

A Constructivist Approach to American Foreign Policy

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of an epistemic community's influence upon American foreign policy vis-à-vis political Islam. It tries to account for American hostility toward Islamic resurgence by employing the constructivist paradigm. In this regard, the following observations are highlighted: The epistemic community in question has two rival wings: Accommodationist and Confrontationalist, the resulting foreign policy view is a function of the dialectic between them; and constructivism coupled with the concept of epistemic communities helps explain the dynamics associated with the role of connoisseur recommendation in formulating American foreign policy toward political Islam.

Introduction

The contemporary global movement seeking to revive Islam as a political ideology began even before the implosion of the Ottoman caliphate on March 3, 1924. This continuing resurgence of the Islamic sociopolitical economic paradigm has its origins in such late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Muslim thinkers as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida.¹ However, the United States' encounter with political Islam is fairly recent, effectively occurring only when Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah and established the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. Ever since then, political Islam has received an enormous amount of attention in American academic discourse, media coverage, and policy debates.

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This paper examines the role of an epistemic community composed of academic scholars; journalists affiliated with print and electronic media corporations; and policy analysts associated with think tanks, research centers, and policy institutes in shaping American foreign policy toward political Islam.² This is achieved by employing the constructivist paradigm, as opposed to the traditional neorealist and neoliberalist approaches.³ It does not, however, assess American policy toward Islamic resurgence *per se* or its implications for American relations with the Muslim world. Instead, it seeks to understand the origins of the ostensibly hostile American attitude toward the reemergence of Islam as a modern political force in the Muslim world.

This goal is accomplished by presenting the following observations:

First: The epistemic community of scholars, journalists, and analysts appears to be (broadly speaking) divided into two rival schools of thought: accommodationist and confrontationalist.⁴ Both groups have been monitoring the rise of political Islam's activities in the Muslim world and advancing policy recommendations to successive administrations since the early 1980s.

Second: American foreign policy toward contemporary Islamic political revivalism is a function of the dialectic between these two competing schools.

Third: Constructivism, a newly emerging political science paradigm, along with the concept of epistemic communities provide powerful analytical tools for explaining the dynamics associated with the role of connoisseur recommendations in formulating American foreign policy toward political Islam. From a conceptual standpoint, this is perhaps the most important aspect.

This paper begins with a brief chronological survey of political Islam's history over the last 3 decades and then describes the epistemic community concept and gives a synopsis of the constructivist paradigm. The last section, utilizing the constructivist paradigm, demonstrates how the epistemic community influences foreign policy decision-making.

Historical Background

After World War II, the United States emerged as the leading state with the Soviet Union as its only principal adversary. Thus it replaced Britain and France as the hegemons overseeing regional geopolitics in the Muslim world (in general) and the Middle East (in particular). It also has been the traditional supporter of Israel since its inception in 1948, and the sponsor of several authoritarian Muslim regimes (e.g., Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia,

Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, and Indonesia), which accounts for most of the anti-American sentiment informing Islamist discourse.

Popularly dubbed *Islamic fundamentalism* by academicians, journalists, and analysts, political Islam began to receive serious international attention when General Zia ul-Haq's pro-Islamic military regime came to power in Pakistan in 1977. This event furthered the agenda of Pakistan's Islamists, who until then had been politically marginalized. But perhaps the single most important event was Iran's 1979 Islamic revolution that ousted the prowestern Shah and brought an Islamic government to power led by Ayatollah Khomeini. Thereafter, Iran became the champion of the worldwide Islamic cause by providing support for Islamic groups in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, and elsewhere.

In that same year, the Islamic insurgency began in Afghanistan against a fledgling Soviet-backed communist stratocracy. This proxy war attracted thousands of Islamist volunteers from all over the world to join the jihad against godless communism. This jihad was funded by Saudi money, armed with American weaponry, and furnished with Pakistani logistics acting in consortium. In 1981, Islamic militants affiliated with Tanzim al-Jihad (Jihad Organization) assassinated Anwar Sadat, the authoritarian Egyptian leader and a major American ally. Islamists viewed Sadat as a traitor, for he made peace with Israel by signing the 1977 Camp David Accords brokered by the Carter administration. Egypt's authoritarian government, led by Husni Mubarak (Sadat's successor), continues to be threatened by Islamist political organizations actively engaged in a bitter struggle to establish an Islamic state.

During the early 1980s, the United States became embroiled in a bloody conflict with Islamist guerillas in Lebanon over its support for Israel and Lebanese Christian militias. It also supported Iraq's authoritarian leader Saddam in its 8-year war (1980-88) against Iran. In 1989, a military coup in Sudan brought General Omar al-Hasan al-Bashir and Dr. Hasan al-Turabi of the National Islamic Front to power. This was hailed as yet another key victory for political Islam.⁵ Then came the Gulf war in 1990, which radicalized many Islamists, particularly those who had been American allies during the proxy war against the Soviets in Afghanistan (e.g., Osama bin Laden).

