FAITH FIGHTS COMMUNISM: THE UNITED STATES AND ISLAM IN SAUDI ARABIA DURING THE COLD WAR

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A Thesis Submitted to the University of North Carolina Wilmington in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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University of North Carolina Wilmington
2009

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# Table of Contents

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................................. iii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ......................................................................................................................... iv

DEDICATION ........................................................................................................................................ vi

INTRODUCTION – A BRIEF HISTORY OF U.S. DIPLOMACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE IMPACT OF ORIENTALISM ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF AMERICAN FOREIGN RELATIONS ................................................................. 1

CHAPTER I – THE MIGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE: EUROPEAN ORIENTALISTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE PERCEPTION OF ISLAM IN THE UNITED STATES DURING THE COLD WAR .................................................................................. 21

CHAPTER II – A PARTNERSHIP OF FAITH: THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION AND KING SA’UD IBN ABDUL AZIZ OF SAUDI ARABIA ................................................................. 50

CHAPTER III – PREACHING TO THE MASSES: THE STATE DEPARTMENT, THE UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY, AND THE PEOPLE OF SAUDI ARABIA .................................................................................................................. 76

CONCLUSION – LESSONS FROM THE AMERICAN COLD WAR MOBILIZATION OF ISLAM ........................................................................................................................................ 105

WORKS CITED ...................................................................................................................................... 115
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the mobilization of Islam in Saudi Arabia by U.S. policymakers during the early stages of the Cold War. Officials in both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations identified Islam as a potential bulwark against the spread of atheistic communism into the Middle East. As the United States supplanted Great Britain as the hegemonic power in the region following World War II, traditional European misperceptions of a stagnant and monolithic “Muslim world” migrated across the Atlantic and became entrenched in fledgling area-studies programs throughout a number of American universities. These mischaracterizations soon permeated the ranks of the policymaking community as well, causing State Department officials to perceive Islam as a useful weapon against the spread of Soviet communism. The Eisenhower administration targeted Saudi Arabia as a regional base for this mobilization. President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles hoped to establish King Sa’ud ibn Abdul Aziz as a spiritual leader for all Muslims, as well as a pro-Western counter to the Arab Nationalist ambitions of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. The State Department also exploited Sa’ud’s perceived responsibilities as the guardian of the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina in order to discourage him from establishing any connections with the “God-less” Soviets. Officials with the United States Information Agency (USIA) also targeted the Saudi populace with a grass-roots propaganda campaign that featured a variety of materials contrasting the violent oppression of Muslims in communist countries with the spiritual tolerance of the United States.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been fortunate to receive a wealth of suggestions and support from a number of advisors, colleagues, and friends over the course of this project. I would first like to recognize the many professors at UNC Wilmington who read drafts, sat through presentations, and offered equal amounts of critique and encouragement along the way. Many thanks to the department’s graduate advisor, Dr. David La Vere, as well as Professors Kathleen Berkeley, Yixin Chen, Paul Gillingham, Glen Harris, Sue McCaffray, William McCarthy, Will Moore, and Michael Seidman. Your contributions made this work a better thesis and this student a better scholar. I cannot thank you enough for your time and generosity. I am also grateful to Nathan Citino of Colorado State University and Andrew Rotter of Colgate University for taking the time to send some fantastic sources (as well as some useful advice) to a shamefully star-struck grad student who never expected such a kind response.

My work has also benefitted from the influence of an extraordinary group of fellow graduate students. Limited space prevents me from giving credit to all of those who helped me shape my arguments, challenge my assumptions, and reexamine my research in ways that I otherwise would have ignored. However, I would like to extend a special thanks to Matt Jacobs, Matt Shannon, and Keith Clark. As colleagues, they challenged me to produce my best work at all times. As friends, they never wavered in their encouragement and support. I look forward to our future collaborations, both as diplomatic historians and as the very best of friends.

Finally, I want to thank the members of my thesis committee for their invaluable contributions to this project. Dr. Lisa Pollard patiently guided me through my cautious first steps as a student of Islamic history. Her keen insights and observations were matched only by her extraordinary skills as a teacher. Dr. Mark Spaulding was a major influence on the “nuts and
bolts” of this study. His close critique of my writing mechanics during our independent study on modernization theory, as well as his assistance in securing a visit to the National Archives last summer, transformed my thesis into the polished work it is today. Most of all, I would like to extend my appreciation to my thesis advisor, Dr. Taylor Fain. I came to UNC Wilmington in order to study American foreign relations with Dr. Fain, and I have never once questioned that decision. His sound advice, calming influence, and constant dedication to my intellectual development over the past two years will never be forgotten. It is my sincerest hope that in the years to come he will continue to serve as an advisor, a mentor, and most of all, a friend.

In closing, I humbly confess that although these individuals all contributed to the best aspects of this thesis, I alone take responsibility for any inconsistencies, misinterpretations, or mistakes.
DEDICATION

For their constant patience and unwavering support, I dedicate this thesis to my mom and step-dad, Sue and Doug Brown. While I will never be able to thank you enough for all that you have done for me, I promise to never stop trying. I could not have done this without you.

For finding the strength to stare down adversity, I dedicate this thesis to my father, David Morrison. I have always been (and always will be) proud to be your son. Thank you for giving me your inspiration, your love of history, and the Boston Red Sox.

And finally, for making a Masters Degree the second best thing I found in Wilmington, I dedicate this thesis to my future wife, Shannon SanCartier. I never imagined I would find someone as kind, intelligent, and supportive as you. Thank you for your constant encouragement, your much-needed honesty, and most of all, your love. I look forward with great enthusiasm to all the joint projects and sappy dedications yet to come.
INTRODUCTION – A BRIEF HISTORY OF U.S. DIPLOMACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND THE IMPACT OF ORIENTALISM ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF AMERICAN FOREIGN RELATIONS

At the opening of the new Islamic Center in Washington D.C. on 28 June 1957, a diverse group of Middle Eastern dignitaries listened as President Dwight Eisenhower dedicated “one of the newest and most beautiful buildings in Washington.”\(^1\) The guests included Dr. Mohamed Bisar, the Center’s new director, and Sheik Abdullah Al-Khayyal, President of the Center’s Board of Governors and ambassador from Saudi Arabia. Over the course of the benediction it became clear that Eisenhower’s message was actually intended for a global audience. The President stressed the importance of cooperation between the Islamic world and the West to defend “the peaceful progress of all men under one God.”\(^2\) He referred to the recently constructed Islamic Center in the heart of the nation’s capital to emphasize the freedom of worship granted to all Americans, even the followers of Islam, by the Constitution. “And I should like to assure you, my Islamic [sic] friends… this place of worship is just as welcome as could be a similar edifice of any other religion,” promised Eisenhower, and that without the tradition of religious freedom established by America’s forefathers “we would be something else than what we are.”\(^3\)

Placed in the context of the Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union for the hearts and minds of the world, Eisenhower’s vague reference to a “something else” was clear. His words drew a stark contrast between the spiritual tolerance of the United States and the spiritual oppression of Soviet communism. While the atheist Soviets threatened to obliterate Islam, America promised to “fight with her whole strength for your right to have here your own church

\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid.
and worship according to your own conscience.” Although Eisenhower’s message was subtly crafted, it presented a clear choice to the Muslim world: cooperate with the United States and protect the religious traditions passed down by the Prophet Mohammed, or submit to the religious persecution of the Soviet Union and watch those traditions be swept away.

From the outset of the Cold War, American policymakers identified Islam as a potential bulwark against the spread of communism into the strategically crucial Middle East. As the United States supplanted Great Britain as the hegemonic Western power in the region, longstanding misconceptions of a monolithic Islamic society migrated across the Atlantic from Orientalists in Europe and became entrenched in emerging area-studies programs in American universities. These stereotypes permeated the ranks of the foreign-policy establishment, resulting in the mobilization of Islam by State Department officials as an anti-communist tool. The Eisenhower administration targeted Saudi Arabia as a regional base for these efforts. King Sa’ud ibn Abdul Aziz’s (r. 1953-1964) responsibilities as the custodian of the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina led policymakers to identify him as an important anti-communist ally in the region, as well as a potential counterbalance to the Arab Nationalist agenda of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser (r. 1954-1970). Eisenhower himself believed that King Sa’ud could become an influential spiritual leader capable of uniting the entire Muslim world into a rigid anti-communist bloc. Officials also targeted the Saudi populace with a propaganda campaign. Posters, pamphlets, and movie-reels contrasted the violent oppression of Islam by the “God-less” Soviet Union with the religious tolerance of the United States.

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4 Ibid.; as historian William Inboden points out, Eisenhower’s message may have been more effective had he correctly referred to the Islamic Center as a mosque, rather than a church. For more of Inboden’s impression of the opening ceremony, see: William Inboden, Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 292.
The history of American diplomatic involvement in the Middle East is relatively short in comparison with other areas of U.S. foreign relations.\(^5\) Prior to the discovery of vast oil deposits throughout the Arabian Peninsula during the early decades of the twentieth century, interest in the region revolved around missionary activity and a general fascination with the exotic “Orient.” During the nineteenth century, most of the American public’s knowledge of the Middle East came from dramatic travelers’ accounts that described a mysterious land of barbarous inhabitants. Some enterprising newspaper publishers sought to capitalize on this fascination by financing voyages to the “Bible Lands” for famous individuals, and then selling tales of their adventures to eager readers back home.\(^6\) One of these excursions featured iconic author Mark Twain, who published his own impressions of the region in his travel narrative *The Innocents Abroad*. In the summer of 1867, Twain and his companions (including Civil War hero William Tecumseh Sherman) returned home from their trip to the Orient with fascinating tales of their cultural encounters.\(^7\) Twain reflected many of the prejudices of his European counterparts in the literary world, describing images of depravity and “scenes of oriental squalor…”\(^8\) He depicted the Arabs he encountered as a “filthy, brutish, ignorant, unprogressive, superstitious people,” who seemed deluded by “the wild fables of The Arabian Nights.”\(^9\) Despite additional visits to the

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5 The geographic label “Middle East” was actually introduced by an American at the turn of the twentieth century. Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan coined the term in an article in *The National Review* in September of 1902. The term refers to the region encompassing modern day Turkey, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt and North Africa, and Iran. A less “culturally loaded” term for this area might be Southwest Asia, but the Middle East will suffice for the purposes of this study. For more on the early use of the term, see: Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2007), 307-308.


7 Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad or The New Pilgrim’s Progress: Being Some Account of the Steamship Quaker’s City’s Pleasure Excursion to Europe and the Holy Land; With Descriptions of Countries, Nations, Incidents and Adventures, as They Appeared to the Author* (New York: Signet Classics, 2007).

8 Little, “Gideon’s Band”: 513

9 Quoted in: Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 241; Tom Zeiler examines another example of early American cultural excursions in the Middle East in his recent work, *Ambassadors in Pinstripes*. Zeiler explores how American baseball players showcased the game of baseball (America’s pastime) to crowds of Egyptian Muslims during the
region by American statesmen like William Henry Seward and former President Ulysses S. Grant, official interest in the Middle East remained limited throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century.\(^\text{10}\)

However, this official indifference slowly gave way to heightened economic interest during the first half of the twentieth century. In one of the earliest studies of American diplomatic involvement in the Middle East, John A. DeNovo examines how the decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire following World War I and the discovery of major oil deposits in Iraq, Iran, and the Arabian Peninsula, tempted U.S. officials in Woodrow Wilson’s administration to increase the American presence in the region. Despite this early evidence of enhanced diplomatic interest, however, DeNovo concludes that the Middle East remained firmly planted in the British and French spheres of influence until the outbreak of World War II in Europe in the late 1930s.\(^\text{11}\)

Most historians of U.S.-Middle East relations concur with DeNovo’s assessment of the early American diplomatic interest in the region. However, some scholars identify the beginning of official American involvement in the Middle East as far back as the late eighteenth century. Thomas A. Bryson’s analysis of early U.S.-Middle East relations begins in the year 1784.

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\(^\text{10}\) Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 231-238; Cold War policymakers gave similar reports on the early history of American involvement in the Middle East. However, according to a 1959 report by Robert McClintock, American Ambassador in Lebanon, the U.S. Navy was involved in charting the Dead Sea as early as the mid-nineteenth century, and a number of camels were transported back to Texas and Arizona “in the hope that these animals of the Arab desert would prove economically useful in the Great American Desert.” For McClintock’s complete report, see: “American Foreign Policy in the Middle East,” *The Department of State Bulletin* 41 (27 July 1959): 118-120.

Although he outlines some early diplomatic exchanges in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (most notably America’s encounters with pirates off the Barbary Coast in the 1780s), Bryson eventually concurs with DeNovo’s assessment that religious missionaries and educational concerns dominated the American consciousness of the region until the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{12} Michael B. Oren recently published another examination of America’s earliest involvement in the Middle East. Although he analyzes many of the same encounters as Bryson, Oren contends that these events played a bigger role in the early development of the United States than previously understood. For instance, Oren argues that the threat of war with the Barbary Pirates was one of the single greatest motivations for the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. While this claim seems exaggerated, the rest of Oren’s analysis corresponds with the consensus that education, religion, and overall fascination dominated early U.S.-Middle East relations.\textsuperscript{13}

The end of World War II marked a dramatic shift in this relationship. The strategic value of the Middle East increased significantly in the eyes of U.S. officials as oil-producing nations such as Iran and Saudi Arabia became important factors in the post-war reconstruction of Western Europe and Japan.\textsuperscript{14} This economic and industrial reconstruction was encapsulated in the European Recovery Program, commonly referred to as the “Marshall Plan,” after Secretary of State George C. Marshall. William Appleman Williams argues that the Marshall Plan was designed to restart the European economic engine and ensure an “Open Door” for American

\textsuperscript{12} Thomas A. Bryson, \textit{American Diplomatic Relations with the Middle East, 1784-1975: A Survey} (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1977); for a survey of the early history of State Department involvement in the Middle East, see: Phillip J. Baram, \textit{The Department of State in the Middle East, 1919-1945} (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978).

\textsuperscript{13} Oren, \textit{Power, Faith, and Fantasy}, 18-40; for an excellent review of Oren’s work, including an appropriate critique of some of his conclusions, see: Peter Hahn, “Politics, Piety, Paradise?” \textit{Diplomatic History} 32, 2 (April 2008): 281-284.

\textsuperscript{14} Melvyn Leffler, \textit{For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War} (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 132.
capital throughout the international marketplace. According to Williams, this effort was motivated by the same economic self-interest that dominated American foreign policy throughout the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{15} Although the United States did not yet require imported Middle Eastern oil for its own domestic energy consumption, failure to rebuild Europe and Japan would have dire consequences for the American economy in the post-war years.\textsuperscript{16} National security concerns prompted these reconstruction efforts as well. Melvyn Leffler contends that the emergence of the Soviet Union as an ideological rival to the democratic West triggered fears that Europe and Japan might fall victim to aggressive communist expansion, isolating the United States as the last remaining liberal democracy in a world dominated by Soviet totalitarianism.\textsuperscript{17} These economic and security apprehensions propelled the success of the Marshall Plan to the top of the list of post-war priorities. Since the steady flow of oil was crucial to this program, the Middle East quickly emerged as a major focus for U.S. foreign policymakers as the Cold War began to heat up.

Following the breakdown of the old imperial order during and after World War II, the emerging post-colonial world became a major battleground in the ideological contest between the United States and the Soviet Union. According to Michael Hunt, U.S. foreign policy during this period was shaped by an identifiably “American” ideology, consisting of three core ideas. The first was the pursuit of national greatness through the active promotion of liberty. The second element established a racial hierarchy through which most Americans viewed the world around them. Finally, U.S. policymakers determined which social and political changes were acceptable in the post-war world, and which ones must be discouraged in the interest of regional

\textsuperscript{16} Leffler, \textit{For the Soul of Mankind}, 132.
\textsuperscript{17} Melvyn Leffler, \textit{A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 13-19.
stability. They believed that revolutions, which at times could be a force for good, could also lead to disastrous consequences if left unchecked.\textsuperscript{18}

According to Odd Arne Westad, the Soviet Union developed its foreign policy along similar lines. Each superpower presented its own ideological blueprints of modern development for post-colonial, or “Third World” countries to emulate. The American model focused on the free movement of the individual within society, while the Soviet model centered on the good of the collective and communal social justice.\textsuperscript{19} Westad contends that the United States and the Soviet Union shared a common tradition of historical narratives imbued with exceptionalist visions of a unique national destiny. This exceptionalism led both sides to claim that their specific development model culminated in the ideal “modern” state. Westad’s work represents a new trend in the historiography of the Cold War. He focuses on the periphery as the main arena of the conflict, and argues that the battle for the hearts and minds of the post-colonial world represented the core struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{20} Kenneth Osgood echoes this assessment in his examination of American propaganda efforts during the Cold War. He argues that both contestants instituted ambitious information campaigns to sway the loyalties

\textsuperscript{19} American modernization theory developed in large part from the theoretical models of social scientists like Talcott Parsons and Walt Rostow. The importance that modernization theorists placed on the free movement of the individual in a “modern” society was rooted in Parsons’s \textit{The Social Systems}. According to Parsons, free movement of the individual actor, or “ego,” was essential for a truly modern society to function. Rostow later incorporated individual freedom into his own theoretical stages of economic growth, which culminated in consumerism and high mass consumption. Both Parsons and Rostow claimed that their theories were liberal alternatives to those of Karl Marx. Marxism was the developmental model presented to the post-colonial world by the Soviet Union. For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that one of the most crucial differences between the two models was the treatment of religion. While Marx’s theory claimed that a truly modern society would eventually abandon religion, Parsons incorporated religious faith as a necessary component for a healthy modern social structure to function. For more on the theories of Parsons and Rostow, see: Talcott Parsons, \textit{The Social System} (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1951), and W. W. Rostow, \textit{The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952). For more on the development and implementation of American modernization theory, see: Michael E. Latham, \textit{Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).
of newly independent states. According to Osgood, the United States drastically intensified these persuasion tactics during the Eisenhower administration.\(^{21}\)

As the European imperial order dissolved throughout the Middle East following World War II, the United States emerged as the most likely candidate to fill the subsequent power vacuum. The rise of American global dominance coincided with the decline of its greatest wartime ally, Great Britain. The British retained their imperial position longer than any other European colonial power after the war: they preserved their influence with King Faruq of Egypt (r. 1936-1952) until his abdication during the Free Officer movement of 1952; British firms maintained control of significant petroleum concessions in Iran until Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq (r. 1951-1953) nationalized his country’s oilfields in 1951; and the British role in the unification of the Saudi state under King Abdul Aziz ibn Sa’ud (r. 1932-1953) gained them an important ally in the region, until a series of land disputes surrounding the Buraymi region following World War II resulted in the cessation of diplomatic ties between the two nations in 1955.\(^{22}\)

British hegemony quickly receded, however, once U.S. economic and strategic interests in the region intensified at the outset of the Cold War. Wm. Roger Louis assesses this withdrawal in his examination of the decline of the British Empire in the Middle East from 1945 to 1951. Louis focuses on the “official mind” of the British foreign-policy community and the interaction with their American counterparts during this period of transition. He argues that the British government initially tried to replace formal colonial rule with an informal partnership with oil-


rich nations like Saudi Arabia. According to Louis, the Truman administration assisted in these efforts by establishing an anti-Soviet defensive front along the northern tier of Greece and Turkey, in order to give the British time to develop these relationships. This mutually beneficial partnership made the eventual transition of influence between the two powers much smoother.\textsuperscript{23}

According to Robert Vitalis, however, this transition began much earlier than Louis suggests. He argues that Winston Churchill was obligated to accede to American demands for an open-door policy in the region in return for U.S. support in the early years of World War II. This forfeiture was especially devastating to British imperial control in Saudi Arabia. In 1945, British Foreign Minister Laurence Gafftey-Smith remarked that the Saudi kingdom was fast becoming a “virtual protectorate” of the United States.\textsuperscript{24} William Taylor Fain disagrees with Vitalis’s contention. He provides a more recent scrutiny of the hegemonic shift between Great Britain and the United States in his examination of the early rise of American power in the Persian Gulf region. Fain argues that American ascendance and British retreat in the Persian Gulf occurred over a longer period of time than most historians understood previously. In fact, U.S. policymakers were content to keep their Cold War ally in power as long as possible, and only reluctantly supplanted the British position in the Middle East over time.\textsuperscript{25}

Oil remained the dominant theme from the outset of America’s relationship with Saudi Arabia. As early as 1939, American oil companies lifted over 19,000 barrels of oil a day from the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula. Following the war, the Truman administration went to great lengths to ingratiate itself with the Saudi royal family, and made a surreptitious financial aid


\textsuperscript{25} W. Taylor Fain, \textit{American Ascendance and British Retreat in the Persian Gulf Region} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
package via the Arabian American Oil Company (ARAMCO), which frequently acted as an intermediary between the two states. The administration provided tax breaks to companies like ARAMCO with the understanding that the savings would be passed along to the Saudis. This policy allowed Truman to funnel significant amounts of U.S. taxpayer dollars directly into the coffers of the Saudi treasury, strengthening ibn Sa’ud’s preference for a “special relationship” with the United States, rather than Great Britain.26 Major U.S. oil firms like Standard Oil of California (SOCAL) and ARAMCO held a monopoly on Saudi oil concessions by the early 1950s.27

Historians of U.S.-Saudi relations disagree on the actual structure of the partnership between the American government and firms like ARAMCO. Robert Engler examines the early role of American oil corporations in the diplomatic exchange between Saudi Arabia and the United States. He argues that corporations like ARAMCO forced U.S. officials to establish closer ties with the Saudi royal family following World War II by exploiting their influence on the flow of oil into the international market. According to Engler, these oil companies shaped the direction of U.S. policy in Saudi Arabia from the very beginning in an effort to increase profits, often with little regard for national interests.28 Aaron David Miller contests Engler’s assessment to an extent. Miller argues that U.S. officials actually became more proactive in diplomatic relations with the Saudi kingdom in order to keep these major corporations (as well as the British) from dominating U.S. interests in Saudi Arabia. According to Miller, the State Department employed ARAMCO executives as intermediaries, as a way to shift the funds from

Truman’s corporate tax breaks directly into the Saudi treasury. Irvine Anderson takes the analyses of Engler and Miller a step further by arguing that a collaborative arrangement developed between the U.S. government, the Saudi royal family, and major U.S. petroleum corporations, with each side benefiting from a more cooperative relationship with the other. Anderson’s “corporatist framework” provides a new perspective on the role of the domestic business sphere in the shaping of international relations.

Recent scholarship on U.S.-Saudi relations continues to build on this framework. Nathan Citino’s examination of the relationship between the Eisenhower administration, King Sa’ud, and ARAMCO, outlines the establishment of an international petroleum order throughout the decade of the 1950s, featuring a network of public and private relationships that guided American involvement in the Middle East from that point forward. Rachel Bronson maintains that this cooperative relationship between the United States, Saudi Arabia and major oil corporations like ARAMCO was not just economically beneficial, but strategically beneficial as well. According to Bronson, the establishment of a military outpost at Dhahran (and the subsequent construction of the Dhahran airfield) gave the United States a crucial base in the region. Both Citino and Bronson argue that American officials employed a variety of tactics that were designed to keep Saudi oil supplies out of the hands of the Soviet Union, and that the mobilization of Islam as an anti-communist bulwark was one component of this defensive strategy.

