CHAPTER VI

Ideological Blinkers in the American Islamicist Discourse

American Discourse on Arabs/Muslims and the Standard Moment

Middle East studies in the United States are essentially a political project, focusing on the present situation especially in matters related to politics and economy. Even when the past is involved, it is mainly in a functionalized way, i.e. to consolidate understanding of the present. The over-politicization of the field imposes hard boundaries and severe curtailments on the range of scholarly interests, and treatment of the restricted set of prevalent thematic. In other words, the majority of scholars focus their attention on current trends and developments in the Arab world and beyond. The past is mobilized in so far as it accounts for—or helps explain—the present. Power, therefore, becomes sometimes the principal, often the sole, and always the ultimate, yardstick against which current developments, trends and even events are gauged and assigned meaning. The legitimacy of American interests, and by extension, American power and hegemony, are taken for granted, either uncritically and unquestionably advocated, or at best mildly criticized for the approach adopted to materialize them, but not their legitimacy as such. This obsession with power acts as a blinker at times so that it inevitably leads to the lapse into reaction, especially to unpredicted developments.

This tendency is characteristic of American Middle East studies since the outset. The pro-Arab nationalist movements of the 1950s and 1960s had been seen in this light. They were, before all else, viewed as a challenge to American dominance and hence were transformed to discursive events. The same also applies to the oil
boycott of 1973-1974, to Qaddafi’s rhetoric, the PLO, and so on. When an event is transformed into a discursive event, a series of associations follow: harsh rhetoric, exclusion, binary oppositions, reductionism, intensification, unexamined facile generalizations, emergence of representative voices, and hence iconization.

More recent developments that exerted a lasting effect on the discourse on Arabs and Muslims include the utterances and actions of extreme groups and individuals such as Sadat’s assassin, ben Laden’s advocacy of violence and confrontation, Khomeini’s labeling of America as the “great Satan,” Saddam’s call for *jihad* during the massive bombing of Iraq by the United States and its allies in 1991, and so forth. Perhaps no event has had more influence on scholars as the Iranian revolution and the concomitant rise of Islamist activism in Arab countries. The discursive value imbued into such events is reflected in the scholars’ overreaction to them, and their decontextualization and re-contextualization of those events. The discursivity of such events is intensified by a process of intertextuality; that is, the persistent references to the same topoi in various works by the same author regardless of the argument she/he seeks to convey. References, for instance, to Sadat’s assassination swarm the writings of John Esposito, as a specimen from his writings, presented in Table 1, indicates. These references recur in a consistent way and tend to move towards intensification rather than the opposite in response to certain events, such as the 9/11 events.

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This enduring persistence of citing the event bestows upon it additional signification, and hence significance. It is no more an event that took place in 1981 in a specific context. The juxtaposition of this event to other events and referring to it in discussions of various themes such as the rise of Islamist activism projects a picture of violence into contexts that do not fit such a description. Moreover, the mere repetition of the event turns it into a metaphor and icon that can be brought at will to explain successive developments. The iconization of this event and its discursive centrality exacerbate into making it ahistorical by denuding it of its immediate context and positioning it beyond time and space. In other words, a sense of timelessness is assigned to it. Iconization tends to acquire additional emphasis and intensification at times of crisis. Thus, the words of Sadat’s assassin, Khalid Islambuli, appear in Esposito (2002a) as the only epigraph in the whole book. No other epigraphs introduce the book as a whole, or specific chapters in it. Rather, the only epigraph: “‘I have killed the Pharaoh and I do not fear death’” Khalid Islambuli, the assassin of Anwar Sadat” introduces a subsection entitled “Egypt and the Rage for God” (p. 85).
A more revealing topos occurs in Lewis’s invocation of Khomeini’s labeling of the United States as the “great Satan” (always with capital ‘G’ in Lewis’s writings). In Lewis (2001a) the phrase acquires a centralized position as it comes as the title of a separate heading, and is then assigned an interpretive role of the circumstances in the wake of the events of 9/11. Lewis transforms the epithet that originally has its context in a war of words between American and Iranian leaders into a discursive event. First, he decontextualizes it altogether. By divorcing it from its original context, Lewis projects new meanings into it in response to the context at hand. The term thus goes through a journey of significations and re-contextualizations. Lewis projects it into the context of the Muslim perception of the leading Western powers, past and present; a perception stemming from rivalry, in Lewis’s view, with a strong sense of enmity, reflected in the use of such inflated words as the “archenemy” (2004: 310).

Lewis also uses the phrase to support his conflict thesis; Satan as the adversary and deceiver, tempter and seducer. This idea is built on textual analysis, and is traced to Quranic references. By attributing Khomeini’s phrase to the Quran, the conveyed impression is that Islam itself validates anti-Westernism and that the Quran forms the bedrock of anti-Americanism and hostility towards America for what it is rather than what it does (Lewis, 1993c; Lewis, 2004: 318; Lewis, 1994: 145-146; Lewis: 1993b). It is also cited to prove that Muslims as a whole view American culture as “immoral and dangerously corrupting” (1997: 127). Lewis turns the phrase into a discursive asset and manipulates it to mobilize public opinion by associating it with Khomeini, “holy war,” and Islam at once in a context of intense emotions and anti-Islam sentiments in the United States. Thus, Lewis (2001a) writes on 11/19/2001, “For Khomeini, the United States was “the Great Satan,” the principal adversary against
whom he had to wage his holy war for Islam.” The phrase here acquires an analytical value. Lewis projects it as an explanation of the events of 9/11 in terms of “a holy war for Islam”. The sentence that immediately follows the above-quoted one intensifies this mobilization technique by referring to the West as “the free world”. The choice of words and designations is significant. It has a double effect: first, it sets the West which is associated with freedom against “Islam” which is associated with “holy war,” fanaticism (embodied in the reference to Khomeini and ben Laden), and hatred for that freedom which gives meaning to the West (the concept and the locale are treated as synonyms). The constructed hatred is contained in the very phrase “the Great Satan” as Lewis explains in several other citations of the epithet. The “Great Satan,” he maintains, refers to the American way of life and hating America for what it is. It follows, and this is the second point, that the West is supposed to defend that freedom which constitutes its meaning and identity against the encroaching forces of barbarism that seek to demolish that freedom out of envy and enmity. Thirdly, the phrase “the Great Satan” has a further mobilization appeal in that it creates a sense of humiliation that should not go unanswered; Satan is associated with a host of negative connotations such as evil in Western consciousness.

A further manipulation of the phrase is its application as an apologetic strategy for imperialism. Lewis (1995) traces the phrase to the Quran in which Satan emerges as a tempter and seducer rather than an imperialist and conqueror (p. 18). In an immediate response to the 9/11 events, he also states that Satan is “neither a conqueror nor an exploiter,” but a “tempter” (2001a). Hence, Khomeini, according to Lewis, was not referring to imperialism since that simply did not exist, but rather to the temptation of American culture and way of life. Indeed, Lewis argues that the
“real thrust” of complaints about the United States in the Arab world and Iran “is not that America is pursuing imperialist policies, but that America is failing to live up to its imperial responsibilities” (12/17/2001 in 2004: 238). Thus, Lewis not only denies imperialism, but speaks for the Arabs with the authority of the Orientalist, oddly enough that they feel at home with being dominated by the United States. In September 2002, in “Targeted by a History of Hatred,” Lewis again brings the phrase into the apologia for imperialism and the explanation of supposed “Muslim hatred” of the United States, again with the Quran as the ultimate point of reference. To Lewis, Khomeini was exclusively referring to the appeal of American culture: “Satan is not an invader, an imperialist, an exploiter. He is a tempter, a seducer, who, in the words of the Qur’an, “whispers in the hearts of men”” (Lewis, 2004: 376).