Three years later in Algeria, the French-backed military establishment and its civilian supporters in the bureaucracy thwarted what would have been a landslide victory for the Front Islamique de Salut (FIS), Islamic Salvation Front, the nation's leading Islamist party, in the country's first-

ever elections. The elections were canceled, preliminary results were annulled, and the new military regime initiated draconian measures, including mass arrests of supporters of the FIS and other parties. The resulting and ongoing bloody civil war has left 30,000 dead so far.

Islamists also have made significant gains through the ballot box in Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, and Kuwait. An Islamist-led coalition government ruled Turkey for almost 2 years before the ultrasecular praetorian military establishment ousted it in a “constitutionally” engineered 1997 coup. Islamic groups continue to challenge secular regimes throughout North Africa; Eritrea; Syria; Saudi Arabia; Bangladesh; Chechnya; Central Asia; the Armenian province of Nagorno-Karabagh; the Georgian province of Abkhazia; the Balkans; Xinjiang (China’s northwestern Muslim province); Mindanao (the Philippines’ southern largely Muslim province); Southeast Asia; and other regions.

The United States views Islam’s reemergence as a political force challenging pro-western secular governments as a major cause of concern with respect to its national interests and international security. Thus, the United States has adopted a more-or-less antagonistic policy toward the rise of political Islam since the last days of the Carter administration. Over the last 20 years, the American media machine, academic community, and policymakers have focused intently on political Islam. Each of these epistemic groups has a major influence on American policy.

To understand this epistemic community’s role in crafting this policy, it is necessary to move away from the neorealist and neoliberal approaches, for these systemic and rationalistic approaches cannot explain this complex agent–structure interaction. As a theoretical alternative, the constructivist approach is a far more sophisticated conceptual lens that can help explain the role of the media, academia, and think tanks in formulating the making of American foreign policy, particularly toward contemporary Islamic revivalism.⁶ In the case being studied, the concept of epistemic communities can be combined with the constructivist paradigm to render a powerful analytical instrument that can assist with this inquiry. The next section elaborates on the notion of epistemic communities and the constructivist approach, upon which this research is based.

Conceptual Framework

Epistemic Communities

Michael Foucault is believed to have coined the term *epistemic communities* in his *The Order of Things* (1973).⁷ However, Burkhart Holzner and John H.

Marx provided the benchmark definition that is now in vogue. In their *Knowledge Application* (1979), they defined epistemic communities as:

... those knowledge-oriented work communities in which cultural standards and social arrangements interpenetrate around a primary commitment to epistemic criteria in knowable production and application.⁸

In an attempt to amplify this benchmark definition, Haas describes an epistemic community as a group that recognizes a certain authentication criterion and adheres to a set convention of conduct, which it deems indispensable, in order to warrant the accuracy of its inferences. Haas adds that such groups also are subject to their individual and collective limitations, which are due to their respective professions' organizational demands. According to him, these limitations are the reason for their departure from the predetermined performance norms related to manufacturing knowledge.⁹

While Haas is willing to accept this benchmark definition proffered by Holzner and Marx, he nevertheless feels compelled to supplement it so that it can cater to the particular conditions in a given international organization with its express institutional character. Thus, he considers an epistemic community as one whose members, while hailing from a wide range of professional disciplines, share an allegiance to a specific causative exemplar and common political ideals. They are integrated by conviction in their ideal's veracity and their devotion to convert this verity into public policy in the hope that it will serve humanity at large.¹⁰

Haas, along with Holzner and Marx, disagree with Thomas Kuhn that only natural scientists qualify as an epistemic community. While Holzner and Marx are willing to extend this designation to all professional groups, Haas still questions whether all NGOs can be considered epistemic communities. He also observes that as an epistemic community, natural scientists are disproportionately more successful than their social scientist counterparts.¹¹ His son Peter M. Haas, also a political scientist, gives an example of this in his seminal work "Do Regimes Matter? Epistemic Communities and Mediterranean Pollution Control." The younger Haas shows how a group of experts in marine biology, marine chemistry, marine geology, oceanography, microbiology, public health, and civil engineering influenced the formation of an international regime for pollution control in the Mediterranean Sea.¹²

Ernst Haas talks of epistemic communities as being indiscernible institutions or a complex of people on the same epistemological wavelength but

not necessarily employed in the same organization. They gain access to international organizations through advisory positions, contract-based consultancies, and other informal networks. But they are able to acquire leverage only through partnerships with powerful political groups that command influence in these international organizations. Although both Ernst and Peter Haas discuss the concept of epistemic communities in the context of international organizations, nonetheless there are no such constrictions that compel one to confine this concept's application to a certain organizational environment. In other words, epistemic communities can exist and operate in many settings and independently of any organization.

