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The Meridian House Speech and Academic Influence on U.S. Policy in the Middle
East

Shant Eghian

Faculty Supervisor: B.J. Dobski, PhD

Political Science

A Thesis Submitted to Fulfill the Requirements of the Honors Program at
Assumption College

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On July 3rd, 2013, the Egyptian military successfully overthrew the government of Mohammed Morsi, the first democratically elected leader in Egyptian history. Morsi, who was elected a little over a year before, faced criticism from both within the government and among the Egyptian people. Such critics worried that Morsi was attempting to push through a new constitution based on shari'a law, and was willing to overstep checks on presidential power to get his way. There was also worry that he was letting Islamist mobs harass Egyptian Christians¹ with impunity, as well as economic turmoil throughout his presidency.² Citing these criticisms to legitimate its decisions, the Egyptian military decided to take action. After the military coup, then President Barack Obama made remarks both highly critical of the coup as well as urging the military to return to democracy. The American president stated that he "was deeply concerned by the decision of the Egyptian armed forces to remove President Morsi and suspend the Egyptian Constitution." He urged "the Egyptian military to move quickly and responsibly to return full authority back to a democratically elected civilian government as soon as possible through an inclusive and transparent process."³ To punish Egyptian military Commander Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's hold on power after the coup, as well as his harsh crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, the Obama administration suspended a large portion of a promised \$1.5 billion aid package to Egypt.⁴

¹ Paul Taylor, "Two More Dead after Sectarian Clashes in Egypt," Reuters, April 8, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-clashes/two-more-dead-after-sectarian-clashes-in-egypt-idUSBRE93503A20130408>.

² "Going to the Dogs | The Economist," The Economist, March 30, 2013, accessed January 4th, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21574533-unless-president-muhammad-morsi-broadens-his-government-egypts-economy-looks>.

³ "Statement by President Barack Obama on Egypt | Whitehouse.gov," The White House, July 3, 2013, accessed January 4th, 2018, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/03/statement-president-barack-obama-egypt>.

⁴ Spencer Case, "How Obama Sided with the Muslim Brotherhood | National Review," National Review, July 3, 2014, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2014/07/how-obama-sided-muslim-brotherhood-spencer-case/>.

On the surface, it looked as if the Obama administration's actions were noble. The administration supported the right of Egyptians to democratically choose their own leader over an authoritarian military dictatorship, even though that dictatorship was one America's most important Middle Eastern allies. However, by supporting Morsi's Islamist presidency, the Obama administration not only harmed America's own interests, but the peace and stability of Egypt. It is true that Morsi won a free and fair election, but his actions after he won power demonstrated that he was willing to forgo liberal democratic values to pursue his own illiberal agenda. In November of 2012, Morsi issued a declaration banning any opposition to any of his laws and decrees, including from the Supreme Court. He ordered retrials of individuals already acquitted for alleged crimes done under the anti-Mubarak protests, violating the principle of double Jeopardy. The declaration also authorized Morsi "to take any measures he sees fit in order to preserve the revolution, to preserve national unity or to safeguard national security."⁵ Morsi also made statements and actions that were harmful to the security interests of the United States. In 2010, Morsi made Anti-Semitic remarks in a televised statement, calling Israelis "blood-suckers" and "the descendants of apes and pigs."⁶ During his presidency, Morsi also advocated for the release of Omar Abdel-Rahman from American prison. Abdel-Rahman was involved in a number of terrorist incidents in his lifetime, including the assassination of Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat, as well as the 1993 World Trade Center Bombings.⁷ Morsi was far from a liberal and democratic leader, using his electoral victory to push Egypt to more authoritarian and Anti-Western ends. The coup in 2013 involved not only the Egyptian military, but Coptic Pope

⁵ "Egypt's President Mursi Assumes Sweeping Powers - BBC News," BBC, November 22, 2012, accessed January 3rd, 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-20451208>.

⁶ "Morsi in 2010: No to Negotiations with the Blood-Sucking, Warmongering "Descendants of Apes and Pigs"; Calls to Boycott U.S. Products | MEMRI," MEMRI, 2010, accessed January 3rd, 2018, <https://www.memri.org/tv/morsi-2010-no-negotiations-blood-sucking-warmongering-descendants-apes-and-pigs-calls-boycott-us>.

⁷ Case, "How Obama Sided with the Muslim Brotherhood."

Tawadros II, and the Sufi leader of al-Azhar University, Ahmen el-Tayeb, leaders of Egyptian religious minorities who feared persecution under Morsi's Islamist government. Through all of this, the Obama administration continued to support Morsi and oppose the military because of its commitment to Egyptian democracy. Even though Morsi was ultimately worse for the security interests of both Egypt and U.S. security, President Obama remained loyal to the principle of Egyptian democracy, even when it was unprincipled to do so.

The Obama administration's attitude towards Egypt throughout the Arab Spring and the ensuing counter-coup is not an isolated policy. Rather, it is a reflection of a much broader attitude that has pervaded American foreign policy in the Middle East since the early 1990s. This attitude is: When a Middle Eastern Country faces a choice between an authoritarian regime and democratically elected opposition, side with the latter. While this may seem like a laudable goal, American policymakers have not always been mindful of the ways in which democratic movements in the Middle East can use democratic processes for their own illiberal and anti-Western ends. This is particularly true of a movement or ideology called "Islamism" (sometimes called political Islam) that seeks to return Muslim societies to a state of purity governed by a strict theocracy and a highly literalist reading of shari'a law. For the past twenty-five years, American policymakers have seen some Islamist groups not as dangerous and destabilizing, but positive forces for peaceful reform in the Middle East, particularly Islamist groups that seek power through the ballot box instead of the bomb. This is dangerous policy, as it can (and has) led America to support regimes and movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Islamist rebels in Libya and Syria, and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, political movements that are detrimental to both the security of America and the stability of the Middle East.

This framework for thinking about Islamist groups in the Middle East stems from academic trends that have gone back to the late 1970s within Middle East Studies Departments. Two major figures in Middle East Studies who were instrumental in setting these trends and influencing American policy with them are Edward Said and John Esposito. The former wrote the seminal book, *Orientalism*, that was responsible for fundamentally changing the way Western academics viewed the Middle East by arguing that the history of Western scholarship in the region was characterized by bigotry and Western chauvinism, not by objective analysis. The latter academic wrote *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (1992), a highly influential book in American policymaking circles that argued that the revival of political Islam in the Middle East was not a threat the United States should fear, but a wide and varied movement that in many cases was a force for positive social change with which the United States should accommodate and work. This paper will prove that both academics were very important in influencing the way that American policymakers view the Middle East.

The Meridian House Speech

This new framework in Middle East policy began under President George H.W. Bush's administration. In 1992, Edward P. Djerejian, then Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, gave a speech entitled "The United States and the Middle East in a Changing World." Named after the prestigious Meridian House in Washington DC, where Djerejian delivered the speech, it addressed the state of the American-Middle East relations after the end of the Cold War and the First Gulf War. Most importantly, the speech addressed the rising tide of political Islam (Islamism), and how the United States should respond to it.

Islamism Defined

Before proceeding any further, it is important to ask: What is “Islamism?” To answer this, it is important to make the distinction between Islam the religion and Islamism the political ideology. Islam is a religion based off the teachings of the prophet Muhammad and the Qur’an, a text Muslims believe to be the literal word of God. Islam spans back to the seventh century, and consists of various interpretations and traditions. As well as prescribing traditional religious obligations, such as a basic morality, and rules for prayer and fasting, Islam also has a strong political character. There are detailed rules for economic practices, the rules of warfare, as well as governance. Islamism hyper-emphasizes the political aspects of Islam, and it seeks to guide Islamic societies back to the rule of shari’a law. Islamism is rooted in the thinking of reformers such as Hassan al-Banna, Abul A’la Maududi, and Ruhollah Khomeini, as well as more traditional theologians such as Muhammad al-Wahhab and Taqi Ibn-Taymiyyah. In the words of Michael Scott Doran, Islamists “regard the Islam that most Muslims practice today as polluted by idolatry; they seek to reform the religion by emulating the first generation of Muslims, whose pristine society they consider to have best reflected God’s wishes for humans.”⁸ They argue that in order to bring Islamic Civilization back to its rightful place, Muslims had to guide their respective societies back to a strict understanding of Islam and shari’a. This strict understanding of shari’a includes many practices that the West would consider illiberal and authoritarian, such as the repression of women and religious minorities, censorship of speech, and political executions. Islamists “believe that strict application of the shari’a is necessary to ensure that Muslims walk the path of the Prophet. The more extremist the party, the more insistent and violent the demand that the state must apply the shari’a exclusively.”⁹ According to Daniel Pipes, a writer and analyst of Islamism, “Islamism is, in other words, yet another twentieth-century

⁸ Michael Scott Doran, “Somebody Else’s Civil War,” *Foreign Affairs*, January 1, 2002, accessed April 15, 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2002-01-01/somebody-elses-civil-war>.

⁹ *Ibid.*

radical utopian scheme. Like Marxism-Leninism or fascism, it offers a way to control the state, run society, and remake the human being. It is an Islamic-flavored version of totalitarianism.”¹⁰

Waller R. Newell, in his book, *Tyrants*, writes that Islamism, “is the twenty-first century’s main heir to millenarian revolutionary movements stretching back through Third-World Socialism and National Socialism to the Jacobins. Whatever differences may exist between [Islamist groups], they share the same utopian aim—the establishment of a worldwide Caliphate—and they are united in their implacable hatred of the ‘Great Satan’ America, and its local proxy, the ‘Little Satan’ Israel.”¹¹ Islamists have made their intentions clear by the years of violence they have directed at both the West and their own societies.

A perfect example of the danger of Islamist movements is the Islamic Republic of Iran. This theocracy, founded after a revolution in 1979 that overthrew the secular Shah and replaced him with the Shiite cleric named Ruhollah Khomeini, was responsible for holding American hostages for 444 days. In 1989, Khomeini called for the death of Salman Rushdie, a British Indian ex-Muslim writer, for writing a novel called *The Satanic Verses*. The novel drew controversy for depicting the Islamic prophet Muhammad as a false prophet. Khomeini’s edict resulted in Rushdie going into police protection. Islamists bombed bookstores carrying the book and also murdered two of the book’s translators. This incident is similar to the 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* incident, where al-Qaeda terrorists murdered those responsible for publishing an insulting cartoon about Muhammad in the French satirical magazine, *Charlie Hebdo*. Iran was also responsible for the creation of Hezbollah, a radical Shiite organization that attacked U.S. military bases in the 1980s.

¹⁰ Daniel Pipes, “Distinguishing between Islam and Islamism :: Daniel Pipes,” Middle East Forum, June 30, 1998, accessed December 15th, 2018, <http://www.danielpipes.org/954/distinguishing-between-islam-and-islamism>.

¹¹ Waller R. Newell, *Tyrants: A History of Power, Injustice, & Terror* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 199.

Iran is not the only example of the danger of Islamism. Other groups that believe in a similar ideology also cause major violence and instability. Perhaps the most notorious is al-Qaeda, which was responsible for the 9/11 attacks, the 1998 American embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, and the 2000 bombing of the U.S.S. Cole. The Taliban, an Afghan Jihadist group responsible for harboring al-Qaeda, also led its own experiment in radical theocracy in the areas of Afghanistan it controlled throughout the 1990s. The Muslim Brotherhood, an Egyptian Islamist organization, has actively tried to subvert the Egyptian government and turn it into an Islamic theocracy since the 1940s. It also has been responsible for the creation of Hamas, a Palestinian terrorist organization. As can be clearly demonstrated by the preponderance of evidence, Islamism possesses the potential to be a dangerous movement that is a threat to America's security interests as well as to the peace and the security of the Middle East.

An important fact to keep in mind about Islamism is that it is not merely or even primarily motivated by anger towards past Western colonialism or the actions of Israel. Of course, past European colonialism, American foreign policy decisions, and harsh military actions by the Israelis towards the Palestinians provide some of the fuel for Islamist violence. But by itself, these factors are not sufficient to explain their actions. Islamists' hatred for the West and Israel is much more pathological. Iran, for example, is notorious for its violent rhetoric and actions against Israel. This makes no sense outside of Islamist ideology. Why else would Iran be so hostile to Israel? It certainly could not be for secular nationalist or strategic reasons; Palestinians are Arabs, not Persian, so there is no shared sense of nationality or ethnic kinship between Palestinians in the West Bank and Iranians. Under the more secular Pahlavi dynasty, Iran and Israel were in fact strong allies. Iranian hostility towards Israel only begins during and

after the Revolution, when Ayatollah Khomeini referred to Israel as the “Little Satan.” One could perhaps see this as Iran projecting its Anti-Western hostility onto Israel, as Israel was a strong ally of the United States. Again, this may explain some of Iran’s behavior, but certainly not all of it. The Pahlavi dynasty treated Iran’s Jewish minority relatively well. Since the 1979 Revolution, the regime has killed dozens of Jews, while tens of thousands have fled the country, fearing persecution. The government regularly pushes Anti-Semitic propaganda, including Holocaust denial.¹² Such actions indicate that there is more to Iran’s hostility than simple Anti-Western feeling. The only interpretation of Iran’s hostility towards Israel that makes sense is that it is rooted in a rigid interpretation of Islam that is hostile to other faiths.