33 Citino, From Arab Nationalism to OPEC, 96-97; and Bronson, Thicker Than Oil, 23.
Historians of American foreign relations are currently producing a range of scholarship that is shaped by what many refer to as the “cultural turn” in diplomatic history. Much current literature explores issues like class, gender, and race, and how these issues shape the formation and implementation of foreign policy. The literature of U.S.-Middle East relations is no exception, as the most recent scholarship is permeated by cultural themes. Mary Ann Heiss analyzes the use of gender-coded stereotypes by Western diplomats as the impetus for (and justification of) the overthrow of Mohammad Mossadeq in Iran by U.S. and British agents in 1953. Robert Vitalis describes how ARAMCO officials established the practice of Jim Crow segregation throughout the worker towns that surrounded the company’s oil facilities in Saudi Arabia. Other studies examine the impact of popular culture on foreign relations (and vice-versa). For example, Melani McAlister assesses the Western misperceptions of Arab culture in the American media and entertainment industries, and Douglas Little examines how Hollywood capitalized on the American public’s fascination with clandestine operations like the coup of Mossadeq in Iran with the production of television shows like Mission: IMPOSSIBLE.

However, the application of religion as a category of analysis is largely absent from this trend. A recent commentary by Patricia Hill seeks to explain this deficiency by observing that religion “cannot easily be abstracted as a structural component of social order,” and therefore

34 A group of diplomatic historians contributed to a round-table commentary on this and other growing trends for The Journal of American History in June 1990. The participants included scholars and themes like: Thomas Paterson (who provided a general introduction), Akira Iriye (Culture), Michael Hunt (Ideology), Emily Rosenberg (Gender), Thomas J. McCormick (World Systems), Louis A. Perez, Jr. (Dependency), Melvyn Leffler (National Security), Michael J. Hogan (Corporatism), J. Garry Clifford (Bureaucratic Politics), and Richard H. Immerman (Psychology). For more on this discussion, see: Thomas G. Paterson, et al, “A Round Table: Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations,” The Journal of American History 77 (June 1990): 93-180.

35 Mary Ann Heiss, “Real Men Don’t Wear Pajamas: Anglo-American Cultural Perceptions of Mohammad Mossadeq and the Iranian Nationalization Dispute,” in Empire and Revolution: The United States and the Third World since 1945, ed. Peter L. Hahn and Mary Ann Heiss (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2000), 179-194.


cannot “be deployed as a category of analysis in the same ways that scholars have wielded gender, class, and race.”\textsuperscript{38} Despite this obvious challenge, Hill argues that a further examination of the impact of religion and religious identities on diplomatic interactions offers an intriguing contribution to the study of diplomatic history.\textsuperscript{39} Andrew Preston has recently explored why historians find the definition of “religion” to be so problematic in terms that are applicable to historical analysis. According to Preston, the definition of religion itself is simple: “All religions are based on tenets of belief that are invisible, hierarchical, organized, and transcendent… the most basic characteristic of religion is a belief in a higher being, a supreme otherworldly authority to whom ultimate allegiance is owed.”\textsuperscript{40} The difficulty lies in how to limit that definition to fit a particular analysis. For Preston, the most useful classification of religion refers to “the readily identifiable religious affiliations and values that people hold.”\textsuperscript{41} Descriptive challenges notwithstanding, Preston is baffled by the lack of religion in the literature of American foreign relations, since religion and diplomacy “are two of the most exhaustively studied aspects of American history.” Yet the two subjects have hardly ever been “comprehensively or effectively bridged.”\textsuperscript{42} Preston isolates three possible explanations for this: the partisan nature of religion in America, the secular identification of the majority of the field, and the methodological difficulty of analyzing the impact of religion on diplomatic actors.\textsuperscript{43}

Diplomatic historians are only now beginning to assess the ways in which religion and religious identity shaped U.S. foreign policy during the Cold War. William Inboden argues that

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.: 633 and 640.
\textsuperscript{40} Andrew Preston, “Bridging the Gap between the Sacred and the Secular in the History of American Foreign Relations,” \textit{Diplomatic History} 30, 5 (November 2006): 785.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.: 786.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.: 787.
America’s struggle against the Soviet Union was largely a “religious war.”\textsuperscript{44} According to Inboden, religion shaped the conflict in two distinct ways. First, American officials in the 1940s and 1950s believed that their opposition to the dogmatic atheism of Soviet communism was divinely inspired. Second, officials often utilized religion in the development of their Cold War strategies. They saw their world as one divided between “those nations who believed in God and those nations who outlawed such belief.”\textsuperscript{45} Since religion was so important to Americans, and the Soviet Union sought to undermine religious belief, “then it only followed that religion could serve as a potent tool for strengthening anticommunist resolve at home and undermining communism abroad.”\textsuperscript{46}

Despite this and other recent assessments of religion, Islam remains a challenging category of analysis for diplomatic historians. Matthew F. Jacobs recently complained of the “limited participation by historians of U.S. foreign relations in the wider discussion about religion,” referring specifically to Islam and “its impact on US-Middle East relations.”\textsuperscript{47} According to Jacobs, “there remains a remarkable dearth of scholarship by historians of U.S. foreign relations that investigates in substantive terms the ways in which Americans have understood Islam and its potential implications for U.S. involvement in the Middle East.”\textsuperscript{48} In an effort to fill this gap, Jacobs makes note of the ways that policymakers and regional specialists came to view Islam and its potential impact on Cold War efforts in the Middle East.


\textsuperscript{45} Inboden, \textit{Religion and American Foreign Policy}, 4.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 5.


\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
Jacobs credits Andrew Rotter as the first historian to focus on Islam as a central factor in U.S.-Middle East relations. In his analysis of India and Pakistan during the Cold War, Rotter examines the impact of Hinduism and Islam respectively in each countries relationship with the United States. According to Rotter, policymakers perceived each religious identity in gender-coded terms, and juxtaposed their impressions of the effeminacy and moral ambivalence of Hinduism in India with the principled masculinity of Islam in Pakistan. This Manichaean worldview of Islam led officials to favor Pakistan as the most potentially effective ally in deterring the blandishments of communism.49

In fact, this categorization and subsequent mobilization of Islam was an important aspect of U.S.-Middle East relations during the Cold War, and represents the main focus of this study. American policymakers viewed Islam as an intriguing weapon against international communism. Their general impression of the Muslim faith was that of a monolithic cultural phenomenon capable of uniting Muslims around the world into a single front. They believed that Islam dominated every aspect of Muslim life, regardless of differences in geographic location, regional conditions, or socio-economic circumstances. Long-standing European misperceptions of Islamic history recalled images of brutal campaigns against invading non-believers. Armed with the assurances of both European diplomats and Orientalists in the academic community that communism was completely incompatible with Islam, U.S. officials launched this mobilization effort throughout the Middle East as a bulwark against communist encroachment.

As Chapter I will show, the stereotype of a stagnant, monolithic Islamic civilization migrated to the United States from Europe as the balance of global power shifted across the Atlantic following World War II. These deeply imbedded Western misperceptions of Islam were

part of a long tradition of what Edward Said and others refer to as *Orientalism*. Said’s now classic examination of the European encounter with the “Orient” (referring mainly to the Middle East and Islam) analyzes a scholarly tradition based on the distinction between an enlightened, progressive Western civilization, and a backwards, stagnant Islamic society. According to Said, these polarized images were the result of a number of subconscious motivations within European society. Through a dichotomy of “Self vs. Other,” Europeans solidified the notion of a superior Western civilization by projecting the image of a depraved and irrational opposite (the “Other” in this case) on the Muslim world. This projection also provided a justification for the European imperial conquest of the Orient. Thus, a scholarly discourse emerged in the West, based on a dominant/subjugate power relationship that celebrated Western superiority and validated the domination of Islam simply because Islam *allowed itself* to be dominated.50

Said’s work emphasizes the importance of the connection between knowledge and power in imperialism. He argues that the political interests of the empire dominate every aspect of the imperial society. This influence is so pervasive throughout the academic community that it is virtually impossible to produce unbiased scholarship. Said applies the example of British colonial holdings in the nineteenth century to highlight the rigidity of this relationship. He contends that British scholars studying India or Egypt during this period were unavoidably biased by the fact that both of these regions were subjugated “possessions” of the British Empire. A scholar from Great Britain was an Englishman *first*, and a scholar *second*. Said argues, therefore, that the production of any and all knowledge of the subjugate region was completely guided by the political interests of the imperial society. 51

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51 Ibid., 11-14.
It is easy to fault some of Said’s conceptualizations, and his critics point to a number of fallacies, both historical and methodological. Bernard Lewis is perhaps the best-known critic of Said’s paradigm.\textsuperscript{52} One of his most consistent targets is Said’s limited focus on Great Britain and France. Lewis contends that a strong Orientalist scholarship existed in Germany and Austria during the same period of time examined by Said, and that the lack of sources from these powers weakens Said’s contention that all European academics were inflexibly biased by cultural misconceptions. Lewis also accuses Said of possessing a limited knowledge of Middle Eastern history, and asserts that his equal inclusion of evidence from both legitimate scholars and common area enthusiasts diminishes his overall argument.\textsuperscript{53}

Andrew Rotter offers a more even-handed critique of Orientalism in his recent analysis of Said’s impact on the study of U.S. foreign relations.\textsuperscript{54} Rotter challenges the scope of Orientalism, both in terms of its loosely defined time period and its elaborately developed theoretical paradigm. He also decries the lack of archival material included in the study, echoing a common critique of Said’s work. For Rotter, one of the most troubling aspects of Orientalism is Said’s “…dubious epistemological relationship to matters of cause and effect.”\textsuperscript{55} Since it is difficult to establish direct links between stereotypical subconscious misconceptions, cultural representations, and political action, Said’s argument requires the abandonment of the scientific

\textsuperscript{52} Lewis and Said engaged in a number of heated intellectual exchanges throughout the 1980s, culminating in their debate at the convention of the Middle Eastern Studies Association of North America (MESA) in 1986. Said received a warm welcome from the audience at the beginning of the debate, in contrast to the relatively cool reception offered to Lewis. According to Juan R. I. Cole, this moment represented the major shift in the field of Middle Eastern studies that took place in the years following the publication of Orientalism in 1978. According to Daniel Martin Varisco, over 3,000 scholars gathered to witness what would later be described as the “shoot-out at the MESA corral.” For more on this event, see: Juan R. I. Cole, “Power, Knowledge, and Orientalism,” Diplomatic History 19, 3 (Summer 1995): 508; and Daniel Martin Varisco, Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 4.


\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.: 1208.
process in favor of a more reflective conceptualization.\textsuperscript{56}

These are valid criticisms. The lack of archival research is discomfiting at best (especially for diplomatic historians). Said establishes loosely defined (and often disjointed) parameters for his analysis, both in terms of his chosen timeframe and his regional focus. The conceptual nature of his argument presents pitfalls for any study that tries to incorporate Said’s paradigm into a more focused analysis. Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of \textit{Orientalism} is its underlying premise that Western academics are unable to produce unbiased scholarship on Islamic culture, or any other subaltern subject. Said defines the “Orient” as an imaginary construct of Western scholars. Since this is not grounded in reality, any study of the subject is impossible because the subject itself is not real. Said’s opponents see his failure to provide a remedy to this problem as evidence that he does not believe a remedy exists. In other words, Said feels that a Western historian is simply unable to overcome these subconscious stereotypes, and therefore is incapable of producing an unbiased analysis of an Oriental subject.

The question remains, therefore, whether or not historians of American foreign relations can effectively employ Said’s conceptual framework. According to Rotter, many already have, whether they realize it or not. He argues that a pattern of “Saidism without Said” has emerged over the last few decades throughout the literature of American relations with the post-colonial world, even though most of these works fail to cite \textit{Orientalism} directly.\textsuperscript{57} Since the publication of Rotter’s analysis in October of 2000, however, the number of publications that deal directly with the issue of Orientalism and U.S. diplomacy has dramatically increased. One notable example is \textit{American Orientalism} by Douglas Little. Published in 2002, Little’s study examines

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.: 1205-1206.
the effects of Orientalist stereotypes on America’s experience as the dominant Western power in the Middle East during the latter half of the twentieth century.58

Zachary Lockman presents a more focused analysis of the impact of Orientalism on Islamic and Middle Eastern studies programs in the West, with a particular emphasis on the United States in the latter half of the twentieth century. In Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism, Lockman outlines a number of variables (such as personal beliefs, cultural trends, and intellectual development) and discusses how these variables influence the development of the “politics of knowledge” for a particular field, in this case the Middle East and Islam.59 Much of this examination focuses on what Lockman categorizes as “late Orientalism.” He maintains that the majority of mid-twentieth century Western Orientalists considered Islam to be a “coherent civilization,” with a “basically unitary and stable set of core values and beliefs…”60

Many of these scholars also believed that the study of medieval Islam was directly applicable to understanding how Muslims throughout the world would react to present-day issues.

58 According to Little, it is impossible to understand U.S. policy in the region without first understanding the deeply ingrained stereotypes of the Arab world that are persistent in the American psyche. He examines the rigidifying effects of popular culture on this imagined archetype through various literary, religious, and cinematic examples. Little highlights a pattern of suggestive tropes that pervade a wide range of cultural works in the United States, from the previously mentioned traveler accounts of Mark Twain, to the more recent example of Disney’s Aladdin. Little contends that this phenomenon represents a unique form of “American Orientalism,” similar in concept and character to its European ancestor. U.S. policy in the Middle East after World War II has been dramatically shaped by many of these mischaracterizations of Arab and Islamic culture. For more on this phenomenon, see: Douglas Little, American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

59 Zachary Lockman, Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1-5; Lockman traces the roots of Orientalism to ancient Greece (the “cradle” of Western civilization), and shows how the need to fortify a sense of “Self” through the projection of a contrasting “Other” existed long before the era of European global domination. From here Lockman identifies the various manifestations of Orientalist stereotypes, from Western Christianity’s encounter with Islam during the Crusades to the scientific classification of an “Islamic man” (homo islamicus) at the outset of the colonial period. Although Lockman focuses on the Western mischaracterization of Islam, he argues that Orientalist stereotypes are only one example of “the unfortunate human propensity not only to perceive people who are deemed to belong to another group… as essentially different from ‘us’ but also to believe that ‘we’ are superior to ‘them.’” For more on these references, see: Ibid., 27-37 and 67-77; for quotes, see: Ibid., 34-36.

60 Ibid., 105.
and events. Lockman lists some of the prominent Orientalists who contributed to this assumption, including the previously mentioned Bernard Lewis, Phillip Hitti, Albert Hourani, and Hamilton Gibb, the Laudian Chair of Arabic at Oxford and founder of the Middle Eastern Studies Center at Harvard University in 1955. According to Lockman, Gibb was a major promoter of the idea that the actions of every follower of Islam were motivated by a universal and uncompromising “Arab (or Muslim) mind.” His relocation from Oxford to Harvard was symbolic of the post-war transition of power between Great Britain and the United States in the Middle East.61 Citino echoes Lockman’s assessment of the impact of these Orientalist scholars on U.S. policy in the Middle East during the Cold War. According to Citino, men like Lewis and Hourani warned that communism posed a significant threat to Muslims who no longer maintained a strict adherence to their religious values. Both scholars agreed, however, that a pious Muslim was significantly more immune to the seduction of atheistic communism.62

This mindset represented the basic foundation for the mobilization of Islam in the Middle East during the Cold War. U.S. policymakers in the Truman administration were some of the first to identify Islam as a possible anticommunist tool in their efforts to keep Soviet influence out of the region. Based on universal Western misperceptions of the monolithic nature of Islam, these officials hoped to establish a spiritual bulwark against the spread of communism throughout the Middle East and elsewhere. Orientalists in Europe and the United States solidified these assumptions, and policymakers developed programs that targeted this perceived spiritual advantage. The Eisenhower administration specifically targeted Saudi Arabia as a major component of this strategy. Members of the Saudi royal family became prospective anticommunist spiritual leaders, and propaganda campaigns sought to marshal the religious piety of

61 Ibid., 108-110.
62 Citino, From Arab Nationalism to OPEC, 96.
the Saudi masses against the seductions of Soviet communism. Although it is difficult to assess this policy in terms of success or failure, it remained a consistent aspect of the American Cold War effort from the late 1940s through the 1950s.
CHAPTER I – THE MIGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE: EUROPEAN ORIENTALISTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE PERCEPTION OF ISLAM IN THE UNITED STATES DURING THE COLD WAR

As the old imperial order disintegrated following World War II and European colonialism gave way to emerging independent states, Western academics speculated on where the post-colonial world would fit into the burgeoning Cold War. Sir Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen Gibb, famed British scholar of Medieval Islam and student of Arnold Toynbee’s school of the rise and fall of civilizations, suggested how the democratic West should approach these fledgling nations to ensure their support against the Soviet Union:

We can no longer rely on that factor of prestige which seemed to play a large part in prewar thinking, neither can we any longer expect the peoples of Asia and Africa or of Eastern Europe to come to us and learn from us, while we sit back. We have to learn about them so that we can learn to work with them in a relationship that is closer in terms of mutuality.  

This recommendation for the increased study of non-Western subjects included the need for a post-war reassessment of Islam. According to Gibb, however, only classically trained Western scholars (like himself) understood the fundamental characteristics of Islamic civilization well enough to place them within an appropriate modern context. In other words, this was a job for the Orientalists.

Gibb came from a long tradition of Orientalist scholars in Great Britain. He attended Edinburgh University prior to his enrollment in the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. Upon receiving his degree he quickly established a reputation as a respected scholar of medieval Islam, eventually earning an appointment to the prestigious Laudian Chair of Arabic at Oxford University in 1937. Gibb was a major influence on British

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64 Lockman, Contending Visions of the Middle East, 130.
65 Ibid., 105.
Orientalism during the first half of the twentieth century. His work expanded upon traditional European misperceptions of a monolithic Islamic culture that experienced an historical trajectory completely opposite from that of Western civilization. For Gibb (and the majority of his colleagues), the Muslim world remained largely unchanged from the medieval era to the modern period. Therefore, the study of medieval Islamic history was directly applicable to present-day circumstances. He also believed that the entire Muslim world was united by the monolithic tenets of Islam, surpassing in importance political boundaries as well as disparate socio-economic conditions.  

As American dominance replaced European colonial hegemony throughout the periphery during the 1940s and 1950s, U.S. policymakers feared that the lack of regional experts among the diplomatic community represented a serious disadvantage in their competition with the Soviet Union for the hearts and minds of the post-colonial world. This was especially true in the case of the Middle East, which was largely ignored by American diplomats prior to Franklin Roosevelt’s audience with King Abdul Aziz ibn Sa’ud aboard the U.S.S. Quincy in the spring of 1945. Officials turned to their European allies (especially Great Britain) to bolster their regional knowledge. Since the British had enjoyed imperial dominance in the Middle East prior to the American ascendancy, policymakers relied heavily on British Orientalists to provide information on Islamic culture. This transmission of knowledge was a critical aspect of the larger transfer of power that took place between British and American dominance in the Middle East at

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66 Ibid.
67 This meeting between FDR and ibn Sa’ud took place in the Great Bitter Lake in Egypt. It marked the first meeting between an American President and the Saudi King. Colonel William Eddy, who was the Chief of Mission in Saudi Arabia at the time, provided the translation for the two leaders. The meeting was cordial, despite a rather tense discussion of the Palestinian issue. Roosevelt assured the King that the United States would help defend Saudi Arabia following the war. At the end of the meeting, Roosevelt provided the ailing ibn Sa’ud with a state-of-the-art wheelchair, which the King later referred to as “my most precious possession…the gift of my great friend, President Roosevelt, on whom Allah has had mercy.” For more information on this meeting, see: Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy*, 469-472; the selected quote appears on page 472.
the outset of the Cold War. Fledgling area-studies programs throughout the United States incorporated the long-standing European misperceptions of Islam that crossed the Atlantic as part of a larger intellectual migration towards the latest imperial power. Few events captured this transition more appropriately than the moment when Sir Hamilton Gibb, Laudian Chair of Arabic at Oxford and lion of the British Orientalist tradition, left his post of nearly twenty years in order to establish the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University in 1955.68

This chapter examines the influence of British Orientalists on the development of American misperceptions of Islam, and how these misperceptions shaped U.S. policymaking during the first years of the Cold War. The lack of qualified Near and Middle Eastern specialists following World War II required a significant increase in regional education programs. Only a few of these programs were already in existence, so policymakers were forced to rely on the assistance of European scholars in order to establish necessary area-studies programs. British Orientalists like Bernard Lewis, Albert Hourani, and Hamilton Gibb, introduced stereotypes of Islam as a monolithic cultural phenomenon capable of uniting the Muslim world into a rigid anti-communist bloc. Emerging Middle East studies programs at major institutions like Harvard and Princeton became saturated with these impressions. A number of Orientalists also contributed to foreign-policy development through direct participation in discussion groups sponsored by the State Department and the Council on Foreign Relations. Once policymakers adopted these stereotypes, they determined that the mobilization of Islam was the most logical defense against communist infiltration into the Middle East.

In order to discuss these stereotypes adequately, however, it is first necessary to offer a more nuanced interpretation of Islam. According to Ira Lapidus, Muslim societies are built upon institutions that “are subject to internal variation, to variations in the relationships among them,

68 Lockman, Contending Visions of the Middle East, 129.
and to variations over time.”

The limited number of these institutional factors gives scholars license to categorize a subject as complex as Islam “in some ordered way,” while simultaneously recognizing “individual societies as concrete and different entities.” By analyzing the variations of these institutions within different regional and historical contexts, scholars “may be able to comprehend why Islamic societies are similar in general form and yet differ so much in specific qualities.” Although Orientalists often acknowledged these societal variations, they dismissed them as secondary factors to the universal influence of Islam.

Despite their collective expertise on medieval Islamic society, Orientalists also dismissed or ignored the various interpretations and practices that developed among Muslim communities over time. The most dramatic example of these differences (aside from canonical variations like Sufism, Wahhabism, etc) was the rift between the followers of Sunni and Shi’a Islam. The two groups struggled for political control of the Middle East as early as the sixteenth century, when the Safavid Empire (Shi’a) and the Ottoman Empire (Sunni) engaged in a series of imperial conflicts. While the majority of Muslims living in the Middle East were Sunni, the rise of political Shi’ism in places like Iran in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century brought significant changes to the region as a whole. The existence of this inter-faith conflict provides convincing evidence that Islam was not nearly as monolithic or universal as many Orientalists believed. It also suggests that political and economic interests were often just as important as spirituality to Muslim societies in general.

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70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
72 For more on the origins of the Sunni-Shi’a split, see: Ibid., 45-47.
74 Ibid., 20-22.
Whatever misperceptions existed among the Orientalist community, U.S. officials considered their expertise to be an invaluabl

e contribution to the early Cold War effort. Europe’s imperial dissolution following World War II presented serious challenges to the United States thanks to the dearth of regional expertise within the American diplomatic community.

