

# From Greed to Justice: American Policy in the Middle East: Reflections from a Muslim Perspective<sup>1</sup>

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I would like to seize the opportunity of the theme of this conference to highlight some of the flaws which taint and constrain American foreign policy in the Middle East and, more generally, in the Muslim world. I do so with the purpose of exploring the possibilities for a change which would be to the advantage of all parties concerned, for while I believe that America's Middle East policy is largely prompted by considerations of national self-interest and expediency, and that these might be subsumed under the category of "greed," there still remains a recurrent undertone and preoccupation with a moral self-justification that seeks grounds of justice and right for all its pursuits. Beyond greed and morality, however, the determining factor for both dimensions is contingent upon our perceptions, conceptions, and the ideas we have concerning the Other as well as about what constitutes our own best interest and our particular morality. The controls on our perceptions and self-understanding lie in a kind of treasure chest which we inherit or, to use a current idiom of the micro-chip generation, they lie in a floppy disk which lies in the eye of our mind. Whatever it is that we inherit, it comes not so much with our genes as with our cultural legacy, which is transmitted primarily through the process of our socialization. While such perceptions may be decisive in shaping our attitudes towards the situations we encounter, they are not necessarily permanent, for acquired attitudes which have been learned can also be unlearned, although this is often a more complicated process. In the realm of attitudes to the Muslim world, I feel that Americans are encumbered with a heavy legacy which lies at the root of the many enthusiasms and complacencies which have time and again been reflected in American foreign policy and in American reactions to events in that region.

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<sup>1</sup>This is a slightly modified version of a presentation made at the Convention of the Unitarian Universalist Church meeting in Washington, DC, 21-23 April 1991. Notes have been added for the benefit of *AJISS* readers.

Before exploring these perceptions as they affect the design and implementation of American foreign policy, let me begin by summarizing the gist of my presentation. It essentially assumes that American foreign policy in the Middle East has unnecessarily entangled itself in dubious terrain when it could have avoided the embarrassment if only it had observed the self-proclaimed moral sensibilities at the heart of the American dream. Underlying this entanglement are misplaced apprehensions about Islam as a disruptive force in the modern world order. These misperceptions have served to justify a politics of unmitigated greed and moral duplicity which have hindered any prospects of justice for the majority of the peoples of the region. I shall not dwell here on the nature of these misperceptions, nor shall I attempt to rectify them against the realities of Islam as a faith, a culture, a civilization, and a tradition. Here I shall content myself with retracing the impediments and pointing to the possibilities for aligning American foreign policy in the Middle East more closely with the requisites of an ethical stance. This, it is argued, is a stance which would also be more attuned to the realities on the ground and to the aspirations that inspire the public conscience both here in America and in the Middle East.

By way of prefacing my paper, I would like to mention discrepancies and convergences which are often overlooked. First, I wish to point out a basic flaw or inconsistency in the structure and the pursuits of the modern constitutional polity vis-à-vis its foreign policy. We might refer to this as the anomaly of a stunted secularism. This flaw underlies many of the strains which go into making the Middle East an endemic problem area for the architects of foreign policy. Basically, it relates to the subsisting relationship between religion and politics: the Church and the State. It is a matter of history that the modern West has succeeded in challenging the absolutism of the medieval Church and in subordinating the latter to the national interest. This is the story of a secularism which entailed the establishment of separate and distinct areas of competence at the level of the institutional matrix of the domestic polity and within the public sphere.<sup>2</sup>This development might have been true insofar as regards the internal domain and the arena of constitutional politics. In the external domain, however, particularly in our strategic area of concern, this has by no means been the case. The complex story there entailed the emergent secular state's use of the Church as an instrument of foreign policy.<sup>3</sup>The obverse side of this situation and its

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<sup>2</sup>For a brief review of these developments in European history in a relevant context, see Tamara Sonn, *Between Qur'an and Crown: The Challenge of Political Legitimacy in the Arab World* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), chap. 1. It should be pointed out that Sonn writes out of a Eurocentric evolutionary paradigm indulging in misfounded analogies and conflated histories as she projects the European past onto contemporary trends in the Muslim world.

<sup>3</sup>Therein lies the symbiotic relationship between colonialism, orientalism, and evangelization (missionaries) as rooted in the Enlightenment paradigm of instrumental/manipulative knowledge (power-driven and power-seeking knowledge) and ideological interests (or ideas/values used to justify power interests). In many cases, the orientalism which Edward Said wrote about as the

extension has seen the vulnerability of the secular state to the interests and perceptions cultivated by the Church when it comes to prosecuting public policy beyond the domestic sphere.<sup>4</sup> As the perceived interests and perceptions emanating from the politics of religion maintained their hold on public opinion, they continued to condition attitudes to the Other. Unfortunately this influence was not always exerted where it should have been. The problem is not with an institution of religion and the repository of a faith;<sup>5</sup> it lies rather with the memory vested in that institution from a time when the clash of cultures was symbolized by differences in religion. In this sense, the West would seem to have failed its test in prosecuting its secular politics to their logical conclusion both here in the United States as well as in Europe.

In consequence, a legacy of animosity and conflict fed into the modern confrontationalist and hostile posture against the Other — in this case Islam. It continued unabated, assuming new forms perhaps with the preeminence of political and economic colonialism, but it retained its essentially negative

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academic institutionalization and canonization of a power-relationship between a dominant Occident and a subject Orient flourished in a marriage of convenience that grew out of common interests binding “Church and Crown” (colonial state, capitalists, industrialists, or bourgeoisie). Regardless of formal variations in sources and consequences, the essence of this relationship has remained the legacy of the American establishment (policy-making circles, cultural and economic interests, the media) in its attitudes and pursuits in the Middle East and the Muslim world. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), esp. 283 ff., and his *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

<sup>4</sup>My comments here touch on a more basic and general level of church politics which has negatively structured generations of Western imperial attitudes and policies (that have nothing to do with Christianity) towards Islam and towards interests perceived to relate to a majoritarian Muslim constituency. Such negative perceptions have been sufficiently internalized over time and continents to produce offensive gut-reactions in the common man in the street (including the WASP street), and they will take more than the sporadic and scattered displays of goodwill and intent to dispel. For a historical overview of changing public (and church) attitudes towards Islam, see Albert Hourani, “Western Attitudes Towards Islam,” in *Europe and the Middle East*, ed. by Albert Hourani (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980), chap. 1. For a succinct critical overview from a competent and scholarly Islamic perspective, see Ziauddin Sardar and Meryll Wyn Davies, *Distorted Imagination: Lessons from the Rushdie Affair* (London and Kuala Lumpur: Grey Seal and Berita Publications: 1990), 34-75.

