The Internationalization of the Political Islamic Threat to the New World Order: A Revised Image

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Abstract

This paper examines the potential challenge of Islam to the new world order. Since the early 1980s, Islam has been one of the most important concepts to be studied by policy makers, scholars, and the media. Most coverage has been dramatic and misleading, portraying Islam and Muslims as a threat to the new international order and its stability.[1] Considering this portrayal, several related aspects are discussed here, such as the recent literature about Islam, the nature of the internationalization of political Islam, the western perception of Islam and Islamists, the recent changes in political discourse about Islamic revivalism, and finally, the conjunction of this Islamic discourse and western global views and interests. The aim of this paper is threefold: to address the theoretical shortcomings in most of the contemporary literature written on political Islam, to revise negative western images of Islam, and to introduce an alternative and integrated approach for understanding the nature of the recent Islamic revivalism and its effects on the global society and order.

The Study of Islam in the Present Time

In recent years, religion has played an important role in many countries. Monotheism was a strong ideology used to weaken communist beliefs

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throughout the Cold War era. Roman Catholic and Protestant activists have greatly influenced political change in the United States, Latin America, and Europe.[2] Indeed, United States foreign policy cannot escape from religious dimensions, particularly in regard to Middle Eastern politics.[3]

The rise of religion and its reintroduction into political dynamics has been manifested very noticeably in the many Muslim political movements. The Islamic dimension has become an important perspective through which to view the international arena. Thus, it is no longer possible to ignore or simply discount religious factors in contemporary world affairs.[4] The study of Islam has attracted many scholars from a variety of social science fields. The Islamic world from 1940 to 1992 has been the subject of more than 39,500 publications. About 43% of these appeared between 1940 and 1978, a period of slightly more than 35 years; in contrast, 57% of these publications came between 1979 and 1992, a period of only 13 years.[5]

In a number of countries important to the West, the Islamic revivalist movements have gained significant political power. For example, in Egypt, there has been considerable movement among many fundamentalist groups in the last decade. In Algeria, an Islamic group defeated a secular regime through elections in December 1991. Its accession to power, however, was blocked by a military coup. In many other countries – Jordan, Pakistan, Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, and even Israel – all of which had been considered stable territories for western interests, Islamic revivalism is gaining strength. These types of developments are emphatic reasons for focusing greater attention on the Islamic world, both for the scholars who care about increasing human understanding and for the policy makers in many countries who are concerned with conventional national interests. Examples of such concerns are the establishment of the fundamentalism project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Chicago, and the Conference of American and "former Soviet" scholars on Islamic revivalism.[6]

There are many other publications that deal with the same topic, but most of them either display a propagandistic nature or portray orientalist stereotypes. Donald Smith provides a very good description of this phenomenon:

> We are influenced here – as a result of the intellectual imperialism under which a group of us still labor – by western concepts, which restrict religion within narrow limits. . . . Many people still believe that Islam is similar to Christianity or Buddhism, and consists in devotional beliefs and exercises, ethical rules and no more. But, in fact, Islam in its precise sense, is a social order, a philosophy of life, a system of economic princi-

ples, a rule of government, in addition to its being a religious creed in the narrow western sense.[7]

Internationalization of Political Islam

It is inaccurate to argue that the internationalization of political Islam did not begin until the recent period of Islamic revivalism. Islam has always had international dimensions, but the recent revivalism has escalated the political Islamic involvement into international politics. The Islamic empires that succeeded the Prophet Mohammad and his four caliphs (*al-Khulafaʾ al-Rashidun*) or the "Rightly Guided" (632-61) have had great impact on the international system. This impact was felt from the seventh century until the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. During this period Islam was a significant factor in international politics because it was the basis of Islamic empires.

Because these empires, especially the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Ottoman, were in a constant state of war with Christians – that is, Byzantines and Russians – Islam was not presented as just a set of rituals but as a mobilizing and motivating force for both war and peace. Islam was also perceived as a political factor by the opponents of the Islamic empires and often by all actors in the international system at that time. More importantly, during the sixteenth century, when Europe began to emerge as a superpower, Islam had international significance. As Paul Kennedy indicates in *The Rise and the Fall of the Great Powers*.

> It would be fair to claim that it was the Muslim states which formed the most rapidly expanding forces in world affairs during the sixteenth century. Not only were the Ottoman Turks pushing westward, but the Safavid dynasty in Persia was also enjoying a resurgence of power, prosperity, and high culture.... [It] controlled the ancient Silk Road via Kashgar and Turfan to China.[8]

Until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, when new governments appeared along with nongovernmental actors. All these actors were concerned with the Empire's demise and the political vacuum its collapse had created. While the newly formed governments and their agencies were trying to enhance their legitimacy based on national interests, many other Islamic movements were pushing to reestablish an Islamic government that would encompass all Muslims in one caliphate system that could unite all Muslim nations.[9] But these Islamic movements were too weak to play a significant role in the political aftermath of the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the national fragmentation that had created them.

