US FOREIGN POLICY, ISLAMIST POLITICS AND THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

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**U.S. Foreign Policy, Islamist Politics and the Middle East Peace Process**
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**I. Introduction**
This study argues that it is high time for the U.S., the only surviving superpower, to develop a post-Cold War framework that would become the basis of new strategies and policies. As representative protest movements, especially the Islamists in the Middle East, that are on the rise and destined to exert influence on regional and local politics, the U.S. should come to terms with these movements; and it is now than never. As opposed to the misconstrued assumptions of the short longevity and unchanging violent nature of Islamic movements, the prospects of the Middle East and consequently U.S. interests in stability and security hinge, to a large extent, on the ability of the U.S policymaking establishment to reach a true understanding of and develop correct strategies toward Islamic movements as well as Islam.

The practical ramifications of such an understanding and strategies need to manifest in ([[1]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn1%22%20%5Co%20%22)) a fair and comprehensive conclusion of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and ([[2]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn2%22%20%5Co%20%22)) the development of an open and inclusive political culture to positively deal with the central questions of identity, religion, economy and democracy.

However, as a global power, the United State is still operating in, and its foreign policy establishment is still thinking of, the Middle East with almost the same Cold War strategies. Even after the second Gulf War, U.S. foreign policy has maintained, more or less, the same geostrategic policies toward the area: alliances with unpopular governments that serve U.S. interests, the control of oil, and the military superiority of Israel, while upholding either negative distance from or outright opposition to powerful transnational and local Islamist movements and nationalist states. In the new age of globalization, U.S. policymakers and their establishment cannot but take into account new emerging transnational social and political forces.  Focusing only on the technological and economic dimensions of globalization without paying due attention to new social, political and religious ramifications that feed into question of war and peace and legitimacy and power would be self-defeating for the policymaking establishment. It is detrimental to U.S. interests to pretend that U.S. policies could be maintained as if there were no global transformations, both ideological and political.

The U.S., which is leading the world's transition into a new order, can bring together its two contradictory international approaches to politics: realism and idealism. While realism is based on U.S capability to coerce militarily, which its has been applied universally as was the case in the second Gulf War and Eastern Europe and now Afghanistan and elsewhere, its idealism, or its moral authority to coerce, has been applied selectively, especially in the Middle East generally and the Islamist movements. The multidimensional complexity of this transition requires taking into consideration that the power and sovereignty of states are in a process of transformation due to transnationalization of economic, political, religious and ideological forces. While the boundaries between the local and the international is fast eroding, information technology is making traditional transactions, social interactions, political constructions and cultural paradigms deficient. Thus, while the realist approach still focuses its concerns with state actors, non-state actors as well as rising religious ideologies in the Middle East should be taken into consideration. While socialism and communism have lost their ability to mobilize, Islamism is filling the vacuum all over the Islamic world, from North Africa to Central Asia. And if stability in the Middle East is a U.S. objectives, it needs to redraw its policies in the area to include both state and non-state actors, and this would be an opportune case where the U.S. can bring together its realist approach with its upheld idealism that centers on human rights, pluralism and democracy.

That is made easier because the Middle East is largely under the influence of the United States. The end of the superpowers' rivalry has paved the ground for a genuine and long-lasting solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict. While Egypt and Jordan, on the one hand, and Israel, on the other, have concluded peace agreements, and while the Palestinians have periodically been engaged with the Israelis in talks over a final status agreement, and while Syria/Lebanon and Israel have also been periodically involved in a process of finding ways to end their conflict, the fate of the region is not yet and will not be settled by only signing formal agreements among governments or oppressing opposition to current governments.

For there are two sets of issues that daunt the area and that will have impact on the stability and security of the region, whether there is or is not a final formal treaty between the Arab governments and Israel.

The first set, religion and history, and, therefore, religious claims and symbolism, is going to shed doubts on the legitimacy and policies of both Arab governments and Israel, which will negatively effect Arab-Israeli relations, internal Arab and Israeli policies and inter-Arab attitudes and, therefore, long terms U.S. interests. Thus, one fundamental issue for the next few decades will focus mainly on identity questions that are carved out of religion and history.  As much as religious questions over land and identity have galvanized and split the public in Israel, Islamism has opened up the questions of legitimacy and the nature of the state. The U.S. needs to address such issues in the making of a comprehensive peace deal and a new Middle Eastern regional order.

One should keep in mind that when the historic "the Gaza and Jericho First" agreement was signed in September 1993 at the White House in Washington, D. C., in the presence of PLO Chairman Arafat, Israeli Premier Rabin and President Clinton, uproar and discontent were registered by all militant groups, Israeli and Palestinian. The main objections raised were religiously articulated, that is, the giving up of greater Israel or the Promised Land or Palestine, the eternal religiously endowed land.

The second set of issues relates to proper political representation, just economic distribution, and relations with the world, including the West and Israel. If one adds to all of this a generational shift in Arab governments with untested leadership and weak popular legitimacy, then the U.S has to deal with multi-layered levels of instability and danger. More complexity is infused into these sets of problems because of the changing nature of global politics and economics, or globalization.  Therefore, political Islam, or Islamism, intersects with this immediate generational change, Arab-Israeli conflict, and globalization. The future of Islamist movements, whether towards moderation or radicalism, largely depends on the future of democracy in the Arab world. If democracy is to take root, providing an atmosphere of tolerance and dialogue, people will necessarily give of their best. The opposite is also true. The historic example of a conceptual shift undertaken by the Palestinian Liberation Organization toward the U.S. and Israel and vice versa is telling in this regard. The PLO, which was treated for over two decades as one of world's foremost terrorist organizations, is today, after attending the Madrid Conference and signing Oslo Accords, a full partner in the peace process and has renounced the use of violence.

The study is divided into two main sections. The first section outlines and analyzes ([[3]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn3%22%20%5Co%20%22)) U.S. policies in the Middle East since World War II with emphasis on U.S. attitudes towards and views of Islamist movements and states, and ([[4]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn4%22%20%5Co%20%22)) the basic components in the making of the Islamist threat. It shows how the Islamic threat has developed in the foreign policymaking establishment.  The second section develops ([[5]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn5%22%20%5Co%20%22)) the context of Islamist politics and shows ([[6]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn6%22%20%5Co%20%22)) how and why Islamic movements have become transnational opposition groups. The ideologies of moderate Islamist movements are mainly concerned with issues of political representation and economic distribution. The underlying premise used by the dominant U.S. view of a monolithic Islamist movement spread throughout the Middle East is unwarranted. In fact, it obstructs the making of positive U.S. policies toward Arabs and Muslims and antagonizes most peoples of the area.

The vast majority of Islamist movements, whether in Turkey, Algeria or Egypt, are ready to play by the rules of the games. It shows that even Islamic states and movements are capable of positive ideological, political, and economic transformation and development, given the right context. This context is mainly influenced by the policies and actions of the United States and its allies.  For instance, given that Iran is now undergoing a process of positive changes that will be reflected positively on important Islamic movements and the Middle East peace process, the U.S. is well advised to support Iran's transformation.

**II. U.S Foreign Policy:**

**1940s-1950s**

Although the U.S. officials in the first part of the twentieth century supported the concept of self-determination and opposed the perpetuation of colonialism, in the second half of the century they looked with suspicion of populist third-world movements and ideologies. By the late 1940s, containing the Soviet threat and ensuring the security of pro-Western Middle Eastern governments were higher on U.S. foreign-policy agenda than coming to terms with third-world nationalism. The officials in the Eisenhower, Truman, and Kennedy administrations who advocated an alliance between the U.S. and local national forces as a means to contain Soviet expansionism were a minority.([[7]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn7%22%20%5Co%20%22))

U.S. involvement in Iran dates back to the early decades of the 20th century and especially to 1953 when the CIA organized the overthrow of the constitutional government of Mossadegh.  A bitter feeling of anti-Americanism developed with the return of the Shah and lasted after his overthrow and death.  Over the next 25 years, the U.S. armed and trained the Shah's brutal armed forces and oppressive intelligence services. Iranian-American relations have been webbed into a long history of mutual complaints and misunderstanding. The anti-Americanism of the Islamic Republic has been a direct consequence of long U.S. support for the Shah whose policies were, to say the least, repressive and unpopular.

In 1950, Iran recognized Israel as a sovereign state because the Arab states allegedly did not consult with it on the Armistice Treaty that was concluded. Since then Iranian-Israeli relations were based on strategic understanding, including issues relating to the economy, political affairs, and security and military concerns.([[8]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn8%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Both Israel and Iran became pivotal for the U.S. in the Cold War and were considered as policemen for the West. The alliance between Iran and Israel against nationalist Arab states like Iraq, Egypt, and Syria was set up for a geostrategic interests to protect oil resources in the Middle East and to prevent communist Soviet and Chinese infiltration. The bitterness towards the U.S. and Israel is the outcome of the excellent relations of the Shah with both Israel and the U.S. and their aid to his repressive government.

The Cold War, Israel's independence, declining British and French power in the region, and dependence on Middle Eastern oil reinforced the U.S. view to regard the Middle East as a route from West to East. The Truman and Eisenhower Doctrines declared U.S. responsibility in protecting the Middle East from Soviet expansion. To serve that mission well, the U.S had to send troops and supplies through southern Europe to meet its NATO commitments.

