CHAPTER I

Historical and Methodological Background to the Study

The Scope of the Study

The field of Arabist and Islamicist studies in the United States is very broad and diverse. When applied in a loose manner, it involves specialists trained in Arab and Muslim affairs, mainly located within the field of Middle East studies in the American academy, and some specialist think tanks. It also includes specialists in other disciplines who occasionally write on Arab and Muslim affairs, such as Clifford Geertz, Samuel Huntington, and Francis Fukuyama. Moreover, it includes a wide range of non-specialist ‘experts’ based in the think tanks and the media, as well as intelligence and other government agencies such as former diplomats to Arab and other Muslim countries, National Security advisors, military officials, etc. Many in this latter category are instant analysts who are not well-versed in Arab and Muslim history and experiences as well as the intricacies of Muslim societies. Think tanks in the United States have proliferated and risen to a prominent position over the last three decades or so, giving rise to many self-proclaimed experts on various issues, especially contemporary ones such as terrorism, the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and Islamist activism. Arab and Muslim affairs have gained increasing attention in the media and think tanks industry, as well as among the informed specialists who have dedicated their careers to the study of Arab and Muslim societies and communities.

This diversity in locales, positions, expertise and backgrounds translates into diversity in attitudes and approaches. This study excludes the publications by non-specialist think tanks and media personalities who claim expertise on Arab and Muslim affairs. It also excludes the more informed scholars whose original domain of
expertise is not Arab and Muslim affairs \textit{per se}, except in the case of Samuel Huntington, whose influential popularization of the thesis of the “clash of civilizations” has a direct effect on the status of studies of the Arab and Muslim worlds. Nor does this study claim to present a full account of the academic field of Middle East studies in American universities and other specialists outside the academy. It examines the works of a few specialist experts on the Arab and Muslim worlds, who are considered among the most influential scholars in the field of Middle Eastern studies and beyond, both in the United States and internationally.

It would be appropriate to begin with a disclaimer. The field of Middle Eastern studies in the United States is characterized by diversity of approaches and interests that cannot be covered in a single study. The study is, therefore, restricted to a set of topoi that directly bear upon the relations between the United States on the one hand and the Arab world and, to a lesser extent, Iran, and the Muslim communities in the United States and other Western European countries, on the other. Focus is placed upon the treatment of such themes as democratization, modernization, terrorism, Islamist activism, and Muslim communities in the United States in particular. The study examines the dynamics of representations and the ideological discursive positions informing them.

The study draws a distinction between two competing trends. The first represents the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) experts. Sample works by John Esposito, John Voll, Yvonne Haddad, Zachary Lockman, Richard Norton, Juan Cole, Rashid Khalidi, Richard Bulliet, Lisa Anderson, Joel Beinin, and others are dealt with in the study. The other trend represents right-wing scholars with partisan views and ideology, who have lately formed the Association for the Study of the
Middle East and Africa (ASMEA). Scholars covered under this category include Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, and the Israeli-American scholar Martin Kramer.

The time span covered by the study extends over the last two decades (1990-2010). Occasional references to pre-1990 key texts and developments—both in the region and in the field of Middle East studies in the U.S.—are made where these are deemed influential and exercise an enduring impact on the discourses proliferated by the scholars under consideration. The focus on the last two decades, however, is significant in that it deals with the post-Cold War era which witnessed a sharpening rhetoric on the “Islamic threat” in the American discourse on the Arab and Muslim worlds, and the projection of “Islam” as the new enemy. It is also the era that witnessed increasing American intervention in and encroachment upon Arab and Muslim countries. This era has been marked by violent wars that rocked the Arab world and went well beyond it, the damaging effects of which are still very much lived and have dire consequences on the peoples in the Arab world.

Concepts and Terminology

In the American and by extension European discourse on the Arab and Muslim worlds, and their relation to Europe and America, various designations are used, depending on the scope of the geography covered in a given context. The term “Middle East” is used to refer to the Arabic-speaking countries in West Asia and Egypt, as well as Iran, Turkey and Israel. Sometimes, the term is expanded to include the Sudan, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria in Africa and to a lesser extent Pakistan to the East. When dealing exclusively with the Muslim-majority countries in the region; that is, excluding Israel, scholars quite often speak of the “Muslim Middle East”. It is also by no means uncommon to come across such bizarre designations as the “Arab
Middle East”, while it would have been clearer to speak of the ‘Arab countries’ or the ‘Arab world’. There is a great degree of inaccuracy in the term ‘Middle East’ itself, and the qualifications applied to it when referring to specific groups. The term was first inadvertently introduced by Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, an American naval historian, in 1902 and gradually replaced the by now archaic term ‘Near East’.

In India, the term used to designate the region encompassing the Arabic-speaking countries of West Asia plus Egypt as well as Iran, Israel and, to a lesser extent, Turkey, especially among specialists in Arab affairs—yet hardly beyond them—is ‘West Asia’. The “Middle East” and “West Asia” are geographical terms. Geographical terms are often useful in resolving dilemmas of designations in multicultural environments, but they also have their shortcomings. In the case of the region under consideration here, they attempt to define it from the vantage point and perspective of those to whom it is a subject of study. The problem with these geographical terms is that they are perspectival; i.e. they define the region from the geographical position of the scholar studying it, and hence fall into egocentrism. The position of the studying subject becomes the center in relation to the region where the object of study is located and defined. Moreover, such geographical terms fail to account for the complexities involved behind geography, such as ethnicity, cultural variations, etc. They even conceal something of the geography itself; thus, falling into the trap they seek to resolve. The term “Middle East”, for instance, is often modified to “Middle East and North Africa (MENA)”. It incorporates various groups together, while at the same time leaving out the Arabic-speaking countries of North Africa in spite of the many commonalities and shared experiences that link them to the Arabic-speaking countries in Asia.
Besides concealing parts of the geography, these terms do not take into account how the peoples in question see themselves, a point that the scholars who see in these studies a power/knowledge relationship, would be quick to accrue to this urge for exercising power. While “Middle East” is a completely nebulous, fluid, and loose term, made up of two indefinite directions “middle” and ‘east’, it attempts to define a place when it makes no mention of a place at all. Both ‘middle’ and ‘east’ are not places and are not even tangible locations. The region is ‘east’ only in relation to the U.S. and Europe—and even here with a degree of ambiguity, hence the recent tendency especially in the post-Cold War era to speak of ‘north’ and ‘south’. Moreover, its being “middle” is very hard to explain or justify. It presupposes many ‘easts’, ranging from the nearest to the farthest. This one is supposed to be located in the ‘middle’ of the other ‘easts’. Yet, this view is shallow, given the lack of a ‘nearer east’ closer to Europe, as the archaic nature of the term “Near East” reveals.

The term “West Asia” has the advantage of combining a direction ‘west’ and a place ‘Asia,’ locating the direction within a larger definite place (Asia) that has boundaries and demarcations. Yet, it, too, does not abide by the geography it delineates, but rather goes beyond it and includes parts of Africa and even Europe (as is the case with the European parts of Turkey) within its range. Such terms, therefore, will be avoided; and since my focus is primarily on the Arabic-speaking countries in Asia and Africa, I will use the term often used by the Arabs to define themselves, namely; the ‘Arab world’. However, this is not to suggest that the Arabic-speaking countries constitute a monolithic unitary bloc; yet, they do share many commonalities and experiences.
Following the Iranian revolution (1978-9) and the concomitant interest in Islam and Muslim politics and experiences beyond the Arab world that was intensified by the rise of Islamist activism, as well as the study of Muslim societies in Europe and the United States, scholars have increasingly referred to ‘Islam and the West’. This designation is rather a recent one. Perhaps one of its early uses occurs in Norman Daniel’s *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (1960). Since the 1980s, “Islam and the West” has become a widely used designation in intellectual circles in Western Europe and North America and is finding its way to scholarly discussions of the relations between the Muslim world and the West globally. Yet, in recent years some university-based scholars of the Arab/Muslim worlds in the United States use terms such as the ‘Muslim world’ and the ‘Islamic world’. In the Arab world and Iran, the common designation is the ‘Islamic world and the West’. In both cases, two antithetical ideas are put side by side. The first term ‘Islam,’ the ‘Muslim world,’ or the ‘Islamic world’—whichever is used—refers to a religion or a geographical area nebulously defined with a purely religious rather than geographical frame of reference. The ‘West’, on the other hand, designates a completely geographically-defined area, debunked of any religious content. In other words, the former insinuates the centrality of religion to the peoples occupying the geographical area designated by the term, whereas the latter denotes the lack of any role of religion in the attitudes, outlooks, and indeed everyday life of the peoples and countries encompassed within the range of the term. My aim here is not to underscore the centrality of religion or the lack thereof in either of these areas, nor do I suggest at all that the relation between the two sides is determined, or had ever been solely determined, by religion, even though religion has been quite often, and is still, invoked by groups and individuals on both sides for polemical purposes.
Ironically, the task of those polemists on both sides is facilitated by stressing
religion as the centripetal, perhaps the only, factor in the relationship. This
reductionist approach well serves the ideological dimension of both, mainly due to the
different trajectories that the historical experiences of both the ‘Muslim world’ and
the ‘West’ have taken. In the ‘Muslim world’, where religion does not revive a
negative memory in the minds of the majority of Muslims, the term ‘Islamic world’
represents—to diverse groups, antithetical at times in ideology and outlook; and not
necessarily religious in nature, but secular as well—a reservoir for emphasizing
identity and is invoked without feeling any restraint. The term is even at times inflated
and infused with meta-linguistic connotations; thus, it symbolizes the spirituality of
the Muslim-majority countries, which is compared to ‘Western’ spiritual
degeneration.

By contrast, in the ‘West’, where appeal to religion conveys a sense of unease
in the minds of many and revives negative experiences and sad memories of the
oppression of the Church as an authority in Medieval Christian Europe, the religious
designations, ‘Islam’, the ‘Islamic world’, or the ‘Muslim world,’ symbolize
backwardness, rejection of modernity, incapability of change, fanaticism, despotism,
irrationality, and the like, whereas the purely geographical term, the ‘West’,
symbolizes a worldly and hence, according to its proponents, neutral and rational
weltanschauung; i.e. a secular outlook, and therefore it reflects a modern and
progressive view.

Nonetheless, a modification is in order. The phrase ‘Islam and the West’ is not
necessarily coined in the ‘West’–which is dominant politically and culturally–for
nothing but to represent the Muslim communities as backward and fanatical, though
such a tendency does exist. After all, the term ‘Islam’ in Western European languages denotes not merely the faith, but also the geographical areas and countries where Muslims constitute the majority of the population as well as the peoples whose religion is Islam. Such usage, however, derives from the Orientalist tradition. Besides, the definition of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’—in this case the Arab/Muslim ‘Other’—has gone through various stages of revision in European consciousness down the ages, governed by the nature of the interaction—convergence as well as difference—between the two sides.

Macfie (2002) distinguishes four stages in the definition of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ from the European perspective. The first stage extends from ancient times until the collapse of the Western Roman (not the Byzantine) Empire. During this era, the Greeks and then the Romans drew on geographical divisions, designating themselves as the inhabitants of Europe, as opposed to the Persians and other races who were the inhabitants of Asia. During the second stage, from the collapse of the Western Roman Empire to the emergence of Islam, another designation along racial lines emerged. Europeans saw themselves as the sons of Japheth as opposed to the Semites inhabiting Asia. The racial classification was based on religious distinctions derived from the Bible. During the third stage which began roughly after the rise of Islam, Europeans focused more on religious identity. Europe became increasingly known as Christendom, whereas the Muslim-populated areas, as Macfie claims, became known as ‘Islam’. Contrary to Macfie’s supposition, however, “Islam” actually was rarely used, if at all, during this period. Europeans used merely misnomers in reference to Muslims, their faith, and the lands they inhabited. Terms such as ‘Saracens,’ ‘Mahometans’, etc. were used. The fourth stage began with the era
of geographical discoveries in the fifteenth century. Geographical designations were reintroduced, and Europeans began to differentiate between the various regions beyond their geographical borders. Terms such as the ‘Orient’ and the ‘East’ became widely used, sometimes with differentiations between the ‘Near East’ and the ‘Far East’, while ‘Europe’ became widely used in reference to the ‘self’ (pp. 14-19).

In the modern period, the term ‘Levant’, from French meaning “where the sun rises” (i.e. the East), came to be used together with the Medieval designation ‘Holy Land’ in reference to Palestine and the surrounding areas. This name was even assigned to transnational Western companies such as the Levant Company. At any rate, Macfie’s classification is not a watertight categorization. Certainly, terms dating back to earlier periods continued to be used in later eras such as referring to Muslims as ‘Saracens’, ‘Mahometans,’ and ‘Mohammedans’; indeed the last term continued to be used until the second half of the twentieth century by the Orientalists. As late as the 1949, the prominent British Orientalist H.A.R. Gibb, for instance, published a book entitled *Mohammedanism: An Historical Survey*, which he revised in a later edition (1975) to *Islam: An Historical Survey*. ‘Mohammedanism’ as a designation of Islam was also very common among colonial officers, Orientalists, travelers, artists of all stripes, and especially the missionaries.