Another common reason given for Islamist violence are European colonial decisions such as the Sykes-Picot agreement, an agreement between the French and the British that divided the Middle East between the two powers and formed the bedrock for the modern map of today’s Middle East. Many in the Middle East despise the agreement, arguing that it separated different ethnic and religious groups with arbitrary national borders while also forcing together different groups that historically have not gotten along. Islamists see the agreement as a disaster that inaugurated an era of heretical secular nationalism, replacing the golden age of a pan-Islamic caliphate. One of the first public actions of ISIS was to break through the borders of Iraq and Syria, referencing the Sykes-Picot agreement while doing so.¹³ While of course the Sykes-Picot agreement can legitimately be seen as a disastrous agreement that fueled the sectarian violence seen in the region today, it cannot explain all of it. The Sykes-Picot agreement affected not only Muslims, but Christians, Druze, and Yazidis. With few exceptions, these religious groups have

¹² Robert S. Greenberger, “How Jew-Friendly Persia Became Anti-Semitic Iran,” Moment, June 14, 2013, accessed March 20th, 2018, <https://www.momentmag.com/how-jew-friendly-persia-became-anti-semitic-iran/>.

¹³ Mark Tran and Matthew Weaver, “Isis Announces Islamic Caliphate in Area Straddling Iraq and Syria | World News | The Guardian,” The Guardian, June 30, 2014, accessed December 10th, 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/30/isis-announces-islamic-caliphate-iraq-syria>.

committed no such violence against the West. If Western imperialism has affected all religious groups, how come only one has responded in such a disproportionately violent manner? To push the point even further, why do Islamists often target religious minorities such as Alawites, Baha'is, and Yazidis, groups that had nothing to do with colonial abuses of the past? Like their fascist and communist counterparts of the past, Islamists may use Western abuses to justify their actions, but their violence stems from a totalitarian utopian impulse that seeks to destroy all who resist it.

This definition of Islamism as just another violent totalitarian ideology is not universally agreed upon by academics and foreign policymakers. It is not even the definition that Djerejian gives in the Meridian House Speech.

The Meridian House Speech: An Overview

Before looking into what Djerejian thinks of Islamism, it is important to note the almost boundless optimism he has in liberal democracy and the capacity for people to accept it internationally around the globe. Djerejian begins the speech by reminding his audience of the end of the Cold War, a conflict that had lasted almost five decades. Djerejian believes that because of the United States' victory in this conflict, "A new mode of international cooperation... 'collective engagement,' is replacing the acrimonious competition of the Cold War."¹⁴ Djerejian gives the example of the U.S. led coalition in the Gulf War of 1990-1991 as a successful case of 'collective engagement,' when otherwise disparate countries joined forces to uphold a new liberal democratic order. Djerejian also emphasizes the U.N. as taking an increasing role in world affairs, commending the organization for its efforts in stopping the massacre of Bosnian Muslims in the Yugoslavian conflict, as well as its sanctions against the

¹⁴ Edward Djerejian, "The U.S. and the Middle East in a Changing World; Address at Meridian House International," *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, 1992.

terrorist actions of Libyan dictator Muammar Qaddafi. Ultimately, Djerejian believes that this new era of international cooperation and consensus in the superiority of “democratic governments and market economies” will make it all the easier for the United States to accomplish its goals of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and securing the Persian Gulf for safe access to oil.¹⁵

Djerejian continues by giving basic U.S. policy for goals for various Middle East issues, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the threat of Saddam Hussein and the Islamic Republic of Iran. He eventually gets to a section of the speech entitled “Fundamental values.” “There is more to our policy agenda than protection of vital recourses and conflict resolution” Djerejian says. “Another pillar of U.S. policy is our support for human rights, pluralism, women’s and minority rights and popular participation in government and our rejection of extremism, oppression, and terrorism.”¹⁶ Djerejian says that as well as basic interests, the United States should support and foster these values around the globe. The United States should also consider three factors in its relations with various Middle Eastern Countries, diversity (having a level of tolerance of the different ways of life practiced by Middle Easterners), interaction, and common aspirations. This section of the speech again stresses Djerejian’s great faith in the capacity for the values of liberal democracy to spread across different cultures, because he assumes that cultures fundamentally different from the West will be able to accept liberal values.

Djerejian gives his views on Islamism in a section of his speech entitled, “Islam and the West.” It is important to understand that Djerejian gave this speech during a time when Islamic terrorism was gaining intensity in the region. Many figures in Western academia and media, such as Bernard Lewis, Charles Krauthammer, Samuel Huntington, and Steve Emmerson,

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

warned the West of a resurgent political Islam that would threaten American security.¹⁷ In the Meridian House Speech, Djerejian cautions against this view, assuring this audience that, “if there is one thought I can leave you with tonight, it is that the U.S. Government does not view Islam as the next ‘ism’ confronting the West or threatening world peace. That is an overly simplistic response to a complex reality.”¹⁸ Instead of viewing Islamism as a fanatical and apocalyptic strain of Islam, Djerejian claims that the resurgence of political Islam is a series

of groups or movements seeking to reform their societies in keeping with Islamic ideals. There is considerable diversity in how these ideals are expressed. We detect no monolithic or coordinated international effort behind these movements. What we do see are believers living in different countries placing renewed emphasis on Islamic principles and governments accommodating Islamist political activity to varying degrees and in different ways.¹⁹

Djerejian’s view of Islamism is much more open than the view espoused earlier than this paper.

For Djerejian, Islamism can be a potential opportunity for Muslims to have broader political participation in their own countries. It is a response to the popular aspirations of Muslim majority countries. Djerejian does not rule out the fact that many Islamist parties calling for democracy could in reality only be calling for “one person, one vote, one time,” which justified the United States’ opposition to the democratically elected FIS Islamist Party in Algeria in 1991, but Djerejian would argue that it is unfair and closed-minded to view all Islamist movements in this way.²⁰

For Djerejian, the real enemy to combat in the Middle East is not a specific religious movement or group of people, but all “those, regardless of their religion, who practice terrorism, oppress minorities, preach intolerance, or violate internationally accepted standards of conduct

¹⁷ For More Information, see Bernard Lewis, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” Charles Krauthammer “The New Crescent of Crisis,” Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations,” and Steve Emmerson’s Documentary, *Jihad in America*.

¹⁸ Djerejian, “The United States and the Middle East in a Changing World,” 5.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

regarding human rights.”²¹ Because of this, according to Djerejian the United States has basic differences with theocratic tyrannies such as Algerian Islamists and the Islamic Republic of Iran *as well* as “the avowedly secular governments in Iraq and Libya...Simply stated, religion is not a determinant—positive or negative—in the nature or quality of our relations with other countries. Our quarrel is with extremism and the violence, denial, intolerance, intimidation, coercion, and terror which too often accompany it.”²² Djerejian shifts the threat from the particular ideological movement of Islamism to the more general categories of extremism and violence.

Academic Influences on the Meridian House Speech

The work of academics Edward Said and John Esposito heavily influenced Djerejian’s ideas in the Meridian House Speech. Both Said and Esposito argued in their works that Western fears over Islamic terrorism were over exaggerated and that many of these movements were motivated by other factors, such as anger over decades of American action in the region, secular authoritarian dictators, and resentment of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories. Esposito in particular also argued America should not uniformly see Islamists as a threat, because many of them in fact were agents for peaceful democratic reform in the Middle East, trying to run their respective countries democratically according to Islamic principles. This definition is identical to the one given by Djerejian in the Meridian House Speech. Given these striking similarities, one wonders about the nature of Esposito’s involvement with the speech. Esposito’s ideas would heavily influence Djerejian’s ideas about Islamism in the Meridian House Speech.

The Limits of Djerejian’s View

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

The Meridian House Speech had a tremendous influence on how the U.S. conducted policy in the Middle East through subsequent administrations. Over the next twenty-five years, the United States supported Islamist groups that worked through democratic means or acted as rebels trying to overthrow secular dictatorships (such as Yemeni Islamist parties, the Muslim Brotherhood and Egypt, or even some Syrian rebel groups), while rejecting those Islamist groups that used the mentality of “one vote, one person, one time,” or achieved their aims through violence against civilians (such as Hamas and al-Qaeda).²³ While this at first seems like a prudent distinction, it in fact underestimates the ways in which Islamist groups can use democratic means to lead their respective societies towards totalitarian and anti-Western ends. As this paper will set out to prove, even if the tactics of the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda differ, their essential goals in creating a strict Islamic theocracy (the “caliphate”) remain the same. Djerejian and Esposito’s view of Islamism is not sensitive to this fact, and so opens up the possibility for the United States to help groups that act democratically now, but will later on use their power to make their own societies more totalitarian as well as harm the security interests of the United States.

A Brief Overview of the Thesis

Analysis will begin with a study of Edward Said, the most influential academic in Middle East scholarship in the last half-century. His seminal work, *Orientalism*, argued that the entire history of Western scholarship of the Middle East was in fact a veneer of Western chauvinism and imperialism over a perceived “inferior” civilization. For Said, the ability to study and categorize something shows that you have power over it, and he claimed that this is what European scholars were really doing as they studied the Arabic language and Islamic religion. They were not really trying to objectively study the region, but instead assert their dominance

²³ Ibid.

over it by categorizing it into intellectual compartments that they could understand and demean. Wrapped into this subversive redefinition of “orientalism” (once a respectable word describing the objective Western study of the Middle East, but now reworked by Said to show the bigotry and imperialism at the heart of the discipline) is the West’s definition of Islam, often shown as a fanatic and irrational faith even to this day. The religious violence in the Middle East we see today, Said argues, is in fact not religious at all; it is simply a reaction to years of Western (including American) colonialism, Israeli aggression, and secular authoritarian dictatorships.

If Said argued that Islamist violence was not really motivated by a particular reading of Islam, but rather a reaction to unjust political circumstances, Esposito carried this argument one step further. For Esposito, not only is ascribing blame for Islamist violence on Islam unfair to Islam, but viewing all Islamists as violent and authoritarian is unfair to Islamists. Esposito argued that in fact, many Islamist groups (such as the Muslim Brotherhood), were positive social reform movements trying to run their societies according to traditional Islamic principles. Not only were they highly popular with Islamic populations, they also served as a legitimate alternative to the secular military dictatorships that dominated the Middle East in the early 1990s. This argument heavily influenced Djerejian’s approach to Islamism in the Meridian House Speech. To prove this, we will examine the language and arguments used in the Meridian House Speech and compare it to Esposito’s 1992 book, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?*, in which Esposito makes his important argument about Islamism. This paper will show that the arguments used in both the book and the speech are so similar to each other, that it is virtually impossible to deny that Esposito’s thought influenced on Djerejian’s speech.

After examining the thought of Said, Esposito, and Djerejian, this thesis will show both how influential the Meridian House Speech was in American foreign policy in the Middle East,

and how remarkably consistent America was in following the original argument of the speech. The paper will then look at the limits of Djerejian and Esposito's view of Islamism, and how, ultimately, the argument that Islamists can potentially be a force for good in the Middle East has led to disastrous decisions in the region. This also leads us to ask: Is academic influence on policy is always benign, and should academics perhaps take more responsibility for their ideas and how they affect public policy?

Chapter 2: Edward Said and *Orientalism*

Edward Said is the most influential figure within Middle East Studies for the past fifty years. His book, *Orientalism*, singlehandedly changed the way academics, particularly in America, viewed the Middle East. Before *Orientalism*, Western Scholars of the Middle East (or “orientalists”) saw themselves as objective observers of the history and culture of the region. They understood themselves as studying the people, places, and history of the Middle East, with a scientific curiosity and a sincere desire for the knowledge of how other people in the world lived. Before Said’s book, people saw orientalism as a respectable field of study whose findings were basically sound. This all changed with Said and the publication of *Orientalism* in 1978. The book’s central argument is that, contrary to what most orientalists may have thought, they certainly were not objective in their study of the Middle East. Orientalists, in fact, only served to create an image of the Middle East that was “orientalized,” that is, homogeneous, out of history, and inaccurate. “The Orient,” Said writes in the introduction to the book, “has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience.”²⁴ All Western depictions of the Orient, whether through art, literature, or even academic study, serve not to depict the region as it actually is, but to depict it as Europe’s “surrogate and even underground self.”²⁵ The book then launches a sustained attack on Orientalism in the West, claiming that the entire field in the end only serves to promote a Eurocentric worldview.