Isolationism (with some notable exceptions) was the dominant theme of American foreign policy for nearly two decades prior to the U.S. declaration of war against the Axis Powers. From the end of World War I to the late 1930s, officials devoted most of their attention to the “Great Powers” in Europe, dismissing the periphery as little more than an extension of the European imperial network. Policymakers ignored the indigenous cultures, histories and languages of these marginalized regions because they were only pawns in the “Great Game” of European colonialism. When the outbreak of World War II necessitated the deployment of American military personnel throughout the periphery, however, State Department officials hurriedly established makeshift regional education programs. Their primary focus was language training, although a small number of courses focused on cultural issues as well.

Immanuel Wallerstein describes many of the early efforts by the military to prepare soldiers for tours of duty in the Near East, North Africa, and East Asia. He highlights two of these programs over the course of his analysis: the Foreign Area and Language Curricula of the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP-FALC), which was designed for enlisted personnel and operated out of fifty-five different institutions throughout the United States; and ten separate Civil Affairs Training Schools (CATS) that focused exclusively on officer training. After the war these programs underwent a period of evaluation to determine the effectiveness of their techniques and to identify any possible improvements for the future. According to a Smithsonian

Institute report issued by William Nelson Fenton, subjects like geography and anthropology were integrated throughout both the ASTP and the CATS programs. However, there was no mention of any participation by Orientalist scholars in any of these wartime training schools.\(^7^6\)

Robert B. Hall’s assessment offered a grim appraisal of the effectiveness of these programs in a 1947 Social Science Research Council (SSRC) report. According to Hall, “much of the effect of the war was harmful to a sound development of area studies,” because the majority of these programs “were devised to train people to do specific and limited jobs.”\(^7^7\) Hall dismissed most wartime area instruction as “largely makeshift.” Although he was encouraged by the study of language, “which on the whole was well taught,” he expressed frustration that linguistics dominated most of the training programs, becoming “the one important aim in many institutions.”\(^7^8\) In conclusion, Hall suggested that the future of area-studies programs would benefit from a more scholarly approach, recommending that policymakers emphasize a more cooperative relationship with the academic community.\(^7^9\)

This kind of discourse between scholars and policymakers is an example of the important relationship between knowledge and power that develops in imperial societies, as described by Edward Said in *Orientalism*.\(^8^0\) Said suggests that imperial powers like Great Britain and France during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries “impart[ed] to their civil societies a sense of urgency, a direct political infusion as it were, where and whenever matters pertaining to their imperial interests abroad [were] concerned.”\(^8^1\) The growth of official and corporate interest in the Middle East by the United States at the outset of the Cold War required more than the

\(^7^6\) Ibid., 199.
\(^7^7\) Ibid.
\(^7^8\) Ibid., 199-200.
\(^7^9\) Ibid., 200.
\(^8^1\) Ibid., 11.
rudimentary strategic knowledge provided by language training schools during the war.\textsuperscript{82} Therefore, the development of area-studies programs became critical to American Cold War policy. The SSRC provided an early contribution to this effort with the establishment of the Committee on World Area Research in 1946, whose mission was to “identify foreign regions of growing American national concern, to evaluate the state of the art in American universities and to administer a program of area fellowships and travel grants…”\textsuperscript{83} A few years later, the SSRC created a Near and Middle East Committee that focused on the promotion of social science research and academic training in the Middle East. Non-governmental organizations like the Ford Foundation provided the majority of the funding for these two initiatives.\textsuperscript{84} Few colleges and universities in the United States featured any kind of Middle Eastern studies programs prior to the war, with the notable exception of the Department of Oriental Languages and Literatures at Princeton University, which was the first American institution to feature this kind of study in its curriculum. The chair of the department was Phillip K. Hitti, one of the most respected scholars of Islamic history in the Western world. Hitti was born in Lebanon and received his education from Christian missionaries at the American University of Beirut. After finishing his degree, he moved to the United States and joined the faculty at Princeton, eventually becoming the chair of the Oriental Languages Department in 1944. He developed a curriculum in Near Eastern studies that served as a model for many later programs in the United States.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 291-292.
\textsuperscript{83} Lockman, \textit{Contending Visions in the Middle East}, 123-124.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 124; the majority of early Cold War education programs relied heavily on donations from non-governmental groups like the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. This reliance on private funding was eventually replaced by a major increase in government spending following the introduction of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958. According to Wallerstein, the NDEA was established in direct response to the Soviet launch of Sputnik in October of the previous year. For more information on this program, see: Wallerstein, “The Unintended Consequences of Cold War Area Studies,” 209.
\textsuperscript{85} Lockman, \textit{Contending Visions of the Middle East}, 126.
Hitti’s influence on the American perception of Islam began soon after his arrival at Princeton. His early work contained a number of references to a monolithic Islamic civilization that failed to achieve anywhere near the level of modern progress enjoyed by Western society. He published an article in the summer of 1943 analyzing the possibility of political unity among the newly emerging Arab states following the disintegration of both the Ottoman Empire and European colonialism. He argued that the term “Arab” could no longer be applied to the “homogenous people limited to the Arabian peninsula and the inside fringe of the adjoining Fertile Crescent.”

The rapid spread of Islam and the Arabic language necessitated “a different and more extensive meaning” of the term, which should include “any Arabic-speaking people, especially if Moslem, irrespective of national affiliation or racial origin.” This expanded definition increased “the total estimated population of the Arab world [to] some fifty million,” all of whom were united by their adherence to the Muslim faith. According to Marshall Hodgson, the Orientalist tendency to overlap the terms “Arab” and “Muslim” when describing Middle Eastern subjects resulted in an oversimplification that was “as unfair to Christian and Jewish Arabs as to the overwhelming majority of non-Arab Muslims.” The suggestion that these two terms were interchangeable ignored the demographic realities of the region as a whole.

Hitti’s characterization of Middle Eastern history was typical of most Western Orientalists in the mid-twentieth century. For example, he maintained that the Arab world was only recently “awakened from medieval slumber” by Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt in 1798,

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87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
90 In order to remedy this problem, Fred Donner suggests that the term “Arab” should be diffused, allowing “Arabian” to represent the geographical region of the peninsula, “Arabic” to represent the language of the peninsula, and “Muslim” to represent anything that has to do with Islam specifically. For more on this tautological problem, see: Varisco, Reading Orientalism, 71.
forcing the region into a continuous series of encounters with Western modernity from that point forward.91 Hitti argued that this clash with the West was especially problematic for the Arabian Peninsula, due to its “medievalism, lack of facile communication… geographic isolation, and the insulation of its people against modern ideology, which is on the whole European…”92 His analysis of the recently unified kingdom of Saudi Arabia criticized “the emergence of the ultraconservative, puritanical Wahhabis under ibn-al-Sa’ud as the leading community in the peninsula after the first World War,” claiming that the tenets of Wahhabism represented “the extremity of the pendulum swing in that direction in Islam… If the postwar Turks proved to be the ‘protestants of Islam,’ the Wahhabis proved to be the greatest conformists…”93 Ironically, this same Wahhabi fundamentalism made Saudi Arabia an enticing target for Cold War policymakers in their efforts to mobilize Islamic piety.

In April 1946 the State Department announced that Hitti was departing for a four-month lecture and research tour of the Middle East under the sponsorship of the Lebanese Government and the Department’s new “cultural-cooperation program.”94 His tour included visits to Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, and his lectures focused on the contributions of American scholarship to Arab and Islamic history. Dorothea Seelye Franck, a Divisional Assistant with the State Department’s Office of International Information and Cultural Affairs, emphasized that “as an American of Lebanese background,” Hitti was uniquely qualified to “discuss the contributions to American life of Americans of Arabic origin, thus strengthening the bonds of friendship between the two cultures.”95

91 Hitti, “The Possibility of Union Among the Arab States”: 724.
92 Ibid.: 726.
93 Ibid.
Aside from Hitti, however, the American academic community lacked any viable Orientalist tradition at the outset of the Cold War, forcing U.S. policymakers to turn to European scholars as sources of information on the Middle East and Islamic culture. This factor distinguished the American experience in the Middle East from that of its European forerunners in many ways. Unlike British and French imperialism (which developed over an extended period of time) the United States had only recently emerged as an “imperial” power over the course of a few short decades. Since this did not allow enough time for the gathering, processing, and institutionalization of necessary imperial knowledge, the United States was forced to borrow this knowledge from the declining European empires that it was replacing. According to Said, the uniqueness of this transition of imperial knowledge was evidenced “by the extent to which the European tradition of Orientalist scholarship was, if not taken over, then accommodated, normalized, domesticated, and popularized… into the postwar efflorescence of Near Eastern studies in the United States.”

The question of whether or not the United States was truly “imperial” by the middle of the twentieth century is a source of debate for many scholars. Some argue that the American experiment was imperialist from the start. In the case of the Middle East, U.S. policy often...
favored American corporate and strategic interests at the expense of the “self determination” of the local populace. The United States engaged in a wide-range of imperialist tactics, including: the use of economic pressures, the exploitation of regional resources for use in other parts of the “empire,” and the covert suppression of local political movements in favor of the tyrannical rule of pro-Western despots.\textsuperscript{98}

The sudden rise of American imperialism in the Middle East required access to an established collection of imperial knowledge. According to Nathan Citino, U.S. policymakers gained many of their initial impressions of the Middle East and Islam from the scholarship of two British Orientalists: Albert Hourani and Bernard Lewis.\textsuperscript{99} Lewis was educated at the University of London and began teaching Islamic history at the School of Oriental and African Studies in 1938.\textsuperscript{100} He produced a number of journal articles and lectures on Islamic culture throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The majority of his work during this period featured two over-simplifications of Islamic culture: the belief that modern and medieval Islamic societies were essentially the same, and the idea that the most influential aspect of every Muslim’s life was their strict adherence to Islam. Although Western society developed over time into “a rationalistic and materialistic generation” that no longer focused on exclusively spiritual issues, Lewis claimed


\textsuperscript{98} The most notable example of this last practice was the CIA-sponsored coup of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq in 1953. For more on the 1953 coup and its consequences for U.S.-Iranian relations, see: Barry Rubin, \textit{Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); James A. Bill, \textit{The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); and Stephen Kinzer, \textit{All the Shah’s Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror} (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003).

\textsuperscript{99} Citino, \textit{From Arab Nationalism to OPEC}, 96.

\textsuperscript{100} Lockman, \textit{Contending Visions of the Middle East}, 130.
that Islamic society “sought no further explanation” aside from religious interpretation.\textsuperscript{101} He argued that “Islam has always had a strong equalitarian strain and has insisted on the brotherhood of believers of whatever nationality and whatever social origin – though it may be mentioned in passing, there may be rather more difficulty in securing acceptance for the unbeliever as a brother or even as an equal fellow-citizen.”\textsuperscript{102} These statements evoked the image of a cohesive global community, united by its adherence to Islamic doctrine, regardless of local political and/or socio-economic circumstances. Lewis also argued that the foundation of the rule of law in Islamic society was “theocratic rather than democratic, deriving from the immutable revelation of God and not from the changing will of the people,” which suggested that Islam was not only a universal faith, but a totalitarian one as well.\textsuperscript{103}

Lewis’s most significant contribution to Cold War policymaking came in October 1953 when he delivered a lecture on “Communism and Islam” at the Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House in London. The complete text of his lecture appeared the following January in the organization’s publication: \textit{The Journal of International Affairs}. Lewis believed that an analysis of the possible compatibilities between communism and Islam was critical in light of “the present competition between the Western democracies and Soviet Communism for the support of the Islamic world…”\textsuperscript{104} He warned that strong anti-Western sentiments throughout the Middle East made the threat of communist subversion especially dangerous. The Muslim world exhibited “a fundamental and universal revulsion from all that is Western,” based on a negative legacy of colonial exploitation as well as a sense of cultural and economic inferiority.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.: 10.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.: 3-4.
Lewis claimed that the totalitarianism of “the Islamic political tradition” was also advantageous to the spread of communism.\textsuperscript{106} Despite this apparent compatibility, Lewis reassured his audience that communism “is not and cannot be a religion, while Islam, for the great mass of believers, still is,” designating spiritual faith as “the core of the Islamic resistance to Communist ideas.”\textsuperscript{107} Although Lewis did not believe that the basic doctrines of Islam were more opposed to communism than those of any of the other world religions, Islam was “more potent as a force affecting the lives and thoughts of its adherents. Pious Muslims – and most Muslims are pious – will not long tolerate an atheist creed, nor one that violates their traditional religious and moral principles.”\textsuperscript{108} This assessment was critical for American officials in search of any potential advantage against the Soviets in the Middle East. Although Lewis did not move permanently to the United States until 1974, his work influenced the ways that policymakers perceived Islam from the earliest years of the Cold War.\textsuperscript{109} 

Like Lewis, American officials also considered Albert Hourani to be an important source of knowledge on the Muslim world. He was the founding director of the Middle Eastern Studies Centre at St. Antony’s College at Oxford, and like his contemporary Lewis, he believed that the best way to predict the reaction of the Muslim world to modern events was by the careful study of medieval Islamic history. His address at Chatham House in November of 1952, however, featured a slightly different interpretation of both the monolithic nature of Islam as well as its inherent aversion to communism. Hourani maintained that there was only one force in early Arab history “strong enough to check the disruption caused by feuds and individualism: the force of

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.: 7. 
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.: 12. 
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid. 
\textsuperscript{109} Lockman, \textit{Contending Visions of the Middle East}, 130.
While he agreed with Lewis that the rise of Islam was initially successful in “binding men together into a community wider than the family, the village or the tribe,” he argued that certain factors caused those ties to decay over time. Hourani posited that this breakdown was caused by the “comparative absence in Muslim thought of natural law and causality” resulting from “the concepts of a dogmatic theology which set limits to the use of reason.” Therefore, the Muslim world experienced a slower development than the West because its strict adherence to the tenets of Islam caused a “lack of order and continuity in thought and action which are among the weaknesses of the Arab popular mind…”

Hourani’s appraisal of the incompatibility between communism and Islam was less optimistic than the one offered by Lewis a year later. For Hourani, “the Arab peoples are neutral in the cold war. For them it is unreal, an invention of Western propaganda, or else irrelevant, a quarrel between two groups of potential exploiters.” He warned that the majority of the Arab world was reluctant to side with the West “because of their resentment of Western policy” (vis-à-vis Israel), as well as the strong mistrust of the West’s imperialistic intentions. Hourani also challenged the belief that Islam, in its modern context, was completely antithetical to communism. Although he agreed that the tenets of the two doctrines were essentially incompatible, this fact alone was not necessarily a deterrent since “as much was true of Communism and Russian Orthodoxy.” Communism could easily spread “among those on

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111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.: 25.
113 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.: 170.
whom the inherited religion has lost its hold... even within the framework of Islam.” The traditional strength of Islam slowly diminished as the Arab world encountered Western modernity during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hourani warned that this weakened faith could easily result in the “turning of the Arab mind towards the communist belief, which does at least provide a systematic and coherent doctrine not only of society but of man and the universe.” The most effective counter to this threat, therefore, was to develop “what already exists... a more serious, responsible, and troubled reflection on Islam.” He maintained that this effort would most likely result in a strong spiritual partnership between the Muslim world and the Christian West, since “Islam has no intrinsic hostility towards Christianity, and those who have had the friendship of believing Muslims know how free are their hearts of any enmity for the ‘People of the Book.’” Despite the weak state of modern Islam, it was still the most likely defense against the spread of communism in the Middle East since any study of the history of Islamic civilization “shows that no political movement, however external it may seem, is devoid of some root in the inner life. In proportion as the Islamic movement tends towards a revival of the inner life of thought and devotion, the danger of fanaticism will grow less.”

Although Lewis and Hourani were both significant influences on American policymakers, few Cold War era scholars exemplified the transfer of imperial knowledge from Britain to the United States more than Hamilton Gibb. His relocation from Oxford to Harvard in 1955 was emblematic of the ascendancy of American hegemony in the Middle East in the decades after World War II. Gibb felt that it was his duty to volunteer his conception of the

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117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.: 181.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.: 182.
121 Ibid.
essential characteristics of Islamic civilization to the American policymaking establishment.¹²² According to Said, the majority of Gibb’s post-war career was spent “speaking and writing for policy-determining organizations,” maintaining that the most valuable contribution of the Orientalist “was not his positive work as a scholar,” but rather “its adaptability for use in the public world.”¹²³ Even Gibb’s Orientalist counterparts recognized his contribution to Cold War policymakers. In a tribute to Gibb following his death in 1971, Hourani described his former mentor’s dedication “to the elucidation, by careful study of the past, of the specific nature of Muslim society and the beliefs and culture which lay at the heart of it. Even this problem he tended to see at first mainly in political terms.”¹²⁴

Gibb promoted many of the essential misperceptions of Islam that were later adopted by U.S. policymakers. In the influential work *Islamic Society and the West* (co-authored by Harold Bowen) Gibb argued that early Islamic society consisted of small, autonomous social groups governed at the local level by members of the elite classes. According to Gibb and Bowen, the one factor that was able to unite these scattered communities into a single cohesive society was the “Religious Institution” of Islam. This institution served a dual purpose: it filled the gap between ruler and ruled, and provided a common identity for a large number of disparate groups that was based solely on their faith in Islam.¹²⁵

¹²² Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 129-130.
¹²⁵ Sir Hamilton Gibb and Harold Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West: A Study of the Impact of Western Civilization on Moslem Culture in the Near East*, 1, 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1950): 70-77; according to historian Roger Owen, *Islamic Society and the West* represented a landmark in the modern literature of Middle Eastern history, “in that it provid[ed] a way by which the traditional methods and presuppositions of the orientalists [could] be carried over to structure an examination of the modern period.” The tendency to draw direct parallels between medieval and modern Islamic society was a consistent aspect of Gibb’s approach to Islam. Although Owen’s critique of Gibb and Bowen appeared three years before the publication of *Orientalism*, he observed many of the same Orientalist stereotypes that were later highlighted by Said. According to Owen, *Islamic Society and the West* “played a significant role in perpetuating what remains basically a nineteenth-century historical method… with its mystificatory attitude to the role of religion, [and] with its built-in tendency to compare so-called Western with so-called Islamic civilization – always to the latter’s disadvantage.” For more on Owen’s analysis, see: Roger Owen,
Gibb expanded on these theories during a series of lectures delivered at the University of Chicago in 1945, which were later published under the title *Modern Trends in Islam*. He suggested that “the present religious attitudes and movements of the Muslim peoples,” came from a distinctive “Arab (or Muslim) mind” which dominated the thought process of the entire Muslim world throughout history.\(^{126}\) Gibb compared the impact of language on both Western and Arab societies as a way to illustrate this phenomenon. He argued that the influence of expressive language in the civilized West was mostly superficial, while “upon the Arab mind” the impact of expressive language was “immediate; the words, passing through no filter of logic or reflection which might weaken or deaden their effect, go straight to the head.”\(^{127}\) This effect limited the possibility of logical thought, which explained how “the Muslim” came to see the Qur’ān as “a work of superhuman origin and a veritable miracle.”\(^{128}\) Gibb also indicated that Islam was “a living and vital religion, appealing to the hearts, minds, and consciences of tens of hundreds of millions, setting them a standard by which to live honest, sober, and god-fearing lives.”\(^{129}\) But despite his contention that the faith of the Muslim world was “living and vital,” he maintained that the actual tenets of orthodox Islam were inflexible and rigid.\(^{130}\)

Gibb was deeply involved in the development of area-studies programs in colleges and universities throughout the United States during the 1950s. He served on the Near and Middle East Committee established by the SSRC in 1951.\(^{131}\) He also provided valuable leadership in his role as the first director of programming for the new Middle Eastern Center at Harvard.

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\(^{127}\) Ibid.

\(^{128}\) Ibid.

\(^{129}\) Ibid., 123.

\(^{130}\) Ibid., 123-125.

\(^{131}\) Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 124.
University. Owing to the lack of available funding, however, it was difficult for other colleges and universities to come up with the money to develop programs of their own. They relied heavily on the support of corporate and philanthropic donations to pay for any kind of curricular expansion. Despite the efforts of many non-governmental organizations like the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, it was often difficult for school administrators to secure the necessary funds.

Once area-studies development became an important priority of America’s Cold War policy, however, State Department officials began facilitating contacts between private donors and academic institutions. One example of this effort occurred during the summer of 1954 when C.J. Rees, Dean of the Graduate Program at the University of Delaware, sent a letter to Richard H. Sanger in the Office of Public Affairs in the Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs, requesting financial assistance in the development of a Near Eastern studies program. Rees declared that this program would be very useful in presenting the facts about the Middle East to the people of Delaware in order to “understand what the government is doing and why certain decisions must be made.”

Even schools with established Middle Eastern studies programs sought the assistance of the State Department in securing additional funding. In December of 1950, Assistant Secretary of State George C. Wadsworth received a letter from Phillip Hitti concerning a recent $5,000 donation to Princeton’s Near East studies program from The Gulf Oil Company. This was the second donation of this amount that the program received.

132 Ibid.
133 The five major universities that featured some kind of Middle Eastern studies program were: Columbia University, Dropsie College, the University of Michigan, Princeton University, and the School of Advanced International Studies of Johns Hopkins University. For more information on these programs, see: Ibid, 126.
134 Letter from C.J. Rees, Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, University of Delaware, to Richard H. Sanger, Office of Public Affairs, Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs, 3 August 1954, Department of State Central Decimal File 511.80/8-354, Record Group 59, National Archives II (hereafter referred to as DOSCDF, RG 59).
from Gulf Oil. Although it was not exactly clear, the letter indicated that Wadsworth was somehow involved in securing these donations.\(^{135}\)

This practice of oil corporations providing funds to area studies programs was a major aspect of the “corporatist” relationship that developed between domestic petroleum interests and U.S. policy. Even major non-profit organizations like the Rockefeller Foundation (whose endowment was funded by revenues from the Rockefeller family’s significant oil holdings) participated in this corporate funding. By 1951, the Rockefeller foundation contributed more than $6 million to the expansion of area-studies programs in the United States.\(^{136}\)

Aside from their role in the development of area-studies, a number of British and American Orientalists were involved in official government service, often participating in research and intelligence gathering for the foreign policy community or the military.\(^ {137}\) Gibb and Hitti both served on advisory committees sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) that focused on the modern Muslim world and its impact on the Cold War. According to Citino, Gibb’s expertise on Middle Eastern and Islamic culture was an important influence during these CFR study sessions.\(^ {138}\) Both he and Hitti often served on committees with influential policymakers like Allen Dulles, Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) during the Eisenhower administration, and William Eddy, former Chief of Mission in Saudi Arabia, later ARAMCO employee, and a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) official himself.\(^ {139}\)

\(^{135}\) Letter from Phillip K. Hitti, Department of Oriental Languages and Literatures, Princeton University, to George C. McGhee, Assistant Secretary of State, 13 December 1950, DOSCDF 511.80/12-1350, RG 59.

\(^{136}\) Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 124.

\(^{137}\) Ibid., 122.