In a sleight of hand projection, Lewis interpolates the “Great Satan” into democracy in the Arab world. In this case, all traces of the original context of the phrase are obliterated altogether. Khomeini is replaced with the “fundamentalists,” and the argument is shifted from one of “temptation” to one of belief and two diametrically opposed weltanschauungen. To the fundamentalists, Lewis observes, “democracy is an alien and infidel intrusion, part of the larger and more pernicious influence of the Great Satan and his cohorts” (2005: 48). The phrase here is iconized and normalized. It has become a normal phrase and part of everyday language, a development reflected in Lewis’s dropping of the quotation marks and making no reference to Khomeini. The scope of the phrase is broadened to encompass all “fundamentalists”.

If the “great Satan” can be put to all these uses, so why not endow it with limbs and even progeny? Lewis (1990) contends that the “Muslim rage” extends to
Western sympathizers, even those among them who have converted to Islam, for no reason but their being Westerners. In Lewis’s account, these sympathetic Westerners are viewed by Muslims as the “limbs of the Great Satan” (2004: 324). Since there is a “Great Satan,” Lewis does not hesitate to concoct a “Little Satan” represented by Israel (1986: 267; 1998). Here the “Little Satan” is the “spearhead” of Western corruption and Western penetration (1986: 267).

Lewis’s manipulation of Khomeini’s misnomer of the United States symbolizes the process of intertextuality and its transformation into a discursive event for clearly political purposes anchored in power and military conquest at that. The repetition of the phrase in various contexts is intended to summarize the relations of the Arab and Muslim worlds with the West. It reduces the Arab and Muslim worlds into catchy phrases with an especially powerful indoctrinating appeal due to their repulsive connotations and the inherent sense of demonization contained within them.

To recapitulate the argument so far, what the present researcher proposes to call the ‘standard moment’ then refers to an event, a development, or even a single utterance that is materialized by an individual or group in the Arab and Muslim worlds; and to which American scholars react rather emotionally and disproportionately. The overreaction does not necessarily reflect the real weight and significance of such an act to the peoples in the region. In fact, both the significance and impact of the act are exaggerated and assigned legendary dimensions. They are created by the experts. In short, what might well have gone unnoticed to the majority of the peoples in the region is standardized and turned into an epic event and a watershed in both the thinking and actions of the Arabs and Muslims. A standard moment is, therefore, by definition a timeless and ultra-spatial moment; i.e. it
transcends its immediate context of time and place and acquires a metaphorical symbolic value. Hence, a central analytical value is accrued to it. Subsequent events and developments are gauged against it, traced back to it, compared with it, represented as offshoots of it, and so forth.

Several factors contribute to the standardization of what might otherwise have been a natural, predictable and understandable outcome in a given political, economic and social context. First and foremost, the sense of suddenness, shock and betrayal of expectations felt by the scholars in response to an act or event yields an emotionally-charged response. This in itself is an indication of the inadequacy of the methods employed in the study of the Arab and Muslim worlds. Scholars focus their attention and lay their expectations and aspirations on unpopular Westernized elites who are entrenched in power, and neglect the majority of the peoples without realizing that they bet on the losing horse. Even in autocratic settings the people cannot be dismissed as ineffectual. The people are always the makers of their own destiny. They might acquiesce for a time, but the seemingly quietist attitude does not preclude the simmering agitations underneath, which can turn into various ways of protest, including radicalization and advocacy of violence. This is what the American experts on Arab and Iranian affairs fail to grasp in relation to the Iranian revolution. Throughout the 1970s and even 1960s it was very clear that discontent with the Shah’s rule was snowballing rapidly, yet scholars failed to pay attention to it. When the revolution broke out, they were taken aback. Even after the revolution became a reality, some experts still persisted in viewing it as a deflection from the right track.

Secondly, standardization may result from the sense that American interests and hegemony are threatened and the concomitant feeling of uncertainty—even
fear—that things have gone amiss and something has to be done to roll back the threat. This view is squarely anchored in the power equation, combined with a historical tradition of viewing Islam as a problem. Social actors and movements invoking Islam in their rhetoric arouse suspicion which gives way to disproportionate reactions, based on difference. Hence, personal prejudices and biases creep in and crystallize into a process of standardization of acts and events.

Thirdly, quite often standardization is employed as a strategy of mobilization, as in Lewis’s construction of an imagined world from Khomeini’s misnomer of the United States discussed above. In this case, it is consciously intended as a discursive strategy. Fourthly, a standard moment may emerge from a combination of inadequate understanding and a polemical attitude as in Pipes’s notion of the “oil boom”. Pipes applies this notion as an analytical category for explaining the rise of Islamist activism and assigns Qaddafi a pivotal role in the emergence of “militant Islam” even against Pipes’s own remarks on the idiosyncrasy of this association. Evidently, ideological biases and concerns for the position of Israel in an oil-rich Arab world were behind Pipes’s unrealistic approach. The ideological blinkers, however, were so overwhelming that Pipes persisted in this approach for over two decades. Pipes (1982) writes, the “boom in oil exports has, more than anything else, caused the recent [sic] Islamic resurgence” (p. 45). Libya and Saudi Arabia, in Pipes’s view, supported that resurgence, but he does not show how. Moreover, both countries “worked in tandem” for that purpose (p. 47). The “oil boom” approach had mobilization appeal in the 1980s, especially as the oil boycott of 1973-4 was still fresh in the memory of Americans, and Pipes continued to apply it. With the invention of the “Islamic threat”
in the 1990s he added other factors to it, but did not discard it despite its evident inadequacy.

In the preface to *In the Path of God* (2003), Pipes shifted his position. “I no longer try to account for the rise in militant Islam with a single explanation, finding that this phenomenon is too complex for such monocausality. Rather, I see it resulting from the interaction of identity and circumstance. The Muslim world feels something has gone very wrong, but has been frustrated in its attempts to right matters. The attraction to militant Islam manifests that frustration” (p. x). Now he is more Lewisian in his analysis as he echoes Lewis’s notion of the clash between Islam and modernity that resulted in frustration and rage against the West. He has dropped his argument of “the tight connection between oil and Islam” (p. ix), and became more immersed in the traditional Orientalist tradition deriving his arguments from Lewis, if only he does not acknowledge that. Yet, the role of Qaddafi has not been questioned by Pipes over two decades,

Militant Islam has evolved from the primitive impulses of Mu’ammar al-Qadhdhafi and the revolutionarism of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to the savvy efforts of leaders like Rashid al-Ghannushi of Tunisia and Hasan at-Turabi of Sudan. What was raw and vague is now refined and targeted. Qadhdhafi (a military officer) and Khomeini (a member of the ‘ulama) have been overtaken by more sophisticated and media-savvy thinkers and operators who can convincingly speak the language of democracy and reform. (p. x)

Only new actors have emerged. The effect is an accumulation of standard moments and bringing them together to make the enemy more threatening.