<sup>5</sup>My remarks here are structural and historical and do not reflect on the many constructive and justice-minded stances adopted by conscientious objectors and umbrella organizations such as the NCC (National Council of Churches) and others protesting American policy in the Middle East, nor offensive postures like the vigil organized by the Catholic churches on the eve of the massive bombing raids on Iraq — highlighting the prominent role played by that group in particular. This has been eloquently and forcefully summed up in the congressional testimony of Archbishop John Roach, Chairman of the International Policy Committee of the US Catholic Conference, and submitted before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 6 December 1990. Other relevant literature includes “Theologizing on the Gulf” *The Christian Century* 107 (12 Dec. 1990): 1156-7 and “The World Council of Churches on the Gulf War,” *ibid*, 108 (3 April 1991): 355-6.

psychological content together with its “crusading” intent. The Muslim Middle East continued to be seen as a region falling outside the area of grace and Christian morality and as needing to be tamed before being admitted to the orbit of a civilized order of nations. *Such were the civilizing intents of the allied mandatory powers on the eve of splitting up the remains of the Ottoman Empire in the aftermath of World War I. It anticipated a politics of power with a conscience, of greed without guilt.* Indeed, in the modern West these negative attitudes towards Islam have only been aggravated by the burdens of a multiple rejection and condemnation. The legacy of the Crusades of a bygone epoch in medieval Christendom and the aftermath of a scramble for imperial domination have been further compounded in our own time with the ambitions of a resuscitated Jewish nationalism indebted for its very origins and success to non-Jewish religious-colonialist ideas and forces.<sup>6</sup> From the perspectives of justice and peace for the majority of the historical inhabitants of the modern Middle East who are predominantly Muslim, this historic reconciliation between the Star of David and the Holy Cross would seem to have been concluded in the service of Mammon, not in the service of God.<sup>7</sup>

If conflicting religious perceptions seem to dim the crystal ball through which Americans and Muslims view each other,<sup>8</sup> is there nothing in the residual intervening experience of either that might mitigate such strains? This brings me to my second remark. Here, I would like to remind my audience that notwithstanding the euphemistic rhetoric about “Europe and her daughters,”<sup>9</sup> America too was at one time a victim of the British Empire and of British colonialism. Indeed, to borrow an epithet from PBS commentator Bill Moyers, were it not for the politics of conscience exercised over and against the instincts and the interests of a politics of conformity, America would have still continued to partake of the afflictions and the grievances of many a less fortunate cousin

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<sup>6</sup>For a succinct deconstruction of the conceptual and historical underpinnings of these connections, see Abdelwahab Elmessiri, *The Land of Promise: A Critique of Political Zionism* (New Brunswick, NJ: North American, 1977), which features a foreword by John Davis.

<sup>7</sup>For perceptive insights on this dimension of ecumenical politics, see Marc Ellis, “Beyond the Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Solidarity with the Palestinian People” in *The Link* 24, no. 2 (May-June 1990). This magazine is published by Americans for Understanding the Middle East, Inc.

<sup>8</sup>Of course there are Muslim Americans as well as Americans of various Middle Eastern and other Muslim backgrounds. For a source of informed enlightenment about “Islam and the West” and about Muslims in America more particularly, see the Occasional Papers series, “The Muslim World Today” published by the Islamic Affairs Programs of the Middle East Institute, especially John Esposito, *Islamic Revivalism*, no. 3 (1985) and Yvonne Haddad, *A Century of Islam in America*, no. 4 (1986); also John Voll’s perspective-setting essay, “Arabs and Westerners: A Historical View,” *The World and I* 5, no. 2 (February 1990): 453-65.

<sup>9</sup>*The Atlantic Monthly* (September 1990), 49.

in the Third World.<sup>10</sup> What we need to remember here is that on the eve of its primal triumph, the first country from among the nations of the Old World to recognize the emergent republic in the New World and to lend it credence was a Muslim Arab country. "The American nation will remain indebted . . ." sounds a note of gratitude from the founding fathers which rings from that not-so-remote past when a Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed with the Sultan of Morocco in 1787.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Americans and Arabs, the America of the West and the historical core of the peoples of Islam, could have developed the closest and most cordial of relations in later generations. But this was not to be.

Today we find "the American mind" bogged down and "impoverished by its own certitudes," with its will locked in against its own misperceptions, apprehensions, and inhibitions. Caught between a moral fervor and a calculating prudence, it seems ill-prepared for what some have called the "American moment

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<sup>10</sup>Address to a Democratic Issues Convention meeting in Leesburg, VA, on 10 March 1991. A master communicator, Moyers appealed to his fellow Americans not to bask in unearned glory over an easy victory (with no match and no proportion) and reminded them of the ugly truths of a situation where the Iraqi people were victims of American collusion, explaining how "through no fault of their own they became victims because they could not escape the tyranny of their leader and the weight of our technology" — adding the pointed reminder "to those who find it more convenient to ignore the fact, that [it was] we [who] made them, the hundreds of thousands, pay for his sins." While Moyers may have voiced the conscience of a minority, he was clearly representative of the best of an American tradition which prides itself on integrity and moral courage. For an important review essay written with hindsight, see Theodore Draper, "The True History of the Gulf War," *The New York Review of Books* 39, no. 3 (30 Jan. 1992). Included in the books reviewed here is a substantive report published by the Middle East Watch/ Human Rights Watch, *Needless Deaths in the Gulf War* (402 pp.).

<sup>11</sup>To confirm Edward Said's prognostics, *Orientalism*, 314-20, Bernard Lewis manages time and again to deftly turn even the most benign historical evidence, such as that event, into material for stigmatizing a culture. He does so by anticipating the positive elements of an argument and trivializing them before launching an offensive. To witness, the prestigious Jeffersonian lecture for 1990 and reprinted in *The Atlantic Monthly* (op. cit.) was delivered at the height of cultural tensions to educate a perplexed and gullible audience about "The Roots of Muslim Rage": these he attributed to an imminent "clash of cultures" which marked the perennial divide between "Us," the heirs of a "Judeo-Christian" heritage on the one hand, and the aliens, "Them," bearers of an "ancient rival civilization" on the other. Implicit in this paradigm is the belief that Muslim resentment against the West in general and the United States in particular was virtually a fixed cultural given independent of any concrete grievances and existed regardless of any specific policies. Operating outside the pale of rationality, Westerners were forced to take recourse in violence as its own best defense to protect civilization against a threatened "Return of Islam," an article of his which appeared in *Commentary* (January 1976), spelling barbarism and retrogression. This message coincided with a publicity stint for another notorious book, Bernard Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) in "The Scholar's Choice of Current Books," *The Wilson Quarterly* (WQ) 15, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 84-6 and shortly before in a special feature on the Islamic world in *Wilson Quarterly* (Autumn 1989). In all fairness to Lewis, though, his alter egos in the villain culture play a role in sustaining negative stereotypes although they do so with less humor and erudition. cf. *Wilson Quarterly*, *ibid.*, (Spring 1990): 147.

in history.”<sup>12</sup> There are three blinding blights or fears which dampen its resolve and obstruct any effort to forge any enduring partnerships or bridge any passing differences. Some of the anxieties and inhibitions might be partially justified; others are impossible to understand. They may be briefly recapitulated here.

**First.** There is that total and unremitting alignment with the state of Israel, that very strange/compulsive special relationship which has totally overlooked every other consideration of justice, right, or even any interest or expediency experienced outside an unquestionable/unquestioning and overarching commitment to Israel’s security.<sup>13</sup> This commitment is given to the satisfaction of all the desiderata and demands made by the Israeli state and its representative agencies regardless of their justification. So spellbinding has this commitment been that it has persistently complicated and shadowed any prospective American relationship with Arabs in particular and, more generally, with Muslims — and it has repeatedly caused the latter to lose an initially ready fund of faith and trust in American values.<sup>14</sup> What might be observed as the mounting anti-Americanism over the seventies and eighties marks the steady erosion of American credibility in the region.

**Second.** Ever since the mid-seventies there has been that marauding obsession with controlling oil resources at whatever cost, as the record of a generation of strategic debate in the most influential opinion and policy-making circles shows.<sup>15</sup> This preoccupation has not simply been pursued as a means to satisfy those conceivably legitimate needs of a growing domestic economy, but

<sup>12</sup>Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

<sup>13</sup>One of the more promising developments attending the latest US involvement in the Gulf crisis lies in a new willingness among influential opinion makers to rethink the rationale of the special relationship with Israel and to weigh the pros and cons of a strategic alliance against the receding ground of perceived shared affinities and common interests. See Steven Spiegel, “America and Israel — How Bad is It?” and the comments that follow in a topical symposium. *The National Interest*, no. 22 (Winter 1990-91).