Enlargement of the U.S. role in the Middle East as a guarantor of stability added to the importance of the remaining bases. Since 1945, over 40 percent of U.S. deployments have gone through the Mediterranean. U.S. strategy centered on containing the spread of communism and the USSR strategy centered on containing the spread of capitalism. The Soviet Union tried to break that containment by developing strategic interests with countries like Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. The United States relied heavily on counties like Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey.

**1960s-1980**

On the whole, between 1960 and 1980, U.S. policy in the Arab world was framed in opposition to secular Arab nationalism. In fact, the U.S. tried to construct an alliance of Islamic states with sufficient prestige to counterbalance communism. The expansion of U.S. relationship with Israel, especially after the 1967 and 1973 wars, reinforced the importance of these bases, even though the United States began to lose access or face restrictions on its use of some facilities.

The 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the consequent Arab oil embargo, and the 1978-79 Iranian revolution and ensuring hostage crisis shocked many American officials and led to viewing Islam as a threat to Western interests. From an American perspective, the new Islamic resurgence was accompanied by the OPEC oil boycott, which triggered escalating oil prices and had an effect on the daily life of every American.[[9]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn9%22%20%5Co%20%22) The oil crisis of 1973 and the boom in oil prices that followed changed the balance of power dramatically, as financial power allowed the monarchies to stabilize their governments and subvert their enemies. The decision by Anwar Sadat, to give up the struggle against Israel further undermined the secular revolutionaries. They faded in the 1980s into old age, corruption and compromise. "Arafat's Palestinian National Authority is what is left of them."([[10]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn10%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Also, Libyan President Mu'amar al-Qaddafi employed Islamic symbolism to legitimize his populist rule and advocated Islam as the religion of the black man in Africa, which had an impact on U.S. view of Islam long before the Iranian revolution.([[11]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn11%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Following the collapse of the Shah of Iran's government in 1979, a "domino theory" developed within policymaking circles that envisioned the toppling of governments in Algeria, then Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and even Libya. A type of jihad against the West seemed to be growing. The Iranian revolution of 1979 has been most formative on the U.S. foreign-policy establishment and the public views of Islam. Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini called the U.S. the Great Satan. By holding 53 American hostages for 444 days, Khomeini Khomeini's Iran inflicted daily humiliation. It was under the impact of the Islamic revolution that Islamism replaced secular nationalism as a security threat to the U.S. interests, and fear of a clash between Islam and the West crystallized in the minds of Americans.([[12]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn12%22%20%5Co%20%22)) More importantly, the U.S. feared destabilization of the Persian Gulf region. At the end of 1979, for instance, Saudi Arabia was rocked by the two-week takeover of the Grand Mosque at Mecca by radical Islamists and in 1981 Egyptian President Sadat Anwar Sadat was assassinated, and bloody attacks against U.S. personnel and installations in Lebanon, Kuwait and elsewhere heightened U.S. officials' concern over the export of Iranian Islamism.([[13]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn13%22%20%5Co%20%22))

On the other hand, the Soviet invasion of Aghanistan in 1979 led the U.S. and its allies in the Middle East to mobilize anti-communist Islamic groups, especially in the Arab world. The Carter Administration attempted to use the Islamic groups against communist expansion and considered Islamic fundamentalism to be a troublesome issue but not at any event equal to dangers coming from the Soviets. However, the Reagan Administration adopted a much more antagonistic bent towards fundamentalism, though still viewing that the main global threat was emanating from the "evil empire."[[14]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn14%22%20%5Co%20%22) Iran gate was telling in that the American preoccupation was with the Soviets and that they were ready to work with Islamists to counter communist threats. While in the mid-1980s, the National security Council tended more to wanting to use Islamist groups against the Soviets, the State Department tilted more toward viewing Islamism as a threat of its own and tilted more toward Iraq in its war with Iran.([[15]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn15%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Connected to this situation was the disturbing prospect of the spread of weapons of mass destruction into the region. Libya obtained Scud-B missiles that could strike neighbors in northern Africa as well as Italian islands, and Iraq's missiles could be used against Israel. Widespread concern grew about its chemical weapons program, and some thought Egypt also might possess chemical weapons. In addition, there was concern that if an Islamist government came to power in one of these or other countries, it might be controlled or influenced by states such as Iran, which might supply such weapons or encourage militancy toward neighbors.(10) Such concerns became one of the arguments to support the development of ballistic missile defense capabilities that could shield Europe from attack from North Africa or the Middle East.([[16]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn16%22%20%5Co%20%22))

However, from the start of the Bush Administration in 1989 basic debates over Islamic fundamentalism emerged within the foreign-policy circles and establishment. Islamic fundamentalism had by then spread all over the Middle East and North Africa, including the rise of the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria and an Islamist takeover in the Sudan. The U.S. was alarmed by the successes of Islamic fundamentalism, and Secretary Baker expressed the U.S. dislike to see the success of the Islamic Salvation Front that could set a model for other Islamist movements. After the Gulf War, the U.S. tried to sell Turkey as the 'proper' Islamic model for Central Asia.([[17]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn17%22%20%5Co%20%22)) What survived from the Bush Administration is its pressure on the Likud government of Prime Minister Shamir to halt the spread settlements in the Occupied Territories and to participate in the 1991 Madrid conference and to reduce tension with Iran.

**1990s-present**

In particular, two basic trends in the United States circles have emerged early in 1990s on how to deal with and understand Islamic movements by the policy-making elites and institutions.([[18]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn18%22%20%5Co%20%22)) The American Administration has had within it different attitudes, while the State Department was generally more prone, in theory at least, to co-opt and include Islamic political movements in local political processes, the Defense Department looked at Islamism as an ideological and geopolitical threat that had to be eliminated. The trend that opposes the inclusion of Islamism is the most influential and includes most of the American media.

The reason behind this is that official U.S. thinking is constructed within polarized around internal and external contexts. One view that is dominant in the making of American foreign policy on Islamism is that all Islamists, both states and transnational actors, are radicals that pose a regional threat to the U.S. This trend calls for the elimination of Islamists views Iran as the center of a new world hostile to Western liberalism. A domino-theory effect is thus postulated. All that is needed is a Sunni Islamist takeover in one Islamic state in order to trigger a sea of change and anti-Westernism.(14)

In the views of Martin Indyk, efforts of pro-Western governments to improve their legitimacy through the ballot box seen only to provide opportunities for Islamists to capture power through legitimate means.([[19]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn19%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Jeanne Kirkpatriick said she had no faith in the Arabs' and Muslims' capacity to make rational political choices through the ballot box.(16) Judith Miller believes that free elections seem more likely than any other route to produce militant Islamic governments that are in fact inherently anti-democratic.([[20]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn20%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Thus, Islam could be viewed as a unitary, timeless, and monolithic threat. Iran, Sudan, and Iraq and many Islamist groups are represented as grave threats to regional and global stability.(18) These allegedly rogue states provide material and moral assistance to extremist Muslims who are bent on sabotaging the Middle East peace process and overthrowing the pro-Western Arab political order.([[21]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn21%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Also, think tanks moved into that kind of analysis. For instance, a study published by Cato institute in Washington, "The Green Threat" by Leon Hardar, Bureau Chief for the Jerusalem Post, summarizes the need for creating a new enemy.  The end of the Cold War made the American Administration look for new enemies, including instability in Europe, the revival of European powers, new modern Russian imperialism and new nuclear terrorism. The "yellow threat" comes on the top of the new list of enemies, because of the economic threat that East Asia represents. Next comes the "green threat" which is represented by Middle Eastern Islamism.

Furthermore, the media followed suit. The Economist invented, for instance, the term "fundie" as a creature who looks like a religious imam armed with radical ideology and equipped with nuclear weapons with all the intention to declare war against Western Civilization.([[22]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn22%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Again, George Will believes that a major war between Islam and Christianity might well start again. This was part of his response to a question whether the West might celebrate in the future the Prophet's birthday. It is obvious from these two instances --and there are hundreds of similar comments([[23]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn23%22%20%5Co%20%22))-- that most of the Western Press attempts to instill in the Americans fear of Islamic movements.

The rise of political Islam in North Africa and in Egypt, as well as the rise of Muslim states in Central Asia in addition to Iranian and Sudanese foreign policies, has fueled up the push to picture Islamism and, along with it, Islam as the new enemy of democracy, the United States and the West.([[24]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn24%22%20%5Co%20%22)) A political commentator in the Washington Post said that Islamism is revolutionary and aggressive similar in its radicalism to the movements of Bolshevism, fascism, Nazism in the past. It is authoritarian, anti-democratic and anti-secular and cannot be absorbed in the secular Christian world. Because its objective is to establish the authoritarian Islamic state, the United States should smother it at its inception.([[25]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn25%22%20%5Co%20%22)) This picture of total confrontation and non-conciliation between Islam and the West has been strongly positioned in Washington, D.C. The developments in the American and Western press before the second Gulf War shows clearly how public opinion was being charged to accept any action against Saddam Hussein. Suddenly, Saddam Hussein became the most dangerous man in the world and the most important enemies of the United States after the Cold War. Iraq was portrayed as aiming at controlling all of the Middle East, a portrayal that prepared the way for public acceptance of the war as a strategic necessity.

