

CHAPTER ONE CONTEXTUALIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The philosopher, as we free spirits understand him – as the man of the greatest responsibility, who has the conscience for the general development of mankind – will use religion for his disciplining and educating work, just as he will use the contemporary political and economic conditions. – Friedrich Nietzsche¹

It is now clear that the coordinated seizure of four commercial aircraft and their use to strike targets on the ground on September 11, 2001 was perpetrated by a global, Islamist² terrorist network known as al-Qa'idah (pronounced kah-i-dah, 'the base'), headed by Usama bin Laden. This group's hostility to the United States is not new – its members (to the extent that this term can be used) and associates have been implicated in the 1993 car bombing of the World Trade Center (6 dead, over 1000 wounded), the 1995 and 1996 attacks on American forces in Saudi Arabia (25 dead, over 260 wounded), the coordinated attacks in 1998 on the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es-Salaam (224 dead, over 5000 wounded) and the October 2000 attack on the USS *Cole* (17 dead, 39 wounded). Neither is U.S. experience with Islamist terror new. The 1983 bombings of the

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, Helen Zimmern, trans. (London: T. N. Foulis, 1914), 79. Emphasis in the original.

² There has been an ongoing debate about how best to define modern Islamic movements (i.e., are they fundamentalists, revivalists, radicals, extremists, etc.?). For consistency's sake, we will use the terms "Islamists" and "Islamism" throughout this essay to refer to activists and their organizations that, among other goals, seek to create Islamic polities based on a strict interpretation of Islamic law. Many excellent articles and books have been written about Islamism, Islamist terrorism, Islamic-Western relations and other related topics. Among the best are Emmanuel Sivan, *Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); R. Scott Appleby, ed., *Spokesmen for the Despised: Fundamentalist Leaders of the Middle East* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997); Martin Kramer, ed., *The Islamism Debate*, Dayan Center Papers 120 (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University, 1997); Martin Kramer, *Arab Awakening and Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1996); Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); John L. Esposito, ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, *Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1982).

U.S. embassy and Marine barracks in Beirut (304 dead, over 200 wounded) and the kidnapping of Americans and other Westerners in Lebanon throughout the 1980s also were the handiwork of Islamist groups.

Some analysts have taken notice of the rise in religious terrorism worldwide in recent decades and discerned ways in which it differs from what was seen in the past as more secular, ideological or ethnic terrorism. The data suggest that religious terrorists are not bound by the same self-imposed limits as their secular counterparts, with the result being that religious terrorism claims many more victims per attack.³ Religious terrorism is demonstrably more lethal.

Unfortunately, prevailing Western analytic treatment of religion in the policy realm tends to be Manichean, characterized by dualistic stereotypes that make little allowance for shades of gray. Worse, perhaps, is the common assumption that the Western understanding of the societal and individual place and power of religion, to give but one example, is universally applicable. This problem is not limited to the field of counter-terrorism policy research. In recent decades there have been a number of American foreign and defense policy failures stemming from similarly over-generalized assumptions about political behavior, only some of which have to do with terrorism. In this dissertation, we will examine a number of the assumptions that underlie American foreign policy in general, and counter-terrorism policy in particular, the psychological and other factors influencing those assumptions, and their ultimate impact on policy.

³ Bruce Hoffman, "Terrorism Trends and Prospects," *Countering the New Terrorism*, Ian O. Lesser et al. (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), 15-20.

Can “Placement” Keep Us Honest?

To help avoid the pitfalls of misplaced universalism, Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May write of the importance of “placing strangers” in their *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers*:

For effective analysis or management, the kind that is not just academically right but gets something done, it is crucial, we think, to anticipate and take into account the different ways in which different actors see the world and their roles in it – not only organizationally but also humanly as individuals.⁴

Neustadt and May define placement as “using historical information to enrich initial stereotypes about another person’s outlook – ‘sophisticating’ stereotypes in the sense of adding facets or perspectives or at least shadings to what otherwise are very crude conjectures.”⁵ They detail a methodology that includes examination of both the public and personal history of an individual or group as the basis for understanding or anticipating resultant points of view. For the purposes of this dissertation, we expand on this definition to include socio-cultural, religious and other factors that the amorphous category “history” might miss. Additionally, we apply some of the techniques to non-state actors (i.e., terrorist groups and networks), though the language in Neustadt and May generally is limited to foreign states and their leaders as the subjects of placement. The methodology appears as equally relevant – if not more so – to the current non-traditional political/military environment as it was to the Cold War when it originally was formulated.

⁴ Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 157.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

Psychological Barriers to Placement

Efforts to gain insight into the different behavior of foreign actors, particularly those considered enemies, is hardly a new idea. In June 1944, in anticipation of a protracted war with Japan, the Office of War Information assigned cultural anthropologist Ruth Benedict the task of studying “Japanese habits of thought and emotion and the patterns into which these habits fell.” As Benedict put it in her resulting study, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, “We had to put aside for the moment the premises on which we act as Americans and to keep ourselves as far as possible from leaping to the easy conclusion that what we would do in a given situation was what they would do.”⁶ The diplomatic and political exigencies of the Cold War led to other systematic efforts to understand the past and future behavior of foreign actors, such as Raymond A. Bauer, Alex Inkeles and Clyde Kluckhohn’s *How The Soviet System Works*,⁷ and the development of “operational codes,” a term made famous by Nathan Leites’s classic RAND study, *The Operational Code of the Politburo*. Leites, like Neustadt and May, recognized the importance of understanding foreign actors on their own terms and in historical context:

To ensure the best predictions of Politburo action, many kinds of data besides the writings of Lenin and Stalin should be analyzed. The historical record reveals un verbalized, but equally important, rules of conduct of this group of policy-makers. It may also reveal a disposition to deviate from recognized rules under certain conditions.⁸

⁶ Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (Boston: Riverside Press, 1946), 4-5.

