Middle Eastern Studies: What Went Wrong?

Norvell B. De Atkine and Daniel Pipes

A pronounced leftist bias and the proclivity toward apologetics for enemies of the United States are problems that scholarship on the Middle East shares with other area studies. However, the tendency to overemphasize the Arab-Israeli conflict, to engage in severe factional infighting, and other traits are specific to experts in this field. The seriousness of these issues, as well as the potential influence of scholars on the understanding of a complex region, prompts us to look closely at the writings and statements of leading Middle East specialists. In parallel with critiques from the Left,[1] but for wholly different reasons, we find the current situation dismaying.

Leftist and Jargon-Ridden

The old saw about Marxism's having become the opiate of English and comparative literature departments is true—and it applies in spades to Middle East specialists. Scholars of the Middle East tend to write in the indecipherable hieroglyphics and arcane theories of their disciplines, relying on incomprehensible Foucaultean, neo-Marxist, deconstructionist jargon with limited relevance to the outside world. Hisham Sharabi of Georgetown University relies on the convoluted, quasi-Marxist theory of "petty bourgeois hegemony" and "neopatriarchal discourse."[2] Joel Beinen and Zachary Lockman fill their study on the labor movement in Egypt with discussions of "the world capitalist system," "the capitalist mode of production," "comparadors," and the "reactionary and parasitical class of large landowners."[3]

Even good books falter in the underbrush of leftist theories. An otherwise readable and reliable study by Issa Boullata (professor of Arabic literature and language at McGill University) on contemporary Arab thought stumbles badly when the author interrupts the account for a long-winded digression on "discourse analysis."[4]

The postmodern practice of stuffing the complexities of political science and history into bottles labelled race, gender, and class contributes to the erosion of analytical standards. The 1993 meeting of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) offered more papers on gender issues than on religion, economics, sociology, or language and linguistics.[5]

Norvell B. De Atkine is the Middle East Director of Studies in the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, Fort Bragg, N.C. The views expressed here are purely his own. Daniel Pipes is editor of the *Middle East Quarterly*, where an earlier version of this article first appeared. Please address correspondence to *Academic Questions*, 575 Ewing Street, Princeton, NJ 08540-2741.

Will someone inform the professorate that, at a time when Marxist institutes are closing all over Eastern Europe, the day has come to abandon the intricacies of neo-Marxist thought and return to the real world of politics and culture? Even Edward Said of Columbia University, a man of the Left usually laudatory of the postmodern and the theoretical, despairs of this trend, telling an interviewer that the MESA, the main professional body, "has been taken over by a younger generation of scholars who use modern methodologies, who are influenced by Marxism, by the computer, by all the up-to-date research tools, but whose field of interest is much more narrowly defined" than that of the older, more generalist observer of the Middle East.[6]

Personal Bias

Scholars tend to speak on behalf of vast populations—the Egyptians, the Arabs, or even Muslims as a whole. In general, however, their pronouncements lack proof; rather, personal views are embedded in what purports to be reasoned academic analysis. For example, in a presentation at the Middle East Institute (MEI) annual conference in 1992, Yvonne Haddad, a specialist on Islam, lectured on what "Muslims think." She informed the audience that Muslims are aware of pejorative Western views of Islam and that these views, along with Western support for Israel, are the most significant barriers to an understanding between East and West. Perhaps so, but she cited no evidence for this interpretation.[7]

Fortunately, ungrounded assumptions are sometimes exposed. During the Kuwait crisis, scholar after scholar announced that Muslim antagonism to the U.S. position would lead to uprisings throughout the Muslim world. Mamoun Fandy of Mount Mercy College in Iowa compared Saddam Hussein to Saladin and foresaw the Iraqi leader's launching a widely popular jihad.[8] He also predicted an Iraqi-led revolt of the Shi'a throughout the Arab world.[9] Bahman Baktiari of the University of Maine foresaw a U.S. war with Iraq that would lead to upheavals in Iran and Saudi Arabia,[10] while Stephen Humphreys of the University of California blithely predicted "massive unrest throughout the Arab world."[11] Of course, these predictions proved completely wrong; no Iraqi-led jihad took place, nor massive unrest, nor even significant terrorism against Americans. This complete misreading of the mood in Arab countries suggests that evaluations by academics often derive more from personal predilection than from scholarly inquiry.

Curiously, such sweeping generalizations about Arab and Muslim thinking undermine the frequent charge, made by Edward Said and others, that Eurocentric Orientalists believe in an "essentialist" and monolithic Islamic world.[12] Those who make this charge then happily generalize about the Muslim world—and so engage in the same stereotyping they reject in Orientalist writings.