\(^{139}\) Ibid.: 582; for more on Colonel William Eddy’s career in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and later the CIA, see: Thomas W. Lippman, *Arabian Knight: Colonel Bill Eddy USMC and the Rise of American Power in the Middle East* (Vista, CA: Selwa Press, 2008), 63-97 and 203-214.
These forums provided useful exchanges between historians, social scientists, and members of the policymaking establishment, allowing representatives from the academic community to contribute directly to the formation of international policy. For Orientalist scholars like Gibb and Hitti, this opportunity allowed them to shape the official American perception of the Muslim world the way they saw fit, based on their own misperceptions of Islamic culture. As early as the 1940s, Orientalists introduced policymakers to mischaracterizations of a monolithic Islamic society, uniting Muslims around the world solely on the basis of religious devotion. Princeton’s Walter Livingston Wright, Jr. provided a typical example of this mindset during a CFR session on Islamic culture in 1948. Wright informed his fellow committee members that Islam was “not a religion, as religion is conceived in the West. It is a totalitarian religion; it tells its followers what to believe, how to think, what to do. It is a complete way of life, a complete culture.” He also maintained that “Islamic culture is a seamless fabric – it covers the whole of the Moslem world.”

The concept of a united civilization dominated by a strict adherence to religious doctrine appealed to American policymakers who were in search of an effective counterbalance to the spread of the similarly totalitarian ideologies of Soviet communism. When reports from diplomatic posts around the globe flooded the State Department with accounts of local displays of Muslim aversion to communism, the mischaracterizations of Orientalists like Gibb and his colleagues seemed to be validated. The diverse regional origins of these reports further suggested that the potential for an anti-communist bulwark based on faith in Islam was not isolated to the Middle East alone.

141 Quoted in: Ibid.: 712.
Alan G. Kirk, the American ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1949 to 1951, sent a telegram to Secretary of State Dean Acheson in the summer of 1950 describing the mistreatment of Russian Muslims at the hands of the Soviet government. Although officials in Moscow publicly assured the Muslim world that communism was ideologically compatible with Islam, Kirk reported that Soviet ideology remained “utterly contemptuous of spiritual values…”142 He informed Acheson of the government’s refusal to grant the American embassy access to any newspapers from the more heavily Muslim-populated regions throughout Russia. However, the embassy did receive reports from a number of reliable sources indicating that the tenets of Islam were in the process of being “steadily and systematically eradicated from the [Soviet] state.”143 In light of these developments, Kirk suggested that the State Department should continue to emphasize “the Soviet intention of turning Islam into a sterile and purely formalistic rite.”144

Reports from Indonesia revealed that local communist activities often met with significant opposition from the indigenous Muslim population. William Lacy, of the Office of Philippine and Southeast Asian Affairs, notified the State Department of a recent meeting with a man named Abikusno Tjokrosuyoso, who claimed to be “the most powerful leader of Darul Islam.”145 Abikusno had been recently imprisoned for nine months because of his involvement in anti-communist activities throughout Indonesia. During the course of their meeting, Abikusno

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143 Ibid., 1208.
144 Ibid.; Kirk was one of the few American officials with experience in the Middle East prior to World War II. According to Robert Kaplan, Kirk was a member of the small group commonly referred to as “the Arabists.” He served as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Saudi Arabia from February 1941 to July of 1943. Along with his fellow “Arabist” Raymond Hare, Kirk recognized the strategic importance of the region early on, and expressed frustration with the lack of support among officials in Washington for providing military assistance to the British in Egypt during the war. For more information on Kirk and his colleagues, see: Robert Kaplan, The Arabists: The Romance of an American Elite (New York: The Free Press, 1993).
described the efforts of the various Islamic political movements in Indonesia to challenge the growing influence of communism. He assured Lacy that Islam and communism “were completely incompatible,” and that the Muslim population in Indonesia “would continue to fight Communism in every way it thought effective.”

Officials expressed similar confidence in Islam’s potential as an anti-communist tool in Pakistan. The issue of a possible “flirtation” between the Pakistani government and the Soviet Union was discussed during an informal meeting between Assistant Secretary of State George McGhee and members of the British Foreign Office in London in the fall of 1950. McGhee reassured his British colleagues that the Muslim faith of the Pakistani people provided a major advantage in the suppression of any potential communist infiltration. McGhee’s confidence appeared justified the following summer when the government of Pakistan introduced a counter-propaganda campaign against Soviet influence that was focused specifically on the Muslim faith. This was an encouraging development for State Department officials because the Pakistani army was critical to regional defense strategies against a possible Soviet military encroachment into the Middle East.

According to Andrew Rotter, Islam was an important factor in the decision by U.S. policymakers to ally with Pakistan instead of India during the Cold War. They preferred the stark contrast between good and evil demonstrated by Pakistani Muslims to the perceived ambivalence of Hinduism in India.

McGhee was also convinced that North Africa was safe from Soviet infiltration, since “the inhabitants of the region concerned were, for the most part, fanatically devout Muslims and

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146 Ibid., 568.
149 Rotter, Comrades at Odds.
as such were likely to resist Communist ideas." He expressed this belief during a meeting with the Sultan of Morocco, which McGhee later described in his memoirs. According to McGhee, he and his State Department colleagues “considered Islam [to be] an important barrier against the spread of Communism. We felt that the Muslim religion was by its nature antipathetic to Communism. The Sultan agreed that the tenets of Islam were fundamentally opposed to the Communist philosophy. God-worshiping people could never have anything in common with the godless…” McGhee concluded the meeting by complimenting the Sultan on Morocco’s rich cultural heritage, adding that there was “much we could learn from the art of Islam.”

The State Department also received reports from the American embassy in Tangiers detailing the natural aversion demonstrated by Muslims throughout North Africa to the communist ideology. One report featured an account of the Grand Vizir of Tunisia’s recent encounter with Muslims living under Soviet control during a pilgrimage to Mecca. He described many of the abuses that these Muslims had suffered at the hands of the Soviet government. The French Governor General of Algeria provided the embassy with similar descriptions of the ill treatment faced by Muslims in other Soviet-controlled areas. Embassy officials quickly recognized the propaganda value of these stories, and announced that a new information campaign featuring these accounts was already “having an effect.”

In Libya, U.S. Ambassador Lewis Clark and Prime Minister Muhammad Shaqishli (r. 1945 – 1946) met to discuss future Libyan involvement in the United Nations. During Clark’s opening remarks, he claimed that the United States was dedicated to the freedom and dignity of

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151 Ibid., 247.
152 Ibid.
every individual, a distinction that represented “the fundamental difference between Soviet communism and civilization as we know it…”154 He told the Prime Minister that this principle was also the historic foundation of both Christianity and Islam. “All of us are privileged to share the conviction – ingrained in our minds through centuries of religious development – that the individual is not destined to serve the state but that the state is created to serve the individuals.”155 Clark maintained that this conviction, together “with the help of God,” was critical in the recent defeat of Nazism and Fascism by the peoples of the free world during World War II.156

These regional assessments reinforced the perception of Islam’s incompatibility with communism. With this perception firmly in place, policymakers in the Truman administration began to implement policies that were designed to mobilize Islam as an anti-communist weapon. These initial efforts featured two fundamental objectives: stressing the commonalities between the Muslim world and the democratic West, and emphasizing the threat posed to Islam by atheistic communism.

During the 1951 Conference of the Middle East Chiefs of Mission in Istanbul, Turkey, State Department officials outlined a number of regional factors as well as their potential impact on American interests in the Middle East. The conference participants concluded that “all political regimes in the Middle East” were susceptible to “the reactionary influence of Islam…”157 The group agreed, therefore, that the most effective course of action for the United

155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
States was “to support influences corresponding to our own, since our moral force is our greatest asset.”\textsuperscript{158} They also recommended that the “collection of local cultural patterns should be explored,” as “a means of expressing our interest in the area.”\textsuperscript{159}

The following year, the National Security Council (NSC) received an assessment of U.S. objectives and policies in the Middle East that focused on potential problems for American interests in the region. The report highlighted the likelihood of political upheaval throughout the Arab world as the “relatively rigid social and economic institutions” of the region experienced increasing pressure from “the introduction of Western techniques and ideas… without the stabilizing political and religious forces once dominant in the area.”\textsuperscript{160} Despite the declining strength of these “religious forces,” however, the report maintained that religion was still the most important factor in the Middle East:

Religion has important effects upon social, political and economic life in the area. This region is the heart of the greater Islamic world stretching from Morocco to the Philippines, embracing approximately 250 million Moslems, and includes Israel, a holy land of three great religions. The reactions of the peoples in this area to United States policy will be reflected in the reactions of Jews and Moslems throughout the world. The three monotheistic religions in the area have in common a repugnance to the atheism of communist doctrine and this factor could become an important asset in promoting Western objectives in the area.\textsuperscript{161}

In light of these circumstances, the report suggested that the NSC should focus only on policies that emphasized the spiritual compatibilities between the Muslim world and the West.\textsuperscript{162}

The State Department issued a report later that summer on “American Publications on the Near East and Islam,” which highlighted “the growing number of publications on the Near East

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 19.
and Islam” as well as the possibility of “utilizing this type of material.” The report suggested that an exhibition of American publications dealing with Muslim subjects would “be an effective means of showing serious American interest… and therefore will be a step toward achieving objectives” set forth by U.S. policymakers. The report also claimed that there were over fifty publications on Islam issued in the United States since 1945, including government pamphlets and periodicals. Any material that dealt with “pre-Islamic civilizations” was omitted from this list.

A few months later, State Department officials analyzed a list of suggested programs that were featured in a recent policy paper entitled “A Positive Approach to the Peoples of Near East Asia.” The paper argued that it was not enough for the United States to simply counter the propaganda efforts of the Soviet Union. Instead, “we must set forth a positive program for which we stand… The more we are for something,” especially something like spirituality, “the more in the long run Near East Asian peoples will be for it also.” The officials that reviewed the paper were particularly interested in “the treatment of the threat of Communism to the Moslem faith,” and concurred with the suggestion that communism should be classified as “the enemy of all mankind,” a designation that could potentially be “most constructive.” The paper included a list of possible themes that stressed incompatibilities between communism and Islam, including such examples as: “Communism means the victory of materialism over spirituality…

163 Foreign Service Information and Educational Exchange Circular No. 50, 5 August 1952, DOSCDF 511.80/8-552, RG 59.
164 Ibid.
165 Ibid.
166 Commentary on “A Positive Approach to the Peoples of NEA,” 23 September 1952, DOSCDF 511.80/10-352, RG 59.
167 Ibid.
Communism persecutes the clergy… Communism has destroyed churches and Mosques…” and finally, “Communism keeps people in the darkness of ignorance.”

In an effort to capitalize on the close partnership that developed between the academic and policymaking communities during the early years of the Cold War, the State Department organized a global colloquium on Islamic culture at Princeton University that was scheduled for the fall of 1953. On the surface, this colloquium was the result of a joint effort between Princeton’s Near East Studies Department and the Library of Congress. In reality, however, the event was orchestrated and convened by State Department officials “behind the scenes and in a background capacity.” The event was designed to provide a forum for the exchange of different views between “scholars and intellectual leaders of the Muslim countries and the United States.” Officials also hoped that this program would “impress the Muslim world with United States interest in Islamic culture,” and stimulate more of an interest in Islamic culture among the American public.

As the date of the colloquium grew closer, the need to maintain secrecy concerning State Department involvement became more urgent. In a briefing paper sent to John Foster Dulles (the new Secretary of State under Dwight Eisenhower) organizers insisted that the conference would only be successful if it appeared “on the surface” to be “an exercise in pure learning.” They believed that the colloquium was an excellent opportunity “to bring together persons exerting great influence in formulating Muslim opinion in fields such as education, science, law and philosophy and inevitably, therefore, on politics,” and insisted that every effort must be made “to...

168 Ibid.
169 Circular Airgram on the Colloquium on Islamic Culture Under the Auspices of the Library of Congress and Princeton University Scheduled for September 1953, 1 August 1952, DOSCDF 511.80/8-152, RG 59.
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
172 Briefing Paper for Secretary – Islamic Colloquium, 30 April 1953, DOSCDF: 511.80/4-3053, RG 59.
ensure that the visitors from Islamic countries feel that the conference is an honor and a tribute to their culture and position.”173 They also suggested that an audience with President Eisenhower at the White House would be an invaluable way to “emphasize the importance which the U.S. places upon mutual understanding between America and the Moslem world.”174

After the colloquium, the State Department issued a report to every diplomatic post in the Middle East announcing the event’s complete success. The conference was hailed as “probably the outstanding event of the decade in United States cultural relations with the Islamic world… those attending the gathering were virtually unanimous in their commendation of both the concept and the execution of the Colloquium.”175 A summary of the proceedings provided a glimpse at some of the themes that State Department officials were concerned with the most. It indicated that although “no major Marxist work has yet been published in Arabic,” the deplorable social and economic conditions in the region threatened to break down “the natural Muslim aversion to a materialistic approach to life… and [therefore] Communist propaganda might have more success than in the past.”176 The report also claimed that the White House visit with Eisenhower produced the desired reaction among the colloquium’s participants. The theme of Eisenhower’s remarks during the meeting stressed the importance of cultural, rather than political interactions between the United States and the Muslim world, “because politics is temporary whereas culture is eternal.”177 According to a report by Richard H. Sanger, Public Affairs Adviser with the Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs, the

173 Ibíd.
174 Briefing Paper – Colloquium on Islamic Culture, 2 July 1953, DOSCDF: 511.80/6-2953, RG 59.
175 Circular Airgram on the Colloquium on Islamic Culture in its Relation to the Contemporary World, 7 December 1953, DOSCDF: 511.80/12-753, RG 59.
176 Summary of the Proceedings of the Colloquium on Islamic Culture in its Relation to the Contemporary World, 7 December 1953, DOSCDF: 511.80/2-254, RG 59.
177 Ibíd.
Colloquium “gave a large number of Islamic scholars a new understanding of the scope and intensity of American interest in Islam.”

Following Eisenhower’s inauguration in 1953, policymakers placed an even greater emphasis on the mobilization of Islam as a defense against communist infiltration into the Middle East. Officials in the Eisenhower administration implemented many of the policies developed under the Truman administration. The same Orientalist misperceptions of Islam that were introduced by scholars like Hamilton Gibb continued to shape American foreign policy in the Middle East. While the foundations of this religious mobilization remained constant, the application of the policy experienced significant changes. Most notably, the Eisenhower administration turned to local Middle Eastern leaders to provide assistance to the mobilization of Islam. In the fall of 1953, officials believed that they found the perfect partner in His Royal Highness, the custodian of the Muslim holy sites at Mecca and Medina, the newly crowned King Sa’ud ibn Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia.

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CHAPTER II – A PARTNERSHIP OF FAITH: THE EISENHOWER ADMINISTRATION AND KING SA’UD IBN ABDUL AZIZ OF SAUDI ARABIA

President Eisenhower’s diary entry on the night of 28 March 1956 recounted some disturbing news he received earlier that day in a memorandum from his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles. Dulles was concerned about the rising threat of communist penetration in the Middle East. He warned Eisenhower that recent increases in military and economic aid from the Soviet Union to local Middle Eastern governments put America’s regional interests in serious jeopardy. Soviet aid to Egypt was especially problematic since “the growing ambition” of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser was due in large part to “the sense of power” he had gained “out of his association with the Soviets.”179 Both Eisenhower and Dulles recognized that if Nasser’s stature in the region continued to grow he could potentially emerge as “a true leader of the entire Arab world,” providing the Soviet Union with a significant regional advantage.180

In light of these developments, Eisenhower suggested that the State Department should begin to “build up some other individual as a prospective leader of the Arab world,” one that was more amenable to American interests. He recorded his preference for this potential leader in his diary that night:

My own choice of such a rival is King Saud. However, I do not know the man and, therefore, do not know whether he could be built up into the position I visualize. Nevertheless, Arabia is a country that contains the holy places of the Moslem world, and the Saudi Arabians are considered to be the most deeply religious of all the Arab groups. Consequently, the king could be built up, possibly, as a spiritual leader. Once this were accomplished we might begin to urge his right to political leadership.181

In order for this effort to succeed, however, Eisenhower believed that the future of American policy in the Middle East “should be directed toward separating the Saudi Arabians from the

180 Ibid.
181 Ibid.
Egyptians and concentrating, for the moment at least, in making the former see that their best interests lie with us…”  

There were a number of reasons why policymakers in the Eisenhower administration identified King Sa’ud ibn Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia (who ascended to the throne following his father’s death in the fall of 1953) as a potential leader of the entire Muslim world. He was seen, for the most part, as a pro-Western, anti-communist figure, financially dependant on the revenue from oil sales to the United States and Western Europe. He was also the son of the late monarch Abdul Aziz ibn Sa’ud, the founder of the modern state of Saudi Arabia and a widely respected individual throughout the Middle East. Sa’ud’s most important feature for many policymakers, however, was the prestige he enjoyed as the protector of the Muslim Holy sites at Mecca and Medina. They believed that this position gave Sa’ud the devotion of all Muslims, a responsibility that made him uniquely immune to communist influence.

This chapter examines how the Eisenhower administration identified King Sa’ud of Saudi Arabia as a potential ally in the mobilization of Islam in the Middle East. He was the preferred choice over both his brother, Prince Faisal al Sa’ud, and Gamal Abdel Nasser, the widely popular President of Egypt. American policymakers constantly reminded the king of the responsibilities bestowed upon him as the custodian of the Muslim holy sites. They urged him to use the status granted to him by this position as a way to restrain his Arab neighbors from falling into the clutches of communism. U.S. officials also exploited the perceived spiritual devotion of Sa’ud himself to keep him from forming close ties with the Soviet Union and communist China, and employed his faith as a way to further America’s regional interests.

Most regional specialists in the State Department considered Saudi Arabia to be America’s most important Cold War ally in the Arab world. According to George McGhee, this

182 Ibid., 318.
belief resulted from the perception that Saudi Arabia was “the most Arab of the Arab states;” the place where “the prophet Mohammed founded the Islamic faith about six hundred years after the birth of Christ,” as well as the location of “the holy cities of Mecca and Medina...” Former State Department official Colonel William Eddy was well known throughout diplomatic circles for his pro-Arab leanings, as well as his specific preference for the Saudi kingdom. Eddy was U.S. Chief of Mission in Saudi Arabia from 1944 to 1946, and served as the translator for President Roosevelt and King ibn Sa’ud during their meeting aboard the *U.S.S. Quincy* in 1945. At the same time, Eddy served as an undercover operative for the C.I.A., overseeing both the rapidly expanding American embassy presence in Jidda as well as the various dealings of ARAMCO officials. According to historian Phillip Baram, Eddy was “the great and personal friend of the Arabs and expressed their point of view, especially Ibn Saud’s, with unceasing advocacy,” even after he left the State Department in 1947 to protest the pro-Jewish policies of the Truman administration.

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183 McGhee, *Envoy to the Middle World*, 181.
185 Eddy served as translator for both Roosevelt and ibn Sa’ud, which was a slight break of protocol. Given the physical infirmities of both leaders, Eddy was forced to kneel in between them for the duration of their meeting. Since no active American Minister (Eddy was still Minister to Saudi Arabia at that time) was allowed to kneel before a foreign leader, Roosevelt was forced to suspend Eddy’s diplomatic status and revert him to his previous military rank of Colonel. Therefore, in every picture of this historic meeting, Eddy is shown kneeling between the two leaders wearing his old World War I uniform. He was reinstated as Minister immediately after the meeting. For more on Eddy’s role in this meeting, see: Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 48, n45.
187 Quoted in Kaplan, *The Arabists*, 128; Eddy expressed his concerns with the overall policies of the United States in the Middle East in an article published in *Life* magazine in June 1952. According to Eddy, “the growth of anti-American feeling among Arabs is not directed at American government officials, businessmen or missionaries residing in the Near East, but against U.S. policy, which appears to value Israel as equal to all the rest of the Moslem world put together; against insults hurled gratuitously by members of the U.S. Cabinet and Congress at Moslem and Arab culture; and against the support of colonial powers against the people of Asia and North Africa. This resentment is not diminished by the conviction that the U.S. is preoccupied and overextended in Europe and the Far East, and has no real strategic interest in the Near East, except to scorch its earth in a future war with Russia.” He was also critical of development efforts like Truman’s Point Four program, stating that “the Arab nations want security, not charity; respect, not philanthropy. No proud people regard themselves as backward.” For more on Eddy’s critique of America’s Middle East policies, see: William Eddy, “Silent Crisis in the Near East, *Life* 32 (23 June 1952): 28.
There were also a number of American opinion leaders who extolled the benefits of a strong partnership with Saudi Arabia. In a speech in front of the Executive’s Club of Chicago in March 1954, journalist Dorothy Thompson (a founding member of the lobbying group The American Friends of the Middle East and a good friend of Colonel Eddy) outlined some of the potential drawbacks of America’s support for Israel.\textsuperscript{188} Channeling her inner Orientalist, Thompson began her lecture by claiming that the modern world “is not one world, and those who think so should get around more. It is not even living in One Time, and this is particularly true of that area of the world which we call the Middle East.”\textsuperscript{189} According to Thompson, this was especially the case in Saudi Arabia, which she labeled “the last and only absolute monarchy in the world in which the monarch is king, judge, and First High Priest.”\textsuperscript{190} She claimed that of all the countries in the Middle East, the Saudi kingdom was the most amenable to U.S. regional interests since the Saudi economy was based in Dhahran, the administrative headquarters of ARAMCO, and an area that represented “the largest American colony outside the United States.”\textsuperscript{191} Under the leadership of ibn Sa’ud, Saudi Arabia became “the only pro-American Arab country.”\textsuperscript{192} She maintained that an alliance with Saudi Arabia was crucial to America’s struggle against atheistic communism, given the prestige of the Saudi royal family throughout the Muslim world. According to Thompson, “Islam not only converted the peoples of what is now the Arab world, but it embraced the Turks, the Persians, the Pakistani, and large populations of the South

\textsuperscript{188} Dorothy Thompson, “The Middle East Problem,” \textit{Vital Speeches of the Day} 20, 10 (1 March 1954): 295; Colonel Eddy was also one of the founding members of the AFME, along with Thompson, Garland Hopkins (Secretary General of the Continuing Committee on Muslim-Christian Cooperation) and Rev. E. L. R. Elson, pastor and spiritual advisor to both Eisenhower and Dulles. For a list of initial members as well as a report on the first annual meeting of the organization, see: Memorandum from Leonard Ware at IFI/N to Richard H. Sanger at NEA/P, “Suggestions from Damascus Concerning the American Friends of the Middle East,” 1 December 1952, DOSCDF: 511.80/12-152, RG 59; and Memorandum from Richard H. Sanger at NEA/P to Mr. Hart at NE, “First Annual Conference of American Friends of the Middle East,” 2 February 1953, DOSCDF: 511.80/2-253, RG 59.

\textsuperscript{189} Thompson, “The Middle East Problem”; 295.

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid.; 296.

\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.
Pacific, notably the Indonesians. Therefore, one can reasonably say that as the Arabic-speaking and Islamic world goes, so will go the ballot of world orientation between the West and the Soviet Union.”

