Though it continued to insist it had done nothing wrong, the ADL eventually paid a substantial sum to settle a suit brought by the city of San Francisco over charges that it had illegally acquired confidential government information and disbursed additional sums to settle other lawsuits.

Edward Said, probably the most outspoken and visible advocate for the Palestinian cause in the United States, was the target of several scurrilous attacks apparently intended to besmirch his character and intimidate critics of Israel. In 1989, for example, the neoconservative Jewish magazine Commentary published an exercise in character assassination titled "Professor of Terror." Its author, Edward Alexander, accused Said of leading a "double career as literary scholar and ideologue of terror," because Said had allegedly defended the punishment of Palestinians who collaborated with the Israeli occupation during the first Palestinian intifada, but more broadly because for Alexander the PLO (of whose Palestine National Council Said was then a member) was nothing but a terrorist organization, so that anyone who supported it was ipso facto a terrorist or, at best, an apostate for terrorism.

As we saw in our discussion of terrorism, this was an argument which the Israeli right and its allies in the United States propagated widely. A decade later Commentary returned to the fray by publishing an article accusing Said of lying about his own life story by claiming that he had spent his childhood in Jerusalem rather than in Cairo. The author's real point seems to have been to undermine Said's credibility and that of the Palestinian cause as a whole, in keeping with the Israeli right's ultimately successful effort to discredit and derail Israeli-Palestinian negotiations which might have led to Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, the dismantling of Jewish settlements and the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza.

After the September 11 attacks, some on the far-right end of the Middle East studies spectrum decided to exploit this apparently propitious moment to launch an assault on scholars in Middle East studies who did not kowtow to the views of the Bush administration and those of the Israeli right. A key figure in this campaign was Daniel Pipes, who received his Ph.D. in medieval Islamic history from Harvard in 1978 but soon began to focus on contemporary issues. In various articles and in his 1983 book, In the Path of God: Islam and Political Power, Pipes argued that the "Islamic revival" of recent years was attributable largely to the vast sums expended by the Saudi and Libyan regimes, enriched by the
post-1973 rise in oil-prices, to disseminate and promote their versions of Islam. As a result, Pipes predicted, “current waves of Islamic activism would die along with the OPEC boom.”¹¹ Pipes’ thinking apparently evolved in the years that followed, when oil prices dropped but Islamist movements flourished. On his own website he would later tout himself as “one of the few analysts who understood the threat of militant Islam.”

Pipes taught at various universities for short stints and held minor government posts but never secured a permanent academic position; instead he made something of himself in right-wing foreign policy circles. He served as editor of the conservative foreign policy journal Orbis and by 1990 had become director of his own small think tank, the Philadelphia-based Middle East Forum, whose goal was to “define and promote American interests” in the Middle East. Those interests were defined as “strong ties with Israel, Turkey, and other democracies as they emerge,” human rights, “a stable supply of a low price of oil,” and “the peaceful settlement of regional and international disputes.”¹²

In the 1990s Pipes carved out a small but moderately successful niche for himself in the world of right-wing punditry, disseminating his views through op-ed pieces, magazine articles, books, public lectures and appearances on television and radio talk shows, as well as through his own publication, Middle East Quarterly. By the mid-1990s Pipes was arguing that militant Islam posed a grave threat to the United States and its allies, especially Israel. This threat should be met, Pipes believed, not by acknowledgement or accommodation of essentially baseless Muslim grievances but by a tough, indeed aggressive stance to undermine or eradicate the militants and the states which supposedly fostered them—a stance which the Republican right believed had won the Cold War and which it now wanted to serve as the foundation for US foreign policy in the post-Cold War world. For Pipes this also meant promoting the views and policies of the Israeli right, which rejected the kind of peace settlement (with the Palestinians but also with Syria) that most of the world (including many Israelis) regarded as reasonable and instead sought to use Israel’s military superiority (and if possible America’s as well) to impose its terms for peace on the Arabs.