⁷ Raymond A. Bauer, Alex Inkeles and Clyde Kluckhohn, *How The Soviet System Works: Cultural, Psychological, and Social Themes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956).

The seemingly obvious task of placement, in fact the heart of what Graham Allison famously termed the Rational Actor Model,⁹ is notoriously difficult to accomplish objectively. As Ron Robin has pointed out in his meticulously researched *The Making of the Cold War Enemy*, the work of Leites and other operational codebreakers often was dominated by an exceedingly normative American understanding of foreign political behavior, and often was dismissive of the possibility of rationally chosen ideological commitment that strayed from the American model.¹⁰ Instead, Robin claims, Leites focused on “chance gestures of speech that might uncover the real – mostly unconscious, psychopathological – motivation of the Bolshevik character.”¹¹ While Robin comes across at times as overcritical and impatient with the contemporary beliefs of the scholars he examines, he is correct in pointing out the problematically universalist and/or provincial tendencies in the formulation of operational codes and in other Cold War studies of foreign actors.¹² Throughout his work, Robin focuses on ethnocentrism, American ideological commitment and influence, and fear as the reasons behind the shortcomings of these studies.

In recent decades, American analytic abilities vis-à-vis the Islamic world also have been hindered by strong ethnocentric forces, pulling from both West and East. These manifest themselves strongly in the American academy, which remains the most important training ground for American analysts and decision-makers alike. The sources of bias can be divided into two general categories,

⁸ Nathan Leites, *The Operational Code of the Politburo* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1951), xiii. A similar case is made in Gordon H. McCormick, “Surprise, Perceptions, and Military Style,” *Orbis* 26.4 (Winter 1983): 834-6.

⁹ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Second Edition (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999), 4-5, 10.

¹⁰ Ron Robin, *The Making of the Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 131.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

corresponding roughly to two groups upon whose expertise the nation relies – in varying degree – for analytical support in dealing with Islamist terrorism. The first group, affected by what we will call loosely Western biases, comprises primarily terrorism experts and other political and social scientists. The second, affected by an eclectic mix of Eastern and post-modernist biases, is made up largely of academics specializing in Middle Eastern affairs. The limitations of both groups have undermined their ability, and in some cases, even their inclination, to aid and advise decision-makers, who typically are neither experts in terrorism nor in the nuances of the Islamic world.

Identifying the source of bias in foreign policy analysis as ethnocentrism tells only half the story, however, for ethnocentrism – whether from West or East – is itself an intermediate cause, being itself the result of well-known, documented psychological phenomena. Forty-five year CIA veteran Richards J. Heuer, Jr. discusses the problem in his *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*:

To see the options faced by foreign leaders as these leaders see them, one must understand their values and assumptions and even their misperceptions and misunderstandings. Without such insight, interpreting foreign leaders' decisions or forecasting future decisions is often little more than partially informed speculation. Too frequently, foreign behavior appears "irrational" or "not in their own best interest." Such conclusions often indicate analysts have projected American values and conceptual frameworks onto the foreign leaders and societies, rather than understanding [sic] the logic of the situation as it appears to them.¹³

¹² Robin is not the first to observe this problem. See, for example, Alexander L. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980), 46-7.

It is difficult not to be struck by this passage, given the frequent popular and official references to bin Laden and his associates as “crazy madmen” who have “distorted Islam” to justify their acts of terror. These claims may be true, but they are not as self-evident as the statements of media figures and public officials would suggest. On the contrary, analysis of the kind suggested by Neustadt, May and Heuer makes the Islamist movements’ violent interaction with the United States much more comprehensible and possibly even predictable. These groups do have their own rational ways of conceiving their interests. We have done a lamentable job of properly and consistently identifying them.

Heuer, Robert Jervis, Deborah Welch Larson and others have done pioneering work in bringing social psychological theories to bear on foreign policy issues, and in documenting psychological phenomena relevant for foreign policy analysis.¹⁴ Many of these phenomena can be categorized as either unmotivated (seeing what we expect to see) or motivated (seeing what we want to see) biases.¹⁵ For example, in his chapter, “Perception: Why Can’t We See What Is There To Be Seen?,” Heuer systematically discusses a number of scientifically observed, psychological phenomena that can lead to the kind of biased analysis mentioned above in which foreigners are assumed to behave as we would, a

¹³ Richards J. Heuer, Jr., *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1999), 33. This point is also made in Gregory F. Treverton, *Reshaping National Intelligence in an Age of Information* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 208-9.

¹⁴ See especially, Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976); Heuer, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*; and Deborah Welch Larson, *Origins of Containment: A Psychological Explanation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985).