The weakness of the Islamic movements and actors came from the desire of the new governments and colonizing powers to dismiss Islam as a political ideology and not to accept it as a mobilizing force. Consequently, secular regimes evolved to replace the religious establishments, making Islam and its adherents even less important. It was seen as insignificant; in some states it was a forbidden and negative force, as in Turkey. When Mustafa Ataturk (1881-1938), the founder and first president of the Turkish Republic, came into power, the political atmosphere surrounding him suggested to many, particularly supporters of the modernization school, that religion, in general, and Islam in particular, was no longer a major participant in the political arena locally or internationally.

The role of Islam during the previous empires and the motivation of many Islamic groups and scholars to cooperate with political realities to recreate that glorious history kept the political aspects of Islam alive, although with a low profile. But when these newly secularized governments (from the 1920s to the 1970s) failed to achieve the promised development or to improve the daily life of the people, the Islamic groups arose. They presented an alternative political force that has escalated into international influence. These groups soon became a transnational force with a considerable international network, paving the way for a new era in Muslim life and politics.

In that sense, it could be said that the recent social and political changes in many countries in the Islamic world, categorized by the Islamic revolution, gave birth to transnational and nongovernmental organizations. These transnational organizations have created a new field of interactions among state and nonstate actors. Because of the volatile relations between the two parties, the political situation is always occupied by tendencies toward political tensions. This situation has led to a complex conflict that involves three parties: first, the local governments in the Islamic world; second, local Islamic movements, which have a transnational nature in most of the Islamic countries; and third, many foreign governments that share some political interest with the local governments.

This complex conflict again thrust the internationalization of political Islam into the world view, gaining more attention than it otherwise might have received because the revival of political Islam coincidentally took place in the transitional phase toward what is now labeled as the new world order. Hence, the new world order became in one way or another tied to political Islam, paving the way for the latter to be internationalized as a new threat.

One way to look at the internationalization of political Islam is to track the new actors, particularly the transnational organizations. It is essential to understand the nature of transnational Islamic organizations, how they came to the political arena, and how they influence its political discourse. This research does not exclude the role of some governmental Islamic organizations, such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), but we suggest that the OIC does not reflect popular Islamic politics. The OIC is also not a good indicator of the realpolitik of the Islamic state. As Mushtak Parker says, "The OIC became an organization of parleys passing endless ineffectual and in many instances totally unrealistic resolutions."[10] Therefore, the OIC and similar intergovernmental Islamic organizations do not play a significant role in internationalizing Islam in a political sense, particularly in its association with the concept of the new world order.

In addition, focusing on transnational Islamic organizations is essential to examining the realpolitik and to uncovering aspects of the popular level that will allow a more systematic understanding of recent revivalism and its effects worldwide. Recent studies about political Islam have little to say about the significance of Islamic transnational movements and their interaction with the outside world and state actors. Consequently, the body of literature in international relations and comparative politics and area studies needs to be refocused away from its traditional view of these issues. Some scholars have tried to highlight this problem and stress its significance. In addressing several crucial topics for a future research agenda, Lisa Anderson notes:

> The relationship between prior or simultaneous non-state forms of political authority and the state must be explored systematically. Comparativists must inquire about the relationship between historical conceptions of community and contemporary appeals for legitimacy, for example, and about the ties and tensions between state institutions and forms of non-state political authority based on kinship or religion.[11]

Islamic nongovernmental organizations and movements have begun to play an important role that challenges the legitimacy of the local governments, particularly in the field of civil services. As local governments in many countries failed to deliver on their promises to the masses, many Islamic groups have stepped in to deliver jobs, health care, education, and other services to the public, as in Egypt and Algeria. This situation has created a dual authority, which has ultimately resulted in conflict between the two agencies.

The Evolution and Proliferation of Transnational Islamic Organizations

The significance of Islamic organizations is related to the concept that Islam is a religion and a state (*din wa dawla*), framed by the concept of the *Ummah* (community), which consists of a unity between religion and politics.[12] Although the concept existed long before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the idea that Islam is a religion and a state reemerged in a more articulate fashion after that event. It arose to fill the political gap that was created by the disintegration of that empire. The first suggestion of creating an Islamic organization to replace the Ottoman Caliphate, according to Landau,[13] was initiated by A. Sanhoury in his Ph.D. dissertation in 1920 and later published in 1926 by the University of Paris as *Le Califat: Son Evaluation Vers Une Societe des Nations Orientales.* Sanhoury discussed an Islamic union that would include all Muslims and be headed by a Caliph elected by a General Assembly.

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Islamic organizations existed largely outside the arena of existing governments.[14] The first of these was the Pan-Islamic League established in 1921, which has international scope, with branches in Berlin, Geneva, London, Rome, and Damascus. There were also many local Islamic organizations, such as the Elevation of Islam (Teali-yi Islam cemiyeli) founded in Istanbul in 1919, the Union of Islam (Ittihad-i-Islami) in Istanbul, and a militant organization called the Muslim League of Nations created in 1923 in India.[15] Hasan al-Banna, head of the Ikhwan movement (the Muslim Brotherhood) in Egypt was among the first to call for the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate, or more specifically, an Islamic League that would be headed by an elected Caliph.[16]

Many local regimes in that period (the 1930s and 1940s) attempted to utilize some of these organizations to enhance the political power of the existing regimes. Egypt especially played a remarkable role in attracting the attention of Muslims by utilizing the Azhar institution, which has links with almost all Islamic countries and groups in one way or another.[17]

