The search for Middle Easterners we could like— because they were like us—put blinders on the Middle East Studies enterprise from the very outset.

CHAPTER 3

Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places

IN 1985, CBS television explored turning the novel *Saigon* into a miniseries about American involvement in Vietnam.[1] The British author, Anthony Grey, presented the history of modern Vietnam through the eyes of an American journalist, the scion of a fictitious family intimately involved with Vietnam for over three generations. As the story moved toward the climactic American evacuation of Saigon, the script version highlighted the protagonist's appraisal of the unfolding tragedy: It was *love*, not anticommunism, imperial design, or fear of falling dominos, that had embroiled America in that bloody quagmire. What "love" was supposed to mean was never explained.

It is hard to imagine that an American viewing audience would have fully sympathized with this analysis. (Nor does it surprise that Grey later became a publicist for Claude Rael's theory that life on Earth stems from genetic engineering by space aliens.) Yet Grey's politico-amatory fancy

did not entirely lack substance. By comparison with the European imperial powers, America has always seen itself as more altruistic and less greedy, more a provider of help than a grabber of land. Contemporary Americans have come to feel uncomfortable about the brief fever of imperialism that brought Puerto Rico and the Philippines under U.S. control in the Spanish-American War, and they positively recoil at the accusation—on its face, an arguable assertion—of having fresh imperialist designs on parts of the Muslim world. Whatever we have done in remote foreign lands since the end of World War II we attribute either to a quest for security or to basic goodness—Christian altruism repackaged as American idealism.

However, unrequited love appeals only to the most saintly of martyrs. Prior to World War II, American missionaries searched long and hard for Muslims willing to accept the humanitarian American embrace, express thanks for American love and support, and commit themselves to benevolent American ideals and practices. But they encountered frostiness more often than affection once they reached beyond the immediate circle of the sick, the needy, and the ambitious who availed themselves of their medical, charitable, and educational services. After the war, undeterred in their desire to do good, Americans of more secular inclination bent their creative efforts to imagining a deeply appreciative Muslim world, a world capable of requiting American love, and they sought to identify those individuals they were certain were already citizens of such a world. In the process, they blinded themselves to certain realities of Muslim life and thought, and to a growing Muslim suspicion of American benevolence and culture. This chapter will seek to describe postwar thinking about the Middle East and show how the distortions in understanding that it encouraged are still guiding U.S. policy in a post-9/11 world.

Middle East Studies

Orientalism, Edward Said's celebrated critique of western thinking about Islam and the Arab world, focuses on Europeans rather than Americans. It illumines the ways in which travelers, writers, artists,

and scholars imagined a lurid Orient of sexual decadence, obscene cruelty, and craven pusillanimity—all, Said argues, with the hidden (or not so hidden) design of justifying imperialism and adding intellectual to colonial subjugation. However, absent American indulgence in establishing colonies, negotiating spheres of influence, and imposing exploitative treaties, the American style of Orientalist imaginings did not particularly suit Said's argument, at least down to the second half of the twentieth century. So the overseas experiences of Washington Irving and Mark Twain in Andalusia and the Holy Land, the pseudo-Muslim exoticism of St. Louis' annual Veiled Prophet pageant, and the lasciviously Oriental hoochy-cooch dance performed by "Little Egypt" at Chicago's Century of Progress exposition, did not command his attention. Nineteenth-century America's fated "other" was the African slave, not the Muslim Arab.

What most Americans knew about Muslims, at least until U.S. soldiers deployed to the far-flung theaters of conflict that made up World War II, came from accounts of the good works of Christian missionaries. Schooling, medical care, relief of misery: such manifestations of Christian love were the American way. Far from supporting imperialism, most Americans who followed the colonial machinations of the British, French, Dutch, and Germans vented feelings of righteous indignation. They shared the European belief in the superiority of Christian civilization, of course; but they did not think that this, in and of itself, justified conquest and colonial subjection.

In the aftermath of World War II, however, a small number of Americans, assisted by a few European scholars, attempted to service new American ambitions to engage with the world by inventing an Orient that was neither Edward Said's sink of slavery, sexuality, and superstition, nor the missionaries' land of unsaved souls. The prominence of Britain's wartime Middle East Supply Centre in Cairo led them to call it the Middle East, a term with an older pedigree but of no previous popularity. The Middle East they imagined centered on a small but mushrooming number of eager, secular Westernizers, men and women who could hardly wait to

get on with the business of dragging their benighted brothers and sisters out of their medieval fatalism and obscurantism and into the modern world. Where British travelers had written of noble savages roaming the desert and corrupt effendis lazing about in coffee houses, the new enthusiasts heralded the advent of neophyte democrats, free market entrepreneurs, and secular intellectuals. Where French sybarites had seen sultry demoiselles, postwar American Middle East analysts sketched a near-term future of unveiled women gaining university degrees and important government positions. As with the earlier Orientalist stereotypes, particular individuals who fit these new stereotypes could indeed be found. But the single-minded focus on noble, forward-looking trees obscured, and continues to obscure, any realistic attempt to look at the forest surrounding them.

These imaginings of a new Middle East are the exact opposite of those put forward by the European artists and intellectuals that Edward Said writes about. But lumping them all together as two different faces of Orientalism, while logically plausible, conceals the degree to which American government policies in the Middle East have been driven for half a century by a new vision: Arabs and Muslims that Americans can love and who will love America in return. The postwar American invention of the "modern" Middle Easterner deserves independent consideration because it shaped a distinctly American view of the region, and because it is still a guiding beacon for policymakers.

Bernard Lewis, in the quotation cited in the last chapter, observed that his postwar generation of Americans and Europeans faced the 1950s with minds shaped by the defeat of fascism and the looming Cold War. That same decade saw a select group of American universities establish the first graduate programs in Middle East Studies. The students who populated those first Middle East studies classrooms, myself included, were too young to have experienced the anti-fascist crusade first-hand, but they felt its impact. When we found out how many of our professors had served in the American or British intelligence during the war,

we did not question whether wartime experience and postwar anxiety might be shaping the ideas we were being taught more than a dispassionate appraisal of Middle Eastern society, culture, and history.

In the clumsily titled *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle East Studies in America,* a bitter book devoted to disparaging the entire Middle East Studies enterprise, Martin Kramer has argued that the key role in founding this enterprise was played by a cabal of academic entrepreneurs bent on pilfering money from the national treasury, and that government officials assessing America's need for foreign area expertise had nothing to do with it.[2] However, the Middle East was not overlooked in intelligence circles, even if first priority went to the Soviet Union and China, and the moneys provided for the study of the region were not procured on false pretenses.

In 1953, President Eisenhower established the Operations Coordinating Board to succeed President Truman's Psychological Strategy Board. Staffed by representatives of the government's top intelligence, defense, and propaganda agencies, this board sought to understand the aspect of global Cold War competition that would later be described as "winning hearts and minds." In 1957 a working group of the Board issued a classified document entitled *Inventory of U.S. Government and Private Organization Activity Regarding Islamic Organizations as an Aspect of Overseas Operations.* The argument of the report appears in its opening statement on "The Status of Islam Today":

1. **Islam is important to the United States:**

   a. *Because it has compatible values.* The present division of the world into two camps is often represented as being along political lines while the true division is between a society in which the individual is motivated by spiritual and ethical values and one in which he is the tool of a materialistic state. Islam and Christianity have a common spiritual base in the belief that a divine power governs

and directs human life and aspirations while communism is pure-
ly atheistic materialism and is hostile to all revealed religion.

b. *The Communists are exploiting Islam.* In spite of basic incompati-
bility, the Soviet and Chinese Communists have far surpassed the
West, including the U.S., in making direct appeals to the Muslims
as Muslims. . . .