¹⁵ For a more fundamental discussion of motivated and unmotivated biases from the psychology literature, see Thomas Gilovich, *How We Know What Isn’t So: The Fallibility of Human Reason in Everyday Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1991); Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross, *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980); and Scott Plous, *The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

process known as mirror-imaging, and against which he cautions in the strongest terms.¹⁶

The difficulties in understanding foreign actors have been noted even by Islamists themselves, such as Mahmud Abouhalima, interviewed by Mark Juergensmeyer, and now serving a life sentence for his role in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing:

He [Abouhalima] said that he understood the secular West because he had lived like a Westerner in Germany and the United States. The seventeen years he had lived in the West, Abouhalima told me, "is a fair amount of time to understand what the hell is going on in the United States and in Europe about secularism or people, you know, who have no religion." He went on to say, "I lived their life, but they didn't live my life, so they will never understand the way I live or the way I think."¹⁷

While Abouhalima's view reflects an extreme cultural relativism, Heuer, in noting the multitude of sources that can influence our expectations and thus, our analysis as well, sums up the important part of Abouhalima's message quite succinctly: "We tend to perceive what we expect to perceive."¹⁸

Bolstering the inclination to see what we expect to see is the tendency to hold fast to our initial beliefs and interpret new data in ways that fit our preconceived notions, making the already unnatural goal of disproving (rather than proving)

¹⁶ Heuer, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, 70-1.

¹⁷ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 69.

¹⁸ Heuer, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, 8-9.

our own hypotheses even more difficult.¹⁹ Robert Jervis puts the phenomenon of interpreting data to support existing beliefs in policy-making in more familiar epistemological terms, noting the equivalence to the Kuhnian paradigm in the natural sciences: “While evidence must be adduced to support a theory, the inferences drawn depend on our theories....”²⁰

The result of these common, natural, psychological biases is that while analysts continue to recognize the need for placement (using various terms for the process), it remains a difficult and complex task. In the pages and chapters that follow, we shall present specific, recent examples where these biases and their resultant ideological and ethnocentric influences have undermined the quality, objectivity and scope of analysis of Islamist terrorism-related issues. We shall conclude the chapter by presenting a number of counter-bias strategies that we employ in the case study chapters that make up the remainder of the dissertation.

Is this Islam?

An apparent example of motivated bias can be found in the various discussions about whether the terrorism that al-Qa'idah practices is in fact Islamic. Media pundits and decision-makers alike have gone to great lengths to assert that the attack on September 11 was not truly Islamic. Attorney General John Ashcroft, after investigators recovered a letter belonging to suspected September 11 terrorists:

¹⁹ Ibid., 16; Nisbett and Ross, *Human Inference*, 170-1.

²⁰ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 156. This point is also made in Charles G. Lord, Lee Ross, and Mark R. Lepper, “Biased Assimilation and Attitude Polarization: The Effects of Prior Theories on Subsequently Considered Evidence,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 37.11 (November 1979): 2108.

Let me make clear that, while this letter contains a number of religious references, I do not believe it to be representative of Muslims or the Islamic faith. The letter is a stark reminder of how these hijackers grossly perverted the Islamic faith to justify their terrorist acts.²¹

Frankly, the discussion as to whether or not this terror is Islamic would be irrelevant, or even humorous (Is John Ashcroft *really* deciding what is or is not Islamic?), were it not for its potential to threaten good analysis seriously. To be sure, the president, the vice-president, the attorney general, members of the media and other public figures are walking a tightrope. Statements such as these undoubtedly are informed by the wise desire to maintain order and stability, both at home and abroad. Domestically, an anti-Islamic witch-hunt would be destructive, divisive and sow fear in every major American city. It would raise the specter of the regrettable Japanese-American internment during World War II and the attendant civil rights issues. Any statements perceived as vilifying the American Muslim population would also serve to radicalize it, creating a two-way self-fulfilling prophecy. That is, the Islamists would be proved right insofar as America would be seen as waging war against Islam, and the resultant Muslim hostility to the American authorities would validate the latter's concerns.

Abroad, observers are right in noting that most Muslims are not Islamists and even among those that are, most do not choose the path offered by al-Qa'idah. Further, the United States has important relationships with governments in the Islamic world whose hold on power is based on a precarious balance between Islamic sentiment on the one hand and national interests bound with those of the United States on the other. Attempting to separate the Islamists from other Muslims is an important part of American efforts to maintain stability in the

²¹ "FBI Recovers Letter Belonging to 3 Hijackers," CNN.com, September 28, 2001, Internet: <http://www.cnn.com/2001/US/09/28/inv.document.terrorism/index.html> .

Islamic world while garnering support for counter-terrorist military and diplomatic action against and within countries with Muslim majorities. This is a point to which we shall return in Chapter Five.