To recapitulate, the use of the phrase ‘Islam and the West’ began among specialists in Arab and Muslim affairs to answer the need for an expression with clear outlines from the epistemological and ontological point of view, to designate the object of study; i.e. the Muslim communities everywhere. Scholars with specific expertise on the Arab world and Iran broadened their interests since the 1980s with the rise of Islamist activism, which went well beyond the Arab world and Iran to
include other Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Malaysia, Afghanistan, and even countries in Central Asia. That interest was honed by the view of that activism as a threat and/or challenge to American hegemony. This need was further exacerbated by the inadequacy of the geographical terms and their failure to capture the Muslim-majority countries in a single designation. In addition, besides their arbitrary nature, the geographical terms such as the ‘Middle East’ exclude the majority of Muslims who actually live outside the Arab countries. Only one fifth of Muslims are Arab, while the remaining majority of Muslims live in South and Southeast Asia and Africa. The escalating emphasis on the “Islamic” identity by many trends in the Arab world and elsewhere, which coincided with the use of the term in the West, led to its propagation in the Muslim world and the West alike.

In this thesis, I will use terms with specific denotations as far as possible. Despite their limitations, the terms ‘Arab world,’ ‘Muslim world’ and the ‘West’ will be used, the last one very sparingly. They are to be understood throughout as neutral terms denuded of all ideological packages. The term ‘Islam’ in this study refers exclusively to the faith, the religion of Muslims, except when it occurs in quotations. References to the term in its inflated sense in the course of the analysis will be enclosed in inverted commas. Whenever references are restricted to the Arabic-speaking countries, the term ‘Arab world’ is used. Similarly, the term ‘Muslim world’ is used to refer to the global population of Muslims. The use of these terms in this thesis does not at all suggest that there is such a monolithic cohesive tangible Arab and/or Muslim bloc out there. In the case of the ‘Arab world’, the study takes into consideration the political, social, and economic variations as well as inter-Arab conflicts, rivalry and political disintegration. Likewise, Muslims are diverse
geographically, politically, and culturally. Hence, the ‘Muslim world’ is used in the sense of the global Muslim communities, Muslims everywhere who do share a common identity in terms of religious affiliation, but, at the same time, do have multiple identities, including American and European identities. The term, ‘the West’, is used to refer to Western Europe and North America, and acknowledges the multiple identities and diversities. Yet, here too, there is a sense of commonality in terms of past traditions and present secular and democratic systems that do not blur the diversity and multiple identities within North American and Western European societies.

The study of the Arab and Muslim worlds in the United States has paid special attention to the phenomenon of Islamist activism over the last three decades. Here reference is exclusively restricted to peaceful movements that work within the political systems—as much as those relatively closed systems allow—and do not resort to violence as a tactic to achieve their goals, with the notable exception of Hamas and Hizbullah in Palestine and Lebanon respectively. These two groups are functioning within an atmosphere of occupation and continuous incursions by the Israeli military that is armed to the teeth with the most advanced and sophisticated weaponry. Furthermore, Hamas and Hizbullah resort to violence in a restricted way—i.e. in response to the violence of an expansionist state whose actions are viewed generally, yet unjustly, as legitimate—rather than indiscriminately against innocent moms and dads. On the whole, the present researcher tried as much as he could to steer clear of dealing with these disputable issues, being convinced that the question of terrorism and its ramifications needs to be addressed in depth in its own right. Suffice it here to state that the term ‘terrorism’ has undergone a sea change since it
first appeared in the context of the French revolution. It was first used to refer exclusively to state terrorism (Hurbst, 2003: 164). The manipulation of the term and its politicization from the vantage point of the hegemonic powers show the extent to which hegemony and power construct reality by means of ideologically-loaded discourse.

The Islamist movements that participate peacefully in the political systems are often purposefully lumped together with the extremist violent groups in the American discourse, especially unmistakably in the discourse of scholars with ideologically-inspired partisan views. This phenomenon has commanded a great deal of attention and is variably designated as “Islamic fundamentalism,” “Islamic radicalism,” “Islamic extremism,” “radical Islam,” “Islamic militancy,” “Islamic resurgence,” “militant Islam,” “political Islam,” “Islam international,” and “Islamism,” not to mention “Islamic terrorism”. Recently, some scholars have avoided the qualifier “Islamic”, and prefer to use “Muslim” instead; thus, they speak of “Muslim fundamentalists,” “Muslim terrorists”, and so forth. I propose to refer to this phenomenon as “Islamist activism” mainly due to what I perceive as the inadequacy of the other terms. The term “Islamist activism” has advantage over the other terms in that it avoids encompassing all Muslims in this phenomenon or attributing it to the religion itself as the qualifiers “Muslim” and “Islamic” denote respectively. Moreover, those terms are either reductionist projections from completely different contexts or demonizing designations lacking in objectivity.

To illustrate this point, the term “fundamentalism” will be analyzed as an example of the inaccuracy of these terms. By far, the term “Islamic fundamentalism” is the earliest and most widely used one. The first occurrence of the term in reference
to a Muslim context was in a letter written by Sir Reader Bullard, a British Minister in Jeddah in 1937 with reference to ibn Saud. Bullard wrote that ibn Saud had been “coming out strong as a fundamentalist”. Perhaps the first to coin the term “Islamic fundamentalism” was the famed Orientalist H.A.R. Gibb in his book *Mohammedanism* referred to above. Gibb used the term in reference to Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, the nineteenth-century Iranian reformer (Ruthven, 2007: 18-20).

The term “fundamentalism” originally appeared in a purely Christian context. Experts on Arab and Muslim affairs belonging to various trends rightly underscore the inadequacy of the term in the Muslim context, regardless of the justifications they bring to bear on its inadequacy; yet it is still widely used. In its religious context, the term “fundamentalism” dates back to the early twentieth century in a Protestant context in the United States. It was used to designate the campaign led by the brothers Milton and Lyman Stewart. It was not used as a derogative term in the beginning; it first appeared in a neutral context in a Hollywood movie. In 1910 the brothers Stewart initiated and supported a program of publishing and distributing a series of tracts and pamphlets, distributed in large quantities for free to Protestants in the United States and Britain. The series was entitled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of Truth*. It stressed the infallibility of the Bible and that it was the literal Word of God, and hence was insusceptible to criticism. The main goal was the reassertion of Christian faith which had been rocked violently by Darwin’s ‘Theory of Evolution’. Those who participated in the campaign did not feel any constraint as the issue was completely natural at first. However, the tables turned as Curtis Lee Laws coined the term “fundamentalist” in 1920, defining fundamentalists as those who were ready to engage in a battle royal for the fundamentals (Ibid., pp. 7-8). Hence, the term acquired
a purely religious, fanatical and militant connotation, and began to be used in a derisive sense with strict reference to religious movements.

Indeed, Laws’s definition allows for the use of “fundamentalism” as a concept and a term beyond its original strictly narrow religious domain. It can be applied to designate any movement, regardless of its orientation, that bestows upon itself a sense of self-righteousness coupled with a rejectionist battling and exclusionary attitude towards the other. As Ruthven (2007) observes, the term can be broadened to include that stance in feminism, for instance, that views all penetrative sex as an act of rape, and those animal liberationists who view every abattoir, no matter how human its procedures are, as an extermination camp (p. 22). The same also applies to those who militantly defend a political or economic system, such as secularism and capitalism, or even an intellectual current in a self-validating manner, disregarding the other and negating her/him altogether.

The inadequacy of the term in the Muslim context stems from the fact that virtually the overwhelming majority of Muslims would be encompassed within the domain of the term when grafted from its original Christian context since the overwhelming majority of Muslims believe that the Quran is the literal Word of God and believe in creationism as recounted in the religious scriptures. The use of the term to designate every movement that appeals to religion—for whatever reason—is also facilely simplistic. This use often translates into broadening the scope of the term, giving rise to an unquenchable search for moderate Muslims; thus, tightening the cycle of inaccurate projections and distorting reality.

The term “Orientalism” has acquired a negative derogative connotation following Edward Said’s critique of Orientalism in 1978. It has been recently used in
a derogative manner, especially in the debates among scholars of the Arab and Muslim worlds in the United States. However, Orientalism in its traditional European variety is far from dead. It still persists even today in the United States and Europe. There have been recently remarkable efforts and activities to reintroduce Orientalism as the centerpiece of inquiry and the theoretical and conceptual model for the study of the Arab and Muslim worlds. As Qamar-ul Huda (2004) observes, the term is hardly used in the academy today. Many academics have adopted new methods and approaches that have nothing to do with Orientalism (pp. 515-516). Surely, these scholars have dissociated themselves from Orientalism and its legacy, and broke up with that tradition. Such scholars cannot be designated as Orientalists without falling into outright distortion and prejudice. Others, however, have defended that tradition and advocated its restoration. Nonetheless, not all of them are Orientalists in the full sense of the word. Orientalism may be defined as a style of thought and an approach to the study of Arab and/or Muslim societies, which is based on essentialist views of Arabs, Muslims and Islam, drawing mainly on a reservoir of antique philological and textual methods and other reductionist models such as culture and civilization. It is not amenable to empirical data or advances in the social science disciplines. Anyone who fits into this definition is an Orientalist; and if he partly fits into it; i.e. the overall effect of his argument is Orientalist without necessarily observing the antiquated methodological tools, she/he can be designated neo-Orientalist. Therefore, when these terms figure in this thesis, they are not meant as derisive designations. Rather, they seek to reflect the dynamics governing a particular trend in the American expertise on Islam and the Arab and Muslim worlds and to place that trend in its proper sphere. It may be noted that some of these scholars associate themselves rather with a sense of attachment to the Orientalist tradition. At any rate, such controversial terms are used
as sparingly as possible, restricting their use to contexts where the use of other terms would be marked by ambiguity and inadequacy.

**Definitions and Methodology**

**Terms used in the title**

I have already referred to the terms “Arabs,” “Muslims” and “Orientalist” above. The key terms in the title: “ideology,” “representations” and “discourse” will be defined from the vantage point of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which is applied as a theoretical framework in this study.

Fairclough (1995) views ideology as “virtually synonymous with ‘worldview’”. Hence, “any group has particular ideology corresponding to its interests and position in social life” (p. 17). Fairclough presents a Marxist view of ideology in which ideologies are “constructions of practices from particular perspectives … which iron out the contradictions, dilemmas and antagonisms of practices in ways which accord with the interests and projects of domination” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1997: 26). Ideology refers to the “worldviews” that constitute “social cognition”; “schematically organized complexes of representations and attitudes with regard to certain aspects of the social world” (Van Dijk, 1993: 258). Similarly, Van Dijk views ideology as an interpretation framework that organizes a set of attitudes about other elements of modern society (1991: 45). These definitions are broad in scope and tend to encompass a range of issues that involve a hegemonic drive as ideologies. Besides, there is the lexical definition of the term. *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines ideology as “a system of ideas and ideals forming the basis of an economic or
political theory”. A related meaning is a “set of beliefs characteristic of a social group or individual”. Both the lexical and CDA definitions will be used in this study.

**Representation:** According to *Webster’s Dictionary*, representation is “a statement or account esp[ecially] made to convey a particular view or impression of something with the intention of influencing opinion or action” (p. 1926).

**Discourse:** *Webster’s Dictionary* defines “discourse” in its linguistic context as “connected speech or writing consisting of more than one sentence” (p. 647). Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) define discourse as “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)” (p. 1). Foucault (1972: 117) defines discourse as follows:

> [Discourse is] a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation… [It] is made up of a limited number of statements for which a group of conditions of existence can be defined. Discourse in this sense is not an ideal, timeless, form … it is, from beginning to end, historical—a fragment of history … posing its own limits, its divisions, its transformations, the specific modes of its temporality.

This study seeks to analyze the American discourse on the Arabs, Muslims and Islam, as proliferated by specialist scholars over the last two decades. It applies the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis, (CDA) for short. CDA is essentially a branch of linguistics, known also as Critical Linguistics (CL). CL and CDA are quite interchangeable terms, though the latter has become more common (Wodak, 2001:1). CDA views language use as a vital component of power relations, and seeks to examine the relationships between language and power (Ibid., p. 2). Wodak defines CDA as a field fundamentally concerned with analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language … CDA aims to investigate critically social
inequality as it is expressed, signalled, constituted, legitimized, and so on by language use (or in discourse). (Ibid., p. 2)

CDA, however, is not restricted to the textual analysis of discourse, but also theorizes and describes the contexts in which discourses are produced, the “social processes and structures” which give rise to the production of discourses, and the process of the creation of meaning. Hence, three concepts are centripetal in all CDA: the concept of power, the concept of ideology, and the concept of history (Ibid., p. 3).

CDA maintains that discourse is structured by dominance; that discourse is historically produced; i.e. it is situated in time and space; and that the hegemonic structures are legitimated by the ideologies of dominant powerful groups (Ibid., p. 3). Context is very crucial in discourse analysis. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) opine that discourse “is not produced without context and cannot be understood without taking context into consideration” (p. 276). Theorists of CDA argue that ideology is an integral part of discourse structure, and that ideologies as systems of thought motivate discourses. Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) is a branch of CDA that focuses on context. Wodak (2009) views ideology as an important factor in establishing and maintaining unequal power relations. She opines that “One of the aims of the DHA (and of all CDA) is to “demystify” discourses by deciphering ideologies” (p. 312). Ideology and discourse have material effects. They create and recreate a world as real and contribute to the creation and recreation of relations (Fairclough, 1995: 73). This study seeks to examine this process of constructing the other and how that comes to bear on relations between the Muslim world and the United States.