Admittedly, public opinion in the Muslim Middle East is not easy to discern. It hosts few polls of political attitudes, no Ahmad Limbaugh call-in shows, and, with few exceptions (Turkey in particular), little public discussion of political issues. Even where there are no constraints on the free exchange of ideas, social inhibitions can serve as equally pervasive deterrents. Given the difficulty of gauging public opinion, scholars should present their sweeping generalizations as speculations and not as conclusions drawn from hard evidence.

Factional Fighting and *Ad Hominem* Attacks

One would hope that scholars debate each other's ideas. In the Middle Eastern arena, though, arguments quickly turn into *ad hominem* attacks. A 1993 article by Joel Beinin, assessing the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), typifies this approach: "To enhance its intellectual legitimacy, WINEP has solicited minimal Arab participation. Paul Jureidini, a consultant specializing in terrorism and urban violence, is probably the most frequent Arab presence at WINEP."[13] Beinin here confronts not WINEP's intellectual product but the identity of its personnel, and he insults Paul Jureidini by presenting this astute American analyst of political-military affairs as merely a token Arab.

This factional infighting becomes particularly bitter in the context of the Arab-Israeli issue. Halim Barakat of Georgetown University simply dismisses as "Zionist scholarship" anyone who dares dispute his dubious vision of the Arab world as "a single overarching society."[14]

More than that, scholars turn one's view of Palestinians and Israelis into a political litmus test. For example, Fouad Ajami, the articulate interpreter of Arab culture and politics who teaches at Johns Hopkins University, has been subject to scathing attacks from Arab critics. In a review of his book *The Vanished Imam*, Asad Abu Khalil verbally assaulted Ajami, calling him a "neo-orientalist," an insult in Middle East studies circles.[15] Ostensibly, Arab critics find Ajami's scholarship faulty. In reality, they see him as too soft on the question of Israel and, worse, selling out to the enemy. He endured much abuse, for example, for attending a Jewish function.

Republic of Fear, a remorseless indictment of Ba'thist rule in Iraq that appeared in 1989, was written pseudonymously, its author fearful of retribution from the regime in Baghdad. After Saddam invaded Kuwait, and the book acquired renown, the halls of Middle Eastern scholarly convocations filled with speculation about the identity of the author. He must be an Iraqi Jew, went the usual thinking, for no Arab could write such calumnies about fellow Arabs. When the author's identity was revealed as that of Kanan Makiya, an Iraqi Shi'i, the speculation continued, but now with a different twist: "*Man warrahu?*" (Arabic, "Who is behind him?"). The anger at Makiya came out in reviews of his 1993 book, *Cruelty and Silence*. Eqbal Ahmad did not just attack the book but also the writer: "With his rationalization, dual lives, pseudony-

mous pretensions, ill-founded hates and self absorption, Makiya is a mess, just the type the media would find suited to personify the good Arab."[16]

With passions high, civility goes out the window. Edward Said dismisses Makiya as an "Uncle Ahmad" and insults Bernard Lewis of Princeton University as "too shoddy a historian;" he accuses Fouad Ajami of offering "unmistakably racist prescriptions" toward the Arabs and *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman of writing "racist clichés."[17] Though Said discredits himself more than his intended targets, these attacks on personalities rather than ideas impoverish the debate and diminish the stature of all scholars.

They also stifle freedom of inquiry. Those who do dare to speak outside of the scholarly consensus face caricature and vicious attacks. One academic characterizes those opposed to fundamentalist Islam (or Islamism) as "maliciously dangerous." These attacks also get personal. For his intellectual candor, Bernard Lewis is assaulted by Edward Said, who depicts Lewis's work as "polemical," "not scholarly," and "political propaganda."[18] Judith Tucker of Georgetown University skewered the contributors to a book critical of Islamism as having written articles "seriously marred by thinly-veiled racism and psychologism born of an apparently deep-seated fear, even loathing of their subject."[19]

Worse, someone with the wrong views often cannot find a good job. What William Ratliff wrote in this journal in 1989 about Latin Americanists applies almost word-for-word to specialists on the Middle East:

> Today centrists and conservatives with low public profiles can find positions on many faculties, and can publish with most academic presses. But those with high ideological profiles who speak out forcefully on controversial issues are unlikely to be hired for major faculty positions or to find many receptive major [academic] publishers, at least when they write on the debated subjects. By way of contrast, openly ideological leftists who loudly condemn United States regional policies often find that their activism enhances their stature and professional opportunities.... Under these circumstances, during the 1970s and 1980s, many outspoken centrists and conservatives... either withdrew from regular teaching, or never bothered looking for full-time faculty positions.[20]

With this kind of reception awaiting anyone who leaves the confines of groupthink, who can blame young scholars for sticking within the approved consensus? Interestingly, John Esposito of Georgetown University acknowledges the environment of intimidation that limits debate on Islam and democracy by averring that many scholars "privately" question the compatibility of the two.[21] Why privately? Because the professional cost is too high.