However, still Saddam Hussein's threat was not identical to the "green threat," for while Saddam was considered as wild thug that broke the rules of the game and consequently endangered Western interests, he could be finished off. But he did not threaten Western lifestyles. On the other hand, the threat of political Islam is different in its nature.([[26]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn26%22%20%5Co%20%22)) The struggle with political Islam is treated as a zero-sum game, if political Islam wins the West loses and vice versa. The Islamic Republic of Iran is considered as a non-rational state that cannot be induced by traditional military threats and political co-optation. The struggle is therefore going to last for a long time since it is also viewed as cultural. As it was with the red threat during the Cold War, the green threat is seen as a cancer that destroys Western values. This is why the American people have been prepared for a relentless struggle and for imposing containment and, therefore, a new class of foreign policy experts on Islam is needed.

There seems to be many indications that the sporadic acts of terror as well as the practices of radical groups are being used in order to develop such a threat. The bombing of the world trade center was portrayed as the action of international terrorism. Tehran has replaced Moscow as the center of ideological and physical terrorism and military expansion; and Islam is replacing communism. A political commentator shows how Islam has been seen to be well suited to play the role of the bad guy after the Cold War, for it is large, frightening and anti-Western and lives on poverty and anger. It is spread all over the world and therefore the maps of the countries of the Islam could be shown on TV in green, as the communist countries used to appear in red.([[27]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn27%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Many factors that give credibility to the cultural and ideological Islamic-Western conflict can be identified, first among which is quite a few Arab governments and Israel. Most Arab states are afraid of some kind of alliance between the United States and some Islamist groups, since Islamists have posited the non-contradiction between the rise of Islamic states and the maintenance of Western interests in the area. For a while the Arab governments were chilled by the idea that the U.S. would give safe haven to Sheikh 'Umar Abd al-Rahman and a political platform to Hasan al-Turabi in the U.S. Congress--the former is now in prison implicated with the World Trade Center's bombing, and the second is identified with Islamic terrorism in North Africa and even Egypt.([[28]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn28%22%20%5Co%20%22))

The Egyptian government has for long called for curbing Iranian influence in encouraging Islamists. The U.S. has instead, and for a short period had contacts with moderate Islamist groups in the Islamic world. But when the New York bombing took place, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman denied any involvement, and his Jama'a saw in that bombing in addition to another bombing earlier that week in a Coffee house in Egypt an attempt to discredit it inside and outside Egypt and to eliminate any possibility of U.S.-Islamist dialogue.(27) After security apparatuses in Egypt accused the Sheikh and his group of being behind the strikes against tourists in Egypt and therefore implicated 'Abd al-Rahman personally, they raided the Jama'a's strongholds. Immediately after the bombing, the Egyptian President reminded the international community that he had already warned it from the danger of Islamic radicalism inside and outside of Egypt.

For the same reasons, the Council of Arab Interior Ministers held a meeting on 5 February 1993. The Egyptian minister of interior asked the conferees to be aware of the dangers of Islamic radicalism that beset all of them, for all of them are in the same boat. The Tunisian minister of interior condemned, of course, Islamic radicalism because it is a danger to the Arab and Islamic nation and because it aims at destabilizing all states and the progress of their nations. The Algerian minister of interior affirmed that the radical movements had chosen Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria as their targets. This is why the three countries put the issue of religious radicalism at the top of the list of their priorities on the difficulties that Arab governments should confront. On 4 March 1993, the Tunisian minister declared that his country took steps with regional and international organizations in order to contain radical groups. In order to convince their peoples and the international audience of the real danger of Islamism, Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria have publicly coordinated their efforts to curb the dangers emanating from Sudan and Iran. These three countries are also trying to market their views about Islamism and radicalism with other Islamic and Arab countries as well as the West in general. They have been trying to picture the existence of an international net of Islamism, where the Arab Islamist groups are organized by the Sudanese Islamist state and then try to connect this Arab Islamism to international Islamism whose base is Iran. An earlier summit of the leaders of North Africa puts its finger on the nature of danger: it threatens the stability of all North African states and its "democratic development."

The PLO, or now the Palestinian Authority, is not far away from the other Arab governments. The United States halted its dialogue with the Movement of Islamic Resistance (Hamas), and Hamas considered that such a development was unwarranted and irrational. This happened after the New York explosion where Hamas was also implicated with it. The PLO announced on 6 March 1993 its good reception of the news that the U.S. halted its relations with Hamas. The PLO justified its position on the ground that the U.S. wanted to split the unity of the Palestinian people and to force the PLO to give more concessions to Israel. In a meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister, the U.S. Secretary of State justified that act on the ground that Hamas had been committing terrorist acts.

Again, under pressure form Arab governments, Pakistan announced on 4 February 1993 that it would expel all illegal residents and that was made in reference to the Arab Afghans --that is the Arabs who fought the Russians in Afghanistan-- and was supplementing by a vicious campaign and expelled most of the Arab Islamists.

U.S. strategists and policymakers have been concerned with the role attributed by Arab countries --especially Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia-- to Iran being the fountain of international Islamism and the source of and support for all Arab Islamist groups. Iran is now pictured in the West, especially in the United States, as leading an Islamic alliance that aims at destabilizing the pro-Western governments and Western interests. For Iran's arm extends to very strategically sensitive places: Hizbullah in Lebanon, Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine and Israel as well as Islamic movements in Egypt and North Africa. Furthermore, what added to this danger is the CIA director's testimony that Iran is developing its nuclear capabilities in order to control many important areas in the world.([[29]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn29%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Within the Arab world, only Syria has escaped such incriminating charges towards against Iran as well as Sudan because it has considered that the challenges the Arab world is facing go beyond the Arab differences and those with Iran. For this reason, it has shown its willingness to mediate into those conflicts, because its strategic relations with Iran help Syria to focus on the Arab-Israeli conflict.([[30]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn30%22%20%5Co%20%22))

The second important factor in highlighting the danger of Islamism is Israel. It has redrawn its strategic role, after the elimination of the red threat, to become the only power that can halt the green threat from expanding. In the first summit meeting between the U.S. President and the Israeli Prime Minister, the former said on 16 March 1993 that the discussion focused on security matters of the region and the proliferation of nuclear weapons in addition of course to peace negotiations and the economy. President Clinton underlined the importance of curbing terrorist and violent activities. Rabin, on the other hand, spoke after the President and focused on the importance of confronting all sorts of bigotry that create destructive terrorism similar to the terrorism that landed on the American shores, and this was made in reference to the world trade center's bombing. He called on all the free nations to find a viable way to contain the danger of radicalism.([[31]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn31%22%20%5Co%20%22))

For Israel such a position serves as a justifying vehicle for putting down Islamic political movements in the occupied territories and Israel itself. Israel has for long, and since the collapse of the Soviet Union, shifted the focus of strategic danger from communism to Islamism in order to maintain its strategic value in the Western world and therefore preserves its special position in the Middle East. It wants to maintain it image as on advanced Western position that serves Western interests, while at the same time showing that Islamic movements are a new world threat that must be contained once and for all. The beginning of containment is, of course, in the Middle East. The President of Israel, Ezer Weizman, announced in Europe that the Islamist Hamas forms the main destructive force against the peace process in the Middle East, not the Arab-Israeli conflict, notwithstanding its importance.([[32]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn32%22%20%5Co%20%22))

The Israeli Prime Minister condemned Islamic movements and called for the containment of radical Islam as represented by Iran, Hizbullah, and Hamas--before then he focused on the containment of Iraq long before it actually happened. He added that the Sudan where there were many Iranians became the base for the Islamists of Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia. He warned against the fall of the Jordanian order because the Islamists would come to power, which lead--again, the domino theory--to the fall of the Egyptian government under the hammers of the Islamists.([[33]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn33%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Also, the American Jewish community has been able to develop a special and privileged relationship between the U.S. and Israel. The leading pro-Israeli lobby, AIPAC, has been able to lobby and mostly win the congress on all the concerns of Israel, not withstanding the deep division within the Jewish community into secular and religious, Orthodox and non-Orthodox, and hawks and doves.([[34]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn34%22%20%5Co%20%22))