Like others on the American Jewish right, and increasingly also the non-Jewish right, Pipes argued that the interests of Israel and the United States had converged: militant Islam had replaced the Soviet Union and its allies as the gravest threat to both, and they should work together to confront this threat by all means necessary. Along the way Pipes acquired a reputation in Muslim-American circles as an “Islamophobe” and “Muslim basher” whose writings and public utterances aroused fear and suspicion toward Muslims. Pipes claimed that he was not against Muslims or Islam but was only opposed to Islamism, which distorted Islam and used terrorism to attack the United States and its allies. Yet the tone and often the content of much of what he had to say could plausibly be understood as inciting suspicion and mistrust of Muslims, including Muslim-Americans, and as derogatory of Islam.⁴³

In his campaign against radical Islam—critics said Islam period—Pipes sometimes collaborated with journalist Steven Emerson, whose main focus during the 1990s was to sound the alarm about the threat Muslim terrorists posed to the United States. By the end of that decade Emerson was describing himself as a “terrorist expert and investigator” and “Executive Director, Terrorism Newswire, Inc.” Along the way, critics charged, Emerson had sounded many false alarms, made numerous errors of fact, bandied accusations about rather freely, and ceased to be regarded as credible by much of the mainstream media.⁴⁴ The September 11 attacks seemed to bear out Emerson’s warnings, but his critics would probably respond that even a broken clock shows the right time twice a day. Pipes’ association with Emerson and others like him did not enhance his standing among either scholars or more balanced journalists and commentators.

A year after the September 11 attacks, Pipes and his Middle East Forum launched a new initiative, which invited academic Middle East studies. This was a website called Campus Watch, ostensibly established to “review and critique Middle East studies in North America, with an aim to improving them.” Campus Watch initiated its campaign against those who did not share Pipes’s right-wing views by attacking eight professors of Middle East or Islamic studies from institutions around the country for what Pipes deemed unacceptable views about Islam, Islamism, Palestinian rights, and/or US policy in the region; the website also cited fourteen universities for similar sins. Among those attacked was Professor John Esposito of Georgetown University, who was characterized as an apologist for Islamic and Palestinian terrorism, apparently because he had urged attention to the grievances that led some Muslims to perpetrate suicide bombings and many more to applaud or tolerate them, and also advocated the scholarly study of Islam rather than blanket denunciation. Campus Watch also invited college students and others to monitor their professors and send in classroom statements which they deemed anti-Israel or anti-American, helping Campus Watch compile “dossiers” on suspect faculty and academic institutions.

The attacks prompted a storm of protest: over one hundred professors from around the country sent messages denouncing Campus Watch for its crude attempt to silence debate about the Middle East and the airing
of critical views by insinuating that the scholars under attack had been apologists for terrorism or were somehow unpatriotic. To show solidarity with their beleaguered fellow scholars, many of the protesters demanded that they too be added to Campus Watch's blacklist. Campus Watch thereupon compounded the damage it had already done by listing the names of those who had written to protest its smear campaign under a heading which stated that they had done so "in defense of apologists for Palestinian violence and militant Islam."

This was of course an egregious falsehood, because those who had written Campus Watch in protest did not for a minute accept Campus Watch's original allegation that the first eight scholars it had attacked were apologists for terrorism. They had written to denounce Campus Watch for launching what they saw as a vicious attack, by means of distortion and innuendo, on respectable scholars and to uphold academic freedom, the right of free speech and the importance to a democratic society of open discussion of issues of public concern. The protests and considerable media interest (and criticism) apparently led Campus Watch to back down and remove the web pages attacking the eight scholars as well as pages containing dossiers on individual professors. But it persisted in its mission of rooting out purported anti-Americanism, antisemitism, extremism, and apologetics for terrorism among academics.

In what may have been a reward for his vigorous advocacy of US military intervention in the Muslim world and his vociferous attacks on critics of official policy, in April 2003 President Bush nominated Pipes to the board of directors of the United States Institute of Peace, a federally funded institution dedicated to preventing, managing and peacefully resolving international conflicts. This appointment struck many as rather ironic, not only because Pipes opposed even the Bush administration's rather half-hearted and inconsistent efforts to restart Israeli-Palestinian negotiations but also because Pipes had expressed himself in favor of resolving conflicts through the use of superior military force rather than through negotiations. Muslim-American groups were outraged by the appointment of someone they believed had deliberately sought to spread fear and suspicion about Islam and Muslims, but so were moderate scholars who regarded Pipes as extreme in his views as well as in how he expressed them and therefore not suitable for a position on the board of this kind of institution. The liberal Washington Post called the Pipes nomination "sult in the wound" and a "true joke" for US Muslims and urged that it be rescinded by the White House or rejected by Congress.

When the nomination came before a Senate committee in July 2003, a number of Democratic senators expressed opposition and the session ended without a vote; the following month President Bush bypassed

After Orientalism?

Daniel Pipes was not alone in seeing academic Middle East studies as a cesspool of error, fuzzy thinking and anti-Americanism. Soon after the September 11 attacks the Washington Institute for Near East Policy published a book by Martin Kramer titled <i>Israeli Thinkers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America</i>. Whereas Pipes's Campus Watch specialized in attacking scholars and academic institutions, Kramer's book claimed to offer a detailed and comprehensive critique of US Middle East studies from the right and therefore merits serious discussion.