Funding Issues

Scholars of the Middle East are so infected with "country-itis"—identifying more with their subjects than with the United States—they take money from rogue regimes and not from agencies of the U.S. government. The MESA

board of directors urges members "not to seek or accept" any awards from the National Security Board (NSB), which administers the National Security Education Program–federal grants to scholars in foreign area studies in return for obligations to work for a U.S. government agency. A past MESA president, Barbara Aswad, expressed her concern for funding of American students in the Middle East under this program. Citing dangers to academic freedom, she endorsed a MESA resolution deploring "the entrance of the military into educational facilities."[22]

The ostensible reason given for avoiding NSB grants is that, because they are administered from a room in the Pentagon, they would taint the research of American scholars in the Middle East and possibly lead them into personal jeopardy. But, who is kidding whom? Middle Eastern political culture is so full of paranoia that any American scholar in the area is automatically assumed to be underwritten by "powerful forces." A return address at the Pentagon hardly makes any difference.[23] In essence there is much more *Man warrahu?* to the anti-NSB resolution than concern for academic freedom or the safety of grantees.

Further, when it became public knowledge in 1985 that Nadav Safran of Harvard University used money provided by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to write a book on Saudi Arabia, an apoplectic reaction followed, including an anti-CIA resolution by MESA. Ironically, MESA appears not to have a parallel prohibition on accepting funds from foreign states. Indeed, universities happily take funds from Arab governments. Libyan money finds its way to American schools and there are good reasons to believe that a Middle East studies program has been established at the University of Arkansas with funds provided by Saudi Arabia.

Preoccupation with Arab-Israeli Issues

Scholars tend to portray the Arab-Israeli conflict as the force driving all else in the Middle East. "Every major crisis in the region, including the Gulf Crisis," writes Hisham Sharabi, "has been directly or indirectly connected to the question of Palestine."[24] In a report on the impact of the Kuwait war, Shibley Telhami of Cornell University sees the two biggest issues as "Palestine and economic disparity."[25] Scholars on occasion go so far as to see Arab-Israeli issues as the key to developments all around the globe. The "new world order" resembles the old one in Meir Porat's view, in large part because "the essential composition of the Arab-Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts remains intact."[26]

More generally, scholars overemphasize Arab-Israeli affairs in their teaching and writing. A 1990 survey of Middle Eastern studies in the United States found that Arab-Israeli issues were predominant over all others: 73 percent of the courses emphasized the Arab-Israeli dispute, making it taught more than

any other topic. Nationalism in the Middle East was second with 68 percent; Islamism came in third with 59 percent.[27]

The avalanche of literature on the Arab-Israeli issue continues. A search through Ebsco Publishing's *Academic Abstracts* shows 1,440 entries on "Israel," 322 on "Palestine," 220 on the "West Bank," 205 on "Gaza," and 177 on the "West Bank and Israel." In contrast, it lists just 533 on "Turkey" and 282 on "Iran." A mere nine articles deal with "Islamism."[28] The periodical *Middle East Policy*, whose stated purpose is "to provide a forum for viewpoint on recent developments that affect U.S.-Middle East policy," has printed ninety-six book reviews since the first issue of 1992. Of those, nearly half (forty-one) were on Arab-Israeli issues.

This preoccupation with just one of the Middle East's many conflicts is not entirely surprising, for the U.S. government and media similarly overemphasize Arab-Israeli issues. But scholars are supposed to stand apart from domestic politics and group-think; their role is to understand the larger picture. Too much attention to the Arab-Israeli conflict limits their ability to do this.

Apologies for Islamism

The increasing power of Islamism, especially in Algeria and Egypt, makes it the subject of growing debate among Americans. Unfortunately, scholars of Islam tend not to assess it with balance and common sense. Instead, they see their role as countercultural apologists. Of this deeply radical and anti-American movement, John Alden Williams of the College of William and Mary writes that Americans "must become aware that these people [Islamists] are not our enemies, but our partners and potential friends, who can be talked to and who can be understood."[29]

Most proponents of the "potential friend" theory believe that bringing the Islamists into the tent and opening dialogue with them will result in their moderation. Lisa Anderson of Columbia University holds that participation in government will make the Islamists accountable to the people.[30] John Voll of the University of New Hampshire and John Esposito play down the extremist elements, emphasizing Muslim diversity and lack of central direction; Islamists seem to them not much different from Methodists down the street.[31] Saad Eddin Ibrahim makes this comparison explicit when he argues that "even the Islamists may evolve into something akin to the Christian Democrats in the West."[32]

Scholars argue that Islamists are a positive force from the American point of view. Ghassan Salamé writes that "the West should encourage the present [Muslim] regimes to gradually associate moderate Islamist forces with their governments."[33] Some scholars advocate a policy of facilitating the Islamists' rise to power in the hope that the burden of governing will moderate their appetites for power. For instance, Esposito writes that

> U.S. interests will be best served by policies that consist of selective and discreet cooperation with friendly Muslim governments, combined with a clear and consistent public policy concerning the rights of citizens to determine their future democratically.