Saudi Arabia had become a nation-state, and King Abdul Aziz Ibn-Saud (1903-53) was also inspired by the idea of the Caliphate.[18] Ibn Saud was not successful in his attempt, but his idea was to be revived later by his son, King Faysal, who gave unlimited support for a variety of Muslim organizations and brought the idea of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) to political reality. He was also the creator of Rabitat al-'Alam al-Islami (the World Muslim League) in 1962. He recognized that the OIC

was considered an elitist organization.[19] Thus, Faysal devoted significant attention to the Islamic nongovernmental and transnational organizations that could reach the grassroots and mobilize the vast majority of Muslims to support Saudi leadership and its pattern of Islam. Colonel Qaddafi also created an Islamic organization called the Islamic Call Society (Jammiat al-Dawa al-Islamia) which is semi-independent from the political authorities in Libya.

In addition, after its 1979 revolution, Iran also developed the Islamic Propagation Organization (Sazaman Tablighat Islami) in 1982, with semi-independent authority and a transnational nature. This organization is attached directly to the *vali-i-Faqih* (the guardianship of jurisconsult) of Iran: Ayatollah Ali Khameini. The above-mentioned governments designed those organizations to fulfill the criteria of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), but with a third world definition.[20]

It is obvious that these organizations do not just play a role in carrying the messages of their regimes, but they also serve as a communication link between the official and the nonofficial levels. As Telma Rudi Frantz describes this phenomenon,

> Because governments act broadly, they lack effectiveness in certain areas or with certain social groups. By generalizing they lose depth, objectivity, and efficiency. NGOs [nongovernmental organizations], acting at the micro level, manage to join efficiency and effectiveness, though at the macro level their action might lack efficacy.[21]

However, the most important aspect of these organizations is their role in legitimizing the means of political penetration into other countries. As the OIC charter prohibits interference by one member in another's internal politics, and as some Islamic countries, particularly the major ones, are assuming leadership under the notion of *Ummah*, these organizations could be described as political stand-ins by which given political regimes enhance their political vision and reach abroad.

In addition, based on the notion of *Ummah*, many nonofficial Islamic groups and organizations build their own network. Examples of these organizations are found all over the Islamic countries, such as Egypt, Pakistan, Jordan, Algeria, Tunisia, and many others. They have become more influential in the political realities and better represented in the civil societies. They also have become more sophisticated in their political actions and discourse against the established authorities.

Proliferation of Islamic organizations, a notable phenomenon in the Islamic world, was examined by Hrair Dekmejian in his book *Islam in*

Revolution. He found that among 91 Islamic organizations and groups in the Middle East, 49 were established in the mid-1970s.[22] The Islamic groups were able to communicate with each other by utilizing the concept of *Ummah.* Therefore, they developed a remarkable network of cooperation and communication. This international organizational networking has contributed in significant ways to the internationalization of political Islam even when it contradicts many Islamic states' politics and foreign behavior. This contradiction has contributed to the internal clashes between local governments and certain Islamic groups. At times, the clashes heated the political situation to a level of exchanged violence. Because this phenomenon repeated itself in several Islamic countries, the conflict between the official authorities and these groups has intensified. Many western countries, namely the United States, have entered the conflict in the interest of local political regimes, because of their past experience with Iran. Involvement by a western power in local internal conflicts has empowered political Islam to become more internationalized on many fronts.

The Confrontation: From Image to Reality

As both an ideology and a way of life, Islam has the potential for explaining elements of power in different dimensions of Islamic influence. At a theoretical level, Islam has basic perspectives regarding state building and reestablishing a pan-Islamic system, which was the core of the Islamic heritage of the past. Despite the diversity of terminology and religious orientations within the Islamic world, several principles bind many Muslim groups and political organizations to a common view on issues that are important in today's global political affairs. Among these fundamental topics is the Islamic socioeconomic package as an alternative model for development after the failure of imported western and socialist developmental programs. In addition, there is consensus among Muslim groups that state building should be based on genuine Islamic values that embrace certain principles of democratic participation.

Most important, there is a general desire among Islamic activists to liberate their countries from foreign hegemony, in general, and from the western sphere of control in particular. They call for establishing what Benedict Anderson has termed "imagined communities"[23] that are based on keeping independent identities while sharing influence and advantage in the international system.

Muslim activists are optimistic about the huge sources of power, actual and potential, they believe they can harness to enhance their aspirations. Today, Islamic organizations include professionals, technocrats, and other members of the intelligentsia in different parts of the Muslim world who combine genuine Muslim beliefs with knowledge of up-to-date science and technology from different cultures, including those of the West. In addition, the Islamic World possesses great natural and human resources to provide it with all the necessities of modern life. Such resources include water, energy, agriculture, middle and heavy industries, and a large workforce. These resources may be scattered across the region; however, they can be mobilized under successful regional integration and cooperative arrangements.