The Iranian revolution is one of the significant standard moments. It aroused interest in the study of Islamist activism among MESA scholars and brought a renewed interest in Islam as a religion. Esposito (1990) refers to the effect of the Iranian revolution in drawing the attention of scholars to Islamic revivalism. “It was
not in fact until the “Khomeini era” that governments, the media, and academia alike really began to provide serious and substantive coverage of Islam and politics” (p. 1). Y. Haddad (1991) similarly refers to the Iranian revolution as a “watershed, a point of departure for the dramatic rise in interest in the religion of Islam” (p. 1). While for Orientalists and neo-Orientalists there was not much new in the Iranian revolution as they viewed it as a confirmation of their textual and essentialist approach, they capitalized on it as a validation of their reductionist approach. Hence, they invoked it as an embodiment of the anti-Western spirit (Lewis, 2004: 223), the theocratic nature of Islam, and the centrality of religion in Muslim politics (Ibid., pp. 305ff). MESA scholars reintroduced religion as a factor in analysis, yet that often led to heavy reliance on textual analysis. Most importantly, the discourse of the Iranian ideologues about the export of revolution and the serious attempts in that direction in countries such as Lebanon, coupled with Khomeini’s fiery rhetoric elicited an exaggerated response from scholars. While the revolution had some limited impact, it failed to incite even the Shiite majority of neighboring Iraq. Nonetheless, scholars went too far in tracing the impact of the revolution and projected it onto the study of other movements.

Hadar (1992) observes that the majority of American scholars on the Arab world and Iran see Iran and by extension other developments in the Arab world through Khomeini’s rhetoric, dogmatic ideology and his designation of the United States as the “great Satan”. ‘Islam in revolution’ became a central topos in the writings of scholars in the 1980s; a few toned it down to ‘Islam in evolution’ especially in the 1990s. Esposito (1999) writes, “No event demonstrated more dramatically the power of a resurgent Islam than the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79. For many in the West… the unthinkable became a reality” (pp. 14-15). Moreover, the
Iranian revolution dominated much of the Western perceptions of the Muslim world in the 1980s and 1990s (p. 270). Similarly, Hajjar and Niva (1997) observe that the Iranian revolution exerted a paramount influence on the field of Middle East studies. It was perceived as threatening to Western interests and pro-Western regimes (pp. 5-6). It was due to the Iranian revolution that Islamist activism replaced secular nationalism as a threat to American interests (Gerges, 2003: 77).

The events of 9/11 provided scholars with a new standard moment. Apart from the Orientalists and their cohorts in the think tanks, who explained the events in terms of Muslim hatred of the West and provided the intellectual justification for the wars, MESA academics refrained from the facile generalization that Islam was the enemy. Nonetheless, they acquiesced to the government’s narrative of the events and did advocate the war on Afghanistan. Certainly, that war went beyond al-Qaeda and further destabilized a country that was already ravished by the fanatical grip of the Taliban. In the final analysis, the primary losers were the Afghan people who were dislocated or simply lost their lives.

The events of 9/11 were, to say the least, shrouded in mystery. There is a growing body of evidence that the American government’s version of the “Black Tuesday” was at best highly flawed and questionable, if not wholly fabricated. This is not the place to put the argument in full. Suffice it to say that MESA academics accepted the government’s position in its entirety; they supported, and still support, the government’s position to go to war and to provide the regimes across the Muslim world with logistic and financial support to fight terrorism, a term exploited by these regimes to quell the peaceful opposition—including some secular parties—to their autocratic corrupt regimes. Challenges to the American government’s version of the events and dissecting the official narrative came completely from outside the ranks of

The events of 9/11 left an evident imprint on the works of MESA academics. Issues of power were the ultimate point of reference. MESA scholars stressed the need for a combination of hard and soft power. The events symbolized to the scholars, albeit in different ways, the initiation of a new era in Arab-American relations. The treatment of the theme of ‘terrorism’ has been selective. This term has been misused and put to forwarding the political agenda of partisan groups. Terrorism is defined in a way that attaches it to Islam and exclusively violent groups in the Muslim world, while absolving state and non-state actors of terrorism both in Israel and the West. In other words, terrorism, in the restricted sense (i.e. with reference to the violent groups in the Muslim world) becomes a discursive strategy to justify American intervention in the Arab world and other Muslim-majority countries. In an article that links Islam and murder together, Lewis even goes further to assert that the suicide bomber “has a long history” (2004: 102) and becomes a metaphor for the whole region.

In sum, standardization of discourse is a widespread phenomenon in the American study of the Arab and Muslim worlds. Whatever its causes and motives, it contributes to the misunderstanding of Islam in the public arena due to its exaggerated obsession with negative events which are often carried beyond their real import. This has proved an enduring obstacle in the writings of most scholars, even those who are otherwise cautious to avoid this trap. Standardization in the American discourse on the Arab and Muslim worlds is either consciously contrived as a discursive strategy of indoctrination and presenting Islam and the Arab and Muslim worlds in an
unfavorable light, or is unconsciously incorporated into the discourse due to the much obsession with perpetuating American hegemony.

**Discourse and Ideology**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory supposes that every discourse is based on an ideology. Ideological views and formulations determine the context and structure of ideas and shape discourse. A given social institution may contain diverse “ideological discursive formations” (IDFs) associated with different groups within the institution that proliferates the discourse. Each IDF constitutes something akin to a “speech community” with its own “ideological norms” which are embedded in and symbolize “discourse norms”. There is usually one dominant IDF in a particular situation. A distinguishing feature of a dominant IDF is its capacity to “naturalize” ideologies and its success in inducing public acceptance for them as non-ideological “common sense” (Fairclough, 1995:27). Ideology “involves the representation of ‘the world’ from the perspective of a particular interest, so that the relationship between proposition and fact is not transparent, but mediated by representational activity” (Ibid., p. 44). Ideology is camouflaged in and mediated through discursive strategies which endeavor to conceal all traces of ideology (Ibid., p. 44). It is, therefore, imperative to locate the ideological underpinnings of the two trends of American discourse on the Arab and Muslim worlds; what sort of ideology governs the discourse of these two trends; and how it shapes their views, attitudes and approaches.

**Partisan Discourse: Convergence and Fusion of Zionist Ideology and Orientalism**

This study has shown that scholars such as Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes and Martin Kramer proceed from Zionist positions and predominantly pro-Israel attitudes
in their study of the Arab and Muslim worlds. They do so through the adoption of Orientalism as a framework that informs their analyses and conceptualizations. This section seeks to trace the Zionist component in the discourse they proliferate and the way it is mediated, naturalized and disguised. It also seeks to explore the relationship between the Zionist and Orientalist discourses. It will answer the question why these scholars draw heavily on such outmoded framework as Orientalism and modified variants of it or seek to restore it as the only viable methodology for the study of the Arab world and Islam.