Along with criticizing the whole tradition of European orientalism and the legacy of European colonialism, Said’s book also relentlessly attacked American foreign policy and interventionism in the Middle East. The last chapter of *Orientalism*, entitled “The Latest Phase,” focuses particularly on this issue. According to Said, America bases its policy in the Arab world

²⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 1-2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

not on how the people living in that world really are, but on a “fragmentary-yet powerfully and ideologically coherent” set of images that have their roots in the European orientalist discourse of the 19th century.²⁶ Said sees the Arab taking an increasingly negative image in the imagination of most Americans, particularly after the Six-Day War and the oil crisis of the early 1970s. The Arab “is seen as the disrupter of Israel’s and the West’s existence, or in another view of the same thing, as a surmountable obstacle to Israel’s creation in 1948.”²⁷ He points to an endless array of portrayals of Arabs as rapists, pirates, and thieves in American television and cinema to show how Americans negatively stereotype Arabs.²⁸

Said argues that such negative depictions of the Arab world exist not only in popular culture, but in Middle East studies Programs as well. He demonstrates this by citing a 1967 report by Morroe Berger, a sociology and Middle East Studies professor at Princeton University. Berger writes that “The modern Middle East and North Africa is not a center of great cultural achievement, nor is it likely to become one in the near future...The Middle East...has been receding in immediate political importance to the U.S.”²⁹ In Said’s judgment, this wrongful view of the Middle East stems not from a “chance aberration of judgment...but the history of Orientalism as we have been studying it.”³⁰ The tradition of negative stereotypes has carried all the way down to how the experts of his day viewed the Middle East.

For Said the development of Middle East Studies programs in the United States (such as the Oriental Society, MESA, and even parts of the Defense Department and the RAND corporation) was closely tied to American imperial ambitions in the Middle East. “Even the legendary American missionaries to the Near East during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

²⁶ Ibid., 285.

²⁷ Ibid., 286.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Berger in Ibid., 288.

³⁰ Ibid., 289.

took their role as set not so much as by *their* God, *their* culture, and *their* destiny,” Said wrote, arguing that virtually every Westerner only wanted to impose his or her way of life onto the supposedly inferior Arabs instead of really trying to study their way of life.³¹

Said asserted that the faulty and stereotypical images that Americans had of Arabs lead to poor policy in the region. “The Middle East experts who advise policymakers are,” in Said’s view, “imbued with Orientalism, almost to a person.”³² We can see the negative effects of this way of thinking, especially in Universities throughout the Middle East. Said observes that very few Middle Eastern students “who manage to make it through the system are encouraged to come to the United States to continue their advanced work.”³³ The hegemony of American imperialism in the region, Said argues, holds these students back. He argues that that the “Arab cultural elite is “European, not Eastern,” and notes that while Arab and Islamic scholars must pay attention to the major findings of Western academic journals, Western scholars are not required to pay attention to academics in the Arab and Islamic world.³⁴ All of this creates a sense of Western superiority over the Arab/Muslim world, with the result that scholars do not take seriously the people who live in these places.

In a later interview about *Orientalism* given in the late 1990s, Said gave other policy implications for the orientalist worldview, particularly on the Arab-Israeli Conflict. The orientalist worldview believed that because Israel “is a Jewish state and a Western state...there’s a greater coincidence between American interests there than there is between American interests in places like Iran and Saudi Arabia.”³⁵ This creates an American bias towards Israel and against

³¹ Ibid., 294.

³² Ibid., 321.

³³ Ibid., 323.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Palestine Diary, “Edward Said on Orientalism,” YouTube, 2012, accessed December 20th, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVC8EYd_Z_g.

the Palestinians. Americans view Hamas as simply terrorists and ignore the long and harsh Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. In Said's view, this orientalist bias towards Israel will stifle any hope of reconciliation or solution to the Conflict, because the United States will ignore atrocities committed by Israel.

The Influence of Orientalism

The effect of *Orientalism* on Middle East Studies in America was enormous and cannot be overstated. Even if students of Middle East Studies do not read or even hear of *Orientalism* today, they still encounter the book's basic argument. Such influence is due to several reasons. Firstly, it is important to realize that Said's argument in *Orientalism* was not only influenced by his own observations of Western treatments of the Middle East, but also by Marxist thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci. In the introduction to *Orientalism*, Said acknowledges that the framework which undergirds his thinking about orientalism stems from Foucault's works *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*.³⁶ He also cites Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony in helping to understand why orientalism has such "durability and strength" throughout the West and the Middle East.³⁷ This intellectual background meshed well with a new generation of American academics, who on the whole were farther to the political Left than their predecessors.³⁸ According to writer Martin Kramer, *Orientalism* also became popular due to its accessibility among undergraduates. Kramer writes that "Said partly overcame the limits of the subject matter by managing to quote, at least once, many of the English and French authors whose works are the staple of introductory literature courses... This meant that *Orientalism* could be integrated easily into introductory curricula in English and French

³⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁸ For more information, see Martin Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001) particularly the chapter, "Said's Splash".

literatures, especially in their less demanding American varieties.”³⁹ Kramer also points out a variety of changes within Middle East Studies that he argues occurred as a response to the popularity of *Orientalism*. He notes that “in 1971, only 3.2 percent of Middle East area specialists had been born in the [Middle East], and only 16.7 percent had the language and foreign-residence profiles coincident with a Middle Eastern background.”⁴⁰ By the early 1990s, half of MESA’s membership was of Middle Eastern heritage. Kramer links this large shift to Said’s insinuation in *Orientalism* that Westerners could not possibly study the Middle East objectively. By hiring more Middle Easterners, Middle East Studies programs would remove Western bias from their departments.⁴¹ Said himself noted the

extraordinary change in studies of the Middle East, which when I wrote *Orientalism* were still dominated by an aggressively masculine and condescending ethos... “During the 1980s, the formerly conservative Middle East Studies Association underwent an important ideological transformation. . . . What happened in the Middle East Studies Association therefore was a metropolitan story of cultural opposition to Western domination.”⁴²

This statement by Said, formerly a fierce critic of Middle East Studies, shows at the very least that the field went in a direction that he approved.

The Limits of Orientalism

The publication of *Orientalism* in 1978 signaled a large paradigm shift for Middle East Studies. While there was much in this shift to be applauded, such as an increase in interest for Middle Eastern scholars from the Middle East, the new paradigm also came with serious problems, the chief of which was an inability to take seriously Islam’s influence on the region. In *Orientalism*, Said argued that one of the problems of the orientalist worldview was that it focused too much on Islam. Middle East scholars did not study political and economic factors in

³⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 39.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Said in Ibid.

the region enough. In *Orientalism*, Said wrote, “history, politics, and economics do not matter [to Middle East scholars]...Islam is Islam, the Orient is the Orient, and please take all your ideas about a left and a right wing, revolutions, and change back to Disneyland.”⁴³ Here, Said criticizes Western scholars of the Middle East for what he sees as a refusal to pay attention to the political nuances in the Middle East. The Middle East, according to the orientalist (or at least according to Said’s view of them), is a monolithic block dominated by the backwards and irrational religion of Islam. Secular leftist and national liberation movements are of no particular importance. In Said’s view, the reality was the other way around. Secular leftism was the way of the future in the Middle East, while Islam as a serious political force was on the decline. In a later interview, Said argued that “one of the great problems with orientalism to begin with is these vast generalizations about Islam and the nature of Islam...there’s very little in common you can talk about as Islam let’s say between Indonesia and Saudi Arabia...the differences in history and language and traditions is so vast that the word ‘Islam’ has at best a tenuous meaning.” He also argued that “the predominant mood of the Arab world is very secular,” meaning that Arabs care more about improving their societies through modern political means rather than a yearning for the rule of traditional shari’a law. For Said, the media’s constant obsession with Islam in the Middle East is part of a larger political agenda to create foreign boogeyman in order to justify large military spending and intervention.⁴⁴

Said’s insistence that Islam was not an influential force in the Middle East, or that to even think of “Islam” as a monolithic force was too simplistic, led to a similar dismissal of Islam as a significant factor in the Middle East by much of Middle East Studies. This caused vast swaths of Middle East Studies Departments across America to fail to predict seismic political events in the

⁴³ Said, *Orientalism*, 107.

⁴⁴ Palestine Diary, “Edward Said on Orientalism.”

Middle East. Said argued that Middle East scholars writing about a return of Islam were merely displaying their “orientalist” biases in a book published in 1978, only a year before the Iranian Revolution would create an Islamic theocracy and inspire a wave of Islamist activity in the years to follow. Nor did Said and his followers seem to notice the intense political clashes between Islamists and secular authorities that took place in countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan, or the growing popularity of radical forms of Islam among younger Muslims. In his book on the formation of al-Qaeda, *The Looming Tower*, author Lawrence Wright recounts the experience of American newsman Abdallah Schleifer, who visited Egypt in 1974. In Egypt Schleifer “quickly sensed the shift in the student movement in Egypt. Young Islamic activists were appearing on campuses, first in the Southern part of the country, then in Cairo...they completely dominated the campuses, and for the first time in the living memory of most Egyptians, male students stopped trimming their beards and female students donned the veil.”⁴⁵ One would think that Said and others would pick up on such significant changes in the region. But either they did not or they selectively reported them. Much of this is rooted in Said’s Marxist ideological lens provided by thinkers such as Gramsci and Foucault. For Said and others of this worldview, there only existed “an epistemology...which could be summarized in three words: resistance, revolution, liberation.”⁴⁶ Radical political change would come in an explicitly secular and left-leaning direction, and would certainly have nothing to do with conservative Islam reasserting itself in the region.

There are other problems with Said’s view of Orientalism and Western policy in the Middle East besides his undervaluing of Islam. Throughout his analysis of the Middle East, he seems to continually view history through the lens of “orientalism” and Western imperialism,

⁴⁵ Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 41.

⁴⁶ Kramer, 44.

even when this reading is not a satisfactory interpretation for the historical facts. For example, Said observes that “no Arab or Islamic scholar can afford to ignore what goes on in scholarly journals, institutes, and universities in the United States and Europe; the converse is not true.”⁴⁷

Said argues that this is a product of Orientalist discourse, which has convinced Middle Easterners that their culture is “second-rate” compared to European culture. Therefore, they must pay attention to the Europeans, while no one should pay attention to them. Said seems to make this phenomenon *purely* a product of colonialism. While of course, colonialism served an important role in the fact that Middle Eastern academics look to the West as a source of knowledge, even for their own culture, a large part of this is that the Arab world simply does not produce enough significant studies when compared to the West. When we look at the situation about a thousand years ago, when Medieval Europe looked to Islamic scholars to learn about mathematics and science, we would not say that this is purely as a result of Islamic control over certain Western territories (Spain and so forth), but because Islamic civilization, at this point in time, was superior intellectually to Medieval Europe. In fact, many of the first European universities were heavily influenced by similar institutions within Islamic Civilization. Would Said say of Islamic civilization as he says of Western civilization, that this was due to “scarcely-concealed racism, [or] paper-thin intellectual apparatus” that was dominating the West?⁴⁸ Or would it make more sense to argue that because Islam was undergoing a Golden Age at this point in history, it would influence weaker civilizations? Said works only within a certain ideological framework (set down by the likes of Foucault and Gramsci) and does not take into account the various complex factors that can lead to a certain historical event. If the reason for a certain event

⁴⁷ Said, *Orientalism*,

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 322.

falls outside of the purview of “orientalist” domination, Said does not seem to take it into account.

Said’s ideological blind spots also come into play when discussing the Arab-Israeli conflict. In an interview given in the 1990s, Said asserted that “the presence of...Israel [regarding] the whole Arab world as its enemy is imported into American Orientalism. I mean the idea for example that Hamas terrorists in the West Bank are just interested in killing Jewish children is what you derive from looking” at the media, rather than realizing that much of this violence (in his view) stems from the long and harsh Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.⁴⁹ Again, it seems strange to just attribute this to the shadowy intellectual system of “orientalism.” In the late 1990s, when Said gave this interview, the Palestinian political scene was becoming increasingly radicalized. Of course, years of Israeli military occupation spurred this on, but when groups like Hamas rooted themselves in fanatical and Anti-Semitic interpretations of Islam, how could Americans simply ignore this? The actions of Hamas draw more attention because of their violent rhetoric and tactics against Jewish civilians. Hamas *aims* to draw attention to itself by doing these things. Hamas’s own charter cites Islamic hadiths that say “The Day of Judgement will not come about until Moslems fight the Jews, when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Moslems, O Abdullah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.”⁵⁰ Hamas understands itself as a religiously extreme movement dedicated to the destruction of Israel, this has nothing to do with a shadowy system of “orientalism.”

Washington’s Lack of Attention to Political Islam

⁴⁹ Palestine Diary, “Edward Said on Orientalism.”

⁵⁰ al-Bukhari in “The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement,” 1988, trans. by The Avalon Project, accessed April 12th, 2018, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp.