In the case being studied, the epistemic community of academicians, media correspondents, and policy analysts employed by think tanks provides a classic example of knowledge-based professionals converging (and diverging) on the basis of expertise in a certain field. They try to influence politics by seeking recognition from the foreign policy apparatus, which searches for expert advice on issues related to highly specialized subjects.

Notwithstanding the limiting of this concept to international organizations, Ernst Haas does offer a criterion to gauge the success (or failure) of epistemic communities. In his opinion, this touchstone consists of two factors: First, it is essential that the position(s) being furthered by an epistemic group be more convincing to the leading group of political decision-makers than the claim(s) being flaunted by their rival epistemic group(s); and second, an epistemic community's success hinges upon its ability to forge alliances with key elements in the decision-making apparatus.¹³ Thus, in a way, epistemic communities try to dominate the interfaces of the corridors of power and authority. Haas also notes that few epistemic groups are able to maintain their dominance for sustained periods of time, as the environment in which they operate is, by its very nature, in a constant state of flux.

Constructivism

This new and upcoming approach, which has been incorporated into the theoretical body of political science (and its sister discipline international relations) actually was borrowed from sociology. Some scholars see a similarity between the institutionalist methodology of inquiry and constructivism.¹⁴ In any case, constructivism's nomenclature comes from Nicholas Onuf, author of *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (1989).¹⁵ Instead of an *a priori* view of actors and interests, constructivism regards them as being the focus of investigation.

Constructivism, which views global politics as a socially constructed phenomenon, is based on a criticism of the more traditional neorealist and neoliberal theories. Constructivists see both of these rationalist theories as tied to a materialist understanding of international politics. On the other hand, constructivism offers a more social and idea-based comprehension. Finnemore argues that constructivism reverses the causal arrows placed by neorealism and neoliberalism. She does, however, admit that constructivism is a social and not a political theory, and that it remains useful in the sense that it provides a technique for investigating the complex correlations between agentic and structural forces.¹⁶

In his "Banning Landmines," Kenneth R. Rutherford takes this one step further by claiming that constructivism is not even a theory, and thus should not be compared to neorealism and neoliberalism. He argues that it is actually an alternative ontology that is able to explain why certain behavior is even deemed neorealist, neoliberalist, or even constructivist.¹⁷ Since both neorealism and neoliberalism assume the state to be the preferred actor and do not consider the role of nonstate actors, they are unable to account for the role of epistemic communities in shaping foreign policy. Notwithstanding this deficiency, this author agrees with Rutherford that constructivism does not replace neorealism and neoliberalism, as it only complements them in the sense that it explains those factors that are beyond the scope of rationalist theories.¹⁸

According to Finnemore, constructivism allows researchers to acknowledge the false assumption that states and other actors actually know what they want, and to entertain the thought that nonstate actors can change state preferences.¹⁹ While agreeing with Finnemore on these basic ideas, this author is, nevertheless, forced to differ with her insofar as constructivism's applicability is concerned. Finnemore deals exclusively with international organizations and how they affect state behavior. Thus she is very concerned about the dichotomy of arguments based on the agent vs. structure dialectic. This causes her to be preoccupied with the locus of the source of preferences.

Since her study is about the role of international organizations as the structure influencing the state, she does not accept that nonstate actors within a given state can be the source that has the ability to supply preferences to the state.²⁰ She also inaccurately assumes that scholars in the foreign policy area are engaged in single-country research studies. As the theme of this study shows, the phenomenon of political Islam is by no means limited to one particular geopolitical region (let alone to one country). Over the course of the last 2 decades, political Islam as a political ideology has

grown into an issue that directly affects even many non-Muslim states (particularly such core western nations as the US, the UK, France, Canada, and Germany), in part due to recent immigration trends.

Finnemore also appears to be critical of researchers in the area of foreign policy, as she opines that they try to explain foreign policy decisions as the outcome of interest group politicking and lobbying with state officials. While acknowledging the work of Ernst Haas and others, she fails to distinguish between epistemic communities and state-centered interest groups, both of which are essentially two different types of groups.²¹ The concept of epistemic community, in fact, addresses her concern that forces independent of the state are not being taken into account by foreign policy analysts and comparativists. Being a knowledge-based group, an epistemic community acts as a conduit that channels information from both outside as well as inside the state, and then articulates it to the policy-making apparatus.²²

In the case of political Islam, the accommodationist strand of the epistemic community is involved in this kind of work. On the other hand, the confrontationalist faction may warrant Finnemore's criticism, since its arguments are based on the neorealist line of thinking rooted in the framework of power, security, and material gains (and losses). Notwithstanding this negligible aberration in this case study, the notion of an epistemic community in and of itself can alleviate much of Finnemore's apprehensions about *a priori* and endogenous specifications of actors and their preferences.²³