A series of similarities and commonalities between the Orientalist and Zionist discourses suggest themselves. Both discourses are based on and sustained by a host of myths that are circulated and assigned a position of truth. These myths are mediated by evasive strategies such as broad generalizations, ambiguity, non-conformity, unfilled gaps, and other stylistic techniques such as the use of ambiguous words and using multiple designations for what is in reality a single signified. Concealment of part of the story and the iconization of terms are also very common in both. The Zionist slogan and myth of “A land without people for a people without land,” for instance, embodies many of these features and discursive strategies. While it obliterates part of the story, denying the existence of a Palestinian people altogether by representing Palestine as an uninhabited ‘land’, it assumes the unity of the Jewish communities of Europe, Asia, Africa and, indeed, all corners of the earth, representing them as a single ‘people’. It maintains silence towards the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine, disguising this gap in the rhetorical brevity of the slogan. The slogan becomes an icon, and its truthfulness is assumed to reside in the world it constructs rather than in the world of reality.
More recent iconized phrases include “the peace process” which mainly means peace on the terms set by Israel and its patron, the United States; the ‘six million’ Jewish victims in the Holocaust. While this number is highly exaggerated and deflects attention from other victims (such as the Slavs, the disabled and the gypsies), any critical inquiry into the number is considered a great offence and may well lead to unfavorable consequences under the guise of “holocaust denial”. Iconized terms in the Orientalist discourse include “Islam,” “the West,” “Arab and/or Muslim exceptionalism,” Israel as “the only democracy” in the region, “militant Islam,” “Islamic fundamentalism,” “Islamic terrorism,” etc.

Myth-making is a central component of both discourses since both are implicated in perpetuating ideas and ideals that are at odds with reality: the one in the service of imperialism—embedded in the slogan of the “white man’s burden” which can be discerned in Lewis’s and Pipes’s writings—and the other in advocating a Jewish nationalism based mainly on ancient and Biblical accounts as well as contemporary ideas of nationalism. Whenever such ideas and ideals clash with reality, deficiencies and contradictions are concealed in myths. Ben Gurion, Israel’s first Prime Minister and one of the founders of the Jewish state, was such a notorious myth-maker. One of his close associates, S. Yizhar, in an embattled apologetic attempt to square the circle between myth and truth, writes:

Myth is no less a truth than history, but it is an additional truth, a different truth, a truth that resides alongside the truth, a non-objective human truth, but a truth that makes its way to the historical truth. (As quoted in Rose, 2004: 9)

When this quotation is deconstructed and deciphered, it reads like the following:
Myth is essentially not a truth, but it can be constructed, naturalized and made to sound like a truth. That process of construction and naturalization makes a mythical invented event as natural as a real historical one, even though it is a conscious peripheral ‘addition’ done by specific agents, hence its difference—a “different truth” is in fact a non-truth, a fabrication. It is a second-class order and even a fabrication aimed by its perpetrators to erase the truth and occupy its place; hence its subjectivity (“non-objective”) and immanence within the ideology of its “human” myth-makers who naturalize it through discourse so that it may parallel “historical truth”. The “non-objective” nature of the myth stems from the fact that it exclusively reflects the interests of those who concoct it while at the same time subverting the established historical truth, and hence erasing the ‘other’. The ultimate aim is to make it look transcendental and established as the historical truth.

Yizhar’s words are revealing on several counts: they reveal the demagogic, seemingly profound, evasiveness of ideologically-inspired discourse that seeks to conceal the inherent contradictions and antithesis in a tautological circular reiteration disguised in hollow rhetoric. Moreover, the repetition of the word ‘truth’ eight times in this short quotation—though redundant in itself—seeks to identify ‘myth’ with ‘truth’ and bridge the chasm that separates them through tautology in spite of the awkwardness of the argument and logic. Meaning is imbued to and projected onto the myth through the dominant reiteration of the word ‘truth’. In a broader sense this discursive strategy is the mainstay of the Zionist and Orientalist discourse alike, and other totalitarian ideologies for that matter. Evasiveness and repetition of topoi are effective strategies to naturalize and deflect attention from inherent contradictions. The quotation above also categorically reflects the dominance of apologetics that is
often incorporated into ideological discourses to buttress the unmediated absolutes that inform them, and which they seek to establish.

Both Orientalist and Zionist discourses adopt reductionist approaches that turn Arab/Muslim and Jewish peoples respectively into fixed ahistorical monolithic entities. Simplified and generalized hypotheses that exclude the complexity of reality provide the background for representation and analysis. Hence, events are decontextualized from their historical and human contexts. Certain historical facts that fit into the preconceived and predetermined framework are accumulated and generalized to account for the complex reality. Selective eclecticism governs the structuring of the discourse. Reductionist approaches easily relapse into racism which inevitably results from reducing the multifaceted reality into a monolithic essence and attributing designs and a single unitary attitude to it. This process is enforced further by the ethnocentric views of the ideologies involved which see the ‘other’ from a ‘we-versus-them’ perspective. Therefore, one’s identity is constructed in relation to the ‘other’ and one becomes whatever the ‘other’ is not; thus, widening the dichotomy and excluding common ground for dialogue and co-existence.

However, this is not to suggest that the Zionist and Orientalist ideologies are identical in every respect, or that Zionist scholars graft the Zionist ideology in its entirety and apply it to their study of the Arab and Muslim worlds. Rather, while they share the ultimate outlook of that ideology and its basic concepts, they still function from their immediate setting, i.e. from within the American society which is targeted by their discourse. They address American audience in a language familiar to them and avoid the excesses of appearing too ideologically-inspired by concealing the ideological component of their discourse in a language of American interests and
hegemony as well as proceeding from an American position. The principal aim of these scholars, in so far as their ideological stand is concerned, is to guarantee Israeli dominance in the region and continued American support for Israel by mobilizing public opinion in a pro-Israel direction. They also define American interests and channel conceptualizations of Arabs and Muslims in a way serviceable to Israeli interests.

These scholars have proved resistant to the advances made in other fields of area studies and the social sciences. Their tenacious adoption and defense of the Orientalist tradition is informed by ideological partisanship and even imposed by ideological limitations and strictures. Orientalism and the Zionist ideology are discursive formations or ideologies constructed through the operation of several discourses in the sense that they do not simply reflect real distinctions between peoples but create them. Such structuring and restructuring of worlds-as-real would be seriously curtailed and indeed damaged if social science theories are adopted. Even those scholars who are essentially trained in the social sciences, such as Pipes and Kramer, reject the social science theories in favor of facile topoi—sometimes rehearsed to suit contemporary circumstances—imported from the Orientalist tradition. “Arab” and/or “Muslim exceptionalism” is offered as an explanation for the failure to respond to new theoretical and explanatory paradigms.

Besides rejecting empirically-tested approaches, they attack MESA academics for adopting them. Kramer (2001) criticizes Middle East studies on these counts, claiming that Orientalism had “heroes” while Middle East studies do not, and will never have “unless and until” they restore Orientalism as their methodology (p. 123). The absolute assertion introduced by “unless and until” reflects the extent to which
these scholars embrace the Orientalist tradition, as well as the absolutist nature of Orientalism. According to the Orientalists and neo-Orientalists, the opening up of the field of Middle Eastern studies in the American academy was solely orchestrated by an Arab attempt to take over the field and push it in a pro-Arab orientation, as Pipes (1996) and Kramer (2001) charged. Thus, Kramer (2003) commanded MESA experts to “Get off the public dole and find other subsidies—perhaps from one of those rich Saudi princes on an academic shopping spree.... You won’t be missed.” Important in this regard is Said’s influence upon which they blame the irrelevance of the field (Kramer, 2001: 37-40).