Academia's views of political Islam ran parallel to the State Department's views prior to 1979. During the Cold War, America did not pay much serious attention to Islam as a political force in the region. This was due to several reasons. For one, the Middle East was really only viewed as a proxy for the conflict with the Soviet Union. Besides oil, the region had no importance in itself for the American Government. Countries in the Middle East were viewed in terms of their alliance or hostility with the United States or the Soviets. Take, for example, the CIA's support of Afghan mujahedeen during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The United States was willing to work with this otherwise unstable band of fighters because they were dedicated to the expulsion of Communism from Afghanistan. The State Department mistakenly believed that the growing tension between Islamist and secular groups had no particular relevance to American interests. A second reason is that while Islamist groups were bubbling up from the political underground during the Cold War, it was mostly secular nationalist elements that were ascendant. For example, the PLO, the main voice of the Palestinian resistance to Israel before the rise of Hamas and Hezbollah, had secular left-wing roots. Its language was one of secular nationalism, and not of Islamism.⁵¹ According to writers Shadi Hamid, Peter Mandaville, and William McCants in an article for *The Atlantic* they wrote in 2017, "American foreign policy granted no particular significance to Islamists, other than to wonder whether their religious nature might make them useful partners in checking the spread of 'Third World' socialism."⁵² The American foreign policy establishment was oblivious to the growing popularity of Islamism in the Middle East.

⁵¹ The 1968 PLO Charter makes no reference to Islam.

⁵² Shadi Hamid, Peter Mandaville, and McCants William, "How America Changed Its Approach to Political Islam - The Atlantic," *The Atlantic*, 2017, accessed December 21st, 2017 <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/america-political-islam/541287/>.

America's failure to pay attention to the spread of Islamism during the Cold War meant that its policymakers would be taken completely by surprise by the Islamist takeover of Iran in 1979 and the subsequent rise of groups such as Hezbollah. In his book, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, Michael B. Oren writes that then President "Carter was confounded by the appearance of a popular Middle Eastern leader [Khomeini] who, though never enamored of the Soviets, showed scant affection for the West. He was further confused by the refusal of a religious man like Khomeini to respect even the most basic civic rights."⁵³ This confusion reflects both America's underestimation of the growing force of political Islam during the Cold War and its failure to understand how Islam has its own fundamentally different views concerning politics and human rights. Carter assumed that Khomeini's religiosity would lead to similar views of the dignity of every human being the way Carter's religiosity affected his own views on human rights. He did not understand that Khomeini's brand of fundamentalist Shiite Islam would lead to different political implications from Carter's own American Evangelicalism. Like academics within Middle East Studies Departments, American policymakers were caught completely unawares when political Islam exploded onto the landscape in 1979.

⁵³ Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 545.

Chapter 3: John Esposito: Islamism as Democratic Reform

In academia, one individual would attempt to grapple with the Islamic revival occurring in the Middle East during the 1980s and 1990s who would have enormous influence on the way U.S. policymakers approached the region. That individual was John Esposito, then a Professor at The College of the Holy Cross, who wrote a highly influential book (in both academic and policy-making circles) entitled *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* The central argument of the book was that, contrary to a growing consensus, Islamism was not inherently a fanatical movement prone to violence. Instead, Esposito “place[d] Islamist movements in the political category of participation, or even democratization.”⁵⁴ By doing this, Esposito argued that Islamism could often be a positive force in fostering democracy and pluralism in the Middle East, helping to make the region more modern and free, albeit perhaps outside of a Western context. This argument strongly influenced Djerejian’s views of Islamism in the Meridian House Speech.

The Basic Argument of The Islamic Threat and its Connections to Meridian House

In the opening chapter of *The Islamic Threat*, Esposito writes that “Much of the reassertion of religion in politics and society has been subsumed under the term *Islamic fundamentalism*...For a number of reasons [this term] tells us everything and yet, at the same time, nothing.”⁵⁵ Immediately, Esposito attempts to disassociate the Islamic revival of the 1970s and 1980s from any sense of violent fanaticism and instead presents it as a much more complex phenomenon. He later states that “‘fundamentalism’ is often associated with political activism, extremism, fanaticism, terrorism, and anti-Americanism. Yet while some engage in radical

⁵⁴ Kramer, 50.

⁵⁵ Esposito, 7

religiopolitics, most as we shall see, work within the established order.”⁵⁶ Because of this association, which Esposito claims to be inaccurate and unfair to politically legitimate Islamist groups in the Middle East, Esposito instead prefers to use the term, “Islamic revivalism” or “Islamic Activism.”⁵⁷ The Meridian House Speech also reflects this line of thinking when it states that “religion is not a determinant—positive or negative—in the nature or quality of our relations with other countries. Our quarrel is with extremism and the violence, denial, intolerance, intimidation, coercion, and terror which too often accompany with it.”⁵⁸ Both *The Islamic Threat* and the Meridian House Speech attempt to legitimize certain Islamist political parties by reframing the issue. The real threat to lasting peace in the Middle East is not a resurgent aspiration towards violent theocracy of a specific type, but extremism and violence in general.

Continuing its more open-minded approach to Islamism, the Meridian House Speech stressed:

In countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa, we thus see groups or movements seeking to reform their societies keeping with Islamic ideals... What we do see are believers living in different countries placing renewed emphasis on Islamic principles and governments accommodating Islamist political activity to varying degrees in different ways.⁵⁹

According to this speech, the United States Government did not consider Islamism as an inherent threat to either its own security or the stability of the Islamic World as a whole. Instead, Islamism is a broad political revival with many different forms. While some of these groups are extreme, the United States government can work with other Islamist groups politically. This is precisely what Esposito argues in *The Islamic Threat*.

⁵⁶ Esposito, 7-8.

⁵⁷ Esposito, 8.

⁵⁸ Djerejian, “The U.S. and the Middle East in a Changing World; Address at Meridian House International.”

⁵⁹ Ibid.

To give an example of Esposito's more open stance to political Islam, it would be best to read his treatment of perhaps the most controversial Islamist group: the Muslim Brotherhood. When Esposito talks about the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna, he never associates him with radicalism or violence. Instead, Esposito portrays al-Banna as a spiritual and political reformer who "did not simply retreat to the past but instead provided Islamic responses, ideological and organizational, to modern society."⁶⁰ For Esposito, Islamism is a necessary and even sometimes positive response to years of Western Imperialism and domestic stagnation. Later in the book, when talking about the modern history of Egypt, Esposito presents the Muslim Brotherhood as an organization of moderate activists trying to reform Egypt's harsh military dictatorship. In doing so, Esposito glosses over the more radical origins of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Muslim Brotherhood: Islamist Organization with Totalitarian Aspirations

The Muslim Brotherhood has its origins in the anti-colonial movements of the early twentieth century. It was opposed to British colonial rule in Egypt. With this in mind, however, it is important to realize that the Muslim Brotherhood was not merely a national liberation movement such as the FLN in Algeria or the EOKA in Cyprus. Its goals for Egypt were rooted in a highly traditional and conservative reading of Islam. To understand the Brotherhood's aims, we should examine the founder of the organization, an Egyptian schoolteacher named Hassan al-Banna. In *The Islamic Threat*, Esposito portrays al-Banna as a man who "modernized Islam by providing a modern interpretation or reformulation of Islam to revitalize the community religiously and socio-politically...[by] self-consciously reapplying Islamic sources and beliefs, reinterpreting them to address modern realities."⁶¹ This is a rather sanitized summary that, while technically not

⁶⁰ Esposito, 121.

⁶¹ Ibid.

false, obscures the more radical elements of what al-Banna really believed. When one more closely scrutinizes al-Banna's writings, one clearly sees the ideological groundwork for later more radical and violent figures, such as Sayyid Qutb, Omar Abdel-Rahman, and even Osama Bin Laden. Firstly, al-Banna was not simply interested in reviving Islam's dominant role in society in only Egypt or even the wider Islamic community. Rather, al-Banna saw it as the ummah's (community of Muslims) duty to restore control over all the lost lands once controlled by Islam, and ultimately, the entire world. In a letter written to various leaders of the Muslim world (including the then King of Egypt, Farouk I) in 1947, al-Banna proclaimed that the West

was tyrannical and unjust, insolent, misguided, stumbling blindly, all it requires is a strong Eastern power to exert itself under the shadow of Allah's banner, with the standard of the Qur'an fluttering at its head, and backed up by the strong soldiers of unyielding faith; then you will see the World living under the tranquility of Islam, and on the lips of everyone will be the following slogan: "Praise be unto Allah who guided us to this. For truly we would not have been guided if Allah had not guided us."⁶²

It is important to understand that the leaders al-Banna wrote to were not very devout Muslims. They would not have been sympathetic to al-Banna's views. This is evidence that al-Banna actually believed in what he was saying, and was not just trying to appease colonial powers at the time. There are plenty of other instances of al-Banna advocating for the international rule of Islam. In a treatise entitled "The Message of the Teachings," a manifesto for the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Banna writes that some of the goals of the Brotherhood are to rebuild the "international prominence of the Islamic Umma by liberating its lands, reviving its glorious past, bringing closer the cultures of its regions and rallying under one word. Until once again the long awaited unity and the lost Khalifah [Caliph] is returned," as well as "Guiding the world by spreading the call of

⁶² Hassan al-Banna, "Toward the Light," 1947, accessed February 12th, 2018, https://thequranblog.files.wordpress.com/2008/06/_1_-toward-the-light.pdf.

Islam to all corners of the globe.”⁶³ Clearly, al-Banna saw his mission as restoring Islam’s rule as a world power. He did not simply want to guide Egypt society closer to Islamic principles.

Esposito also undervalues al-Banna’s commitment to violent jihad as a means of spreading Islam. He writes that for al-Banna, the “Islamic revolution was to be first and foremost a social rather than a violent political one.”⁶⁴ He further states that al-Banna would inspire a social revolution through “religious commitment, modern learning and technology, and activism.”⁶⁵ The statement makes al-Banna look somewhat like a Muslim John Wesley, who peacefully advocated for the gradual reformation of society according to Islamic principles, simultaneously bringing Egypt further to social progress. Even though it is true that al-Banna did not call for a violent overthrow of the Egyptian monarchy, he certainly had no issue with engaging with violent warfare against non-Muslims. In a treatise simply entitled “al-Jihad,” al-Banna continuously stresses that “Jihad is an obligation from Allah on every Muslim and cannot be ignored or evaded.”⁶⁶ While al-Banna cites the Qur’an and hadith to place certain restrictions on the rules of engagement, he also says that “jihad is used to safeguard the mission of spreading Islam.”⁶⁷ Jihad is not simply a defensive tactic used when an aggressor attacks the *ummah*, but something that the *ummah* should proactively undertake to spread Islam. In fact, al-Banna writes

⁶³ Hassan al-Banna, “The Message of the Teachings,” accessed March 20, 2018, https://thequranblog.files.wordpress.com/2008/06/_3_-the-message-of-the-teachings.pdf.

⁶⁴ Hassan al-Banna, “Toward the Light,” 1947, https://thequranblog.files.wordpress.com/2008/06/_1_-toward-the-light.pdf.

⁶⁵ Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, 124.

⁶⁶ Hassan al-Banna, “Toward the Light,” 1947, https://thequranblog.files.wordpress.com/2008/06/_1_-toward-the-light.pdf.

⁶⁷ Hassan al-Banna and A.M.A trans. by Dr. Fahmy, *Al-Jihad* (International Islamic Forum), accessed January 21, 2018, https://thequranblog.files.wordpress.com/2008/06/_10_-al-jihad.pdf.

that an “Imam must send a military expedition of the Dar-al-Harb⁶⁸ every year at least once or twice, and the people must support him on this.”⁶⁹

Another crucial point about al-Banna that conflicts with Esposito’s view of him as a simple peaceful reformer is al-Banna’s views about the lesser and greater Jihad. In Islam, Jihad is a wide term that encompasses both external struggle (warfare against the unbeliever) and internal struggle (the fight against one’s sinful passions). Many Muslims believe that the internal jihad against one’s sins is more important than the external jihad of war against the infidel, quoting a hadith as proof. The hadith states that after coming home from a battle, Muhammad said “We have returned on the lesser jihad to embark on the greater jihad.” When his followers asked what Muhammad meant by the ‘greater jihad,’ Muhammad responds by saying, “The jihad of the heart, or the jihad against one’s ego.”⁷⁰ Muslims use this hadith to argue that warfare against non-Muslims is not nearly as important as the fight against one’s own sins. Al-Banna attacks this hadith as resting on spurious tradition, and reinforces the idea that violent jihad is necessary “in order to rescue the territories of the Muslims and repel the attacks of the disbelievers.”⁷¹ Despite Esposito’s curious lack of attention to al-Banna’s enthusiasm for violent Jihad, al-Banna’s writings indicate that he viewed it as integral to his understanding of Islam.

Esposito’s misrepresentation of al-Banna is so important because al-Banna forms so much of the basis of modern Islamism. The fact that Esposito has this rather sanitized view of al-Banna’s philosophy reveals much about what he thinks about Islamist political movements as a whole. This is not the only time Esposito obscures the danger of Islamist groups. In 1994, Esposito claimed that Hamas was a community focused organization that focused on “honey, cheese-

⁶⁸ Literally “House of War,” lands that are not under the control of Islam.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Tasdid al-Qaws in Hassan al-Banna and A.M.A trans. by Dr. Fahmy, *Al-Jihad* (International Islamic Forum), accessed January 21, 2018, https://thequranblog.files.wordpress.com/2008/06/_10_-al-jihad.pdf.