In the summer of 1951, Eddy wrote a letter to Thompson in which he described an audience with ibn Sa’ud that he attended the previous week. According to Eddy, the king discussed the idea of Christians and Muslims throughout the world joining forces against the spread of Soviet communism. Apparently, ibn Sa’ud strongly believed that this was an important cause for both religions. He remarked that “Christians and Muslims both worship the one true God… and Russia is determined to destroy the worship of God.” Eddy stressed the important role that Islam played in ibn Sa’ud’s decision-making process. A copy of this letter was forwarded to Brigadier General Robert A. McClure, who served as the Director of Psychological Warfare for the Department of Defense.

As early as World War II, the influence of the Saudi royal family appeared to Great Britain and the United States as a stabilizing force for the rest of the Arab world. The Saudis appeared to be adamantly opposed to the Axis Powers from the beginning of the war, and seemingly convinced many of their Arab neighbors to follow suit. The fascist influences that emerged in countries like Egypt and Syria did not take hold in Saudi Arabia. In fact, ibn Sa’ud officially declared war on both Germany and Japan in April of 1945. In a message to Roosevelt, the Saudi king announced his intention “to adhere to the Allies” in the conflict. However, his

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193 Ibid.: 297.
195 Ibid.
declaration excluded “the zone of the Holy Shrines.”\textsuperscript{197} For ibn Sa’ud, the cities of Mecca and Medina represented a “zone of safety and peace for all those who live therein, and all those Muslims who come to them” which required all Saudis to “ask God to direct our steps to righteousness and to grant us to ever act in behalf of Islam and Muslims.”\textsuperscript{198} Despite his apparent support for the Allied cause, ibn Sa’ud’s actions at the outset of the war indicated his willingness to abandon his stated principles in order to advance Saudi self-interest. He opened diplomatic relations with Nazi Germany in 1939, and sent a personal letter to Hitler, stating “that it is our foremost aim to see the friendly and intimate relations with the German Reich developed to the utmost limits.”\textsuperscript{199} Not until the war turned in favor of the Allied Powers did ibn Sa’ud shift his allegiance to Great Britain and the United States.\textsuperscript{200}

When British and American officials discussed the possibility of providing an economic advisor to ibn Sa’ud during the war, the king told them that he would accept only a practicing Sunni Muslim, rather than a Christian, to serve in such a capacity. Officials in the State Department were advised that it was important for the financial advisor to be a Muslim because “the Saudi Arabian Treasury, where he will have to work, [was] situated in Mecca.”\textsuperscript{201} Officials were also urged to consider this request not just in terms of British or American interests, “but also Ibn Saud’s own position. He has to be extremely careful not to expose himself to criticism to the effect that he, as guardian of the holy places of Islam and as leader of one of the strictest

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{199} Lacey, \textit{The Kingdom}, 257; the partnership between Saudi Arabia and Germany included a deal for 4000 German rifles, ammunition, and the establishment of a German arms factory outside of Riyadh. King ibn Sa’ud also finalized arms deals with Benito Mussolini of Italy, and ratified a series of treaties with Japan, who actively pursued oil concessions in Saudi Arabia during the early stages of the war.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid.
Moslem sects, has come under foreign influence and has accepted Christians to administer his affairs.”

The Arabian Peninsula also held strategic geographic importance following the war, with its central position in the Middle East, its location astride international trade routes, and its proximity to the Soviet Union. As a major source of the world’s oil, the economic significance of the region could not be overstated. The importance of Saudi petroleum reserves to the European recovery effort made it a key factor in the post-war world. The stewardship of Muslim holy sites provided the Saudi royal family an elevated status throughout the Muslim world. All of these factors made Saudi Arabia an attractive partner for the United States in the Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union.

King ibn Sa’ud himself frequently contributed to the belief that Islam provided the most effective bulwark against communism in the Middle East. After an audience with the king, George McGhee reported that ibn Sa’ud “reiterated his strong opposition to Communism which was based on the fact that [it] opposed religion which constituted the basic element in Arab life, and also because it was an aggressive force.” In fact, ibn Sa’ud warned McGhee that communism was making headway in the region already, particularly in Iraq and Egypt, and cited

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202 Ibid.
203 Leffler, For the Soul of Mankind, 132.
205 Ironically, the Soviet Union was the first country to recognize ibn Sa’ud’s leadership of Saudi Arabia, and also established the first diplomatic post in Jidda. Kerim Hakimoff, the first Soviet Minister dispatched to the Saudi kingdom, went as far as abandoning his “Western” attire in favor of the traditional robes and headdress of an Arab Bedouin. The Soviet Union even attempted to strengthen ties between the two countries by delivering £30,000 worth of petrol to Saudi Arabia following Prince Faisal’s official visit to Moscow in 1932. This fact makes the Soviet Union the only nation to ever export oil into Saudi Arabia. King ibn Sa’ud eventually closed the Soviet ministry, sending Hakimoff and his aides back to Moscow, where the majority quickly fell victim to Stalin’s purges. For more on this early relationship between Saudi Arabia and the Soviet Union, see: Lacey, The Kingdom, 240-241.
China as an example of “what happens when such movements are unchecked.” These words were not taken lightly in the Truman State Department, especially in light of the public outcry in the United States at the “loss” of China to communism following World War II. The king himself claimed that he “would never abandon his people or his religion” to the ideologies of the Soviet Union. His role as the protector of the Muslim holy places “dictated an anti-communist stance.”

Despite these impressions, much of the American public was unsure about ibn Sa’ud’s potential as a pro-Western Cold War ally in the Middle East. A profile of the Saudi monarch in a September 1951 issue of Time stated that although his policies were based on a “strict devotion to the letter of the Mohammedan religion, and friendship for the U.S.,” like most Arab leaders he was displeased with America’s open support for Israel. He also offered little to the United States as a regional advocate, since he was “too old and complacent to go out of his way to help the West or assume active leadership of the Middle East.”

However, ibn Sa’ud’s son, Crown Prince Sa’ud, was altogether different. He established a reputation as an actively pro-Western and firmly anti-communist figure as early as March of 1950, when The New York Times published a public statement from Sa’ud calling for “a common Christian-Islamic defense against communism.” According to The Times, Sa’ud believed that communism represented “a common danger to both Islam and Christianity. If the Moslems and Christians can sink their points of difference and emphasize their points of contact, they will be

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207 Ibid.
208 Quoted in Bronson, Thicker Than Oil, 26.
able to join together to protect religion from the onslaught of this anti-God poison. In fact, it is a religious obligation both of Moslems and Christians to do so.”

Initially, ibn Sa’ud’s younger son, Prince Faisal al Sa’ud, expressed similar views on the spiritual importance of Saudi Arabia. He served as the Saudi Foreign Minister, and was believed by many to be his father’s favorite for the throne, despite trailing his older brother Sa’ud in the line of succession. He informed U.S. Ambassador J. Rives Childs that Saudi Arabia’s influence as the Muslim Holy Land made it different from every other Arab country. It also made it essential for the Saudi royal family to protect against “criticism abroad by other Arab or Moslem states.” However, Faisal did not offer similar guarantees that Islam would prevent the spread of communism into the Arab world. During a meeting with American officials in 1952, he administered a dire warning: “Don’t place too much faith in what Arab leaders may tell you that Communism is incompatible with Islam. We are in desperate straits. A drowning man will grasp at a snake – even a poisonous one – if it is the only chance he has to prevent his going under for the last time!” Such statements left policymakers with little confidence that Faisal would remain staunchly anti-communist should he ascend to the throne.

When ibn Sa’ud became ill in the fall of 1952, Secretary of State Dean Acheson urged President Truman to send medical aid. Crown Prince Sa’ud approached U.S. officials in Saudi Arabia to ask for their assistance in guaranteeing his succession. He had recently become the target of some ridicule by his father at court, and he feared that he might be passed over in favor

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212 Ibid.
of his younger brother Faisal. The State Department provided Sa’ud with radio broadcasts designed to rally the people of Saudi Arabia behind him. He was urged by officials in the Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs to begin these broadcasts with religious sermons in order to ensure the full attention of his audience. In appreciation for this assistance, Sa’ud promised his contacts in the State Department that he would develop a plan for a Pan-Islamic movement to unify all the Muslim people of the Middle East.\textsuperscript{216} Sa’ud later ascended to the throne following ibn Sa’ud’s death on 9 November 1953.\textsuperscript{217}

Western policymakers speculated whether or not the new king could achieve the same level of prestige in the Arab world that his late father enjoyed. In the April 1954 issue of \textit{Foreign Affairs}, the celebrated British expatriate and Arabian expert Sir Harry St. John Philby eulogized the former monarch and touched on some of these concerns:

The death of King ‘Abdul-‘Aziz ibn Sa’ud… closed a great chapter in the history of the Arabian peninsula: certainly its greatest since the days when the Prophet Mohammed and his successors spread the fame of Arabia through the world with the book and the sword of Islam… The many thousands of telegrams and letters received by the new King, to say nothing of the people and deputations which visited him in person, were a measure both of the respect and admiration inspired by the late monarch and of the hope that his son would maintain the high standard of service which he has inherited.\textsuperscript{218}


\textsuperscript{217} “Telegram 212, Jidda, 9 November 1953,” \textit{FRUS, 1952-1954, Vol. IX, Part 2: The Near and Middle East} (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1986), 2574; interestingly, when ibn Sa’ud died the Saudi Arabian flag was not allowed to fly at half-mast. Since the name of God is inscribed on the Saudi flag, it cannot be lowered to mark the passing of any individual, no matter what their position or importance may have been. For more on ibn Sa’ud’s death, see: Lacey, \textit{The Kingdom}, 297-298.

\textsuperscript{218} H. S. J. B. Philby, “New Reign in Saudi Arabia,” \textit{Foreign Affairs} 32 (April 1954): 446; according to Daniel Yergin, Philby was a major influence in the early rise of the Saudi state. He was a former British official in the Indian Civil Service, and was one of the first to suggest the possibility of oil within the Saudi kingdom. He shared a close personal relationship with ibn Sa’ud, going so far as converting to Islam (despite the painful process of adult circumcision), and taking on the Islamic name of Abdullah. Philby is perhaps best known for being the father of one of the most notorious spies of the Cold War, Harold “Kim” Philby, who provided information and intelligence to the Soviet Union while serving as the head of counterespionage for British intelligence. For more on the eccentric Philby and his exploits in Saudi Arabia, see: Daniel Yergin, \textit{The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power} (New York: Free Press, 1992).
Sa’ud’s policies, however, quickly wasted the initial good will that he received from the West upon the death of his father. The editors of *Time* magazine published a scathing assessment of the new king’s performance in December 1955. Their list of grievances included Sa’ud’s wasteful spending of millions of dollars in oil revenue and loans from American companies like ARAMCO with little to show in terms of improvements for Saudi civil structures. They charged him with building lavish palaces for himself and members of the royal family, while failing to provide desperately needed welfare to his people. Finally, Sa’ud instituted a tyrannical police state that engaged in brutal reprisals against his critics within the kingdom.\(^ {219} \)

Despite these problems, the Eisenhower administration continued to nurture an alliance with the new king. Eisenhower and Dulles were both more active participants in the Cold War mobilization of religion, and Islam specifically, than their predecessors in the Truman administration. Religion was a major influence on both statesmen, and their faith shaped many of their views on foreign and domestic policy.

Possibly more than any other Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles viewed America’s role in the Cold War through the lens of his spiritual beliefs. According to Melvyn Leffler, Dulles considered the war with the Soviet Union as essentially an ideological struggle. He was the son of a minister, and his religious background often influenced his decision-making.\(^ {220} \) He discussed the state of religion in the communist world during an address to the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church in Watertown, New York, in August 1949:

> Orthodox Communists believe that there is neither God nor moral law, that there is no such thing as universal and equal justice, and that human beings are without soul or sacred personality. They are free of the moral restraints and compulsions which prevail in


\(^{220}\) Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 98-99.
a religious society, and they think it quite right to use force and violence to make their way prevail.221

According to Dulles, Western democracies like the United States achieved greatness and global prestige “because their practices developed under the dominating influence of religious beliefs.”222 In order to maintain the respect of the rest of the world, therefore, it was necessary that the United States continue to stress moral, and not just political, leadership.

His early opinion of Islam, however, did not suggest that he considered the Muslim faith to be a potentially useful weapon against the spread of communism. On the contrary, he believed that the two ideologies exhibited a number of disturbing similarities. Prior to his appointment as Secretary of State, Dulles often compared the spread of communism to the historic spread of Islam, claiming that: “For one thousand years Western civilization grew in power and influence and was not seriously challenged. There was such a challenge by Islam one thousand years ago, and now we have the challenge of Soviet Communism.”223 In an address to the Brotherhood of Saint Andrew in Philadelphia on 8 September 1946, Dulles remarked that “Soviet leaders consider, as Islam considered, that the Governments of the outer world are selfish and unsound and out of touch with people.”224 Although Dulles did not suggest the possibility of a spiritual partnership between the Christian West and the Muslim world against communism early in his career, his assessments echoed many of the Orientalist mischaracterizations of Islam made by Western scholars like Gibb and Hitti.

Dulles continued to describe America’s Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union in overtly religious tones following his appointment as Eisenhower’s Secretary of State. In a speech

222 Ibid., 9.
223 Ibid.
224 Ibid., 112.
at the National War College in June of 1953, Dulles stated that the United States “was founded by the men who believed that there was a Divine Creator who endowed men with unalienable rights.”

As George Washington stated in his farewell address: “religion and morality are the great pillars of human happiness and that morality cannot prevail in exclusion of religious principles.” That fall, Dulles returned to the First Presbyterian Church in Watertown, New York, to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the church’s founding. His speech included a number of comparisons between the United States and the Soviet Union. He assured the congregation that the Eisenhower administration recognized “the priority of spiritual forces,” and would not allow communism to transform the free world “into a purely material fortress and to suppress the freedom of thought and expression of the inmates, so that our people would more and more assume the likeness of that which threatens and which we hate.”

Dulles maintained that since Soviet communism represented “a materialistic and atheistic creed,” it was naturally “repugnant to those who believe in the supremacy of the spirit.” He argued that the strong faith of the American people caused them to “attach exceptional importance to freedom… We are as a nation unsympathetic to systems and governments that deny human freedom and seek to mold all men to a preconceived pattern and to use them as tools to aggrandize the state.”

Given the strength of these religious convictions, Dulles believed it was “inevitable that they should influence our foreign policy.” For Dulles, the spirituality of the American people represented “an important bearing on our alliances. As leader of a great

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226 Ibid.
229 Ibid.: 42.
230 Ibid.
coalition, we can never hope to please all countries. But we can win respect if it is felt that we are acting in true character.”

Eisenhower was also a deeply spiritual individual. Leffler argues that the religious values of the former Allied commander were instilled during his early childhood. According to William Inboden, Eisenhower’s presidency marked the beginning of a new period in American faith. His inaugural speech was entitled: “Proclaiming Our Faith Anew,” and it emphasized the importance of spirituality in the tumultuous era of the Cold War:

At such a time in history, we who are free must proclaim anew our faith. This faith is the abiding creed of our fathers. It is our faith in the deathless dignity of man, governed by eternal moral and natural laws. This faith defines our full view of life. It establishes, beyond debate, those gifts of the Creator that are man’s inalienable rights and that make all men equal in His sight.

Eisenhower also broke precedent by offering the opening prayer at his own presidential inauguration, which he wrote himself earlier that morning. He became the first (and only) President to be baptized while in office on 1 February 1953, at the National Presbyterian Church in Washington D.C., by his longtime friend and spiritual advisor Reverend Edward Elson. He established the tradition of a National Prayer Breakfast, and oversaw the adoption of the phrase “In God We Trust” within the motto of the United States as well as on all paper currency. The

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231 Ibid.: 43.
232 This image of Eisenhower contradicts more conventional depictions that he was not a particularly devout individual. Traditionally, Eisenhower was portrayed as presiding over the era of American “civil religion” in the mid-twentieth century. According to these previous interpretations, his advocacy of religion centered on the need to separate the United States from the Soviet Union in the eyes of the world. The idea that Eisenhower himself was motivated by spiritual beliefs is a relatively new one.
233 Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 95-96.
234 Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 257.
236 Ibid.: 167.
237 Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 257; Dulles was also a member of the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, and Elson was his families pastor. For more on this relationship, see Ibid., 242.
phrase “one nation, under God,” was also added to the Pledge of Allegiance during the Eisenhower administration.²³⁸

Eisenhower was also an advocate of the religiously-motivated anti-communism of Reverend Billy Graham. Graham was a fierce opponent of atheistic communism, and became famous for his Cold War sermons challenging the spread of Soviet influence around the globe. He urged the American people to “pray earnestly for the Russian people,” because the power of prayer “can leap oceans” and “penetrate Iron Curtains.”²³⁹ Following a tour of India and Pakistan, Graham wrote the following in his diary: “How different, on the surface, people are; yet, in their hearts, how much alike… Perhaps the Communists can match us in material aid. But for this deeper need they have no answer: the hunger after God that I have found everywhere. There lies our greatest opportunity: to speed with moral and spiritual leadership this turn to God.”²⁴⁰ When asked why he gave Graham so much of his time and attention, Eisenhower responded that the reverend was “a man who clearly understands that any advance in the world has got to be accompanied by a clear realization that man is, after all, a spiritual being.”²⁴¹ Like Graham, Eisenhower believed that the Cold War was nothing more than “a battle between those people who believe that man is just an educated animal and those who believe he is something more.”²⁴² For Eisenhower, the Cold War was essentially nothing more than “some kind of religion, against atheism…”²⁴³

During the Cold War, Eisenhower looked for a spiritual advantage in a variety of instances of American involvement throughout the world. As Dulles delivered his report on the

²³⁸ Ibid., 257.
²³⁹ Billy Graham, “What Can We Do to Help Christianity in Russia?” Reader’s Digest 66 (January 1955): 44.
²⁴² Ibid.
²⁴³ Ibid.
breakdown of French control in Vietnam during a meeting of the National Security Council on 4 February 1954, Eisenhower interrupted “to inquire whether it would be possible to capitalize on the religious issue in an effort to provide inspiration to the French Union cause.” In his mind, since the majority of the people of Vietnam were Buddhists, it might be possible to “find a good Buddhist leader to whip up some real fervor.” He pointed to the rapid spread of Islam into North Africa and Southern Europe during the Middle Ages as an illustration of how effective a strong spiritual leader could be in mobilizing a large population of believers. The meeting quickly erupted into laughter, however, when “it was pointed out to the President that, unhappily, Buddha was a pacifist rather than a fighter.”

Most importantly, Eisenhower was convinced that religion could serve as a common link between the United States and the Islamic world. These feelings were not limited to his close circle of advisors or kept within the privacy of his administration. In conversations with Muslim leaders he often used religion as the basis for his firm opposition to communism. During a 1960 meeting with Saeb Salam, the newly elected Prime Minister of Lebanon, Eisenhower wondered aloud how anyone with any religious feeling could betray his or her faith to an atheistic creed. He argued that for a population with any religion at all, “death is better than slavery.” Eisenhower assured Salam that if the Lebanese people were forced to choose between communist oppression and religious freedom, the United States would take the necessary steps to intercede on their behalf. In fact, he promised Salam that if faced with such a scenario, America would “fight to the last man” to support their faith.

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245 Ibid.
246 Ibid.
248 Ibid.: 657.
While most Middle Eastern countries were violently opposed to the newly formed Jewish state of Israel, Eisenhower reminded them time and again that it was a communist threat, not a Zionist threat, with which they should be concerned. In a conversation with Prime Minister Rashid Karame of Lebanon, Eisenhower argued that Jews and Muslims all worshipped one God. He warned that “religious antagonisms” within the Middle East caused the Arab world to “overlook the main threat,” which was the “anti-religious, atheistic force of communism.” The Lebanese Ambassador informed Eisenhower that given a choice between opposing Zionism and opposing communism, Arab Muslims would always hate Israel first. Eisenhower disagreed, and continued to urge Karame that communism was the main enemy of Islam. Eisenhower’s incomprehension of the feelings of Muslim leaders towards Zionism highlighted his misinformed understanding of contemporary Middle Eastern politics.

Unlike his predecessor Truman, however, Eisenhower’s policies tended to be more supportive of the interests of the Arab world, rather than those of Israel. While Truman granted recognition to the new Israeli state despite the warnings of his own State Department, including Secretaries of State George Marshall and Dean Acheson, Eisenhower offered a different approach. A few months after taking office, Eisenhower held a meeting with some members of a pro-Israeli lobby, in which he was asked to be more supportive of Israel. The president emphatically pointed out the strategic importance of the region, and stated that he would not ignore the interests of the Arab world in favor of Israel. As the men left his office, Eisenhower wondered aloud why they seemed more concerned with the welfare of a foreign power over the interests of the United States.

250 Ibid.: 642.
251 Inboden, Religion and American Foreign Policy, 291.
This position echoed that of Eisenhower’s spiritual mentor, Reverend Elson. According to Inboden, “Eisenhower’s own faith, along with his relationship with his pastor… reinforced his own skepticism towards Israel and his relative affinity for Arab states.”\textsuperscript{252} In fact, Elson’s personal history with evangelicalism in the Middle East, along with his anger at Truman’s recognition of Israel, prompted him to help form the AFME in 1948.\textsuperscript{253} Both men believed that the Muslim world represented a significant ally in the battle against the godless Soviets. In a letter to Elson, Eisenhower declared that a “belief in God should create between them and us the common purpose of opposing atheistic communism.”\textsuperscript{254} He maintained that religious mobilization offered the clearest and most direct path to gaining Muslim support. Christians in America should join with the Muslim world to protect their common spiritual tenets against the oppressive threat of global Soviet domination.\textsuperscript{255} When describing his approach to Islamic leaders on the subject of the Cold War, Eisenhower claimed that he never failed, “in any communication with Arab leaders, oral or written, to stress the importance of the spiritual factor in our relationships.”\textsuperscript{256} Nowhere was this “spiritual factor” stressed more urgently than in Eisenhower’s relationship with the royal family of Saudi Arabia. In his conversations with Sa’ud, Eisenhower continuously referred to the atheism of Soviet communism and the threat posed to Islam by Soviet ideology.\textsuperscript{257}

In the summer of 1957, Eisenhower sent Elson to the Middle East as his personal envoy. Officially, Elson journeyed under the capacity of his position with the AFME. According to Inboden, “this opportunity for ‘back channel’ diplomacy [was not] lost on Eisenhower, who

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item ibid., 289.
\item Ibid., 291.
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waited eagerly for a report from his pastor-turned-ambassador.”\textsuperscript{258} When he visited Saudi Arabia, Elson presented a personal letter from Eisenhower to King Sa’ud. In response, the king was exceedingly generous in his praise for “Elson’s most prominent parishioner,” citing his “spiritual qualities” as well as “his statesmanship.”\textsuperscript{259}

The relationship between the newly crowned King Sa’ud and the U.S. government was put to the test two years prior to Elson’s visit in the summer of 1955. Sa’ud’s brother Faisal received an invitation to visit communist China, and asked Sa’ud’s royal counselors whether or not he should accept. The counselors said he should go, but Sa’ud disagreed, claiming he wished to have “no relations with Communists.”\textsuperscript{260} He instructed Faisal to politely decline the Chinese offer. Sa’ud’s personal secretary, Abdullah Bilkhair, informed ambassador George Wadsworth about the Chinese communication during a state dinner a few days later. Wadsworth quickly telegrammed back to the State Department the news of the invitation and informed Dulles of Sa’ud’s refusal. He included a written statement from Sa’ud along with his cable, in which the king based his rejection of the Chinese proposal on the basic tenets of Islam, rather than a desire to please the American government.\textsuperscript{261}

Dulles instructed Wadsworth that should a member of the Saudi government approach him with similar proposals from communist nations, he should, at his discretion, remind Sa’ud that any acceptance of such overtures “might cause confusion among Arabs faced with Communist propaganda in SA [Saudi Arabia] and elsewhere.”\textsuperscript{262} Wadsworth was also ordered to remind the king of the dangers of associating himself with a regime that openly persecuted other

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\textsuperscript{258} Inboden, \textit{Religion and American Foreign Policy}, 292.
\textsuperscript{259} Ibid., 293.
\textsuperscript{261} Ibid., 262.
\textsuperscript{262} Ibid., 263.
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Muslims. Wadsworth was directed to inform Sa’ud that: “Soviet Embassies in other countries have assisted local Communist activity…” and that he should consider the dangers of associating with “disrupting forces threatening unrest in [the] Arab world.” Dulles’s message emphasized how much Soviet involvement in Saudi Arabia threatened American interests, and urged Wadsworth to discourage any relationship between Sa’ud and Moscow.