c. *It significantly affects the balance of power.* Of the 81 members of the
United Nations, 16 nations have Muslim majorities and there are
32 which have 50,000 or more Muslims . . . [T]he 16 UN members
draw together into a bloc which advances Muslim interests and
may oppose those of the West. But more important is the fact that
Islam is the fastest growing of the world's great religions, due both
to natural increase and missionary activity.

d. *The future direction of Islam is uncertain,* following the negative re-
action experienced from the impact of the West and technology on
Muslim countries. Attraction to materialism has undermined
moral and ethical values—leaving many directionless. Intellectuals
in every Muslim land are searching for answers, and unless a rec-
onciliation is achieved between Islamic principles and current so-
cial and political trends, the spiritual values of Islam will be lost
and the swing toward materialism will be hastened.

e. *The area covered by Islam is vast.* . . . As a militant missionary faith,
the ultimate aim of Islam is world conversion. . . . In the Middle
East stability ranges from good to poor and where instability pre-
vails, the populace responds most readily to inflammatory appeals.
In Southeast Asia the patterns of modern political and social be-
havior are in flux but in this region Muslim political parties are
very strong. In blacker Africa Islam is spreading like flame and
large areas may become increasingly receptive to bold anti-foreign
and anti-Western propaganda.[3]

After a few comments on Islamic religious organization, the in-
ventory goes on to identify factors that favor cooperation with the
West—common beliefs, opposition to atheism, natural friendli-
ness toward strangers—and factors that hinder such cooperation,

including Muslim militancy, cultural differences between Muslims and Christians, Muslim resentment of domination by western civilization, Muslim dissatisfaction with democracy, and Muslim feelings of religious superiority.[4] In assessing American capacity to deal with either set of factors, it observes that missionary efforts are of long standing. "The lives of these Christian missionaries created a favorable, admired image of the American in the minds of the Muslims. More recent and extensive contacts have served to bring this image somewhat into question." American businessmen also became engaged in the region, but "tended to carry on business without regard for local religion and culture. . . . There was no effort to relate American business ethics to local ethics and hence to parallel the missionary approach." Such was the state of affairs through the end of World War II.

> Until 1946 our legations in the area were staffed by a handful of officers and in several countries we had no diplomatic representative. Since then floods of Americans have gone out as official representatives of this country. *Lacking background they have tended to rely on English-speaking, Western-educated intellectuals and to believe that these locals, and all others, reason and act much as they do.* Few have any idea of the role of Islam in life and society, and they are unaware of the relationship between Islam and the present currents of nationalism and anti-foreignism. Lack of adequate training of American personnel in Muslim beliefs and practices is indicated, for example, by training programs which offer no specific instruction on Islam and by the absence of adequate guidelines to the field which give information on Muslim organizations locally. Leaders of these states do underline the fact that they are devout Muslims and stress that all programs of progress and reform must be in line with the principles of Islam.[5] [emphasis added]

Finally, the inventory makes several recommendations, the most pertinent of which says that "regional studies should be initiated next in the order of Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia, or

studies on selected countries in these areas."[6] To this end, it lists as resources the fledgling Middle East Studies programs at Harvard, Princeton, the Johns Hopkins University, University of Chicago, University of Pennsylvania, University of Michigan, Columbia University, and UCLA.[7] So Kramer's charge that university programs in Middle East studies came into being solely because a few professors figured out how to winkle money out of the government purse does not stand up to scrutiny.

A look at the substance of the new Middle East Studies programs will cast kinder light on some of Kramer's other contentions, however. The stress on contemporary Islam contained in the Operations Coordinating Board's inventory did not carry over into the universities' Middle East Studies curricula. Also ignored was the warning about "the negative reaction experienced from the impact of the West and technology on Muslim countries" and the caution that without "a reconciliation . . . between Islamic principles and current social and political trends, the spiritual values of Islam will be lost." Instead, as Kramer rightly observes, the Middle East Studies pioneers became committed to theories of "development" and "modernization" that "served as the natural successor of the missionary tradition, and infused Middle Eastern studies [and all other non-Western studies] with an American optimism. . . . So Middle Eastern studies were not only an academic field to be explored; they were also a message to be preached."[8] Where the Operations Coordinating Board was looking for ways to foil the communists, the Middle East Studies professors, like the missionaries before them, were looking for Arabs and Muslims that Americans could love.

Shaping a Field

Three books written at the close of the 1950s, just as the Board's inventory was being compiled, will illustrate the involvement of Middle East Studies with "development" and "modernization." Not everyone read or assigned these particular works, but every-

one knew more or less what they contained, and at least tacitly took their views as gospel.

The first of them instructed students in the irrelevance of Islam. *The Passing of Traditional Society: Modernizing the Middle East,* published in 1958 by MIT professor Daniel Lerner, began with a survey project sponsored by the prestigious Bureau of Applied Social Research of Columbia University in 1950. The survey was administered in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Syria and Iran following a trial run in Greece. Three queries preface the 117 numbered questions that make up the survey: Do you ever go to the movies? Do you ever read a newspaper? Do you ever listen to the radio?[9] The remainder of the survey deals almost exclusively with practices and attitudes involved with those media. Exceptionally, question 112 solicits personal data, including religious identity and make of radio. Question 111 asks how often the respondent goes to a place of religious worship and how important religion is in day to day life on a scale ranging from "Very important" to "Not important at all." Religion otherwise goes unmentioned. Five multi-part questions sample specific and comparative attitudes toward the United States, Great Britain, and Russia.

The rationale for the narrow range of questioning, and for what Lerner confesses was a planned overrepresentation of movie-goers, radio listeners, and newspaper readers, rests on an underlying theory that associates exposure to modern media with a transition to modernity.[10] The eminent Harvard sociologist David Riesman observes in his introduction to the book that, "Mr. Lerner's cast of characters puts the Moderns on the one side—they are cosmopolitan, urban, literate, usually well-off, and seldom devout—and the Traditionals on the other side—they are just the opposite. But in between he puts several categories of Transitionals: people who share some of the empathy and psychic mobility of the Moderns while lacking essential components of the Modern style, notably literacy."[11] What exactly "empathy" and "psychic mobility" mean in this context was presumably clear to sociologists of the time.

"The direction of change," Lerner explains, "is the same in all Middle East lands; the secular trend is toward mobility—physical, social and psychic mobility. . . . In every Middle East country the transitional people exhibit more of those characteristics we have already identified with the participant style: urbanism, literacy, media consumption and empathic capacity. . . . The rate of social change everywhere is a function . . . of the number of individuals accruing to the transitional stratum. The more persons who are 'going modern' in any country, the higher is its overall performance on the indices of modernity."[12]

All well and good, except that the outcome of the surveys was cooked in advance. Key indices of modernity were predetermined, with modernity itself being defined according to a specific western model:

> Taking the Western model of modernization as a baseline is forced upon us . . . by the tacit assumptions and proclaimed goals which prevail among Middle East spokesmen. That some of these leaders, when convenient for diplomatic maneuvers, denounce the West is politically important and explains why we have chosen to speak of "modernization" rather than "Westernization." Rather more important, Western society still provides the most developed model of societal attributes (power, wealth, skill, rationality) which Middle East spokesmen continue to advocate as their own goal. Their own declared policies and programs set our criteria of modernization. From the West came the stimuli which undermined traditional society in the Middle East; for reconstruction of a modern society that will operate efficiently in the world today, the West is still a useful model. What the West is, in this sense, the Middle East seeks to become.[13]

The theoretical rationale for the book is thus presented as being forced on the author by the declared objectives of the region's "spokesmen" and "leaders." It is reasonable to ask, therefore, who the leaders of that time were.

- Turkey: Following in the footsteps of his mentor, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Ismet Inönü served as president of Turkey until political forces led by Celal Bayar and Adnan Menderes, and drawing substantially on religious unhappiness with Atatürk's secularism, defeated his party in an open election in 1950. The Turkish military deposed Bayar and Menderes ten years later and tried and executed the latter.