Power plays an important role in the structuring and circulation of discourse. Hall and Gieben (1992) state that discourses
always operate in relation to power—they are part of the way power circulates and is contested … When it is effective—organizing and regulating relations of power (say, between the West and the Rest)—it is called a “regime of truth”. (p. 299)

Discourses exercise power as they produce and circulate knowledge which shapes individual and collective consciousness. The transported knowledge is the basis of individual and collective action and the “formative action that shapes reality” (Jager, 2001: 38). Fairclough observes that the ideological component of discourse goes through a process of ‘naturalization’; that is, ideological representations are naturalized and come to be seen as non-ideological ‘common sense’. A primary aim of CDA is to “elucidate such naturalizations, and more generally to make clear social determinations and effects of discourse which are characteristically opaque to participants” (1995: 72). Ideologies cut across the boundaries of various situations and transcend institutions. Hence, CDA seeks to discuss how they transcend particular situations and institutions, and how ideology is mediated and naturalized to appear like common sense. This requires focus on ‘discursive events’ to discover and uncover the ideological restructurings since these are mediated through those events (Ibid., p. 72). Fairclough writes:

Ideology is located … both in structures which constitute the outcome of past events and the conditions for current events, and in events themselves as they reproduce and transform their conditioning structures. (p. 72)

Moreover, ideology is mediated in discourse in the ideological investment of elements which are invoked in the production of texts, and the manner in which they are coherently articulated as well as in the ways in which those elements are articulated together and the orders of discourse which are rearticulated in discursive events (Ibid., 74). A discursive event is defined as an event which is emphasized politically and influences the direction and quality of discourse (Jager, 2001: 48).
Discourse can also be invested ideologically at the level of language (at once lexically, syntactically, and semantically). This involves such issues as the lexical items selected for describing a certain event, the grammatical structures of sentences (use of the active or passive, for instance), presuppositions, implicatures, metaphors, coherence, generic and specific references, role allocation, exclusion, etc. It is also invested at the level of selection and treatment of facts.

There are several approaches to discourse semantics: discourse universes, text worlds, discourse contexts, and so on. This study especially draws on discourse contexts. In this regard, ‘intertextuality’ is particularly significant. Intertextuality in CDA refers to the repeated references to a single event or action (referred to as ‘topos’ in CDA) in the course of a single text, or in a number of texts by the same author, as well as the kinds of discourses an author relies on and refers to. As Wodak (2009) puts it, it refers to “the linkage of all texts to other texts both in the past and in the present” (p. 319). The study will also occasionally analyze the discursive strategies as they are mediated through language. It will apply the “discourse immanent critique” and the “socio-diagnostic critique” as defined by Wodak. According to Wodak, text or discourse immanent critique is concerned with revealing contradictions, inconsistencies, paradoxes and idiosyncrasies in the internal structures of text, or discourse; whereas the socio-diagnostic critique aims at “demystifying the—manifest or latent—(possibly persuasive or “manipulative”) character of discourse practices” (2009: 312).

The study places American discourse on the Arab and Muslim worlds in the context in which it emerges; i.e. as a political project related to American power. By virtue of the political nature of the field, hegemony occupies a central position in the
production of the various strands of discourse. Discourse variations, and hence 
hegemonic practices, vary considerably depending on the ideology governing the 
discourse, and the contexts in which it operates. Gramsci differentiates two types of 
hegemony: hegemony by consent and hegemony by coercion. Hegemony and power 
are interrelated. Joseph Nye’s notions of “soft power” and “hard power”, discussed in 
Chapter 2, reflect this interrelatedness. Nye’s concepts mediate the hegemonic 
practices through ideologically-motivated discourses.

Literature Review

The encounter between the Arab world and Islam on the one hand and 
the West and Christianity on the other is an old and perennial one. The Western 
obsession with Islam led to the development of a discipline known as 
“Orientalism” which covers a variety of thematics, disciplines, representations, 
discourses, outlooks, etc., in the course of several centuries. Twentieth century 
scholarship especially since the 1960s has given Western obsession with Islam 
a good deal of attention. Numerous studies have appeared dealing collectively 
with the phenomenon known generally as ‘Orientalism’ or with sub-categories 
of it. In fact, Orientalism is a very broad field due to the historical aspect of the 
Western interest in and obsession with Islam and the wide scope of disciplines 
and cultural aspects dealing with Islam and the Muslim world. The Orientalist 
tradition is deeply entrenched in Western consciousness due to the 
encompassing nature of that tradition, whether at the conscious or unconscious 
levels. The scope of Orientalism is so spacious that it covers the systematic and 
scholarly studies of Islam and the Arabs in the various disciplines, such as 
history, theology, geography, literature, cultural studies, anthropology,
sociology, ethnography, military studies, the visible arts, economics, political science, women’s studies, area studies, etc. It is also overtly present in popular culture: folklore, cultural constructs of the other, the cinema, music, paintings, and so on. The average Westerner, therefore, is bombarded with images, representations and indoctrinating messages throughout, and from a variety of sources, ranging from school curricula to books, the media and entertainment as well as constructions of historical memories and traditions.

One of the earliest studies—perhaps the earliest in English—is Norman Daniel’s *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (1960), which examines the ways in which an image of Islam was constructed and standardized by religious authorities in the Iberian Peninsula early in the history of the direct contacts between the Arab Muslims and the Spanish Christians and how that image spread and came to bear on future representations of Islam in the West. The overarching category was to dismiss Islam as a false religion and imposture. This tendency continued well into the mid-twentieth century. Daniel’s study extends to the late eighteenth century. It examines the developments that accompanied the transition from Medieval to Renaissance Europe when Islam was manipulated for domestic purposes. Daniel’s book fathoms an image in the making, the way it is constructed and reconstructed, and how it was meant as a way of mobilization and indoctrination, gaining root in the public consciousness of the average European towards Islam and Muslims.

Daniel’s sequel to *Islam and the West* is his *Islam, Europe and Empire* (1966). This latter study focuses on the imperial age that witnessed the
expansion of the European powers. Colonialism serves as the bedrock of the encounter on which the image making process rests. An ascendant confident Europe here replaced the nervous apprehensive Europe of the Middle Ages. The image was mainly focused on despotism, slavery, the harem, eroticism, sensuality, and so on. Some of these images, to be sure, were inherited from the age-old tradition.

W. Southern’s *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (1962) focuses on the Western conceptions and conceptualizations of Islam in the Middle Ages. It deals with the antagonistic, xenophobic attitudes displayed by Christian Europe towards Islam in the medieval era. Southern’s conclusions are much in agreement with Daniel’s; mainly the dismissal of Islam as a diabolical religion and a heresy, a fabrication preaching moral degeneration and sin. In short, Islam was demonized in medieval discourse and the emerging picture was one of condemnation, buttressed by a network of myths that became part of the everyday conception of Islam in the mind of the average Westerner.

The critique of Orientalism as an age-old tradition was initiated by Anwar Abdel-Malek in an article in *Diogenes* (1963). Abdel-Malek criticizes what he sees as the Orientalist neglect of the present due to a preoccupation with the past which translates into unsympathetic attitudes to the present concerns of the Orientals and the process of social evolution in their societies. Abdel–Malek accrues this deficiency to the “europeocentrism” in an “epoch of European hegemony” (p.106). In Abdel-Malek’s view, Orientalism has been readily put in the service of imperialism and the two are closely connected.
According to Abdel-Malek, Orientalism deals with “the Orient and Orientals as an “object” of study, stamped with an otherness—as all that is different, whether it be “subject” or “object”—but of a constitutive otherness, of an essentialist character” (p. 107). On the thematic sphere, Orientalism adopts “an essentialist conception of the countries, nations and peoples of the Orient under study, a conception which expresses itself through a characterized ethnist typology” that soon proceeds towards racism (p. 108). This essentializing of the other attains its fullest expression in a static “homo Arabicus” and “homo Islamicus”. Abdel-Malek opines that traditional Orientalism is ahistorical and out of step with the advancements in scientific research. All these factors put together pushed Orientalism towards irrelevance to the present and hence traditional Orientalism underwent a crisis of multiple ramifications.

Abdel-Malek recognizes the emergence of “neo-Orientalism” in the United States and Britain, which is established mainly in the academy and employs the social sciences as its theoretical framework. Yet, according to Abdel-Malek, neo-Orientalism, too, is incapable of transcending the traditional Orientalist legacy. The only difference is that “europeocentrism” has been presented by means of modernist manifestations.

The response of the Italian Orientalist, Francesco Gabrieli (1965) to Abdel-Malek’s article is—as its title, “Apology for Orientalism,” suggests—an embattled attempt to shut out any discussion and to regard Orientalism as a valid and sound discipline. Gabrieli, for example, dismissed Abdel-Malek’s argument that Orientalism collaborated with colonialism as a “claim” that is “unjustly exaggerated, generalized, and embittered” if “not entirely unfounded” (p. 131; emphasis added). The article
reinforced the Orientalist dichotomies of West/Orient, rational/irrational, reason/passion, and so on. Thus, Abdel-Malek’s critique was referred to as “passionate words … [that] should be answered not emotionally but with calm reason” (p. 133). To Gabrieli, Abdel-Malek’s critique amounted to “the accusation of the modern East” (p. 132), leveled unjustly, of course, against the West. Gabrieli’s article emanated from a sense of Western superiority over the ‘East’ which was found lacking in all aspects of modernity: “Our friends from the East should therefore not come to ask us to start studying their past and present in the light of a modern Eastern historiography, philosophy, aesthetics, and economics, inasmuch as these are today non-existent” (p. 135). In other words, the ‘East’ and the ‘peoples of the East’ should hold their peace, as long as “they” are inferior to “us” of the West. Gabrieli concluded in an alarming tone of exclusion, dismissing Abdel-Malek’s article as a “polemical … interpretation of Western orientalism”. Consequently, “so long as the East does not succeed in overcoming this complex of suspicion and ill-feeling that also prejudices friendly cooperation with the West, it [now, Abdel-Malek has become the representative of the whole ‘East’, and his effort is generalized and dehumanized as the use of the pronoun ‘it’ shows] should not speak [Gabrieli sets limits to the confines of decorum that the ‘East’ is supposed to observe when dealing with the ‘West’] with so much presumption of an “orientalism in crisis,” blaming it for what is its own agonizing crisis” (p. 136; emphasis added). Gabrieli bemoaned that the efforts of the Orientalists go ungratefully unrewarded by those belonging to the Arab-Islamic civilization, “precisely from which come the most inflammatory and for the most part unjust accusations and recriminations against the istishraq” (p. 136).
Another response to Abdel-Malek’s article came from Claude Cahen (1965). Cahen’s response was a short note to the editor. Cahen, a professor of Islamic history at the Sorbonne, was on the whole sympathetic, and was inspired by his liberal inclinations. Donald P. Little’s article “Three Arab Critiques of Orientalism” (1979)—in response to Abdel-Malek and Tibawi, as well as Said’s “Shattered Myths”—was on the whole critical of all of them.

A.L. Tibawi’s two critiques of Orientalism, “The English-Speaking Orientalists” (1964) and “A Second Critique of the English-Speaking Orientalists” (1979) focused primarily on theological considerations. Tibawi dealt with the fossilization of Islam in the Orientalist discourse. He hardly went beyond theological considerations in his two critiques. His critiques may well fit into the category of the dialogue of religions and were meant as corrective steps in this direction. Due to his preoccupation with theological questions, Tibawi did not make any references to political, sociological, or economic considerations which had become the defining norms of Orientalist discourse by the time he wrote his critiques. Tibawi’s “Second Critique” did not advance the argument put forth in the first critique. It mainly monitored progress in the field, and found it lacking, apart from restricted signs of progress. Tibawi bemoaned the ill-humor and unease which his first critique of Orientalism stirred. He regarded that as a sign of a closed self-congratulatory discipline unwilling to engage in dialogue.

Roger Owen’s review article (1973) of the Cambridge History of Islam, edited by P.M. Holt, A.K. Lambton and Bernard Lewis, offers insight into the shortcomings of Orientalist historiography. Owen remarks that Islamic studies
had become a “mystery” to non-specialists; a system closed on itself and unwilling to concede other alternative opinions and methods. The Orientalists “proceed according to their own, often hidden, rules” allowing no room for debate; in other words, Islamic studies are canonized (p. 287). Owen further remarks that the Orientalists are cut off from scholars in other fields (p. 287) and that the *Cambridge History of Islam* is “a curiously old-fashioned work, written very much in isolation from methodological advances in other fields” (p. 290). He points out the lack of social and economic history in the work and the inclination to depict the history of Islam as a succession of battles and wars, but nothing else, and its advocacy of the “universal assumption that Islam is a viable unit of historical study”; a view emanating from a Hegelian vision of history as the rise and fall of civilizations that are reduced to essences (p. 289). Owen concludes that “‘the state of the field’ is not good and something certainly ought to be done about it” (p. 297). He shows that ‘civilization’ is a flawed model of analysis and that Islamic civilization as “the basic unit of study” is inadequate, since it imposes an “artificial unity upon a world spreading from Morocco to Indonesia, thus making what it is that the societies of this area have in common far outweigh that which divides them” (p. 297). Owen does not call for a dismissal of “Islam” as a religion from the study of Muslim societies, but objects to making it the only explanatory category.

The most elaborate and vigorous critique of Orientalism was advanced by Edward Said in his 1978 book, *Orientalism*. Said’s argument centers around a number of premises that have their root in the postmodernist thought; namely, deconstruction and postmodernist ideas as well as the Marxist theory as
developed by the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci, especially his notion of hegemony. Said’s notion of knowledge as power and the unavailability of objective knowledge are adopted from the writings of the French postmodernist philosopher, Michel Foucault, especially his notion of discourse as expounded in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*. Said further draws on Foucault’s notion of knowledge as a construct of the domineering subject; a form of exercising power over the studied object. Thus, knowledge is a form of discourse, a subjective construct rather than the expression of a detached or objective reality that transcends the immediate context in which it is produced. In short, knowledge is a form of representation deeply immersed in the immediate circumstances of its production; it is constructed in such a way as to serve the interests of those who produce it. Interestingly enough, Said’s adoption of the Foucauldian approach draws the attention of scholars to an increasing interest in Foucault’s ideas and thought.