At the same time, however, the government and the media have an obligation not to mislead the public about the nature of the threat.²² For the purposes of analysis, these public statements are dangerous. Al-Qa'idah is Islamic. Its membership might represent a tiny fraction of Muslims. Its beliefs and practices might strongly contradict and deviate from traditional understandings of the Qur'an and Islamic law. The bottom line, however, is that this movement, like Hizballah, Hamas and others, comes from the same Islamic kernel as other, non-violent streams within Islam. Furthermore, all these movements claim to speak in the name of, and most definitely do speak in the language of, Islam. Religion is not democratic, except over time; that most Muslims do not practice terrorism is immaterial here. The Islamic roots and Islamically based doctrine of al-Qa'idah make it Islamic. The situation is akin to that of the Jewish terrorists who conspired to blow up the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. Most Jews did not support such an action and would agree that it would constitute a violation of Jewish law. But the very fact that these zealots were Jews, who planned their act in the name of Judaism to initiate the process of bringing the Messiah and rebuilding the Temple, makes it a Jewish act. To the extent that the Ku Klux Klan uses the Bible and Christian theology to support its positions, it is a Christian movement. It is not by chance that the most active Klan group in the United States is the *Church* of the American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.²³

²² The frequent sanitization of the term *jihad* provides one example. To cut to the chase, see Bernard Lewis, "Jihad vs. Crusade" *WSJ.com OpinionJournal*, September 27, 2001, Internet: <http://www.opinionjournal.com/extra/?id=95001224>. The citation of Qur'anic verses that attest to the peaceful nature of Islam is a particularly galling practice that should cease. Much as is the case with the Bible, it is easy to find passages that justify violence as well. It is these that Islamists so inclined choose for their own purposes.

²³ "ADL Backgrounder – Church of the American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan," 22 October 1999, Internet: http://www.adl.org/backgrounders/american_knights_kkk.html.

Understanding the Klan without understanding its (claimed) moral underpinnings would be incomplete. So too for the Islamist movements. What constitutes “true” religion, at a given point in time, is almost entirely in the eye of the believer.

It would be a mistake, then, to ignore the Islamic nature and basis of al-Qa’idah and other Islamist groups. As noted above, for us to place the group and possibly predict its actions, we must be able to cast aside what we are inclined to believe so that we can analyze it on its members’ own terms. This has proved difficult not just for journalists and decision-makers, but for many academics as well.

In recent years, there have been a number of books, like John L. Esposito’s *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?*, Fred Halliday’s *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation* and Fawaz A. Gerges’s *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?*, that have made the important point that not all Muslims hate the West and pose a threat, yet have glossed over the distinctly and unmistakably Islamic nature of groups like al-Qa’idah. Esposito almost mockingly writes of what appears to him to be alarmist Western journalism:

Belief in an impending clash between the Muslim world and the West was reflected in America by headlines and television programs such as “A Holy War Heads Our Way,” “Jihad in America,” “Focus: Islamic Terror: Global Suicide Squad,” “I believe in Islamaphobia,” “Algerians in London Fund Islamic Terrorism,” and “France Back on the Rack”²⁴

²⁴ John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* Third Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 213-4.

One does not have to believe in a full-scale, all-encompassing “clash of civilizations” between the Muslim world and the West to share the concerns reflected in the headlines Esposito cites. “Jihad in America” dealt largely with Islamic charities in the United States that were funneling money to terrorist groups abroad. The federal government is now acting against such fronts.²⁵ The events of September 11 demonstrated that there is such a thing as a “global suicide squad.” That Algerians in London fund Islamic terrorism is not quite so incredible today as Esposito suggested when he wrote his book in 1992 and revised it in 1995 and again in 1999.

Esposito is not alone in his dichotomous thinking. Gerges differentiates between two types of academics, analysts and policy-makers. On the one hand are the “confrontationalists,” those who subscribe to Samuel P. Huntington’s clash of civilizations idea. On the other are the “accommodationists,” who “distinguish between the actions of legitimate Islamist political opposition groups and the tiny extremist majority.”²⁶ Making this latter distinction is of great importance. However, Esposito and Gerges, perhaps out of their fear of much broader stereotyping, seemingly are unable to do so themselves. We argue for the study of Islam precisely so that we can gain insight into the actions of the extremists, who are our cause for concern. Doing so does not amount to a religion- or civilization-wide accusation.

Gerges admonishes American society, government officials and the media for harboring negative stereotypes of all Muslims and for playing fast and loose with the distinct populations of Islamists and Muslims, yet he is guilty of precisely the same sin. Writing about the appearance of a “new kind of anti-Semitism,”

²⁵ Noreen S. Ahmed-Ullah and Laurie Cohen, “Muslims Now Hesitant to Give,” *Chicago Tribune* September 30, 2001, Internet: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-0109300457sep30.story> .

Gerges complains, "Some observers added fuel to the fire by warning of a coordinated international network of 'Islamic terrorist' groups throughout the United States with its guns aimed at Western interests."²⁷ He similarly is critical of those who argued that "Islamic extremism is bound to reach the shores of America through Muslim immigrants and visitors."²⁸ The warnings' striking resemblance to reality are beside the point here. For Gerges, pointing out that there are Islamic terrorist groups – peopled by Muslims and claiming to act in the name of Islam – is somehow an act of racist incitement. The harboring of inaccurate stereotypes of all Muslims is, of course, both wrong and counter-productive. Gerges, though, puts the blame for this almost exclusively on the history, politics and culture of the United States. He only glancingly acknowledges that such stereotypes have been fed in part by decades of American experience with Islamist terrorists, and he fails to mention that these groups consistently claim to represent true Islam.²⁹ For Gerges, criticism and study of the extremist minority somehow indicts the often-silent majority. He appears to be lumping Muslims and Islamists together every bit as much as those he criticizes.