- Egypt: King Faruq ruled until he was overthrown by a military coup in 1952. Gamal Abdel Nasser quickly emerged as the leader of the coup, and then of the government.

- Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan: In 1958 a similar military coup overthrew the Iraqi monarchy, headed by the young king Faisal II and his mentor Nuri al-Said. General Abd al-Karim Qasim became Iraq's president. The day after the coup, the president of Lebanon, Camille Chamoun, made an urgent plea to the United States to send troops to protect Lebanon's independence. President Eisenhower complied. Britain and the United States also sent troops to Jordan to protect King Hussein, who had succeeded to the throne after the assassination of his grandfather, King Abdullah, in 1949.

- Syria: Also in 1958, Syria closed out a series of nine presidents and generals that had ruled successively since an initial military coup in 1949 by uniting (until 1961) with Egypt in the United Arab Republic.

- Iran: Mohammed Mossadegh became prime minister in 1951 and gained enormous popular support by nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi fled the country in 1953 but soon returned after Mossadegh was overthrown by a coup arranged in part by British and American intelligence services.

The torrid pace of political events during the 1950s makes it evident that the leaders of that era were far more concerned with grabbing or retaining power than with programs to modernize their societies on a western model. Admittedly, however, this may not have been what they said to the American ambassador. Be that as it may, Lerner seems to prefer "spokesmen" to "leaders" in characterizing the people who allegedly set the agenda for how he

studied the Middle East. So it may not be fair to speak only of leaders. Besides, although King Faruq clearly did not see eye to eye with Colonel Nasser, nor Inönü with Menderes, nor King Faisal with General Qasim, nor Mossadegh with the Shah, perhaps they did all agree on the criteria for modernization.

Unfortunately, Lerner does not reveal the identities of the "spokesmen" whose views he so deeply respected. It may safely be presumed, however, that they did not include Communist labor leaders, Shi'ite ayatollahs, or the monarchs and shaykhs of the Arabian peninsula. Most likely, the spokesmen consisted of "Moderns," that is, government, business, and educational figures who were committed to closer ties with the West. The Operations Coordinating Board inventory intimates as much when it describes (and deplores) an over-reliance by U.S. diplomats on "English-speaking, Western-educated intellectuals." These individuals affirmed to their American contacts what both parties ardently believed and hoped for, namely, that the Middle East was irrevocably launched on a rapid process of modernization based on the western model. Lerner evidently believed the fantasy that the "Moderns" were about to inherit the earth and designed his study to cloak that fantasy with pseudo-scientific fact.

No one would deny that there were pro-western "Moderns" living in many Middle Eastern countries during the 1950s. Nor can anyone doubt that literacy and media exposure have the effect of changing people's attitudes. What is in question is the trajectory of change. If Lerner had included among his "spokesmen" people like the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, who became a militant, vocal, and highly literate proponent of revolutionary Islamic activism after a sojourn in the United States in 1948–1950, he would have observed a very different, and deeply anti-western, outlook on modernization. He would have seen the same thing if he had considered the abundant writings of the Pakistani religious activist Abu al-Ala Maududi, which began to circulate in Egypt in 1951. Over the succeeding decades, the views of these and similar Muslim religious activists exerted greater pressure for change than the prog-

nostications of the modernist spokesmen whom Lerner relied on for his study.

This is only one book, of course, but it illustrates three important aspects of Middle East Studies in their formative years: gigantic scale, inattention to Islam, and the assumption that western modernity is the only desirable future.

First, the scale of Lerner's enterprise was immense—six countries speaking three entirely different languages, and the assumption that the entire Middle East was involved in a single historical process. This assumption that modernity is homogeneous contrasted nicely with the similarly popular idea, advanced by the anthropologist Carleton Coon in his widely assigned *Caravan: The Story of the Middle East,* that every traditional Middle Eastern society was a heterogeneous "mosaic" of subnational ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups.[14] As students we learned that tradition was a murky and impenetrable maze, and modernization a straight path to a luminous future.

Secondly, while Islam is ignored empirically in the questionnaire that forms the foundation of the book, Lerner confidently dismisses it as being irrelevant to modernization:

> As the intellectual effort to reformulate Islam in a manner more suitable to modernizing society became inhibited, a psychic gap of serious proportions opened in the Middle East. In some lands, aphasia has gone further than in others. Egypt, to take an extreme case, seems increasingly captive of a false position. Seeking hegemony over the Arab area and primacy among Muslims everywhere, Egypt has sought to erect a unifying symbolism on the majority Arab-Muslim syndrome. But this corresponds poorly to observable reality and provides no guidance to those men-in-motion who most need new words to match their new ways.[15]

Thirdly, western-style modernization is identified without convincing rationale as the conscious goal of Middle Eastern society. No alternative way of engaging the modern world receives serious

consideration, nor is any attention paid to the political and cultural critique of the West that grew ever louder from 1950 onward, and was a specific concern of the authors of the Operations Coordinating Board's 1957 inventory.

Yet Lerner does not fit the model of Said's Orientalists. His inventive powers focus on his "men-in-motion," not on romantic tribesmen, steamy harems, or sleazy city Arabs. Lerner devotes most of his attention to describing a type of Middle Easterner that Americans might admire and like. (Anthony Grey would say love.) His Transitionals are modern, western, and on the move. They are so clearly, in Lerner's mind, the people who will shape the future that he scarcely needs mention the exotic Orientals of bygone generations.

From our perspective in the first generation of students engaged in Middle East Studies, the views of Lerner and other members of what we now call "the greatest generation" carried great weight. Ourselves neophytes with little or no prior knowledge of the Middle East, we had no basis on which to criticize what we were taught. Classmates from Middle Eastern countries or from families native to the region were few. On the rare occasions when we did encounter native speakers of Arabic, other than our instructor, the discovery that the classical language learned in class bore scant relation to the everyday spoken language was profoundly dispiriting. Five years of Harvard Arabic and I couldn't express myself in Beirut without causing chuckles!

Yet we were expected to emerge from two years of graduate training with sufficient area expertise to qualify for positions in government or business. The scope of the knowledge deemed pertinent to the field was immense, embracing more than twenty countries, three language areas, and an array of academic disciplines ranging from economics and anthropology to history, political science, and language. What made this impossibly broad curriculum conceivable was the postwar self-confidence of the professors drafted into the task of inventing Middle East Studies, and the all-encompassing utility of theoretical perspectives like

Lerner's. Although Middle East Studies did not enjoy the respect of scholars with deep grounding in the traditional academic disciplines, our esprit de corps was high, as was our trust in the soundness of what we were taught and our unwillingness to find fault with our professors.