After receiving his doctorate from Princeton University, Martin Kramer moved to Israel where he served as a research associate at Tel Aviv University's Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, and then as the center's associate director (1987-95) and director (1995-2001). The Dayan Center, which describes itself as "an interdisciplinary research center devoted to the study of the modern history and contemporary affairs of the Middle East," is of course named after the famous Israeli general and politician, but it incorporated and superseded an older institution, the Shiloah Institute, named after Reuven Shiloah, the founder of Israel's intelligence and security apparatus. Both the old and new names reflect the center's ongoing role as not merely a scholarly institution (though there have certainly been some serious scholars associated with it) but also a key site where senior Israeli military, foreign policy and intelligence officials can interact with academics working on policy-relevant issues. It would seem that the Dayan Center provided Martin Kramer with his ideal model of the proper relationship between the world of scholarship and the world of policymaking, for the main complaint Kramer voiced in <i>Israeli Thinkers on Sand</i> was that US-based scholars of the Middle East had failed, or refused, to meet the US government's need for useful knowledge and accurate predictions about the region.

Kramer's basic argument was that Middle East studies is, to put it simply, a miserable failure. "America's academics have," he asserted, "failed to predict or explain the major evolutions of Middle Eastern politics and society over the past two decades. Time and again, academics have been taken by surprise by their subjects, time and again, their paradigmatics have been swept away by events. Repeated failures have depleted the credibility of scholarship among influential publics. In Washington, the mere mention of academic Middle East studies often causes eyes to roll."
To explain how this came about, Kramer offered his interpretation of the development of Middle East studies in America, portrayed as a fall from (relative) grace largely attributable to the pernicious influence of one bad doctrine and its chief propagator, Edward W. Said.

Kramer began by briefly recounting the origins and early history of Middle East studies in the United States. Despite promising beginnings, things did not go well. Too many scholars were in the grip of overly optimistic notions like modernization theory, which posted that the entire world (including the Middle East) could and would be remade in the image of the United States of the 1950s. In the 1970s the Lebanese civil war and then the Iranian revolution shattered this illusion, revealing the field's intellectual bankruptcy and leaving it without a dominant paradigm. Even worse, scholarly standards were appallingly low, which allowed "tenured incompetents" to secure many of the all too scarce academic positions, breeding resentment among new graduates and graduate students. Government and foundation funding dropped, exacerbating the sense of crisis in the field.

For Kramer, it was this crisis which accounted for the success of Said's Orientalism and the transformation it almost single-handedly wrought in US Middle East studies. Despite its grave flaws, it served perfectly as a weapon in the hands of insurgents pushing a radical political and theoretical agenda. By delegitimizing established scholars and scholarship and providing an alternative theory and politics, it helped achieve intellectual and institutional hegemony in US Middle East studies. Kramer attributed what he saw as the abject failure of most scholars to resist the onslaught of Said and his acolytes to a loss of self-confidence, stemming from the failure of the models in which they had earlier put so much faith.

The damage Orientalism wreaked on US Middle East studies was considerable, in Kramer's assessment: "Orientalism made it acceptable, even expected, for scholars to spell out their own political commitments as a preface to anything they wrote or did. More than that, it enshrined an acceptable hierarchy of political commitments, with Palestine at the top, followed by the Arab nation and the Islamic world. They were the long-suffering victims of Western racism, American imperialism, and Israeli Zionism - the three legs of the orientalist stool." Said's Orientalism also allegedly licensed political and ethnic tests for admission to the field: one had to be a leftist or, even better, an Arab or Muslim, whose numbers now increased dramatically. However, despite their pretensions to intellectual superiority, Said's acolytes who seized control of US Middle East studies in the 1980s failed to do any better than their discredited predecessors in predicting or explaining the dynamics of Middle Eastern politics, precisely because their predictions were driven by their radical politics and trendy postmodernist theorizing, not by careful observation of the real world.

For example, Kramer argued, the Saidian left utterly failed to anticipate or account for the rise of Islamism; all they could manage were denunciations of purported American bias against Islam and Muslims. In the 1990s, liberals like John Esposito who understood that Said's message and tone were too radical and off-putting for the American mainstream developed an accessible, upbeat, softened image of Islam and Islamism, downplaying their violent and threatening dimensions. Esposito and others seized on a string of would-be "Muslim Luthers" who could be touted as the forerunners of an imminent Islamic reformation, all the while failing to notice the ways in which authoritarian Arab states were successfully promoting secularization and blocking the Islamist challenge. Similarly, because they were convinced that the Arab regimes were fragile and lacked legitimacy and social roots, liberal and leftist scholars had grossly underestimated those regimes' durability, all the while lavishing attention and foundation funding devoted to the study of "civil society" in the Arab world were thus based on vain illusions and missed what was really going on in the region. Overall, Kramer charged, US Middle East scholars, misled by their political agenda and arcane theories, had failed to take the real history and culture of the region into account. As a result, their prognoses were mistaken and of decreasing interest to policymakers.