Said’s all-encompassing definitions of Orientalism widen the scope of the discipline to include not merely the scholarly study of the Orient as undertaken by specialists in the field. By ‘Orientalism’, Said means “several things, all of them … interdependent” (1978: 2). First, there is the academic definition, “Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient—and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist—either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism” (Ibid., p. 2). Said provides another philosophical definition of Orientalism as “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and
(most of the time) “the occident”” (Ibid., p. 2). This definition covers a wide range of writers:

poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists and imperial administrators, [who] have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind,” destiny and so on. (Ibid., pp. 2-3)

This kind of Orientalism, according to Said, can be traced back to the times of the Greek. Said’s third definition concerns Orientalism as an institutionalized discipline,

the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient. (Ibid., p. 3)

According to Said, Orientalism has been sustained on a dichotomy of “us-versus-them,” i.e. defining the self (in this case, the West) in relation to something else (the Orient). In the process, the Orient is constructed in a way that ensures Western superiority, underscoring at the same time Oriental inferiority. Central to this discourse of dichotomies is the Western conceptualization of the Orientals as incapable of representing themselves; and hence they must be represented by the superior West. In other words, Orientalism as a discourse dispossesses the Oriental of all qualities, and renders her/him a passive object rather than an active participant or a recognized interlocutor. Such approach gains momentum to the extent that it acquires a canonized norm wrought in the Western culture at large, “European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self” (Ibid., p. 3). Consequently,
“because of Orientalism the Orient was not (and is not) a free subject of thought or action”. Furthermore, the “Orient that appears in Orientalism is a system of representations formed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire” (pp. 203-204). Another pillar of Said’s argument is that the “relationship between the Orient and the Occident is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (p. 5). To Said, Orientalism is an essential fabric of this power relationship and a fundamental ingredient of it. Here Orientalism as a corporate institution provides the intellectual rationale for the imperial project and facilitates the imperial expansion as it makes available research and information about the Orient. In short, it collaborates with the imperial offices of the colonial powers which in turn nurture it in academic institutions, research centers, etc. Hence, Orientalism is an integral part of the colonial and imperial adventures of the Western powers.

The collaboration of the Orientalist discipline with colonial governments, to Said, is an embodiment of the ‘knowledge as power’ structure. Said further elaborates that Orientalism is a much politicized discipline. This, according to Said, can be seen in the political concerns of individual authors and their receptivity to the idea of empire.

The broad scope of Orientalism as delineated by Said generates a further distinction between what he termed “latent” as opposed to “manifest” Orientalism. The first category refers to the “almost unconscious….positivity” whereas the latter refers to “the various stated views about Oriental society,
languages, literatures, history, sociology, and so forth” (p. 206). Latent Orientalism refers to the general perceptions of the Orient that has become part of the European culture, and hence it is a static fixed image. This is repeated as conventional wisdom in pronouncements on Islam by Orientalists. It is a dogmatic image of a quintessential Orient reduced to a set of traits. Manifest Orientalism refers to the varying representations of the Orient that are to be found in the works of various writers. It is the representation made by Westerners who had been to the Orient, had a first-hand experience of it that acquired prominence as Western territorial expansion increased.

Said assigns the last section of the third chapter of his book to American Orientalism. However, his treatment of American Orientalism is less nuanced than his treatment of the British and French schools. A primary problem is that Said tends to lump American Orientalism together with the British and French traditions with little regard to the peculiarities of the discipline in the United States, even though he was aware of it as he stated in his introduction to the book:

Historically and culturally there is a quantitative as well as a qualitative difference between the Franco-British involvement in the Orient and—until the period of American ascendancy after World War II—the involvement of every other European and Atlantic power[.] (pp. 3-4)

Said calls attention to the fact that area studies in the U.S. are politically oriented. In this respect, according to Said, that Middle East studies in the U.S. are more or less an extension of the European Orientalist tradition is beyond doubt. What is less obvious is “the extent to which the European tradition of Orientalist scholarship was, if not taken over, then accommodated, normalized,
domesticated, and popularized and fed into postwar efflorescence of Near Eastern studies in the United States,” as well as the extent to which a “coherent attitude” has been developed among scholars, institutions and spheres of discourse in the United States due to the absorption of the European Orientalist tradition, notwithstanding the apparent attempts to refine the discipline and the introduction of social science models (Ibid., pp. 294-295).

Said draws a distinction between what he designates “hard” and “soft” Orientalist schools functioning in the United States. According to Said, the differences between the two are not genuine ones. Both still adopt “diluted versions of the old Orientalism” in varying degrees and issues peculiar to them. However, “the principal dogmas of Orientalism exist in their purest from” in studies of Islam and the Arabs. These include the perceived difference between a rational, developed, superior West and an irrational, backward, inferior Orient; the unchecked use of abstractions derived from classical texts to explain the Orient or parts of it at the cost of neglecting direct observations and evidence drawn from reality; the timelessness of the Orient and its inability to define itself; and the conviction that the Orient is something to be feared or controlled (pp. 300-301). To be sure, these observations cannot be applied wholesale today to the American discourse on Arabs and Islam.

Said’s seminal study elicited a wide-ranging response from across the various academic disciplines. These were divided into two main categories: on the one hand, there were those who welcomed Said’s book as an overdue and much-needed work in a discipline that has been riddled with bias, prejudice and error. Some within this camp accepted some of Said’s premises and rejected
others. On the other hand, there were those who rejected Said’s critique out of hand and some were engaged in a prolonged polemic with him. It may be safely asserted that Said’s study is deservedly one of the most popular works written in the course of the last quarter of the twentieth century, and one of the most controversial at that.

It would be sufficient here to gloss over such responses without going into details. Generally, attitudes towards Said’s critique of Orientalism can be classified into various trends. First, there are those who, though some occasionally critical, endorsed Said’s argument on the whole (Talal Asad, Ernest Wilson, Hourani, Kabbani, Schaar, King, Turner, Lockman, McAlister, Behdad, S. Hekman, R. Lewis, Lisa Lowe, M. Al-Sagher, V. Das, B. Turner, etc.). Others, for various reasons, considered it invalid and wholly flawed (Lewis, MacKenzie, Melman, Kramer, Humphreys, D.P. Little, etc.). Still others, generally sympathetic, called into question various shortcomings and excesses in Said’s critique (Jalal Al-Azm, H. Hanafi, Fred Halliday, M. Rodinson, Aijaz Ahmad, D. Kopf, Malcolm Kerr, etc.).

Said’s work has had a lasting impact on postcolonial studies, anthropology, sociology, Middle East studies, gender studies, literary studies, etc. Before considering his reviewers, however, a word is in order about his thought, regarding Orientalism as expanded in *Orientalism*. Said’s critique of Orientalism is focused around the “us -versus-them” formula which is a recurring motif in much of Said’s work. This binary categorization is a focal point from which his critical assessment of the West-Muslim world encounter emanates. This obsession with the binary oppositions accounts for the failings of Said’s critical assessments and his failure to capture the wider relations in
that encounter. It blurred his critical insight and functioned as a constraint that prevented him from penetrating the surface and understanding the inner workings and insidious practices and rationales of imperialism American-style—notwithstanding his elaborate critiques of imperialism, especially expounded in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993)—of which he presented Orientalism as an inseparable part. Here especially lie the shortcomings of his approach to the American Orientalist discourse. Said’s critique of imperialism may be helpful in understanding the nineteenth- and first half of the twentieth-century imperialism. Far from challenging the norms of neo-imperialism, his central ideas unconsciously justify it, and even contribute to it, especially in his belligerent advocacy of a global culture. Hence, Said’s understanding of American imperialism, and American Orientalism for that matter, is deeply flawed. While acknowledging that some points raised by Said are still valid even today, as I will show later, American Orientalism does not fit squarely into his critique even at the time he wrote his book. There are many peculiarities—as I will show in the following section—that he simply missed, or declined to deal with.

A substantial number of studies has been carried out examining the Western perceptions of Arabs and Muslims generally in such diverse areas as the media, literature, political science, etc. The bulk of these studies are by far in literary studies, examining various writers, especially the perception of the ‘other’ in their works. Writers are usually treated separately without reference to the Orientalist discourse as propagated by scholars of Islam and the Arab and Muslim worlds. Other studies have also been undertaken in the field of
media representations of Arabs and Muslims with minimum references to the scholarship on the Arab world and/or Islam. Moran (2005) deals with the nineteenth century American constructions of the other in the process of constructing identity. Moran’s study concludes that the creation of the ‘other’ is part of defining the ‘self’.

Mishra (2006) finds out that American prestige press is in line with the discourse of Bernard Lewis, the eminent American Orientalist, to some of whose work references are made in the course of the study. The study examines the representation of Arabs and Islam regarding democracy in the American press. One of the significant findings of the study is that coverage of the issue of democracy in Arab countries is informed by biased views and preconceptions and expectations.

Brunson (2006) analyzes the black image depicted in the print and visual culture within the framework of American Orientalism in the course of the nineteenth century. The study examines the construction of a black image of the Islamic other and how it became an established icon in nineteenth-century American culture as well as in racism and American domestic and foreign policy. B. Edwards (1995) deals with American representations of North Africa in the course of the twentieth century in American culture and how these representations of the other are utilized for defining the self, especially in moments of crises. According to Edwards, this projection of the other to define the self is inherited from the European Orientalist tradition.

Bryan Turner’s unduly neglected study *Marx and the End of Orientalism* (1978) is a preeminent critique of Orientalism from a sociologist’s point of
view. Turner criticizes Orientalism for reducing Muslim societies to a quintessential essence, viewing those societies as stagnant and in a state of perpetual decline. According to Turner, the failure of Orientalism to grasp the dynamic reality of those societies lies in its embrace of dogmatic views about those societies, inscribed in Western consciousness and inherited from the age-old Orientalist tradition. Turner underscores the relapse of Marxism into that canonized picture despite its potential to transcend it. He further discerned the notion of difference as the bedrock of the Orientalist discourse, and regards his book as a personal contribution to decolonization. Ethnocentrism, according to Turner, has been a major problem of the Orientalist discourse and any progress in the field would entail going beyond this stumbling block.

Applying the approach developed by Samir Amin in the 1960s, Turner accrues the lack of development in Muslim societies to the center-periphery relations which are defined by the imperial centers. Besides ethnocentrism, Turner also points out to Western unilateralism which, in his view, is embedded in the capitalist system that is based on exploitation and appropriation of the periphery. Unilateralism, in the broad sense, covers not only the economic system, but also the discourses of othering. “Internalism”, Turner opines, is the way out of the Orientalist tradition and the production of a more nuanced and balanced knowledge about Muslim societies. Other necessary steps, in Turner’s account, are the elaboration of an adequate account of nationalism, ideology, classes, and revolution.

Turner criticizes Orientalism for adopting a Hegelian conception of history and applying it to the study of the Arab world. That conception assumes the existence of an “expressive totality”; that is, that all the institutions of a society are the
manifestations of an essence; that social development is the outcome of internal factors of a society; that historical development of a society is a process of either an evolutionary progress or a gradual decline. The result is that the Arab societies are defined not by their own peculiar features but by a series of absences: the lack of revolution, the lack of an Islamic city, the lack of civil society, the lack of institutions, the lack of freedom, etc. This series of absences is projected from Western experiences due to a process of decontextualization of indigenous experiences. According to Tuner, the Orientalist approach is empirically false and this fact doubles itself in its failure to account for the conditions of underdevelopment in the Arab world. Turner opines that Orientalism infects other disciplines such as sociology and anthropology in studying the Arab world. Marxism, therefore, has to cleanse itself of the influences of Orientalism before undertaking to reform Orientalism.

Clarke (1997) presents a different view of Orientalism. He found much common ground between the East and the West, even during the period of colonial expansion. According to Clarke,

> On the face of it, there is something deeply puzzling about the fact that the West, in a manner which is almost unique amongst major imperial powers, while exerting its hegemony over the East, has simultaneously admired it, elevated it, and held it up as a model, an ideal to be aspired to and emulated. … Much of the West’s perception of the East may have been clouded by fantasy and wishful thinking … the representations of the East by Western thinkers often tell us more about the latter than the former. (p. 6)

To Clarke, this does not negate Western colonial exploitation of the “peoples of Asia,” who were perceived as “the inferior complement of the West, its opposite ‘other’, the bearer of negative qualities whereby the West’s own superiority is by contrast underscored and its rule legitimized” (Ibid., p. 6). Clarke’s study, however, is concerned with South and East Asia, and therefore does not engage the Arab world
which makes a different case due to several factors including its geographical proximity to Europe, the ancient rivalry of two opposing worldviews, each seeing itself as the ultimate truth and savior of mankind.

Kabbani’s study (1988) fully confirms Said’s thesis as put forth in Orientalism. Kabbani even goes beyond Said in her condemnation of Orientalist myths and constructions of the Orient. She finds out that there are predetermined and fossilized representations concerning the Orient. These representations, rather than first-hand experience of travelers and writers, are the determining factor in Western views of the Orient. Kabbani endorses Said’s thesis wholesale. Her study gains momentum in gender studies. Melman (1992) contradicts Kabbani’s findings, proving that many Western women travelers were really sympathetic to the Oriental peoples. Schaar (1979) and Wilson (1981) also endorse Said’s argument in its entirety.

