Constructivism & Epistemic Community: Theoretical Tools for Understanding the Crafting of Foreign Policy toward Non-State Actors

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to forge a theoretical framework, which can enable the study of how states construct foreign policy towards non-state actors, which are both ideological as well as transnational in character. It tries to examine the role of an 'epistemic community' (Haas, Peter, 1989: 138) composed of academic scholars, journalists affiliated with both the print as well as the electronic media corporations, and policy analysts associated with think tanks, research centers and policy institutes, in the shaping of this policy. While this paper is not a case study, it formulates the theory by applying it to a contemporary scenario. In this regard, it makes reference to how the United States has shaped its possible policy toward the phenomenon of Islamism, which manifests itself in the shape of multiple ideological and transnational non-state actors. These are the sundry moderate, radical, and militant Islamist groups seeking to create Islamic states all across the Muslim world and beyond.

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PROLOGUE

The contemporary global trend seeking to effect Islamic revivalism has been in progress since even before the implosion of the Ottoman caliphate-sultanate (the last bastion of Islamicity) on March 3, 1924. This continuing resurgence of Islam in the shape of a socio politico-economic paradigm has its origins in the late 19th/early 20th century Muslim thinkers, such as, Jamal Al-Deen Al-Afghani, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida (Esposito, 1998:126-148). However, the United States' encounter with political Islam is a fairly recent development, which did not take place effectively until the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, led by the late Ayatollah Khomeini, overthrew the monarchy of Reza Shah Pahlavi and established an Islamic republic in Iran. Ever since then, political Islam or Islamism (as it is popularly referred to) has received an enormous amount of attention in the United States in terms of academic discourse, media coverage, and policy debates.

The purpose of this paper is to forge a theoretical framework, which can enable the study of how states construct foreign policy towards non-state actors, which are both ideological as well as transnational in character. It tries to examine the role of an 'epistemic community' (Haas, 1989:138) composed of academic scholars, journalists affiliated with both the print as well as the electronic media corporations, and policy analysts associated with think tanks, research centers and policy institutes, in the shaping of this policy. While this paper is not a case study, it formulates the theory by applying it to a contemporary scenario. In this regard, it makes reference to how the United States has shaped its possible policy toward the phenomenon of Islamism, which manifests itself in the shape of multiple ideological and transnational non-state actors. These are the sundry moderate, radical, and militant Islamist groups seeking to create Islamic states all across the Muslim world and beyond.

This will be achieved by employing the 'constructivist' paradigm, as an alternative to the traditional neo-realist and neo-liberalist approaches (Finnemore, 1996:3-4). It, however, does not assess United States policy toward Islamic resurgence per se, or its implications for US relations with the Muslim world. Instead, it is an attempt to devise a theoretical framework for understanding the construction of foreign policy. Since it cannot be done in abstraction, this paper employs United States foreign policy towards Islamism, a non-state transnational ideological phenomenon as empirical evidence. This task will be accomplished by presenting the following three observations:

Firstly, this paper highlights the epistemic community of scholars, journalists, and analysts that deals with Islamism. This community is (broadly speaking) divided into two rival schools of thought: (a) Accommodationist; and (b) Confrontationalist (Gerges, 1993). Both these groups have been monitoring the rise of Islamist activism of in the Muslim world, and have been advancing policy

recommendations to successive administrations since the early 1980s. Secondly, this study demonstrates that US foreign policy toward contemporary Islamic political revivalism is a function of the dialectic between these two competing schools. Thirdly, and perhaps most important from a conceptual standpoint is that it illustrates how 'constructivism', a newly emerging paradigm in the discipline of political science, along with the concept of 'epistemic communities' provide for powerful analytical tools, in their ability to explain the dynamics associated with the role of connoisseur recommendation in the formulation of US foreign policy toward Islamism.

In terms of its organization, this paper will begin with a description of the concept of epistemic community along with a synopsis of the constructivist paradigm. This will be followed by an attempt to demonstrate how the afore-mentioned epistemic community is engaged in influencing foreign policy decision-making, utilizing the constructivist paradigm.