Kramer went on to attack the Social Science Research Council for its alleged failure - even refusal - to use the government funding it received to support policy-relevant research, and the Middle East Studies Association for its rejection of the National Security Education Program. The "new mandarins" who had assumed leadership of the field lost the confidence of official Washington because of their haughty disdain for policymakers and their squandering of public funds on empty theorizing and worthless research projects. "In the centers of policy, defense, and intelligence," Kramer asserted, "consensus held that little could be learned from academics - not because they knew nothing, but because they deliberately withheld their knowledge from government, or organized it on the basis of arcane priorities or conflicting loyalties."

The self-inflicted crisis of academic Middle East studies was further manifested, Kramer argued, in the growing recourse that government and the media had to Middle East experts based in think tanks rather than those in academia. It was, Kramer claimed, the "intolerant climate" in academia that had led many talented people to gravitate to the think
Scholars in the early and mid-1990s about the moderation and fading away of Islamism were indeed overly broad, though it is also worth noting that in some countries (Turkey, for example) Islamist parties did in fact evolve in a democratic and moderate direction. And Kramer was correct to note that both mainstream and political economy-oriented Middle East scholars generally failed to anticipate the rise of Islamist movements in the 1970s, though he ignored the sophisticated analyses subsequently advanced by scholars.

As a history of Middle East studies as a scholarly field, however, Kramer’s approach was deeply flawed. Kramer simplistically blamed Edward Said and Orientalism for everything that he believed had gone wrong with Middle East studies from the late 1970s onward, utterly ignoring both the extensive critiques of modernization theory and Orientalism that preceded the publication of that book (see Chapter 5) and the complex and often critical ways in which Said’s intervention was received (see Chapter 6). As Ivory Towers tells the story, every scholar in Middle East studies either lost his or her critical faculties and slavishly embraced every pronouncement that fell from the lips of Edward W. Said, or else cringed in terror and kept silent. This is clearly a caricature: as we saw, for the most part scholars in the field did not simply swallow Said’s take on Orientalism but line by line but engaged with it critically, accepting what seemed useful and rejecting, recasting, or developing other aspects. And Kramer’s psychologizing account of why so many scholars and students in Middle East studies were receptive to critiques of the field’s hitherto dominant paradigms was shallow and inadequate, as well as tendentious.

All too often Kramer resorted to cheap shots and epithets instead of serious analysis. For example, it was no doubt good fun for Kramer to characterize the scholars of the Middle East and Islam at my own institution, New York University, as “post-orientalist fashion designers,” but this does not tell us much about what actually goes on there. More broadly, as Ian Cole of the University of Michigan has shown, such right-wing attacks on Middle East scholars as “postmodernist, leftist, anti-American terrorist-coddlers” have little basis in reality. By way of example Cole pointed out that of the fourteen senior professors of Middle East political science teaching at federally funded national resource centers as of early 2003, only one could plausibly be characterized as a postmodernist, few would define themselves as leftists, and none could reasonably be called anti-American (whatever that means) or apologists for terrorism.

Kramer claimed in Ivory Towers that US Middle East scholars had repeatedly made predictions that did not come true. In some instances
his accusations were on-target; in others he took quotations out of context or misconstrued them. But he was also rather selective: for example, in

*Ivy Tower* we do not find Kramer taking his colleague Daniel Pipes to

*task for inaccuretly predicting* in the early 1980s that Islamists activism

*would decline as oil prices fell*, nor is it likely that he would see fit to

evaluate mentors like Bernard Lewis and Fouad Ajami for predicting that

*virtually all Iraqis would welcome invading US forces* and happily accept

*American occupation.* Nor has Kramer’s long-time institutional base,

*the Dayan Center in Tel Aviv*, been especially successful at predicting

*significant developments*, for example the outbreak of the first Palestinian

*Mintada* against Israeli occupation in 1987.

*More broadly, however, Kramer’s fixation on accurate prediction as the

*chief* (or even sole) *guage of good scholarship* is itself highly questionable.