Writing in *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* in 1996, Clarence J. Bouchat posits that "For Islam, as a religio-political bloc, to be a coherent threat, one billion people living in 45 Muslim majority countries must put aside their many differences to unite with a single purpose,"³⁰ then he attaches the caveat that "This line of thinking does not imply that Islamic revivalism poses no dangers to the West,

²⁶ Fawaz A. Gerges, *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 28-9.

²⁷ Ibid., 46.

²⁸ Ibid., 26.

²⁹ Gerges notes that U.S. experiences in Tehran and New York (1993) with Islamist groups have colored U.S. public and official opinion, but makes no mention of the U.S. experience in Beirut or with Osama bin Laden and al-Qa'idah. Ibid., 42-7.

only that intentional coherent threats if they exist, lie far in the future.”³¹ Five years later, although the attacks in New York and Washington yielded fewer casualties than might be expected in an global war between Islam and the West, few would argue that they do not represent an “intentional coherent threat.”

In the same edition of the journal, David G. Kibble hems and haws, saying at one point that “In practice ... the case for militant Islam being a threat is weak; it is as weak in practice as the case is strong for militant Islam being a threat in theory.”³² He goes on to conclude that “This playing down of the threat is seen from a practical standpoint, i.e., the patchwork nature of revivalist Muslim groups, the rejection of violence by most revivalists, and the traditional subservience of the Arab mind [!].”³³ Confoundingly, he also notes the easily accessible Islamist exegesis of the Qur’an and Islamic law to justify violent actions, and counter-concludes that, “In terms of the West, there will no doubt continue to be a terrorist threat from a small group of politically militant Muslims.... In local terms, such a threat *should not be underestimated*.”³⁴ That Kibble recognizes the difference between large-scale civilizational strife and small group terrorism is important. However, his minimizing of the large threat threatens to steer the analysis away from examination of the Islamic context of what is, to him, at once the lesser threat and one that should not be underestimated. How should a decision-maker read this?

Halliday, in his chapter, “Islam and the West: ‘Threat of Islam’ or ‘Threat to Islam’?” also relies on the lack of a single, unified Islamic polity to argue against

³⁰ Clarence J. Bouchat, “A Fundamentalist Islamic Threat to the West,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 19: 342.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 344.

³² David G. Kibble, “The Threat of Militant Islam: A Fundamental Reappraisal,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 19:362.

³³ *Ibid.*, 363.

the existence of an Islamic threat.³⁵ He puts forth a logically flawed argument in rebuttal to the charge that Islam sanctions terrorism, stating that "...there has been terrorism aplenty, but no Islam, in Northern Ireland, Euzkadi, or Sri Lanka," as if the charge had been that Islam was a necessary precondition for terrorism. He goes on to identify, correctly, ways in which Islamists truly believe themselves to be on the defensive. Later in the same volume Halliday writes, "The fact that proponents of the religion claim something is no reason whatsoever to accept it..."³⁶ As we noted above, this is in fact the best reason to take it seriously, put it in context and try to understand its origin and meaning.

Nor should attempts to dismiss the idea of a clash of civilizations be accepted based on mere assertion or the observation that the Islamic world is not a monolith. The analytic reaction to nuance should not be coming to the simplest conclusion. For a whole host of reasons (and there is no shortage of domestic and international apologia on the matter), the September 11 attacks were met with a large measure of approval and even celebration across the Muslim world, while popular condemnation was notably limited. Though determining whether there is in fact such a clash is beyond the scope of this essay, Huntington will undoubtedly read differently under the post-September 11 circumstances.³⁷

Amazingly, Esposito's and Gerges's efforts to de-Islamize Islamic terror are not limited to rebutting what Westerners say, or minimizing their concerns. Esposito goes so far as to ignore the statements and actions of the Islamists themselves:

³⁴ Ibid., 362. Emphasis added.

³⁵ Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation: Religion and Politics in the Middle East* (London, I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1995), 113, 119-20.

³⁶ Ibid., 208.

The problem persists in the nineties. Fears of radical Islam, its threat to the Middle East and the West, loom large: that the Islamic republics of Iran and of Sudan collaborate as major exporters of terrorism and revolution, that Islamists are out to “hijack democracy” through participation in elections in countries like Algeria, and that fundamentalist terrorism has been exported to new battlegrounds, America and Europe.³⁸

In an earlier work, Esposito writes specifically about the Iranian goal of exporting the revolution using both peaceful and violent means.³⁹ Additionally, members of Algeria’s Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) have said on many occasions that if they were to gain power democratically, they would then eliminate democracy. That is, democracy was an acceptable means of gaining power, but not for relinquishing it.⁴⁰ Even at the time of Esposito’s writing, Islamist terrorism already had been exported to the United States and Europe. Esposito himself mentions the December 24, 1994 hijacking of an Air France plane by Algerian Islamists and their reported intentions of blowing it up over Paris.⁴¹

Why do Esposito and Gerges, prolific and respected researchers in the field of Middle Eastern Studies, work so hard to cleanse the image of Islamism? Why are they so hesitant to criticize, to take Islamists at their word and analyze their

³⁷ See, especially, Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the New World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 216-8.