He also holds that "contrary to what some have advised, the United States should not in principle object to implementation of Islamic law or involvement of Islamic activists in government."[34] But this is wrong. Islamists see Western culture as not just alien but hostile; they despise the West not just for what it does but for what it is. The intolerant and polarizing aspects of politicized and fundamentalist Islam need to be challenged. That does happen occasionally (Mahmud Faksh of the University of Maine asserts that Islamism cannot coexist with any other political system),[35] but not often enough. To most Middle East scholars, Islam constitutes a "contrived threat."[36]

This outlook fits into a pattern set in the early twentieth century, when educated elites provided legitimacy to the infamous Fascist and Communist regimes. Friedrich Hayek comments that "the way in which, in the end, with few exceptions, her scientists and scholars put themselves readily at the service of the new rulers is one of the most depressing and shameful spectacles in the whole history of the rise of National Socialism."[37] In like fashion, American scholars of the Middle East offer glib and facile defense of Islamist movements. Like the National Socialists, Islamists espouse a totalitarian system and seek to impose it on as many people as possible. While mildly critical of the intolerance of Islamism, its apologists then relapse into cultural relativism—as outsiders we lack the moral authority, or social knowledge, to judge another culture.

Anti-Americanism

Contempt for traditional America permeates much of the scholarly writing on the Middle East. It disproportionately blames the woes of that region on the United States. It conjures up an American "warrior culture." It criticizes allies of the United States and takes up the cause of her enemies.

Blame the United States

Avi Shlaim writes that the Middle East began the twentieth century under the Ottoman thumb and spent the next seventy years struggling against foreign domination, only to end up under the American thumb. "The leading actors changed but the old order survived."[38] In this scholar's imagination, Washington today rules the Middle East just as Istanbul did eighty years ago.

If that's the case, what can't the United States be blamed for? Eqbal Ahmad writes that economic inequality in the Middle East exists because Great Britain

and the United States "separated the wealth of the Arab people from the Arab people themselves."[39] Yvonne Haddad explains that Saddam invaded Kuwait because, in a masterpiece of entrapment, the U.S. government somehow lured him in and set him up for a beating.[40] Anne Joyce, editor of *Middle East Policy*, informs us that Jewish terrorists in Israel are a product of an American culture "in which young Jews learned to fear and resent their inner city neighbors. They went to the Israeli (wild) West Bank, where they could tote machine guns and harass at will."[41] The keynote speaker at the 1993 MEI convention, Richard Falk of Princeton University, wrote of an American culture "shaped by the commercialization of violence, an addiction to entertainment built around grotesque encounters between various idioms of violence, and a culture shaped by rising crime, official corruption, and pervasive fear."[42] To Falk, this miasmatic culture exalts in the projection of force into the Middle East.

Feminist writings tend to depict the United States as a villain. Aljouhharah Almayman, a Saudi panelist, said the U.S. government instigated the now-famous Saudi women's motorcade in 1990, then abandoned the women to the retribution of Saudi males.[43] Even when the West cannot be directly blamed, some immoral equivalency must be imputed. A film shown at the 1993 MESA conference equates Western treatment of women with female circumcision.[44] More broadly yet, Miriam Cooke writes in a book review that "the colonial experience complicated relations between men and women, so that it is only in the desert beyond the reach of the colonial arm that fear does not predominate and Islam can operate as it was originally intended for the benefit of women."[45]

"Warrior Culture"

If the United States is the villain of the Middle East, the U.S. political-military establishment is the root of evil. Scholars conjure up a malevolent American "warrior culture," where soldiers are high-tech killers. Falk holds that, from an American perspective, "the ideal war would be conducted by high-tech weaponry that could inflict damage and pain at will and face no threat in return."[46] Using quotes from journalists who themselves know nothing of war or weaponry (as David H. Hackworth notes, "Most [reporters] did not know a tank from a turd"),[47] academics describe horrific scenes of carnage and death with facile references to Nintendo. Contributors to the *Triumph of the Image* described the Kuwait war with such terms as "video games" and "shooting gallery."[48] Scholars barely conceal their anger toward the U.S. military for its part in the Kuwait war; in contrast, they portray Iraqis as misdirected peasants. George Gerbner of the University of Pennsylvania describes how

> poorly equipped and demoralized [Iraqi] troops sitting in trenches, caves, bunkers without air cover were napalmed and "fuel-air bombed" to deprive those inside of oxygen, and then they were bulldozed; dead or alive alike were buried in