*Most scholars do not in fact seek to predict the future or think they can do

*so; they try to interpret the past, discern and explain contemporary trends

*and, at most, tentatively suggest what might happen in the future if present

*trends continue*, which they very often do not. Of course, governments

*want accurate predictions in order to shape and implement effective

*policies, but Kramer’s insistence that the primary goal of scholarship

*should be the satisfaction of that desire tells us a great deal about his

*conception of intellectual life and of the proper relationship between

*scholars and the state.*

As I suggested earlier, Kramer’s model of what US Middle East studies

*should be seems to be based on the institution with which he was affiliated

*for some two decades, the Dayan Center. Just as many (though by no means

*all) of the Israeli scholars associated with the Dayan Center have

*seen themselves as producing knowledge that will serve the security and

*foreign policy needs of Israel, so American scholars of the Middle East

*should, Kramer suggested, shape their research agendas to provide the

*kinds of knowledge the US government will find most useful. His book
demonstrated no interest whatsoever in the uses to which such knowledge
might be put or in the question of the responsibility of intellectuals to
maintain their independence and “speak truth to power,” or indeed in what
scholarship and intellectual life should really be about. His real
complaint was that US Middle East studies had failed to produce know-

*edge useful to the state. Yet by ignoring larger political and institutional
contexts, Kramer could not understand or explain why so many scholars
had grown less than enthusiastic about producing the kind of knowledge
about the Middle East the government wanted — or conversely, why it
was that the government and the media now routinely turned to analysts
based in think tanks, along with former military and intelligence per-

*sonnel, for policy-relevant knowledge rooted in the official consensus

*about what constitutes America’s “national interest” in the Middle
East.*

*But there is a larger issue at stake here. At the very heart of Kramer’s
approach is a dubious distinction between the trendy, arcane “theorizing”
of the scholarship he condemned as at best irrelevant and at worst
*pernicious, on the one hand, and on the other the purportedly hard-
headed, clear-sighted, theory-free observation of, and research on, the
“real Middle East” in which he and scholars like him see themselves as
engaging. Kramer was not wrong to suggest that there has been some
trendy theory-mongering in academia, including Middle East studies.

*But he went well beyond this by now banal observation, and beyond a
rejection of poststructuralism, to imply that all theories, paradigms and
models are distorting and useless, because they get in the way of the
direct, unmediated, accurate access to reality that he seemed to believe
*he and those who think like him possess.*

This seems to me an extraordinarily naive and unsophisticated under-
standing of how knowledge is produced, one that few scholars in the
humanities and social sciences have taken seriously for a long time. Even
among historians, those most positive of scholars, few would today
*argue that the facts “speak for themselves” in any simple sense. Almost
all would acknowledge that deciding what should be construed as signifi-
*cant facts for the specific project of historical reconstruction in which
they are engaged, choosing which are more relevant and important to the
question at hand and which less so, and crafting a story in one particular
*way rather than another all involve making judgments that are, at bottom,
rooted in some sense of how the world works — in short, in some theory
or model or paradigm or vision, whether implicit or explicit, whether
*consciously acknowledged or not. Kramer’s inability or refusal to grasp
this suggests a grave lack of self-awareness, coupled with an alarming
disinterest in some of the most important debates scholars have been
having over the past four decades or so.*

*It is moreover a stance which Kramer did not — indeed, could not —
maintain in practice. His assertions throughout the book were in fact
based on a certain framework of interpretation, even as he insisted that
they were merely the product of his acute and hard-headed powers of
observation, analysis and prediction. It is for example striking that at the
very end of *Ivy Tower* Kramer explicitly set forth what is obviously a
political and moral judgment rooted in his own (theoretical) vision of the
world: his insistence that a healthy, reconstructed Middle East Studies
must accept that the United States “plays an essentially beneficial role
in the world.” He never explained why we should accept this vision of the
US role in the world as true, nor did he even acknowledge that it may
be something other than self-evidently true. The assertion nonetheless undermined his avowed epistemologically stance and graphically demonstrated its untenability.

Similarly, though this is largely implied rather than clearly asserted, Kramer seemed to regard Bernard Lewis' notion of the "return" of an ever-present, wounded and enraged "Islam" as the best way of explaining Islamism as a sociopolitical phenomenon. Yet it should be obvious that that interpretation can hardly be taken as simple common sense, as the product of empirical observation untainted by theory. It is rather the product of a specific framework of interpretation which one may accept or reject, embrace or question, but which definitely rests upon certain assumptions about the proper category and method of analysis to be used in order to elucidate the phenomenon being studied. So while Kramer had a good time attacking others for their theorizing, he did not seem to realize that he was doing a fair bit of theorizing himself.