<sup>14</sup>It is here that some of the “outdated literature” of an earlier generation, like Freda Utley’s *Will the Middle East Go West?* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1957), can provide some invaluable and refreshing perspectives that, despite current radical changes in the regional and global settings, remain a key to understanding the prevailing pathos in US-Arab relations. Utley’s argument is basically similar to our own, namely that America is unwittingly and unnecessarily alienating the goodwill of Arabs/Middle Easterners (Muslims) by failing to live up to its self-proclaimed ideals of “doing justice to all, bearing malice for none” in its pursuit of an enlightened self-interest. Moral conscience and integrity has not been wanting in American diplomats who attempt to exert a benign influence in shaping relevant US policy/attitudes. Cf. James Akins, “The New Arabia,” *Foreign Affairs* 70 (Summer 1991): 36-49.

<sup>15</sup>See David Painter, “International Oil and National Security,” *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 120, no.4 (Fall 1991): 183-206 against the classic background by J. B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1980). See also “Symposium on American Foreign Policy in the Nineties,” *SAIS Review*, no. 10 (Winter/Spring 1990): 24-7.

it has been increasingly sought after with the objective of controlling the supply lines to the rest of the world and of preempting the emergence of any potential rival power constellation, be it Japanese, European, or otherwise, that might threaten the American hegemon. In short, need has given way to greed — and in both cases the lusts and the passion for dominion have prompted ambitions beyond any principled or grounded reason.

**Third.** Between the Scylla of the Israeli priority and the Charybdis of American oil strategy, there festers the fear of Islam as a factor of consciousness and an element of radicalization. Above all, there is the apprehension of Islam as a catalyst for unity among Muslim nations. The danger of such an eventuality arises from the perceived disruption of the status quo in a hierarchical world order which is primarily conceived in the interests of the powerful few.<sup>16</sup> Muslim nations, moreover, have the good fortune, or otherwise, of occupying a strategic belt or “crescent” at the crossroads of the global network of communications and at the node of vital strategic resources. The ruling military-industrial complex, like any power establishment of its kind, naturally sees its interests as threatened by a potentially hostile adversary. The trouble with such anticipations is, of course, that seeing Islam as an adversary easily becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

These three related and overlapping factors then, the Israeli-Palestinian factor, the oil factor, and the Islamic factor, constitute the perverted and perverting policy triangle that could have been handled differently. There was nothing preordained or “given” about the direction they have taken. With prudence, and assuming a spirit of enabling and ennobling gratification, their handling could have beckoned into the world political economy something more than the well-being of the American people and the safeguarding of its public interest. Such fecundity would have been possible had American foreign policy been genuinely inspired by the American values of justice, democracy, and liberty — and had the power elite sought to live up to its calling and to universalize these values

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<sup>16</sup>Without apology or shame, there are voices that press for a hegemonic world order and caution against any “soft-headed egalitarianism” in the realm of international politics. In “Why Russia Should Join NATO: From Containment to Concert,” *National Interest*, no. 22 (Winter 1990-91): 37-56, the author discusses the changing structure of the new world order drawing on European analogies and precedents only to dismiss the UN as an idealistic anachronism founded on the illusion of harmonious interests which is contrasted with the more effective power interest structure of NATO. By incorporating Russia and Warsaw Pact countries into NATO and redefining its objectives, Coral Bell makes a case for its regeneration into the cornerstone for maintaining the peace and interests of the great powers (i.e., those actors which count in civilization and history) and an effective framework, by dint of a military consciousness and realistic strategy, for containing the forces of sedition and barbarism — implicitly identified with the Third World. For a more explicit identification of the source of this threat, see William Lind, “Defending Western Culture,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 84 (Fall 1991): 40-50. Lind is the director of the Center for Cultural Conservation at the Free Congress Research and Education Foundation in Washington, DC.

instead of tribalizing them and maintaining them for a parochial treat and preserve for the chosen few. Let me spell out my thoughts here.

Had **justice** been observed, and the Palestinians' right to their homeland been acknowledged, there would have been no room for the rampant duplicity and complicity which has tainted American foreign policy in the region all along and which the current Gulf crisis has bared to transparency.<sup>17</sup> In the absence of the demeaning policies brought on by double standards, America could have shored up its credibility among the nations of the globe, and it would most likely have been capable of winning the hearts of Palestinians and Arabs. This is even more the case now after they have become prepared to recognize the state of Israel. The majority of Palestinian contenders who have opted for a political solution have now demonstrated a willingness to forfeit their original claims to recover their lost homes. Instead, in retrospect of some of the more current views voiced by members of the Palestinian delegation from the Occupied Territories, it is their preoccupation to hold on to what little they may still have in a situation where they feel the ground is giving way under their feet "with every lost moment."<sup>18</sup> Other Arabs have accepted the idea of coexisting in peace with their assertive new neighbor in return for being spared its periodic flashing of the "swift and terrible sword": the recurring threat of assault mounted with every decade under whatever pretext (retaliation, preemption, expansion, lebensraum for new emigration, etc.) as has been the practice ever since the "Return to Zion" in 1948. If American backing could be exerted in a different direction to accommodate an ethic of justice and a justice-based peace to an ecology of balance and measure between man and his environment, the benefits of a reconciliation in the region could go beyond the American and the Arab/Muslim connection to encompass a global leavening. This could be particularly enhanced by a revised energy/resources strategy.

As for **oil**, it might be noted that the consolidation of OPEC and the maintenance of fair prices, which would have benefitted all states (including the United States) with reasonable rates and just returns, was not beyond the bounds of practical politics. Had the baser appetites been reined in and held in check, there would have been no need to engage in a mad hatter's race to beat everybody else to *The Prize*<sup>19</sup> in a frenzy to secure the uncontested dominion coveted in the superpower status of the New Imperial Republic. Accentuating the competitiveness inherent in a rampant individualism and a fluctuating market morality merely whets the appetite for a delusory public glory. This happens

<sup>17</sup>Rashid Khalidi, "Old Myths and New Realities," *The World and I* (December 1990): 27.

<sup>18</sup>Hanan al Ashrawi in an interview aired on the PBS Diane Reem Show, 26 November 1991. For a timely overview, see Muhamad Muslih, "The Shift in Palestinian Thinking," *Current History* 91, no. 561 (January 1992): 22-8.

<sup>19</sup>cf. Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991)



when the race and its reward gain the upper hand, to the exclusion of everything else, in generating and determining the strategies and goals which set the American foreign policy agenda.<sup>20</sup> This need not be so, especially when it can only end in detriment. After all, nations are not unlike individuals — at times a monopoly on power and authority and an indulgence in the illusion of control and sovereignty can be sources of wanton arrogance that end up self-destructing more readily than becoming a means for assuring the happiness and welfare of the public.