To a large extent, Israel's view of Islamism influences U.S. perception. U.S. officials are responsive to Israel's definition of its security in the Middle East.34 In particular, the Congress plays a determining influence on U.S. policy toward the Middle East and is concerned over charges of terrorism, acquisition of nuclear weapons and the security of Israel and the Golf states. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich has called for a coherent U.S. strategy for fighting Islamic totalitarianism.([[35]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn35%22%20%5Co%20%22)) He also pressured President Clinton into approving in December 1995 of $ 20 million in covert aid to change the Iranian government or at least its behavior.([[36]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn36%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Religion has influenced U.S. policy in this region from its early history, when religious leaders hoped to bring the reintroduction of Christianity in the Holy Land and established a pattern of missionary work and American schools that has lasted to the present day.([[37]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn37%22%20%5Co%20%22)) The religious and intellectual challenge of Islamism continues to preoccupy the United States. For many people, Islam is perceived as hostile culture synonymous with the specter of the Islamic revolution in Iran.([[38]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn38%22%20%5Co%20%22)) But it would be misleading to try to explain U.S. attitudes on Islamic resurgence by only referring to cultural and historical factors. Other factors play a prominent role as well, and these include U.S. strategic interests: the resolution of Arab-Israeli conflict, access to Persian Gulf oil, support for pro-U.S. Middle Eastern governments, and opposition to terrorism and the proliferation of nuclear weapons.([[39]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn39%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Religion has reinforced a pro-Israeli stance in U.S. policy, whether because of the identification of American Jews with Israel's welfare or the interpretation by some evangelical groups that events in the region may present the stage for the end of world. However, while one can find anti-Islamic statements by American religious leaders, the characteristics of religion in the United States have isolated it from the memory of Islamic-Christian confrontation in Europe.([[40]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn40%22%20%5Co%20%22))

However, the Religious Right in the U.S, made of Christian conservatives, which constitute one-six of eligible voters, has more than 250 television stations and 1,600 Christian radio stations and had become visible since the Reagan Administration. Its belief in the necessity of complete restoration of the nation of Israel, including the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, as a prerequisite to the end of the present age that ushers in the second Coming of Christ and the establishment of his millennial reign, leads their followers to necessarily support Israel. While, Ironically, the Religious Right's vision ends with a mass conversion of Jews, many Jewish leaders and the Israeli government has welcomed the efforts of the evangelists. In 1998, Jerry Falwell promised to resist the American Administration's pressure on Israel gave back more land to the Palestinians.([[41]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn41%22%20%5Co%20%22))

But the European strategic perspective, which informs U.S. views, holds the Mediterranean as the stage on which Western civilization fought back the incursion of non-Western cultures. This image of the Mediterranean world is traceable to the Greek-Persian Wars of the fifth century BCE, but developed more by the legacies of the expansion of the Islamic faith into the Iberian peninsula, the impact of the Crusades, and the efforts of the Ottoman Turks to expand into central Europe. The legacies of these struggles survive today through the anti-immigrant rhetoric of Europe's political right, debates in some European political circles over the "Christian" nature of their societies, or even in mother's admonishment to children that they must behave or the "Turk" will get them.([[42]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn42%22%20%5Co%20%22))

It has therefore become clear that the slogan of an Islamic threat has gradually developed by two powers that are, though contradictory yet supplementary to each other in, highlighting the danger of Islamism. Israel, with its strategic importance in the Middle East, is making itself the defender of Western civilization. Many Arab governments, on the other hand, are in fact inciting Western fear of political Islam in order that Western powers allow them to maintain the governments' tight grip over their people.

However, in 1992, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Edward Djerejian announced, in an address that has became since the official U.S. policy statement about Islam, that the U.S. Administration does not support the formula of one person, one vote, one time.  He discredited the ideas that Islam is the new global threat and made a distinction between moderate and radical Islamists. The U.S. stands against extremism and radicalism, and not Islam.43 But such policy statements were not translated into practical changes either in strategies or objectives.

Under the Clinton Administration, the fear of Islamic fundamentalism continued but President Clinton has tried to reduce negative stereotypes about Muslims. Anthony Lake, National Security Advisor, perceived that there was a struggle between the forces of good and evil. The former is made up of reactionary blackish states, which include Iran, Sudan, Iraq and Libya that should be contained because of their sponsorship of terrorism and attempts to acquire weapons of mass destructions (WMD). The good forces are made of states that accept free markets, democratic expansion and control of the spread of WMD. Lake added that President Clinton rejected the theory of clash of civilization or the West against Islam.([[43]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn43%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Later, Robert Pelletreau, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, went beyond that and rejected looking at the phenomenon of Islamic revival as being one monolithic bloc and made a distinction between moderate and radical Islamist activists.([[44]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn44%22%20%5Co%20%22))

The test case was Turkey's moderate Islamist politics. The strategic interest of the U.S., which views Turkey as a frontline state in a global struggle between secularism and Islamism that would have impact on several states in the Middle East, the Caucasus and central Asia, have been served well by a secular pro-Western governments. After the second Gulf War, Turkey became a close partner of the United States in its regional policies and the third largest recipient of U.S. aid after Israel and Egypt. It developed as well its relations with Israel and signed several military agreements with Israel and pressured Syria on many issues, water, Kurds, and others.  This was an opportunity for Turkey to be considered in the supposed new regional order.

The coming to power of the Islamists in 1995 alarmed the U.S., whose officials were initially hesitant and uncertain about the attitude that should be taken. Erbakan assured the American of respecting regional American security interests, and the U.S., though worried, did not publicly object to an Islamist-based government in Turkey. However, the Turkish military establishment instigated Washington's fear of Islamism in order to abort the Islamist experience, citing the example of Islamic fundamentalism in Iran.

Again, pro-U.S. governments in the Middle East, especially Egypt and Israel, feared the example set by Erbakan. For the success of Turkish Islamist experiment and accommodation of U.S. security interests may lead the U.S., given its emerging rhetorical views on Islam, to couple it with practical policy changes. However, Egyptian and Israeli fears were misplaced. The moderate Turkish Islamist movement, Refah, received the most of votes, 21,4 percent. When its leader Necmettin Erbakan became prime minister in July 1996, he upheld all of the international agreements, including those with the U.S. and Israel. However, in August 1996, he signed a $ 20 billion natural gas deal with Iran, which the Turkish military establishment initiated and approved. He further antagonized the U.S. by visiting Libya and Nigeria. However, he came under persistent pressure from the Turkish military, and in February 1997 the National Security Council demanded Erbakan to control Islamist activities, all of which are focused on social and cultural reforms.(46)

When the Turkish generals waged a full offensive against the government, Erbakan tried to accommodate them in taking many actions, including the firing of hundreds of army officers accused of being Islamist, and having done that, the military still forced Erbakan in 1997 to resign and later in 1998 outlawed his Islamist party.([[45]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn45%22%20%5Co%20%22))

While the U.S. response warned against a coup d'etat and the need to maintain a civilian rule, it did not uphold its principles of supporting the freely elected government or criticism of military intrusions.  The response was in fact that the U.S. believes in secular democracy and that it understands that the Turkish military has a role to play in Turkish political life.([[46]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn46%22%20%5Co%20%22))

This view is due to the fact that U.S. experts on foreign policy that already started in early 1990s using Cold War terms to describe the struggle with Islam. They pushed for curtailing the Iranian threat all over the world, especially in Central Asia, and subjecting it to "Dual Containment Doctrine." This is why the U.S. Secretary of State visited some central Asians countries in order to draw the red lines that Islamists should not trespass. Also, a diplomatic communiqué in 1992 demanded that the Sudan stop its export of revolution and terrorism.([[47]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn47%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Washington has also welcomed the Algerian government's iron-fist policies towards the Islamists and its suspension of the elections. The notion that Islamists should be stopped somewhere and not allowed to cross over has become stronger and stronger because the domino theory has been used once again. Arnold Beichman, a researcher at Hoover Institute, argues, for instance, that Iran aims at geopolitical expansion through controlling the states of Central Asia, North Africa and Egypt and also the Gulf area. According to him, the basic strategic role for Iran is the control of Saudi Arabia. Therefore he concludes that the inability of the Arabs to control this challenge leads to the creation of a green barrier around the Middle East and the states of Central Asia which will become satellite states for a new order --Iranian-- whose basic rule is terrorism.([[48]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn48%22%20%5Co%20%22))

The bombing of the world trade center publicized further the danger of the green threat in many quarters of policy-making institutions. Iran was described as a rogue state that is developing its nuclear capabilities.([[49]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn49%22%20%5Co%20%22)) While other countries in the area has done more than Iran, American military and policy analysts do not consider, for instance, Israel and Egypt as rogue states: Israel failed to ratify the Nonproliferation Treaty and the 1972 biological and toxic weapons convention, which Iran signed, and Egypt failed to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention.([[50]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn50%22%20%5Co%20%22))

However, the Israeli doctrine of containing Islamic fundamentalism and Arab nationalism has "indirectly" led to the U.S. to conceptualize the Dual Containment Doctrine of Iran and Iraq.  The Dual Containment Doctrine has had two immediate consequences in creating a negative context: first, that U.S. forces have to be deployed in the Gulf for an extended period to maintain constant pressure against Iran and Iraq, and second, that Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states were militarily strengthened in order to balance other regional forces. Thus, the maintenance of formidable military forces in the Gulf region is now viewed as a virtual necessity. Weapons expenditure by Gulf states have exceeded that of Iran by nearly twenty to one. Saudi Arabia has emerged as one of the world's major arms purchaser, spending 36.4 billion dollars to buy weapons systems from the U.S. during 1994-1997. In addition, the U.S. spends around 50 billion dollars per year to maintain and equip its forces. According to the Pentagon, U.S. troops will remain in the Gulf for a period ranging from twenty to fifty years. The goal is to prevent threats to flow of oil that could challenge U.S. interests and destabilize oil markets.([[51]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn51%22%20%5Co%20%22))

The U.S. policy steps, for instance, in 1995 were of course not appreciated by Iranians. Steps included a veto at the Security Council nullifying 14 votes condemning Israeli seizure of land in Jerusalem, President Clinton's announcement regarding containment of Iran and the sanctions against business deals prohibited, for instance, Conoco from accepting a bid given to Americans as a gesture of good will. The deal was picked up by French oil company, Total. There was also the Republicans' call to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem. All of these actions are seen as moves to placate Israel and the pro-Israeli electorate in the U.S.