³⁸ Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, 213.

³⁹ John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, Third Edition (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 207-8.

⁴⁰ See Yahia H. Zoubir, “Algerian Islamists’ Conception of Democracy,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 18.3 (Summer 1996): 75-8, which quotes the FIS representative to Belgium as saying, “We are for democracy as a political practice only, not as a philosophical basis.” Gerges is critical on this point as well, stating that “Washington’s ambivalence toward the results of the 1991 parliamentary elections in Algeria... raises many questions about American commitment to democratization in the Muslim Middle East.” Gerges, *America and Political Islam*, 103. Does it?

⁴¹ Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, 213.

movements on their own terms?⁴² Part of the answer might lie in a personal and professional ideological interest. Esposito is the founding director of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding in the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, a role that presumably leaves him inclined to smooth out interfaith differences. Possibly intensifying this effect is the inclination to vary our scrutiny of data depending on their perceived support for or undermining of our preconceptions.⁴³ Esposito and Gerges, however, provide just two examples of a widespread trend that has hamstrung critical scholarship on the Middle East for almost a quarter century. Informed by post-modernist thought, many academics' imposing of ideologies of victimization on the Muslim world and their related tendency to ignore or justify the anti-Western statements of Islamists demonstrate the power and complexity of arguments driven by motivated biases; these ostensibly open-minded scholars also see what they want to see, and sometimes little else.⁴⁴

Placement in the Past

⁴² It should be noted that earlier in his career Esposito edited and co-edited important volumes that did carry the words of Islamists directly. See John L. Esposito, ed., *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); and John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito, eds., *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

⁴³ Gilovich, *How We Know What Isn't So*, 53-6, 78-84; Nisbett and Ross, *Human Inference*, 170-1.

⁴⁴ The post-modernist trend is both symbolized and justified by Edward W. Said's influential book, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), in which he avers that traditional Western scholarship on the Middle East is not only ethnocentric, but also itself a tool of imperialist domination of the peoples of the region. Despite its many logical and methodological flaws, *Orientalism* continues to have a impressive impact in the academy, and has been described by one scholar as "the most influential text on the Middle East" in the United States. See Barry Rubin, "The Truth about U.S. Middle East Policy," *MERIA Journal* 5.4 (December 2001), <http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2001/issue4/jv5n4a1.htm>; and Andrew J. Rotter, "Saidism without Said," *American Historical Review* 105.4: 1205-1217. As this dissertation was being written, Martin Kramer published an important and controversial study in which he discusses Said's arguments and influence in detail and posits that, in part, it is responsible for the increasing irrelevance of American Middle Eastern studies for practical questions of foreign policy-making. See Martin Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001). For a particularly erudite analysis of *Orientalism*, see the chapter, "Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said" in Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory* (London: Verso, 1992), 159-219.

Our discussion of the many obstacles to understanding foreign actors on their own terms is not to imply that the United States has been blind to the regional/cultural context of al-Qa'idah or other players in the Islamic world. Decision-makers do, however, continue to struggle especially with the problem of mirror-imaging, tending to analyze actors in the Islamic world as if they were Westerners (e.g., by making assumptions about the appeal of religion and its role vis-à-vis the state, the role and rights of the individual, etc.). Thus, we find ourselves in the odd position of tolerating tyrants while expecting them to behave according to (at least some of) our own democratic beliefs. If our analysis better understood the regional and cultural context of these actors, then our expectations for their adherence to the norms of the international community (which are largely Western) could be appropriately framed and tailored to maximize compliance.

Beyond psychology, there is an additional, perhaps more conscious, reason that some analysts and decision-makers have tended to under- or misuse history, religious texts and cultural studies in their analysis – these instruments are often not scientifically rigorous. They rarely provide a definitive, final answer, and they come with no guarantees. In the current age, computing power often allows us to predict specific outcomes or else to rapidly model a multiplicity of outcomes in uncertain circumstances. High-resolution imagery facilitates accurate assessments of quantities of military hardware and force dispositions. In the shadow of such precise intelligence, the very human analysis of religious, social, cultural and other non-quantifiable factors appears to some to be behind the times, a relic of a less sophisticated era. Neustadt and May are up front on this subject:

So, while urging that placement be standard practice, we add a caution: Remember that its only purpose is to produce a better

working guess, a more sophisticated conjecture; the result is still a guess – a hypothesis – and it may be wrong.⁴⁵

It is important to remember here that the task at hand is difficult. Even if one were able to overcome completely the obstacles to good analysis discussed above, human decision-making is not governed by the kinds of laws that allow a physicist to predict missile trajectories. The very nature of forecasting human behavior is uncertain. But this does not make such analysis worthless. On the contrary, informed analysis can reduce the uncertainty involved in predicting a person's behavior. As Neustadt and May put the issue:

Our contention simply is that one improves one's guesses as one "places" her or him against large historical events, the stuff of public history, which *may* mold current views, and also against relatively small details of record in his or her personal history that *might* do much the same. When guessing must be done, we think it ought to be sophisticated in this fashion....⁴⁶