Following China’s invitation, the Soviet Union approached the Saudi government, proposing that the two nations should exchange diplomatic missions. The Soviets also offered to supply arms to the Saudi military. The State Department worried about the potential shockwaves that would be felt throughout the Arab world if Saudi Arabia accepted these Soviet gestures, given the high regional influence enjoyed by the Saudi royal family. Policymakers in the Eisenhower administration also feared the repercussions of matching this offer with U.S. military aid, since a militarily powerful Saudi Arabia presented a major threat to the security of Israel. With few other options available, Dulles instructed Wadsworth to inform Sa’ud that Saudi Arabia was free to do what it wished as an independent and sovereign nation.

As the development of Soviet-Saudi relations became a more realistic threat to U.S. officials in September of 1955, Dulles gave Wadsworth another set of instructions. Since the Soviet Union was in the process of developing relations with Egypt, Dulles worried that Sa’ud might soon follow suit. On 30 September 1955 he instructed Wadsworth to contact the king and warn him that Nasser was “leading Egypt into [the] arms of godless Communism,” and that

263 Ibid.
264 Ibid.
Sa’ud, as keeper of the Muslim Holy Places, must not fall into the same trap.\textsuperscript{266} Dulles also directed Wadsworth to emphasize that although the Soviet government was in the process of revising certain parts of their “Soviet Encyclopedia,” they neglected to revise any articles containing critical assessments of Islam. Wadsworth reasoned that since the Soviets were inclined to soften certain aspects of Marxist doctrine but refused to change their stance on Islam, their influence in the Muslim world could not be tolerated. Sa’ud agreed with this line of thinking, and promised to rebuff any future Soviet overtures for the time being.\textsuperscript{267}

American and Soviet interests clashed again in Saudi Arabia in January of 1956, however, over which nation would receive the lucrative contract to reconstruct the Hijaz railway. The Hijaz connected the cities of Damascus and Medina, and was a vital means of transportation for Muslim pilgrims making the annual journey to Mecca. The religious significance of the railway convinced State Department officials that U.S. involvement in this project would be greatly beneficial to American prestige in the eyes of the Muslim world.\textsuperscript{268} Unfortunately for these officials, however, the lowest contract bid came from a firm in Poland, a country in the heart of the Soviet bloc. After learning this, Wadsworth reminded Sa’ud of his spiritual responsibility to not let any communist influence infiltrate the Saudi kingdom. He warned the king that the Polish bid was an attempt by the Soviet Union to gain political influence within the kingdom. Prince Faisal responded to these warnings by arguing that if the American government was so concerned about which firm received the Hijaz contract, they should have simply


\textsuperscript{268} Determination in Accordance with NSC Action 1550 Relating to a Commitment that the United States Government will Undertake to Insure the Availability of Financing to Meet the Cost of Reconstruction of the Hejaz Railway, 28 March 1958, DOSCDF 986a 712/3-2858, RG 59.
provided a lower bid. In response, Wadsworth pointed to the irony “that communists, recognized enemies of Islam, should be selected by Moslems even to survey reconstruction of their famous pilgrim railway leading to their sacred shrines.”269 Sa’ud overruled his brother’s objections on the basis of Wadsworth’s religious argument, and announced: “the Polish contract would not be approved.” He later reassured Wadsworth of his “desire to continue to cooperate with the United States.”270

Dulles was convinced that Nasser was to blame for these increases in official Soviet activity in Saudi Arabia. This position was a departure from earlier U.S.-Egyptian relations, which featured a more conciliatory tone with Nasser’s new government in the interest of regional stability. According to Peter Hahn, Nasser became a consistent thorn in the side of the Eisenhower administration after he “embarked on a new foreign policy in 1954-55 that committed him first to oppose any strong manifestation of Western influence in the Middle East and then to interact with the Soviet Union and other communist powers to advance his own interests.”271 This flirtation with Moscow caused Eisenhower and Dulles “to confront Nasser with a choice between cooperation with Western policy or ostracism from the Western community.”272 However, this strategy only widened the gap between the two nations, and a defiant Nasser openly began dealing in arms with the Soviet Union and China.273

According to a State Department memorandum sent to the American embassy in Cairo, Sa’ud himself reported that Nasser “appealed to him privately urging [the] recognition [of]

270 Ibid., 312.
272 Ibid., 181.
273 Ibid.
Communist China.” The memorandum also indicated that Nasser was the author of the suggested Soviet/Saudi arms package, and served as the intermediary between the Saudi royal family and the Kremlin. Although this claim was based mostly on speculation, U.S. policymakers maintained that individual representatives of the Egyptian government regarded the reduction of American influence in Saudi Arabia as a “desirable objective [for] Arab nationalism,” and State Department officials reasoned, therefore, that Nasser was motivated by similar aims.

In January of 1957 Sa’ud made a personal visit to the United States. Eisenhower greeted the Saudi king at the Washington International Airport, becoming the first president to meet a foreign dignitary in such a manner. He also prepared some remarks for the occasion: “Your Majesty, on behalf of the American people, I welcome you to this country. We recognize – in you – both a leader of the Arabian people and a custodian of those cities most sacred to Islam. It is an honor to have you here.” Sa’ud offered a statement as well, expressing his own claim of friendship, which he concluded with: “May God the Almighty bestow upon us the wisdom and sagacity and guide us all towards universal peace and goodwill.”

Earlier that month, Eisenhower addressed a special session of Congress on the growing threat of Soviet infiltration into the Middle East. He gave them a brief preview of his upcoming State of the Union Address, in which he provided an assessment of communist gains throughout the world up to that point. He warned that Russia had long held imperialist ambitions in the Middle East, from the early days of the Czars to the recent days of the Bolsheviks. He dismissed

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274 Memorandum to the American Embassy in Cairo from the Department of State, 23 June 1956, DOSCDF: 611.86A/6-2356, RG 59.
275 Ibid.
277 Ibid.
the notion that the United States was interested in the region as a potential base for aggression against the Soviet Union, claiming that “the Soviet Union has nothing whatsoever to fear from the United States in the Middle East, or anywhere else in the world, as long as its rulers do not themselves first resort to aggression.”

Eisenhower argued instead that the United States was interested in the region because of “factors that transcend the material.” As the birthplace of the world’s three great religions, places like Mecca and Jerusalem represented more than “places on the map. They symbolize religions which teach that the spirit has supremacy over matter and that the individual has a dignity and rights of which no despotic government can rightfully deprive him. It would be intolerable if the holy places of the Middle East should be subjected to a rule that glorifies atheistic materialism.”

Once the Eisenhower administration began to stress Sa’ud’s potential as an anti-communist leader for the Arab world, so too did members of the American press. In the May of 1957, *Time* published an account of an attempt by “Nasser and his hotbloods [sic]” to depose King Hussein of Jordan. According to the report, “King Sa’ud of Saudi Arabia, Protector of Islam’s Holy Places” was directly involved with efforts to assist the young Jordanian monarch. Apparently, Sa’ud could not abide “the sight of Communist influence that Nasser had brought into the Middle East.” After securing Hussein’s position from further assault, Sa’ud “gave him a big pep talk on the importance of keeping up the good fight against Communists and extremists.”

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279 Ibid.
280 Ibid.
282 Ibid.
283 Ibid.
In the summer of 1957, communist infiltration threatened to turn Syria into “a Soviet Communist satellite” in the Middle East.\(^{284}\) In order to counter this threat, Eisenhower turned to the regional leadership of King Sa’ud. Dulles instructed Wadsworth to transmit a message from Eisenhower to Sa’ud, beseeching the king to step in and deal with this problem himself. The message included the following statement from Eisenhower: “In view of the special position of Your Majesty as Keeper of the Holy Places of Islam, I trust that you will exert your great influence to the end that the atheistic creed of Communism will not become entrenched at a key position in the Moslem world.”\(^{285}\) As in the case of Jordan, Sa’ud’s intervention seemed to provide a useful solution to the problem.

Although the Eisenhower administration was especially concerned that Nasser was responsible for most of this regional unrest, this image was often countered during conversations with other Arab leaders. During Vice President Richard Nixon’s visit to Africa in 1957, he met with a number of regional leaders including Abdullah Khalil, the Prime Minister of the Sudan.\(^{286}\) When asked for his assessment of the situation in Egypt, Khalil replied that Nasser “would be careful not to be taken over by the Soviets.”\(^{287}\) He reported that in a recent conversation with the Egyptian President he asked whether or not he was a communist, to which Nasser “replied emphatically in the negative.”\(^{288}\) Although he did claim that he wished for good relations with the Soviet Union, he did not want to become the pawn of any other power. To this, Khalil added “that Nasser is a Moslem and has aspirations of leadership among the Moslem states. Most of the

\(^{285}\) Ibid., 646.
\(^{287}\) Ibid.
\(^{288}\) Ibid.
Moslems are aware of the menace of communism and for Nasser to embrace this heresy would be to throw away any pretensions he has to such leadership.”^289

Despite these claims, administration officials continued to vilify Nasser until near the end of Eisenhower’s second term. Ongoing assessments of Saudi Arabia, however, concluded that outside of the obvious oil revenues, the “principal political asset of [the] country seems to be [the] prestige of [the] King, and [his] custodianship [of the] Moslem holy places.”^290 This appraisal of the lofty position and political influence that Saudi Arabia had in the Middle East, plus the friendly relationship that the United States government enjoyed with the Saudi royal family, led U.S. policy makers to the conclusion that the simplest and best way to unite the Arab world against communism was under one spiritual leader: King Sa’ud. According to Citino, the State Department hoped to establish Sa’ud as “a Muslim Billy Graham,” a spiritual leader that could unite the faithful against the atheistic communists and their oppression of the teachings of Mohammed.^291 In fact, the White House even began to openly refer to Sa’ud as “an Islamic pope.”^292 Although this transformation failed to take shape, policymakers still believed that they could manipulate the Saudi king through his Muslim faith. If his response to communist threats in Jordan, Syria, and the Hijaz Railway project are any indication, this manipulation seemed fruitful indeed.

Despite their failure to establish Sa’ud as a regional political leader, U.S. officials believed that this was only one aspect of the American mobilization of Islam in the Middle East. The success of the policy required another, more widespread effort among the general populace

^289 Ibid.
^291 Citino, From Arab Nationalism to OPEC, 98-135.
^292 Bronson, Thicker Than Oil, 27.
of the Arab world. Saudi Arabia served as a staging ground for much of this effort. The propaganda machine of the USIA provided radio broadcasts, films, pamphlets and posters to posts throughout the Saudi kingdom, all of which contrasted the spiritual oppression of communism with the spiritual tolerance of the United States. While this effort began during the Truman administration, it reached its apex during Eisenhower’s eight years in the White House.
CHAPTER III – PREACHING TO THE MASSES: THE STATE DEPARTMENT, THE UNITED STATES INFORMATION AGENCY, AND THE PEOPLE OF SAUDI ARABIA

Less than four months after Eisenhower’s presidential inauguration in January 1953, the State Department issued a new directive to the various field offices of the International Information Agency (IIA), including posts throughout the Middle East and North Africa. W. Bradley Collins, an official with the fledgling United States Information Agency (USIA), instructed IIA field operatives “to take steps to develop output and programming designed to reflect forcefully the strong moral, spiritual, and religious convictions which motivate American life and actions.”

According to this memorandum, the new direction in information programming was focused on two basic objectives: “demonstrating constantly and in all suitable ways our respect for moral values and our capacity for moral action,” and “expos[ing] materialistic atheistic communism for its denial of freedom and justice which are based upon moral, spiritual and religious concepts.”

The memo cautioned that, “given the intimate notion of the subject matter,” it was “especially necessary always to take fully into account the controlling factors of the particular target area.” Put another way, it was one thing to discuss these issues from the perspective of the “Western” world, and quite another to discuss them in the context of the “non-Western” world. USIA officials, therefore, suggested some universal themes for religious programming, including: “love, brotherhood, truth, reverence, honesty, [and] freedom of spirit.” These themes promoted “the equality of all men under God” in regions like the Middle East, stressing the point that basic religious values were “not peculiar to any particular religion or creed,” but

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293 Department of State Memorandum, “Moral and Religious Content in the IIA Program, 1 May 1953,” Records of the United States Information Agency, Special Papers of the Coordinator for Psychological Intelligence, 1952-1954, SP 13, Entry 1044, Box 1, Record Group 306, 1; hereafter referred to as USIA, RG 306.
294 Ibid., 2.
295 Ibid., 3; underlining appears in the original document.
296 Ibid.
instead were “a common element uniting people.”

IIA officers in the Middle East were warned to “avoid any action which might be interpreted as proselytizing,” as well as anything that might be taken as “preachment, condescension, or patronizing.”

An additional memorandum was released a week later, expressing concerns about the use of these new tactics in non-Christian regions like the Muslim-dominated Arab world. Despite the cautious tone of the previous paper, there was a fear that the IIA ran the risk of producing religious programming that would present the “religious, spiritual and moral values” of the United States “as the standard for the rest of the world.”

It was necessary, therefore, to emphasize a common spiritual partnership between Christians in the West and Muslims in the Middle East.

While State Department officials in the Eisenhower administration certainly considered Islam to be a useful tool for influencing the actions of the Saudi royal family, they believed it would be an even more effective instrument for mobilizing the Saudi people. Since Saudi Arabia was a monarchy and not a democracy, oppression and class struggle left the majority of the population open to the blandishments of communism. The Saudi government actively discouraged the United States from presenting information programming that espoused political freedom or democratic values during the Cold War, since the royal family did not wish to inspire a revolution among its own people. Therefore, USIA policymakers determined that the most effective way to counter the allure of communism among the Saudi populace (without directly challenging the autocratic rule of the House of Sa’ud) was to make a direct appeal to their faith.

This chapter examines the joint efforts by policymakers in both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations to mobilize what they saw to be the religious fervor of the Saudi

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297 Ibid., 6.
298 Ibid., 7.
299 Department of State Memorandum, “Comments on Moral and Religious Content of the IIA Program, 7 May 1953,” USIA, 1952-1954, SP 13, Entry 1044, Box 1, RG 306; underlining comes directly from the text.
people against the infiltration of communist influences. The IIA (and later the USIA) developed information programming with overtly religious themes. Radio broadcasts featuring sermons from Mullahs in Saudi Arabia and throughout the Middle East were sent to “Voice of America” (VOA) posts in cities across the country, along with spiritually themed messages by American officials, which were commonly translated into Arabic. The United States Information Service (USIS) and the United States Information Exchange (USIE) developed books, pamphlets, and posters, featuring stories and images that contrasted the spiritual oppression of communism with the religious conviction of the American people. This campaign also included the production of a number of propaganda films that portrayed American interest in the Muslim world, including U.S. military assistance for annual Muslim pilgrimages to Mecca, King Sa’ud’s visit to the United States, and the construction of the Islamic Center in Washington, D.C. These films were screened in new theaters in cities like Jidda and Riyadh, as well as the villages surrounding the Dhahran oil fields.

Most of the early efforts of the American propaganda apparatus came about in response to the perceived threat of communist propaganda activities throughout the post-colonial world. News of this Soviet activity came from a variety of sources. The New York Times published an article in May 1947 referring to a statement by King Abdullah of Jordan, in which he warned his Arab neighbors “of the ‘destructive ideals’ and ‘extremist subversive propaganda’ being imported into the Moslem east” from the communist world. Reports from State Department officials warned that the Soviet Union was actively targeting the general population with propaganda that emphasized the “democracy” of communism and denounced the “imperialism” of the United States and its Western allies. Cold War policymakers feared that any Soviet

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advance into the region could deny the United States “economic resources and strategic positions now available… in the Middle East.”

Secretary of State Dulles was particularly concerned about Soviet propaganda efforts in the region. In April 1954 he published an article in *Foreign Affairs* that put these fears into perspective:

The threat is not merely military. The Soviet rulers dispose throughout the world of the apparatus of international Communism. It operates with trained agitators and a powerful propaganda organization. It exploits every area of discontent, whether it be political discontent against ‘colonialism’ or social discontent against economic conditions… the Soviet rulers seek gradually to divide and weaken the free nations and to make their policies appear as bankrupt by overextending them in efforts which, as Lenin put it, are ‘beyond their strength.’ Then, said Lenin, ‘our victory is assured.’ Then, said Stalin, will be the ‘moment for the decisive blow.”

For Dulles, it was not enough to simply “substitute the glitter of steel for the torch of freedom.” He believed that a more subtle effort was necessary to build a successful partnership between the United States and the emerging post-colonial world.

Regional experts like Col. William Eddy also warned of growing communist propaganda efforts in the Middle East. He published an article in *Life* magazine in June of 1952, claiming that although communism held no sway over “responsible Arabs” thus far, the Soviet desire for more influence in the region was “nourished daily by the Russian-controlled broadcasts to the Near East to which Arabs are listening in growing and disturbing numbers.” In order to counter this threat, Eddy maintained that any future “public-relations task” of the United States must take place “at the grass-roots level.”

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303 Ibid.
305 Ibid.
Despite warnings of communist activity in the Middle East, the embassy in Saudi Arabia announced in June 1951 that no evidence of “Commie propaganda” existed anywhere in the Arabian Peninsula. According to John Lewis Gaddis, the absence of Soviet propaganda in places like Saudi Arabia prior to the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 is further evidence of the lack of a coordinated effort by the Soviet Union to spread its influence into the region during this period. Any claims to the contrary by American officials were more than likely a result of their own exaggerated fears of Soviet aggression. Following the death of Stalin, however, the Soviets increased their efforts to gain influence in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia. Neighboring countries like Iraq and Kuwait (and especially Syria and Iran) became hotbeds for communist activity. Embassy officials in these neighboring countries warned the State Department that it would be naïve to assume that communist influence was not crossing the border into Saudi Arabia. American policymakers quickly took notice when evidence of Soviet propaganda emerged in Saudi Arabia in August of 1954. A leaflet was discovered near an ARAMCO facility that featured a hammer and sickle design and contained a “brief but bitter attack on the royal family, ‘foreign imperialists’ and ‘American pigs,’” and appeared to have been distributed to Saudi oil workers and other local ARAMCO employees.

The State Department issued a formal report on “Soviet Pressures in the Middle East” in December 1955, which was the result of a joint effort between the School for Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University and the Foreign Service Educational Department of State, “Cab[le From Raymond Hare to the Department of State, United States Embassy, Saudi Arabia, 5 June 1951,” in Joyce Battle, “U.S. Propaganda in the Middle East, Document 25.” DNSA [online] (Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, accessed 4 November 2007).


Foundation. The report claimed that the increased receptivity to Soviet propaganda in the Middle East was attributed to three major factors: “growth of the middle classes which are discontented with antiquated social structure; contact with the prosperous West which has fostered further discontent; [and] the Palestine issue which has fostered anti-Western feeling and hence paved [the] way for Soviet penetration.”309 These and other factors led to a serious disparity in the way that Middle Eastern populations reacted to the United States versus the Soviet Union. For example, while Soviet offers of aid were genuinely welcomed, American offers were typically met with resentment. The report blamed the success of Soviet propaganda campaigns on the painful history of Western imperialism: “In short, current Middle East attitudes have been conditioned by the domination of Arab Islamic society by European Christianity. It is not ‘imperialism’ (in the abstract) to which the Middle East reacts, but rather European imperialism which they experienced.”310

In order to counter this perceived Soviet advantage in the Middle East, the National Security Council introduced a working committee on Islam that was charged with compiling a list of various religious groups in the Middle East and North Africa. Once these groups were identified, the USIA was instructed to target them with specific propaganda campaigns designed to appeal directly to their Muslim faith.311 However, the committee warned that while Muslims shared “comparable values” with the United States, their faith was weakened by “the impact of the West and technology,” and “unless a reconciliation is achieved between Islamic principles and current social and political trends, the spiritual values of Islam will be lost and the swing

310 Ibid.; underlining in text.
311 Citino, From Arab Nationalism to OPEC, 126.
toward materialism will be hastened.” Policymakers believed that an effective way to reverse this trend was to mobilize the Muslim world against the common enemy of atheistic communism, and that the best means for achieving such a result was through a widespread and diverse propaganda initiative.

The Cold War necessity for an overseas propaganda program led officials in the State Department to establish the IIA in January of 1952. Prior to this, agencies like the Department of Defense and the CIA provided the majority of funding for “communication research projects” by the academic community in the United States. According to Christopher Simpson, the federal government spent over $1 billion annually on psychological warfare activities during the early 1950s. The Truman administration allocated between $7 million and $13 million annually for “university and think-tank studies of communication-related social psychology, communication effect studies, anthropological studies of foreign communication systems, overseas audience and foreign public opinion surveys, and similar projects that contributed directly and indirectly to the emergence of mass communication research as a distinct discipline.” Major non-profit groups like the Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation provided additional funds for these communication research projects, operating in close coordination with government propaganda and intelligence organizations.