Islam, in the view of its adherents, has an independent ideology that attracts millions of followers, bringing them to the House of Islam and guiding them on the basis of religious and spiritual tenets. The Islamic heritage teaches that such theoretical hopes and aspirations can not only be put into practices but will lead Islam to an advanced position of power, influence, and respect at the international level. Therefore, the nation-state building process in the Islamic world differs from the western state model. These differences reflect the cultural heritage of each society.[24] The western intellectual hegemony in the field of the social sciences appears to many, particularly from the orientalist school, to classify the recent Islamic revivalism as a form of backwardness, anti-modernity, and anti-democracy. These views are particularly held by adherents of the essentialist approach, who argue that Islam is incompatible with democracy.[25]

Unfortunately, democracy is defined for this school in terms of its secularism. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* by Samuel Huntington, and *Islam and Liberal Democracy* by Bernard Lewis are just two examples of the previously mentioned uni-dimensional perspective on democracy.[26] This perception is consistent with the policy toward the Middle East of some western states, such as the United States.

This perception becomes even stronger when linked with major western power policy toward the Middle East – a policy that is constrained by the following variables:

1. Neo-Evangelism: the image of Islam inherited from the Middle Ages and mixed with Cold War era national security definitions

2. Iranian Syndrome: the result of western experience with revolutionary Iran, the presumed leader state of Islamic fundamentalism

3. Israelization of Islam: the amalgamation of the Islamist – Israeli conflict with questions related to the threats of the new international order

First, according to a group of German scholars, the Islamic beast in the West's hostile image of Islam goes back to Christian-Muslim relations in the Middle Ages.[27] The same conclusion was reached by Madlin Naser in her pioneering book, *Surat al-`Arab wa al-Islam fi al-Kutub al-Madrasia al-Faransia* (picture of the Arabs and Islam in French school texts).[28] After a content analysis of French primary and high school texts, Naser concluded that there is a racist stereotype of Muslims and Arabs as being backward, anti-Christian, fanatic, lazy, dependent, and without any type of civilization. Naser stresses that this bias is rooted in the Crusades, French colonization of Algeria, and the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1956, and 1967.[29]

Claud Liauzu, in *L'Islam de l'Occident,* refers to one of the French university publications titled *History of French Population,* published in 1989, that contained a political xenophobic bias against Arabs and Islam. As an example, this book suggests that the Arabic language is probably going to become one of the main European languages; Liauzu stresses the dangers of Islamization to the way of life of European societies.[30]

This hostile image and misrepresentation of Islam in western societies, associated with the rising political power of Islamists in their own societies, revived fears similar to those engendered by the threat of communism to the free world. For many Westerners, the only difference between the old Cold War enemy and the new world order enemy is that the green flag is substituted for the red flag, the crescent replaces the sickle and hammer, and Khomeini succeeds Lenin. Unfortunately, this monologue finds its way into some governmental circles as well as the public sphere. For example, the former president of the United States, Richard Nixon, made such an erroneous comparison:

> Islamic fundamentalism has replaced Communism as the principal instrument of violent change . . . Communist ideology promises rapid modernization, Islamic revolutionary ideology is a reaction against modernization. Communism promises to turn the clock of history forward, Moslem fundamentalists turn it back.[31]

In real life, however, Muslims in number do not exceed 6 million in Europe and they cannot represent anything like the Communist threat.[32] This false comparison was also criticized by B. A. Roberson in his study, *Islam and Europe: An Enigma or Myth.* Roberson argues that because of this misperception in the European mind about the increase of Islamization and the

legacy of the Cold War, many European countries today have adopted policies to counterattack the new threat. Manifestation of these policies can clearly be seen in new rules for controlling immigration and maintaining racial order. In the final part of this study, Roberson asserts that despite the problems of Islamists inside and outside Europe, Islam should not be viewed as a threat.[33] Expressing the same view, Phebe Marr stated:

> In some circles, both in Europe and the United States, "Islamism" has replaced the cold war as a justification for new strategy toward the region that focuses on the negative rather than the positive. A misunderstanding of Islam may serve to distance Europe (and the United States) from the Middle East, widening a perceived cultural gap and acting as an obstacle to finding common ground on which to approach difficult policy issues.[34]

Second, the western perception about Islam is encoded with what is called the "Iran syndrome."[35] Many governments have presumed Iran to be the sole leader of all Islamic radical groups. The Iranian government's relationship with other Islamic groups and organizations, particularly those who oppose the western hegemony and politics in their homeland, is seen by many as a patron-client relationship. Many scholars also have envisioned political Islam through the Iranian experience.[36] Others have debated this error, but their criticisms have remained limited to the circles of academia.[37]

After its revolution in 1979, Iran came into the spotlight and became the core source of stereotyping about Islam. The United States government, in particular, has engaged since then in universalizing its distrustful relationship with Iran. As the White House saw any socialist movement in the 1950s as related to the U.S.S.R., any Islamic movement is now somehow related to Iran. Therefore, any political congruence between Iran and another Islamic group is viewed by the U.S. government as a conspiracy against America and its friends.

In addition, for the U.S. government, Iran is behind every terrorist action, plane hijacking, outbreak of political violence in the Middle East, drug trafficking in mid-Asia, political unstability in the Gulf and many Arab countries, clashes between Palestinians and Israeli soldiers, and counterfeiting of American dollars. For the White House, Iran became the scapegoat for American political deficits in the Islamic world and the main spoiler of world peace and order. Thus, for the United States government, containing Iran is the panacea for all international disorder.