A second example of the broad canvas on which the writers of the 1950s sketched their outlines of the Middle East is *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa*, published by Princeton professor Manfred Halpern in 1963. Halpern discusses his methodological approach in a Foreword:

> This study rarely pauses to make explicit the methodological framework of its analysis, or the concepts and hypotheses that underlie its conclusion. . . . It is not based merely on existing facts. It does not say simply, for example, that the Middle East has few political parties, that there is some talk, though less effort, to form a few more, and that it would therefore be premature to estimate just what political parties might be able to accomplish. The book goes further and asks what role parties must play if they are to be effective in creating a new political culture in the midst of rapid social transformation. . . .
>
> We are here exploring some sixteen countries that have experienced similar problems in passing from an Islamic past into the modern age. . . .
>
> The two methods of analysis on which this book chiefly relies can help us to enhance the range, accuracy, and relevancy of interpretation. They cannot compensate for our ignorance of facts, and much of what is said here still rests on selected examples rather than full and complete evidence. Such examples, nonetheless, are intended in every case to be a convincing illustration that data in support of a particular hypothesis do exist. They are offered on the assumption that further research would reveal corroborative evidence in other parts of the region.[16]

Halpern's confession that he takes for granted that the region is in the process of "passing from an Islamic past into the modern

age" does not lessen the degree to which he is prepared to manipulate data in envisaging a Middle East that fits his vision of the future. Here is how he addresses the consensus among observers that the region lacks a middle class suitable for leading the way into the modern age, a problem that Lerner solved by discovering, through his survey, various tiers of "Transitionals":

> In our unproductive search for middle classes in underdeveloped areas, the fault has been in our expectations. We have taken too parochial a view of the structure of the middle class. . . . Leadership in all areas of Middle Eastern life is increasingly being seized by a class of men inspired by non-traditional knowledge, and it is being clustered around a core of salaried civilian and military politicians, organizers, administrators, and experts.[17]

Halpern, the social science theorist, joins Lerner, the social science empiricist, in assuming that a process of modernization is underway, and in seeking to identify its leadership elements. Both perspectives looked with guarded optimism on the military coups that rocked the region in the 1950s because they confidently counted on the officer corps—"men on the move" for Lerner or the "salaried new middle class" for Halpern—to blaze a trail of modernization. That the trail would actually lead to police state oppression came as a sad surprise.

Halpern also joins Lerner in affirming the haplessness of Islam:

> As long as the Moslem holds that the comprehensive order revealed by God in the seventh century and subsequently hallowed by tradition is final and cannot be amended, he will be unable to study the world independently and scientifically in order to fashion his own world himself. . . . The Moslem [unlike the Christian] emerges from an age in which tyranny, anarchy, hunger, and death seemed often beyond remedy, an environment helping to reinforce his religious dogma that God was all-powerful, and that the moments of life were not a succession of cause and effect but separate God-created miracles.[18]

While Halpern hints that "a reformation and renaissance are well under way in the Middle East,"[19] he doesn't say what it consists of. Instead, his chapter on contemporary Islam concentrates on the failures of reformist Islam, the triumph of secular leadership, and the threat of neo-Islamic totalitarianism.[20]

The Middle East Studies lecturers of the 1960s, following Lerner, Halpern, and others, taught that Westernization was inevitable. Consequently, it was our duty as students—actually, as a medievalist, I was exempted from this part of the curriculum—to discover ways of studying this miraculous transformation and to identify and help the types of people who were making it happen. That same duty is being preached to fledgling colonial administrators in Iraq today.

Islam, as understood by virtually everybody, appeared at best a historical relic destined to pass away as a component of "tradition." At worst it had a threatening potential for totalitarianism. In either case, Islam was not an approved topic of study, except for medievalists. This theory-based dismissal of any positive view of contemporary Islam contributed substantially to the fact that between the end of World War II and the Iranian Revolution of 1979, scarcely a handful of books on contemporary Islam were written by American-trained scholars. Of those that were written, two dealt with Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, the foremost example of Islam as threat.

The search for Middle Easterners we could like—because they were like us—put blinders on the Middle East Studies enterprise from the very outset. The ideological lenses through which Said's Orientalists once gazed upon a land of exoticism were reground in postwar America to produce a differently distorted vision of men-on-the-move. Invisible between the two imaginative constructions lay other alternatives that proved in time to be more important. The middle ground of people deeply wedded to their religious traditions, but eager to share in at least some of the benefits of the modern world, gave birth to the Iranian Revolution, a multitude of Islamic movements and political parties, and, sadly, the jihadist plots of Osama

bin Laden. But with rare exception, Islamic activism went unobserved and unanalyzed in the early days of Middle East Studies, and remains disturbingly puzzling to the present day.

The exaggerated role that modernization played in postwar thinking stemmed from the idea that capitalism, calling itself "the free world," was destined to compete worldwide with communism in offering ways of becoming modern. In the Middle East case, the inventory by the Operations Coordinating Board portrayed the world of Islam as both a spiritual and material battlefield in the Cold War. John C. Campbell's *Defense of the Middle East: Problems of American Policy*, published in 1958, drove this lesson home for students of Middle East studies.[21] Campbell was the Director of Political Studies of the Council on Foreign Relations, a venerable New York institution long associated with sober and liberal assessments of world problems. His book reflects the deliberations of a Council study group that included virtually all of America's Middle East political scientists of the pioneer generation.

Like Lerner and Halpern, Campbell's field of view encompasses the entire Middle East, but his focus is on countering Soviet imperialism. Modernization is assumed, but not emphasized: "Still, the stirrings of every one of the Middle East nations reflect an urge that goads them all: the urge to build a new society, to take their place in the modern world, without becoming the instruments of others or losing their national and cultural identity in the process."[22] Campbell's view of Islam similarly subordinates it to his main theme:

> Certainly Islam cannot be counted upon to serve as such a barrier [to Soviet expansion]. The theory that communism and Soviet influence could never make inroads in the Moslem world because they are materialistic and atheistic has not been borne out. Religion does have a significant place in Middle Eastern society. It colors both popular and official attitudes. But it does not establish an absolute immunity to a political virus such as fascism or communism. Communist theo-

ry does have certain superficial parallels with Islamic dogma, and the promise of a better material life is not inconsistent with it. Above all, the impact of the modern world on Islam has produced two major trends which tend to open the door to Communist influence: first, the inability of traditional doctrines and institutions to hold the loyalty of the intellectual leaders and the new generation bent on finding a way out of material backwardness; and second, the revulsion against the West which, while often reinforcing the sense of dedication to Islam, has often created also a sense of identification with whatever theories and political forces were hostile to the West.[23]

Despite their tunnel vision, the three works described above, along with a handful of others, including Bernard Lewis' *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* and Carleton Coon's *Caravan*, add up to a major intellectual accomplishment. Their grand and tendentious theories and generalizations laid the foundation for a Middle East Studies enterprise that otherwise would have floundered. Applauding the founders of the field for their enterprise and audacity, however, cannot conceal the fact that the limitations and unreality of some of their ideas continue to distort American understanding of the Muslim world down to the present day.

On to Baghdad

Some four decades have elapsed since the publication of these theoretical visions. Wars and revolutions, oil shocks and peace processes, terrorist bombings and *intifadas,* have come and gone, each dramatic event buffeting the community of Middle East specialists in academia and government, and more often than not falsifying the predictions they had put forward in the aftermath of the previous crisis. No one would argue that they got things right more often than they got things wrong. Some of Martin Kramer's fulminations in *Ivory Towers on Sand* hit the mark. Those scholars in the 1980s who (correctly) saw in political Islam a promising route to a democratic future *did* fail to predict the potency of religious

terrorism. And those who (again correctly) looked for the emergence of "civil society" as a harbinger of liberal evolution *did* underestimate the tenacity of police-state oppression. What Kramer uncharitably leaves out is the failure of almost all predictions about the Middle East during the second half of the twentieth century, including those visualizing peace and region-wide prosperity arising from Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, those trumpeting the withdrawal of religion from the sphere of public affairs, and those predicting an enthusiastic welcome for American soldiers in Iraq.

Failures in prediction, in Kramer's view, can best be dealt with by terminating government funding for Middle East Studies, and paying greater attention—if that is possible—to the predictions of the think-tank that published his book, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP). What might this lead to with regard to Islam? A WINEP "Special Policy Forum Report" dated April 10, 2003 quoted Daniel Pipes, Kramer's colleague and mentor, as saying, "If militant Islam is the problem; moderate Islam is the solution. The world is facing not a clash of civilizations, but rather a struggle between Muslim moderates and militants. . . . The time has come for Washington to encourage democratic development, but in small, gradual steps. This means building civil societies in which the rule of law operates, freedom of speech and assembly develop, local elections take place, and so forth."[24] These recommendations sound suspiciously like the optimistic 1980s attitudes toward moderate Islam and civil society that Kramer attacked in his book as naïve and apologetic.