Let us remember that today, as we head into a new millennium — and possibly at the threshold of the American century — the United States in its unprecedented status of unchallenged supremacy as *the* global superpower and as the most affluent of nations, can hardly deny that thirty million of its own are homeless and that poverty continues to be the lot of a growing proportion of its people at steadily perturbing rates.<sup>21</sup> Such developments simply mean that the richest of nations can hardly secure its own people with the minimum threshold of basic needs to assure them a level of subsistence worthy of an intrinsic but all too vulnerable human dignity. Similarly, one cannot overlook the riveting moral and

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<sup>20</sup>Since the mid-seventies, safeguarding Western oil supplies, the acknowledged jugular vein of the world economy, became the top priority and strategic preoccupation on this agenda (that stood on a par with assuring the inviolability of the Israeli sanctum) so much so that it constituted the primary factor accounting for the alacrity and draconian scale and measure of the American reaction; such that the moral arguments were subsequently induced to supplement an ostensible gut-response in a context which merely heightened duplicity/complicity charges. Adel Darwish and Gregory Alexander, *Unholy Babylon: The Secret History of Saddam's War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), chap. 11; Judith Miller and Laurie Mylroie, *Saddam Hussein and the Crisis in the Gulf* (New York: Random House, 1990), chap. 10. In retrospect, two substantial articles published by Robert Tucker (Johns Hopkins international relations professor) in *Commentary* (January and February 1975) addressing "Oil: The Issue of American Intervention" and "A New International Order?" provide a key to understanding current strategic thinking on the region in the Reagan-Bush administration as well as the background for his own argument in justifying the war. See cover story in *The New Republic*, no. 203 (10 December 1990): 22-6.

<sup>21</sup>Reports, surveys, and academic studies sponsored by various agencies on the deteriorating state of the inner cities, the worsening of a cluster of social problems ranging from drugs, AIDS, homelessness, social welfare, health policy, education, and so on have come to constitute their own culture industry, while effective counterpolicies remain pale by comparison. See Robert Haverman, ed., *A Decade of Federal Anti-Poverty Programs: Achievements, Failures and Lessons* (New York: Academic Press, 1977) and more recently, W. J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987); Gertrude Goldberg and Eleanor Kremen, eds., *The Feminization of Poverty* (New York: Praeger, 1990), chaps. 1 & 2. While explanations for the poverty paradox vary among those who blame the victims and those who blame the inadequacies of the welfare state, the fact remains that it continues to feed into the discontent of a larger and more threatening underclass than most European countries. See Paul E. Johnson, "The Urban Underclass and the Poverty Paradox," *Political Science Quarterly* 106, no. 4 (Winter 1991-92): 617-37. Also, it is here that the liberal anti-war lobby critical of the conduct of the Bush administration in the Gulf crisis had its genuine constituency.

social problems, whether we think in terms of the crime rate, drugs, abortion, or any other of the debasing human ailments infesting the “land of the brave and the free.” It is of little consolation or help in the circumstances to know that America is a superpower and the linchpin of a new world order. In the face of such helplessness in resolving or even facing up to its gnawing human problems, power, grandeur, and glory become meaningless categories.

If national leaders in certain Third World countries may frequently be tempted to compensate for their chronic inadequacies at home by diverting attention away from the domestic front with delusory/desultory triumphs abroad, what is the excuse, one might ask, for a great power to avoid confronting its home-grown problems and for procrastinating and inventing pretexts by engaging foreign ventures and celebrating quixotic glories?<sup>22</sup> Whatever the case it might make for such diversions, surely they cannot match in urgency the problems that are posed at home — especially if they are of a magnitude and a scale that can put lesser powers to shame. While great power status entails power with responsibility, the test, the challenge, and the priorities for assuming credibility must surely begin at home.

*I am not arguing for a new Monroe Doctrine or a new isolationism, and I am fully aware that the new world order cannot thrive on a spirit of parochialisms. What I am questioning though is the gratuitous race to imperial dominion manifest in the perception of priorities and power in the present administration. There is indeed some ground for suspecting that the motivating ideal and precedent in influential republican circles is sought in the early phases of the Roman imperium; a glance through Edward Luttwak's vivid portrayal of the geostrategies of the old Mediterranean world order evokes some eerie resonances with the shape of the “New Middle East Order” with its emerging patron-client state network and buffer states.<sup>23</sup> The only question is how much of this might be interpreted as a deliberate pursuit of a “manifest destiny” and how much might be an unwitting replication verging on a cyclical reading of the Western tradition.*

As far as the compulsive and obsessive fear of Islam goes, let us pointedly note here that America is the last country which should fear Islam for its survival.

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<sup>22</sup>Cf. R. Fox, *Military Victory, Moral Defeat* (1991). For one of the more thought-provoking, compassionate, and incisive comments to appear at the height of the euphoria, see the feature essay by Lance Morrow, “A Moment for the Dead” *Time Magazine* (1 April 1991).

<sup>23</sup>*The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century AD to the Third* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); see against relevant perspectives in Barry Blechman and Edward Luttwak, eds., *Global Security: A Review of Strategic and Economic Issues* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1987)

The absence of a colonial legacy or of antagonisms and contentions with Muslims prior to the Second World War renders anomalous the confrontationalist posture which has since then ensued. Besides, the United States is a multi-racial/multicultural society, and the formula of American pluralism along with this multiplicity and diversity affords it ample benefits.<sup>24</sup> It has shown the world how it can draw strength from this diversity/plurality and how it is capable of absorbing whatever negative repercussions might accrue. Surely, this experience and capacity makes it possible for America to channel the energies of the new order in globally more creative and fulfilling directions. Instead of rushing headlong to erect the phantom of an evil empire postulated on enmity with selected races and cultures, it could be in the lead of an alternative dynamic which favors cooperation over conflict and fosters a competitiveness which would be more benign to humanity. In providing a practical example and a successful model for the rest of the world, a pluralist, just, and liberal America could call upon the nations of the globe (which are becoming increasingly multiethnic) to study the American model and benefit from it. By doing this, it could assume the moral leadership it covets in the new world order and assume the role which truly befits a “civilizing mission,” once this mission is purged of its racist overtones (the “white man’s burden”) and civility is acknowledged in its universality as a God-given investiture to all nations worthy of its cultivation.

More specifically, it might be argued that providing and accommodating the Islamic presence in its midst — alongside other religions and “life-styles” — enables the United States to cultivate a wealth of experience and understanding vis-à-vis various mentalities and cultures. It enhances the ability of dealing with diversity and of avoiding or overcoming the menace of the various specters which might arise from the failure of the human condition, whether such specters go under the name of terrorism, fundamentalism, or something else. Such fears have no grounds other than a long and contorted legacy projected in the form of confrontational constructs: counterpoising Islam and Europe on the one hand and the Arab-Israeli conflict on the other.

To round up a sketch of potentials and a catalogue of missed opportunities on a more optimistic note, let me observe further that I do not think that it is too late for America to revise its politics in the region along lines more oriented towards justice and equity there or wherever else it might have overextended its lease on power and manipulation. I say this despite the continuing American embroilment in the Gulf crisis and its aftermath. As this event marks a watershed in the United States’ relationship with the region, I would like to stop here for

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<sup>24</sup>This despite the mounting doubts about the viability of this ideal in the face of the threatened fragmentation into warring and self-conscious exclusionary ethnicities. Cf. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections of a Multi-Cultural Society* (Tennessee: Whittle Publications, 1991).

a moment to retrace its course. This ill-fated involvement began the day America lent its support to deviant, corrupt, and self-serving authoritarian regimes like that of the Shah and others and thus opted to neglect, scorn, and consign to contempt the peoples of the region. Let us not forget that in the midst of the profusion of crises which have marked the American connection with this region of the globe, that for all its inconsistencies and vacillations, America had adopted a policy of rejecting the revolution in Iran from its first day, and that its distrust and hostility towards the enlightened Islamic trend has continued unabated ever since. Indeed, under the tag of the “Islamic menace,” it becomes virtually impossible to conceive of any category as an “enlightened Islam” – short of recasting the divine revelation of Islam in the Christian or modernist secular/Western mode.<sup>25</sup> American foreign policy has steadily succumbed to the myth and put American values and interests at stake in its dodging of the shadow of the bogey phantoms of the sword-brandishing barbarians of yore.<sup>26</sup> It has thereby contributed to resuscitating the medieval cult of fear and hate which lurks in what Edward Said has called the “subliminal layers of the cultural consciousness of the West.”<sup>27</sup> Yet there is no dearth of such moderate elements, even in the contemporary Muslim world and despite the unfavorable constellation of forces both within the region and outside it, which continue to militate against any enlightenment or moderation.