The reformist Iranian trend acknowledges the need for reestablishing relations with the U.S., the only superpower left after the collapse of the Soviet Union. President Khatami called in 1998 for breaking down the wall of mistrust separating the two countries through dialogue among civilizations. Many symbolic gestures have been carried out between Iran and the U.S., like President Clinton's conciliatory comments in April 1998, Albright's remarks to Asia Society in June 1998, and exchanges of scholars and sports teams. However, Khatami's efforts for rapprochement are opposed by the hardliners who prefer to maintain the status quo in the international arena, which would affirm their grip internally to serve their interests.  One should remember after all that Khatami's presidency is limited by the powers invested in the Supreme Leader.  Nonetheless, Khatami's popular and constitutional power should not be overlooked.(54)

Also, while the opposition to the peace process is focused on Iran, all Israeli governments have been under heavy pressure from right-wing and many religious groups that not to give back the occupied territories in Syria or the West Bank. And the possibilities of further violence in Israel are high, where Prime Minister Rabin's assassination is still a painful memory. Before the start of the Israeli-Syrian talks, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak came under renewed pressure from and was manipulated for domestic reason by Shas, which threatened to leave his coalition government.([[52]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn52%22%20%5Co%20%22))

In the past few month in 1999, a group of right-wing members of Congress and pro-Likud lobbyists worked on eliminating from the proposed budget for fiscal year 2000 to fund President Clinton's promises to Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan as part of the October 1998 Wye agreement with the purpose of adding new regulations that recognize Israel's claim to all of Jerusalem and placing new requirements on the Palestinians.([[53]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn53%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Fortunately, the funding proposals for support of the MEPP were passed. Furthermore, Israel has been again focusing on the military capability of Iran to develop ballistic missiles with Russian and Chinese support. Israel has been in position to exert great influence over U.S.-Iranian relations through the U.S. adoption of the Dual Containment Doctrine.([[54]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn54%22%20%5Co%20%22)) The U.S. has insisted that Iran should not support terrorism, should stop building its mass destruction weapons, and refrain from opposing the Arab-Israeli peace process.([[55]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn55%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Martin Indyk said on 14 October 1999 that the international issues on which the U.S. disagrees with Iran are Iran's support of Hizbullah and its weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile development programs. The Iranian response was that the U.S. was responsible for the wall of mistrust and that Indyk's views on weapons of mass Destruction (WMD) and Iran's role in the Middle East are unfounded and aimed at increasing U.S. arm sales and diverting attention from Israeli WMD.([[56]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn56%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Also, some analysts see a few motives behind Washington's latest opening to Tehran that range from economic interests to the pursuit of an Israeli agenda. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's March 17, 1999 speech to the American-Iranian Council in which she outlined U.S. policy changes seems to be a step in the right direction.  She acknowledged the mistakes committed by the United States toward Iran, including the important role it played in engineering the overthrow of Iran's Prime Minister in 1953, and the backing of the Shah's repressive government and the siding with Iraq during its 1980-1988 war with Iran. This apology is made in response to Iran's calls on the U.S. to show good will. Tangibly, this speech lifted sanctions on Iranian carpets and food products such as dried fruits, nuts and caviar.  It as well promised to work to resolve outstanding claims on an estimated $12 billion in Iranian assets frozen by the U.S. since the 1979. The motives behind this change of policy is the future stability and peace in the Gulf, including preventing further Iraqi aggression, containing instability and illegal narcotics in Afghanistan, encouraging stable relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan and regional economic cooperation, and protecting the Arab-Israeli peace process, and Tehran's abandonment of support for militant groups.

The containment of Iran has negatively affected some essential strategic interests of the United States while adding one more reason for intensifying Islamist opposition movements against it. However, the U.S. policy toward Iran is now undergoing major strategic changes that will most likely bring about fundamental transformation in the Middle East, the U.S..  The U.S. is moving into the right direction by encouraging the development of Iranian democracy as practiced during the recent parliamentary elections and consequently the reformist camp since such a move will work to consolidate the U.S. presence in the region and balance regional powers especially after the failure of the Dual Containment policy. In addition, the U.S. will benefit by the reformers' victory in Iran's parliamentary elections. For while Israel will not be effected directly by the reformists' victory in the short term, because the conservative camp still holds the centers of power, it will benefit in the long term by Iran's exerting moderating influence on Islamic movements. Again, positive developments in Iranian foreign policy and, in particular, Iran-U.S. relations will lead to gradual moderation in Iran's stance vis-‡≠vis Israel. The strengthening of Iran's reformists would help as well the U.S. to moderate its views toward political Islam.([[57]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn57%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Also, a moderate Iran may succeed in moderating Islamic opposition and open new opportunity for cooperation between transnational Islamic forces and the U.S.

Iran's introduction into a new regional order is necessary because there are regional limits on the exercise of Israeli power. Even Israel and Turkey together, both opponents of Iran, would be unable to contain general instability in the Middle East.([[58]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn58%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Iran and Saudi Arabia have clearly, although tentatively, explored some sort of regional security co-operation with the goal of limiting U.S. influence. The relationship is starting to move forward.

Symbolic steps are extremely important. For instance, U.S. support for a Muslim population against a Christian state in Kosovo was warmly received in the Islamic world and went a long way in showing that the official U.S. position regarding Islam has not been premised on hostility toward Islam.  Such acts of supporting repressed Muslim population will improve Muslims' perceptions of U.S. foreign policy and moderate Islamist views of U.S. hegemony over the world.([[59]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn59%22%20%5Co%20%22))

**III. The Context and Ideologies of Islamist Politics:**
The nature of the conflicts in the Middle East has been changing since it has been disconnected from the Cold War. As opposed to the propaganda about a global Islamic threat, most of the conflicts seem to be of local or regional nature with rare outbursts of global dangers. Previously, Arab nationalism under Egyptian President Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir seemed to be a regional ideology threatening the interests of the West, as was the case with other third world ideologies, most of which included different varieties of socialism, liberation theology and anti-Westernism. While Arab nationalism is still psychologically alive in the minds of Arabs, it is not anymore a viable vehicle of political protest and mobilization, even in countries like Egypt.

Egypt, for instance, represents the crossroads between globalization, Arab nationalism, traditional Islam and political Islam interacting with the boundaries of the nation-states whose ability to deliver to the populace is curtailed by its very structure and economic manipulation of the country' resources. Egypt wants to open up to globalizing tendencies; however, its structure is traditional and undemocratic. Egyptian Islamism brings together opposition to the ruling elites and their mode of consumption, discrediting traditional official Islam, and seeking an alternative based on reinterpreting Islam and the role of the state in terms of democracy and equitable distribution of wealth.

Nowadays, Arabism, Zionism and Turkish nationalism have lost their deep grip over their people as motives for political action and source of legitimacy. While nationalism is still dominant in justifying the ideologies of political elites, their populations, including Israel, are going through identity crises, "Is Israel a secular republic that happens to be ethnically Jewish or is it a Jewish state under Jewish law? This question is as likely to destabilize Israel as Islam is likely to destabilize Nasserite [nationalist] and monarchist Arab countries."([[60]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn60%22%20%5Co%20%22))

When the conflict between Arabs and Israelis had been at its zenith, it precluded the investigation of the soul-searching questions relating to identity and the nature of state. The perception of immediate danger and possibility of intense armed wars precluded the enquiry into the fundamental nature of states in the Middle East, including Israel, the Arab states, Turkey and Iran. These questions were sublimated into questions of survival and rights vis-à-vis other states in the Cold War ear. Again, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Gulf War II reduced external dangers and brought up internal dangerous questions that have been lurking in the minds of the Arab, Israel, Turkish and Iranian intellectuals in particular and the public in general. Is Israel a Jewish religious state and only Jews enjoy citizenship? Or is it a secular state that even non-Jews or Arabs can enjoy equal rights of citizenship? Is Egypt a Muslim country where minorities have no equal right, or is it a secular state where its citizens of diverse religions have equal rights? Thus, while the threat of external wars in the area have been reduced to a minimum, religious and identity questions are on the rise and likely to threaten the general status quo. Now, there is a thin but strong threat that ties together the religious aspirations of the peoples of the Middle East along with demands for a more equitable distribution of economic resources and representative democracy. Put differently, internal religious ideologies have cut across globalization (particularly in the sense of economic distribution and technology).