The failure of hard-won expertise, whether deployed by Middle East Studies professors or by Martin Kramer and Daniel Pipes, to produce more credible and consistent predictions points to fundamental misunderstandings at the very core of the enterprise. To be sure, other explanations for failed forecasts have their appeal. Some maintain that hopeful prospects have repeatedly been derailed by the failure of successive American administrations to give full support to Palestinian aspirations, and to force liberalization on heavy-handed dictators and monarchs. These paths not taken—

in practical terms, perhaps, never more than dreams—may well have made Middle Eastern politics more predictable. A socialization of oil wealth across all the nations of the Muslim world, and a preference for spending it on improving life in petroleum-poor as well as petroleum-rich states, as opposed to squandering untold billions on armaments, might have helped as well. But lamenting lost opportunities contributes little to the ongoing problem of trying to understand the world we face today.

The question is whether we are willing to jettison the assumptions of the 1950s, or whether we will forever be on the lookout for men-on-the-move who can remake the Muslim world in our image. A look at what has been written since September 11, 2001 is not encouraging. It is as difficult today as it was in 1960 to find a point of intersection between American policy and the worldview of tens, if not hundreds, of millions of Muslims who want their governments and the basic institutions of their societies to reflect a Muslim moral and political order. This lacuna does not stem from a paucity of works by Muslims describing and advocating one or another version of such an order. They are legion. Nor are non-Muslim scholars inattentive to Islamic matters in the way they were before the Iranian Revolution. Books offering new looks at Islam—this one included—appear every month. The problem is integrating this mass of information about Islam with the perspectives of those charged with determining government policies. The policy community, and the scholars on its fringes, continue to shun alternative visions of modernity that might embody a Muslim rather than a western perspective. At worst, they posit Islamic politics as a malignant and inveterate foe, debating the best strategies for holding the Muslims at bay while simultaneously whining, "Why do they hate us?" At best, they acknowledge a need to be sensitive to local cultural norms, and even to moderate Islam, without figuring out how such sensitivity can be manifested in practice.

Middle East Studies began, as we have seen, in the shadow of the Cold War. Its birthright included a mandate to search for ways

to persuade Muslims to follow the free world route to modernity rather than the garden path to dictatorship proffered by the communists. The fact that the free world path led to dictatorships as bad as any produced by communism—in my view, as expressed in the preceding chapters, a result of the long-term workings of a distinctively Muslim political system—did not invalidate the mandate, because the ultimate goal was the defeat of communism, not the salvation of the Muslim world.

Despite the upheavals that have rocked the region since 1979, the mandate of 1957 has not changed much. The communists are gone, but we are still asking how we can persuade Muslims to follow a western model of modernity. With the disappearance of the competing socialist model of modernization, which was just as western in its roots as the free world model, the alternative today is not "going communist," but becoming a "failed state," or even a "rogue state." Where Cold War thinking embodied a choice of modernization models, post–Cold War modernization offers poverty, chaos, and computer illiteracy as the only alternative. Policy circles seem incapable of imagining a Muslim model of modernity. Ironically, the modernity that emerged in Japan after five years of American occupation was distinctly Japanese. For a brief moment, at the height of Japan's economic boom, some Americans even speculated that it might be a superior modernity. Those who advanced the Japanese occupation as a model for postwar Iraq, however, seem to have baseball, Hello Kitty, and Elvis impersonators in the back of their minds rather than women in headscarves and turbaned mullahs. Western triumphalism clouded our understanding of Japan then just as it clouds our understanding of Islam now. Moreover, our inability to imagine alternative positive futures for a region whose future is increasingly in American hands inevitably vitalizes Muslim charges of imperialism. Like latter day missionaries, we want the Muslims to love us, not just for what we can offer in the way of a technological society, but for who we are—for our values. But we refuse to countenance the thought of loving them for their values.

An observation penned by John C. Campbell in 1958 retains its salience some four decades later:

> We shall have to put much seemingly unnecessary effort into convincing people, who should know as much from what they can see, that Western imperialism is a spent and dying force. We shall have to proclaim, more times than seems sane, our adherence to the principles of national sovereignty and noninterference in the internal affairs of others, and to flatter those who regard these principles as the answer to the world's problems.[25]

A contemporary version of the same sentiment appeared in a 2002 exhortation by John Brown, a veteran U.S. diplomat whose views are shared by other senior diplomats and communications professionals, urging more government investment in public diplomacy:

> In the war on terrorism, for example, public diplomacy's diverse tools can have an enormous impact in the Muslim world. First, a truthful and accurate information campaign, if both persuasive and credible, can set the record straight about U.S. policy and intentions. . . .
>
> Finally, given the lack of knowledge about U.S. culture and the tendency to equate it with violence and pornography, there is a special role for serious, but not solemn, cultural activities pertaining to the United States that would appeal to Muslim audiences, especially the young.[26]

The warning about "the negative reaction experienced from the impact of the West and technology on Muslim countries" contained in the Operations Coordinating Board's 1957 inventory retains its salience as well. The problem is not the technology. No group is more assiduous than Osama bin Laden's jihadists in exploiting the possibilities opened up by modern media. The problem is the proposition that technology and western social and governmental practices are an indivisible package. On this

score, decades of frustration in selling America to the Muslim world have produced a somewhat deeper awareness of Muslim sales resistance.

> [T]he United States is a country, not a product, a news event or a movie, and its government and people need to explain themselves abroad in an in-depth manner to maintain and expand their influence in the international arena. *Even with global communications and "Americanization," other nations will continue to have their distinct cultures and ways of looking at reality; for our own national survival in an age of terror, we cannot afford to think that others will eventually become "like us" to the point where there is no need to persuade or communicate with them through public diplomacy.* [emphasis added][27]

This salutary acknowledgement of "distinct cultures and ways of looking at reality" still falls short of asking whether there might be merit in some of those other ways of looking at reality. In a nutshell, is the Muslim charge that the West is anti-Muslim true? And if it is true, should the West do something about it? Or do the Muslims just have to grit their teeth and endure this hostility in order to get those western goods, whether technological, ideological, or economic, that they find desirable?

Pronouncements by top government officials, like former CIA Director James Woolsey, who has embraced the notion that the War on Terror is World War IV—World War III was the Cold War—encourage Muslims to feel that they are collectively the target of American wrath:

> Clearly, the terror war is never going to go away until we change the face of the Middle East, which is what we are beginning to do in Iraq. That is a tall order. But it's not as tall an order as what we have already accomplished in the previous world wars.
>
> Change remains to be undertaken in that one part of the world that has historically not had democracy, which has reacted angrily against intrusions from the outside—the Arab Middle East.

Saddam Hussein, autocrats from the Saudi royal family and ter-
rorists alike must realize that now, for the fourth time in 100 years,
America has been awakened. This country is on the march. We did-
n't choose this fight—the Baathist fascists, the Islamist Shia and the
Islamist Sunni did—but we're in it. And being on the march, there's
only one way we're going to be able to win it. It's the way we won
World War I, fighting for Wilson's 14 points. It is the way we won
World War II, fighting for Churchill and Roosevelt's Atlantic Char-
ter. It is the way we won World War III, fighting for the noble ideas
best expressed by President Reagan but also very importantly at the
beginning by President Truman.