Lest it should be thought that I am indulging in utopic thinking or that I am promoting a nonexistent breed of Muslim liberals, let me name a few who might qualify for representing their societies and, at the same time, who might hold out the promise of negotiability or communication with the Other. We may point to Negmeddin Arbakan in Turkey, Hassan Turabi in Sudan, Rashid Ghannoushi in Tunisia, Abbas Madani and Mahfouz al-Nahnah in Algeria. Elsewhere are

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<sup>25</sup>Which unfortunately seems to be the blueprint for a “reformed Islam” among even the more enlightened Christian historians and theologians like C. W. Smith, Kenneth Cragg, and the late Marshall Hodgson, whose views have been internalized by some contemporary modernists in the Muslim world. The latter (neo-orientalists?) preach rupture with the legacy of Islam and the wholesale adoption of modernity, where religion may be allowed to subsist as a spiritual enclave at the personal level. This is the thesis underlying such recent studies along the lines of Bassam Tibi, *Islam and the Cultural Accommodation of Social Change* (Boulder, CO.: Westview 1991), translated from the German by Clare Krojzl, which receive wider attention in Middle East departments in the American academy than their substance warrants, given the fact that they are palpably out of touch with cultural realities in the region and its effective political dynamics.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. James Copray de Wilde, *The Rising Tide of Islam* (New York: Vantage Books, 1976). Not surprisingly, “hate literature” of that variety surfaces in periods of panic, and reprints of old favorites circulate. To note: Robert Payne’s *The Holy Sword*, published in 1959 at the height of the paranoia about Nasser in the Arab world, was republished under a deceptively neutral title and passed off as *The History of Islam* (New York: Dorset Press, 1990) to feature on the top of the list of best sellers in the nation-wide network of the BOMC (Book of the Month Club) during the Gulf crisis.

<sup>27</sup>Said, *Covering Islam*, 6.

figures like Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Muhammad al-Ghazali in Egypt, or more versatile public figures there known for their Islamic affinities like Shukri and others. Or, again, we can look across at Asia and identify such elements of an openness and integrity like Anwar Ibrahim in Malaysia and Khurshid Ahmad in the Jama'at Islamiyya in Pakistan. All of these individuals are Islamicists who are well educated, and some of them have received part of that education in the West. At the same time, they all enjoy a wide base of support at the grass-root level — enough to enable them to become popular leaders and to provide the nucleus for sound representative institutions in their countries as well as to secure the political stability which would secure a threshold of legitimate “vital interests” for the United States (as much as for Japan or Europe, for example). Over and above their education and popularity, all of these individuals have in common a civilizational approach in their understanding of Islam. We mean by this that most of them subscribe to an essentially sociocultural reading of the faith, one rooted in a “God-centered humanism” — a category of thought and a set of aspirations which are not entirely unfamiliar in the Western tradition either. This should bode well from a Western and American perspective, for it makes these elements less fearsome or archaic since, after all, they are open to a discerning and discriminate or a reflexive and critical assimilation of the values of modernity. All, moreover, are open to cooperating with others in laying the foundations of modern institutions,<sup>28</sup> even if those others might entertain different priorities and defer to alternative counsels for their inspiration, provided that they too are willing to engage a communicative posture and ultimately partake of the same ends.

But America remains intractable on certain fronts. And this is one of them: American policies are constantly opposed to such enlightened and negotiable elements for no other reason, it would seem, than sheer bias and the determined exclusion of any Islamically oriented disposition. In their place, it has openly and unabashedly sought to adopt and encourage military elements and minority

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<sup>28</sup>This is the unequivocal and sobering message that has been consistently put forward by Rashed el-Ghannoushi in addressing mixed audiences, including his own constituency, as witness his recent tour (January-February 1990) of the United States and various media interviews. Yet a basic undercurrent of distrust and ambivalence persists in Western attitudes whenever it comes to an empirical test carrying with it the promise of “normal politics” or participation by Islamists of whatever hue. Cf. Robert Mortimer, “Islam and Multiparty Politics,” *Middle East Journal* 45, no. 4 (Autumn 1991): 575-93. Thanks to the efforts of more enlightened elements in the academy (cf. John Esposito and James Piscatori, “Democratization and Islam,” *ibid.*, 45, no.3 [Summer 1991]), even some of the more die-hard skeptics who have traditionally been dismissive of any constructive potential for Islam in Arab politics are becoming more amenable to rethinking their erstwhile stances. “Incrementally minded” officials are urged by a political scientist at a US military academy to reconsider their misperceptions about the threat to stability (and US vital interests) associated with broadening the political base of regimes in the region. Augustus Norton, “Breaking through the Wall of Fear in the Arab World,” *Current History* 91 (January 1992): 37-41.

parties, or simply authoritarian or technocratic despots and tyrants, along with dubious oligarchs, despite the fact that their records have been appalling. It is noteworthy that the president's statement in Congress hailing the victory of the allies in the Gulf crisis had nothing to say about democracy and representative regimes while outlining its prospectus for the new order in the Middle East.<sup>29</sup> Even to this day, it now appears after demolishing a nation and wreaking havoc upon it in the name of restraining its leadership, American official policy continues to look for an alternative to the Iraqi tyrant from among his own ranks or, failing that, from the military he has created. Doggedly, therefore, and in a doctrinaire frame of mind, the United States studiously avoids any relationship or initiative formed at the grass-root level or with indigenous Islamic trends. It continues to observe that posture at the present as much as it has done so in the past.

Foremost among the unlearned lessons of the Gulf crisis and the now dimming memory of its sources and causes is how American policy has striven to support and consolidate a maniac which it then confronted as a monster of its own creation. Over the years, it has assiduously preferred him to popular and learned leaders who were once around and who could then, as now, have posed a more credible as well as congenial/negotiable alternative to the incumbent. I have in mind figures like the late Abdel Rahman al Bazzaz and Abdel Karim Zeidan among acknowledged public figures and some among the learned scholars with a popular base like Baqir al-Sadr and Sheikh Abdel-Aziz al-Badri, as well as Sheikh Amjad al-Zahawi, Sheikh al-Sawwaf, and Imam Mahdi al-Khalsi, all of whom have come to immortalize a tradition of persecuted and martyred ulama hounded for their moral courage and integrity by the power usurpers of our day.<sup>30</sup> Instead, it left these honored/honorable and learned leaders of their

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<sup>29</sup>*Washington Post* (2 March 1991). It was this duplicity about US attitudes to democracy in the region that precipitated the showdown with Baghdad, according to the Senate hearing of 20 March 1991 with Ambassador Glaspie, where the VOA broadcast of a US foreign policy directive intended for Eastern Europe was accidentally transmitted and miscarried to the Middle East. This incident, which is recorded in Adel Darwish and Gregory Alexander, *Unholy Babylon: The Secret History of Saddam's War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 245, is best read against the more general relationship between the Ba'hist regime and the US, an aspect which is also deftly outlined by the authors in a chapter on "Iraq and the West," *ibid.*, 55-82.