I have treated *Ivy Towers Built on Sand* here as if it were a serious intellectual exercise. Yet it was clearly written and published as a politically motivated polemic, an attack on MESA and the "Middle Eastern studies establishment" designed to further Kramer's political agenda. It is noteworthy that in the same book published: Martin Kramer assumed the post of editor of Middle East Quarterly, published by Daniel Pipes' Middle East Forum. From this perspective, Pipes' McCarthyist assumptions on mainstream, liberal and leftist scholars of Middle East studies by means of his Campus Watch website and Kramer's intellectually simplistic and tendentious critique of US Middle East studies can be seen as complementary. One might even go so far as to portray Kramer and Pipes as, respectively, the "good cop" and "bad cop" of the far-right end of the Middle East studies spectrum.

The Campaign against Middle East Studies

The attacks which Pipes and Kramer launched on MESA and Middle East studies in the United States after the September 11 attacks were quickly picked up by the conservative and neoconservative media, yielding a spate of articles in such magazines as *National Review* and on right-wing websites. Echoing Pipes and Kramer, right-wing commentators attacked MESA because its annual meeting allegedly featured too many scholarly-panels on topics they deemed esoteric and irrelevant, and not enough panels on al-Qa'ida, Palestinian suicide bombings and "anti-American incitement." Such denigration of anything scholars do that does not produce knowledge that is immediately and directly useful to the government suggests a worrisome anti-intellectualism as well as

a gross misunderstanding of the role scholars and institutions of higher education play in a democratic society. Moreover, as Juan Cole has noted, there have in fact been endless academic publications, panels and conferences on Islamism over the past quarter-century, and insisting that MESA (which is in any case supported not by the federal government but by its members) devote itself exclusively to this topic would be like "insisting that Italian historians work only on the Cosa Nostra." It is also worth noting that many Middle East scholars, including some who have been vocal critics of US policy in the region, have always been quite willing to share their expertise and perspectives with government officials and agencies, and their numbers have probably grown since September 11 - though it is not clear that official Washington has been very interested in engaging with critical perspectives.

Some right-wing critics went beyond Kramer's proposals for "reform" of the Title VI program and called for federal funding of Middle East studies to be reduced or cut off. Others urged that the Department of Education use its control over Title VI funding to mandate "balance" and "diversity" in teaching about the Middle East, and particularly about the Arab-Israeli conflict. In this context balance and diversity seemed to be code words for pressuring colleges and universities to muzzle critics of US and Israeli policies and promote viewpoints more congenial to those of the Bush administration and the Israeli government. This was made explicit in proposals put forward by a number of right-wing members of Congress. In April 2003, for example, Senator Rick Santorum, Republican of Pennsylvania, announced plans to introduce legislation that would cut off federal funding to American colleges and universities that were deemed by the conservative faculty, students and student organizations to openly criticize Israel, since Santorum seemed to regard all such criticism as inherently antisemitic. Meanwhile, Santorum's colleague Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas proposed the creation of a federal commission to investigate alleged antisemitism on campus — again defined rather broadly to include virtually all criticism of Israeli policies.

This campaign to use the power of the federal government to reshape the academic study of the Middle East began to bear fruit in June 2003. Responding to right-wing allegations about the abuse of Title VI funding by "extreme" and "one-sided" critics of US foreign policy, the Select Education Subcommittee of the House of Representatives' Committee on Education and the Workforce convened brief hearings on "International Programs in Higher Education and Questions of Bias" at which a conservative critic repeated allegations that Title VI-funded Middle East centers were infested by anti-American acolytes of Edward Said. Over the months that followed this committee formulated, and the
(Republican-controlled) House of Representatives passed legislation to extend Title VI funding which for the first time mandated that programs foster debate on American foreign policy from diverse perspectives.

The bill also provided for the creation of a new International Higher Education Advisory Board with the power to monitor and evaluate federally funded area studies programs; four of the board's seven members would be appointed by congressional leaders and at least two of the remaining three members would represent national security agencies. This and similar proposals were for several years blocked by Senate Democrats who were concerned that they might open the door to an unprecedented degree of partisan political intrusion into university-based area studies, particularly Title VI-funded Middle East studies centers. These proposals were also opposed by a broad range of groups involved in higher education, which perceived them as part of a campaign to stifle critical voices and as a threat to the autonomy of American institutions of higher education and long-established principles of academic freedom. Thanks to persistent lobbying, however, allegations about "bias" in Middle East studies and proposals to amend Title VI in order to promote "diversity" continued to surface every time the program came up for Congressional reauthorization.