> some seventy miles of trenches.... Defenseless convoys fleeing in panic were bombed and strafed into oblivion in what pilots called a "turkey shoot."[49]

Edward Said says that the media managed the war to provide "patriotism, entertainment, and disinformation."[50]

Friendly to Enemies of the United States

Anti-Americanism often implies a soft spot for the enemies of the United States. This goes far to explain why specialists overwhelmingly show sympathy for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Some go further and actually take its side in controversies with the United States. In the proceedings of a conference held in Tehran in mid-1988, for instance, Hamid Algar of the University of California, Los Angeles, salutes Iran for its "proud record of resistance to aggression." James Bill of William and Mary pays homage to its "tenacious and courageous performance." Richard W. Bulliet of Columbia University no doubt delighted his hosts by telling them that the Khomeini government threatened the West "not so much because of its own characteristics but because of European intolerance for any fundamentally different ideology."[51]

But when it comes to Iran, the most egregious case is surely that of Gary Sick of Columbia University. Beginning with an article in the 15 April 1991 *New York Times* and ending with a full-scale book published by a prestigious house,[52] Sick developed a huge canvas of details about an episode that never took place. On the basis of no evidence, he claimed that presidential candidate Ronald Reagan colluded in 1980 with Iranian mullahs to keep American hostages in Iran, thereby stealing the election from Jimmy Carter. Several journalistic investigations established beyond doubt that the conspiracy claimants were hoaxers.[53] Two congressional inquiries then confirmed these conclusions.[54] Despite all, Sick irresponsibly perseveres in his claim of foul play.[55]

Iraq, too, has its academic partisans. Stephen Pelletiere of the Army War College wears the little-disputed title of Saddam Hussein's chief apologist in the United States. Saddam threw Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr, his predecessor, out of the presidency in 1979, then stripped him of all titles; who other than Pelletiere would characterize Bakr as having been "anxious to step down"? Who else would deny Samir al-Khalil's contention that Saddam rules through fear? Or write about the invasion of Kuwait as though it were a lapse of judgment: "Saddam ought to have had better sense than to invade his neighbor"?[56]

Antagonistic to Allies of the United States

Complementing their dislike of the United States, scholars dislike American allies in the Middle East. In general, the closer the ally, the greater the animus. Saudi Arabia provokes less hostility than Turkey, which in turn suf-

fers fewer attacks than Israel. Scholars lovingly dwell on the negative about Israel, then wildly inflate it. Ian Lustick of the University of Pennsylvania sees fundamentalist Jews as the key problem in the Middle East.[57] Philip Mattar of the Institute for Palestine Studies deems Ariel Sharon "no less brutal than Saddam."[58] For Sara Roy, "Gaza's societal debilitation is due, in large part, to Israel's occupation."[59]

Anti-Zionism inspires some very odd analysis. Grace Halsell, an author on religious topics, concludes that, because they share certain Zionist views, Gush Emunim (the Jewish movement placing Israeli settlers on the West Bank) and Jerry Falwell (the American fundamentalist preacher) "both serve the same paymasters."[60] In her presidential speech to MESA, Yvonne Haddad responded intemperately to Bernard Lewis:

> How can one study the literature produced in the last forty years and not recognize Middle East anger at United States policy which acknowledges Jewish nationalism as a legitimate expression of Jewish identity but rejects Arab and Islamic nationalism as illegitimate to U.S. interests? How can a scholar disregard forty-five years of American attempts to control the Middle East?[61]

Anti-Israel sentiments so permeate academic discussion that scholars actually suspect foul moves when these sentiments are not strongly enough expressed. In reviewing a major collection of articles on fundamentalist religious movements, Jane Smith of the Illiff School of Theology in Denver castigates the editors for not devoting more attention to "U.S. support of Zionist policies" as a "major element" in the Islamist phenomenon. In a remarkable leap of logic, she then infers this to be the result of editorial pressure on the grounds that "It is hard to believe that the lack of attention to this reality [i.e., Zionism] does not have the support of the editors."[62]

In all, scholars of the Middle East—like their colleagues in other area studies[63]—feel estranged from American culture. They attack political leaders vituperatively. Yvonne Haddad describes President George Bush (on the basis of unnamed sources) as "protector of the thieves" and "the deceiver," while calling American intervention in the Kuwait crisis a matter of "duplicity and hypocrisy."[64]

Only too aware of their marginality in American political life, academics peevishly insult the general public. Rashid Khalidi, professor at the University of Chicago and a past president of MESA, perceives two views of the Middle East in the United States. One is "the informed view, which is the view of most specialists"; the other is what he calls "the hegemonistic view in Washington, particularly in Congress," which is for the most part "grossly misinformed."[65] In a similarly unpleasant mood, Richard Bulliet asserts that "Arab ignorance of the West pales beside Western ignorance of the Arab world, and Western theories about terrorism and fundamentalist conspiracies rival anything rumored in Arab coffeehouses."[66]