More recently, the establishment of the Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa (ASMEA), with Bernard Lewis as the key founder and chair, is meant to expose the flaws of “Saidism” as the Orientalist trend perceives it and to roll it back (Kraus, 2008). The exaggerated emphasis on Arab influence and restricting the transformation in the academic field of Middle East studies to Said’s critique of Orientalism while ignoring the other factors is an integral part of the ideological package since such assertions tend to exert emotional impact on the officials and public alike.

The preservation and revival of the Orientalist tradition are crucial for the continuity of the Zionist ideology. A balanced study based on social science models would only undermine Zionist assumptions and debunk Zionist myths. While the Orientalist tradition, for example, attributes terrorism to inherent factors in Islam and hence restricts the explanation to the religion itself without reference to other sociopolitical factors, it absolves other sociopolitical, and for that matter, religious groups of terrorism. In this context, it maintains silence towards the Israeli violations
of human rights and Israel’s practice of systematic state terrorism, as well as the use of terrorism by the Jewish settlers in Palestine against the British during the British mandate and the emergence of violent terrorist groups at present. Those acts are even presented as morally sound and strategically a good contribution for making the world a safer place by ridding it of the ‘Muslim terrorists’.

The “Arab exceptionalism” approach of the Orientalist discourse similarly attributes the persistence of authoritarianism in Arab countries to inherent cultural and religious traits, whereas Israel by virtue of not being an Islamic state, as Lewis argues, is an established democracy. This reductionist explanation also canonizes the idea of Israeli democracy and shuts critical inquiry into the Israeli apartheid system that curtails the democracy experiment in the Israeli context. The absolute assertion of Arab authoritarianism versus Israeli democracy thus acquires the status of unquestionable truth. Israel’s treatment of the Muslim and Christian minorities as well as dissident Jewish groups such as the Neturei Karta, not to mention racial discrimination among the various ethnic groups of Ashkenazi, Sephardim, Arab and Falasha Jews, are simply ignored.

The Zionist ideology itself has undergone a process of fragmentation especially inside Israel. Cracks within the Zionist ideology were, in fact, inevitable as the myths sustaining it began to crumble. Zionist consensus suffered as a result. This case has been less affected in the Zionist communities in the diaspora, especially in the United States due to the strong position of the Christian Zionists in addition to the active efforts of the Zionist lobby to maintain consensus, at least on the ultimate ends of the Zionist ideology. In regard to the scholars under consideration, Orientalism offers an ideal discourse to maintain Zionist consensus, as it provides a huge capacity
for maneuvering, evasiveness and eclecticism. Thus, for instance, Lewis can hammer home the point that Jerusalem is unimportant to Muslims since ben Laden mentioned it only in the third place in his call for jihad. To support his hypothesis, selective Orientalist reading of ancient Islamic history gives a suitable justification. Lewis argues that the capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders in medieval times aroused only “little attention” (Lewis, 1998: 16; 2001b). On the latter point, Lewis simply disregards history upon which he draws to support his argument, including such famous events as Saladin’s recapture of Jerusalem since it goes against his point that Jerusalem is merely a Jewish city.

Zionism and Orientalism are complementary in the sense that the latter fits in well with the former. It does not question the unfilled gaps in the Zionist discourse, but rather reproduces them unaltered. The Orientalist apologetics also finely dovetail with the Zionist apologetics. This is mainly due to their common root in the European imperialist project. The Zionist claim that the Zionist project would transform Palestine from a desolate land to an outpost of Western civilization—a point Herzl referred to in Des Judenstaat—converges with the Orientalist, and for that matter imperialist, notion of the “civilizing mission”. Significantly, both notions are still vehemently upheld by the Orientalists and neo-Orientalists.

The Orientalist advocacy of Israeli dominance involves a revision of discursive strategies and a reordering of priorities, combined with the invention and proliferation of myths such as the “Islamic threat”. However, this is not to suggest that these scholars or only Zionist organizations are solely responsible for the creation of an “Islamic threat”. Many right-wing politicians, intellectuals and journalists in the United States and Europe—many of whom with non-Zionist tendencies as such—
concocted the “Islamic threat” thesis to replace the “communist threat”. Nonetheless, Israeli politicians and Zionist intellectuals were admittedly among the first to propagate such notions. The Orientalist discourse broadened the scope of that myth, clearly with an eye on Israel’s regional role and its interests. The partisan scholars present a monolithic picture of an Islamic bogeyman, composed of disparate movements and trends which are lumped together under various designations such as “Islamic fundamentalism,” “militant Islam,” and “Islamic terrorism” in the Orientalist discourse. These provide a pivotal role in the manufacturing of the threat.

To be sure, the idea of “Islamic terrorism” predates al-Qaeda’s advocacy of violence against the United States. It dates back to the mid-1980s when al-Qaeda was still fighting a proxy war on behalf of the United States in Afghanistan. Interestingly enough, in the same year, 1986, while Ronald Reagan received a band of the Afghan fighters in the lawn of the White House and greeted them as “freedom fighters” introducing them to the media, “These gentlemen are the moral equivalents of America’s founding fathers” (quoted in Mamdani, 2005: 119; emphasis added), Benjamin Netanyahu, then Israel’s ambassador to the United Nations, edited a book entitled Terrorism: How the West can Win to which prominent Orientalists like Bernard Lewis contributed.

The Orientalist discourse assigns a prominent position to the internal demographic dimension of the threat. Daniel Pipes emerges as an outstanding proponent of this theme. He writes, “All migrants bring exotic customs and attitudes, but Muslim customs are more troublesome than most. Also, they appear most resistant to assimilation.” They seek to “remake Europe and America in their own image” (Pipes, 2002: 21). Pipes bases his remarks on the idea of difference and dichotomy of
‘we-versus-them,’ in-groups and out-groups. The ‘we’ is defined in relation to the ‘they’. The tone is one of exclusion, stemming from a sense of difference and novelty. The word used to express difference is ‘exotic’ which communicates a radical unbridgeable difference. Immigrants are viewed as a nuisance, a problem and an intrusive element.

The very word “immigrants” conveys a sense of difference and intrusiveness; its use is consciously contrived to reflect that intrusiveness. Indeed, some of these “immigrants” are third- and fourth-generation citizens who do not identify with any other country than the Western countries in which they were born and raised. Hence, the use of the term “immigrants” to refer to them is quite inaccurate. However, Pipes proceeds to identify an inner circle of “immigrants,” which, in addition to the previous characteristics, is imbued with more negative traits, based on religion. In this case, racism and stereotypes which can seldom be said of other groups assume a normal position. Moreover, in this particular case, there is a dynamic reciprocal exchange between the discourse and public culture. The former is facilitated by the latter, shapes it and is shaped by it in return. Pipes’s underlying presuppositions include: all Muslims are unanimous in their attitudes; they are inherently the same; their difference and troublesomeness are inspired by their religion; Islam plays a central role in the life of all Muslims and determines their actions and attitudes; the loyalty of Muslim citizens to their Western countries is doubtful; while other groups may be tolerated, Muslims cannot and shall not be tolerated; Muslims are a threat to Western identity and civilization; and Western Muslims have political and religious designs on the West. Pipes singles out Muslims, and makes no classifications on ethnic, sectarian or political lines between them despite the diversity and often
conflicting views among them. Comparative and superlative adjectives are used to denote the troublesomeness of Muslims. Moreover, the Muslim demographic threat is mediated through the appeal to the rampant and rooted phenomenon of Islamophobia. Pipes’s indoctrinating message thus falls into a receptive milieu.