Even the nature of Turkish state, which has been forcefully secularized since the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, and which served for decades as a model for many secular, anti-religious nationalist states like Iran and Egypt, is being questioned today.([[61]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn61%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Because the elites of the Middle East are tied up to global powers, as represented by the United States and other major powers, for both their security and economy, basic questions are raised over the role of globalization and its impact on the nation-states. Most of the Middle East has been bereft of the benefits of technology and liberal economy, with the exception of the elites and their military auxiliaries. Even rich Arab monarchies that have not adopted earlier revolutionary pan-Arab nationalism and now revolutionary Islamism have problems with the way they derive legitimacy and distribute economic wealth.

The new geopolitical issues in the Middle East center on ([[62]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn62%22%20%5Co%20%22)) legitimacy of current governments, and ([[63]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn63%22%20%5Co%20%22)) the nature of peace between Arabs and Israelis. Thus, for instance, the Islamists reject the efforts exerted to make Israel the only regional superpower. In the minds of the Islamists, legitimacy and peace are interlinked. The religious struggle with Israel is upheld through confronting their respective secular and traditional governments that are themselves looked as subservient to global powers.  As protest movements, the Islamists pose a danger to existing governments in the Islamic world, including the Caucasus and Central Asia. Islamic movements have not been generally allowed to enter the legally established electoral processes. In most of the Arab world, if there were elections, their outcomes would either be falsified or cancelled, as was the case in Algeria when a majority voted for the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS).

By the mid-1990s, Algeria was viewed as a threat to regional stability in North Africa that might spell into Egypt and endanger the Arab-Israeli peace process.([[64]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn64%22%20%5Co%20%22)) The civil war in Algeria lead to the death of, at least, 80,000 lives since January 1992. The Algerian economy suffered from the repercussions of sharp drops in oil prices in the mid-1980s and from population explosion where 70 percent of the population was under the age of thirty and unemployment for young males reached about 75 percent.([[65]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn65%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Meanwhile, the Algerian government did not permit popular political representation or organized political opposition.  However, after the victories of the Islamic Salvation Front in the 1992 elections, the army forced the President to resign and annulled the results. Extreme horrific acts of terror were committed by radical militants, which sent shock waves all over the world, especially in the West. France, which has a sizable minority of Algerian descent, became frightened over the possibility of violence in Europe. While the armed wing of the Islamic Salvation Front renounced in June 1999 its support for violence and received a presidential pardon, the more radical Armed Islamic Group employs still terror tactics. And Algeria has not witnessed any dramatic changes to its socio-economic dilemmas.

Also, serious question over the legitimacy of the Tunisian and Moroccan states exist. While the former has suppressed the Islamists there is a great possibility of an Islamist come back.  While in the latter there are questions about the stability of the government after the death of King Hassan II, King Muhammad VI is attempting to deal with poverty and poor infrastructure.([[66]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn66%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Terror has decreased also partly because of Muslims' opposition to violence in different Islamic communities, splits within the radicals, and better techniques in combating terrorism.([[67]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn67%22%20%5Co%20%22)) And while it is true that the Arab states have curtailed the use of violence by radical groups, radical violent Islamist groups are not representative of the major non-violent moderate Islamist groups. The latter are mass popular movements seeking empowerment of people while the former are destructive by their very nature.([[68]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn68%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Beyond the radical projection of Islamist movements developed by both the Western and Arab media, there is another reality, which has not been well exposed. This reality, that presents a modern Islamist worldview that is adopts democracy, pluralism and human rights and that is not anti-Western is glossed over.

In a sense, all practicing Muslims are part of and provide cover for the non-violent Islamist current, even if there are no organizational affiliations. The increase in the religiosity of Muslims should not be taken as a sign of increase of potential violence.  Judging by the behavior of a few radical militant groups has misled policymakers.([[69]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn69%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Religiosity is vastly growing, as attested to by the increasing numbers of mosque goers, pilgrims to Mecca, and women in Islamic dress code. As opposed to many circulated talks about the dwindling of the Islamic movements, all indications signal the rise of general religiosity, which cater to Islamism. The diversity of the movements as well as their political behaviors reflects diverse political, cultural and economic conditions.([[70]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn70%22%20%5Co%20%22)) The fact of the matter is that Islamist movements do reflect socio-economic realities and are not isolated from their societies. Mostly, they represent popular frustrations, ambitions and demands that turn them into vocal opposition movements.([[71]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn71%22%20%5Co%20%22))

The main in classifying the moderation or radicalism of Islamic movements in this study is based on their acceptance or rejection of the doctrines of human rights, pluralism and democracy. Islamism contains two contradictory trends: one that is very radical, anti-liberal, exclusivist, and militant, and another that is very moderate, liberal, inclusivist and non-militant.  Many analysts have not been able to distinguish moderates from radical because both trends employ the fundamentals of religion, the Qur'an and the Prophetic Traditions.

Islamism is however an umbrella term for a wide range of discourses and activism that tends to move from a high level of moderate pluralism, and thus inclusive democracy, to extreme radicalism, intolerant unitarianism, and thus exclusive majority rule. While some Islamist groups are pluralistic in terms of inter-Muslim relations and between Muslims and minorities, others are not. Again, while some Islamists are politically pluralistic but theologically exclusive, others are accommodating religiously, but direct their exclusivist programs to the outside, the West or imperialism.

Islamists in general believe that their governments do not serve the ideological, political or economic interests of their peoples but those of the dominant world powers. Imperialism, colonialism, exploitation, materialism--all these are charges brought against the West. Liberalization, whether economic, political or cultural, as well as social justice, political freedom, and democracy are major demands of both radical and moderate Islamist groups. Modern national states have been considered by Islamists to be the link between what is unacceptable and inhumane in both Western and Eastern civilizations, namely Western materialism and Eastern despotism.

Again, the real issue in distinguishing a radical view from a moderate one revolves primarily around the conditions and principles of transforming a political agenda into daily life. Islamism employs diverse practical processes to intellectual and political formulas. Because radical Islamism perceived its own real and imagined isolation as a result of social disunity and exploitation, the political violence and illegitimacy of regimes, and personal impiety and corruption, it has reified, mostly under severe conditions of torture and mishandling, its political discourse into purified theology of politics. Both the radical groups and most of the regimes are committed to vicious recycling of violence.

On the other hand, the absence of a pluralistic civil society and democratic institutions are cited by the moderate trend as the real cause for violence. While this trend has for long been excluded from political participation, it still calls for its and others' inclusion into politics and formal institutions. Moderate Islamists are providing Islamic arguments for inclusion and absorption, not mutual exclusivity-- as some secular and religious radicals do in the East and West. The conflict between the East and West is viewed as primarily political and economic, not religious or cultural.

Thus it would be a strategic and historic mistake to treat all Islamic parties and groups as one movements. It is equally mistaken to inflame religious feelings and to mobilize religious doctrines to counter ideological and political difference at the international and regional levels. The Afghan Arabs, a designation used for many groups of Arab volunteers who fought the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Afghani communist government in the 1980's, is an example of misuse of religion and radicalism. The Afghan Arabs are part of the radical groups that are being pursued in Afghanistan and elsewhere since the horrific explosions that took place in New York and Washington on September 11 , 2001 by the United States, specifically, and the West, generally, with world-wide Islamic and non-Islamic official support.

In the international war against the communist takeover of Afghanistan and East-West conflict, they believed-and they were made to believe-- that they were launching jihad against the infidels. Most Muslim regimes and Islamic intellectuals as well as many countries in the West, especially the U.S., totally supported and armed this movement at its beginning and before the collapse of the Soviet Union and in order to curb communism and socialism.

After the end of the Soviet invasion, the Afghan Arabs split and supported different Afghani factions that have been jockeying for power. Many of them became catalysts in their own respective countries for armed revolt and activities against existing regimes. Furthermore, some have left for Pakistan in order to find a safe haven from their governments that have been pursuing them and linking them to home terrorism. However, most of the Afghan Arabs are not involved in terrorist activities. The Afghan Arabs include citizens of most Arab states, especially Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq. Afghanistan's official number of the Afghan Arabs is 6,170, but the actual number goes much higher (about 20,000) since many of them did not register and entered Afghanistan without procedural formalities. Furthermore, many of them used to work in Islamic and Arab philanthropic and educational associations.

There are two notorious organizations that include many of the Afghan Arabs. One is Jama'at al-Takfir wa al-Hijra or Jama'at al-Muslimin (The Muslims' Group), which allied itself with and influenced the radical ideology of the Algerian Armed Islamic Group. The other is Jama'at al-Khilafa, founded by Muhammad al-Rifa'i, who called for establishing an Islamic state on the borders with Pakistan. Other organizations include Black Turbans and the Group of Pure Nature, which upheld naive principles like prohibiting shoes and any footwear and cars. Some of the Afghan Arabs were implicated in the attempt on President Mubarak's life in Ethiopia where two of the alleged assassins were Egyptians from the Afghan Arabs.

Also, Ahmad Ramzi Yusuf , who is charged with masterminding the World Trade Center bombing, has connections with the Afghan Arabs. And those individuals who were accused of bombing the American mission headquarters in Riyadh in Saudi Arabia in 1995 had been in Afghanistan. However, one should not attribute the rise of radical and violent Islamic groups in the Arab world to the Afghan Arabs alone, since they-and even the Algerian Armed Islamic Group-grew up in their respective countries and not in Afghanistan.