Following this train of thought will lead into a labyrinth of false generalizations. To avoid this, the connection between Iran and other Islamic groups should be carefully analyzed. The relationship is more complicated

than previously presented. A study conducted on field and documentary research on this subject shows that the Iranian revolution and the rising Islamic power constitute a new phase of political discourse that has spilled over the Islamic world since the mid-1970s.[38] This new phase is characterized by a critical Islamic stance against the dominant conservative Islamic discourse adopted by Saudi Arabia since the 1960s.

The revolutionary Islamic discourse has a new interpretation of political realities and adheres to a new conceptualization of politics. It looks forward to change rather than maintaining the status quo, as the conservative discourse does. It also reinvigorates Islamic legal interpretation for the sake of political change. Adherents of this political discourse have succeeded in their local societies in creating an ideal of the new Islamic image. They work on social, economic, and political fronts to challenge the local authorities.

Compared with services provided by government, the services offered by Islamists are much more appealing to the majority of the masses in many societies, particularly in rural areas. Their formal and informal organizational networking has increasingly mushroomed. The proliferation of many Islamic social forces is partly a byproduct of governmental mismanagement and ineptness.[39] On many occasions, Islamists have succeeded in stripping and destroying the legitimacy of the local authorities, an action often answered by the dominant political elites with intolerance and violence. This sequence has repeated itself in many Islamic countries, such as Egypt, Algeria, Jordan, Pakistan, and currently Saudi Arabia.

Although Islam may appear to have one form, Islamists display many differences among themselves. However, they either readily adopt a revolutionary means of change or they are forced to accept such violence. Even so, they do not conspire with Iran or in many cases accept the leadership of each other. What may bring them together is the way their enemies unify. Many governments in the Islamic world have adopted policies to contain the Islamists. This action may force the Islamists to accept cooperation among themselves to defend against the common enemy.

In other cases, the Islamists may perform alike, particularly in responding to a specific issue. An example of such occasional congruence is the condemnation of novelist Salman Rushdie. The Jammaat-i Islami (a Pakistani Islamic movement) was the first to condemn Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*; then Iran joined the condemnation. However, it was the Jammaat who took the initiative and mobilized against Rushdie, not Iran.[40] Another example was Khomeini's criticisms of the Saudi Arabian dynasty, which were similar to the criticisms expressed by Juhayman al-Utaybi, who seized

the Holy Mosque in Mecca on November 20, 1979. Juhayman, with his Wahhabi doctrine, regarded Shi`ism as an atheist doctrine; he did not take orders from Khomeini, the grand Shi`ite Ayatollah.

It seems very obvious that for the West to place great emphasis on Iranian and Islamic threats is nothing but scapegoating. Instead, Iran should be better understood in accordance with its own political development. It was the revolutionary phase that colored Iranian policies in the 1980s; Iran in the 1990s, however, is in the state phase, in which political elites are trying to construct new pragmatic domestic and foreign policies.[41]

Third, the tendency to characterize the Islamist – Israeli government conflict as an Islamic threat to world society is another misinterpretation that erroneously points to an Islamic threat to the new world order. As the recent opposition to Israel in south Lebanon and the occupied territories is headed by Islamic groups such as Hizbullah and HAMAS, many Israeli scholars and state craftsmen have warned that the recent Islamic threat is not limited to Israeli security but clouds the entire international society.

Raphael Israeli's book, *Fundamentalist Islam and Israel,* is a good demonstration of mixing the Islamist – Israeli conflict with the myth of an Islamic threat to the new world order. Israeli argues that Islamists pose a threat to many societies.[42] He emphasizes the Iranian role in the recent Islamic revival (pp. 9-22). Then he maintains that Islamists hold dangerous perceptions of the West and Israel (pp. 25-46). One of his conclusions is that Muslim minorities, like those in Washington, London, Geneva, and some Asian countries where they have the power, will seek for autonomy from these societies (pp. 183-84). Toward the end, he suggests that Islamization is not only a risk to Israel but also to the western and civilized world in general (pp. 199-201).

Shimon Peres, the former prime minister of Israel, in his book *The New Middle East,* followed a similar line, as shown in the following: "Today we are witnessing a renaissance of Islamism, now characterized by opposition to western values and culture, a retreat from modernism, and a call for the use of force to establish an autocratic, separative Islamic republic."[43] Another book, written by Emmanuel Sivan and entitled, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics,* is worth mentioning in this context. The author presumes that the language of political Islam is incompatible with the rights of man. A careful reading of Sivan's work shows nothing but sketchy selections used to support a preassumption and bias. It emphasizes private cases from which to draw generalized judgments.[44] Indeed, *Radical Islam* is merely a repetition of many classical Orientalist

works, such as Carleton Coon's *Caravan: The Story of the Middle East* (1951), and Clifford Geertz's *Islam Observed* (1968).[45]