Middle Eastern Origins

Middle Eastern studies in the United States is increasingly the preserve of Middle Easterners. MESA's membership rolls indicate that 50 percent of the membership is now of Middle Eastern origin.[67] The 1994 annual meeting program indicates that at least 256 of 560 scheduled presenters were of Middle Eastern origin. Their presence has many beneficial effects, providing views perhaps not otherwise available. As Albert Hourani points out with reference to Qur'an studies, scholarly analysis of the text "cannot be done from outside, but only by way of the debate between 'modernists' and 'traditionalists' which has continued in every Muslim society for the last century or so."[68]

At the same time, indigenization has changed MESA from an American organization interested in the Middle East to a Middle Eastern one that happens to meet in the United States. This leads to several problems. First, when Middle Easterners predominate, they bring with them the region's conflicts and these become the debate. Iranian students regularly disrupted Middle East studies gatherings in the late 1970s, condemning the shah and insisting that everyone else do likewise. These days, the Turkish-Kurdish confrontation generates intense passions. Rather than demystify these conflicts, scholars from the Middle East tend to present them in a nativist fashion. Interesting and important as these arguments may be, they have little practical value for ferreting out core American concerns.

Second, Middle Easterners, led by Edward Said, often make the wrong and dangerously myopic argument that only an indigenous scholar can understand the Middle East; Westerners who study the region, often known as Orientalists, reflect vested political interests.[69] But this is nonsense. Just as foreign observers (including Alexis de Tocqueville and currently *The Economist* magazine) provide some of the most penetrating insights into American culture, so we believe, along with John Waterbury of Princeton University, "that it is important to see through the outsider's eye."[70] Further, as Waterbury acknowledges, Western scholarship of the Middle East remains the best. It is no exaggeration to state that nearly all the monuments to scholarship in the field of Middle East studies have been written by Westerners. (And much of the rest has been written by Middle Eastern scholars educated in the West in the traditional liberal spirit, such as Philip Hitti and Albert Hourani).

Third, the lead author's experience as an instructor in military schools leads him to conclude that it is very difficult to have a critical discussion of controversial Middle Eastern issues with Middle Easterners at present, for they display a hypersensitivity to criticism that nearly shuts off debate. The same applies to scholars of the Middle East, who infuse intense emotions and hyperbole into their scholarship.

Fourth, more than a few Middle Easterners come from countries where autocratic governments place constraints on their citizens. As Waterbury observes, the "political constraints on social science research" in the Middle East

"have never been stronger" than today;[71] there is no real academic freedom in the Arab world. These constraints then reach even into the United States and sometimes close free speech. Having family in the Middle East also prompts some scholars to hold their tongues. For example, virtually every scholar of Syrian origin interprets politics in his home country in a way acceptable to the regime. In the current climate of Islamist intimidation–real or perceived–there also appears to be much self-censorship on the subject of Islam.

There remains the most delicate issue of all: that many scholars, though American citizens, actively disassociate themselves from the United States. When Edward Said writes that "Palestinians today are separated by geography and by Israel's designs to keep us fragmented and isolated from one another,"[72] he seems to write only as a Palestinian, not as an American. This was even more the case when he told a Kuwaiti newspaper in 1989 that "the Israeli and U.S. Governments are our enemies."[73]

The expression of such sentiments are within a scholar's rights, but they show poor judgment, and most especially when they intrude directly into research. This is the case with Rashid Khalidi when he dedicates his study on the PLO "to those who gave their lives during the summer of 1982...in defense of the cause of Palestine and the independence of Lebanon."[74] The celebration of bloodshed is an even worse offense against civilized intellectual discourse, as when Harvard scholar Ayad Rahim, an American citizen of Iraqi origins and a self-proclaimed pacifist, openly admits hoping for "a great number of American soldiers to be killed" in the Kuwait war.[75] Unfortunately, it would seem that many scholars of the Middle East share Rahim's sentiments.

Many problems weigh down the field of Middle Eastern studies: a trend toward abstract and compartmentalized inquiry, personal bias, factional fighting, an obsession with Arab-Israeli issues, a reluctance to approach Islamism critically, a dogmatic anti-American outlook, a dislike of America's allies, and the home-grown Middle Eastern drift of the debate. What can be done to remedy these unfortunate characteristics?

Middle East scholars need to make special efforts to exclude the hot politics of their region from scholarly work. They should also resist the temptation to promote an ideological line; at present, pressures to conform push all but a minority into adopting similar attitudes. Finally, scholars need more contact with the life outside the academy. The university world has become so large and remote from the country that professors have come predominantly to write for each other. In the process, they have developed unhealthy jargons, political assumptions, and repressive habits.