While Finnemore acknowledges that scholars differ on what constitutes an *agent* and what represents a *structure*, she criticizes most studies for being heavily slanted toward the agent orientation. This is also her stated reason for examining the structure side first. Only after isolating the *structure* from the *agent* does she then reintroduce the agent into the equation by employing constructivism.²⁴ In this debate, she tries to assume a middle ground by recognizing that both are mutually constitutive, for both reinforce each other since agents participate in formulating social structures and, in turn, structures influence agents in the form of a feedback loop.²⁵ But ultimately, by describing how international organizations can induce state behavior on issues, she succumbs to the same *faux pas* that she criticizes others for committing. This is explicit from her statement that "structures not agents are ontologically primitive and are the starting point for analysis."²⁶

Finnemore only parenthetically concedes that interdisciplinary associations formed on the basis of shared knowledge can offer states both the

policy preferences and the strategies with which to pursue them.²⁷ It can be argued that this, in fact, is an inadvertent admission that epistemic communities as agents can influence a state's foreign policy-making machinery (i.e., the structure). Thus, by integrating the concept of epistemic communities into the constructivist paradigm's body, both the agent and the structure can be incorporated simultaneously. This allows one to avoid being caught in the dichotomous debate that pits agent and structure in a mutually exclusive relationship.

But most importantly, this modified constructivist model that I seek to advance provides for far more explanatory power. This, in turn, can facilitate the examination of the microlevel activity informing the making of a particular foreign policy. This, I contend, is a more rigorous alternative than what is offered by neorealism and neoliberalism, which simplify the policy process as being based on national interest calculations and international regime inducements, respectively.

Analysis

The Divided Epistemic Community

Fawaz Gerges, professor of international affairs and Middle East studies at Sarah Lawrence College and author of *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Interests*, along with Maria do Céu Pinto, reader in the political science and international relations department at the University of Minho, Portugal, in her *Political Islam and the United States*, identify two dichotomist approaches by which political Islam is being viewed by the "experts" in the United States. Pinto endorses Gerges' assertion that on one side of this debate is the confrontationalist camp, which views political Islam as antithetical to democracy and inherently antiwestern. Situated on the other end of this particular epistemic spectrum is the accommodationist camp, which disagrees with the confrontationalists' assumptions and argues that political Islam represents a genuine mass movement that has emerged as a response to the Muslim world's failed secular authoritarian regimes, which are held responsible for the socio-politico-economic chaos.²⁸ These rival factions are not formal groups, and hence the appellation *epistemic community* fits them perfectly.

The Confrontationalist Faction

The former group argues that culture and civilization, instead of material and political interests, shape the dialectical struggle of Islam vs. the West. It

sees Islam basically as a threat to American national interests and allies, as well as global security, in a way similar to that posed by communism during the cold war. Some of this camp's more noted academicians are Bernard Lewis, Samuel Huntington, Martin Kramer, and Emanuel Sivan. Among the more prominent analysts and journalists in the policy arena and journalism are Amos Perlmutter, Mortimer Zuckerman, Edward Mortimer, Daniel Pipes, Steve Emerson, Yossef Bodansky, and Milton Viorst. The confrontationalist faction is enigmatically composed of more analysts and journalists than academicians, and also has links to such powerful political interest groups as the pro-Israeli lobby in the United States.²⁹

This faction continues to disseminate the idea that after the demise of the "Communist International," the United States must prepare itself to meet a new global threat: the "Islamic International."³⁰ Confrontationalists allege that, similar to the cold war's "Red Menace," a "Green Peril" is growing. As it is bound to undermine the peace of democratic capitalism, it threatens the United States' national security interests.³¹ They recommend that the United States adopt a tough posture toward Islamic fundamentalism and extend greater support to maintaining the status quo established by the pro-western Muslim regimes.³²

Others have stated that Islamic fundamentalism is by nature anti-democratic, aggressive, anti-Semitic, and ideologically anti-western.³³ A recently written advisory piece to George W. Bush claims that Islamism (a synonym for political Islam) threatens American interests in the Middle East as well as those located from the shores of the Atlantic to the Pacific. Pipes goes on to say that Islamists hate westerners not because of what they do, but for who they are. Thus, as there is no possibility of reconciliation, they must be dealt with forcefully.³⁴

In an attempt to highlight the magnitude of this alleged hostility harbored by Islamists, Yossef Bodansky, a highly influential analyst in congressional circles and the author of *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America*, says that while Islamists disagree with each other on the issue of an Islamic state, they are in perfect synchronization regarding their goal of annihilating the United States and its western allies.³⁵ It is also interesting to note that Jean Kirkpatrick, a former American ambassador to the United Nations and currently a faculty member of Georgetown University's department of government, wrote an endorsement for Bodansky's book.