In summer of 2008 critics of the Title VI program finally achieved a measure of success: Congress passed, and President Bush signed, a bill that reauthorized the program but for the first time included a requirement that institutions applying for Title VI funding explain "how the activities funded by the grant will reflect diverse perspectives and a wide range of views and generate debate on world regions and international affairs." Applicants were also required to describe how they would encourage students to enter government service in "areas of national need," to be determined by the Secretary of Education after consultation with a wide range of federal agencies. It remains to be seen what impact these provisions will actually have on the allocation of Title VI funding and on the direction and character of the program.

Partisans of the US and Israeli right, and critics of mainstream Middle East studies, continued to pursue their agenda in a variety of other arenas as well through the end of the Bush presidency. For example, in 2006 the United States Commission on Civil Rights issued a briefing report entitled "Campus Anti-Semitism," and somewhat later its findings and recommendations on the issue. Based on a rather cursory and partisan "factfinding" process, the report and findings seemed to conflate criticism of Zionism and Israel with antisemitism while accepting at face value questionable assertions concerning alleged antisemitic incidents on university campuses. It would seem that the real purpose of this exercise was not to combat actual antisemitism on university campuses but to censor and delegitimize certain opinions expressed by faculty by tarring them with the brush of antisemitism.

At the state level, David Horowitz, a 1960s radical turned ultrareactionary, orchestrated a campaign to induce state legislatures to enact a "Student Bill of Rights" that would combat the allegedly pervasive indoctrination of innocent college students by leftist faculty. As of 2006 no state had actually adopted such legislation, but through his online magazine FrontPage, and its associated Jihad Watch website, Horowitz and his allies (the Pipes and his acolytes at Campus Watch, along with other groups) continued vociferously to accuse colleges and universities of being "anti-American" and supporters of "terrorism." Middle East studies centers, programs and departments were accused of lacking balance and diversity, or of harboring critics of Israel (often depicted as antisemites). There were also instances in which invitations to scholars for speaking engagements were withdrawn by the sponsors after pressure from outside groups, usually because of the invitees' actual or purported positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

One particularly egregious incident, in which a local government agency actually blacklisted a respected Middle East scholar on the basis of his purported political views, was reminiscent of the "Red Scare" of the late 1940s and 1950s, when schoolteachers and college faculty (among others) who had been accused of communist affiliations, or who refused to testify about their political beliefs or sign "loyalty oaths," were driven from their jobs or denied employment. Early in 2005 the right-wing New York Sun, along with a vote-seeking candidate in the Democratic primary for mayor of New York City, went after Professor Rashid Khalidi of Columbia University for criticisms he had allegedly voiced of Israeli policies toward the Palestinians. Without giving Khalidi any opportunity to respond to the allegations against him, the chancellor of the New York City public schools barred Khalidi from participating in a professional development program that Columbia, like other universities with Title VI centers, had been running for city schoolteachers. To its credit Columbia University defended Khalidi's First Amendment rights, rebuked the chancellor and severed its connection with the teacher-training program.

It is worth noting that the David Horowitz maestro of FrontPage and the Student Bill of Rights, was also one of the chief purveyors of the term "Islamofascism." Along with Paul Berman, Christopher Hitchens and several other formerly left-leaning intellectuals who had embraced
some or all of the Bush agenda, as well as many neoconservatives, Horowitz used this term to denote a broad range of avowedly Islamic regimes, groups and trends that were supposedly very similar to the European fascist and Nazi movements and regimes of the interwar years and should therefore be fought just as vigorously. This identification of (a very loosely defined) radical Islamism with fascism seems to have been intended to help whip up public support for the Bush administration’s policies, among other things by portraying the invasion of Iraq (and the open-ended and apparently permanent “global war on terror”) as the moral equivalent of the Second World War. However, most scholars and observers of Islam and Islamist movements rejected the equation of Islamism and fascism as historically and analytically inaccurate and misleading, in part because it unhappily lumped together regimes and movements as different from (and as often in conflict with) one another as Hizbullah, al-Qaeda, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hamas, the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, and Saudi Arabia—the latter, of course, a close ally of the United States.

In the post-September 11 period, groups based outside of academia also stepped up efforts to deny jobs, tenure or promotion to scholars they deemed excessively critical of Israel or of US foreign policy in the Middle East. Through scurrilous media and website attacks, by letter-writing and email campaigns, by threatening to withhold donations and by other means, these groups sought to pressure colleges and universities to make decisions based not on a fair and objective peer review of a current or prospective faculty member’s record of scholarship, teaching and service but on his or her purported political views. University administrators were not always resolute in resisting such pressures, despite demands by organizations like the Middle East Studies Association and the American Association of University Professors that they vigorously defend their faculty’s academic freedom and the integrity and independence of their institutions.