Thus, Shimon Peres with this background concludes that democratization will not work for many Arab countries because it will result in a paradoxical outcome. For Peres, seeing Islamists win an election in countries such as Algeria and Jordan is a real manifestation of this paradox. This perspective means that democracy will not produce or accommodate any religious figure. More important, what Peres suggests is that the West should not encourage such democracy because it produces agents opposed to Israel's security. Instead, the West should continue supporting the famous key figures of dictatorship in the Arab and Muslim countries because Israel can deal with them successfully. Israeli politicians market such views to justify counterattacking their political opponents. However, the real puzzle is why so many regional and western governments buy this Israeli political propaganda. To a lesser extent, some western scholars are adopting the same views. Bernard Lewis, for example, in his *Rethinking the Middle East,* suggests that Iran is the leader of the Islamic fundamentalists that threatens western interests, and that Israel is the deterrent against such threats.[46]

In the political reality, the United States is not the only government that buys into this vision; Britain and many countries in the European Union adhere to it, also. In Britain, according to many reporters, the Zionist lobby is pressuring Parliament to adopt more restrictive policies against Islamic organizations working in Britain. As a result, the interior ministry has carried out a wide investigation among many British Islamic associations and groups. This move might be a reaction to Islamist threats that some consider national security issues such as those related to the oil supply. The ministry is also interested in averting terrorist activities that might be carried out in or outside Europe.[47] The European Union is also engaged in reviewing its policies toward Islamic organizations on the basis of recent developments in Israel, Turkey, Algeria, and Egypt.[48]

This is not to suggest that western governments have become Israeli instruments. In fact, European states generally tend to dissociate themselves from unquestionable support of Israel in its conflict with the Arabs, particularly after the 1973 war. However, there have been many attempts to capitalize on the recent problems between the Islamists and the Israelis, to characterize them as a problem for the West. If this perception is realized, it will add more complicated dimensions to the existing problem between the West and the Islamists. In fact, recent Islamist rhetorical campaigns

against some western states and policies are related to the West's support of Israel. These oratorical campaigns are popular and attract an audience in the Islamic world. Therefore, by adopting a policy based on a perceived, unified Islamist threat, western governments are responsible in part for giving more credibility to the Islamists' language.

Thus, the phrase *Islamist threat* has become very popular in scholarly writing, in statements by top officials and decision-makers, and in the media. The term threat is very broad. It is also relative and multidimensional. Most usage of this term as associated with world order can be misleading.

One important task in understanding contemporary world politics and studying international relations is to define the main concepts related to the phenomena. What is the threat? What is world order? How can world order be threatened and in which aspects: stability, security of most nations, or maintenance of the status quo of the international hierarchy? The new vision and perception of the new world order is strongly influenced by western ways of thinking. Accordingly, the phrase *threat to the world order* is meant as a threat to western interests in particular. Such a narrow definition is not only misleading, but dangerous.

Ideological differences between political Islam and the West may lead to political, economic, and culturally based confrontations. However, that does not necessarily mean that Islam poses a threat to the world order, unless such an argument is investigated within the main bases of theoretical analysis of the literature of international relations. In other words, even a possible confrontation between Islam and the West should not be considered a threat to the world order. The outcome of such a conflict should be clearly referred to according to its ultimate impact on issues such as international stability and security.

Considering Islam as the sole threat to the international order is misleading, as this perspective may allow other factors that can affect international stability to be ignored or underestimated. The reason for considering Islam a threat to world order is to justify whatever actions and policies the West may prefer, including use of force and providing political support to local dictators in the region in order to maintain stability to the advantage of western interests. For example, in Algeria, although the Muslim groups (Salvation Front) won the majority through a democratic process, they were condemned. At the same time, the existing outlaw authority, which came to power by military coup, was and is considered legitimate. The secular dominating elite in Algeria, which toppled the democracy, is regarded as authentic by many western governments. However, these gov-

ernments speak of the danger of Algerian Islamists who made controversial statements about the idea of democracy. The dilemma here is that many western governments – namely France, which represents in the public mind a bastion of modern democracy – are siding with those who took power illegally. The variables explained earlier may clarify why this self-contradicting method is implemented in cases like that of Algeria.

Conclusion: Reversing the Image

During the Cold War era, scholars, including those in the West, held the United States and its allies equally accountable with the communist bloc for world stability. On many occasions the West gave concessions and held talks and negotiations with its rivals, actions that led to breakthroughs in arms reductions and in limiting involvement in the other party's sphere of strategic interests. The international system of world order should be perceived as part of an ongoing evolution that is subject to continuous changes regarding the distribution of power. Accordingly, forecasting of world order and sources of possible threats should be based on the main principles of the literature of international studies. Therefore, political scientists from different cultures are obliged to investigate any related topic and concept, based on what Noam Chomsky once called a literal approach, which takes the issue seriously, and not with a propagandistic approach that attempts to construct a justification for the policy makers.[49]

First, and before talking about the Islamist threat to the new world order, it is essential to define the term. There are many contending views of the new world order. Is it Fukuyama's "the end of history," John Mearsheimer's "revitalization of ethnic wars in Europe after the collapse of the balance of power," Paul Kennedy's "imperial overreach and its consequences," Richard Gardner's "reinvigoration of the role of the United Nations and the application of international law," Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations," or Joseph Nye's "unchallenged hegemony of the United States"?[50]