⁷¹ Ibid.

making, and home-based clothing manufacture.”⁷² To call this troubling is an understatement. In the mid-nineties, Hamas had openly engaged in numerous suicide bombings against Israeli civilians. When the Palestinians voted Hamas into political power in 2006, Esposito harshly criticized the United States’ decision to condemn the victory, saying that the United States had engaged in a “failure to respect the democratic choice of the Palestinians, whatever its reservations.”⁷³ Imagine if someone reacted the same way to an American denunciation of Nazi electoral victories in 1933. But Esposito does not just minimize the violence of Hamas. He takes a similar stance towards Hezbollah and the Muslim Brotherhood, portraying them as moderate political reform movements or national liberation groups, when in fact they have been proponents of theocratic violence and authoritarian rule.⁷⁴ This really weakens Esposito’s claim that Islamism is not inherently violent and tyrannical, because he needs to ignore the violence of several Islamist groups in order to prove his point. If Esposito was able to properly distinguish between which Islamist groups were dangerous (Hamas) and which actually were more moderate (as could be argued for Ennahda, a Tunisian Islamist Party), then perhaps his claims about the moderate aspects of Islamism in *The Islamic Threat* would have more weight. Unfortunately, however, it comes across as if Esposito is denying the violence and instability the vast majority of Islamists foment.

Islam and Christianity: Similarities and Differences

Another aspect of *The Islamic Threat* that is similar to the Meridian House Speech is Esposito’s emphasis on the commonalities between Islam and the West. Djerejian makes

⁷² Winfeld Myers, “John Esposito, in His Own Words - Campus Watch | Middle East Forum,” Campus Watch, February 24, 2009, accessed April 12th, 2018, <https://www.meforum.org/campus-watch/articles/2009/john-esposito,-in-his-own-words>.

⁷³ “John Esposito: Defending Radical Islam,” *The Investigative Project on Terrorism*, 2008, accessed February 3rd, 2018, <http://www.investigativeproject.org/documents/misc/304.pdf>.

⁷⁴ See Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*

explicitly clear “that the U.S. Government does not view Islam as the next ‘ism’ confronting the West or threatening world peace. That is an overly simplistic response to a complex reality.”⁷⁵

The speech goes on to point out the contributions to human history that Islam has made (such as being one of the world’s great religions and promoting a long tradition of arts and sciences) and identifying commonalities between Islam and Christianity (such as a shared line of prophets).

The Islamic Threat also goes into great length about these commonalities. In the chapter “Islam and the West: Roots of Conflict, Cooperation, and Confrontation,” Esposito writes that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam “are children of Abraham, the first prophet to receive God’s revelation. They share an Abrahamic faith with its common belief in God, prophets, revelation, a divinely mandated community, and moral responsibility.”⁷⁶ Esposito then gives a brief history of the religion of Islam, constantly stressing the religion’s similarities to Judaism and Christianity. For example, he writes that “Muslim tradition portrays an initially confused and somewhat reluctant prophet who, like the biblical Hebrew prophets, was overwhelmed by the experience.”⁷⁷ In this synopsis of the birth of Islam, Esposito virtually never spends time explaining the differences between Islam and Christianity. Some important differences include, whether or not Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God and the Messiah, the doctrine of Original Sin, and the place of reason in light of Divine Revelation. In fact, it is the similarities between Christianity and Islam that Esposito claims put the two religions “on a collision course.”⁷⁸

Like his treatment of Islamist political movements elsewhere in *The Islamic Threat*, focus on the similarities between Islam and Christianity obscure much important information. For example, when discussing “Jihad,” Esposito writes that the term itself “has a number of

⁷⁵ Djerejian, “The U.S. and the Middle East in a Changing World.”

⁷⁶ Esposito, 26.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

meanings which include the effort to lead a good life, to make society more moral and just, and to spread Islam through teaching, preaching, or armed struggle.”⁷⁹ He later goes on to say that “In its most generic meaning, ‘jihad signifies the battle against evil and the devil, the self-discipline (common to the three Abrahamic faiths) in which believers seek to follow God’s will... This is the primary way in which an observant Muslim gives witness to... the truth of the first pillar of Islam.”⁸⁰ While Esposito briefly talks about the use of jihad as warfare against nonbelievers, he does not sufficiently emphasize the importance Jihad had on building the first Islamic community. This skews his picture of Islam’s relations with Christian civilization, because it downplays the crucial factor that Christendom felt genuinely threatened by the growth of Islam as it took over lands formerly under Christian control.

It is important to realize that for the purposes of a speech that aims to foster cooperation between the Islamic world and the United States, it is essential and prudent to focus on the things that Christianity and Islam have in common. This attitude, however, does not make for good policy. A foreign policy framework that seriously tries to foster effective relations with the Middle East cannot engage in vague generalities about similarities between Christianity and Islam. Instead, the creator of such a framework must have a firm understanding of the Christian roots of Western political civilization, and rigorously analyze this against the beliefs and experiences of Islamic civilization. For example, how do the theological differences between Christianity and Islam create the differing political orders that emerged out of the two civilizations? How does the nature of Islam affect how Islam has traditionally viewed political communities when compared to Christianity?

Underplaying the Threat

⁷⁹ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

To go further in a critique of Esposito's book, it must be said that the book's entire thesis—that the concept of an "Islamic Threat" is just an "exaggerated [fear] of Islam as a resurgent 'evil empire' at war with the New World Order" that "reinforce[s] an astonishing degree of ignorance and cultural stereotyping of Arabs and Islam"—does not stand up to scrutiny.⁸¹ In 1992 (and continuing up until the present day) there was a significant threat to the security interests of the United States by an international movement of violent Islamic extremists motivated by a desire to return to a romanticized "Golden Age" of Islam and subjugate the world under a strict interpretation of shari'a law. Only a few years after Esposito published his book, al-Qaeda had carried out bombings of embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, as well as the bombing of the USS Cole. The organization was also responsible for the 9/11 attacks. In Iran, radicals held Americans hostage between the years 1979 and 1981. In 1983, Hezbollah carried out attacks against American military barracks in Beirut. In Sudan and Afghanistan, Islamic militants had overthrown the respective governments and created a strict religious theocracy. But Esposito does not place particular importance on these trends, nor is he able to predict the turmoil that would come. "It is important that the vacuum created by the end of the Cold War not be filled by exaggerated fears of Islam as an 'evil empire' at war with the New World Order and a challenge to global stability," Esposito writes in the introduction to *The Islamic Threat*.⁸² According to Esposito, the majority of contemporary images of Islam among media, policymakers, and academics is one of the fanatical terrorist bent on attacking the West. He brings up what he thinks are double standards against Muslims. For example, he considers the fear of Pakistan's

⁸¹ Esposito, 4-5.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 4.

nuclear capability to be irrational and rooted in bigotry against Muslims. After all, he argues, why don't we have similar fears over the nuclear arsenal of America and Israel?⁸³

The work of Edward Said heavily influences Esposito's perceptions of double standards between the West and the Islamic World. Similar to Said, Esposito's observations about political events lack any context. He automatically assumes that if the West harbors any negative or suspicious feeling against Middle Eastern countries, this must be due to a long tradition of Western chauvinism, and not because of any other factors. Take Esposito's point about Pakistan's nuclear program. In the early 1990s, when Esposito wrote this book, Pakistan was increasingly falling into a state of civil strife and economic stagnation. The country was also a hotbed of Islamic fundamentalism, with the Pakistani Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami funding Islamist insurgents in the Kashmir region. Most importantly, Abdul Qadeer Khan, the founder of Pakistan's atomic weapons project, was selling his technology to dangerous countries, including North Korea. To compare Pakistan with Israel and the United States, who were both enjoying periods of relative peace and prosperity during this time, completely misses the point. Fears over Pakistan's nuclear arsenal were not motivated by bigotry, but by concrete fears rooted in the particular situation of that country.

Another aspect of Islamism that Esposito underemphasizes is the global nature of the threat. He criticizes those who engage in a "monolithic/reductionist/threat approach to the Islamic world."⁸⁴ In other words, he accuses right-wing commentators of portraying the increased violence in the Islamic world as caused by a giant international conspiracy. Esposito instead argues that the motivations and situations of these Islamist groups are so different, that one cannot lump them all together in one group without greatly oversimplifying and thus distorting

⁸³ Ibid., 174.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 182.

their true nature. For example, groups such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Esposito argues, are motivated by the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, while the Islamic Republic of Iran is motivated by anger towards the authoritarian regime of the Shah and his Western allies. Esposito believes that many of these movements are mainly caused by a diverse array of political motivations, rather than animated by a singular religious cause. He argues that political pundits such as Charles Krauthammer, who say that “the political reawakening of the Islamic World” is a major force that the West must be wary of, are only creating a two-dimensional threat.⁸⁵

Esposito underestimates the ways in which these various Islamist movements cooperate and share similar aims. While it is true that Islamist movements are not centrally directed by a single source, they nonetheless operate under a shared ideological framework. For example, Hamas was originally an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Islamic Republic of Iran has continually aided and supported Hezbollah from its very inception. Osama Bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Abdullah Azzam, the founding members of al-Qaeda, all had links to the Muslim Brotherhood. While of course these various groups and individuals had disagreements with each other, these disagreements were mostly over tactics instead of goals (how to best create an Islamic State versus whether or not they should create one), and the commonalities they all shared ultimately outweighed their differences.

⁸⁵ Charles Krauthammer, “The New Crescent of Crisis Global Intifada,” *The Washington Post*, February 16, 1990, accessed January 30th, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1990/02/16/the-new-crescent-of-crisis-global-intifada/a89fcd86-fadb-4ea5-9bcb-8573edd916a0/?utm_term=.0dd47bd30379.

Chapter 4: The Meridian House Speech

America's unpreparedness towards the rise of political Islam is one of the reasons why the Meridian House Speech given by Edward Djerejian is so important. It was the first speech that tried to address the explosion of Islamism across the region. In his memoir, *Danger and Opportunity*, Djerejian wrote that he crafted the speech "after the Soviet Union broke apart and [America] had to adjust to a new international landscape."⁸⁶ The Middle East was no longer simply a proxy region for the Cold War, and the region was concerning in its own right due to the rising dominance of Islamic political parties, the chief of which was the Islamic Salvation Front's (FIS) electoral victory in the 1990 Algerian elections. In response to their electoral victory, the Algerian military staged a coup and ousted the FIS from power. The United States was now in a dilemma: should it condemn the coup as undemocratic, or should it stand by and let the Algerian military violently crush a political party that had its own undemocratic and illiberal tendencies? This is the question that Djerejian's speech would attempt to answer.

In his memoir, Djerejian stated that at the time he delivered the speech he was concerned that America might "in search of a new enemy...begin to define Islam as the next 'ism' the United States would have to confront."⁸⁷ It was out of this concern that Djerejian "thought it important for the U.S. government to begin to enunciate its...approach towards Muslim countries in general."⁸⁸ This approach "does *not* [sic] view Islam as the next 'ism' confronting the West or threatening world peace." Rather, "the next 'isms'...are terrorism and extremism, which may either wear a secular or religious cloak."⁸⁹ This is very important to consider. For Djerejian, the biggest danger emanating from the Middle East is not a specific set of ideas or religious beliefs

⁸⁶ Edward P. Djerejian and William Martin, *Danger and Opportunity: An American Ambassador's Journey Through the Middle East* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Threshold Editions, 2008), 19.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 21.

(such as Salafism or Islamism). It is instead a certain tactic (terrorism), or mood (extremism) that transcends any one ideology or religion.

Given Djerejian's identification of the next "isms" from the Middle East that confront the United States, how does he then define "Islamism," and how does he believe the United States should address Islamist countries? In the Meridian House Speech, Djerejian notes that "the role of religion has become more manifest [in the Middle East], and much attention is being paid to a phenomenon variously labeled *political Islam*, the *Islamic revival*, or *Islamic fundamentalism*."⁹⁰ According to Djerejian, it is important to *not* view this as a monolithic movement committed to undermining Western values. In the speech, Djerejian instead defines the movement as a loosely connected series of "groups or movements seeking to reform their societies in keeping with Islamic ideals."⁹¹ What Djerejian is concerned about are political groups "who would use the democratic process to come to power, only to destroy that very process in order to retain power and political dominance."⁹² Here lies the justification for the United States' lack of response to the Algerian military coup. It feared that the FIS was a party that subscribed to the philosophy of "one person, one vote, one time," and would soon tear down all democratic institutions in Algeria once they took power.⁹³ With this said, however, Djerejian's policy framework still makes it theoretically possible for the United States to tolerate and even work with Islamist parties as a positive force in the region. His insistence that America's "quarrel is with extremism per se, and the violence, denial, intolerance, intimidation, coercion, and terror that accompany it," and not with a certain religion or religious ideology, avoids any serious attempt to stifle

⁹⁰ Djerejian, "The U.S. and the Middle East in a Changing World."

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Djerejian, *Danger and Opportunity*, 22.