King (1999) supports Said’s thesis of an Orientalist construction of the Orient. He argues that Orientalism facilitated the imperial project through its depiction of the Orientals as degenerate people much in need of reform. Moreover, Orientalism draws binary oppositions of a timeless mysterious Orient as opposed to a modern rational West. MacKenzie’s study (1995) found Said’s thesis of a West closed on itself and solely maintaining stereotypical views of the ‘Other’ completely wrong. Both ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ were always in a process of modification. Orientalism in the arts was, according to MacKenzie, far from supporting imperialism.

Rodinson (1980) is a critique of Orientalism from within its ranks. According to Rodinson,

[1]here does not exist an Orientalist “science” whose limits have been defined by God or by the nature of things. What does exist is a multiplicity
of issues coming under the jurisdiction of many general disciplines. These issues emerge from varied phenomena found in certain countries previously grouped under the questionable rubric of the West. (p. 81)

Although Rodinson views Said’s critique of Orientalism as exaggerated and faulty at times, he does converge with Said on many issues such as Eurocentrism and the implication of that for the Orientalist discourse. He writes,

European society and civilization were held up as universally valid models assumed to be superior in all areas … but the factors active inside the fabric of Western society and civilization were taken out of context and rather mechanically applied to every society and era imaginable (p. 91).

Rodinson’s references to Europe apply to the United States as he made clear in his introduction to the book.

Rodinson criticizes what he terms “theologocentrism” which he regards as a leftover of the nineteenth century “theologocentric” approach to history, but which had survived to the second half of the twentieth century. He defines “theologocentrism” as

[...]ose schools of thought that believe that almost all observable phenomena can be explained by reference to Islam, in societies where Muslims are the majority or where Islam in [sic.] the official religion (p. 104).

Rodinson relates “theologocentrism” to conservatism which, he concludes, translates into essentialism.

In the ranks of Orientalism and MESA-based scholars, Malcolm Kerr (1980) responds to Said’s critique of Orientalism, accepting its general premises, while at the same time drawing attention to the slippery ground on which Said builds his critique, which led to his inevitable essentialization of the West.
The debate over Orientalism that emerged between Said and Bernard Lewis—who took upon himself the advocacy to defend the Orientalist tradition—soon relapsed into polemic. This is reflected in “Orientalism: An Exchange” in the *New York Review of Books* that poses Said and Lewis at the extreme ends of the spectrum. “The MESA Debate” (1986) that followed also revealed the extent to which each was entrenched in his view and steadfast in his position. It merely confirmed the division that was inspired by the political affiliations of each of them.

The prolonged entanglement in the Orientalism debate proved endurable. Until the present Said’s book is still widely cited and referred to in academic discussions of studies of the Arab and Muslim worlds as well as in other disciplines. The book has elicited diverse responses over the last three decades. Said himself returned to the question of Orientalism in 1985 and engaged some of his critics and launched new criticism on some of the specialists in Middle East studies, particularly those who tenaciously upheld the old tradition such as Bernard Lewis, or who adopted a similar approach that can be labeled “neo-Orientalist” such as Daniel Pipes. The entanglement over Orientalism led many scholars to call for an exit from Orientalism in favor of adopting a cross-cultural approach, especially in an era of globalization. Two seminal studies in this regard are Turner (1997) and Fred Dallmayr’s (1996). Both argue for the need to transcend Orientalism and adopt multiculturalism.

In her study of American Orientalism, McAlister (2001) opines that culture and religion have been two important ingredients in the American study of and policy towards the Arab world. “Two factors, the presence of oil and the claim to religious origins, have been particularly important to these encounters,” (p. 1) and “have made
the Middle East central to U.S. nationalist and expansionist discourses” (Ibid., p. xiii).

She further points out that

[m]yriad types of representations—from news reports to films to popular novels—have influenced the understandings that Americans have had of their own “interests” in the region. Culture matters in these understandings because cultural productions played a significant role in making the Middle East meaningful to Americans, particularly after 1945, when the United States dramatically expanded its political, economic, and military power in the region. (p. xiii)

McAlister sees religion as an important factor that helped shape American views of and foster American interests, both public and government, in the Arab world (Ibid., pp. 1-2). Orientalism has influenced American perceptions of the Arab world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Yet, over the last fifty years, that perception has been more complex than the critics of Orientalism claim. While the Orientalist representations continued to exist, they were not the only representations. Even in “post-Orientalist” discourse, there were limitations. “Post-Orientalist logics undergirded U.S. global hegemonies, American nationalism, new forms of racism, and the appropriation of Middle Eastern histories, as well as hopeful engagement and unexpected alliances” (p. 270).

Lockman (2004a) reviews the state of the fields of Orientalism and Middle East studies in Europe and the United States, offering insights into the developments of the field of Middle East studies in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century.

**The United States as a Distinct Superpower: The World Order, Old and New**

In the wake of the Second World War, the United States succeeded the European empires of Britain and France as the most powerful superpower. Many factors contributed to the American ascendance to the superpower status: the
American involvement in the World War II and its military capabilities that decided the war in victory for the Allies. Besides, the United States already possessed the economic credentials necessary for a superpower status. This was coupled by fatigued Britain and France which emerged exhausted from the war. The declining power of the European empires was further exacerbated by the rising nationalist liberation movements in the colonies (Lockman, 2004a: 112).

The United States assumed a prominent role in global politics in an environment that posed many challenges for its newly-acquired status and was not conducive to enforcing its colonial yoke on other nations in the style of traditional empires. On the one hand, the bipolar order that emerged in the post-war era together with the intensive campaigns of decolonization dissuaded the United States from treading the beaten track of former empires, a path which had become shrouded in perilous adventures and uncertain, even disastrous, outcomes. The global order required a diversion of course and the construction of a new path to spread and consolidate influence and to shape the world order in a way serviceable to American imperialist ambitions, especially in what came to be known as the ‘Third World’, a term itself reflecting the Western and American predominance. The top of American priorities were opening the way for American investment and free market economy as well as ensuring a safe and lasting access to resources (Ibid., p. 113).

The United States adopted a new definition of itself in relation to the rest of the world. The Americans did not see themselves as imperialists, but as benefactors and champions of the ideals of democracy, peace, freedom, and modernization of the world. Indeed, the idea of imperialism itself is viewed negatively by a large number of the American people due to their own historical experiences. This last point is
invoked by the apologists for imperialism and is transformed into a discursive strategy in the apologia for imperialism. However, this is not to suggest, as the apologists for imperialism do, that the United States had been immune to imperialism prior to the World War II. Rather, the opposite is true. Despite the proclaimed American position of neutrality and isolationism, the United States was occasionally involved in imperial ventures especially in Latin America and its seizure of the Philippines. There was also occasional American involvement in treaties that guaranteed the economic interests of the United States, and even deployment of the naval forces as far as Gibraltar and the Mediterranean in the course of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth (Little, 2004: 229). From early on in their history, the Americans had a deep-rooted belief in the universality of their own system and cultural values. They embraced the idea of setting a model that the world cannot but follow. This is what came to be known as the “manifest destiny” in the course of the nineteenth century.

Except for brief periods of involvement abroad prior to the World War II, the United States remained mainly within its shores. It followed an isolationist strategy with minimum involvement in world affairs. Isolationism was the principle orientation of American foreign policy in the nineteenth century and informed much of America’s policy in the interwar period, particularly after 1935 when the Congress attempted to insulate the United States from aggravatingly perilous world politics through the enactment of the so-called “neutrality laws” (Jonas, 2002: 337). The aim of the founders of America was to preserve a burgeoning nation by steering clear of major involvements with the major European powers, focusing instead on promoting trade and commerce as pillars of national development. Trade was promoted by
agreements and military missions where necessary. The United States sought to pursue its interests unilaterally (Ibid., pp. 339-340).

Some scholars argue that imperialism is deeply entrenched within the capitalist system. According to this view, capitalism is intrinsically imperialist and without imperialism it cannot survive. The two are so interlocked that imperialism constitutes the pillar and mainstay of the capitalist system. Lack of imperialism would create immense problems to a capitalist superpower including inflation, lack of markets, and stagnant economy that would lead to the collapse of the capitalist state which thrives on exploitation. As Barroll (1980) observes, the capitalist system is based on the requirement to “expand or perish” (p. 186). According to this view, a powerful capitalist system is by definition imperialist. This view is particularly upheld by the Marxist interpretation of imperialism.

To be sure, imperialism predates capitalism; the former has existed throughout history whereas the latter emerged as a full-fledged system only relatively recently. However, the very synthesis of the capitalist system has an irresistible tendency towards imperialist practices. Capitalism has reached a stage when it can impose its economic pressures on the whole world, and hence has no need, for the most part, to resort to colonial rule. “The fully developed capitalist empire, which depends above all on economic imperatives, is basically the story of U.S. imperialism” (Wood, 2006: 13). The main goal of American imperialism is free access to global markets, and opening the door to U.S. capital—a process euphemistically called ‘openness’. This global domination through capital does not entail colonial rule or the direct domination of the colonial peoples, nor does it necessitate the disappearance of sovereign territorial nation states—as the theorists of globalization often assert.
Rather, “a stable global system of multiple states” is required “to maintain the kind of order and predictability that capitalism—more than any other social system—needs” (Ibid., p. 14).

Neo-imperialism can be easily draped in the discursive tropes of positive and appealing values. Its adoption of these strategies makes it antithetical to the old imperialisms and resistant to the criticism of traditional imperialism. On the surface level, it does not justify imperial domination, but seeks to deny it altogether. Penetration and exploitation rather than direct colonial rule are its mainstays (Ibid., p. 14). This indirect form of imperialism has culminated in globalization which is conceived of as a natural and inevitable outcome of the historical processes of the laws of the market (Ibid., p. 15). Nonetheless, this does not mean that neo-imperialism is exclusively based on economic exploitation. In fact, the preservation of the stable global system requires military, political, and ideological support to buttress the economic power. Due to its global reach and planetary scope, it requires the most massive military power than has ever been the case in order to effectively deter any challenges to its predominance. Neo-imperialism is something vague and all-embracing, like policing the world to make it more safe for capital. … its purpose is completely open-ended. So, the new imperialism needs not only an ideology to help sustain the right political environment in the global state system but also a justification for massive military power. … [yet] it needs an ideology to justify what amounts to a state of permanent war. (Ibid., p. 16)

Realists, on the other hand, locate imperialism within the sphere of power politics, accruing it to intrinsic human tendency towards domination, the temptation of power, a loose anarchic international system conducive to imperialism, and the pursuit of the vested interests of the state (Menon & Oneal, 1986: 178).
Imperialism American-style is subtly shrouded in humanitarian language. American interventions are portrayed as an altruistic endeavor so as to secure consent at home and silence opposition abroad. During the Cold War, American interventions were enveloped in a language of unselfish humanitarianism. The moral obligation of the United States as the leader of ‘the free world’ was to fend off the communist pursuit of a global revolution. Hence, those moral justifications for interventions in the Third World were based on ideology (Hippler, 1994: 31). The manufacturing of a ‘threat’ thesis was the principal pillar of the political and intellectual American discourse. The United States was constantly represented in that discourse as a beacon of freedom and human rights, of democracy and modernization. Yet, practical American policies were at odds with these proclaimed values (Chomsky, 2004: 34).

The prevention of the rise of nationalist regimes in the Arab world and elsewhere was and still is a primary American concern (Mitchell & Schoeffel, 2002: 64). The all-embracing American imperialist adventure is also supported by an equally significant “cultural imperialism” (Harvey, 2003: 56). The sustained efforts to integrate domination in various forms amount to what Said subtly calls “empire as a way of life” (Said, 1995: 32).

The disappearance of the bipolar world and the emergence on its debris of a unipolar one—euphemistically called the “New World Order”—brought a sharp increase of the American role in global politics. Most of the ideas that had buttressed the Cold War order were maintained and new ones were introduced; either incorporated or invented. The ‘communist threat’ was replaced by the ‘Islamic threat’. The U.S. made it clear that it was dedicated to purge the world of “Islamic terrorism” and the threat posed by “rogue states”. Discourse of democratization, human rights,
and intervention in humanitarian terms became a central theme in the post-Cold War era. These strategies of defining the enemy and the initiation of a new civilizing mission are two interrelated issues supporting the ideology (Hippler, 1994: 178-188).

The early 1990s were marked by a discourse of inter-dependence (Golub, 2004: 772) under U.S. leadership. The New World Order sought to establish the American claim to leadership and was shaped by the U.S. It was conceived of as an American world order. The so-called ‘shared values’ were in fact American values of free market economy, while ‘international cooperation’ signifies an international community willing to accept American leadership. The meaning of ‘peace’ also included the possibility of war to maintain the *Pax Americana* (Hippler, 1994: 89). The 1990s and 2000s became the period of “humanitarian interventions” shrouded in altruistic discourse (Chomsky, 2004: 22). The U.S. control of international organizations and the acquiescence of its complicit allies facilitated this task (Ibid., p. 32). The United Nations is instrumentalized by the dominant powers to the extent that it becomes in effect a “colonial body” (Hippler, 1994: 175-176).

The U.S. dominance of the world order gained increasingly in strength as did the U.S. sense of its role—which is portrayed as a mission—moving from emphasis on partnership to American leadership (Ibid., p. 89). The dawn of the twenty-first century witnessed a further development: U.S. disregard for its allies and emphasizing American unilateralism, even when this is opposed by other powers. A major shift was made in the discourse of the neoconservatives in their explicit expression of empire. Aided by the technological and information revolutions, globalization helped consolidate the American dominance on a global scale. It is the last culmination of the U.S. hegemonic project. Halliday (2001) remarks that globalization in its various
forms is almost indistinguishable from Americanization (p. 92). The “war on terrorism” reflects an inclination towards the use of force at will, disguised as ever in a discourse of humanitarianism and peace in an ongoing global crusade that is portrayed as “existential in nature and global in scope” (Brand, 2004: 3). Islam replaced communism as the threat, “the quintessential ‘Other’” and “the touchstone against which US citizens measure their collective sense of Self” (Pintak, 2006: xiv).