Similarly, it is very important to diagnose and conceptualize the sources of threat to the world order and to suggest proper indicators to measure these threats, thus having an effect on issues related to worldwide instability and unrest. Here again, terms such as fundamentalism, terrorism, and radicalism, are misleading. Directing these terms against Islam and its political groups and movements has become commonplace, even though such charges are applicable to almost any political group worldwide. The originators of the myth of the Islamic threat should know that

political phenomena are not black and white. Instead, they are mostly multidimensional in nature. Otherwise, why would the most civilized and democratic countries in the world, such as the United States and its friends, be the greatest precipitators of state terrorism events? These include accounts of killing innocent people, waging wars, initiating bombings, and funding terrorist groups, as Alexander George once stated.[51]

Alternatively, Islamic states and religious groups, like other international agents, have a variety of interactions and relationships with numerous members of the international system. Such members include countries, regional organizations, and western nations. Most of these relationships are based on mutual interests and cooperation, which may lead to broader cooperation and peaceful coexistence.

Confrontation between certain western countries, led by the United States, and Islam and its representatives are many sided. Some take the form of direct confrontation and containment, such as the United States versus Iran and Sudan. Others are indirect, such as placing pressure on Islamic activists, or using the regimes of local allies. A third example is ignoring crises and conflicts that weaken and sometimes crush the Muslims, as in Bosnia and Chechnya.

Before condemning Muslims' actions as irrational or radical, one should first judge the actions and policies directed against them. The responses of Muslims to confrontation can be seen as natural when measured by the actions and threats directed toward them. Thus, there is an opposing side to the argument: Muslims view themselves as victims rather than as threats to the world order. They see the strategic interests of the West as encouraging a policy of denying Muslims the right to exist and pursue their own interests, most of which are still restricted to demands for self-determination, building their own identity, and creating their own wealth.

Most of today's rhetoric against Islam and its manifestations in international politics represents a new and unfolding era of world politics. It is a new phase of international conflict and struggle, and of emerging national interests within a new structure of global systems. The major difference between this period of inter-state relations and earlier phases is that new means are being utilized to maintain traditional and essential national interests. This kind of paramnesia will definitely lead toward a difficult future for us all.

At every stage of world politics there are two main groups: those who want to preserve the status quo and those who strive to change it. Political Islam, whether emerging from an established state or from one that wants

to achieve such a goal, is not satisfied with the status quo. These Islamic groups share their visions with a large number of states in the South as well as with millions of individuals all around the world. They see the moment at hand to effect change. If it is justifiable for western powers to maintain the structure of the current world system simply because they choose to do so, why should other nations be denied the same right of choice to pursue their own advantages and interests?

Finally, as far as knowledge about Islam is manipulated by terms such as "harem," "ayatollah," and "jihad," perceptions of fear about Islam will remain dominant. However, Islamization as a process of postmodernization[52] and self-determination, which are in some sense equivalent to progression and pluralism, needs to be investigated more intensely and clarified if it is to be understood. There is a pressing need in the West to replace the knowledge about Islam that has been produced by the orientalist school through a new approach of "Islamology."

At the same level, Muslims, particularly the intellectual elite, should liberate their thinking from myths such as a western conspiracy against Muslim society and instead engage more in social enlightenment. They should emphasize that western life is not just a realm of sexism, materialism, and other kinds of negativism but embodies science, technology, and development. Despite the few efforts made by some western specialists for better understanding of Muslims and Islam, more serious analyses, that are free from the interests of political establishments, are needed. In addition, mutual understanding should be sought by both sides, western and Muslim scholars, to generate a genuine picture of each other. An image, which relies on "value free judgments" and the truth of science. No quick formula can be made that has all the solutions to the world's problems. But it is very essential for both sides to avoid the use of pigeonholing vocabulary, particularly words encoded by the media.

Notes

1. Edward Said, *Covering Islam* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
2. William Dinges, "Roman Catholic Traditionalism and Activist Conservatism in the United States," in *Fundamentalism Observed,* ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991); Pablo Deiros, "Protestant Fundamentalism in Latin America," in *Fundamentalism Observed*.

3. Youssef Al-Hasan, *The Religious Dimension of U.S. Policy toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Beirut: Arab Unity Studies Center. n.d.).
4. Bruce Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt against the Modern Age* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989).
5. Abdullah Mohammad, "The Role of Transnational and Nongovernmental Organizations in Hegemonic Contests: Case Study of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky, Lexington, 1994).
6. A useful report about this conference appears in *Middle East Journal* 45, no. 4 (1991), eds. Dale F. Eickelman and Kamran Pasha.
7. Donald E. Smith, *Religion, Politics, and Social Change in the Third World* (New York: Free Press, 1971), 116.
8. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 9.
9. Jacob Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
10. Cited in Brigid Ann Starky, "State, Culture and Foreign Policy: Exploring Linkage in the Muslim World" (Ph.d. diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 1991), 140.
11. Lisa Anderson, "Policy-making and Theory Building: American Political Science and the Islamic Middle East," in *Theory, Politics, and the Arab World,* ed. Hisham Sharabi (New York: Routledge, 1990), 74.
12. Landau, *Pan-Islam.*
13. Ibid., 221-22.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. A. Chris Eccel, *Egypt, Islam, and Social Change: Al-Azhar in Conflict and Accommodation* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1984).
18. Landau, *Pan-Islam.*
19. Gorm R. Olson, "Islam: What Is Its Political Significance? The Cases of Egypt and Saudi Arabia," in *Islam: State and Society,* ed. K. Ferdinand and M. Mozaffari (Riverdale, Md.: Riverdale Company, 1988).
20. Many third world countries attempted to establish public organizations to act as nongovernmental organizations. However, their identities are under the individual control of the governments. For more details see Mohammad, "Transnational and Nongovernmental Organizations."
21. Telma Rudi Frantz, "The Role of NGOs in the Strangling of Civil Society," *World Development,* 15 (autumn 1987), 20 (supplement).
22. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1985).
23. Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State: Essays on Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993).
24. Ibid.