<sup>30</sup>Such rulers also have their notorious prototypes in the past who are probably far better known in current western/ized literature than the exemplars of virtue for the obvious reason that they reinforce the negative stereotypes about a culture of violence. Cf. Samir al-Khalil, *The Republic of Fear* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989). More relevant, however, to appreciating the politics of a culture which is actively shaped by its live ideals is a long-standing distinction in the Islamic legacy between self-serving religious scholars who are the instruments of power (*'ulamā' al sulṭān*) and those who embody the integrity inherent in their status-bearing function as the revered heirs of the prophets (*al 'ulamā' warathat al anbiyā'*): a hadith in a tradition that also holds that "the ink of the scholar is worthy of the blood of the martyr. One should also note that the authority of the *'ālim* (scholar) is doubly accessed: once through the knowledge learned and once through the credibility earned in his/her public conduct. His/Her peers are the source in the one, and his/her

people and culture at the mercy of a thug who sought to liquidate them. It then proceeded with a single-minded obduracy, indifferent to the human consequences and regardless of all qualms about subsidizing a posted reign of terror, to arm the monster with the most lethal weapons to enable him to confront the revolution in neighboring Iran at a time when it was led by its more enlightened elements, many of whom had roots in the West. Yet, to confound complicity with duplicity, it preferred to them an illiterate tyrant, a bland commoner, and a career murderer to boot,<sup>31</sup> simply to undermine the emerging regime and, with the cunning of reason (or “diabolical intent”?), ultimately to exhaust the resources of both countries, depleting thereby the region of its civilizational potential for at least a generation to come and paving the way for the desolation we now witness.

Blinding ignorance, it might be noted, was no justification for such preferences, as there was ample information about more than the tyrant: the brutishness of a tyranny.<sup>32</sup> Yet a deliberate front of amorality was maintained by official policy circles in the United States — and the focus of another “special relationship” with (the strong man of) Baghdad and his analogues — back in the seventies as much as today in the nineties, and it was to be tuned to a concerted ethic of wheeling and dealing regardless. Such conduct was initially justified

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following (the people) are the arbiters in the other. See ‘Abd al ‘Azīz al Badrī, *Al Islām baynā al ‘Ulamā’ wa al Hukkām* (Islam between the Wielders of the Pen and the Wielders of the Sword). The author, himself an ‘ālim, was a living example of his preaching up until his execution by the Ba’thists in June 1969.

<sup>31</sup>The rhetoric here is more descriptive than pejorative. Among the more reliable biographies, there are different perspectives on a man who has shaped the fate of a nation for over two decades and stomped the will of at least one generation: Judith Miller and Laurie Mylroie, *Saddam Hussein and the Crisis in the Gulf* (New York: Times Books, Random House, 1990), provide a more intimate and personal portrait reeking with a “prime-time terror” stench and leading up to the stand-off with the Kuwaiti invasion, while a more empathetic version that verges on an apologia in parts in its attempt to humanize the “blood-thirsty” and “ogre-like” image of the “strong man of Baghdad” may be found in E. Karsch and I. Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein: A Political Biography* (New York: Free Press, 1991). Yet the factual history remains that his initial accession to power was due to his credentials as a ruthless security agent and that his survival was a function of his consolidation of the *Jihāz Hanīn*, the Ba’thist party’s organ for intimidation which he transformed into the nucleus of a formidable network of intelligence and terror agencies which soon became the staple of his order. In his chilling narrative *The Republic of Fear: The Inside Story of Saddam’s Iraq* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), Samir al-Khalil (pseudonym) embeds an ingeniously deconstructed profile of the man as much as of a regime in this context.

<sup>32</sup>Published evidence existed at least since 1981, eg. *Iraq: Evidence of Torture* (London: Amnesty International, 1981) and not only with recent updates and retrospects, eg. David Korn, *Human Rights in Iraq: A Human Rights Watch Book* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990). However, as long as “vital interests” continued to be maintained and Saddam was capable of placating his powerful friends, a media blackout was maintained and the regime was discreetly shielded. For example, during the Iran-Iraq war, the sum of US\$ 27 million was paid as compensation for the lives of thirty-five Americans following the accidental sinking of the USS Stark (cf. “friendly fire” incidents during Desert Storm?). Miller and Mylroie, *Saddam Hussein and the Crisis in the Gulf*, 147.

and continued to be condoned by an irrational obsession with containing and uprooting what has continued to be perceived in American policy circles as the dreaded Islamic revival. The only explanation for such an obsession lies in apprehending the nature of stereotypes, a subject on which Walter Lippman has been eloquently articulate. The myths and apprehensions about Islam in the West continue to feed the imagination and the passions in the form of stereotypes.

We learn that people react to stereotypes rather than to the object itself: and stereotypes precede the use of reason “. . . and impose a certain character on the data of our senses before the data reached the intelligence.” In the intervening seventy years since Lippmann’s original contribution, Michael Curtis tells us in a recent study<sup>33</sup> that many attempts have been made to define the concept of stereotypes (primarily in the field of social psychology). The literature here falls into three categories: sociological, psychological, and cognitive. The sociological sees stereotypes as present in our culture and as being absorbed through the processes of socialization as we do with other concepts and behavior patterns. Psychologically, stereotypes are used as rationalizations for prejudice. And it is this linkage of stereotypes with prejudice which makes them so objectionable. We also learn that such categories may be rational (but often they are based on emotion and feeling) and that they vary according to the intensity with which they are held and in the consensus about them. If we are aware of these factors, then we can well imagine the harm done by the pervasive stereotypes about Muslims and the negative associations with Islam which persist in the West and which exert such a deadly influence when they thrive in decision-making and foreign policy circles. Lippmann voices the thoughts of others and speaks for many a misconception about Islam when he asserts in a more general vein that “My moral system rests on my accepted version of the facts, (and) he who denies either my moral judgments or my version of the facts is to me perverse, alien, dangerous.” It seems that because Islam offers an alternative view of reality, modernity, or morality, it comes to be perceived by American statesmen as “perverse, alien, and dangerous” when in reality there is far more that binds than blinds.

What are the prospects for American policy in the Middle East and, more generally, for America and Islam? Will it be to retrieve, to renew, and to reconstruct, or will it rather be to reprieve, to banish, and to self-destruct? I speak here of retrieval and renewal in terms which I have spelled out elsewhere. Together we, Muslims, Christians, and Jews, of whatever moral persuasion, as the progeny of the Abrahamic faith and branches of the same tradition of *tawhīd* which proclaims the oneness of God and the unity of “man,” ultimately belong to and remain within that same tradition and share the same destiny. This is true even if our routes might diverge and represent variations on the same tradition — each endowed with its rationality and its fullness — rather than collapsing into a

<sup>33</sup>*Social Science and Modern Society* 28, no. 2 (January-February 1991): 23-31.



uniformity of the same. And I speak of retrieval and renewal because the elements for our common prosperity in a global moral order can be found there: in the sharing of our God-given resources, in their recovery, rediscovery, and cultivation together rather than in their dissipation and, in the process, bringing on our own devastation. It is this awareness which renders it imperative to point out the potentials of a change of heart in American foreign policy in the Middle East as well as to warn against the dangers of persisting in its waywardness.