Along these same lines, Huntington notes that Islam – not Islamic fundamentalism – is the problem for the West. In his opinion, it is Islam (as a civilization) and Muslims who are in an awe of their cultural superiority

and obsessed with being an inferior power.³⁶ Echoing Huntington's views, Martin Kramer, director of Tel Aviv University's Moshe Dayan Institute of Middle Eastern and African Studies, worries that an apathetic West may well succumb to the power of a few like-minded Muslim states coming together on the basis of pan-Islamism.³⁷

Operating from the belief that Islam is inherently incompatible with democracy, this school of thought also proposes that the United States should not call for democratic elections before promoting the culture of human rights and civil society and exporting other western values. This group sees electoral processes by themselves as the springboard (or the backdoor) through which many Islamic groups hope to attain power. They contend that once in power, Islamist groups usurp the very process that brought them to power by replacing it with an allegedly absolutist Islamic order. This camp insists that if elections are to work, they must be preceded by the above-stated prerequisites.³⁸

Judith Miller, an influential *New York Times* columnist, interviewed Dr. Hasan al-Turabi, the Sorbonne-educated intellectual who is the Sudanese Islamist movement's leader and chief theoretician, and Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, the leading ideologue of the Lebanese Hizbullah. She tries to point out how both men, while exhibiting a desire for dialogue with the United States, secretly yearn for its decline.³⁹ Other confrontationalists warn that the Talibanization of South and Central Asia threatens international security. The [former] Taliban rulers of Afghanistan are seen as exporting an extremist brand of Islam that has the potential to undermine such countries as Pakistan, India, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan as a result of a domino effect.⁴⁰ Others advise the American government to invest in a policy of counter-exportation that can strengthen the Muslim world's secular educational systems in an effort to stave off radical Islam, which seems to be taking over.⁴¹

The Accommodationist Faction

This group rejects Huntington's clash of civilizations theory and counsels policy makers on the dire need to distinguish mainstream Islamic opposition groups, which represent most Islamists, from fringe radical groups that constitute an infinitesimal minority and operate on the periphery of political Islam's continuum. Its members encourage constructive engagement and dialogue with the majority of moderate Islamists, whom they consider as rational and not necessarily opposed to democracy, free-market economics, plu-

ralism, and the rule of law. Accommodationists assert that the whole notion of an Islamic threat is an exaggeration of certain localized events.⁴² In their opinion, political Islam is the latest manifestation of genuine attempts to address the serious socio-politico-economic problems plaguing the Muslim world. They are highly critical and even ridicule the notion of a monolithic Islamic world trying to undermine western civilization.⁴³ Another accommodationist critique is that the clash between Islam and the West is a thesis promoted on the historical antagonism between Islam and Christianity.⁴⁴

This group disproportionately consists of more academicians than journalists and policy analysts. John L. Esposito, John O. Voll, Yvonne H. Haddad, Edward Said, Charles E. Butterworth, Louis Cantori, John P. Entelis, James Piscatori, Richard Bulliet, and Dale F. Eickelman are some of the more prominent names in academia. Graham Fuller, Ian O. Lesser, Leon Hadar, Eric Margolis, and Robert Fisk represent policy think tanks and the media. The accommodationist camp points to the linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and theological differences among the 1.2 billion Muslims as factors suggesting a bitterly divided Muslim world. For example, it has been suggested that the United States has suffered greater difficulties at the hands of secular Iraq and Lebanon than from Iran or Sudan. Some accommodationists also argue that the coming to power of Islamist governments does not necessarily translate into a threat to the United States' national interests.⁴⁵

After the cold war ended in 1990, American foreign policy did not follow any set formula or doctrine. This is primarily due to the nature of the post-Soviet world and the "democratic revolutions" that ousted Eastern Europe's communist regimes. This withering away of the communist states effectively ended the bipolar nature of the international system that had existed since the end of World War II. Some experts suggest that what has existed since 1991 is essentially a *uni-multi-polar* global system, with the United States as the only remaining global hegemon and several regional powers aspiring for increased global influence. The Soviet Union's unexpected and sudden collapse left many policy makers and academicians searching for a new overarching doctrine for this "new world order," as proclaimed by then-president George Bush, Sr., after the end of the Gulf war.

In such a global atmosphere, the perception of an Islamic threat could entangle the United States in a second cold war, which would be based on fictitious assumptions.⁴⁶ Hadar points out that among the propagandists for an Islamic threat are Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan, all of whom have an axe to grind – they want to preserve their strategic value in the post-Soviet era. Hadar further comments that these and other gov-

ernments and their lobbyists in Washington rely on a campaign of misinformation and disinformation to issue these warnings of impending danger from the global Islamist nexus.