According to Simpson, Congress officially established the foundation for groups like the IIA in 1947 with the passage of the Smith-Mundt Act, which authorized “a permanent U.S. Office of International Information (OII).” The OII eventually became the IIA, which was the
predecessor to both the USIA and its international branch, the USIS. The VOA was a major aspect of this expansion, and the budget for radio programming experienced dramatic increases during the late 1940s, mostly in response to communist activities in places like Czechoslovakia, Berlin, and China.317

George V. Allen, the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, discussed the importance of information programming to the American Cold War effort during a speech at Mount Holyoke College Institute in the summer of 1948. He maintained that the most effective propaganda methods currently in use by the State Department included “[the] disseminating [of] information… through public speeches, newspapers, magazines, books, films, and the radio.”318 According to Allen, this type of information programming was “nothing more, nor less, than an instrument – one of the instruments – in achieving the foreign policy of the United States.”319 Allen brought his impressions of the importance of propaganda techniques to the Eisenhower administration less than seven years later when he was named Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs in Dulles’s State Department in 1954.320

Radio broadcasts were a key component of American propaganda efforts during the Cold War, and religion was a common theme in programming from the earliest days of the conflict. In July 1951, the State Department and the IIA issued a joint press release announcing that the VOA was expanding its “campaign of truth” in order to reach minority regions inside the Soviet Union, including broadcasts in Tatar, Turkestani, Azerbaijani, and Armenian.321 One of the target groups of this expanded focus was Soviet Muslims, which represented one of the first

317 Ibid.
319 Ibid.
major efforts by the State Department to appeal to a religious group within the Soviet Union on so large a scale. The initial broadcasts included a recorded message from Secretary of State Acheson:

I am very happy to have this opportunity to say a few words to the Moslem peoples of the Soviet Union. For some while now, the Voice of America has been bringing its message of truth and liberty to the peoples of the free world including Islamic peoples of Asia and Africa… The people of the United States have a friendly regard for the Moslem peoples of the U.S.S.R… these, like the other God fearing peoples of the Soviet Union, are regarded by us Americans as staunch pillars against atheistic, materialistic tyranny. The Voice of America will henceforth bring you in your own languages the truth which the Communists fear and try to keep from you… the goal of the American people and their Government is a peaceful world where all men can live and work freely and happily, without want or fear and with the right to worship God in their own way. This is our vision of the future; we invite you to share it.\footnote{Ibid.: 102-103.}

Although this programming was intended for the Soviet Union, the VOA introduced similar efforts to use religion throughout every theater of the Cold War, including the Middle East.

That next fall, Roger Lyons, the Director of Religious Programming for the International Broadcasting Service of the IIA, announced that the VOA was increasing its focus on religious themed programming in an effort to counter the rising communist threat throughout the non-industrial world. The goals of this new initiative were: “to encourage the free people of the world in their search for the divine,” as well as “to tell the real story of the place religion holds in the United States and the rest of the free world and in the Soviet Union.”\footnote{Roger Lyons, “Religion and the Voice of America,” \textit{The Department of State Bulletin} 27 (10 November 1952): 727.} Aside from broadcasting news of religious events within the United States (such as Christmas, Easter, Hanukah, etc.), these programs also featured indigenous religious practices throughout the non-Western world. In order for this kind of broadcasting effort to succeed, however, VOA officials recognized that “a specialized knowledge of the religious climate of each listening area, as well as of its culture
as a whole, is required.”324 Therefore, the State Department announced that every language unit of the VOA would include “personnel specializing in the treatment of religious subjects.”325 In Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern nations, programs broadcasted in Arabic focused on strengthening ties between the Muslim world and the West, based “on the principle that the Koran enjoins upon Moslems belief in Christ as a great prophet and tolerance of Christianity and Christians.” Lyons also reported that “the Voice [would broadcast] readings from the Koran…” on every Friday and during important Muslim holidays.326

Acheson placed an order for thirty packages of these radio programs to be played over Radio Jidda, a local USIE installation of the VOA in Saudi Arabia. While descriptions of the programs were not included in his memorandum, these broadcasts were most likely similar to many of the programs that were playing in Iran during the same period. They featured various recordings of Mullahs in local mosques sermonizing against the evils of atheistic communism. Muslim clerics claimed that the adoption of communist principles was tantamount to an abandonment of the tenets of Islam. These messages were played in full during twice-daily broadcasts in urban areas throughout Saudi Arabia. Similar radio programming packages were sent to VOA stations throughout the Middle East, as well as posts in Pakistan, Indonesia and parts of North Africa.327

When Eisenhower took office in January 1953, he and Dulles set out to expand the American propaganda machine from its relatively modest roots in the Truman administration. Both men shared the belief that the United States was in an ideological conflict with the Soviet

324 Ibid.
325 Ibid.
326 Ibid.
Union for the hearts and minds of the post-colonial world. They were also determined to cut the cost of communist containment wherever possible, and both were critical of the Truman administration’s expensive policies during the Korean War. Dulles himself complained to the readers of *Foreign Relations* that “these and like measures were costly,” and although they “were necessary to our security… they partook much of an emergency character.”

Both Eisenhower and Dulles considered psychological warfare to be the most cost-efficient approach to American Cold War policy. If post-colonial societies could be convinced that communism was incompatible with their way of life, then containment would not require an expensive military commitment. The mobilization of religion, and Islam in particular, was an example of this mentality.

According to the USIA’s mission statement, the organization was focused on “submit[ing] evidence to peoples of other nations by means of communication techniques that the objectives and policies of the U.S. are in harmony with and will advance their legitimate aspirations for freedom, progress, and peace.”

The organization achieved these goals in a number of ways, including: “Showing the correlation between U.S. policies and the legitimate aspirations of other peoples;” and “portraying aspects of U.S. life and culture which facilitate understanding [of] U.S. policies and objectives.”

In the spring of 1954, the State Department

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328 Dulles, “Policy for Security and Peace”: 354.
329 Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 95-111; this mindset also led to the eventual formation of the USIA, an official information organization independent of other foreign policymaking agencies, on 1 August 1953. According to Robert Elder, Dulles was “anxious to rid the Department of State of operational duties” like the dissemination of propaganda, and he became a major supporter of the fledgling USIA in the early stages of its development. The organization was the result of Reorganization Plan No. 8, which was presented to Congress on 1 June 1953. Although it was a separate apparatus within the foreign policy establishment, the USIA continued to receive guidance from officials in the State Department. For more on the early development of the USIA, see: Robert E. Elder, *The Information Machine: The United States Information Agency and American Foreign Policy* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1968), 39.
331 Ibid.
announced that the USIA’s fiscal budget for the following year would be set up on a regional basis, “permitting concentration of effort in areas where the need is greatest.”

After Eisenhower’s election, the new president placed Robert L. Johnson, former Vice-President of advertising for Time magazine, in charge of operations for the VOA. In April 1953, Johnson announced his intention to continue the “Voice’s” emphasis on religion: “We must stress the importance of religion to our national life… religion is foreign to the Communist… people want to believe in God, and we hope to reach them by showing that we, as a nation, are a religious people.” Johnson, who had also served as President of Temple University, felt that it was unproductive to focus on the material wealth of the United States. “We are not going to tell the peoples [of the world] all about the wonders of automatic dishwashers and streamlined cars.”

The Reverend Billy Graham also espoused the use of religious messages in the VOA’s radio programming. In January 1955, Graham gave Newsweek a list of suggestions for how the United States could best mobilize the Christian faith within the Soviet Union and throughout the rest of the free world. He proposed that the State Department “should begin a series of religious programs over the Voice of America which would drive home in simple, understandable language the truth of the Gospel message.” Given Graham’s apparent sway with Eisenhower, it is unlikely that this suggestion went unnoticed by administration officials. In fact, shortly after this article appeared, Dulles ordered twenty separate VOA programs to be sent to USIS stations

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332 Ibid.
334 Ibid.
335 Billy Graham, “What Can We Do to Help Christianity in Russia?” Reader’s Digest 69 (January 1955): 44; this article was a condensed version of one that appeared in Newsweek.
in Bahrain, Beirut, Cairo, and Jidda. Each of these programs was recorded in Arabic, and they all featured religious themes.  

According to Kenneth Osgood, the VOA broadcasted in Arabic for more than nine hours a day in places like Saudi Arabia, including a sixteen-program series entitled “Islam and Communism,” which relayed stories of the communist repression of Islam. The VOA’s regular programming in the region featured a five minute reading from the Qur’an before each of its morning and evening broadcasts. Not only that, but longer readings from the Qur’an occurred every Friday, and special religious programs were aired on Muslim holidays.  

American officials often pressed Mullahs into service in Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Middle East. They were recruited to spread pro-religious, anti-communist rhetoric to a mass illiterate audience throughout the region.  

Aside from this radio programming, however, the USIE also made use of visual displays, which were aimed at the highly exploitable majority population that were unhappy with their social status and easily targeted by Soviet influence. The most common theme of these pamphlets and posters was the choice between religious freedom in the United States and religious oppression in the Soviet Union.  

Posters were another effective means of this visual persuasion. One example compared the state of religion in the United States with that of religion in a “communist state.” The purpose of the poster was to show the “complete freedom of religious expression in the United States,”

337 Osgood, Total Cold War, 314.
while describing the suppression of religion by communism.\textsuperscript{340} Images of tortured religious leaders in Soviet-controlled states as well as depictions of communist agents harassing anyone wearing religious garb were common. One poster characterized the Soviet Union as a “big bully,” beating a peaceful-looking man who was labeled simply: “religion.” The other half of the poster offered contrasting photographic images of “the construction of the new Washington mosque on Massachusetts Ave.”\textsuperscript{341}

Some policymakers believed that advertising the number of mosques in Washington, D.C. would be a useful public relations tactic, and could help gain the trust of the Saudi people. A group of State Department officials suggested that local schools in the D.C. area should start an art competition to see which children could paint the best picture of one of the local mosques. These pictures would then be gathered up, distributed throughout Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Middle East, and put on display for the general public to see. Most of these policymakers agreed that there were “almost unlimited public relations you could build around the construction of the Mosque.”\textsuperscript{342}

From the early years of the Cold War, the American embassy in Saudi Arabia reported that members of the Saudi royal family were not open to the dissemination of American propaganda in their country. In November 1951 the embassy claimed that the posters, pamphlets, and radio campaigns employed by the IIA would only anger the Saudi government and would


\textsuperscript{341} Ibid.

not prove very effective in the long run.\textsuperscript{343} The embassy discouraged movie reels as well because of the detrimental effects they seemed to have on the local population. Officials pointed to a specific case involving a Saudi man who murdered an ARAMCO officer with a shotgun when he failed to answer a dressing room door. Having seen a movie villain shoot a lock off a door with a shotgun, the Saudi man tried to emulate it and ended up killing the American. The cable concluded with this statement: “we all know the influence of American movies on foreigners is not always one to which we can point with pride.”\textsuperscript{344} Spiritually themed programming was another matter entirely, however. It offered a useful counterbalance to communist influence without placing the Saudi royal family in a bad light.

With this in mind, IIA officials produced a series of pamphlets entitled “Communism and Religion” in 1952, which focused on the communist suppression of religious groups around the world. The cover of these pamphlets contained images of various religious leaders (including priests, rabbis, and mullahs) facing off against a poisonous snake labeled “communism.” The version that was sent to the embassy in Saudi Arabia (Figure 3.1) featured a Muslim cleric confronting the snake with the “sword of democracy” in his hand. Behind him stood various places of worship, including a mosque adorned with a crescent moon on the roof. The first page of the pamphlet gave a general warning to every Saudi Muslim:

COMMUNISM DENIES THE EXISTENCE OF GOD. THE COMMUNISTS TEACH THAT THE IMMORTALITY OF GOD IS NONSENSE USED TO DRUG THE EMOTIONS OF THE MASSES. RELIGION IN ALL FORMS IS FORBIDDEN TO PARTY MEMBERS. IN EVERY LAND THE COMMUNISTS HAVE OCCUPIED


THEY HAVE TRIED TO DESTROY RELIGION… COMMUNISM IS THE ENEMY OF RELIGION.345

The inside pages of the pamphlet also contained a number of images depicting some of the various injustices visited on religion by communist forces. These images included: busts of communist leaders put in place of spiritual images; classrooms full of local children being indoctrinated by communist orthodoxy; the closing of churches, synagogues, and mosques; and the forced expulsion of religious leaders from the community (Figures 3.2-3.4).346

Officials in the USIE also developed a series of brochures in 1952 under the general title: “The Voices of God.” These brochures included pictures of mosques and other places of worship on their covers and contained quotations from the Qur’an, the Bible, and spiritual figures like the prophet Isaiah, Jesus Christ, Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi, and even Abraham Lincoln. One of these brochures, entitled “Peace Under God,” featured the following phrase on its back cover:

The peace free men believe in is a living peace. It rests upon the dignity and freedom of all men. But this freedom and this peace are challenged today by the tyranny of Soviet imperialism. Like all oppressors, these tyrants seek to kill the divine and good in men to impose the equality of death and the peace of the graveyard.347

Many versions of these brochures were distributed in Tehran, Iran, and throughout the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia.348

Another pamphlet campaign developed by the USIA in 1956 described the overall “Communist Attack on Religion.” It listed a series of quotations from prominent communist figures attacking religion throughout history:

In 1843, Marx said: “Religion is the opiate of the people; our duty is to deliver the people from this opiate.”

346 Ibid.
Figure 3.2

COMMUNISTS SET UP THEIR LEADERS IN PLACE OF GOD.

Figure 3.3

COMMUNISTS TEACH CHILDREN THAT BELIEF IN GOD IS NONSENSE.

Figure 3.4

CHURCH LEADERS WHO REFUSE TO BECOME TOOLS OF THE STATE ARE PERSECUTED, IMPRISONED AND EVEN KILLED.
In 1909, Lenin said: “Marxism is materialism; as such it is a deadly enemy of religion.” In 1927, Stalin said: “Science and religion are two incompatible concepts. The communist state works for the glory of science and thus is incompatible with religion.” And in 1955, Khrushchev has said: “We remain atheists. We will do all we can to liberate a certain portion of the people from the charm of the religious opium that still exists.”

The pamphlet also included a report on the state of Muslims living within the Soviet bloc. It claimed that the number of mosques in the Soviet Union dwindled from over 10,000 in 1917 to only 350 in 1956. The number of Muslim clerics living in Russia dropped from 28,000 to fewer than 400 over the same period of time. The pamphlet also declared that out of the 30 million Muslims living in the Soviet Union, only forty individuals were given the chance to make the annual pilgrimage to Mecca in 1945. This number dropped to eighteen in 1953, and only twenty-one were allowed to make the trip in 1954.

The pamphlet also described the treatment of Muslims in communist China. It alleged that, “the same repressive measures were taken against the Chinese Moslems as elsewhere. Moslem laws and customs were suppressed. The holy pilgrimage to Mecca was forbidden, and all Moslem lands and buildings were confiscated.” Despite these negative reports, however, the pamphlet concluded with an encouraging tone: “In country after country where the pattern of communism’s suppression of religion has repeated itself, the courage of the people stands out as they cling stubbornly to spiritual freedom.”

Many of these early examples featured broad spiritual themes in order to accomplish two main objectives: emphasize a sense of community among all world religions, and identify communism as the common enemy of all religious peoples. While these brochures and

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351 Ibid., 40.
352 Ibid., 44.
pamphlets featured testimonials from specific religious groups, they incorporated them into one shared experience of communist atrocities. As this campaign progressed, however, the USIA began to produce material that focused more exclusively on individual religious communities, especially Islam.

One such example, entitled “Red Star Over Islam,” was published in late 1954 and distributed to USIS posts throughout the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia. Its cover displayed the image of a communist soldier sitting atop a mosque, crouched over the entrance with a gun in his hand (Figure 3.5). Inscribed below the image was the phrase: “The God-fearing can never be conquered by the Godless!” The inside cover of the pamphlet offered a direct appeal to the “followers of Islam”:

At the close of the day, as you bow your heads in prayer and contemplation, turn your thoughts toward your long-suffering brethren within the orbit of the Soviet Union. For over 30 years the children of Islam have been subjected to one of the most brutal persecutions any people have ever faced. They have been killed, tortured, enslaved. And why? Their only crime has been to refuse to abandon their faith and embrace the Communist creed of the godless. This is their story—the story of the Bolshevik struggle to destroy Islam and substitute the worship of Lenin and Stalin for the worship of Allah. Pray to Allah that your brethren in the Soviet Union and its satellites may someday be delivered from their bondage.353

According to the pamphlet, the communists feared the Islamic faith because it went “beyond political boundaries, uniting peoples behind the universal goals of peace and brotherhood.”354 It claimed that the communist effort to destroy the Muslim faith began as soon as the Bolsheviks took power following the Russian Revolution of 1917. At that time, the new government embarked on a brutal campaign of suppression against Muslims in Turkestan, and “through the

354 Ibid., 3.
Figure 3.5

RED STAR OVER ISLAM

"THE GOD-FEARING CAN NEVER BE CONQUERED BY THE GODLESS!"
ruthless confiscation of food supplies,” the Soviets “brought death by starvation to 800,000 Moslems.”

The pamphlet claimed that since the end of World War II, very few Muslims were allowed to leave the Soviet Union to make the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. This left a large majority “cut off from their brothers in the rest of the world.” The next few pages featured a number of eyewitness accounts by Muslims who had faced persecution at the hands of the Soviet government. One story described how Muslims in a Bulgarian village were rounded up by Soviet officers and told: “Your God Allah is a false God and his prophet Mohammad is a tool of reaction! In the future… we will expect you to give up the decadent ways of your ancestors and become obedient citizens of the Communist world.” Another story told of communists boarding up mosques and even resorting to violence when faced with Muslims that refused to abandon their faith:

One evening I went to my Mosque as I always do at sundown to pray to Allah. A Soviet soldier stood at the entrance. When I tried to enter, he blocked my way. ‘Go away, you son of a sheepherder,’ he sneered, ‘Allah’s house is now an anti-God museum!’ …When it became dangerous to practice our faith openly, we practiced it secretly. We prayed in the privacy of our homes. We paid lip service to the new anti-God ways but clung secretly to the teachings of Allah. Many of my friends would not stoop to such hypocrisy. They continued to carry their prayer rugs out into the fading light of each sundown and prayed to Allah for everyone to see. One by one they vanished – as if into thin air. We found out later that they died in a communist labor camp. They had been starved to death. We found this out from the lone survivor, a fellow villager who had escaped the camp and made his way south. He showed the scars on his flesh where he had been tortured with hot irons.

The back cover of the pamphlet urged all Muslims to unite with the rest of the God-fearing world in opposition to atheistic communism:

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355 Ibid.
356 Ibid., 1.
357 Ibid., 5; italics appear directly in the text.
358 Ibid., 6-7.
The Communists say they are your friends. They try to make you believe that Communism and Islam stand for the same things. DO NOT BE DECEIVED! DO NOT BE MISLED BY THESE LIES! JOIN WITH ALL OTHER FREE AND GOD-FEARING PEOPLES OF THE WORLD IN THE STRUGGLE TO STOP COMMUNISM. The God-fearing can never be conquered by the Godless. The forces of darkness and evil can never overcome the forces of light and good. As it is written in the Koran: “VERILY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE THE TRUE BELIEVERS OF EITHER SEX, AND AFTERWARDS REPENT NOT, IS PREPARED THE TORMENT OF HELL!”

Pamphlets like “Red Star Over Islam” exemplified how USIA officials shifted their focus away from broad religious themes and towards a more concentrated appeal to the Muslim faith.

The USIA also used movie reels in an effort to mobilize Islam in Saudi Arabia. During the summer of 1953, USIS officials produced a film called “Pilgrimage to Mecca,” which featured a group of pilgrims in Lebanon in desperate need of assistance in making their annual voyage to Mecca. According to the opening narration, the focus of the film was “the story of the pilgrimage of the faithful to Mecca, the Hajj of the year 1952. In many ways it was the same as the Hajjs of the years and the centuries that have gone before. But in one way and for many pilgrims it was unlike all others, for this is what happened.”

The film opened with the sounds of the Muezzin calling faithful Muslims to their daily prayer, played over various scenes from Islamic cities throughout the world. As the narrator began describing the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the scene shifted to Muslims boarding ships in places like Morocco, Pakistan, and Algiers, with “time on deck for good talk among men of different lands who have one faith.” The next scene focused on a group in Beirut, Lebanon, boarding airplanes bound for Jidda. Unfortunately, there was not enough room on the planes for everyone, and about four thousand pilgrims were stranded without any way to participate in the

359 Ibid.
361 Ibid., 2.
Hajj. As the scene progressed, however, the American government offered a solution to the problem. The film described how Harold Minor, U.S. ambassador to Lebanon, requested a group of military transport planes from the State Department to help the stranded pilgrims complete their journey. Minor and his young son joined the pilgrims at the airport to greet thirteen American planes, which offered more than enough space for the waiting Muslims.362

However, as word spread about the arrival of the transport planes, more and more pilgrims arrived at the airfield by bus. They began lining up for seats on the planes, and soon there was no longer enough space for all the new arrivals. The order went out for each loaded plane to take its passengers to Jidda, refuel, and return to Beirut to pick up another group of pilgrims. According to the film, the thirteen planes made seventy-five trips each, with three of the flights stopping at Baghdad, Iraq, and Mafraq, Jordan, in order to pick up additional pilgrims.363 In partnership with the U.S. government, King Ibn Sa’ud “extended by two days the limit of time when the pilgrims must arrive,” in order to accommodate the groups coming in by plane.364 According to the narrator: “The United States Air Force carried 3,763 people into Jidda. Not one who had arranged for passage was left behind.”365

The film concluded with images of Muslims praying in Mecca, along with the arrival of ibn Sa’ud and his son Prince Faisal. The last scenes focused on Ambassador Minor in Lebanon, who was “invited to meet [with] notables of the Moslem community.”366 He received 707,000 pounds in reimbursement for the tickets, which he originally funded out of his own pocket. When Minor received these funds, however, he immediately turned around and “presented them

362 Ibid., 2-3.
363 Ibid., 3-4.
364 Ibid., 4.
365 Ibid., 5.
366 Ibid., 6.
to an officer of a Moslem Welfare Fund” in the name of the United States. The narrator concluded the film by stating: “Thus ends the history of an event in which men of different faiths worked as brothers for good.”

This was not the only example of the United States providing technical assistance with the annual Hajj to Mecca. Officials in the Truman administration initiated a series of treaties in order to facilitate cooperation between the American government, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Saudi Ministry of Health, in strengthening quarantine and public health services for the vast number of pilgrims arriving in Saudi Arabia during the Hajj. American and WHO officials assisted Saudi health officials with medical examinations, vaccinations, and quarantines, for each ship carrying pilgrims to the Port of Said.

The Eisenhower administration also continued to provide assistance to Muslim pilgrims. In June 1956, the State Department facilitated a contract between the government of Afghanistan and Pan American World Airways of New York for the loan of a four-engine airplane for sixty days during the Hajj. During this time, the plane made between fifteen and twenty round trips to Jidda for the purposes of transporting pilgrims to Mecca. The State Department also helped the Afghan airline “Ariana” purchase a DC-6B passenger plane in May 1960. Abdul Karim Hakimi, the president of the Afghan Air Authority, dedicated the plane at the Washington National Airport before it left for Afghanistan where it was “immediately placed in operation transporting Afghan Muslims on the annual pilgrimage to Mecca.” This was the fifth time that

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367 Ibid.
368 Ibid.
the U.S. government provided a loan to Afghanistan in order to purchase equipment for the development of civil aviation.\(^{372}\)

Such examples were useful to USIA propaganda efforts for a number of reasons. First, the image of U.S. servicemen assisting Muslims during their annual Hajj offered a stark contrast to the stories of Soviet officials prohibiting Muslims from making the journey to Mecca that were perpetuated in USIS brochures and pamphlets. Second, these incidents gave the impression that the United States government supported the practice of Islam, and respected the piety of the Muslim faithful. By showcasing the use of American resources in support of Muslim pilgrims, these examples portrayed the United States as a spiritual ally.