The project for the New American Century seeks to fasten the U.S. grip on global politics and ensure its unrivaled hegemony (Donnelly, et al., 2000). The rise of the neocons intensified the ideology based on a threat and enemy. Their intellectual mentor, the political philosopher, Leo Strauss, believed that politics is before all else a distinction between “us” and “them”, and that it cannot be stable unless it is based on an external threat. If no such threat exists, one has to be constructed (Drury, 1997: 23-24).

**Empire/Hegemony and Two Manifestations of Power**

The notion of “American imperialism” has often been dismissed as unrealistic and even hostile to the U.S. To support their position, defenders of imperialism American-style often invoke the issue of geographical expansion as the touchstone of imperialism; an issue, at any rate, in which the United States is not completely innocent. Harvey (2003) argues that

> From the late nineteenth century onwards, the US gradually learned to mask the explicitness of territorial gains and occupations under the mask of a spaceless universalization of its own values, buried within a rhetoric that was ultimately to culminate … in what came to be known as ‘globalization’ (p. 47).

Many scholars and observers have increasingly come to associate the United States with “empire”. Ignatieff (2003) remarks:
what word but ‘empire’ describes the awesome thing America is becoming? It is the only nation that polices the world through five global military commands; maintains more than a million men and women at arms on four continents; deploys carrier battle groups on watch in every ocean; guarantees the survival of countries from Israel to South Korea; drives the wheels of global trade and commerce… (p. 22).

Ignatief, also in the New York Times Magazine of 28 July 2002, writes, “America’s entire war on terror is an exercise in imperialism. This may come as a shock to Americans, who don’t like to think of their country as an empire. But what else can you call America’s legions of soldiers, spooks and special forces straddling the globe?”

Boyle (2004) observes that “the United States has succeeded to the imperial mantles of Rome and Alexander” and has become “the Emperor of the world” (p. 12). Chomsky shares this view of the United States as “empire” in many of his writings, especially since the early 1990s. Some senior U.S. officials endorsed the term “empire” in reference to the U.S. A senior Bush administration official squarely put this idea forth to a journalist, “We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. We’re history’s actors … and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do” (as quoted in Brand, 2004: 3).

Other scholars and policy-makers alike reject the notion of the United States as ‘empire’ on various grounds. To the scholars, the United States can best be viewed as a hegemonic power, while at the same time they acknowledge the domination and hegemony associated with the Pax Americana. Some scholars have even rejected the idea of hegemony itself either as discursive maneuvering—as in the case of the Orientalists and neo-Orientalists dealt with in this study—, or due to what they see as declining U.S. influence. However, according to Cox (2001), the U.S. has “special qualities as a great power” and cannot even escape the “imperial overstretch” (pp. 39-
Agnew (2005) argues that the two notions of ‘empire’ and ‘hegemony’ are often used interchangeably while, in fact, they are quite different (p. 13). To Agnew, ‘hegemony’ is a more accurate term in the context of American predominance. On the other hand, policy-makers reject the term ‘empire’ due to its negative connotations. Obama insisted in his Cairo Address to the Muslim world on June 4, 2009 that “America is not the crude stereotype of a self-interested empire”.

Whatever the case, both terms—‘empire’ and ‘hegemony’—do not constitute a problematic at the analytical level. Nonetheless, ‘empire’, when understood in the traditional sense of exclusively military expansion and the acquisition of colonies poses a challenge in the context of the American exercise of power and hegemony. The nature of global as well domestic American politics has made it difficult for the U.S. to adopt an imperial role in the spirit of traditional empires. Hence, the discourse on power has also expanded and incorporated new strategies to deal with new developments. These have also crept into the policy-makers’ conceptualizations of power. Richard Haass, former policy planning director at the State Department, argues that “the principal aim of American foreign policy is to integrate other countries and organizations into arrangements that will sustain a world consistent with U.S. interests and values” (as quoted in Ikenberry, 2002: 48).

That the terms do not present an analytical problematic is reflected in the huge proportions and various ways available for a potential American exercise of power and domination. The American project is colossal in scope; the U.S. plan is to “rule the world” as D. Armstrong puts it. According to Armstrong, the “overt theme is unilateralism, but it is ultimately a story of domination” (as quoted in Harvey, 2003: 80). This hegemonic project is clad in a rhetoric of “delivering peace and freedom for
all” (Harvey, 2003: 77), or what Chomsky calls “the fifth freedom” which he explains as “the freedom to rob, to exploit and to dominate, to undertake any course of action to ensure that existing privilege is protected and advanced” (1999: 7). Chomsky observes that when the “Four Freedoms” the U.S. claims to uphold; namely, freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear, are deemed incompatible with the fifth, they are simply “set aside with little notice or concern” (Ibid., pp. 7-8).

Furthermore, American hegemony is carefully disassociated from considerations of geography. Emphasis is placed on insubstantial notions that cannot be easily challenged such as the emphasis on “the American century”. By steering clear of the use of “the geographical language of empires,” the United States was able to preclude emphasis on American dominance that is often presented as the corollary outcome of historical progress. “In so far as it was beyond geography, the American Century was beyond empire and beyond reproof” (Smith, 2003: 20). The United States “did not acquire its imperial structure through denial: it simply used denial of geography and the rhetoric of universalism to hide its territorial engagements, more so from itself than from others” (Harvey, 2003: 60). The hegemonic project is further shrouded in attractive values. Neo-imperialism “has had to drape itself in new ideological clothes”. The defenders of neo-imperialism must conceal their advocacy of imperialism in the parlance of freedom and human rights, democracy, pluralism and inclusiveness, gender equality and development. Alongside these modernist tropes, some other advocates of imperialism have appealed to “timeless verities” such as culture and civilizations, allegedly in a constant state of conflict and clashes to sell out wars and justify imperialism as an inevitable consequence of historical progress,
while still others drew heavily on the supposedly beneficent legacy of European imperialism (Mooers, 2006: 2). Mooers observes,

the new ideologies of empire express the same contradictory combination of the retrogressive and the modern: of civilizational clashes and democratic ideals; of virulent racism and postmodern multiculturalism; of gender equality and religious oppression; of old-fashioned propaganda and new fangled forms of “soft power”; of torture and human rights (Ibid., p. 2).

There is really no ground to think of this rhetoric as a sincere commitment on the part of the United States. Hippler (1994) observes that such rhetoric “did not mean that the US was going to renounce power politics in its own interests and instead work in strict cooperation with other states to solve the world’s problems as an equal among equals”. There is no reason for the United States to follow such a moral course, renouncing its power at a time when it has overcome its greatest rival (p. 88). Harvey (2003) refers to this form of hegemonic imperialism as “ultra-imperialism,” which seeks to resurrect nineteenth century dichotomies of “civilized, barbarian and savage states in the guise of postmodern, modern and pre-modern states” (p. 209).

Antonio Gramsci’s notions of hegemony are relevant in the study of American policy, and for the sake of this study, American discourse on the Arab and Muslim worlds. Gramsci draws a distinction between two forms of hegemony; namely, hegemony by coercion and hegemony by consent (Hoare & Smith, 1971: 12). Gramsci originally uses these two notions of hegemony in relation to the state/society relations. However, they have been broadened in scope by scholars to analyze power relations between states.

“Soft Power” vs. “Hard Power”
American intellectuals have revised the notion of power, what constituted it, and how it should be exercised so as to enhance the hegemonic position of the power center and to preserve it in the long run. In a world dominated by mercantilism, free market economy and United Nations organizations, aided by cultural values and ideologies in the age of technological and information revolution, new sites of power emerge. These are no less effective than military leverage; they even exceed it in certain respects and circumstances. Thus, the power centers multiply and reduce the traditional—solely military—option to one among many. Joseph Nye, Jr. has developed a categorical expression of two manifestations of power; namely, “soft power” and “hard power”.

Nye’s conceptualization of power is grounded in the hegemonic context. According to Nye (1990), the traditional definition of power as the “ability to do things and control others, to get others to do what they otherwise would not” and, in a similar vein, the prevalent conception of power among politicians and diplomats as “the possession of population, territory, natural resources, economic size, military forces, and political stability” (p. 154) fall short of responding to new developments and neglect to make use of available opportunities. In Nye’s formulation, that definition of power was useful in earlier eras that required and relied heavily on “military force and conquest”. Nye emphasizes the role of technology, education, and economic growth which “are becoming more important in international power [Nye’s term for a hegemonic superpower], while geography, population, and raw materials are becoming somewhat less important” (Ibid., p. 154; emphasis added). Nye observes that the critical issue facing the United States is not its resources, a case that is guaranteed, but the extent of its ability to control global politics and entice others to
endorse its agenda and “do what it wants” (Ibid., p.155), hence, the need for a “more attractive way of exercising power than traditional means” (Ibid., p. 166).

Nye provides a new definition of power. Power, to Nye, is

the ability to produce the outcomes you want. When someone does something he would otherwise not do but for force or inducement, that’s hard power—the use of sticks and carrots. Soft power is the ability to secure those outcomes through attraction rather than coercion. It is the ability to shape what others want. ... Soft power can rest on the attractiveness of one’s culture, political ideals, and policies, or on one’s ability to manipulate other countries’ political agendas (2003a: 74).

The two forms of power are complementary rather than contradictory, “Hard and soft power sometimes reinforce and sometimes substitute for each other” (Ibid., p. 74).

Nye draws a distinction between “hard power” and “soft power”. As opposed to the “command” hard power, which is coercive, soft power resides in “intangible power resources” like culture, institutions and ideology (1990: 167). Hard power, in Nye’s argument, is not merely restricted to the military aspect, but also includes the economic factor; that is, it involves “inducements (carrots) or threats (sticks)” (2004: 30). Coercion is just one form of hard power (the military); the other is “inducement,” which is the manipulation of others’ consent by offering them economic aids. Soft power “rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others” through “getting [them] to want the outcome you want”. It “co-opts people rather than coerces them” (Ibid., p. 5). Soft power is “not merely the same as influence. After all influence can also rest on the hard power of threats or payments. And soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument, though that is an important part of it” (Ibid., p. 30). In sum, soft power is “the ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence”. Its resources are those “that produce such attraction,” such as “an attractive culture, ideology and institutions” (2004: 6-15). Thus, soft power not only
enhances the image of the hegemon, but also reduces costs to a minimum. Nye explains,

you can get others to admire your ideals and to want what you want, you do not have to spend as much on sticks and carrots to move them in your direction. Seduction is always more effective than coercion, and many values like democracy, human rights and individual opportunities are deeply seductive” (Ibid., p. x).

The sum of Nye’s argument—and this has crucial implications for the American discourse on the Arab and Muslim worlds—is that the so-called international ideals are diplomatic terms that constitute an integral part of the process of power accumulation rather than ends in themselves. Their value lies in their seductive appeal, no matter what happens next. They are a temporary stage, serving the hegemonic goal when hard power fails to achieve such a result. They are stripped of their meaning and vacated of the content they embody in the original value system. The values projected unto them reduce them to the level of the discursive; i.e. to their luster, and their appeal to and seduction of the target. The study seeks to relate the conceptualizations of power to hegemony and to examine the motivations behind adopting a particular approach to power accumulation.

**The Place of the Arab World in the Global Order since 1945**

The Arab world has loomed large in the American pursuit of global hegemony due to three factors: oil, the security of Israel, and, during the Cold War, its strategic location (Lockman, 2004a: 117-118). Focus was mainly placed on the potential threats to American hegemony in the region (Chomsky, 1999: 98), as was the case with the nationalist regimes, and currently the supposed threat posed by terrorism, the Islamists and ‘rogue states’. The American record of policy towards the Arab world reveals categorically the disparity between theory and practice. Since the 1950s, the
United States has been a staunch supporter of the authoritarian regimes and dictatorships that are deemed friendly to its interests, in spite of its claims to democratization and human rights. When it comes to the Arab world, the U.S. discourse of democratization is subdued to an emphasis on stability which means the preservation of the status quo. This even holds true at the level of discourse, let alone reality. The authors of the “Project for the New American Century”, for example, while asserting the American support for democratization around the world—a doubtful assertion, at any rate—are content to stress the American need to “maintain stability in the Middle East” without any reference to democratization in this case (Donnelly, et al., 2000: 14). Since the Bush Jr. second term through the present, emphasis has been placed on stability. Such exceptions of the Arab world are often presented in terms of “Arab exceptionalism” in intellectual discourse. The U.S. hegemony in the region is secured, *inter alia*, by its support for its regional proxies—the authoritarian regimes—coupled with an inimical attitude towards the agents of reform and nationalist tendencies, regardless of their orientation.

The last two decades have witnessed a policy of penetration often accompanied by military intervention where penetration is less effective. The creation of free markets and globalization helped appease the obstinate Arab countries and consolidate the American grip over them. Now the United States is determined to redraw the map of the region and reshape it anew. Some strident steps in this regard have been taken (post-Saddam Iraq), and some are underway (Iran and Syria). The American project is a ‘new Middle East’ free from grassroots opposition, from nationalist aspirations, a world governed by hedonistic pleasures, in which Israel plays the leading role and dominates the whole region economically and politically.
Theorists of imperialism stress the role of domestic politics in influencing the imperialist inclinations of powers. These include, *inter alia*, the lobbying of interest groups in a pluralistic society. The Zionist lobby has been one of the most active interest groups in the United States in influencing American policy towards the Arab world and Iran. This will be dealt with in the following section.