Unless American policy is freed of its constraints and a way is opened to rid itself of the insidious legacies and irrational fears and passions which choke it, and unless it makes an effort to see to it that the ambivalent and multidimensional relationship between Europe and Islam does not also indiscriminately include the United States, the prospects are dim for a more propitious new world order. Any such constellation must inevitably include the Middle East and the Muslim world as well. If such an order is to be made of the stuff of justice and equity which alone can provide the matrix for an enduring and prosperous peace and plenty for all, America will need to set a new agenda where, first of all, the Israeli complex will have to be overcome. It will need to reexamine the assumptions of its regional alliances concerning the cornerstones of its security interests and the policing function in the region, a process which has in fact already begun in some influential quarters, as the symposium round Steven Spiegel's initiative to this effect has shown.<sup>34</sup> Next, it will need to overcome its inhibition/complexes vis-à-vis Islam and institute relations with "enlightened" Muslims and, by the same token, it will have to stop preferring tyrants over them and defending hated regimes against their own people. (This is unfortunately a stalled process — the missing dimension which has yet to emerge in US foreign policy circles.) It will need to listen more attentively to such voices of reason coming from within that urge prudence and call for rethinking the principles and ends of an Islamic policy for the United States such as would refrain from dispensing more of the same routine agenda of suspicion, hostility, resistance, and repression. There is a rationale to this plea:

Government suppression. . . against Islamic activist organizations, directly or indirectly supported by Western powers can radicalize moderates, transforming reformers into revolutionaries. Many moderate Islamic activists have resisted such pressures and indeed remain a challenge to Arab governments, as well as Western powers, to honor their commitments to political ideals and values such as popular political participation and self-determination.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>*The National Interest* (Winter, 1990/91).

<sup>35</sup>John Esposito, "The Impact of Islam on Arab Politics," *The World and I: A Chronicle of Our Changing Era*, 5 no. 2 (February 1990): 483-99. This magazine is published by the Washington Times Corporation.

It will need, in short, to extricate itself from what Richard Falk has diagnosed as “the terrorist logic of modernism” so crudely and theatrically played out in the most recent foreign policy excursion in the Gulf.<sup>36</sup> This can only happen when the self-imposed hurdles, blunders, passions, and prejudices which prevent the “honoring of commitments” are alleviated and America’s conscience is free to pursue a principled policy privileging justice over avarice and reason over prejudice. Such a policy can be just as realistic as any pragmatism informed by the just moral ethos, and would not involve succumbing to the Kissinger temptation to write off the Third World to “alternative moralities.”<sup>37</sup>

To the extent that America effectively rectifies its policies in light of an enhanced understanding, it will be able to demolish the face of the ugly and rapacious American – the stereotypical source of the region’s virulent and growing anti-Americanism.<sup>38</sup> This is the image of the self-interested and insensitive “Westerner,” whether he/she is intent on pursuing his/her ends with all the flourish and fanfare of the “Wild West” approach<sup>39</sup> or whether he/she indulges a kind of “benign insensitivity to the consequences of his/her actions for others.”<sup>40</sup> In whatever guise or garb, he/she is unmistakably perceived in the eyes of the Other to be out to ride roughshod over the world, run it over, and then to exploit, manipulate, subvert, convert, and dominate it under the banner of those much-vaunted values which he/she merely flouts with every beat. It is an image which no honest American will admit or even recognize as his/her own, for I believe that the common American genuinely believes in his/her own morality and is given as much as any other self-respecting human being to a level of

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<sup>36</sup>Richard Falk, “The Terrorist Foundations of Recent US Foreign Policy” in *Western State Terrorism*, ed. Alexander George (New York: Routledge Chapman and Hall and Polity Press, 1991), 104.

<sup>37</sup>This logic comes through his bicentennial essay, “America and the World: Principle and Pragmatism,” *Time Magazine* (27 December 1976) and resonates with the note of Coral Bell’s more recent article cited above. Indeed, such specialized scholarship dealing with American foreign aid to Third World countries, especially to Muslim countries, is notoriously ambivalent in its prescriptions. See Jerrold Green, “USAID’s Democratic Pluralism Initiative: Pragmatism or Altruism?” *Ethics and International Affairs* 5 (1991): 215-31.

<sup>38</sup>One does not have to be an anarchist or a radical to agree with the charge that a pervasive element of hypocrisy underlies official US policy in the Third World and that this provokes the righteous resentment of its victims. In Middle Eastern policy circles, for example, stances are notoriously notable for a situation where “elementary facts cannot be perceived and obvious thoughts are unthinkable” in a setting where “one finds accolades to our benevolent intentions and nobility of purpose, our elevated standards of ‘democracy, freedom and humanism,’ sometimes flawed in performance.” Noam Chomsky, “International Terrorism: Image and Reality,” in *Western State Terrorism*, 35.

<sup>39</sup>Graham Fuller, “The Strategic Irrelevance of Israel,” *The National Interest* (Winter 1990-91): 31-3, in which the author rightly castigates US Middle East policy for its ad hoc, *deus ex machina* style of rough justice politics to regional crises.

<sup>40</sup>Bill Moyers, Democratic Issues Convention, 10 March 1991.

highmindedness intrinsic to the species. Highmindedness cannot condone a heavy hand. Yet an American foreign policy conceived without regard to the standards of justice and liberty for all does a grave disservice to the image of the common American. It defies the American consciousness and conscience which prides itself and sees its worth echoed in the meaning signified by the national credo: one nation under God, dedicated to the noblest of human ideals: justice and liberty for all.

Yet notwithstanding the flaws in American foreign policy, the frailties of decision makers and the lapses of the incumbents of power, Americans have reason to be proud in partaking of a system of government and representation which, at its best, can assure them of the mechanisms and the opportunities needed for a sustained process of feedback, self-correction, and rectification. While it is all too tempting to condemn a policy for its inconsistency and a polity for its intransigence, the system of authority and responsibility is ultimately constituted of individuals. And persons are capable of learning. Indeed, even cynical Middle East scholars are capable of changing their minds and mollifying their attitudes.<sup>41</sup> It is up to the common American to opt for the pursuit of principled politics over and above the counsels of expedience and the hard-nosed and short-sighted perceptions of interest. But no such pursuit or option is possible unless each and every member of a concerned American public resolves to reexamine what he/she knows and, above all, what one takes for granted about the world we live in and the people and cultures with which we are destined to become increasingly involved.

Allow me to conclude this brief diagnosis and prognostication by sounding an evocative note — “evocative” because I find myself speaking in part as a Muslim from a benighted and currently traumatized region of our globe, and in part as one who aspires to make of America an adopted and cherished second home. I have outlined the challenges and opportunities for America and Islam in terms of an immediately tangible sphere pertaining to American foreign policy in the Middle East and with an eye on connections nearer to home as well. I have also

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<sup>41</sup>More than a shifting emphasis attributable to changing events, developments in the current literature on the region reflects changing perspectives verging on the paradigmatic. See, for example, Alan Taylor, *The Arab Balance of Power* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1982) and a later study, *The Islamic Question in Middle East Politics* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1988); or again, the dean of Arab politics at Georgetown in his presidential address at the Middle East Studies Association Convention in 1987 “Democratization and the Problem of Legitimacy in Arab Politics,” *MESA Bulletin* 22, no. 2, (December 1988) and his more careful prognostics in “After the Gulf War: Prospects for Democratization in the Arab World,” *Middle East Journal*, 45, no. 3 (Summer 1991). As some observers note, the single most significant long-term implication of the Gulf War upon the region could be related to internal structural developments bearing on democratization and Islamicist participation. See Augustus R. Norton and M. Muslih, *Rising Tides in the Middle East: Beyond the Gulf Watershed* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1992).

suggested the prevailing options and imperatives which make for a review of attitudes in light of considerations of morality and justice. Given the shaping realities of our times and the responsibilities of America as the leading nation in the world today, let me stress that these responsibilities ultimately fall on its citizens as conscientious individuals and as action groups mobilizing for common concerns.