This war, like the world wars of the past, is not a war of us against
them. It is not a war between countries. It is a war of freedom against
tyranny.[28]

The distortions of history contained in these few paragraphs—
most sadly the exclusion from the roster of American stalwarts
against communism of Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, John-
son, Nixon, and Carter, all of whom confronted communist mili-
tary expansion—are emblematic of the degree to which ideology
is coming to prevail over common sense in the American policy
community. Americans did not fight World War I for Wilson's
Fourteen Points, a policy proclaimed only in January 1918, nine
months after the U.S. Intervention. Nor did Americans fight World
War II for the Atlantic Charter. The pact between Roosevelt and
Churchill, signed four months before Pearl Harbor, made no men-
tion of Japan or of America becoming a combatant nation. More
importantly, both the Fourteen Points and the Atlantic Charter
proclaimed, as the latter put it, "the right of all peoples to choose
the form of government under which they will live." As the course
of history unfolded, respect for this right took second place to im-
perialist ambition. Great Britain and France assumed control of
the Middle East after World War I, and the signatories to the
United Nations Declaration of 1942, which embodied the Atlantic
Charter, included imperialist nations like Great Britain, Belgium,

and the Netherlands that had no intention of freeing their colonies at war's end.

This historical failure of the imperialist countries to fulfill the principles for which the first two world wars were allegedly fought leads Woolsey to a phenomenally obtuse conclusion: "Change remains to be undertaken in that one part of the world that has historically not had democracy, which has reacted angrily against intrusions from the outside—the Arab Middle East." By "intrusions from the outside," can Woolsey be referring to anything other than imperialist occupation and manipulation? Does he really believe that it was wrong of the people of the Middle East to "react angrily" to these betrayals of wartime promises? One can only hope that his words were simply ill-considered, in the fashion of so many statements made by American leaders that deeply offend Middle Eastern and Muslim audiences.

Capping his apparent endorsement of imperialism, and seemingly blind to the hypocrisy it represents with respect to the ideals he claims to espouse, Woolsey proceeds to list our enemies in World War IV: on the one hand, "Saddam Hussein, autocrats from the Saudi royal family and terrorists;" on the other, "Baathist fascists, the Islamist Shia and the Islamist Sunni." Who has he left out? First, U.S.-supported governments like those of Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, and Turkey that employ police state measures to suppress political participation by Muslim activists seeking access to the electoral system. Second, the "English-speaking, Western-educated intellectuals" already mentioned in 1957 as the favored interlocutors of American diplomats and catapulted into prominence—often after spending decades in the United States as émigrés—as the potential founding fathers of Middle Eastern democracy after the conquest of Iraq in 2003. No Muslim can be sure what Woolsey and like-minded officials mean when they use the word "Islamist," but it does not take a particularly skeptical mind to surmise that the United States is no more prepared today to tolerate an Islamic road to modernity than it was when Muslim revolutionaries deposed the tyrannical Shah of Iran in 1979.

For adumbrations of a more pluralistic and less rigid viewpoint, one can turn to a United Nations document entitled "Arab Human Development Report 2002." This report gained wide and deserved publicity for its frank assessment of conditions in an Arab world whose cultural and educational landscape it presents as unremittingly bleak and stagnant. It was authored by a group of Arab intellectuals, however, not by American officialdom, and its United Nations auspices further distance it from the world of American policy-making. Though unquestionably secular in tone, the report nevertheless exhibits an awareness that large segments of the Arab world look at politics and society through religious eyes, and an appreciation of the fact that this optic cannot be ignored. It begins with a blunt but moderately worded statement of the problem:

> There is a substantial lag between Arab countries and other regions in terms of participatory governance. . . . This freedom deficit undermines human development and is one of the most painful manifestations of lagging political development. While de jure acceptance of democracy and human rights is enshrined in constitutions, legal codes and government pronouncements, de facto implementation is often neglected and, in some cases, deliberately disregarded.
>
> In most cases, the governance pattern is characterized by a powerful executive branch that exerts significant control over all other branches of the state, being in some cases free from institutional checks and balances. Representative democracy is not always genuine and sometimes absent. Freedoms of expression and association are frequently curtailed. Obsolete norms of legitimacy prevail.[29]

The opening toward Islam comes in a section entitled "An Open Culture of Excellence":

> Culture and values are the soul of development. They provide its impetus, facilitate the means needed to further it, and substantially define people's vision of its purposes and ends. Culture and values are

instrumental in the sense that they help to shape people's daily hopes, fears, ambitions, attitudes and actions, but they are also formative because they mould people's ideals and inspire their dreams for a fulfilling life for themselves and future generations. There is some debate in Arab countries about whether culture and values promote or retard development. Ultimately, however, values are not the servants of development; they are its wellspring. . . .

Governments—Arab or otherwise—cannot decree their people's values; indeed, governments and their actions are partly formed by national cultures and values. . . .

Traditional culture and values, including traditional Arab culture and values, can be at odds with those of the globalizing world. Given rising global interdependence, the most viable response will be one of openness and constructive engagement whereby Arab countries both contribute to and benefit from globalization. The values of democracy also have a part to play in this process of resolving differences between cultural traditionalism and global modernity. Different people will have different preferences, some welcoming global influences, others resenting their pervasive impact. In a democratic framework, citizens can decide how to appraise and influence cultural changes, taking account of a diversity of views and striking a balance between individual liberty and popular preferences in the difficult choices involved.[30]

Half a century after Daniel Lerner helped embed modernization theory at the heart of Middle East studies, the two score Arab intellectuals who contributed to this study, some of them surely the sons and daughters of his "men-on-the-move" of 1950, announce clearly and politely that as "spokesmen" for their societies they do not concur with Lerner's bedrock assumption that "what the West is . . . the Middle East seeks to become." Under the discreet veil of "culture and values," Islam has regained a place at the negotiating table. The question is whether Lerner's conceit that "the Western model of modernization as a baseline is forced upon us . . . by the tacit assumptions and proclaimed goals which prevail among Mid-

dle East spokesmen" still survives in American educational and policy circles. It was one thing to aver in 1950 that the desires of the people of the Middle East—putatively to become just like us— should dictate the analyses of change carried out by American scholars. It is quite another to propose that if the voters in a Middle Eastern or Muslim country desire a government that will observe Muslim norms and values, Americans should look with equanimity upon that outcome.

A Conversation

It may appear that my line of argument has gotten lost, but it's just been hiding. Let me flush it into the open. Before World War II, American missionaries in the Middle East looked for souls to save. They usually couldn't save them because local laws prohibited converting Muslims, but they could at least bestow some Christian love upon them, and seek to be loved in return.

After the war, the founders of Middle East Studies ignored recommendations that they focus on contemporary Islam and focused instead on Middle Easterners trying to act like westerners. There weren't a lot of these, just as there hadn't been a lot of converts, but the conviction was strong that those few would be pioneers in bringing western modernity to the region. In their heart of hearts, the founders believed, Middle Easterners—in fact, everyone in the nonwestern world—wanted their societies to be like those in the West.

The people we supported as agents of modernity became tyrants, their societies police states. A surer grasp of the political culture of Islam might have warned us of this, but we were infatuated with men on the move. Though we were disappointed when they did not act as our theorists had predicted, we did not give up on them.

The Iranian Revolution proved particularly trying. We loved the Shah, and he loved us in return. But he was a tyrant, and his subjects wanted a voice in government. Lacking a better understanding

of Islam, we couldn't understand why so many Iranians thought that turbaned mullahs could lead them, much less design a democratic government. After all, modernizers were supposed to be people just like us.

Then Osama bin Laden came along and confirmed the theories, at least in the reckoning of analysts who believe that he and his followers hate the modern world. But this left us with a confusing picture. Some religious activists seemed to want elections and some sort of integration into the modern world. Or did they? Others seemed to hate western civilization and yearn for theocracy? Or did they?

Islam, which the theorists had dismissed as a fading vestige of the past, became a source of puzzlement. Could we trust them? Could we like them? Could they like us? The aftermath of the second Gulf War proved a test. Ahmad Chelabi, a well-tailored, well-healed friend of the American administration, was the classic man on the move. But the Iraqis inexplicably didn't seem to care for him. The Shi'ite mullahs in Najaf, on the other hand, had thousands of enthusiastic followers. But we had no idea what they really stood for. Again, our failure to comprehend the centuries-old dynamic of Islamic political theory clouded our vision.