**The Domestic Political Scene in the United States: Faction Politics and the Zionist Lobby**

**American Domestic Politics**

The United States is an established democracy, genuinely based on pluralism. The multiethnic nature of the American society calls for a pluralistic system in a democratic state. The rights to organize along political and even ethnic lines is guaranteed and protected in the American legal system. The vibrant civil society of the United States functions within an atmosphere of total freedom and open system. Hundreds of NGOs based on ethnicity, civil and human rights organizations, professional guilds, religious and social movements, political and ideological organizations, etc. flourish in the United States. These are also known as interest groups. Truman (1960) defines an interest group as “any group that, on the basis, of one or more shared attitudes, makes certain claims upon other groups in the society for the establishment, maintenance, or enhancement of forms of behavior that are implied by the shared values” (p. 33). Several of these organizations have their own affiliated think tanks, institutes, scholars and colleges, which lobby on behalf of a certain state such as China, Japan, Russia, Mexico, Israel, Turkey, etc. These lobbies function legitimately in the American political system. Safran (1963) observes that ethnoreligious politics such as the interest group politics are “an inescapable
consequence of the pluralism and multiplicity of interests in American life” (p. 276). The American society is centered on communalist centers—collectivities and lobbies. Azmeh (2006) opines that in such a situation, liberty is devalued in favor of communal interests and configures the body-politic as “a coalition of communities” and turns politics into an arena for special pleading (p. 31).

Interest groups and lobbies play a significant role in the American political system. With numerous staffers and millions of dollars at their disposal, these lobbies—individuals and groups—influence elections (including presidential elections), government agendas, and legislations with the aim of advancing their own interests or protecting them from being influenced in the process of government policy. Their political functions center on two factors: donating money to candidates to the presidency and Congress to guarantee friendly relations with members of both the legislative and executive bodies, and recruiting lobbyists to influence legislation of concern to the interest groups. They engage in intensive public relations campaigns to indoctrinate the public and shape public opinion in a way sympathetic to their causes (Ness, 2000: xvii). Moreover, interest groups in the United States have become “so ubiquitous that it is impossible to understand modern American politics without understanding these groups wield in shaping the national political debate” (Ibid., xvii). The United States has come to be known as the ‘democracy of interest groups’. This is not a new phenomenon in American domestic politics. Rather, it has a long history in the American system. As early as the 1830s, the political theorist Alexis de Tocqueville drew attention to the tendency of Americans to organize in groups to effect political, economic, and social change (Ibid., p. xvii).
Interest group politics has proved a challenger to American democracy. According to Ness, the American “democratic system ... becomes muddied when powerful interest groups that represent a narrow issue, a single profession, or a small minority of the people play a decisive role in electing candidates and influencing policy” (Ibid., xviii). That interest groups have become an integral part of the American political fabric is reflected in the failure of the Congress to roll back the lobbyists and limit their influence (Ibid., xviii). Although the lobbyists cannot dictate the way members of Congress should vote, the threat of withdrawing future financing of campaigns for those in office, and working against them, translates into pressure to vote in favor of interest groups (Ibid., p. xix).

The Zionist Lobby

Mearsheimer and Walt (2007) define the pro-Israel Zionist lobby as

a loose coalition of individuals and organizations that actively work to move U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction. ... it is not a single unified movement with a central leadership, and it is certainly not a cabal or conspiracy that “controls” U.S. foreign policy. It is simply a powerful interest group, made up of both Jews and gentiles, whose acknowledged purpose is to press Israel’s case within the United States and influence American foreign policy in ways that its members believe will benefit the Jewish state. (p. 5)

Tillman (1982) refers to the Zionist lobby as “the most formidable of domestic political lobbies,” and further observes that it is “not a lobby in the conventional sense in which farmers, organized labor, the oil companies, the consumer movement, or the National Riffle Association is a lobby, with commitments to specific economic or social objectives.” Rather, it is “a commitment to a people and a cause, a commitment rooted in powerful bonds of kinship, in the memory of a common history and the conviction of a common destiny” (p. 54).
Much literature, especially in Arabic, and to a lesser extent in European languages, has been written on the exceptional power of the Zionist lobbies in the United States and Europe. Much of that literature is palpably antisemitic. It proceeds from the hypothesis of a Zionist conspiracy to rule the world. That literature relies on such antisemitic fabrications as the infamous Protocols of the Elders of Zion, which dehumanizes the Jewish communities everywhere. It is not uncommon in such writings, especially in Arabic, to find references to and quotations from the Hebrew Bible (The Old Testament), the Talmud and other religious sources. To say the least, such references and quotations are pulled out of context and applied carelessly as a theoretical framework and a background for the study of the Jewish communities and groups in Israel and the diaspora.

It bears equal emphasis that not all members of the Jewish community in the United States are Zionists or pro-Israel. Indeed, a substantial portion of them does not partake to the Zionist ideology, and some of them are outspoken anti-Zionists. This latter group includes rabbis and other prominent Jewish religious leaders, lay intellectuals, activists and ordinary men and women. Some of them, such as the late rabbi Elmer Berger, dedicated their whole career to a struggle against Zionism. Other prominent figures include Noam Chomsky, and in Middle East studies Joel Beinin, Zachary Lockman and Leon Hadar, to name only a few. Indeed, within the ranks of Middle East studies, it was Beinin who challenged the orthodoxy and dissented from the self-validating Orientalist approach to the study of the Arab world by establishing MERIP (Middle East Report and Information Project) in 1970, especially with regards to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Likewise, Zachary Lockman is an outstanding example of a dissident scholar who has shown a steadfast dedication to scholarly
integrity, challenged the government’s position, and responded to the lobby’s incursion on the field of Middle East studies.

A good many of the American Jewish community are uninterested in the Zionist idea as such, and their activities are limited to occasional donations and sporadic participations in the lobby’s activities, involving usually minor activities such as writing letters of protest. Their lack of enthusiasm for the Zionist ideology has induced some scholars to designate a new form of Zionism known as “check-book Zionism”. The majority of the Jewish community is fully integrated in the American society and most of them feel in their skin in being American citizens. And this applies also to the active members and groups of the lobby, albeit their staunch embrace of the Israeli causes have made them vulnerable to accusations of double belonging and dual loyalty.

Nor are the lobby’s individuals and supporters merely Jewish. In fact, gentile Zionists and sympathizers with Israel play a key role in the success of the lobby. Christian televangelists and other religious leaders are particularly significant in this regard. The roots of Christian Zionism are deeply rooted in the American idea itself. The early immigrants to America were persecuted Puritans who fled the oppressive religious intolerance of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Britain. They saw the New World as the new ‘Promised Land’. Even at the time of discrimination and oppression of the Jewish communities throughout Europe, they displayed a sympathetic attitude towards the Jews, a point which derives from their liberal interpretation of the Jewish scriptures (the Old Testament). Some Christian evangelists, however, are, to coin a term, Israelophiles. Their support of the Zionist cause and ideology is based on their belief in the ‘Happy Millennium’. They see the restoration of the Jews to Israel as a
preliminary for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The world of symbols, Judeo-Christian tradition and historical memory springs forth to the foreground and lends vigor to the mobilization campaigns.

The boundaries of the lobby cannot be easily defined. The members and organizations of the lobby are multifarious. Some are highly committed and embrace the Zionist ideology such as the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), and scholars such as Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, and Martin Kramer. There are sympathizers such as Congressmen, key figures in government, and scholars such as Fouad Ajami (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007: 113). Organizations and members within the ranks of the lobby include political organizations, think tanks, prominent individuals (businessmen, intellectuals, leaders, policy-makers, etc.). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into a comprehensive overview of the organizations of the Zionist lobby. Suffice it here to refer briefly to the most active ones. Several organizations functioning in the United States were established shortly after the establishment of the Zionist movement towards the end of the nineteenth century such as the Zionist Organization of America which was founded in 1898, and Hadassah that was established in 1912. The Zionist lobby remained relatively marginal in exercising leverage on American policy-makers until 1973 when the United States intervened and supported Israel with weapons and financial aid. Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that the Zionist lobby was completely marginal or did not have a remarkable presence in the United States before 1973. It had achieved that status around the declaration of the state of Israel. What facilitates the task of the lobby is not the Jewishness of its members, but rather
their Americanness, which coincides with the awareness of the U.S. policy-makers of the value of Israel as a strategic asset.

Since the 1960s AIPAC has been exceptionally active. It is by far the most effective among the network of organizations comprising the lobby. The lobby has been immensely involved in public relations campaigns, arranging trips for prominent American policy-makers and intellectuals to Israel, proliferating Israel-friendly ideas among the public, depicting a positive image of Israel as a democracy and a peace-loving nation, ensuring—and where necessary enforcing—media releases that are free from criticism of Israel, and where such criticism exists vibrant rebutting it. The lobby also ensures the lack of legislations that would affect the position of Israel. To a great extent, the activities of the lobby have remained within the legitimate sphere of the law.

The record of the lobby, however, is not an idealistic one. Lobbying involves corruption, culminating often in the payment of bribes, and where necessary, intimidation to silence dissent. It is often a disruptive activity in foreign policy as lobbyists tend to define national interests in self-serving ways, a process which translates into the preemption of the arena of public discussion in the attempt to enforce a standard narrative, or at least to make it prevalent. This suffocation of debate often snowballs into intimidation and hence threatens the fabric of pluralism and pluralist democracy. According to Tillman (1982), “the politics of faction or of “preemption” seems to dominate in the modern American political system”. In an atmosphere of intensified lobbying, the houses of Congress and the Senate came under the influence of the lobbyists and “largely ceased to be deliberative bodies” for deciding the American interests, and assumed a “brokerage”. The interests of a certain
group cannot represent the general “national interest” and the two cannot be identical (pp. 70-71). Tillman remarks,

In such a political environment, open debate, receptiveness to ideas, tolerance of dissent, and the common commitment to the general good, a “politics of variation” give way to factional struggle, mutual intolerance, the avoidance of debate so far as possible, and the insistent equation of factional interest with the national welfare which is to say, to a “politics of preemption.” Pressure rather than discussion becomes the catalyst of decision, and the legislature becomes a battleground of groups, preempting when they can, yielding when they must. Compromises are made, to be sure, but they are concessions to necessity rather than logic, and the individuals who make them are more likely to have been overwhelmed than convinced. (p. 71; italics in the original)

The Zionist lobby has also engaged in massive intimidation campaigns. A more serious issue is dual loyalty and giving precedence to Israel at the cost of endangering American interests, and even disloyalty to the United States. Many documented cases show that members and organizations in the lobby have been implicated in activities harmful to the interests of the United States and antithetical to the American values of pluralism, democracy, and inevitability of dissent. The case of Jonathan Pollard, a White House official who passed confidential classified information to Israel, is a well-known case in this regard. AIPAC has kept some dossiers involving some confidential intelligence records in transgression of the law. Since the 1967 war, the lobby has adopted a more aggressive attitude towards the critics of Israeli policies. Following the 1967 Arab/Israeli war, AIPAC became a significant and influential factor in shaping public opinion and U.S. Middle East policy (Beinin, 2003a). AIPAC sought to enforce a standard view of Israel in the media. Unfavorable references to Israeli policies, however factual they may be, are faced with disproportionate response. Likewise, the intellectual sphere is monitored. The intimidation campaigns and threats against the dissenting voices—including threats to life, which are not uncommon anyway—have dissuaded intellectuals to
follow a cautious line when dealing with Israel lest they should incite the anger of the lobby. Such attempts at enforcing consensus have proved more effective and enduring in the United States than in Israel itself. The late Edward Said was subjected to many such arbitrary practices of demotion and slander, his office at Columbia University was ransacked and his family members received death threats (Rubin, 2004: 37-38; Sallum, 2003: 271 ff). Similarly, Joseph Massad’s case at Columbia in 2004 was also a severe case of intimidation (Massad, 2005).

Recruiting of academics is also an arena in which the lobby gets involved. Columbia’s effort to woo historian Rashid Khalidi away from the University of Chicago in 2002 was faced by objection campaigns from the lobby. In a similar vein, the attempt by Yale University to recruit historian Juan Cole of Michigan was vigorously opposed by the lobby so that the committee had to drop the appointment (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007: 182-183). A more recent case involves the strong campaign against John Mearsheimer and Steven Walt who were requested in 2006 by the Atlantic Monthly—a prominent lobby outlet—to write a review article of the status of the lobby. When they completed the article, “The Israel Lobby,” the editor of the Atlantic Monthly declined to publish it. Determined to publish the article, the authors sought different journals which equally rejected to publish it either due to its length or content. More significantly, they did not want to antagonize the lobby, which would be harmful to their reputation and interests. The article was ultimately published by the London Review of Books on March 23, 2006, and was posted online at the journals website (www.lrb.co.uk). The wide range of interest it aroused and its denunciation by the lobby induced the authors to expand it into a book in 2007, still arousing more antagonistic campaigns against the authors and accusing them of
“antisemitism” (Ibid., pp. 183-184). To be sure, Mearsheimer and Walt were pro-Israel, but were very critical of the unrestricted power of the lobby. Such attacks are not restricted to academics and intellectuals, but also extend to prominent figures who have a high-profile record of dedication to Israel. Jimmy Carter is a case in point. When he published *Palestine: Peace, Not Apartheid* (2006), he was subjected to a harsh campaign of defamation and intimidation by the lobby, notwithstanding his record of supporting Israel, which he explicitly asserted in the book.