A double ideology is at work in Pipes’s remarks. On the one hand, there is the quite explicit, easy-to-grasp ideology of exclusion and Islamophobia, immanent in the social fabric of the American society. On the other hand, in the deeper level, there is the implicit Zionist ideology. This latter is indiscernible and difficult to grasp since it is completely concealed from the picture. Discerning it requires intertextual references to other activities and statements by Pipes. A statement like the following clarifies this point: “I worry very much from the Jewish point of view that the presence and increased stature, and affluence, and enfranchisement of American Muslims … will present true dangers to American Jews” (as quoted by Haddad, 2004b: 108). When related to demographic facts, Pipes’s concern becomes clearer. The Jewish community is thought to be the second largest religious group in the United States, with the Muslim community coming closely after with a very narrow margin. In addition, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the United States. There is even good reason to suppose that Islam may well have become the second largest religion in the U.S. as the latest approximate figure indicates the numbers of Muslims in the United States between six and eight million Muslims (Esposito, 2010: 4), compared to the approximately at most six million Jews. Yet, accurate numbers of either Muslims or Jews are difficult to attain. AIPAC statistics claim that Jews number between six and eight million; yet, these numbers are often exaggerated and unreliable. But neither Muslims nor Jews are organized along religious lines.
Diversity within these communities outweighs commonalities. Pipes’s activities of ensuring pro-Israel correctness in the academy are well-known. Equipped with websites and email lists as well as student correspondents on campuses, Pipes makes no secret of his Zionist views. Gerges (1999) observes, “If there is one characteristic that unifies confrontationalists, it is their explicit identification with Israel” (p. 36). By depicting “Islamic fundamentalism” as a larger-than-life enemy, the partisans’ strategy is designed to convince the American public and policy-makers of Israel’s continuing strategic value in a turbulent region (Ibid., p. 52).

The Orientalist discourse, thus, overlaps with the Zionist ideology. The Zionist component of the Orientalist discourse is marked by a degree of inconsistency at the level of discursive strategies. In other words, it is sometimes concealed altogether, and at other times it is blatantly expressed. However, in all cases it exerts a remarkable influence of structuring and organizing the discourse. This interconnectedness of the two ideologies consists of the interplay of three dimensions and respective goals: first, it constructs an ideational dimension that makes sense of the “West” and “Islam”. Israel is incorporated into the “West” category and presented as an outpost of Western civilization and a bulwark for the protection of Western interests. Hence, the West owes a moral obligation towards Israel, based on the Judeo-Christian tradition, common outlook, common heritage and other commonalities. In addition, this moral obligation is doubled to make up for the wrongs that had been perpetrated against the Jewish communities in Europe prior to the Enlightenment and the subsequent salvation. Second, there is the geographical dimension which draws borders between the Muslim world and the West along civilizational fault lines. Here comes the argument for Israel as an indispensible and invaluable “strategic asset” that
renders the West great services by containing Soviet penetration during the Cold War, “Islamic fundamentalism” and “terrorism” in the post-Cold War era and by maintaining the “Pax Americana” in the region. Thirdly, there is the organizational dimension: organizing the West in its response to the “threat”. This builds on the previous arguments and assigns a position of confrontation as the only viable course to overcome the “threat” and secure Western victory.

Globalization has given rise to various trends concerning diversity. On the one hand, there are those who call for multiculturalism. This approach acknowledges cultural diversity and co-existence based on mutual respect. On the other hand, some vehemently advocate a global culture, which is almost synonymous with Americanization of the world. The Orientalist discourse, however, proves steadfast in its dichotomizing stance and is deeply entrenched in a divisive outlook, conceptualized around a “clash of civilizations”. The Orientalists champion the idea of the Americanization of the Muslim world by force, mainly through military conquest. Their views are based on difference deriving from cultural and civilizational disparities, incessant conflict and endless clashes. The notion of a global culture would actually entail hegemony by consent—a tactic seen by the Orientalists and neo-Orientalists as insufficient; and hence hegemony by coercion is deemed as the only viable option. Huntington, who carries the ‘clash’ thesis to its corollary conclusion, goes further and dismisses such notions as Westernization and the emergence of a global culture as wishful thinking, asserting instead the urgency of aligning along a cultural and civilizational grouping as an imperative for the West (1996: 56ff). These civilizational appeals also abound in Lewis, Pipes and Kramer. In regard to these scholars, these notions go in diametrical opposition to their ideological stand which is
based on exclusion and thrives on the definition of the ‘self’ in relation to the
construction of a particular image of the ‘other’. In other words, if this dichotomizing
conflictual view is superseded, the ideological component will cease to function, and
hence, ideological commitments will be ruled out, which is in fact an unthinkable
outcome to these scholars.

It would be appropriate to end this section by analyzing a sample of Lewis’s
writings. The proposed article is entitled “The Revolt of Islam: When did the conflict
with the West begin, and how could it end?” This article was written in response to
the 9/11 events and appeared in the New Yorker on 11/19/2001. An online version of
the article is available at the New Yorker website.

A critical analysis of the article would involve examining the title first.
Lewis’s title locates the enemy and defines him. It also places the events of 9/11 on a
broader stage in terms of time and geographical space, and insinuates a vision for
dealing with the enemy in a decisive manner. Thus, it sets a tone and arouses
expectations. The enemy is defined as “Islam”—a typical Orientalist generalization.
The term “Islam” is ambiguous. It could mean: (a) the faith; (b) all Muslims
everywhere; and (c) the Muslim-populated geographical areas especially in Asia and
Africa. This supposedly unitary monolithic bloc is presented in a state of “revolt,” a
term which denotes rebellion and mutiny. The entry for “revolt” in the Concise
Oxford English Dictionary reads as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{revolt} & \\
1 & \text{verb rise in rebellion. } & \text{refuse to acknowledge someone or something as having authority. } & \text{[as adjective revolted] archaic having rebelled.} \\
2 & \text{cause to feel disgust.} \\
\text{noun} & \text{an attempt to end the authority of a person or group by rebelling. } & \text{[as a refusal to obey or conform[.]} \\
\end{align*}
\]
Furthermore, the word is loaded with an ego-centric view of the world, that presupposes Western supremacy and hence dominance and hegemony as well as the right to rule over others whose actions are perceived as rebellion; hence the suggestion of what to do with the “revolt” in the subtitle. Moreover, the term is an emotionally-charged one; hence, it fits well into a situation of sharpened emotions. The emotional appeal of the phrase “the revolt of Islam” becomes clearer when one recognizes its poetical origin. Lewis borrows the phrase—indeed plagiarized it as he does not acknowledge the borrowing by putting it in quotation marks—from the title of an epic-like poem by the nineteenth century romantic English poet, Percy Pysshe Shelley. Shelley’s poem of the same title, “The Revolt of Islam,” attacks Islam and portrays it in a negative light. Thus, the phrase has an Orientalist history of its own and exemplifies the sort of intertextuality prevalent in the Orientalist discourse. It also reflects the predetermined and reductive framework into which the ideas and analysis are fitted; thus, decontextualizing events and ideas and excluding the possibility of a critical engagement with the other.