Notes

1. E.g., *Middle East Studies: International Perspectives on the State of the Art*, ed. Tareq Y. Ismael (New York: Praeger, 1990), and *Theory, Politics and the Arab World: Critical Responses*, ed. Hisham Sharabi (New York: Routledge, 1990).

Here's one example of contrasting perspectives: Whereas we find an intense scholarly bias against Israel, Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael conclude "that the standard of objectivity in Middle East studies in the United States demands a decided bias in favor of Israel.... The scholar who rejects such a status quo is swimming against a powerful current." Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, "Middle Eastern Studies in the United States," in *Middle East Studies*, 14.

2. Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 125, 85.
3. Joel Beinen and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882–1954* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 8, 11, 449.
4. Issa J. Boullata, *Trends and Issues in Contemporary Arab Thought* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1990), 139–44.
5. *MESA Newsletter*, May 1994, 23.
6. Edward Said, interview, "Orientalism Revisited," *Middle East Report* (January/February 1988): 32.
7. Yvonne Haddad, "Islam and Politics: Contending Views," paper delivered at the Middle East Institute conference, 17 October 1992.
8. Mamoun Fandy *The Christian Science Monitor*, 17 August 1990.
9. Mamoun Fandy, *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 September 1990.
10. Bahman Baktiari, *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 December 1990.
11. Stephen Humphries, *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 December 1990.
12. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 96–107.
13. Joel Beinin, "Money, Media, and Policy Consensus: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy," *Middle East Report* (January/February 1993): 13.
14. Halim Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1993), 8, xi.
15. Asad Abu Khalil, review of *The Vanished Imam: Musa Al-Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon*, by Fouad Ajami, *Middle East Report* (January/February 1987): 46–47.
16. Eqbal Ahmad, "The Question of Iraq," review of *Cruelty and Silence*, by Kanan Makiya, *The Nation*, 9 August 1993, 183.
17. Edward Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969–1993* (New York: Pantheon, 1994), 316, 338, 289, 362.
18. Said, *Orientalism*, 316–17.
19. Judith Tucker, "Fearing Islam," *MERIP Reports* (February 1982, 32).
20. William Ratliff, "Latin American Studies: Up from Radicalism?" *Academic Questions* (Winter 1989–90): 70.
21. John L. Esposito, quoted in Karen J. Winkler, "Islam and Democracy," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 5 October 1994, 95.
22. Barbara Aswad, *MESA Bulletin* (July 1993), 17.
23. Actually, this perception has its advantages. The status of the lead author of this essay was considerably enhanced at the American University of Beirut from 1967 to 1970 when word got around—wrongly—that he was working for an intelligence agency. Several of the most vocally anti-American Arab students actually sought him out to offer their services.
24. Hisham Sharabi, "Consequences in the Arab and Muslim Worlds," in *The Palestinians and the War in the Gulf* (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine, 1991), 30.
25. Shibley Telhami, "Sources of Insecurity in the Persian Gulf," in *The Persian Gulf: Political and Economic Issues* (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Institute, 1991), 3–5.
26. Meir Porat, "Israel and the New World Order," in *The Gulf War and the New World Order*, ed. Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida Press, 1994), 363.
27. Lori Anne Selem, "The DANTES Survey of Courses in Contemporary Middle East Studies," *MESA Bulletin* (December 1992), 162–77.
28. *Academic Abstracts* (Birmingham, Ala.: Ebsco Publishing, April 1995), ver. 4.1.