Let me pause here and sound a note inspired by an ennobling but much maligned idiom. In addressing the urgency of mobilizing for justice and equity in American foreign policy in the Middle East, we find ourselves standing on a worthy ground inviting us to a concerted effort — a jihad — against our own complacencies and urging us to become involved in shaping the new world order instead of allowing ourselves (and others) to become the unwitting partisans to its injustices and ultimately its sodden victims as well. In the new perceptions we acquire and foster, we do not have to search out enemies to engage in battle in order to maintain our enthusiasm for life. The enemy lies within ourselves, and the evils which need to be rectified are in our midst. The end of the Cold War era should be an opportunity for closing the credibility gap which has long continued to distort our image among those with whom we have so much to share. And, beyond this distortion, it has imperceptibly precipitated the erosion of our moral energies and reserves. I speak of “us” and “our” to indicate a mood of transcendence, where the binaries are left behind and the realization of basic affinities and common commitments to the values of justice and equity prevails.

In an epochal decade ushering in the new millennium and promising us a new world order, it is imperative to question and reexamine the premises of American foreign policy in the Middle East. This imperative is moral as much as historical. The distortions of a bedeviled confrontational psyche must be addressed, and the myth of Islam as the enemy must be disposed of. Revamping our perceptions and understandings of Islam should lie at the heart of this soul-searching venture, for Islam is not simply out there, an adversary which must be contained and placated in our image or, failing that, an evil to be defeated, humiliated, uprooted, destroyed, and eradicated. Planet Earth and the consciousness of the requisites needed for rehabilitating its ecology on the eve of a new millennium have no room for the racist brand of tongue-in-cheek Enlightenment that was so unabashedly expressed by the French philosopher and orientalist Ernest Renan nearly a century ago. There, he had reduced Islam to a pathological semiticism, a wart on the brow of civilization, a condition which he conflated with Europe to which humanity itself was aptly reduced. He then sequestered the future for an exclusive preserve which would be ensured only after the last of the perfidious sons of Ismā'īl had been slain or consigned to the desert to rot.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, some of President Bush's statements in the heat

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<sup>42</sup>For the excerpted original of that inaugural lecture delivered at the College de France on 23 February 1862 see Vincent Monteil, *Clefs pour la Pensée Arabe*, 3d ed. (Paris: Seghers, 1987),

of the crisis bore faint echoes of that tenor.<sup>43</sup> Islam must be seen for what in reality it is: a comprehensive coherence of values and meanings cast in the embers of a divine and providential mercy and justice; a whole and a medium of wholesomeness which has been made accessible to the mind and hearts of men and women so as to secure each one of them a much-needed universal human guidance which they can draw upon if they so choose. It is meant to make their sojourn in their temporary and temporal abode a tolerable if not a completely felicitous one; to give meaning and purpose to their mortal strivings as they journey on to their ultimate abode and return, to their beginning and beyond.

To refer back to our current immediate concerns as citizens of a shrinking earth and as architects within a new global moral order, we invoke the terms of the mundane. We must realize (again as Americans) that Islam is essentially that persistent and pervasive force destined to remain with us even here within our own world, at the threshold of our estate and the hearth of our home, so to speak, and that it can no longer simply be dismissed as lying in that mythical convenient distance, "out there." As we realign our perceptions with changing realities we might, even within these precincts of Peter Berger's "homeless mind," also come to gain by the "promises of Islam"<sup>44</sup> — if only we understood them.

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202. But for the scholarly prestige of both speaker and site, this statement could have been conveniently consigned to the heap of anachronistic polemics which are best forgotten. It is a poignant reminder, however, of the fact that human reason is not necessarily a source of human virtue nor a sole reliable arbiter in human affairs, and that rationality and prejudice can coexist in the same mind and generate and thrive on the paradoxes which beset the human condition when it is cut off from its external guidance. My discussion of open and closed culture-types drawing on vertical and horizontal epistemological bearings touches on this theme. See Mona Abul-Fadl, "Cultural Parodies and Parodizing Cultures," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 8, no.1 (March 1991).

<sup>43</sup>Against the unprecedented fury with which the US-led "allied coalition" carried out a ruthless, cold-blooded, methodical, and systematic destruction of the infrastructures of power and progress in this part of the world, and with the historical Western aversion to Islam, it was not hard to detect the nature of the stakes President Bush had in mind when he stated that it was not the man or the regime he cared about, but rather the symbol this nation stood for which needed to be ruthlessly demolished if (Western) civilization was to be preserved. Cf. W. Lind's demarcation of a new agenda for a conservative domestic and foreign policy emphasizing the cultural over the economic. "Defending Western Culture," *Foreign Policy*, op.cit. Whatever the intent, the outcome has certainly left both man and regime intact, and the infrastructure of power and progress in this geostrategic culture-region visibly depleted and devastated for at least another generation to come. See Laurie Mylroie, "How We Helped Saddam Survive," *Commentary* 92 (July 1991): 15-8.

<sup>44</sup>This is the title of one of the many original works by a contemporary French philosopher-activist, Roger Garaudy, author of *Promesses de l'Islam* (Paris: Seuil, 1981) which, together with such prescient works as *L'Islam habite notre Avenir* (Paris: Descl e de Brouwer, 1981) and *L'Islam en Occident: Cordoue, une capitale de l'esprit* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987) is testimony to the humanist vision and wealth of those who came to learn of the world of Islam from its cultural sources with open hearts and minds. In the English-speaking world, Charles Le Gai Eaton's *Islam and the Destiny of Man* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987) provides a thoughtful and refreshing insight into this numinous mind-set. Countering the current alarmist casts of mind

Fortunately, such understanding is not beyond the faculties of human reflection and reflexivity, on the condition that we are prepared to open our minds to enlightenment and our hearts to illumination.

Here are some truths we must heed if we are to grow and prosper together – and together it must be, for there is no alternative to our common destiny if we are to survive our own vicissitudes, our misconceptions, and their consequences. We need to integrate the outer with the inner and to realize that human life, like the human entity itself, cannot be compartmentalized without losing its essential meaning and purpose. We also need to recognize that politics and policies relating to the public domain are of a piece, comprising a single multifaceted and multilayered texture inscribed in the same code of morality. Any attempt to segment and qualify this morality by distinguishing a private from a public morality, or by parceling out the latter into fiefs, must be ruled out as futile and seen as unjustified as it is senseless. Only then can we address the issue of American foreign policy in the Middle East without tongue in cheek, and only then can we come to experience the convictions we proclaim when we demand and expect that sea-change from greed to justice as a measure of conduct and accountability. Islam can help us in this process of integration and recognition. Reorienting ourselves away from the long-held myths about Islam to the realities it enshrines can enable us to revamp that system of perceptions and understandings which can benefit our conduct in the Middle East and extend to reshaping the new world order so that the latter can turn into a practicable and realizable vision of liberty and justice, peace and plenty, for all.

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(cf. Antony Hartley, "Europe's Muslims," *The National Interest* [Winter 1990/91]: 57-66). It is reassuring to hear honest Christian voices which also warn against "the darker side of the European character" and plead for more openness towards Muslims and Islam as a moral imperative as does Charis Waddy in *Shaping a New Europe: The Muslim Factor* (Platform One in a Series: Papers for the Nineties) (London: Grosvenor Books, 1991), which is a reprint of a lecture delivered at a Moral Re-armament Conference held at Caux, Switzerland in 1990. Waddy who has authored two important books – *Women in Muslim History* and *The Muslim Mind*, new ed., (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1990), was the first woman to study Oriental languages at Oxford University and is an example of a committed Christian who has spent a lifetime of bridge-building with those she warmly refers to as her friends in the Muslim world.