The subtitle offers an explanation of the catchy phrase of the title in the form of two questions that bring together past, present and future. The first question suggests that the current event is one in a series of such events in an incursion that has been going on for a long time. The second suggests that the “revolt” can indeed be suppressed. The encounter between “Islam” and the “West” is depicted as one of conflict, and an extended historical one at that. Lewis identifies the target as “the West,” a broad generic term covering North America and Western Europe, and perhaps beyond. The use of the two generic terms (“Islam” and “the West”) completely decontextualizes the events Lewis seeks to explain. Instead, the emerging
picture is of two clashing civilizations; the one is defined by reference to religion and the other is designated by a geographical term. This in itself is revealing. To the average American or European reader, religion is associated with backwardness and negative memories. Hence, a religio-centric grouping is deemed irrational and fanatical, as opposed to a geographically defined entity based on a worldly and secular worldview, and hence is associated with rationality. Lewis, however, conveys more than this. “Islam” is depicted as the instigator of this historical “conflict”. First, it is in “revolt”. Secondly, it is the aggressor since it began that conflict “with the West” while the “West” was supposedly completely innocent, peaceful, and on the defensive; the conflict has for long been imposed upon it. By virtue of its power at present, it can put an end to that conflict.

The Orientalist discourse is plagued with ethnocentrism which is manifested in various strategies. These may include the dichotomizing of the world into distinct entities of ‘us’ vs. ‘them’. It may also involve deletion of the ‘other’ (the agent in a particular context) altogether. In “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” Lewis writes, the “French have left Algeria, the British have left Egypt, the Western oil companies have left their oil wells, the westernizing Shah has left Iran—yet the generalized resentment of the fundamentalists and other extremists against the West and its friends remains and grows and is not appeased.” (Lewis 2004: 323). Several goals are achieved by excluding the social actors—in this case resisters and revolutionaries. Such aims include: avoiding any reference to imperialism, erasing any traces of resistance to occupation and imperialism, and hence dismissing national aspirations, legitimizing imperialism by centralizing the West as the logos of the universe with Westerners as the only actors in it, who have the right to dominate the world, occupy
it, instrumentalize it, etc. Westerners are presented as the only actors. The ‘other’ is obliterated altogether as there is no place for them in this closed system. The human agent is erased from the picture which is reduced to a barren map consisting of a geographical area (Egypt, Algeria, Iran) with no peoples, histories, etc., or supposedly empty locales beneficial to the “West,” merely “oil wells” which are presented as belonging to the Western oil companies. In this view, the world becomes a stage into which Western people can enter and exit at will. This erasing of the Arab and Muslim peoples is coupled with mentioning the Western peoples (reference is made to human actors: the English, the French) or those who are like them (the Shah is referred to as “westernizing”). Mentioning these latter agents also furthers the deletion of Arabs and Muslims. The European colonizers supposedly simply left their colonies only as an act of favor without resistance or struggle for independence. The Arabs/Muslims are allowed to appear only in the context of violence and rage. They are referred to here as “fundamentalists and other extremists,” in rage against the West which is represented as innocent; the grievances of the Arab and Muslim peoples are completely dismissed. Hence, their resentment is unjustifiable; it is portrayed as inherently anti-Western since they hate the West for what it is. The generic term “West” is used in a monolithic manner for mobilizing purposes. The inclusion of the West’s “friends” also gives the impression that the fundamentalists and extremists are “anti-modern” since they hate the modernizers. This resentment against the West and its friends is represented as very intense by a succession of verbs “remains”, “grows,” “not appeased”. Removing the claimed grievances (claimed because Lewis does not mention them at all and he is at pains to prove the opposite) does not stop that resentment and rage, but rather it is steadfast and growing, and is not appeased by the
friendly and beneficent actions of the French, British, oil companies, and friends of the West.

A similar example is the deletion of any reference to Jerusalem as important to Muslims.

The triggers for bin Laden’s actions, as he himself has explained very clearly, were America’s presence in Arabia during the Gulf War—a desecration of the Muslim Holy Land—and America’s use of Saudi Arabia as a base for an attack on Iraq. If Arabia is the most symbolic location in the world of Islam, Baghdad, the seat of the caliphate for half a millennium and the scene of some of the most glorious chapters in Islamic history, is the second. (Lewis, 2001a)

He omits any Muslim claims to Jerusalem. Here Lewis even resorts to distortion and fabrication. In his controversial, even doubtful media releases, Ben Laden always refers to Jerusalem and the Palestinian issue as the most important grievance against the United States and Israel.

Distortion of historical fact is applied by Lewis for political purposes:

In current American usage, the phrase “that’s history” is commonly used to dismiss something as unimportant, of no relevance to current concerns, and, despite an immense investment in the teaching and writing of history, the general level of historical knowledge in our society is abysmally low. The Muslim peoples, like everyone else in the world, are shaped by their history, but, unlike some others, they are keenly aware of it. (Ibid.)

The supposedly oblivious American attitude to history is contrasted to the Arab/Muslim awareness of it, and it is a history of confrontation according to Lewis. So, while the good-intentioned tolerant West assigns no value to the past—which is made up, in Lewis’s account of incessant conflict—, Muslims are captive of that very past. Lewis states this point bluntly:
For Osama bin Laden, 2001 marks the resumption of the war for the religious dominance of the world that began in the seventh century. For him and his followers, this is a moment of opportunity. Today, America exemplifies the civilization and embodies the leadership of the House of War, and, like Rome and Byzantium, it has become degenerate and demoralized, ready to be overthrown. Khomeini’s designation of the United States as “the Great Satan” was telling. In the Koran, Satan is described as “the insidious tempter who whispers in the hearts of men.” This is the essential point about Satan: he is neither a conqueror nor an exploiter—he is, first and last, a tempter. And for the members of Al Qaeda it is the seduction of America that represents the greatest threat to the kind of Islam they wish to impose on their fellow-Muslims. (Ibid.)

This passage typically combines many elements of the Orientalist’s indoctrinating discourse. Lewis applies exaggeration to incite fear: ben Laden will overthrow America. This danger is broadened by the reference to Khomeini. Stylistically speaking, there is no logical connection or cohesion between the sentences on Khomeini and what goes before them. Mentioning Khomeini, the other devil in the Orientalist classification, is interpolated forcibly due to its discursive value: to whet fear and evoke sentimental memories especially as it refers to a symbol of evil to the Americans, still fresh in memory. The two have become speakers for Islam, and indeed its representatives. Then, the Quran is brought in to explain the actions of these figures in the context of their attitudes toward the U.S. To make his message fully upheld, Lewis presents America as completely innocent and peaceful; denying any causes for radicalization. In other words, Muslims have no grievances. They don’t “hate”—to use Lewis’s word—the U.S. for what it does, but for what it is.