29. John Alden Williams, "The Revival of Islam in the Modern World," *America* (13 October 1990): 240.
30. Report on March 1994 symposium at Georgetown University, *United States Institute of Peace Journal* (April 1994): 3.
31. John O. Voll and John L. Esposito, "Islam's Democratic Essence," *Middle East Quarterly* (September 1994).
32. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Civil Society and Prospects of Democratization in the Arab World," in vol. 1 of *Civil Society in the Middle East*, ed. Augustus Richard Norton (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 52.
33. Ghassan Salamé, "Islam and the West," *Foreign Policy* (Spring 1993): 33.
34. John L. Esposito, "Islamic Movements and U.S. Foreign Policy," in *Riding the Tiger*, ed. Phebe Mann and William Lewis (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1993), 202, 206. See also Leon T. Hadar, "What Green Peril?" *Foreign Affairs* (Spring 1993): 38, 42; and Eric Rouleau, *MEI Newsletter* (July 1993).
35. Mahmud Faksh, "Religion, Democratization, and Development in the Third World," (Paper delivered at the Association of Third World Studies Annual Meeting, Williamsburg, Va., 8 October 1994).
36. Hadar, "What Green Peril?" running head.
37. Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 190.
38. Avi Shlaim, *War and Peace in the Middle East: A Critique of American Policy* (New York: Whittle Books, in association with Viking, 1994), 9.
39. Eqbal Ahmad, "Portent of a New Century," in *Beyond the Storm: A Gulf Crisis Reader*, ed. Phyllis Bannis and Michel Moushabeck (New York: Olive Press, 1991), 20.
40. Yvonne Haddad, "Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm: The Islamist Perspective," in *Beyond the Storm*, 250.
41. Anne Joyce, "Editor's Note," *Middle East Policy*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1994).
42. Richard Falk, "Democracy Died at the Gulf," in *The Gulf War and the New World Order*, 42.
43. Aljouhharah Almayman, "The Gulf War: A Saudi Perspective" (Paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Third World Association, University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla., 2 October 1992).
44. *Rites*, directed and produced by Penny Dedmon (New York: Filmmakers' Library, Inc., 1990).
45. Miriam Cooke, review of *Both Right and Left Handed: Arab Women Talk about Their Lives*, ed. Bouthaina Shaaban, *MESA Bulletin* (July 1991): 56.
46. Falk, 543.
47. David H. Hackworth, "The Gulf Crisis: The Media Point of View," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* (December 1991): 182–91.
48. *Triumph of the Image: The Media's War in the Gulf–A Global Perspective*, ed. Hamid Mowlana, George Gerbner, and Herbert I. Schiller (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992).
49. George Gerbner, "Persian Gulf War, The Movie," in *Triumph of the Image*, 253.
50. Edward Said, "Thoughts on a War: Ignorant Armies Clash by Night," in *Beyond the Storm*, 1.
51. *The Iraq-Iran War: The Politics of Aggression*, ed. Farhang Rajaee (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1993), 196, 198, 216.
52. Gary Sick, *October Surprise: America's Hostages in Iran and the Election of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Times Books, 1991).
53. See especially Frank Snepp, "Brenneke Exposed," *Village Voice*, 10 September 1991; John Barry, "Making of a Myth," *Newsweek*, 11 November 1991; Steve Emerson and Jesse Furman, "The Conspiracy That Wasn't," *The New Republic*, 18 November 1991; and Frank Snepp, "October Surmise," *Village Voice*, 25 February 1992.
54. United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *The "October Surprise" Allegations and the Circumstances Surrounding the Release of the American Hostages Held in Iran* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992); Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union, *Joint Report of the Task Force to Investigate Certain Allegations*

Concerning the Holding of American Hostages by Iran in 1980 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1993).
55. *New York Times*, 24 January 1993.
56. Stephen C. Pelletiere, *The Iran-Iraq War: Chaos in a Vacuum* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 28, 122, 152.
57. Ian Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1988).
58. Philip Mattar, "The PLO and the Gulf Crisis," *Middle East Journal* (Winter 1994): 39.
59. Sara Roy, "Separation or Integration: Closure and the Economic Future of the Gaza Strip Revisited," *Middle East Journal* (Winter 1994): 11.
60. Grace Halsell, review of *The Revenge of God*, by Giles Kepel, *Middle East Policy* (April 1995): 139.
61. Yvonne Haddad, "Middle East Studies: Current Concerns and Future Directions," *MESA Bulletin* (July 1990), 6. Haddad was specifically responding to Bernard Lewis's "The Roots of Modern Rage," *Atlantic Monthly* (September 1990).
62. Jane Smith, review of *Fundamentalisms Observed*, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *MESA Bulletin* (December 1994), 171-72.
63. See, e.g., Ratliff, "Latin American Studies," and L.H. Gann, "African Studies: A Dissident's View," *Academic Questions* (Spring 1989).
64. Haddad, "Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm," 253, 254.
65. Rashid Khalidi, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 January 1994.
66. Richard W. Bulliet, "Reform or Revolution," *New York Times Book Review*, 5 March 1995.
67. Barbara C. Aswad, "Arab Americans: Those Who Followed Columbus," *MESA Bulletin* (27 July 1993), 16.
68. Albert Hourani, *Islam in Western Thought* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 55.
69. Said, "Orientalism Revisited," 32-36.
70. John Waterbury, "Social Science Research and Arab Studies in the Coming Decade," in *The Next Arab Decade: Alternative Futures*, ed. Hisham Sharabi (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1988), 300.
71. Ibid., 298.
72. Edward Said, "Palestinian Independence," *The Nation*, 14 February 1994, 192.
73. *Al-Qabas*, 7 October 1989.
74. Rashid Khalidi, *Under Siege: P.L.O. Decisionmaking during the 1982 War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), ix.
75. Ayad Rahim, "Attitudes to the West, Arabs and Fellow Iraqis," in *Iraq since the Gulf War: Prospects for Democracy*, ed. Fran Hazelton (London: Zed, 1994), 178.