But contrary to popular belief, Islamist organizations are not inherently anti-democratic, as they also have suffered from authoritarianism.⁴⁷ These American images of political Islam as saturated in conspiracy theories are conjured up by deliberate acts of misinformation and also are the result of the ignorance and confusion springing from the lack of an American educational curriculum designed to address non-Christian religious traditions.⁴⁸ Enver Masud, director of the Wisdom Fund, has chronicled key events since the Gulf war, from 1991 to 2000, which have stereotyped Islam in the American media. In addition, he provides numerous examples in which Islam has been the target of media hype. He offers compelling evidence by means of which he seeks to substantiate his assertion that the American government is following an imperial policy as far as the Muslim world is concerned.⁴⁹

The only formal policy outlined by the American government toward political Islam was unveiled during Bush Sr.'s administration by Edward Djerejian, who was serving as the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs and was retained by the Clinton administration. In his famous speech, now remembered as the "Meridian House Declaration," he clearly stated that the United States does not oppose the religion of Islam, but that it is opposed to extremism and violence. Referring to Algeria's ill-fated democratic experiment in 1991, he clarified the American position as one based upon a concern that if Islamists came to power by elections, they would close the door behind them.⁵⁰ This cautious approach is the hallmark of American foreign policy toward political Islam, which manifests the interplay of influences from the accommodationist and the confrontationalist camps. This remains the official guiding principle of American foreign policy today, with the return of the White House to Republican control.

Constructivism Applied

There is a plethora of literature on interest groups seeking to influence foreign policy matters. However, studies on how epistemic communities seek to influence foreign policy remain rare. Perhaps this is due to the predominance of the neorealist and neoliberalist approaches to studying foreign policy making. Understanding the epistemic community's role in influencing American foreign policy toward political Islam (or any other policy issue for that

matter) can only be achieved through the constructivist approach, for this paradigm is willing to consider the interaction of various nonstate actors (i.e., academicians, journalists, and policy analysts) with the foreign policy bureaucracy. It is within the standard operating procedures of the American foreign policy machinery to consult experts and seek advice on constructing a policy toward foreign policy matters.⁵¹ In the case of political Islam, experts provide a host of preferences and strategies for foreign policy officialdom on how to deal with Islamic groups seeking power in the Muslim world.

This exchange allows the agent(s) (e.g., scholars, journalists, and analysts) to shape the structure's [state's] identity and interests. Here, it seems as if the media and policy analysts associated with the confrontationalist faction have secured more leverage with the government in favor of maintaining a tough posture toward Islamic groups trying to attain power. This is due to its ability, as Ernst Haas explains, to present a more convincing argument than the accommodationists, whose position has not found much reception with the policy-making elite. Furthermore, the confrontationalists have built coalitions with such powerful political groups as the Israeli and Indian lobbies in Congress.

Political Islam remains a relatively new subfield when compared with such other areas as the Arab-Israeli conflict, India-Pakistan relations, and Turkish studies. Thus, knowledge in this area remains highly specialized and limited to a handful of experts. As a result, there are hardly any full-time experts in the State Department, the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, and other federal agencies and departments who have a command of this issue. This forces the government to contract individuals and rely on policy analysts associated with think tanks and, most of all, the media to provide them with the necessary feedback on how to deal with Islamist activity, for example, in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, or Pakistan. This solicitation of expert advice, in turn, opens up access points for the epistemic community to advance its views on a particular situation and thus impact the eventual policy position. Those who subscribe to constructivism believe that a government formulates its policy on the basis of a social interaction between the state and other nonstate actors. Additionally, it requires going beyond the focus on material aspects to nonmaterial ones, which can be knowledge and information. According to Onuf, the interaction between an array of agents (e.g., individuals and NGOs) and states can offer a much more enhanced appreciation of international politics.⁵²

The information supplied by both factions of this epistemic community to the American government informed it that political Islam's rise

warrants serious attention. Initially, the intelligence community gathers information, since its members are out in the field. This allows them to transmit early warnings regarding developments that may have potentially serious implications for American interests in a specific country or region. Media corporations are mostly second in line, as far as receiving information is concerned. They also channel the information in the context of policy implications. This initial input sets the foreign policy apparatus in motion. At this stage, policymakers solicit counsel from the epistemic community. Thus, this is by no means a uni-directional process.

The epistemic community also keeps itself informed of developments in the Muslim world by relying on the media and their network of alliances with local proto-epistemic groups overseas. In this age of mass production, they constantly turn out literature for academic journals, newspapers, and magazines. Through this type of scholarly output, scholars and analysts create a space in which they can gain the attention of official circles. Upon acquiring a reputation, they contribute directly to policy debates by offering information that is restricted to a very elite class of scholars and thus is a much sought-after commodity by the government. This influential status accords them direct access to actual policy making. It is common knowledge that the White House, State Department, Congress, and other key governmental institutions call upon members of the epistemic community to testify in order to provide insight on a given subject.