Lewis covers his hostile attitude in a grain of feigned objectivity that can, however, be easily peeled away to reveal his intended message:

Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda followers may not represent Islam, and their statements and their actions directly contradict basic Islamic principles and teachings, but they do arise from within Muslim civilization, just as Hitler and the Nazis arose from within Christian
civilization, so they must be seen in their own cultural, religious, and historical context. (Ibid.; emphasis added)

First, the use of the modal verb “may” indicates doubt and probability; they may as well represent Islam. The emphasis contained in “do” negates the seemingly positive statements and invalidates them, Islam is also brought again into the picture “from within Muslim civilization”. In this phrase religion is underscored twice, one explicit “Muslim” [naming the agent to give the impression that all Muslims are alike and partake to ben Laden’s actions; it may be noted that the Arab/Muslim agent is named only in mostly negative contexts] and one implicit, contained in the word “civilization” of which religion forms a very important factor as Huntington (1993: 24) states and the most important one as Lewis and Huntington (1996: 42) do not fail to assert. The reader is then left no room for thinking or judging matters for herself/himself, as reflected in the modal “must”. Lewis completely closes all possibilities, denying the reasoning faculty of his readers, ruling out any other possibilities for explanation such as the political context, and enforcing his ideologically-motivated view of developments: “cultural, religious, and historical”.

MESA Scholars and the New World Order

The context of the New World Order and the emergence of globalization brought about more emphasis on the American values of democratization and pluralism by American policy-makers and intellectuals alike. Yet, the advocacy of such notions is a hegemonic discursive strategy rather than a sincere dedication to values as such. In other words, these values are manipulated as a discursive strategy suitable to the new context of changing geopolitics. In the context of the Arab world, for all the talk about democratization, the United States continues to support the
authoritarian regimes in the Arab world and work closely with them (Gerges, 1999: 238). This line of policy even intensifies in the wake of the 9/11 events and the subsequent “war on terrorism” that is still going on at present. The “war on terrorism” also serves as a grand discursive strategy that provides a moral justification for expanding the sphere of American hegemony and the expansionist urge of the American government. The idea of a “war on terrorism” is not new in the American context. It has been espoused by Ronald Reagan in the early 1980s as the basis for ‘counterinsurgency’ in Latin America and elsewhere (Chomsky, 2001: 68). Its application to the Arab world during the Cold War was very restricted. It was used especially with reference to the PLO and Qaddafí’s regime.

Some MESA academics, such as Esposito, Khalidi, Y. Haddad, and Beinin, have been critical of the American governments’ double standards in relation to democratization in the Arab world. The failure of the successive American administrations to live up to their rhetoric arouses concerns among these academics since it has negative effects on the long-term interests of the United States. Their opposition to the war against and occupation of Iraq, and indeed the idea of empire in the form of expansionist conquest, is based on their formulation of the current global context rather than as a purely humanitarian impulse. Hence, the discourse they proliferate is not neutral. Instead, it is informed by a different vision of the current global situation and American dominance and hegemony in it.

In the view of these scholars, the emergence of the United States as the world’s sole superpower is challenged by the European Union and the burgeoning powers of Asia. More significantly, due to the nature of the world order itself which is based on globalization, direct intervention is unnecessary and even risky. It damages
America’s image and feeds anti-American sentiments. Capitalism as an ideological system informs these views.

The capitalist system is loose and flexible and allows for different degrees of the accumulation of capital, and hence power and hegemony. Whereas in its first phase, capitalism relied on mercantile imperialism which was followed by imperial expansion and the acquisition of colonies in the second phase, the Cold War gave rise to a new order which relied on the free market economy, buttressed mainly by deterrence. The unipolar world with globalization as its centerpiece reinforces the open global economy. The position of the United States as the most powerful hegemon is enhanced by the structure of the international system and institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank which are serviceable to American hegemony (Harvey, 2003: 185; Hudson, 2003: 377ff). Hegemony can be achieved without resort to the old ways of mercantilism and direct intervention. Cole (2009) identifies the dangers of the unilateral exercise of power and warns against “neomercantilism” and “the temptation to meddle” (p. 34). The interdependence of the world in the globalization era necessitates a policy of engagement that does not relinquish American hegemony. America’s status as the leader of the international system lends a great degree of confidence to the idea of the ability of the United States to maintain its global prominence without resort to the traditional imperial ways. In other words, hegemony by consent—which Nye designates as “soft power”—is an effective way of playing the hegemon in a globalized world. Norton (1996) gives a vibrant expression of this approach and explains its advantages, and at the same time, lays bare disadvantages of coercive hegemony. “Accumulation by dispossession,” as Harvey (2003: 137) calls it,
and mediating that from the center through international institutions such as the World Bank and the WTO guarantees American hegemony without necessarily resorting to heavy reliance on intervention.

Nonetheless, the restriction of American interests to the economic factor ignores other equally significant factors. These include strategic calculations and control of key arenas crucial for the victory of prospective wars, guaranteeing the maximum number of allies who would be willing to align with the United States in case of conflicts involving the U.S. and other rival parties, and building consent to the hegemonic status of the United States throughout the world through economic aid. Thus, the *modus vivendi* can be reached with the various parties provided that American supremacy is not affected. Once a challenge emerges, then intervention is the answer. MESA scholars do not exclude the military option, but retard it to the last resort. While it is needed, it should be used sparingly.

Hudson (1996: 342) opines that “American hegemony in the Middle East is not going to disappear soon. The question is, what kind of hegemony, will it be?” will it be “benign” or “hurtful”? Hudson continues,

If history is any guide, hegemony by the United States or any other party in the Middle East tends to produce resistance. Under the most benign of scenarios there will be problems. But under the hurtful scenario the problems will be vastly worse. It behooves the hegemon then to play the game wisely. Among other things, wisdom suggests that the hegemon adopt a low profile by involving other outside players such as the European countries, Japan, and even Russia, in regional issues. Wisdom suggests pursuing less confrontational and more balanced policies. (p. 343)

Esposito (2010) emphasizes the need for coexistence in a globalized context, “Muslims and non-Muslims alike face new challenges in the twenty-first century. The forces of globalization have made us interdependent politically, economically, and
environmentally” (p. 10). “Building a global culture of pluralism,” Esposito asserts, is “a necessity” (Ibid., p. 181); and is the only effective way to defeat what he calls “global terrorism”. Esposito explains:

Global terrorism will continue to threaten European and American policymakers as well as Muslim governments. The Bush administration quite correctly adopted a three-pronged strategy to fight global terrorism: military, economic, and public diplomacy. But although the military can kill, capture, and contain terrorists, neither military responses nor economic measures to cut off terrorists’ financial support address the ideological war, the ideas as well as the conditions that radicalize mainstream Muslims and create terrorist recruits. Public diplomacy has the power to target the broader Muslim world and its mainstream majority. (p. 191)

The ideas of “soft power” and the “battle for hearts and minds” are euphemisms for Gramsci’s notion of “hegemony by consent”. The MESA academics view the American hegemonic position from a broader perspective that takes into account the risks of aggressive policies in the long run. However, not all of them share the same outlook in regard to American double standards towards the various issues concerning the Arab world. While some—such as Esposito, Khalidi, Norton and Beinin, to name but a few—advocate democratization and political reform, others, such as Juan Cole, are silent or at least not concerned about reform and liberalization.