Islamism in the Middle East, which is the most dangerous threat to the region's instability and violence.⁹⁴

Objections

One article that questions the importance of the Meridian House Speech is “How America Changed its Approach to Political Islam,” written by Shadi Hamid, Peter Mandaville, and William McCants. “The most straightforward way to characterize the evolving U.S. approach [towards Islamism]” they write, “is to say that Washington decided not to have a specific policy towards Islamists,” the authors write. “There was a recognition that the agenda of these [Islamists] groups varied from country to country.”⁹⁵ To show these differing approaches to various Islamist groups, the authors show how the United States condemned the electoral victory of Hamas in 2006, but supported Islamist parties in Yemen and Jordan at the same time. While the authors of this article ascribe these differing attitudes to *realpolitik*, we can also trace these differing approaches towards various Islamist parties to the basic framework that the Meridian House Speech created. Like Djerejian, the United States Government throughout both the Clinton and Bush Jr. administrations saw Islamists “living in different countries placing renewed emphasis on Islamic principles....to varying degrees and in different ways,” rather than viewing all Islamist groups as a “monolithic or coordinated international effort.”⁹⁶ The Bush administration condemned Hamas's victory in 2006 not because Hamas was an Islamist party, or even merely because of America's alliance with Israel, but because Hamas was (and remains) one of those groups that held to the idea of “one person, one vote, one time. It “practice[s] terrorism, resort[s] to violence, reject[s] the peaceful resolution of conflicts, preach[es]

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁹⁵ Shadi Hamid, Peter Mandaville, and McCants William, “How America Changed Its Approach to Political Islam - The Atlantic,” *The Atlantic*, October 4, 2017, accessed December 20th, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/america-political-islam/541287/>.

⁹⁶ Djerejian, “The U.S. and the Middle East in a Changing World.”

intolerance, disdain[s] political pluralism, [and] violate[s] international standards regarding human rights.”⁹⁷ Under Djerejian’s framework, Hamas is a group that the United States should condemn because it practices terrorism and preaches extremism, regardless of the ideology that it holds. So, the United States did (and continues to) have a consistent policy towards Islamists based on the Meridian House Speech.

The Limits of the Meridian House Framework

Although Djerejian’s framework for dealing with Islamists may seem prudent and nuanced, dealing with each Islamist group on a case by case basis instead of painting them all with one broad brush, the approach he recommends suffers from one fundamental problem: it completely misunderstands the nature and threat of Islamism. In the Meridian House Speech, Djerejian presents the view that Islamists represent a broad movement with various parts. While all of these groups seek “to reform their societies in keeping with Islamic ideals[,]...[t]here is considerable diversity in how these ideals are expressed.”⁹⁸ Some Islamist groups, such as al-Qaeda, Hamas, and the current regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran, use terror and violence to reach their goals. But, Djerejian stresses, other Islamist groups, such as the various Islamist parties in Yemen, Jordan, and Turkey that the United States has funded in the past twenty-five years, are nonviolent and use democracy to achieve their aims, so the United States should encourage their political participation. The idea behind this is that broader political participation by all sides in a democracy will allow for better deliberation and will encourage moderation on all sides. However, this underestimates both the ideological commitment of Islamist groups (and the commitment of many of their supporters among the population) and whitewashes the true aims of such groups. As has been stated above, Islamism at its core aims to bring Islamic

⁹⁷ Djerejian, *Danger and Opportunity*, 23.

⁹⁸ Edward Djerejian, “The U.S. and the Middle East in a Changing World; Address at Meridian House International,” *U.S. Department of State Dispatch*, 1992.

societies to a state of rightly guided rule under “shari’a” law. Their interpretation of shari’a is highly conservative and literal. It includes the repression of women, religious minorities, and harsh punishments for even minor crimes. Hassan al-Banna called for the censorship of music and movies that encouraged vice.⁹⁹ Under Khomeini, Iran banned alcohol, restricted the rights of women, and punished Muslim apostates. In Afghanistan, the Taliban banned women from going to school and ran the country under rigid religious grounds. Even democratically elected Islamists, such as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, have taken actions such as massive societal purges as well as tougher restrictions on alcohol¹⁰⁰ and large funding of conservative Islamic religious schools.¹⁰¹

One example of an Islamist group that uses democratic means to get into power, but possesses the same fanatic and totalitarian impulses as ISIS or Hamas, is the current day incarnation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Recall that the founder of the Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna, set up the group in order to overthrow the Egyptian government and replace it with an Islamic theocracy. This included a number of violent attacks against government officials, as well as funding to a number of violent Islamist groups around the world (such as Hamas). After the death of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1970, the Brotherhood was allowed back into Egypt and was given varying amounts of political participation. During this time, the organization claimed to have moderated and eschewed violence.¹⁰² Indeed, Esposito talks positively of the Brotherhood in *The Islamic Threat*. What Esposito seems to miss, however, is that although the Brotherhood no longer uses violence to secretly attempt to

⁹⁹ Al-Banna, Hassan “Toward the Light,” 23.

¹⁰⁰ Shadi Hamid, “How Much Can One Strongman Change a Country? - The Atlantic,” The Atlantic, 2017, accessed March 23rd, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/06/erdogan-turkey-islamist/531609/>.

¹⁰¹ Daren Butler, “With More Islamic Schooling, Erdogan Aims to Reshape Turkey,” Reuters, 2018, accessed March 23rd, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/turkey-erdogan-education/>.

¹⁰² For more information, please see “Muslim Brotherhood | Counter Extremism Project,” Counter Extremism Project, February 6th, 2018, <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/muslim-brotherhood>.

overthrow the Egyptian government, the organization still remains committed to creating a radical Islamic theocracy. The best example of this claim would be the actions of Mohammed Morsi during his 2012-2013 presidency, as discussed in the introduction to this paper.

Esposito claims that The Muslim Brotherhood, while responsible for some political violence in Egypt throughout the 1950s and 1960s, moderated in the seventies and should now be seen as a perfectly legitimate political group with which the United States should be willing to work. In the *Islamic Threat*, he claims that “from 1970 to 1991 the Muslim Brotherhood rebuilt its organization, self-consciously espousing a policy of moderate reformism.”¹⁰³ He also claims that the Brotherhood “clearly opted for socio-political change through a policy of moderation and gradualism which accepted political pluralism and parliamentary democracy.”¹⁰⁴ He uses these claims to demonstrate that the Brotherhood had departed from its violent roots. What Esposito does not mention however, is that the Brotherhood only renounced violence because this was the only way Sadat would let the organization become politically legitimate.¹⁰⁵ The leaders of the Brotherhood did not change their mind about violence of their own initiative. There were in fact many offshoot organization created by the Brotherhood that were expressly committed to violence. The most significant example is Hamas, which was a creation of the Muslim Brotherhood’s Palestinian Branch.

A second important point about the Brotherhood is that even if it rejects violence as a tactic for gaining power, it still holds to an extreme ideology predicated on a literal and rigid reading of Islam. While it rejects the methods of al-Qaeda and ISIS, it still shares their ultimate goal. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Osama Bin Laden, and Ayman al-Zawahiri were all members of the

¹⁰³ Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, 131.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁰⁵ House of Commons, “Muslim Brotherhood Review - Main Findings,” 2015, February 11th, 2018 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486932/Muslim_Brotherhood_Review_Main_Findings.pdf.

Muslim Brotherhood. While they did break off from the group to form their own organizations, it is important to realize that they broke off because the Brotherhood was not willing to overthrow secular governments by force, not because they disagreed with the Brotherhood's interpretation of Islam. In fact, Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's Syrian branch, regularly uses Brotherhood writings for ideological training.¹⁰⁶ The Brotherhood and many of its members have shown support, both financially and rhetorically, for al-Qaeda and ISIS. The Brotherhood continues to call Bin Laden by the honorific title, Sheikh, and have openly praised his "resistance" work in Afghanistan and Iraq.¹⁰⁷ The Brotherhood was also involved in the creation of Bank al-Taqwa, which secretly gave money to Hamas and al-Qaeda.¹⁰⁸ For the United States government accused Mohammad Jalal Khalifa, a senior member of the Brotherhood, of laundering Bin Laden's money.

Although the Brotherhood has officially rejected violence, this attitude has begun to change, particularly since the military coup against Morsi's government. While the older generation of Brotherhood members still desires a gradual change of Egyptian society to shari'a law, the younger generation has increasingly turned to jihadist rhetoric and even has pursued violent acts. Since 2013, mobs associated with the Brotherhood have looted Coptic Churches and attacked Egyptian police and soldiers. There is even concern that the Brotherhood has started to form links with ISIS in the Sinai Peninsula.¹⁰⁹ Far from a peaceful group seeking democratic

¹⁰⁶ Hassan Hassan, "Jabhat Al Nusra Leader Reveals His True Colours - The National," The National, June 8 2015, accessed February 11th, 2018, <https://www.thenational.ae/opinion/jabhat-al-nusra-leader-reveals-his-true-colours-1.106446>.

¹⁰⁷ Eric Trager, "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood Sticks With Bin Laden - The Atlantic," The Atlantic, May 8 2011, accessed February 12th, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/05/egypts-muslim-brotherhood-sticks-with-bin-laden/238218/>.

¹⁰⁸ Paul O'Neil, "The United States and Italy Designate Twenty-Five New Financiers of Terror," U.S. Department of the Treasury, August 29 2002, accessed February 21, 2018, <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/po3380.aspx>.

¹⁰⁹ "Muslim Brotherhood | Counter Extremism Project," Counter Extremism Project, 2018, <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/muslim-brotherhood>.

reform of Egypt, the Brotherhood possesses a dangerous theocratic vision, and is increasingly comfortable with using violence to attain their goals.

Using the Muslim Brotherhood as a case study, what does this tell us about the nature of Islamism and what they would do once in power? It shows that, even self-professed non-violent Islamist groups aim at illiberal and anti-Western goals, making it much harder to deny that Islamism merely uses democracy to serve anti-democratic ends. To quote Turkish President Erdogan, who himself has ties to Islamist movements, the Islamist view is that “democracy is like a train...you get off once you have reached your destination.”¹¹⁰ Even if figures such as Muhammad Morsi and Erdogan attained their positions democratically, the statements they have made and actions they have taken once in power show they are willing to use democracy as it suits them. Does it make as much sense to have faith in a “moderate Islamist” as in a “moderate Marxist-Leninist” or a “moderate fascist?” Perhaps people can democratically vote for Leninist politicians or massive collectivization policies instead of a Leninist violently seizing power, but the end goal will always lead to the same piling up of corpses and suppression of freedoms because the ideology *itself* is dangerous, regardless of the means it uses to attain power. The Meridian House Speech is unaware of this fact, and it contends that Islamism can be a path of genuine political success for the Middle East and wider Muslim world. These beliefs blind the Meridian House Speech to the illiberal heart of Islamism. While it is true that there is no single mastermind behind the various Islamist groups in the region, and there is often much infighting between these various groups, all of them are motivated by a common totalitarian ideology that is ultimately dangerous to both American interests and the Middle East itself. Does this mean that America should *never* compromise or work with Islamists? Certainly not. Foreign policy can

¹¹⁰ “Getting off the Train - Politics,” The Economist, accessed December 26, 2017, accessed February 23rd, 2018, <https://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21689877-mr-erdogans-commitment-democracy-seems-be-fading-getting-train>.

never be so rigid. Despite its many problems, America's alliance with the Soviet Union during World War II was politically necessary to stop the larger threat of the Nazis. If Americans can work with Stalin, they can work with anybody. The problem with the Meridian House speech is not that it leaves the option of working with Islamists open; it is that it refuses to see things as they are. By characterizing Islamists as the vanguard of some sort of democratic political reform movement, the speech tries to suppress the real conflicts that were occurring within Islam during this time, and the explosive political implications that these conflicts had on the world stage.

The wording of the speech also seems to indicate that any reasonable person of good will would hold to the values of liberal democracy, regardless of his or her own cultural background. Djerejian writes that "I believe that [promoting social justice, international peace, and economic stability] are aspirations which the peoples of the region-whether Muslim, Jewish, Christian, or otherwise-can realistically share. Like us, they seek a peaceful, better future."¹¹¹ This is an incredibly lofty statement. It is very hopeful and aspirational, what exactly does Djerejian mean by "enhancing security and deterring or defeating aggression...promoting economic and social justice, and promoting the values which we believe"?¹¹² Saudi Arabia's definition of "social justice" is completely different from America's views of social justice circa 1992. And to a significant group of Middle Easterners, the real aggressor is the United States and its allies. The Meridian House Speech divides the region into two parts, there are those who, regardless of religion or cultural background, hold to liberal democratic values and share the same aspirations as modern America. Then there are those, who, regardless of religion or cultural background promote the vague territories of "violence" and "extremism" (terms that themselves can become uselessly vague when one breaks them down). These are our enemies. Here is the real irony of

¹¹¹ Djerejian, "The United States and the Middle East in a Changing World."

¹¹² Ibid.

the speech. Djerejian claimed to write the speech with the intent of preventing oversimplifications in how we characterize the Middle East. He does this by ignoring the facts on the ground, by both obscuring the true character of political Islam's revival and of the real value differences between the West and Islamic countries. In doing so, he creates his own oversimplified dichotomy, those who believe in democracy, and those who do not.