In the chapters that follow, three historical case studies will be presented, namely examinations of U.S. negotiation with Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad following the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, the U.S. and Israeli understanding of the interests of Hamas and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) since 1993 and U.S. deterrent posture vis-à-vis al-Qa'idah and other Islamist terrorist groups, with particular focus on *how these actors have understood U.S. behavior*. We will glean underlying assumptions and perceptions from primary and secondary sources,

⁴⁵ Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, 211.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 159. Emphasis in the original. Jervis makes a very similar point. Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 224.

and examine the resultant U.S. decision-making and consequences. The first case study will demonstrate how a particular motivated bias led then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger unintentionally to help turn Asad from a wartime loser into an intransigent cease-fire winner. Chapter Three will present a number of widely held preconceptions about the use of terrorism in the shadow of the Oslo Accords, then show how these preconceptions are the products of the avoidance of nuance as well as a mix of motivated and unmotivated biases. The chapter will conclude with a re-examination of Hamas's historical use of terror based upon alternative assumptions that strongly suggest that such violence is not necessarily intended to "torpedo the peace process," and that, in turn, lead to policy options for possibly influencing the pattern of terror in the future. Chapter Four will evaluate the gross differences in perception of American deterrent messages by both the senders and receivers of those messages that ultimately led to the deterrence failure on September 11. Chapter Five will conclude with the examination and recommendation of more specific policy options for the near- and long-term, with a particular emphasis on meeting America's stated policy objective of deterring future terrorism.

The cases were chosen for their intrinsic importance and policy relevance – one addresses U.S. dealings with a long-time state sponsor of terror, while the others concern U.S. policies toward specific, still-active terrorist groups – and for their heretofore unsatisfactory practical and theoretical explanations. Together, these cases demonstrate how psychological biases and a lack of proper placement of regional actors have harmed U.S. long-term interests with consequent, substantial loss of life. This is not to be hindsight-based speculation and Monday-morning quarterbacking, though it certainly is far easier to second-guess foreign policy decision-making once history has provided the analyst with a degree of perspective than it was to make those decisions in the first place. Undoubtedly, all those involved were acting in what they perceived to be their respective best interests. Nevertheless, we hope to provide concrete examples of cases where

awareness of preconceptions and psychological biases and employment of the placement methodology of Neustadt and May might have led to different, and even better sets of decisions. It is by design that more questions are raised here than are answered. Woven throughout the case studies are alternative placements of the main actors, and a presentation of the related policy options that might have been available and known to U.S. decision-makers if they had access to similar analysis. In other words, assumptions are both challenged and re-developed for the tasks at hand. Our approach to the case studies is summarized in the table below.

Methodology	Historical Examples	Analysis and Decision-Making ⇒	Outcomes
Current	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syria, 1973 • Hamas & PNA, 1993- • Al-Qa'idah, 1990s 	Ethnocentric, psychologically biased	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syrian-sponsored terrorism; validation of hard-line approach • Hamas/PNA terrorism collaboration • Increasingly bold and costly anti-US attacks
Placement, counter-bias measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Al-Qa'idah, 2001- 	Informed by the history of antagonists, psychological self-awareness, consideration of antagonists' psychological biases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy-makers will have an expanded and improved tool set to analyze, predict and possibly prevent future attacks

It is important to point out here that our focus is on policy-makers rather than on analysts, and for several reasons. First, intelligence analysis tends to be either classified or unpublished. Second, the connection between analysis (good or bad) and decision-making is not at all obvious. Indeed, given the multitude of domestic and international factors that influence executive decision-making, one

may have nothing to do with the other.⁴⁷ Finally, the ultimate decisions of policy-makers are what truly matter. Our concern is with real American action and inaction and how to improve the decision-making behind them.

Reducing the Distortions

How will the case study analyses reduce the effects of the biases noted above and discussed in detail in the following chapters? There are two primary means for doing so. The first, discussed throughout this chapter, relates to broader consideration of the foreign actor's context (that is, using placement where it has not been used before), while the second has to do with explicit and implicit recognition of our own. It has been observed that there are four main theoretical traditions in the social sciences that roughly adhere to units and types of analysis – rational actor/individual; institutional; cultural; and historical. While Neustadt and May focus on the latter only, the analysis proposed here will go beyond the use of history (though this can be an all-inclusive term, to be sure), blurring these unsatisfying theoretical lines, and making use of elements from all four interrelated traditions and a multitude of diverse sources to enrich and/or question the heretofore held understandings of the actors being studied.

It is conceivable, even likely, for example, that once an analyst has a greater understanding of the foreign actor's historical, cultural and institutional background, s/he will be in a much better position to understand the actor's perceived interests, which in turn allows for the creation of potentially powerful rational actor models. Beforehand such models would have been based on biased assumptions or else would have been impossible to create at all due to the perceived "irrationality" of the subjects. This study, then, does not reflect a rejection of the social scientific theories that have proven problematic in the context of Islamism. On the contrary, it seeks to augment and improve them in

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the gaps between analysis and decision-making, see Treverton, *Reshaping*

the hopes that their refinement will provide meaningful explanatory power in this realm as well.