Since the confrontationalist faction receives a better reception from official ears, official American policy reflects the government's unwillingness to engage proactively and positively with Islamist groups. Hence, the attitude is one of extreme distrust even toward moderate Islamist groups willing to seek power through constitutional means. Obviously, when two rival groups try to influence a government on a particular issue, the resultant policy is a hybrid based on some configuration that contains input from both schools of thought. Thus, in principle, it is presented as a balanced viewpoint. But, in reality, it remains deeply influenced by the dominant group.

The downside to the notion of an epistemic community is that it can be inveigled into serving government and corporate interests. Edward W. Said, a professor of comparative literature at Columbia, is a prolific writer on Islam and Palestine and the correlation between knowledge and power. In a scathing attack on the proto-confrontationalists back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, he states that no other religious or cultural group has been accused so aggressively of threatening the western way of life as Islam.⁵³ He attacks the dominant stream of Orientalist scholarship for advancing mis-

leading information about Islam and for being coopted by the government and corporations. Notwithstanding the methodological and intellectual problems with this type of discourse, Said points out that Islam has come to represent barbarism for the Right and medieval theocracy for the Left.⁵⁴ In his opinion, this is due to the political saturation of the study of Islam.⁵⁵

He questions the objectivity of those engaged in the scholarly research of Islam for purposes of governmental policy.⁵⁶ In this regard, Leonard Binder, a former professor of Middle Eastern studies at UCLA, agrees with Said that the motive behind the development of area studies in the United States is political.⁵⁷ Writing almost 20 years ago, Said remarked that the media, government, geopolitical strategists, and academic experts on Islam all agree that Islam threatens western civilization. He argues that the media is a profit-seeking industry that promotes specific images of Islam within a political context.

The emergence of the accommodationist school has contributed to a more balanced view of Islam. Nevertheless, Said's arguments are still valid for the confrontationalist school, which continues to dominate the policy-making process. Furthermore, the intricate web entangling academia, media, analysts, government, and special corporate interests exposed by Said remains very much a reality. Said contributes to this discussion about epistemic communities being able to influence foreign policy by poignantly confirming many of this theory's postulates.

A Critique of Rationalist Theories

Neorealism and neoliberalism are rationalistic approaches that do not consider nonstate actors (i.e., NGOs and social forces) as capable of affecting state behavior in the international arena, especially when the issue is perceived as a security matter. Another drawback of the rationalist perspective is its reductionist nature. Its adherents operate on the tapered assumption that state behavior is guided by materialistic egocentricity. This prevents rationalists from realizing that epistemic communities actually can have a strong influence on the foreign policy apparatus.

Both the neorealist and the neoliberal frameworks view governmental decision-making in terms of a monolithic black box that generates decisions. What they do not explain is that this box is a complex machine composed of gears and levers in a highly differentiated decision-making configuration. These decisions are the end result of several – and often conflicting – actions by individuals within governmental circles and the ability of outside forces

to influence the final policy.⁵⁸ They cannot offer a micro-level explanation for why the United States has a certain policy toward the rise of political Islam. Neorealism assumes the international system to be anarchic and adopts a state-centric approach to state behavior, whereas neoliberalism relies heavily on the idea of institutions playing a role in international affairs. Thus both cannot explain how an epistemic community can play a vital role in constructing foreign policy.

Conclusion

The role of expert advice in formulating official state policy is by no means a new matter. However, this paper divulges how such nonstate actors as academic scholars, journalists, and research analysts can be persuasive catalysts in manufacturing foreign policy decision-making toward a global phenomenon. This is a contribution to existing literature on foreign policy decision-making, for it explains how nonstate actors can have a major impact on the policy-making process. The constructivist paradigm, along with the concept of epistemic communities, facilitates this investigation in the sense that when combined, they provide a framework that allows researchers to consider variables that rationalist paradigms (neorealism and neoliberalism) are not even willing to recognize as participants in the making of foreign policy.

Critics may argue that the case of formulating American foreign policy toward political Islam is an anomaly and does not prove that either epistemic communities or constructivism has any broader applicability beyond this specific case. While this may have a certain degree of validity, nevertheless the fact remains that this framework offers an insight into an issue for which the more dominant theories cannot account. While neorealism and neoliberalism tender alternative explanations for American foreign policy antagonism toward the contemporary Islamic resurgence due to exogenous factors, constructivism offers a more rigorous framework that enables the inclusion of both endogenous and exogenous factors affecting this specific policy's formulation.

This paper proposes a new theoretical approach for examining foreign policy making in other issue areas as well. Furthermore, it can serve as a benchmark to gauge the epistemic community's effectiveness in having a meaningful influence on the process of foreign policy making. In a sense, it widens the locus of foreign policy making from a small vertical elite of politicians and bureaucrats to a much more horizontally situated and larger

group of individuals. Academicians, journalists, and analysts, through their often contradictory positions, actually bring issues to the public front and thus contribute to the cause of attentive citizenry and public affairs. It also underscores the need for non-state actor involvement in issues with which the state, on its own, may not be able to deal, especially in this age of increasing specialization.