Chapter 5: The Meridian House Speech and its Effects on U.S. Foreign Policy

After viewing many of the theoretical problems with the Meridian House Speech, such as its misunderstanding of the theocratic nature of Islamism, and its almost boundless optimism in the spread of liberal democracy, one must wonder whether these problems affected actual foreign policy in the Middle East. I would argue yes, and the policy implications of the Meridian House Speech can be most clearly seen in the Arab Spring, a period of political instability and demonstrations that lasted roughly from 2010 to 2012. Overall, the United States took a positive role towards these demonstrations, encouraging the protesters and insisting that the autocratic governments either moderate or step aside. Concerning the 2011 protests in Egypt, the Obama administration released a statement on February tenth of that year, a day before then president of Egypt Hosni Mubarak resigned. At this point, President Mubarak had made concessions and promised reforms, but still refused to step down from his thirty year reign. Concerning this course of events, the Obama administration said, “too many Egyptians remain unconvinced that that the [Egyptian] government is serious about a genuine transition to democracy, and it is the responsibility of the government to speak clearly to the Egyptian people and the world.”¹¹³ The statement also said that the transition “must immediately demonstrate irreversible political change, and a negotiated path to democracy.”¹¹⁴ Although President Obama did not take any concrete policy action to support this rhetoric, these very forceful statements clearly put the American government on the side of the protesters. This rhetoric echoes Djerejian’s point that

¹¹³ “Statement of President Barack Obama on Egypt | Whitehouse.gov,” The White House, 2011, accessed December 22nd, 2017, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/02/10/statement-president-barack-obama-egypt>.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

the United States differs “with those who are insensitive to the need for political pluralism...regardless of whether they describe their approach in secular, religious, or any other terms.”¹¹⁵ For the Obama administration, Mubarak’s desire to limit political pluralism, and not the ever present threat of an illiberal and theocratic Muslim Brotherhood coming into power, was the paramount problem of Egypt.

After Mubarak stepped down, the Obama administration continued not only to intensely support Egypt’s first open election in its history, but also warned the military against taking back any control. In the days leading up to the election, then Secretary of State Hilary Clinton said that it was “imperative that the military fulfill its promise to the Egyptian people to turn power over to the legitimate winner.”¹¹⁶ Considering that Morsi’s main opponent was a member of the Egyptian military, this statement certainly seemed to work in Morsi’s favor. Although Morsi took a number of troubling steps to limit checks on presidential power during his rule (discussed above), the Obama administration remained silent on this point, instead applauding Morsi for his electoral victory in Egypt’s first democratic election. When the military led a coup against Morsi a year later, the Obama administration stated that it was “deeply concerned by the decision of the Egyptian armed forces to remove President Morsi and suspend the Egyptian Constitution.” It urged “the Egyptian military to move quickly and responsibly to return full authority back to a democratically elected civilian government as soon as possible through an inclusive and transparent process.”¹¹⁷ The administration ignored Morsi’s repeated undemocratic behavior in restricting legal challenges to his authority and the growing unrest in Egypt with Morsi’s rule. Morsi and his party were elected democratically, and that was that.

¹¹⁵ Djerejian, “The U.S. and the Middle East in a Changing World.”

¹¹⁶ Clinton in Case, “How Obama Sided with the Muslim Brotherhood.”

¹¹⁷ “Statement by President Barack Obama on Egypt | Whitehouse.gov,” The White House, 2013, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/07/03/statement-president-barack-obama-egypt>.

The problem with the administration's approach to the Egyptian political crisis was that it prioritized democratization of Egypt over other concerns, such as illiberal and theocratic elements in Egyptian society, and how these elements could exploit democracy to its own purposes. This overemphasis of democratization cannot be blamed on the Meridian House speech. Recall that the speech was well aware "of those who would use the democratic process to come to power, only to destroy that very process in order to retain power and political dominance."¹¹⁸ In his memoir, Djerejian opens with a letter to the incoming president, in which he warns the president that "elections alone do not make democracies," demonstrating that Djerejian is not ignorant of how easily tyrannical individuals and parties can use democracy for their own ends.¹¹⁹ Djerejian's mistake is his misunderstanding of the illiberal nature of Islamist movements. Almost immediately after warning against the dangers of democratic exploitation, Djerejian implores the incoming president to "differentiate between the Islamic radicals and Islamist groups that do not engage in terrorism. Accordingly [he] should authorize the secretary of state to have our diplomats contact and engage certain Islamist groups and parties in the Muslim countries, especially those that do not resort to violence" in order to determine their views and find common ground."¹²⁰ Once again, Djerejian believes that there is a possibility that America can negotiate with Islamists in good faith. He believes that there exists a significant group of "moderate Islamists" that shares goals similar to the United States.

When one takes into account the assessment of the Islamist movement of Esposito and, in turn, Djerejian, it is easy to find many problems. Both overestimate the Islamic world's capability to peacefully transition into liberal democracy, both underemphasize the violent and supremacist aspects of political Islam, and both focus too much on the ancillary political causes

¹¹⁸ Djerejian, "The U.S. and the Middle East in a Changing World."

¹¹⁹ Djerejian, *Danger and Opportunity*, 9.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

instead of the central role that a literal and highly conservative reading of Islam plays in the ideological formation of these movements. However, if we were to boil down the flaws in Esposito and Djerejian's framework into one point, then this quote by Middle East scholar Bernard Lewis does the best job: "In 1940, we knew who we were, we knew who the enemy was, we knew the dangers and the issues...It is different today. We don't know who we are, we don't know the issues, and we still do not understand the nature of the enemy."¹²¹ Lewis is referring of course, to, the Allied struggle against Nazism in World War II. He argues that the British people's understanding of the threat that faced them allowed them and their allies to win the battle against the tyranny of National Socialism. The same could be said for America's conduct during the Cold War. While the United States' conduct during that near fifty year struggle against the Soviet Union was far from perfect, America was able to do so well in part because it very early on knew the nature of the enemy it was facing: its goals, motivations, strategies and weaknesses. The same thing cannot be said for the so-called "War on Terror." Even the name "War on Terror" displays a certain ambiguity about what we're supposed to be at war against. What kind of Terror are we fighting? Who is doing the terrorizing? Are all forms of terror the same or even worth getting into a war over? Calling our current conflict the "War on Terror" makes as much sense as calling World War II the "War on Blitzkrieg." Terror is a tactic, used by many different people in many different forms, and not a concrete enemy that can be targeted and fought against in a clear manner. It is hard to think that the Bush administration was not thinking of the following line from the Meridian House Speech when it declared a war on Terror: "Simply stated, religion is not a determinant—positive or negative—in the nature or

¹²¹Lewis in Fouad Ajami, "A Sage in Christendom - WSJ," The Wall Street Journal, May 1, 2006, accessed December 30, 2017 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB114643805792240018>.

quality of our relations with other countries. Our quarrel is with extremism and the violence, denial, intolerance, intimidation, coercion, and terror which too often accompany it.”¹²²

Out of a (in many ways legitimate) fear of alienating the Muslim World, the United States shied away from calling out political Islam for what it was: a fanatical and utopian movement bent on subjugating entire countries under an oppressive form of shari’a law. Instead, they turned to more neutral words such as “terror” and “extremism.” While this sounds wise on the surface, the decision does not stand up to much scrutiny. A cursory look at how the FBI, the CIA and the State Department define terrorism show that political communities cannot even agree on precisely what terrorism is.

A good example to what the proper response to Islamism in the Middle East should look like is President Bush Sr.’s response to The Algerian Civil War. In this decade long war, the battle was not between an oppressive regime and freedom-loving rebels, but between an oppressive regime and murderous Islamists who would have led Algeria down an even worse path. The United States’ actions in Algeria wisely ranged from cautious support of the Algerian military regime to non-interference. It never supported the rebels because it knew that if they won, Algeria would have descended into a totalitarian theocracy. It chose the lesser of two evils and opposed the forces that would have been the most dangerous to their national security interests. Djerejian and Esposito’s framework would not have allowed this decision. Because the Algerian government used force and terror during the Civil War, they were just as much enemies of the United States as the Islamist militants were. If anything, America may have supported the militants, because they marched under the banner of “democracy” and “reform,” and in fact were more popular among the Algerian people in the early 1990s. This is precisely what America has done by backing dangerous Islamist movements in Egypt, Libya, and Syria. In backing the forces

¹²² Djerejian, “The U.S. and the Middle East in a Changing World.”

of democratization and popular reform, America has in fact backed forces that both pose a threat to its interests and the stability of the region in general. The framework of the Meridian House Speech fails to make distinctions between levels of threats. Instead, it makes a Manichean distinction between the forces of repression and the forces of liberalism. Those proclaiming the values of democracy and popular reform will always share values with the United States, while those actors who use violence and oppression must always be diametrically opposed to it. As in the case of Algeria, however, sometimes a tyrant can be the strongest bulwark against an even greater evil, while those who proclaim to operate under democratic values will only use them to create an even worse situation.

Conclusion

Since the end of the Cold War, America has consistently committed to supporting democratic movements in the Middle East. While this goal is laudable, it has also led America to support Islamists, Muslims who wish to establish a strict theocratic state in Muslim countries in order to return the religion to its original state of purity, who wish to achieve their goals through democratic means. This commitment to spreading democracy and viewing Islamists as potential democratic reformers stems back to Secretary Edward Djerejian's speech given at the Meridian House in 1992. In the speech, Djerejian highlights the shared values that the United States and the Middle East share, while also emphasizing the need to encourage democratic values in the region and reassuring the Muslim world that Islamists who fairly worked through the democratic process would be considered as allies of the United States. The ideas within Djerejian's speech, particularly concerning seeing Islamists as potential allies, stems from the work of academics Edward Said and John Esposito. Both of these academics blamed Middle East political turmoil primarily on the legacy of Western colonialism and Israeli military aggression, and both paid

insufficient attention to the danger of Islamist movements in the Middle East. Esposito in fact argued that Islamist movements were not inherently fanatic and violent, but perhaps could potentially be a source of positive democratic reform in the Middle East. This thesis has argued that Islamist movements, because of their view that Muslim societies must revert to a pristine understanding of shari'a law, an understanding that includes harsh censorship, warfare against non-Muslims, and the oppression of women, can never be seen as a basis for democratic reform, but rather as a totalitarian movement similar to Fascism or Marxism-Leninism. This thesis has also questioned the benignity of academic influence on U.S. policy. As this thesis has shown, the work of Esposito and Said had important flaws and limits, and these flaws and limits carried over to the Meridian House Speech and subsequent U.S. policy in the Middle East. What resulted from this, as can be seen in America's reaction to the Egyptian political crisis, were years of America making decisions that harmed not only its own interests but the security and stability of the Middle East.

Appendix: The U.S. and the Middle East in a Changing World

For over 4 decades, the central characteristic of international relations was the dichotomy between the Soviet empire of dictatorial regimes and centrally planned economies and the free world of democratic governments and market economies. Thus, the Cold War reverberated around the globe, affecting virtually everyone everywhere. Much of America's foreign policy and that of many other free nations was either driven by or [was] a derivative of our collective efforts to contain Soviet aggression and expansion.

Today, East-West competition and conflict over the future of Europe and the Third World has been transformed. In the former Soviet Union, new leaders are striving for peaceful, democratic change as the only effective road to sustainable economic and social progress. Partnership has replaced conflict. A new mode of international cooperation, which Secretary Baker has called "collective engagement," is replacing the acrimonious competition of the Cold War.

This sea change in world politics has had a profound effect in the Near East. An early example of the new "collective engagement" was the response to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. A historically unprecedented coalition responded forcefully and successfully in reversing that aggression and in preventing Iraq from threatening or coercing its neighbors.

In partnership with Russia, we have been able to bring Israel and all her immediate Arab neighbors--Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestinians--together for the first time ever in a historic peace process to negotiate a comprehensive settlement of their long-standing disputes in direct, face-to-face negotiations based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

Further, the United Nations has taken an increasingly active and positive role in enforcing the principles of its charter. Just this weekend, we have seen the UN Security Council enact Chapter Seven sanctions against Serbia and Montenegro following--in Secretary Baker's words--the "humanitarian nightmare" in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where many people, including Muslims, have been brutally victimized by the continued warfare. Besides its many resolutions on Iraq, the Security Council has shown it will not tolerate Libya's use of terrorism. In the Near East and Maghreb, the UN's activities extend from Iraq and the Iraq-Kuwait border to the Western Sahara.

Within the ancient lands of the Near East, the rapid and fundamental change evident elsewhere is also pressing people to see their own futures in a new light and to reevaluate their relationships with other nations, with their neighbors, and with each other in a particularly challenging manner.

US Goals in the Near East

Amidst these changes, basic US foreign policy objectives remain consistent and clear. Two major goals stand out:

First, we seek a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace between Israel and all her neighbors, including the Palestinians; and Second, we seek viable security arrangements which will assure stability and unimpeded commercial access to the vast oil reserves of the Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf.