In Jordan, al-Afghan al-'Arab are represented by Muhammad's Army. It is alleged that this group wanted to assassinate the Palestinian delegation to peace negotiations with Israel and Jordanian Prime Minister 'Abd al-Salam al-Majali as well as army and police officers and to blow up a large commercial center and movie theaters. Its membership is estimated at around 1,000.

Al-Afghan al-'Arab are also blamed for the explosion that took place at the American Military delegation barracks in Riyadh in Saudi Arabia. The four suspects belong to the Saudi Afghans who had fought in the 1980s in Afghanistan against the Soviets. The suspects had been affected by the ideology of Usama Bin Laden and Muhammad al-Mas'ari and the writings of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi.

Al-Maqdisi is now in Jordanian jails on charge of forming an illegal organization, Bay'at al-Imam (Oath of Allegiance to the Imam) and planning terrorist activities. He is Palestinian but brought up in Kuwait and was effected by Jam'iyyat Ihya' al-Turath al-Islami, a cover organization for the Salafi trend in Kuwait and the Gulf. His book, Millat Ibrahim (Abraham's Sect), espouses radical traditionalism, paganism and violence. Al-Maqdisi even accused the mainstream fundamentalist movements of unbelief and had numerous differences with other Afghan Arabs. During this period, some young individuals from the Gulf arrived in Afghanistan and joined al-Maqdisi who moved them away from the mainstream fundamentalists trend because of the Muslim Brotherhood's influence over it.

Usam Bin Laden is today most notorious international Afghani Arabs. After graduating from an engineering school at King 'Abd al-'Aziz University in Jeddah in 1979, he fought in Afghanistan and was one of the main leaders of al-Afghan al-'Arab (the Afghan Arabs). He recruited thousands of Arabs and organized training camps to fight the Soviets. In 1989, he returned to Saudi Arabia to run the family business.

However, his anti-government activities led to his exile to Sudan in 1991. Because of his radical opposition to the Saudi regime, he was stripped of his Saudi citizenship. After the Gulf War, Bin Laden became very critical of the United States and viewed the American troops in the Gulf as an occupying army of infidels in the shadow of Islam's holiest shrines. In Sudan, he established and ran several businesses and employed hundreds of Afghan Arabs. Under heavy pressure from the American government, the Sudanese government expelled Bin Laden who moved to Afghanistan in 1996. He issued a legal opinion declaring war against U.S. presence in the Gulf. He lives now in an elaborate hideout under the protection of the Taliban government and has established training camps for radical Arab fundamentalists. His followers are estimated at around 4000 fighters in many countries.

Bin Laden's wealth, originally estimated around 250 millions dollars, is mostly spent to fund Islamic activist movements that usually oppose their regimes and the United States. He has been implicated in the attempts to assassinate Pope John Paul II and President Hosni Mubarak and the bombings of World Trade Center in New York in 1995, an American center for training National Guards in Riyadh in 1995, al-Khobar Towers in Dhahran in 1996, and the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998. He has set up the 'Advice and Reformation Committee' and the 'International Islamic Front for Jihad against Jews and Crusaders'. The latter, a shadowy organization made up of radical groups, pledged to launch severe retaliations against American forces and interests all over the world. U.S. and Saudi officials link Bin Laden to terrorist organizations and incidents in Algeria, Saudi Arabia, London, Egypt, Somalia, Philippines, Ethiopia, Yemen and other places. The International Islamic Front is supposedly made up of Bin Laden's al-Qaida and Islamic Jihad and al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya. He is also considered to be one of the main fund-raisers in the Gulf for the Islamic movements. Bin Laden finds the means for distributing the funds to Muslim activists all over the Islamic world through companies in the United States, Europe and the Middle East. His assets were frozen in Saudi Arabia in 1994 and in the United States in 1998. Today, he is cornered in caves of the southern part of Afghanistan with his followers and some members of Taliban. Their fate is not yet clear, but is definitely not promising. Bin Laden, his followers and the Taliban could not accommodate themselves to the new world [dis]order.

Nonetheless, while Bin laden's affiliated groups may be militarily eliminated, his newly brought up complaint about the Arab-Israeli conflict as example of his objections against the United States will not.  It has proven to be a long-standing and a source for Arab and Islamic grievances against U.S. Middle East policies.

For instance, the primary issues in Iran's Middle Eastern policy are confronting Israeli expansionist policies and increasing Islamic solidarity and encouraging arms control schemes, including the de-nuclearization of Israel and the promotion of a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (NWFZ) in the region.([[72]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn72%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi has declared that Iran will never recognize Israel as a state because it has violated the legitimate rights of Palestinians. Thus, Iran's view of the Israeli state and the peace process has become one of the main points of controversy between Iran and the United States. Kkarrazi also stressed the important of international and regional efforts to safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon and to stop Israeli aggression.

Meanwhile, during the first half of October 1999, some Iranian officials held meetings with Hizbullah functionaries. One the one hand, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei told Hasan Nasrallah, Hizbullah's Secretary-General, that continuing the struggle to liberate the occupied territories is necessary. The Speaker of Parliament also told Nasrallah that the struggle should continue until liberation was achieved. On the other hand, President Khatami told Nasrallah that the liberation of Jerusalem is the common goal and that outsiders should not be allow to hatch plots and sow discord among them-in apparent reference to rumors that Khatami and his trend do not support the organization. Foreign Minister Kharrazi stressed the Iranian support for the resistance movement of the Lebanese people and government.([[73]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn73%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Kharrazi's visit to England in January of 1999 year 2qw considered a watershed in breaking new grounds with England and the European Union. He emphasized the need for Iran's help in its industrial development and, meanwhile, reiterated that Israel is the real threat in the Middle East.([[74]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn74%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Earlier, in November 1999, Kharrazi said that Iran would welcome changes in U.S. policy that come out from the good offices of a third party.([[75]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn75%22%20%5Co%20%22))

On the other hand, Iran and Syria have continued to develop close ties and Iran has supported the Syrian demand for the return of the Golan Heights. This is why the Iranians took a hardline position against the government of Benjamin Netanyahu. In that sense, Khatami has kept on reducing revolutionary orientations of Iranian foreign policy and has increased positive ties to Arab governments and the Palestinians. Furthermore, Iran has maintained its continued condemnation of the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem and called on the Israelis to implement all U.N. resolutions concerning the holy city and the liberation of the occupied territories and the return of the refugees to their homeland. President Khatami himself participated in the International Day of Jerusalem to support the right of Palestinians for a homeland and the liberation of Jerusalem.([[76]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn76%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Such a posture makes a clear diversion from the revolutionary zeal of Ayatollah Khomeini who denied the legitimate existence of Israel. Rather than denying Israel's existence, the Iranian government is now ready to deal positively with U.N. resolutions relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict and a new regional order that takes into consideration the interests of regional powers. Iran is edging more towards realistic pacifism.

When President Asad visited Tehran in 1998, some influential circles in Iran made no secret of their concern about Syria's attitude to Israel. However, the emerging component for possible Iranian-American reconciliation at the same time caused muted concern in Damascus. It feared that any rapprochement between the two sides would become contingent on an improvement in Iranian-Israeli ties, thus, weakening Syria's hand in future peace negotiations. Thus Syria and Iran's partnership could be undermined not only by the resumption of Syrian-Israeli peace talks but also by a prospective Iranian-American rapprochement.

However, much of the tension is due to the split within the Iranian establishment between hardliners and reformists.78 The conflict between reformists and hardliners is real and substantial, and the outcome of that conflict charts the roadmap for the future. While the hardliners still hold key positions in the Iranian establishment, the reformists, headed by President Khatami, wield real popular and some institutional power. For instance Abd Allah Nouri's earlier dismissal from his ministerial post and then conviction by the Special Court of the Clerics is an attempt by the hardliners to abort the reform trend. Thus, Nouri is disqualified by the Council of Experts from the Parliament race in February 2000. Nouri is already the fourth pro-Khatami cleric who has been charged by the Special Court after the second Khordad phenomenon (the day Khatami was elected president and the symbol of the reform trend).([[77]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn77%22%20%5Co%20%22)) The hardliners are obsessed with staying in power at any cost. Their bid to control the parliament elections of February 2000 was lost to the reformists.