Exactly what the United States' foreign policy should be toward political Islam's contemporary resurgence remains a question that divides the concerned epistemic community. Moreover, it surely will continue to be an intensely debated issue. The impact of this divided epistemic community also will undergo a great metamorphosis, as the phenomenon is undoubtedly one that will continue to evolve. Nonetheless, knowledge-based communities will be required to continue exploring the issue. This is where constructivism remains a relevant paradigm, whereas neorealism and neoliberalism will become increasingly marginalized.

Notes

1. John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 126-48.
2. Peter Haas, "Do Regimes Matter? Epistemic Communities and Mediterranean Pollution Control," *International Organization*, eds. Friedrich Kratochwill and Edward Mansfield (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 138.
3. Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 3-4.
4. Fawaz Gerges, *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Interests?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
5. As of the writing of this paper, Dr. al-Turabi and General al-Bashir have parted ways.
6. Although this author has applied the constructivist approach to explain the crafting of American foreign policy toward political Islam, it offers a wider application to other policy issues.
7. Peter M. Haas, *When Knowledge Is Power: Three Models of Change in International Organizations* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992, 221).
8. *Ibid.*, 40.
9. *Ibid.*, 41.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, 221.
12. Peter M. Haas, "Do Regimes Matter?" 132.
13. Ernst B. Haas, *When Knowledge Is Power*, 42.
14. Finnemore, *National Interests*, 3.

15. Ibid., 4.
16. Ibid., 27.
17. Kenneth Rutherford, "A Theoretical Examination of Disarming States: NGOs and Anti-Personnel Landmines," *International Politics* 37, no. 4 (December 2000): 470.
18. Ibid., 471.
19. Finnemore, *National Interests*, 6.
20. Ibid., 7.
21. Ibid., 16-17.
22. The manner in which epistemic communities channel information has been called the boomerang effect. For a full treatment, see Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).
23. Finnemore, *National Interests*, 9.
24. Ibid., 25.
25. Ibid., 24.
26. Ibid., 14.
27. Ibid., 15.
28. Graham E. Fuller and Ian O. Lesser, *A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam & the West* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 165.
29. Ahmed AbulJobain, "Radical Islamic Terrorism or Political Islam?" *Occasional Paper Series*, no. 1 (Annadale VA: United Association for Studies and Research, 1993), 18-25.
30. Leon Hadar, "What Green Peril?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 2 (1993): 28.
31. Ibid., 70.
32. Richard Nixon, *Beyond Peace* (New York: Random House, 1994), 147.
33. Daniel Pipes, "There Are No Moderates: Dealing with Fundamentalist Islam," *National Interest* (1995).
34. Daniel Pipes, "Memos to the Next President," *Middle East Insight* (December 2000).
35. Yossef Bodansky, *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing), xvii.
36. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 217.
37. Martin Kramer, "Ballots and Bullets: Islamists and the Relentless Drive for Power," *Harvard International Review* 19, no. 2 (1997): 16-19.
38. Judith Miller, "The Challenge of Radical Islam," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 2 (1993): 53.
39. Judith Miller, "Faces of Fundamentalism: Hasan al-Turabi and Muhammad Fadlallah," *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 6 (1994): 133-36.
40. Ahmad Rashid, "The Taliban: Exporting Extremism," *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 6 (1999): 22-35.
41. Jessica Stern, "Pakistan's Jihad Culture," *Foreign Affairs* 79, no. 6 (2000): 126.

42. John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
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44. Addi Laouhari, "Religion and Modernity in Algeria," *Journal of Democracy* 3, no. 4 (1992): 80.
45. Zachary Karabell, "Fundamental Misconceptions: Islamic Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy* 105, no. 4 (1996-97): 86-90.
46. Hadar, "What Green Peril?" 27.
47. Graham Fuller, "Islamic Fundamentalism," *Conflict after the Cold War: Arguments on Causes of War and Peace*, ed. Richard K. Betts (New York: Macmillian, 1994), 392.
48. Fred R. von der Mehden, "American Perceptions of Islam," *Voices of Resurgent Islam*. ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 19-20.
49. Enver Masud, *The War on Islam* (Arlington, VA: Madrassah Books, 2000), 151.
50. Edward P. Djerejian, "The Arc of Crisis: The Challenge to US Foreign Policy," *Harvard International Review* 19, no. 2 (1997): 33.
51. Graham Allison and Philip Zelikov, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2d ed. (Pearson PTP: 1999), 147-48.
52. Rutherford, "A Theoretical Examination," 461.
53. Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), xii.
54. *Ibid.*, xv.
55. *Ibid.*, xviii.
56. *Ibid.*, 22.
57. *Ibid.*, 133.
58. Allison and Zelikov, *Essence of Decision*, 5.