These are not new goals, of course. We have striven toward both for decades. What is new is the opportunity afforded us by recent global and regional events to make real progress toward achieving them.

Arab-Israeli Peace Process

The first of these goals--the search for peace between Arabs and Israelis--has challenged every US Administration in the last 4 decades. In the Middle East, where war has at times seemed endemic, the road to achieving lasting peace through negotiation now stretches before us. The first historic steps forward have been taken.

We knew last autumn, before the first negotiations began in Madrid, that the path we had embarked on would not be an easy one. Fundamental and bitterly contested differences separate the parties to the conflict. Nevertheless, there have now been five rounds of direct, bilateral talks between Israelis and Arabs, and a sixth round is being planned for a venue closer to the region--namely, Rome. In addition, we have worked closely with our Russian partners in this endeavor to launch the multilateral phase of the peace process. Let me comment briefly on where we stand in this process.

In the bilateral negotiations, the parties have resolved many procedural questions and have begun to put substantive issues on the table. Israel and the Arabs, including the Palestinians, are all engaging on the basic issues of land, peace, and security which form the nexus of these negotiations.

Israel and the Palestinians are focusing directly on the central issue of interim self-government arrangements for the Occupied Territories as a first, transitional step along the path to a permanent settlement of their dispute, which will be resolved in final status negotiations.

While major gaps remain between the respective positions of the parties, the bilaterals between Israel and Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan have begun down the path of serious negotiations aimed at defining possible areas of agreement and at narrowing differences through compromise where disagreement persists.

This is the essence of the art of negotiation, and it is the essence of the negotiating process upon which the parties first embarked, 7 months ago in Madrid.

Another major accomplishment has been the beginning of the multilateral phase of the peace process. As a result of closely coordinated planning by the United States and Russia, 36 countries, including 11 Arab states, gathered in Moscow in January to organize working groups on issues of regional concern, such as economic development, the environment, refugees, water resources, and arms control and regional security. In mid-May, these working groups held their initial meetings in various capitals around the world. Follow-on meetings will convene later this year.

I just returned from Lisbon, where the multilateral steering committee met on May 27 to coordinate the work of these working groups. I can report that we had a successful and productive meeting. The reports from the five working groups demonstrated again that all parties are approaching the issues seriously and pragmatically, and we achieved agreement on the venues and timeframe for the next round of working group meetings to be held in the fall. These multilateral talks support rather than substitute for the bilateral negotiations, and we hope that those bilateral parties who have so far refrained from participating will join all these important talks as soon as possible.

President Bush and Secretary Baker have committed the United States to play the role of an honest broker, a catalyst, and a driving force to assure the continued progress of the peace process in all its dimensions. We look forward with real hope to the continued dedication and commitment to peace evinced thus far by the regional parties and the international community.

Gulf Security and Stability

A second major aspect of our Middle East policy is our shared interest in the security and stability of the Persian Gulf. We all know that the countries of the Arabian Peninsula are located in a dangerous neighborhood and confront risks to their sovereignty and independence. Stability in the Gulf is vital, not only to our own national interest but also to the economic security of the whole world.

Arabian Peninsula.

In February, I visited the countries which are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC]. In all my conversations with their leaders and government officials, I stressed the need for individual self-defense and for collective defense planning and arrangements among the six GCC states--Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman--with the goal of strengthening their ability to defend themselves against external aggression. I also encouraged security cooperation between the Gulf states and their friends in the region. Much work needs to be done in attaining this goal.

At the same time, I assured the GCC leaders that the United States will cooperate closely with them to meet their legitimate defense needs. This includes both the sales of weapons within the context of the President's Middle East arms control initiative and bilateral security arrangements such as the periodic conduct of joint military exercises, the maintenance of an enhanced naval presence in the Gulf, and arrangements for the access and pre-positioning of critical military materiel and equipment. I emphasized that these bilateral efforts would complement but not supersede the Gulf states' collective security efforts. I reiterated that we do not intend to station ground troops permanently anywhere in the region. The purposes of both

arms sales and collective security measures are to deter threats to our shared interests and to raise the threshold of future requirements for direct US military action.

Iraq

The most drastic threat to the security of the Gulf, and indeed of the whole region, has been Saddam Hussein's aggression against his neighbors and against the people of Iraq. Here, the collective engagement of the international community and our coalition partners has been noteworthy in carrying out UN Security Council resolutions. Saddam continues to refuse to comply fully with these resolutions, which were passed by the Security Council to ensure peace and security in the region.

Using "cheat and retreat" tactics, he has resisted dismantling his weapons of mass destruction, including ballistic missiles and the means to produce them, as mandated by Resolution 687. He refuses to end his repression of the Iraqi people or to respect their human rights as mandated by Resolution 688, and he is intentionally and systematically depriving large populations in the north and south of Iraq of the basic necessities of life for the sake of hanging on to his own personal power. Clearly, he hopes to frustrate and outlast the will of the Security Council. We will enforce the UN sanctions fully. Saddam Hussein's regime has become more brittle, and he is preoccupied by his quest for survival. Clearly, the Iraqi people deserve new leadership which will be representative of the pluralistic nature of Iraqi society and ready to live at peace with Iraq's neighbors.

Iran

Across the Gulf from our friends and allies lies the Islamic Republic of Iran, an important country that can contribute to regional security if it chooses a constructive path. Iran knows what it has to do to be accepted by the international community. Many hope that the recent Majlis [parliament] election will lead to moderate policies. We share this hope, but actions must be the litmus test. From our view, the normalization of relations with Iran depends on several factors, particularly an end to support for terrorism. Iran's role in the freeing of American hostages held in Lebanon was an important step. We hope this will lead to the release of all those being held outside the judicial process, regardless of nationality, and that this signals the permanent cessation of hostage-taking.

However, Iran's role in sponsoring terrorism continues in other ways that are deeply disturbing. Iran's human rights practices and its apparent pursuit of a destabilizing arms build-up, including everything from submarines to weapons of mass destruction, also remain matters of serious concern. Further, Iran's policies toward its neighbors in the Gulf, where we have vital interests, and in Central Asia need to be watched closely. Another serious problem is Iran's categorical opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process and its support for those, like Hezbollah in Lebanon, who violently oppose it.

We have made clear from the outset that we are prepared to engage in a dialogue with authorized representatives of the Iranian Government to discuss these issues and US-Iranian relations. To date, the Iranian leadership has declined to engage us in this dialogue.

Fundamental Values

Reviewing the main thrusts of our policy in the Middle East reminds us that, even in the 1990s, our national security interests in the region continue to exert a powerful claim on our attention. But there is more to our policy agenda than protection of vital resources and conflict resolution. Another pillar of US policy is our support for human rights, pluralism, women's and minority rights, and popular participation in government and our rejection of extremism, oppression, and terrorism. These worldwide issues constitute an essential part of the foundation for America's engagement with the countries of the Near East--from the Maghreb to Iran and beyond.

In this context, there are certain factors which we should underscore in discussing US relations with these countries.

The first is diversity. Not only is this area diverse within itself, so are our relations with the countries that make it up. This diversity requires not only that a clear sense of our own values and interests guide our policy but also that understanding and tolerance be key factors in our dealings with other political cultures.

The second point is interaction. US relations with this part of the world are just the latest chapter in a history of interaction between the West and the Middle East that is thousands of years old. Our interaction spans political, economic, social, cultural, and military fields. We should not ignore this totality.

The third point is common aspirations. Despite obvious differences, we and the peoples of the Near East share important aspirations, which I will touch on later. These common aspirations provide a promising foundation for future cooperation.

Islam and the West

Politics in the region has increasingly focused on the issues of change, openness, and economic and social inequities. As part of a trend that predates the events I have recounted, the role of religion has become more manifest, and much attention is being paid to a phenomenon variously labeled political Islam, the Islamic revival, or Islamic fundamentalism. Uncertainty regarding this renewed Islamic emphasis abounds. Some say that it is causing a widening gap between Western values and those of the Muslim world. It is important to assess this phenomenon carefully so that we do not fall victim to misplaced fears or faulty perceptions.

A cover of a recent issue of *The Economist* magazine headlined its main story, "Living With Islam," and portrayed a man in traditional dress, standing in front of a mosque and holding a gun. Inside the magazine, we are told that "Islam Resumes its March!" and that "one anti-western 'ism' is growing stronger." If there is one thought I can leave with you tonight, it is that the US Government does not view Islam as the next "ism" confronting the West or threatening world peace. That is an overly simplistic response to a complex reality.

The Cold War is not being replaced with a new competition between Islam and the West. It is evident that the Crusades have been over for a long time. Indeed, the ecumenical movement is the contemporary trend. Americans recognize Islam as one of the world's great faiths. It is practiced on every continent. It counts among its adherents millions of citizens of the United States. As Westerners, we acknowledge Islam as a historic civilizing force among the many that have influenced and enriched our culture. The legacy of the Muslim culture, which reached the Iberian Peninsula in the 8th century, is a rich one in the sciences, arts, and culture and in

tolerance of Judaism and Christianity. Islam acknowledges the major figures of the Judeo-Christian heritage: Abraham, Moses, and Christ.

In countries throughout the Middle East and North Africa, we thus see groups or movements seeking to reform their societies in keeping with Islamic ideals. There is considerable diversity in how these ideals are expressed. We detect no monolithic or coordinated international effort behind these movements. What we do see are believers living in different countries placing renewed emphasis on Islamic principles and governments accommodating Islamist political activity to varying degrees and in different ways.

Political Participation

For our part as Americans, we are proud of the principles on which our country is founded. They have withstood many severe challenges over more than 2 centuries. We know they work. We, therefore, are committed to encouraging greater openness and responsiveness of political systems throughout the world.

I am not talking here about trying to impose an American model on others. Each country must work out, in accordance with its own traditions, history, and particular circumstances, how and at what pace to broaden political participation. In this respect, it is essential that there be real political dialogue between government on the one hand and the people and parties and other institutions on the other. Those who are prepared to take specific steps toward free elections, creating independent judiciaries, promoting the rule of law, reducing restrictions on the press, respecting the rights of minorities, and guaranteeing individual rights will find us ready to recognize and support their efforts, just as those moving in the opposite direction will find us ready to speak candidly and act accordingly. As Secretary Baker has said:

We best can have truly close and enduring relations with those countries with which we share fundamental values.

Those who seek to broaden political participation in the Middle East will, therefore, find us supportive, as we have been elsewhere in the world. At the same time, we are suspect of those who would use the democratic process to come to power, only to destroy that very process in order to retain power and political dominance. While we believe in the principle of "one person, one vote," we do not support "one person, one vote, one time." Let me make it very clear with whom we differ. We differ:

- With those, regardless of their religion, who practice terrorism, oppress minorities, preach intolerance, or violate internationally accepted standards of conduct regarding human rights;
- With those who are insensitive to the need for political pluralism;
- With those who cloak their message in another brand of authoritarianism;
- With those who substitute religious and political confrontation for constructive engagement with the rest of the world;
- With those who do not share our commitment to peaceful resolution of conflict, especially the Arab-Israeli conflict; and
- With those who would pursue their goals through repression or violence.

It is for just these reasons that we have such basic differences with the avowedly secular governments in Iraq and Libya. To the extent that other governments pursue or adopt similar practices, we will distance ourselves from them, regardless of whether they describe their approach in secular, religious, or any other terms. Simply stated, religion is not a determinant--positive or negative--in the nature or quality of our relations with other countries. Our quarrel is

with extremism and the violence, denial, intolerance, intimidation, coercion, and terror which too often accompany it.

The facts bear that out. The United States has good, productive relations with countries and peoples of all religions throughout the world, including many whose systems of government are firmly grounded in Islamic principles. Religious freedom and tolerance are integral elements of our American national character and constitutional system. Indeed, as much as any society, the American people understand the meaning of diversity and the virtues of tolerance.

Conclusion

The broad policy goals of the United States in the Near East region have been laid down by President Bush and Secretary Baker: Genuine peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors, enhancing security and deterring or defeating aggression, helping to protect the world's economic security, promoting economic and social justice, and promoting the values in which we believe.

I believe these are aspirations in which the peoples of the region—whether Muslim, Jewish, Christian, or otherwise--can realistically share. Like us, they seek a peaceful, better future. They aspire to work productively in peace and safety [in which] to feed, house, and clothe their families; in which their children can be educated and find avenues to success; in which they can have a say and can be consulted in how they will be governed; and in which they can find personal fulfillment and justice. In this respect, the pursuit of viable economic and social development programs, privatization, and adequate educational and vocational training opportunities are key to responding to the basic material needs of the region's people.

Working with an international community of unprecedented solidarity, we have come a long way in the past few years in repelling aggression and in promoting a negotiated peace to a

seemingly intractable conflict in the region. We still have a long way to go before these worthy efforts will have achieved success and before the other aspirations we share are realized. We can get there through close engagement and constructive interaction between the United States and all the countries of the Near East region at all levels--government-to-government, group-to-group, person-to-person, and faith-to-faith.

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