Such campaigns, and the broader right-wing offensive against Middle East studies of which they were a part, cumulatively had something of a chilling effect on scholars of the Middle East and Islam, many of whom understandably felt that they were being monitored, and even sometimes threatened, harassed or persecuted, by apparently well-funded and highly partisan zealots based outside of academia who used every means at their disposal to denounce and defame those with whom they disagreed. Graduate students applying for academic jobs and younger scholars not protected by tenure felt especially vulnerable, knowing that they might be judged on the basis not of their scholarly work and teaching skills but of their real or alleged political views.

More broadly, it was quite plausible to see the often vicious attacks launched against Middle East scholars, against Middle East studies as an academic field, and against the institutions at which this field was based as a campaign directed against knowledge, expertise and scholarship, designed to marginalize or silence those who actually knew something about the region so that the Bush administration and its allies could pursue their manifestly disastrous policies with as little public debate and opposition as possible. (Continuing a trend that, as we have seen, began decades earlier, the Bush administration usually drew its Middle East specialists not from universities but from conservative foreign-policy think tanks.) There was considerable irony in this situation, given that developments in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East in the post-September 11 years suggested that it was the targets of this right-wing offensive, and not its perpetrators and their mentors, who were by far the more productive and innovative scholars and who possessed the more accurate and reliable understanding of what was actually going on in the region and beyond.

Nonetheless, in the fall of 2007 a group of scholars and others who had long been alienated from the Middle East Studies Association, for four decades the pre-eminent learned society in North American Middle East studies, announced the establishment of an organization of their own, on the model of other small splinter groups formed over the years in several academic fields by disgruntled conservative scholars. The Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa (ASMEA) declared from its founding a new academic society dedicated to promoting the highest standards of research and teaching in Middle Eastern and African studies, and related fields. In short, and foremost, a community of scholars concerned to protect academic freedom and promote the search for truth to reach new heights in inquiry.

Reasonably predictably, the new organization’s Academic Council (spearheaded by Bernard Lewis, then ninety-one years old) as chairman and Jad Awad Ajami as vice-chairman. ASMEA’s founders proclaimed it to be a scholarly and apolitical alternative to an irredeemably politicized MESA. It was, however, telling that, as of early 2009, its Academic Council included, alongside several bona fide academics whose scholarly work actually focused on the Middle East, at least two people who had achieved prominence outside academia in the world of policymaking: former Secretary of State George P. Schultz, an economist by training but hardly a noted scholar of either the Middle East or Africa, and Leslie
who served as a Pentagon official during the Vietnam War and in the State Department during the Carter administration, was a diplomatic correspondent for the *New York Times*, and then became president and eventually president emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations. Perhaps coincidentally, both Schultz and Gelb had also been vocal advocates of the invasion of Iraq. Given ASMEA’s obvious political bent and partisan agenda, it seemed very unlikely that it would pose a serious challenge to MESA’s status as the leading professional and scholarly organization in this field any time soon.

The assaults to which US Middle East studies was subjected in the post-September 11 period certainly did not make it easier for scholars of the modern and contemporary Middle East and Muslim world to pursue their work. Nor did the tense atmosphere enhance the likelihood that Americans would acquire a better understanding of what was going on in the Middle East and the Muslim world, or facilitate a more informed, intelligent and reasoned discussion of the involvement of the United States in those regions, past, present or future. It was understandable that many scholars of the Middle East and Islam could feel themselves and their field to be under siege, even if such attacks were not, as discussed earlier in this chapter, entirely unprecedented. But it should also be said that, despite this, most US-based scholars of the Middle East and the Muslim world continued to go about their business, and the work they produced remained by and large not only impressively high in quality but also in more sustained and productive dialogue with scholars, methods and ideas in other fields than perhaps it had ever been.

It was also the case that September 11 and its aftermath led to a surge of public interest in the Middle East and Islam, to which scholars (among others) responded with a flood of books and articles, many of them of excellent quality and some of which were also highly accessible to a non-academic public. The period also witnessed dramatically increased enrollments in college courses taught by specialists on the Middle East and Islam, including language courses, and increased hiring in these fields. There was at the same time a heightened awareness in Congress and beyond that the United States urgently needed to expand the number of Americans who knew something about the languages, history and cultures of the region, which led to several new federally funded programs, especially for language pedagogy.

So, despite the nasty assaults to which scholars and their organizations and institutions were subjected, and notwithstanding (or perhaps partly because of) the very grim situation in much of the Middle