While President Khatami is the second strongest personality in the establishment and fails at times to protect his men from being tried by the hardline judiciary, his power is nonetheless significant and cannot be simply swept away. He definitely enjoys popular support, and the demonstrations of the summer terrified the clerics but empowered Khatami's pro-reform trend.([[78]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn78%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Pro-reform nominees for the February 2000 Parliament elections were declared eligible this January.([[79]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn79%22%20%5Co%20%22)) The hardline Assembly of Experts, which approved the eligibility of the nominees warned against creating crises after the elections and reminded the nominees to obey the Supreme Leader. All this is happening in an environment where an influential Ayatollah, Hussein Ali Montazari, called on the leaders of Iran not to interfere in international affairs and in the economy. He also underlined the idea that all leaders, including the Supreme Leader, should be elected.([[80]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn80%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Furthermore, Caspian countries such as Azerbaijan have largely followed U.S. and Israeli policies on Iran. Oil industry officials and financial institutions may now find a new reason to delay the Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the trans-Caspian gas pipeline since an eventual end to Israeli-Iranian hostilities could open up Iranian routes. Overtures between the Iranians and the Israelis could slow any progress on the pipeline decision. An Israeli-Iranian dÈtente may well reduce tensions among the Caspian countries.([[81]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn81%22%20%5Co%20%22))

Excellent Iranian-Syrian relations have been maintained since the election of President Khatami. The visit of Khatami to Syria in May 1999 reinforced the strategic alliance between the two and their views on the Arab-Israeli peace process. Both have supported the implementation of UN Resolution 425 that calls for a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.([[82]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn82%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Iran has also branched out in its relations with major powers in Central Asia in order to safeguard its strategic interests. While the Iranian foreign minister's spokesman expressed deep concern about the Russian escalation of war in Grozny, Tehran's criticism of Moscow is largely mild; while Iran's aid to Chechnya took the shape of 40 tons of food. Iran is more interested in developing economic and military ties with Russia. Russia expressed through the secretary of the Russian Security Council in Moscow that expansion of relations with Iran is among the priorities of Russian foreign policy in reference to cooperation between Tehran and Moscow in the Central Asian area, the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, and the broad international domain. He expressed these sentiments to the Iranian visiting Supreme Security Council and first deputy Parliament Speaker concerning the readiness to transfer Central Asian oil and gas through the Caspian Sea. Also, Iran is also opening up to Pakistan because it wants to build a natural gas pipeline to India that must pass through Pakistan, whose dividends come up to around $ 500 million to $ one billion dollars annually. Similar discussions are going on with Turkey over another pipeline.([[83]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn83%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Iran's natural gas reserves rank second in the world. Furthermore, Russia has suggested, and Iran is sympathetic to, establishing a world organization for gas exporting countries.

However, the U.S. until very recently seems to have ignored the fact that Iran is no longer globally supporting terrorist actions and is not opposing the peace process in absolute terms--though the hardliners in Iran do still oppose the process altogether. More than ever, the official Iranian view is in harmony with the Syrian view of the peace process, which accepts in principle the concept of a comprehensive and just peace. It is obvious now after Khatami's visits to Syria and Saudi Arabia and the thaw in Arab-Iranian relations since the Tehran Islamic Summit in 1997 that Iran is moving towards greater Islamic solidarity and Arab-Iranian strategic interests. Iran views this movement as a necessity for both Iranians and Arabs, given the rapid regional and international developments. Iran believes that, because of its geopolitical, economic, and military position as well as its support for Arab causes, it can provide strategic depth for the Arab nation that counterbalances Israeli plans for the area as well American dominance in the Gulf-oil pricing, U.S. direct control of the Gulf, using the Iraqi threat, and so forth.([[84]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn84%22%20%5Co%20%22)

V. CONCLUSION

The collapse of the Soviet Union has not led to substantial changes in the underlying doctrines governing U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. U.S. objectives have largely remained the same as they were during the Cold War.([[85]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/us-foreign-policy-islamist-politics-and-middle-east-peace-process%22%20%5Cl%20%22_edn85%22%20%5Co%20%22)) Since the end of the Gulf War, the U.S. has worked on two tracks: pushing for incremental successes in the Arab-Israeli peace process and intensifying the containment of Iraq and Iran. However, in this age of globalization, transnationalization of capital and democratization, the U.S. is well advised to alter it policies for achieving its strategic objectives.

The importance of resolving Middle Eastern conflicts in general and the Arab-Israeli one in particular has sprung essentially from the realization of many American strategists and policy makers of the possibility of the explosive nature of these conflicts which might negatively affect the interests of the United States. The U.S. has a vested interest in a "new world order" that aims at the reactivation of world commerce.  Its attempt to establish a new regional order in the area cannot succeed without first eliminating the basic obstacle in the Middle East, namely the Arab-Israeli conflict. The settlement of this crisis requires that Arabs and Israelis enter into a dialogue that would eventually lead to a peaceful resolution of the conflict as well as subsequent normalization of relations  However, a portrait of the new enemy is being presented as Islamism that must pay the price, along with the governments such as Iran, Libya, Iraq and the Sudan that are capable of 'developing' mass destruction weapons, not to mention their having individual regional ambitions.

While breakthrough steps should be taken at the formal level, which serve the interests of the United States, Israel, and the concerned Arab parties as well as other Arab states, and while similar steps with Syria and Lebanon for the completion of the peace process are required, major obstacles remain and are likely to remain and intensify. Although formal peace is commended, it is still insufficient for regional cooperation in the long run. What is needed immediately after or during the completion of the peace process is to take into consideration the deeper issues whose resolution puts the peoples of the area into a genuine popular peace and thus cooperation. The normalization of relations strictly between Israel and other Arab governments is not conducive in the long run for the region's security or for the well being of its peoples.

The main opposition to the on-going peace process is portrayed as being basically orchestrated by Iran, the Sudan and Arab Islamic movements. Now the Palestinians and Israel have mutually recognized each other's right to exist as two peoples with basic human and political rights, the future of the Arab-Israeli conflict seems to shift the focus of the conflict from the traditional lines of conflict between Arabs and Israelis to another level of conflict. Although this level has long existed, such as the conflict between Hamas and the PLO and between Israeli Labor and Likud parties, the near and foreseeable future is going to be nonetheless plagued with Islamic and Jewish fundamentalists struggling against the recognition of each other. In this way, the Palestinians and the Israelis will genuinely become part of this troubled area, the Middle East, where they are likely to experience, like Egypt or Algeria, questioning over their legitimacy by the religiously oriented movements. Claims and counter claims will be postulated, leading to internalize what has been thus largely an external problem that has helped the cohesion of both the Israeli and Palestinian societies. Thus, no wonders that civil war, civil strife and uprising against the Palestinian and Israeli establishments cannot be discounted. Then, it seems that all countries of the area are going to share many concerns, including fundamentalism, religious claims, just economic development, and proper political participation.

Violence, spearheaded by radical religious groups, is expected to intensify from within and against both Israel and the Arab governments. While the governments are capable of destroying the military infrastructure of such movements, it cannot liquidate their bases or dismiss their grievances, which happen to be the grievances of the broader Islamic movements, nationalist movements and, above all, of the people themselves. That religious movements are on the rise and likely to be more so after peace treaties are signed has to be given priority in order to manage the roots of cultural animosity. That there is terrorism and violence is a matter of fact, but not every opposition as well as popular opposition by the fundamentalists is a terrorist act. Clearly, ultimate responses to popular grievances cannot be of a security nature; it has to address and resolve the underlying causes.

The Islamicity of East Jerusalem serves par excellence as the ideological focus of the current and future opposition; for the status of occupying East Jerusalem goes beyond the status of an ordinary occupied territory to the status of religious aggression; it is a holy land for Muslims and, of course, for the Jews and Christians. We should keep in mind that the second intifada has started the Arabs perceived that Ariel Sharon committed a religious aggression against a very important shrine.

CONCLUSION

It is in the U.S. interest to not postulate a cultural or religious threat or a global Islamic enemy, but, instead, try to locate and solve problems within their immediate contexts. For threats to the strategic interest of the U.S. spring from specific grievances within states and not from a general Islamic view of the U.S. In real terms, the Islamists, even the radical, cannot pose a real long-lasting geopolitical threat. However, the U.S. needs instead to

(a) initiating dialogue and positive engagement and better channels of communication with Islamic states and movements. Opening up to Iran will a major impact on softening political Islam, especially its positions on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the U.S.

(b) increasing research to understand the structures and ideologies of Islamism and the role of religion in the 21st century

(c) increasing all kinds of educational programs that bring Muslims to the U.S. and familiarize them with the American political system and society and vice versa

Also, the U.S. should be consistent and outspoken positions on the implementation of human rights, pluralism and democracy as well as terrorism and armaments in order to prevent misconception of the U.S. in the Islamic world will serve long-terms objectives of stability and security. This will reduce antagonistic attitudes and threats of instability toward the U.S. that is perceived to have double standards when it comes the issues of Arab governance and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The U.S. is well advised to recognize that a Middle East based primarily on its superior military powers and those of its allies, the cornerstone of its Middle East policy during the Cold War and beyond, cannot last and damage in the long run the interests of both the U.S. and its regional allies and increase regional instability. Therefore, it is necessary to rethink U.S. strategic interests and come up with new policies.

The U.S. policy needs to stop being reactive and become proactive. For instance, the U.S. can engage Iran through Tehran's shifting interests and begin to prepare for future U.S.-Iranian relations. The world is already exploring this course. The U.S. needs to move from old Cold-War positions to new strategic ones.

A peace settlement between Arabs and Israel should be accompanied by multinational talks on major concerns of the area, armaments, water, oil, border, refugees and others. Parties involved in the conflict should be enticed to and drawn into a final peace settlement with regard to its dividends, a decrease in the armament race and an increase in economic, social and political benefits and security. There is a need to justly and comprehensively resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the creation of a Palestinian state and satisfying religious symbolism. Also, non-Israeli, non-Arab factors should be included in any new regional order.

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