Robert H. Bates and colleagues refer to the combination of historical narrative and social science theory as “Analytic Narrative.” This methodology lends itself to policy analysis quite well in that “... the chapters in [*Analytic Narratives*] are problem driven, not theory driven; they are motivated by a desire to account for particular events or outcomes. They are devoted to the exploration of cases, not to the elaboration of theory.... Although informed by deductive reasoning, the chapters themselves seek no universal laws of human behavior.”⁴⁸

The goal here, then, is decidedly not to create anything like an operational code for Islamists. Operational codes can be overly comprehensive in their efforts to produce a behavioral guidebook and at the same time overly narrow in their focus on a specific actor or body of actors detached from a specific historical event or problem. To avoid these pitfalls, we will examine specific cases in which Islamists have played a role and in which understanding discrete elements of their behavior (as opposed to the general “rules” of an operational code) are helpful in addressing the problems at hand.⁴⁹

Aside from being problem driven, another advantage of this approach is that arguments can be evaluated with some scientific rigor. Specifically, Bates et al. posit five questions that can be asked of each case study: 1) Do the assumptions fit the facts, as they are known? 2) Do conclusions follow from premises? 3) Do its implications find confirmation in the data? 4) How well does the theory stand

National Intelligence, 177-215.

⁴⁸ Robert H. Bates, et al, *Analytic Narratives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 11.

⁴⁹ Alexander L. George points out that operational codes were not designed to “provide a simple key to explanation and prediction,” but could help in “bounding” the alternative perceptions and courses of action open to the foreign actor. Alexander L. George, “The ‘Operational Code’: A

up by comparison with other explanations? and 5) How general is the explanation? Does it apply to other cases?⁵⁰ We believe that the case study analyses in the chapters that follow provide satisfactory answers to these important questions, answers which also serve as a control against the wholesale tossing about of social psychological theories as a tool for explaining almost anything away. That is, the usefulness of such theories in creating alternative models is dependent on their positive contribution to the explanatory power of those new models.

As we discussed above, it undoubtedly is the case that our own understandings of history, culture and institutions – foreign or domestic – are colored by who we are. While it is impossible to divorce ourselves from our context, recognizing this fact also will improve our analysis. The case studies will include examples where even a modest degree of self-placement might have led the actors to make different, better decisions. The psychology literature is explicit in noting that human beings will never be able to eliminate the underlying mental mechanisms that lead to distorted perception, many of which have positive cognitive effects as well. There is, however, a two-part strategy for limiting the effects of the motivated and unmotivated biases that threaten our perception. First, awareness of the biases and their effects (i.e., a kind of self-placement) can itself inspire auto-corrective behavior. Second, with this psychological self-awareness it becomes easier to consider a wider range of alternative assumptions and explanations related to a given issue, which is a critical element of the analytic narrative methodology.⁵¹ Epistemologically speaking, this approach is consistent

Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," *International Studies Quarterly* 13.2 (June 1969): 200.

⁵⁰ Bates et al, *Analytic Narratives*, 14-18. The authors are explicit in recognizing that their methodology is not immune to the problems often associated with the generalizability of case study research. *Ibid.*, 232-6.

⁵¹ Gilovich, *How We Know What Isn't So*, 185-8; Nisbett and Ross, *Human Inference*, 293. This is consistent with Heuer's Analysis of Competing Hypotheses (ACH) methodology and with the multiple-model approach described by Paul K. Davis and John Arquilla (discussed further in the

with Lakatos's idea of testing alternative hypotheses rather than simply trying to falsify the one currently prevailing,⁵² and it has already proved useful in other studies of foreign policy.⁵³

The utility of psychological self-awareness does not stop with ourselves, however. Further intertwining the placement and psychological approaches is the need to apply the insights gained from social psychology not just to understanding our own perceptions, but to understanding the perceptions of foreign actors as well. That is, placement must take into consideration not just the historical and cultural, but also the psychological context of those being studied. They too bear the burden of motivated and unmotivated biases, and it is crucial to factor that into our analysis. This point is most dramatically evident in the discussion of deterring terrorists in Chapters Four and Five, but informs the other case studies as well.

We believe that our use of placement and multiple or alternative models in the case studies successfully fills some of the gaps left in the literature that deals with those cases.⁵⁴ That said, a word of methodological humility and consistency is in order here. The psychological explanations offered here for analytic and decision-making failings and the alternative models so implied are not the only ones possible. It is entirely likely that other, as yet undiscovered, alternative

chapters below). Heuer, *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, 95-109; Paul K. Davis and John Arquilla, *Thinking about Opponent Behavior in Crisis and Conflict: A Generic Model for Analysis and Group Discussion* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1991), 6-8.

⁵² Imre Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes," *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, eds. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 91-196.

⁵³ Larson, *Origins of Containment*, 25.

⁵⁴ Bruce W. Jentleson points out that there have been problematically few academic publications addressing policy-relevant aspects of terrorism and counter-terrorism. Specifically, he identified only four such books from academic presses in the five years before 2002 and only seven related doctoral dissertations completed during the period 1998-2001. Bruce W. Jentleson, "The Need for Praxis," *International Security* 26.4 (Spring 2002): 171-2.

hypotheses will, in time, complement or supersede the conclusions of this study. It is our deepest hope that the following chapters will catalyze the development of such alternatives on the road to more useful, sound and successful models of counter-terrorism policy-making.