25. There are two main approaches in studying Islam from a western standpoint: the essentialist (the nature of the Islamic ideology does not allow any space for democratic notions and presumptions) and the critical (the lack of democracy in the Islamic world is due to the foreign [western] intervention and support of local ruling elites, but not to Islamic ideology). For more details, see Simon Bromley, *Rethinking Middle East Politics: State Formation and Development* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994).
26. Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Bernard Lewis, "Islam and Liberal Democracy," *The Atlantic,* Feb. 1993, 89-98.
27. See S.V.R. Nasr, "Democracy and Islamic Revivalism," *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 2 (1995); Fred Halliday, Review Article, "The Politics of Islam: A Second Look," *British Journal of Political Science,* 25, part 3 (July 1995).
28. Madlin Naser, "*Surat al-*>*Arab wa al-Islam fi al-Kutub al-Madrasia al-Faransia*" (Picture of the Arabs and Islam in French School Texts) (Beirut: Markaz al-Wahda al->Arabia, 1995).
29. Ibid., 317.
30. Cited in Beshara Khuder, *Europe and the Arab Nation* (Beirut: Markaz al-Wahda al->Arabia, 1993), 39.
31. Richard Nixon, *Victory without War* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1990), 293-95.
32. Halliday, "Politics of Islam."
33. B. A. Roberson, "Islam and Europe: An Enigma or Myth," *Middle East Journal* 48, no. 2 (1994).
34. Phebe Marr, "The United States, Europe, and the Middle East: An Uneasy Triangle," *Middle East Journal* 48, no. 2 (1994), 224.
35. For more details about the Iran Syndrome, see Nader Entessar, "Realpolitik and Transformation of Iran's Foreign Policy: Coping with the 'Iran Syndrome,'" in *Islam, Iran, and World Stability,* ed. Hamid Zangeneh (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).
36. Edward Shirley, "Is Iran's Present Algeria's Future?" *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 1995), 28-44. Many other studies carry the same theme; see, for example, Mohammad Mahaddessin, *Islamic Fundamentalism: The New Global Threat* (Washington, DC: Seven Locks Press, 1993); Patrick Clawson, *Iran's Challenge to the West: How, When, and Why* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1993); Martin Kramer, "Islam vs. Democracy," *Commentary* 95, no. 1. For newspaper articles and media coverage on this subject, refer to Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).
37. See, for example, Nasr, "Democracy"; Halliday, "Politics of Islam"; Cyrus Bina, "Farewell to the Pax Americana: Iran, Political Islam and the Passing of the Old Order," in Zangeneh, ed., *Islam*; and Esposito, *Islamic Threat*.

38. Mohammad, "Transnational and Nongovernmental Organizations."
39. Some scholars reached a similar conclusion in this regard. See, for example, Syed Rashid Naim, "The Radical Tradition in Islam and the Islamist Tendency in Contemporary Egypt" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1990), and Hrair Dekmejian, "Islamic Revival: Catalysts, Categories and Consequences," in S. Hunter, ed., *The Politics of Islamic Revivalism: Diversity and Unity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
40. See S.V.R. Nasr, "Democracy and Islamic Revivalism."
41. For a good explanation of Iranian redirection of foreign policy, see K. L. Afrasiabi, *After Khomeini: New Directions in Iran's Foreign Policy* (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1994).
42. Raphael Israeli, *Fundamentalist Islam and Israel: Essays in Interpretation* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1993).
43. Shimon Peres, *The New Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), 38-39.
44. Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theory and Modern Politics* (Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press, 1985).
45. Carleton Coon, *Caravan: The Story of the Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt, 1951). In this book, Coon asserted that Arabs cannot adjust to modernity. Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968). For Geertz, Islam was becoming a justification for modernity for its adherents, but Islam is actually not modern.
46. Bernard Lewis, "Rethinking the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 4 (1992): 99-119.
47. Report in *Al-Watan* newspaper published in Kuwait, 30 Jan. 1995, no. 6816/1262, year 34.
48. Ibid.
49. Noam Chomsky, "International Terrorism: Image and Reality," in Alexander George, ed., *Western State Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
50. See Manochehr Dorraj, "The New World Order: Proposals for the Third World," in Zongeneh, ed., *Islam, Iran, and World Stability*; Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (summer 1993); Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).
51. See Alexander George, introduction in his edited book, *Western State Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
52. Akbar Ahmed and Hastings Donnan, eds., *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity* (New York: Routledge, 1994).