According to Mearsheimer and Walt, the unchecked power of the lobby is harmful to Israel’s interests (2007: viii). Because of the power of the lobby, candidates to high office pay attention to its wishes and are always careful not to antagonize it. It has become a tradition in the United States since Carter that the presidential candidates compete in their rhetoric of supporting Israel. This has led some observers to exaggerate the so-called ‘Jewish vote’ as if the Jewish community in the United States would form a bloc and vote unanimously for a particular candidate. In fact, no such trace of unanimity exists. The Jewish voters, like any others, have different political orientations and divergent interests to the extent that it is reductive to categorize them under any single rubric. The leftists and the religious reformists were even opposed to the Zionist ideology itself, especially in the early years of Zionism. The leftists regarded Zionism as an exploitative project aimed at the enslavement of the proletariat, while some religious groups objected to Zionism on the grounds that it was against God’s will, a view stemming from their belief that only a Messiah can bring Salvation and restore the Jews to the “Promised Land”; still others—religious liberals, such as Rabbi Elmer Berger—opposed Zionism as an
exploitation of the Jewish peoples and viewed the state of Israel as anti-Jewish. Berger (1975-76) elucidated these themes.

The power of the lobby derives from its efforts to exercise leverage in Washington, pressurizing the legislative and executive branches of the government through lobbyists and staffers and presenting support for Israel as the better way for guaranteeing American interests. On the other hand, it strives to channel public discourse in a certain direction by drawing on the founding myths of Israel (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006). Such myths are anchored in a moral argument. They include the absolute assertion that Israel is a bulwark of democracy in a region of authoritative regimes, thus concealing the apartheid system and the shortcomings of Israeli democracy; the assertion of a single Jewish identity while reality has revealed the inconsistency of such a claim even within Israel itself; the portrayal of the conflict as mainly Arab-Israeli—this even expands to include Iran and sometimes ‘Islam’ as a faith and monolithic community of believers. This latter point depicts a small state beset by an ocean of rage, hatred, and irrationalism. It obliterates the fact that the conflict is Palestinian-Israeli; and while it is true that Arab states were involved in the conflict, this situation has changed since the 1980s and especially after the Gulf War I. The Arab states now adopt at least a de facto recognition of Israel, if not a full recognition and diplomatic relations. For the last three decades, Israel has been entangled in wars exclusively with guerillas and non-state groups, beginning with its incursion into Lebanon in 1982. This reality goes even as far back as the 1973 war, the last war in which Israeli forces fought against Arab armies. It is true that some states such as Saddam’s Iraq and Syria remained antagonistic towards Israel, yet they did not pose a serious threat to it.
Such depiction of Israel as the underdog is meant to divert attention from its war crimes and violations of human rights and international law. References to the Holocaust and the long European tradition of antisemitism lend a sense of victimhood to the moral argument, whereas emphasis on common historical, cultural, and religious traditions solidify the sense of unity with the West; hence enforcing the moral argument. In other words, unconditional American, and generally Western, support for Israel is presented as an incumbent obligation, in part to compensate for guilt committed against the “the Jewish people,” and in part as the duty to assist a “people” that shares many commonalities, past and present, with the West against a vehement tradition of “new anti-Semitism,” as Bernard Lewis (1986: 236 ff) calls it.

Although it remains an essential ingredient of the Zionist discourse, the moral argument dwindles increasingly as the myths buttressing it fall apart and the consensus breaks down in spite of the Zionist attempts to preempt such cracks in the ideology. The inability of the Zionist argument to withstand the test of time is further accelerated by the fact that the Zionist ideology is a synthesis of disparate elements separated by a series of gaps leaving many issues either nebulously tackled or completely ignored. As these gaps came to be filled, it was inevitable for the Zionist discourse to go through a crisis. For example, it became clear that the Palestinians (Muslims, Christians, and even Palestinian Jews) constitute a solid nation belonging to the same ethnic and cultural group, living in their own land, and resisting attempts of denial and liquidation, while the Jewish communities even in Israel failed to constitute a single harmonious cultural bloc. Their various ethnic and cultural backgrounds multiply and are reflected in the social divisions in Israeli society. The discrimination against the Arabs in Israel, together with the various strata of
Ashkenazi Jews at the top of the social scale, followed by the Sephardim and Falashas at the bottom of the scale pose a challenge to the conception of Israel as a liberal democracy. The definition of the state along religious lines is a formidable challenge in this regard. In a similar vein, the very notion of Israelis as “Semitic” is at least shaky and inconsistent. Whereas the Zionists are quick to accuse their contesters of being ‘antisemitic’, they are inclined to stress their ‘Westernness—in fact Israelis see themselves as part of the West—thus undermining not merely their claims to the land, being as they are settlers coming from all corners of the earth, but also the sense of belonging and fitting into a region of which they do not consider themselves a part.

A parallel strategic argument is therefore required to make up for the deficiencies of the moral argument. Israeli leaders have unfailingly asserted the strategic importance of Israel as a cheap base for American (and generally Western) operations in the region, a barrack for protecting American interests first against communism and pan-Arabism and currently against “Islamic fundamentalism” and “rogue states” (Hadar, 2005: 178; Gerges, 2003: 83). Former Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, declared “We stand first today in the line of fire against the dangers of extremist Islam” (as quoted in Esposito, 1999: xv). Such rhetoric intensified in the wake of the 9/11/2001 events. The American support for the Jewish state springs from the official American realization of the strategic value of Israel as a base for American imperialism in the heart of the Arab world. The founders of Zionism and the founding fathers of Israel alike were equally cognizant of the fact that a Jewish state should be an integral part of the Western imperialist project and that if it were to survive, it should have a central function in that system. Eisenhower, for example, was enraged at the trilateral attack on Egypt in 1956 when Britain, France, and Israel attacked
Egypt following the Egyptian nationalization of the Suez Canal. He threatened to take the issue to the United Nations and seek the imposition of sanctions on Israel because, as he put it, “nothing justifies double-crossing us” (as quoted in Little, 2002: 176).

The special relationship between the United States and Israel can be seen in the unmatched American support for Israel in the political, military and economic arenas. The number of U.N. resolutions condemning Israeli transgressions and that have been vetoed by the United States is revealing. Between 1972 and 2006, the United States vetoed 42 U.N. resolutions critical of Israel (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007: 40). The United States was the first state to recognize Israel, only 11 minutes upon the declaration of the state of Israel on May 15, 1948. Successive American presidents unequivocally stressed that “special relationship” at every turn. The average annual American aid to Israel stands at $3 billion (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006: 183; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007: 26). Little (2002) observes that since 1948, “Israel and the United States became ever more deeply involved in a complicated “special relationship” that some observers have compared to a durable but informal alliance and that others have likened to an unstable common-law marriage” (pp. 77-78).

The commitment to that relationship is usually presented in moral terms. In 1977, President Carter expressed this view, “we have a special relationship with Israel. It’s absolutely crucial that no one in our country or around the world ever doubt that our Number One commitment in the Middle East is to protect the right of Israel to exist, to exist permanently, and to exist in peace. It’s a special relationship” (as quoted in Tillman, 1982: 53). In 2009 Obama made similar remarks, “America’s strong bonds with Israel are well-known. This bond is unbreakable. It is based upon
cultural and historical ties, and the recognition that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland is rooted in a tragic history that cannot be denied” (Cairo Address, June 04, 2009). The source of this commitment, as clearly reflected in these statements, cannot be simply attributed to strategic considerations. Explanation must also be sought in shared sentiments and values, obligation and affiliation. A plethora of factors, rather than a single one, account for that relationship. The American-Israeli bond goes beyond partnership to alliance which is based on a number of links—-invented at times—gluing them together. References to Israel as an ally are persistently expressed in official American statements especially since the early 1990s. Quandt (2005) assigns domestic politics, of which the lobby is a significant part, a major role in shaping U.S. policy towards the Arab countries, Iran and Israel, especially with regards to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (pp. 7-8).

The special relationship between the United States and Israel is a factor in the exceptional success of the lobby and not vice versa. Undoubtedly the efforts of the lobby to push American policy towards the Arab world and Iran in a certain direction are not always successful. The lobby’s protests against selling sophisticated weapons to Saudi Arabia often fail to frustrate the bargains. Similarly, the Israeli attempt to manufacture F-16 airplanes and the American stubbornness in preventing that move is not altered by the intensive lobbying efforts. Thus, Israel emerges for the most part as a dependent outpost of American imperialism in the region rather than as a fully independent state acting in its own right. The overriding category has been the protection of American imperial interests which coincide and to a great extent converge with the Israeli interests. However, this is not to say that the two are identical, as the lobbyists often claim, for the simple reason that no two states can
have identical interests. The tactics of ensuring those interests are not necessarily identical; what might be profitable to one party may prove disruptive to the other. As far as American foreign policy is concerned, the principal issue in the activities of the lobby has been striving over tactics, particularly as the value of Israel as a strategic asset to the United States becomes more and more questionable over the last two decades, a fact reflected in the two Gulf wars in which all that was desired from Israel was to keep away.

The crisis of the relevance of Israel as a strategic asset to the U.S. has left a vacuum that is filled by ideologically charged constructions of a new enemy and portrayals of Israel as standing in the firing line in the supposed combat. In addition to the ideologically constructed narrative, the rise of the neoconservative lobbyists and sympathizers to prominent positions in the successive administrations beginning with the Bush Sr. administration has made up for the vacuum in Israel’s efficacy as an ally that resulted from the end of the Cold War. The crisis can be seen in the new developments within the ranks of the lobby since 1989.

Many active individuals in the lobby became increasingly dissatisfied with the uncompromising attitudes fostered by AIPAC and other leading organizations within the lobby. They realized the need to navigate in a course consistent with the new developments in global politics and to secure a prominent place for Israel in the unfolding international order; thus ensuring the continuation of Israel as a strategic asset for and ally of the United States, as well as guaranteeing the position of Israel as a regional hegemon politically, economically, militarily, and culturally. This new role neatly fits in the New World Order which relies primarily on economic penetration and political isolation and even liquidation of states that are deemed inimical to the
The plan is no less than redrawing the map of the region and reshaping it in a way guaranteeing Israeli predominance as the plans for a “New Middle East” and its sequel “Larger Middle East” demonstrate.

Several institutes and think tanks boasting some prominent individuals and opinion makers were established to meet those needs. Prominent among them is the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), founded by Martin Indyk in 1985. Indyk had served as deputy director of research at AIPAC and grew dissatisfied with the image of AIPAC as a partisan organization in the public sphere. He recognized the need for an outlet that would be perceived as friendly to Israel but would also do more credible and balanced research on the region as a whole. There was also the need for exerting leverage on the executive branch of the government lacking in AIPAC that focused mainly on the legislative body (Beinin, 1993: 12; Beinin, 2003a). The establishment of WINEP expanded the influence of the lobby as it produced research relevant to policy issues. WINEP’s relation to AIPAC and other candidly partisan organizations and think tanks is clearly recognizable in the staffers and public relations (Milstein, 1991: 30).

The rise of the neoconservatives and their remarkably active presence in the American political scene especially since the mid-1990s touched off new developments in the activities of the Zionist lobby due to the confluence of the outlooks of the two on the tactics and formulations of the national interest of the United States. Hawkish and neoconservative think tanks, such as the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA) and the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), which was founded in 1997, adopted a tough military approach towards the Muslim world and beyond. JINSA’s senior staff and advisors included such
prominent figures in American politics as Dick Cheney, John Bolton, Douglas Feith, and Richard Perle who occupied high positions in the Bush Jr. administrations. Likewise, the PNAC included equally prominent figures (Beinin, 2003a). In 1996, just prior to the Israeli elections, JINSA issued a policy guide to the forthcoming government entitled, “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm,” authored by a group of the neoconservatives such as Douglas Feith, Richard Perle and others. The policy brief urged the Israeli government to repudiate the Oslo Accords and to pursue an expansionist policy including the annexation of the West Bank and Gaza. It also advocated a tough line towards Iraq, Syria, and Iran. In retrospect, the prescriptions outlined in the report became the official Israeli policy not only during the Netanyahu first tenure but have endured through the present. In a parallel orientation in 2000 the PNAC issued a report entitled, “Building America’s Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for A New Century” authored by Donald Kagan, Gary Schmitt and Thomas Donnelly. The report emphasizes the role of the military prowess and reliance on force alone to retain American unilateral hegemony, an approach followed by the Bush administration. What binds the two together is their identical outlook of expansion by conquest and destruction which set the stage for the invasion in Iraq and the similar pursuit after Iran and Syria, which did not materialize due to the debacle in Iraq. To be sure, the Lobby’s involvement in the Iraq war did not occur overnight. Lobbying efforts to make the case for the war went back to 1990, when Zionist pundits like Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes, as well as some key policy figures threw all their weight for making the war the only smart and viable choice. (Beinin, 2003a; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006: 210, n171 and n172: 244; Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007: 248-249).
In sum, the Zionist lobby attempts to sway American policy towards the Arab and neighboring countries in a manner beneficial to Israel. It seeks to do that from the vantage point of American interests. It defines the American interest in a way that leaves little doubt that the primary concern of the lobby is Israeli interests. The success of the lobby has been facilitated by a group of neoconservatives, some of whom lobbyists on behalf of Israel, who occupied key positions in the successive administrations. The crisis faced by the lobby due to the weakening of its moral and strategic arguments gives rise to the search for new threats and adopting a tough line towards dissenting views. The activities of the Zionist lobby that aimed to bolster its grip on the accepted discourse and maintain the status quo amongst the American public involved various activities of intimidation and muscle leverage to silence the voices critical of Israel.