The problem is vexing, but it is not new. At a conference on the twenty-first century held in Japan in 1993, a distinguished Columbia University colleague of unimpeachably liberal outlook was discussing the 1992 Algerian coup that suspended parliamentary elections, which the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) had been sure to win. The coup had troubled him when it occurred, he said, but on reflection he had decided that stopping the election was better than allowing the men who assassinated Anwar Sadat to come to power. Pointing out that Algeria was not Egypt and that the FIS and the violent fringe group that carried out the assassination were unconnected did not dissuade him from his view. His unalterable opinion was that terrorists acting in the name of Islam were indistinguishable from Muslim political parties seeking access to the electoral process.

Lumping religious terrorists and religious democrats together appeals to many Americans. But even people whose unfriendliness toward Islam is beyond doubt don't always seem sure. The WINEP *Special Policy Forum Report* cited above quotes Daniel Pipes: "The United States can promote a modern, moderate, good-neighborly version of Islam, but it cannot on its own ensure the ascendancy of such a vision. Only Muslims can do this." It sounds like we should be looking for *good* Muslims to love. Then he continues in a more characteristic vein: "There is no such thing as a moderate Islamist, for all Islamists share the same long-term goals; they differ only over means."[31]

Pipes' fellow panelist, independent scholar and former CIA analyst Graham Fuller, follows with a friendlier point of view:

> Islamism is not analogous to fascism or communism. Rather, it is a religious, political, and cultural framework that addresses the concerns of Muslims, serving as a more attractive alternative to past Arab ideological movements that failed to deliver what ordinary Muslims need. The Islamist phenomenon is a result of global trends toward modernization, a response to the problems and aspirations of the modern world. Islamism is part of the universal struggle to make sense of a troubling world, in this case using religion. . . . Democratization will be a long process . . . Muslim populations have been penned in for years, and when the gates open, it will be a rough ride. Islamists will win the first elections, but will they win the second? If Islamists do not deliver once in power, they will fail.[32]

The general American outlook on Islam pays little heed to quarrels among specialists, including those aired at clairvoyant think-tank conferences. Virtually all thoughtful Americans shudder at the idea of Islamists forming governments, even through free elections. But they are generally hazy on what the word "Islamist" actually means. Liberals shudder because of the illiberalism they see at the heart of Islamic movements. Conservatives shudder because of the anti-Americanism they see in those same movements. Both

consider the separation of church and state sacrosanct, even though they know little about the relations between mosque and state in Muslim history.

The idea of a Muslim political party frightens most Americans, even though parties labeled Christian Democrat have formed governments in several European countries. Closer to home, many of those who want Islam out of politics support the political activities of Christian fundamentalist groups in the United States and/or Jewish religious parties in Israel. They sometimes deplore the specific policy prescriptions of Christian and Jewish political activists, but they invariably defend their right to stand for election.

Does acceptance of Christian and Jewish politics and rejection of Muslim politics have a credible rationale? Or is this split vision simply anti-Muslim prejudice? And what of the many Muslims who share the American distaste for Islamic politics? Calling them "men on the move" sounds antique. But is Daniel Pipes' vision of anti-Islamist Muslims who can construct an America-approved "modern, moderate, good-neighborly version of Islam" any different?

A conversation I had—somewhat reconstructed—with a male Moroccan graduate student at Columbia, is representative of stand-offs I've encountered in trying to assess Muslim attitudes:

STUDENT: Professor, you've said that you consider the coup that prevented the FIS from winning the Algerian parliamentary elections a terrible mistake. But how do you respond to the oft-made claim that if they had won, it would have been a case of "one man, one vote, one time"? Moreover, wouldn't they have curtailed the freedom of Algerian women?

PROFESSOR: Let's take the "one man, one vote, one time" charge first. It's obvious that in any country that is holding free elections, particularly if it is for the first time, there is no way of knowing whether the winners of the election will relinquish power when their term in office ends. Indeed, there are many cases of presidents and parties not leaving office. "One man, one vote, one

time" has been the sad story in a number of African and Latin American countries. In the Middle East, elections in Syria, Iraq, Tunisia, Egypt, and, for a long time, Turkey, have simply served to perpetuate the rule of single-party regimes. This is not solely a non-European problem. Think of Louis Napoleon, Adolf Hitler, and various post–World War II communist regimes in eastern Europe. Indeed, in American history there were people who feared that George Washington, like Mustafa Kemal Atatürk or Gamal Abdel Nasser, would never give up the presidency once he was elected. Yet no one ever bans the most egregious offenders, generals and heads of nationalist parties, from running for office. Why? Because it is assumed that the risk of an elected government subsequently subverting the electoral process is a risk worth taking in the interest of establishing democracy. So why are Islamist parties singled out for suspicion? There is no historical precedent for ascribing such malign motives to them.

STUDENT: But don't they say that they want to create an Islamic republic and monopolize power?

PROFESSOR: Sometimes they do, but various communist parties have similarly aspired to create fully communist regimes. In some countries, this aspiration has led to communists being barred from running for office. But in some countries where communist parties have won elections, such as India, they have neither created totalitarian regimes nor refused to relinquish office when defeated in subsequent elections. In the United States we do not bar communists from running for office, but we make a sworn commitment to uphold the Constitution a condition for serving.

STUDENT: But take the case of Iran. Parties that do not support an Islamic republic are excluded from elections, and candidates for office have to be approved by a committee of mullahs. If the FIS had been elected, they would have emulated the Iranians and created an Islamic republic in Algeria.

PROFESSOR: What you say about Iran is certainly true, but the Islamic Republic of Iran did not come into being through the election of an Islamist party running against non-Islamist opponents.

It came into being through a revolution, followed by a constitutional referendum. We have to distinguish between ordinary elections and constitutional referenda. If the FIS had won in Algeria, it's altogether possible that it would have sought the establishment of an Islamic republic. Two possible strategies come to mind: a military coup, which would have been hard to pull off given the power of secularists in the military command; or promulgation of a new constitution, which was possible but would have required a massive parliamentary majority. Possibly the majority of the Algerian people would subsequently have voted for an Islamic republic; but if they had, and if the military had permitted that vote to be implemented, on what democratic basis can you or I say that the Algerians should have been denied the opportunity to choose that form of government?

STUDENT: On the basis that an Islamic republic would have denied a voice in government to minority views and would have oppressed the people—and women in particular—by forcing them to abide by religious rules.

PROFESSOR: What you say is possible, but it is not necessarily certain. An Islamic republic can take different constitutional forms. In Iran, the constitution guarantees parliamentary representation for certain religious minorities, but permits oppression of Baha'ism, which is not recognized as an independent religion. Women vote and run for office, but they suffer restrictions on their public behavior. These are serious imperfections and ones that call to mind the age-old fear of an electoral majority suppressing minority rights. But this is not solely a problem with Islam. The authors of the American constitution, for example, unlike the major Islamist parties throughout the Muslim world today, made no provision for women voting and did not prohibit African slavery. Their democracy was not for everyone. Moreover, one has to wonder whether in 1790 a royalist would have been able to run for election in the United States on a platform of returning the country to British rule. In more recent times, it is evident that Turkey has devoted as much effort to denying voters the choice of religious elec-

toral candidates as Iran has expended on excluding royalists and secularists from standing as candidates.

STUDENT: That may be true, but clearly there is a difference. The Turkish policy arises from a desire to separate church and state, a principle that is at the heart of democracy, while the Iranians are imposing religion on everyone whether they want it or not.