The “special relationship” between the U.S. government and the Saudi royal family was another feature of the USIA film series. In February 1957, the USIS produced a movie reel on King Sa’ud’s visit to the United States. It opened with Eisenhower meeting Sa’ud’s plane at the airport (he was the first American president to meet another head of state in such a way), including images of Eisenhower and Dulles holding the king’s three-and-a-half year old son, Prince Mashhur.\(^{373}\) During an audience at the White House Sa’ud was greeted by Sheik Abdullah Al-Khayyal, the Saudi Arabian ambassador, and his young children, who were “brought in to meet their most gracious sovereign – an experience they can relate to their grandchildren.”\(^{374}\) The film concluded with a visit to “Washington’s world renowned Islamic Center” for Sa’ud’s Friday prayer.\(^{375}\) As these images flashed across the screen, the narrator announced (in Arabic) that the Center was “a beautiful addition to the City’s many imposing religious edifices – It was built by contributions from every Islamic land – funds supplemented by generous donations from

\(^{372}\) Ibid.: 832.


\(^{374}\) Ibid., 12.

\(^{375}\) Ibid.
Islam’s many friends in the United States.” This film stressed that Sa’ud was more than simply a head of state. The extravagant treatment he received, coupled with the closing visit to the Islamic Center, emphasized Sa’ud’s role as a spiritual leader for the entire Muslim world.

The Islamic Center was a useful public relations tool for the United States, and was the focus of its own USIS filmstrip a year later, entitled “The Washington Mosque.” The opening scenes began with the following narration: “In the city of Washington, the capital of the United States of America, the voice of the Muezzin is heard five times each day.” The film’s main characters included a man named Dr. Esfandiary, his Muslim student Bahram, and Bahram’s American friend Jim Smith. The script read:

Jim Smith, like many Americans, has never seen a Mosque. Thus, a purpose here is to help all Americans understand Islam’s religious and cultural contributions to the modern world. When Dr. Esfandiary leaves for his ablutions, young Bahram shows Jim Smith one of the most beautiful buildings in America. Sponsored by 15 Muslim nations the Islamic Center consists of the mosque, a library, a museum, a lecture hall and a school… This Islamic Center stands as a symbol of progress, of an ancient principle – al Iman Walamal – faith and action. Al Iman Walamal has created magnificence and beauty here. While Dr. Esfandiary is at prayer, Bahram and Jim explore the center courtyard.

The narrator also claimed that the Washington mosque belonged to “all Islam, many millions of people throughout the world,” and that Islam itself was “closely linked with Judaism and Christianity, through their origins, histories and teachings.” The script included quotes from the Qur’an claiming that the same religious principles established by the prophet Mohammad were also inspired by the teachings of Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus: “Namely, that we should remain steadfast in religion and make no divisions therein.”

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376 Ibid.
378 Ibid., 1.
379 Ibid., 2.
380 Ibid., 3.
381 Ibid.; the movie also provided audiences in Saudi Arabia with descriptions of the mosque itself. The Center’s courtyard was “predominately Moorish,” patterned after the Court of the Lions in the Alhambra, located in Granada,
According to the narrator, Jim Smith’s introduction to the Islamic faith represented “the way toward a better world, for if all of us, as children, could meet in play and young enthusiasm, before divergency take[s] hold, we could not but grow, in understanding and friendship.” 382 In the spirit of this notion, the script described Jim’s “first introduction to Islamic study.” 383

According to the film, Muslim children from all nationalities met at the Islamic Center for religious instruction. It displayed images featuring “a pleasant mixture of American dress and the colorful costumes of the East.” 384 As the scene faded out, the narrator offered the following commentary:

Through these children Islam may make its contribution toward understanding and cooperation among the world’s people. If all men adhered to the principles of Islam, there would be less conflict and ill-will among men. What better lesson can children take with them into today’s troubled world? 385

In conclusion, the script offered a brief assessment of Jim’s experience at the Center:

As Jim Smith leaves, he has begun to understand, like many Americans, that Islam is a universal religion, and a culture that is essentially creative… Jim will tell his parents and his friends about this beautiful place and they will come to see it, as uncounted thousands of Americans are doing each week… And today Jim Smith has learned that Islam, though unfamiliar to him in its mosaics and kufic inscriptions, has much in common with his own religion. Jim Smith has sensed Mohamed’s plea to all people: “Our origin is one. Our God is one.” 386

The construction of the Islamic Center served the dual purpose of symbolizing a mutual belief in one God between the leaders of the United States and those of the Muslim world, as

Spain. Most of the arches and pillars were constructed with granite and limestone from American quarries. The inside of the mosque was “a perfectly square room” which was “scientifically oriented to Mecca,” with “deep rugs, infinite mosaics, a kaleidoscope of color, all aglow in soft worshipful light.” The walls, arches and ceilings were all adorned with inscriptions proclaiming “the titles of God, with verses from the Holy Koran.” Aside from prayer services, the Center offered “lectures and discussion programs” that focused on “general adult education, language study, the study of Islamic literature, philosophy, [and] art,” for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. All these meetings were held in the central library of the Center, which the narrator claimed was “among the finest Islamic libraries in the Western Hemisphere.”

382 Ibid., 7.
383 Ibid.
384 Ibid.
385 Ibid., 8.
386 Ibid., 9.
well as providing a shining symbol of religious tolerance for all adherents of the Muslim faith. Eisenhower himself marked the occasion of its opening by tying Islam and the West together into one moral front. “Inspired by a sense of brotherhood,” he proclaimed, “common to our innermost beliefs, we can here together reaffirm our determination to secure the foundation of a just and lasting peace.”  

Eisenhower assured his audience that “the common goals” of America and the Islamic world, morality and spiritual freedom, were “both right and promising.”

It was this spirit of religious cooperation that the propaganda apparatus of the United States focused on the most during its information campaign in Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Middle East. Policymakers hoped to capitalize on a perceived “brotherhood of faith” between the Christian West and the Muslim world, which they felt was a significant advantage against the Soviet Union. If support for Muslim leaders like King Sa’ud represented the mobilization of Islam at the state level, then the dissemination of Islamic-themed propaganda among the Saudi populace represented a grass-roots foundation. In order to determine the success or failure of this campaign (as well as the mobilization of Islam as a policy in general), it must be viewed in light of events in the region in the first years after the end of the Eisenhower administration.

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388. Ibid.
CONCLUSION – LESSONS FROM THE AMERICAN COLD WAR MOBILIZATION OF ISLAM

In an address at Queens College in New York on 28 April 1959, David Newsom of the National War College offered the following anecdote about the current political situation in the Middle East:

There is a story about a frog and a scorpion that has been making the rounds in the Near East. The frog and the scorpion were standing on the banks of a stream, and the scorpion asked the frog to let him ride across the stream on the frog’s back. The frog protested that he could not; he was afraid the scorpion would sting him and kill him. The scorpion argued persuasively that it would be senseless and illogical for the scorpion to sting the frog while they were crossing the stream, for if this happened they would both drown. The frog agreed, and the scorpion climbed upon his back. Halfway across the stream the scorpion stung the frog. As the frog was going down in his death throes, he gasped, “I thought we agreed it would be senseless and illogical for you to sting me.” The scorpion replied, as he followed the frog, “You forgot. This is the Near East.”

Newsom used this story to illustrate the point that events in the Middle East were, for the most part, completely unpredictable. According to Newsom, it was a region “where leaders and peoples cannot be placed in simple categories. There is seldom pure black or pure white in any given situation… Old ideas are being discarded; people are searching for and experimenting with new ideas.” This story is even more enlightening when placed in the context of the American mobilization of Islam in Saudi Arabia during the 1940s and 1950s. The idea that a region as culturally, socially, and politically diverse as the Middle East could be so simplistically categorized appears, in hindsight at least, to have been largely misguided.

It is difficult to classify the mobilization of this American vision of Islam in Saudi Arabia as a success or failure, therefore, because to do so is to ignore the inherent flaws in the foundation of the policy itself. The initial reliance on Orientalist misperceptions of Islam led policymakers to believe that faith alone was enough for Muslims in the Middle East to ignore

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390 Ibid.
both their own self-interests as well as their general mistrust of Western intentions. As the 1950s gave way to the 1960s, the academic community abandoned many of these notions. In some notable cases, Orientalists like Hamilton Gibb offered critical reevaluations of the very perception of Islam that they had so emphatically cultivated. However, the scholarly community was not alone in misjudging the anti-communist potential of Islam. The Eisenhower administration’s attempts to build up King Sa’ud ibn Abdul Aziz as a spiritual leader in the Middle East were also inherently misguided. Finally, the use of Islam in American propaganda efforts in Saudi Arabia failed to garner any real sympathy for the United States among the Saudi populace, given the Eisenhower administration’s support for the oppressive rule of the Saudi royal family. U.S. actions outside of Saudi Arabia also contributed to the growth of anti-American sentiment, including the CIA-sponsored coup of Mohammad Mossadeq in Iran in 1953. Not only that, but the Kennedy administration’s emphasis on Third World modernization projects abandoned religious mobilization in favor of infrastructural development.

Edward Said points out that Near Eastern studies programs became much less important to American policymakers following the 1950s. In a speech to his colleagues in 1967, Morroe Berger, professor of Near Eastern studies at Princeton and President of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), offered the following assessment of the field:

The modern Middle East and North Africa is not a center of great cultural achievement, nor is it likely to become one in the near future. The study of the region or its languages, therefore, does not constitute its own reward so far as modern culture is concerned… Our region is not a center of great political power nor does it have the potential to become one… The Middle East (less so North Africa) has been receding in immediate political importance to the U.S. (and even in “headline” or “nuisance” value) relative to Africa, Latin America and the Far East.391

Berger’s statement was a significant departure from the earlier positions of Orientalists like Bernard Lewis and Hamilton Gibb, who were often quick to espouse the importance of Near

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Eastern studies to America’s Cold War conflict with the Soviet Union. With much of the European economy back up and running, and British and American corporations comfortably in control of oil-fields throughout the Arabian Peninsula and Iran, the political importance of the Middle East appeared to take a back seat to events in the Far East (especially Vietnam) and Latin America (especially Cuba).

Some Orientalist scholars were not above a reexamination of their impact on the field, however. While Gibb was perhaps the most appropriate example of the migration of knowledge from Europe to the United States at the beginning of the Cold War, he was also symbolic of the intellectual about-face experienced by a number of traditional Orientalists in the 1960s. In his 1963 lecture on “Area Studies Reconsidered,” Gibb offered a mea culpa on the limitations of classical Orientalism, which he believed was too focused on “the ‘great culture,’ …recognised as authoritative and paradigmatic by all its adherents, but rarely more than loosely approximated in their diverse local groups, at grips with the actualities of their existential situation…”

According to Gibb: “Rather suddenly the orientalist has come to realise that diversity is not just a modern phenomenon – on the contrary, it has always been there, a permanent feature of social life and organisation under the overarching unity of the ‘great culture.’”

Despite this apparent call for a more subtle approach to the study of the Middle East, many of the same cultural misperceptions survived to the present day. According to Zachary Lockman, Bernard Lewis took up the mantle of the dean of Anglo-American Orientalists following Gibb’s death in 1971. From his residence at Princeton University, he continued to suggest that the Islamic world was a wholly separate civilization from the West. He made this distinction the subject of his 1993 work *Islam and the West*, in which he suggested that for over a

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392 As quoted in: Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East*, 129.
393 Ibid.
394 Ibid., 130.
thousand years “Islam and Christianity have lived side by side – always as neighbors, often as rivals, sometimes as enemies. In a sense, each is defined and delimited by the other.” As Juan Cole rightly points out, Islam and the West continues the Orientalist tradition of constructing an image of “the Muslim,” which is then juxtaposed with the image of “the European.”

Lewis is not alone in his assertion that the Muslim world and the West are two distinct civilizations. Samuel Huntington gives a similar assessment in The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order, in which he suggests that following the defeat of Soviet communism in the late 1980s, Islam remained the most serious global threat to the democratic West. According to Huntington:

The survival of the West depends on Americans reaffirming their Western identity and Westerners accepting their civilization as unique not universal and uniting to renew and preserve it against challenges from non-Western societies. Avoidance of a global war of civilizations depends on world leaders accepting and cooperating to maintain the multicivilizational character of global politics.

This position has its share of critics in the modern academic world, to be sure. According to Michael Hunt:

Huntington’s notion of civilization is monolithic, static, and essentialist – much like the Cold War-era view of the Communist enemy… Huntington is heir to one of the most ethnocentric and aggressive notions in American history. Like nineteenth-century advocates of Manifest Destiny faced by the perceived barbarism of Native Americans, Latin Americans, the Spanish, and the Chinese, he posits U.S. civilizational superiority and on that basis calls for a kind of moral rearmament to promote and defend Western values. In his construction, countries determined to find their own way are not part of a culturally diverse world, but wrong-headed rebels against a preponderant and enlightened West.

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395 Bernard Lewis, Islam and the West (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993): vii; for more on examples of this belief that Islam and the West were two separate civilizations destined for an eventual confrontation, see Lewis’s: What Went Wrong?: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) and The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror (New York: The Modern Library, 2003).
396 Cole, “Power, Knowledge, and Orientalism”: 508.
Despite the criticism of scholars like Cole and Hunt, however, the works of Lewis and Huntington suggest that the Orientalist tradition described by Said is alive and well in the contemporary study of the Middle East and Islam.

The Eisenhower administration’s attempts to establish Sa’ud as a unifying religious leader for all Muslims were doomed by two significant factors. First, the Saudi reliance on Western oil revenues and infrastructural assistance from ARAMCO weakened Sa’ud’s credibility as a political leader. At the same time, Sa’ud’s extravagant lifestyle weakened his credibility as a moral one. According to Salim Yaqub, the influence that ARAMCO held over Saudi affairs made the royal family “vulnerable to the charge of being an American vassal.”399 Yaqub also argues that Sa’ud’s personal lifestyle was “a gaudy spectacle of opulence and debauchery, [which] scandalized many non-Saudi Arabs, making it difficult for them to regard the king as a serious contender for regional influence… Eisenhower was naïve to suppose that the king’s religious credentials could make up for this fact.”400 Rachel Bronson emphasizes the repercussions of American support for King Sa’ud, arguing that this policy resulted in serious consequences for the future of U.S.-Middle East relations. Cooperation with the House of Sa’ud came “at the expense of democratization, human rights, and the promotion of religious freedom, goals that drove American policies elsewhere.”401

Sa’ud was not even able to maintain control of his own government. By March 1958 his brothers, especially Faisal, were already fed up with his mismanagement of the Saudi treasury. Once he began naming his sons to key positions within the government (in a not-so-subtle attempt to shift the succession away from his siblings and towards his own line), his brothers

400 Ibid., 45.
401 Bronson, *Thicker Than Oil*, 27.
forced him to relinquish the majority of his power over to Faisal. “For the rest of the decade,” according to Yaqub, “Saud would be little more than a figurehead.”

Robert Lacey maintains that the first years after the death of King Abdul Aziz ibn Sa’ud “clearly demonstrated that Faisal knew how to govern Arabia and that Sa’ud did not.”

By the early 1960s it was apparent that the two brothers were at an impasse. In 1961, a year after Eisenhower left office, Sa’ud violated his “special relationship” with the United States by actively pursuing relations with the Soviet Union. Against the wishes of his younger brother Faisal, Sa’ud contacted Moscow in the hopes of reestablishing diplomatic ties and securing a new arms package.

As Sa’ud’s actions continued to become more erratic, and his health continued to deteriorate, his grip on the throne began to weaken. The Saudi ulama (religious authorities) issued a fatwa (religious ruling) placing executive authority permanently in Faisal’s hands, effectively reducing Sa’ud to little more than a ceremonial monarch. Unwilling to acquiesce to this decision, Sa’ud was forced to abdicate the throne to his younger brother in November 1964.

Once it became clear to U.S. officials that Sa’ud could not offer an effective partner in the region, the Eisenhower administration initiated steps towards rapprochement with Egypt and Gamal Abdel Nasser in the late 1950s.

According to Peter Hahn, this policy was continued by the Kennedy administration, which hoped to stem the rise of communism in places like Syria and Iraq. American policymakers in the early 1960s went so far as to avoid any attempts as Arab-

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402 Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism*, 198.
403 Lacey, *The Kingdom*, 348.
405 Lacey, *The Kingdom*, 348-357.
406 The previous mistrust of Nasser’s brand of nationalism was indicative of a common tendency among policymakers in the Eisenhower administration, who often feared that nationalist movements were motivated by communist subversion. This paranoia resulted in U.S.-sponsored coups in Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954, an adverse reaction to Fidel Castro’s revolution in Cuba in 1959, and an unwillingness to deal with Nasser’s government for much of the 1950s. For more on this tendency, see: Robert J. McMahon, “Eisenhower and Third World Nationalism: A Critique of the Revisionists,” *Political Science Quarterly* 101, 3 (1986): 453-473.
Israeli peacemaking, in order to avoid upsetting the tenuous developing relationship with Egypt.\footnote{Peter Hahn, \textit{Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945} (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 37.}

The effectiveness of American propaganda tactics in Saudi Arabia was also questionable as the 1950s came to a close. Richard Hunt, an American correspondent stationed in Beirut for much of the decade, published an article in \textit{The New York Times Magazine} in May 1959 in which he offered his impressions of the American mobilization of Islam:

\begin{quote}
Ever since the Soviet Union began wooing Arabs in 1955, devout Moslems in this part of the world have been assuring their Western friends: “Don’t worry. Communism will never threaten us here. It is against the Koran, the Holy Book of our faith.” Today their assurances are less than convincing. The Koran, despite the unshaken faith of Arab millions, has not stopped the spread of communism in their midst… Communism exists in every major country of the Arab world – including Saudi Arabia, that stronghold of Islamic zeal.\footnote{Richard P. Hunt, “The Koran vs. Das Kapital,” \textit{The New York Times Magazine} (10 May 1959): 17.}
\end{quote}

According to Hunt, there were two main reasons why Islam appeared unsuccessful in stopping the spread of communism into the Middle East: “First, Moslem authorities themselves disagree on whether communism and the Koran are really incompatible, and their disagreement has been subtly fueled by communist propaganda. Second, the Arabs are poor and want a better life.”\footnote{Ibid.}

The basic misunderstandings of Islam and Islamic culture upon which the foundation of the American propaganda campaign was premised, also contributed to its lack of success. Kenneth Osgood argues that despite the Eisenhower administration’s recognition of the potential use of religion to counter the appeal of communist ideology, “the USIA provided no training on Muslim religious practices to its staff working in Islamic countries,” including Saudi Arabia.\footnote{Osgood, \textit{Total Cold War}, 313.}

The IIA and the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) also failed to supply their operatives with
guidelines for addressing Muslim audiences. In fact, an OCB report in May 1957 offered the following criticism of American personnel working on information campaigns in the region:

[They] have tended to rely on English-speaking, Western-educated intellectuals and to believe that these locals, and all others, reason and act much as they do. Few have any idea of the role of Islam in life and society, and they are unaware of the relationship between Islam and the present currents of nationalism and anti-foreignism.411

This assessment was emblematic of the inherent flaws in the American propaganda campaign in Saudi Arabia.

The tendency to support brutally autocratic regimes like the Saudi royal family was another complicated factor in U.S. propaganda efforts. The more American officials endorsed these rulers, the more the Arab population came to see the United States as nothing more than a successor to their former European exploiters. This partnership, coupled with American support for the state of Israel, resulted in the emergence of anti-American sentiment throughout the region.412 Some critical events in the Middle East at that time also placed the United States in a negative light for the majority of the population. Most notably, historians point to the CIA-sponsored coup of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq in Iran as one of the major sources of the rise of anti-Americanism. Recently, historians like Nikki Keddie, Roy Mottahedeh, and Steven Kinzer, draw distinct connections between the coup of 1953 and the anti-American, Shi’a-dominated Iranian Revolution of 1978-1979.413

As Eisenhower gave way to Kennedy, U.S. policymakers shifted their focus from religious mobilization to economic and political modernization throughout the post-colonial

411 Quoted in: Osgood, Total Cold War, 314.
413 For more on the connection between the 1953 coup and the Revolution of the late 1970s, see: Keddie, Modern Iran, 320; Roy Mottahedeh, The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 115; and Kinzer, All the Shah’s Men.
world. The Kennedy administration was hesitant to support “status-quo-oriented powers” like Saudi Arabia. Unlike their predecessors in the Eisenhower administration, scholars-turned-policymakers like John K Galbraith and Walt W. Rostow maintained that nationalism and communism did not represent the same thing, and that conservative monarchies like the Saudi royal family actually facilitated the spread of communism, rather than discouraging it.

This focus on modern development and infrastructural assistance programs was a considerable shift from the spiritually focused (and more cost-efficient) policies of the Eisenhower administration. It is ironic that the Cold War mobilization of Islam in the Middle East centered on the search for a common ground between the United States and the “Muslim world,” especially in the light of current Western attitudes towards Islam. The last few decades of U.S.-Middle East relations have seen a dramatic rise in anti-American sentiment, highlighted by revolutions, hostage crises, oil embargoes, and terrorist bombings. The United States engaged in a number of military conflicts in the Middle East during the 1980s and 1990s. Most recently, the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq fermented anti-Muslim sentiment throughout the United States. In hindsight, the concept of American policymakers seeking a global partnership with Muslim communities during the Cold War is a significant departure from present-day attitudes.

414 In Modernization as Ideology, Michael Latham examines how the development of American “modernization theory” influenced the foreign policymaking of the Kennedy administration. Latham argues that prominent American social scientists like Talcott Parsons and Walt Rostow provided a theoretical foundation for Kennedy’s policies towards “developing” nations. The influence of modernization theory coincided with a cultural and societal sense of American exceptionalism and the belief that the United States was responsible for assisting post-colonial societies in the development of the kind of modernity embodied by America itself. In his examination of how modernization transformed from social science theory to administration policy, Latham highlights three separate case studies: the Alliance for Progress in Latin America, the Peace Corps, and the Strategic Hamlet Program in Vietnam. By analyzing these examples, Latham illustrates how the theoretical model of modernization became a key ideological component of Kennedy’s foreign policy initiatives in the developing world. For more on modernization during the Kennedy administration, see: Latham, Modernization as Ideology.

415 Bronson, Thicker Than Oil, 79-80.
It must be noted in any final analysis of the mobilization of Islam that the roots of anti-
Americanism in the Middle East are not the result of a simple resurgence in religious fervor. Specific U.S. actions in places like Saudi Arabia and Iran are also not entirely to blame, and despite some claims to the contrary, the world is not in the midst of an unavoidable “clash of civilizations.” In the end, the overall rise of American imperialism in the Middle East during the second half of the twentieth century is chiefly responsible for the current tempestuous state of U.S.-Middle East relations. Rashid Khalidi describes the impact of American imperialism in Resurrecting Empire. According to Khalidi: “Like Britain before it, the United States towered strategically over the entire region, from the Atlantic to central Asia, with both significant military, naval, and air deployments in numerous countries and a dominating economic and cultural presence.”\footnote{Rashid Khalidi, Resurrecting Empire: Western Footprints and America’s Perilous Path in the Middle East (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 152.} It was this all-encompassing presence that dominated America’s relationship with the Middle East since the outset of the Cold War. Although the mobilization of Islam was a significant aspect of this presence, it was by no means the only one.
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