PROFESSOR: Separation of church and state has assuredly become an important principle of European and American democracy. But it was not originally a cornerstone of the U.S. Constitution. The bar on legislation establishing an official religion appears in the First Amendment, adopted two years after the Constitution, and it applied only to the federal government until the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 extended the principles of the Bill of Rights to the states. As the federally recognized territorial governor of Utah between 1850 and 1857, Brigham Young certainly did not change his views on the dominant role of religion in public affairs. As for how Americans have understood the "established religion" clause, interpretation has changed over the past two centuries as the United States has become more secular. Yet the storm of protest that met a Federal Court's removal of the words "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance attests to the continuing objections of many people of faith to the most rigorous efforts to enforce separation.

STUDENT: We're not talking here about the Pledge of Allegiance or prayer in schools. Islam is not like Catholicism and Protestantism in the United States. Islam has dominated the outlook of people in the Middle East for so many centuries that permitting it to play a role in government will inevitably lead to the imposition of a religious state and the end of democracy.

PROFESSOR: The same might have been said of the hold eighteenth-century Christianity had on popular sentiment at the dawn of democratic government in Europe and America. The democrats of the French Revolution tried to eliminate the influence of the church in all aspects of society. Their anticlerical approach became a model for the Europeanizing Middle Eastern governments of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By contrast, American democrats

erected a firewall between church and state, but retained the tradition of tax exemptions for religious bodies and did nothing to curtail their social and educational activities. Following a third path, English democrats—so long as they weren't Catholic—saw nothing wrong with having the Church of England as the established faith of the land, this being the form of church-state relationship that the American Bill of Rights explicitly prohibited. In Israel, finally, religious political parties wield their influence in the Knesset to gain substantial government benefits for their pious followers. Historically, therefore, American-style separation of church and state has not always gone hand in hand with democracy. In a general way, however, attachment to religion as a basis for government does seem to diminish with prolonged exposure to democratic practices. Secularists may reasonably hope that the institution of democratic regimes in Muslim countries will lead in time to a largely secular political culture; but it is naïve to think, as the Bolsheviks did, that one can quickly cut people off from their religious roots by government decree, particularly if the government issuing the decrees has to face elections.

STUDENT: What you are saying, then, is that people who call for democracy have to accept whatever comes along, even if it forces secular citizens into exile and compels women to wear veils. Religious tyranny is okay so long as it is supported by a majority of the voters, many of whom are poorly educated and subject to the guidance of religious leaders and demagogues.

PROFESSOR: Things need not be quite so horrendous as you describe. Every democratic regime has a written or unwritten constitution, and constitutions set limits for government activity. Officials take oaths to uphold the constitution, and there is usually a supreme judicial authority that decides what is or is not in accord with the constitution. The crafting of a constitution is a key step in the transition from an authoritarian state to a democratic state. Whether devising an Islamic republic, a secular republic, a pluralist republic, or a constitutional monarchy, the framers of a constitution have to decide where to lodge the ultimate sanctions of le-

gitimacy. A monarchy may make the ruler the ultimate arbiter, but many constitutional monarchs wield no power. An Islamic republic may insert into the governing structure a committee or individual—in Iran's case both—charged with ensuring that government actions do not violate religious strictures. But that is not the case in Pakistan, which calls itself an Islamic republic but looks constitutionally to a strong presidency and a supreme court for ultimate legitimacy. In other models—notably Turkey and Algeria—the army guarantees the constitution, even if the structure of that guarantee is not explicitly spelled out.

STUDENT: But constitutions can change—and will change if Islamists come to power.

PROFESSOR: They can indeed, but changes are usually difficult to transact and require popular votes. I don't imagine that any of the framers of the U.S. constitution imagined a day would come when a supermajority of the states would agree to grant the vote to women. A constitutional prohibition on the transportation, sale, and manufacture of intoxicating liquors would equally have astounded them. The former amendment, which passed in 1920, we now take to be a cornerstone of American democracy. The latter, which passed in 1919, now strikes us as a Taliban-like anomaly driven by Protestant fanaticism. Constitutions cannot protect a people absolutely from excesses endorsed by the majority of the electorate, but they can make the process of instituting such excesses slow and difficult, thus forcing the voters to think two and three times about whether they really want a particular change.

STUDENT: I notice that you've skirted the question of the oppression of women. They are half the population. Don't you think that it is an absolute moral wrong to hobble them with civil disabilities?

PROFESSOR: Yes I do. I cannot imagine any constitution written in this day and age being deemed democratic if it denied women the vote or sanctioned slavery. For that reason, my optimism with regard to the potential of Muslim political activism does not extend to movements calling for an Islamic autocracy unconstrained by electoral institutions, whether the ruler is called an emir, a king, or

a caliph. Most Muslim political movements endorse elections and call for women's suffrage. Some, like the Taliban and the zealots clustered around Osama bin Laden, do not. Giving women the vote is not the same thing as freeing them from social disabilities, however. Social practices do not change overnight, nor is adherence to European or American customs the best way of assessing the status of women. From my perspective, the right to vote, access to jobs, and fairness in marriage, divorce, and child custody seem of a higher priority than regulations on costume. Some women I know disagree and tell me that I fail to understand the symbolic character of dress restrictions. Not being immersed in a Muslim cultural milieu, I will leave these judgments to people who are. But it does strike me as a peculiarity of American self-righteousness that after a century of missionary striving to persuade women in non-European lands to cover their bosoms, a morbid fascination that continues to the present day in local prohibitions on topless beaches, Americans now devote equivalent zeal to urging Muslim women to exhibit their hair.

STUDENT: I'm amazed that you would trivialize such an important issue this way.

PROFESSOR: I don't mean to trivialize it. I was simply observing that American views on gender matters in the Muslim world are less important than the views of Muslims. Given access to elections, Muslim women will fight their own battles.

STUDENT: That may well be; but all in all, I remain unconvinced by your many arguments. I wouldn't say that I never want to live in an Islamist state, or that Islamists should be prevented from coming to power. But I do think there should be an overseeing authority—the military or maybe the judiciary—that will step in if the Islamists try to do away with elections, fundamentally change the constitution, or introduce measures opposed by much of the population.

I have been involved in variants of this conversation hundreds of times, but I don't believe I have ever thoroughly convinced my interlocutor. Distrust of political Islam runs very deep. Since I be-

lieve quite firmly in the soundness of my position, its weakness as a platform for debate concerns me.

Political events receive dramatically different evaluations as soon as Islam is involved. If Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi had emerged the victor in his confrontation with Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, he might have guided a transition to a constitutional monarchy and instituted electoral reforms more or less identical to those that exist today, but with himself taking the place of the Governing Jurist (*Vali Faqih*), and a council of royal nominees taking the place of the mullah-dominated Council of Guardians. If this had happened, Iran would unquestionably be considered today a progressive and democratic country—even if, as a sop to clerical opposition, the Shah had put strictures on women's dress, spoken harshly of the United States and Israel, sought nuclear weapons capability, and scared his neighbors. On the other side of the coin, even moderate, electable, and politically savvy Islamists like Turkey's Recep Erdogan give hives to allergy-prone Islamophobes. Daniel Pipes, for example, ventures the opinion that, "The Justice and Development Party in Turkey is very different from the Taliban in its means, but not so different in its ends. If the party gained full control over Turkey, it could be as dangerous as the Taliban were in Afghanistan."[33]

Until there is a fundamental reconsideration of what Islam has meant as a political force for the past millennium and a half, and of the long-term sibling relationship between Islam and the West, the word Islam will continue to sound to western ears like a rattlesnake's rattle. A half-century of scholarly effort, following a full century of missionary attempts, to find or imagine Muslims Americans can love provides a weak foundation for the sort of reappraisal that is needed. But without a reappraisal, the future of American relations with the Muslim world will be thorny and unpredictable, haunted by dashed hopes and missed opportunities.