The re-emergence of Islam as a political force challenging pro-western secular governments is viewed by the United States as a major cause of concern with respect to its national interests and international security. This has resulted in the adoption of a more or less antagonistic policy toward the rise of Islamism on the part of the United States, which goes back to the last days of the Carter administration. Over the course of the last twenty years, Islamism has remained a major focus of the US media machine, the academic society, and the policy people. The use of Islamism here is merely an attempt to move the discussion beyond the abstract level to one where its empirical utility can be gauged. All three of these epistemic groups have been a major influence on US policy. In order to understand the role played by this epistemic community in the creation of policy, it is necessary to move away from the neo-realist and neo-liberal approaches. Systemic and rationalist theories such as these lack the ability to explain this complex interaction of agent and structure. As a theoretical alternative, the constructivist approach is a much more sophisticated conceptual lens that can help in explaining the role of media, academia, and think tanks in the making of American foreign policy particularly toward contemporary Islamic revivalism. In addition, in the case at hand, the concept of epistemic communities can be combined with the constructivist paradigm to render a powerful analytical instrument that can assist with this inquiry. The next section elaborates on these theoretical components of this research, that is, the notion of epistemic communities and the constructivist approach.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A. Epistemic Communities:

It is believed that Michael Foucault, in his work *The Order of Things* published in 1973, coined the term 'epistemic communities' (Haas, 1990:221). However, it was Burkhart Holzner, and John H. Marx, who provided the benchmark definition that, is now in vogue. In their work, *Knowledge Application* published in 1979, they defined epistemic communities to be, "those knowledge-oriented work communities in which cultural standards and social arrangements interpenetrate around a primary commitment to epistemic criteria in knowable production and application" (Haas, 1990:40). In an attempt to amplify the definition of Holzner and Marx, Haas describes an epistemic community as a group that recognizes a certain criterion of authentication, and adheres to a set convention of conduct, which it deems as being indispensable in order to warrant the accuracy of its inferences. Haas adds that such groups are also subject to their individual and collective limitations, which are due to the organizational demands of their respective professions. These limitations, according to Haas, are the reason for their departure from the predetermined norms of performance in the manufacture of knowledge (Haas, 1990:41).

While Haas is willing to accept the definition proffered by Holzner & Marx, nevertheless, he feels compelled to supplement it, such that it can cater to the particular conditions in a given international organization with its express institutional character. Thus, for Haas an epistemic community is one whose members, while hailing from a wide range of professional disciplines, share an allegiance to a specific causative exemplar and common political ideals. They are integrated by conviction in the veracity of their ideal and a devotion to convert this verity into public policy, in the hope that it will be a service to humanity at large (Haas, 1990:41).

Haas along with Holzner and Marx disagree with Thomas Kuhn that only natural scientists qualify as an epistemic community. While Holzner and Marx are willing to extend this designation to all types of professional groups, Haas still questions whether all types of NGOs can be considered as epistemic communities. He also observes that, the epistemic community, involving natural scientists disproportionately are more successful than their social scientist counterparts (Haas, 1990:221). His son Peter M. Haas (also a political scientist) in his seminal work *Regimes Matter? Epistemic Communities and Mediterranean Pollution Control* demonstrates an example of this. The younger Haas shows how a group of experts from the fields of marine biology, marine chemistry, marine geology, oceanography, microbiology, public health, and civil engineering were able to influence the formation of an international regime for pollution control in the Mediterranean Sea (Haas, 1989:132).

In regards to how epistemic communities are formed, Ernst Haas talks of them as being indiscernible institutions or a complex of people who are on the same epistemological wavelength, but not necessarily employed in the same organization. They gain access to international organizations through advisory positions, contract-based consultancies, and other informal networks. Nevertheless, they are only able to acquire influence through partnerships with powerful political groups that command influence in these international organizations. Both Ernst and Peter Haas discuss the concept of epistemic communities in the context of international organizations. Nonetheless, there are no constrictions which compel one to confine the application of the concept to a certain organizational environment. In other words, epistemic communities can exist and operate in many other settings, independent of any organization as well. As for the case at hand, the epistemic community of academicians, media correspondents, and policy analysts employed by think tanks provides for a classic example of knowledge-based professionals converging (and diverging) on the basis of expertise in a certain field. They are trying to influence politics by seeking recognition from the foreign policy apparatus. Conversely, foreign policy officials are also is in search of expert advice on issues that are related to highly specialized subjects.

Notwithstanding this limiting of the concept to the locale of international organizations, Ernst Haas does offer a criterion by which the success (or failure) of epistemic communities can be gauged. In his opinion, this touchstone consists of two factors. First, it is essential that the position(s) being furthered by an epistemic group should be more convincing to the leading group of political decision-makers than the claim(s) being flaunted by their rival epistemic group(s). Second, the success of an epistemic community hinges upon its ability to forge alliances with key elements in the decision-making apparatus (Haas, 1990:42). Thus in a way, epistemic communities try to dominate the interfaces of the corridors of power and authority. Haas also notes that not many epistemic groups are able to maintain their dominance for sustained periods of time, as the environment in which they operate is by its very nature in a constant state of flux.

B. Constructivism:

This new and upcoming approach, which was incorporated into the theoretical body of political science (and its sister discipline international relations) has actually been borrowed from sociology. Some scholars see a similarity between the institutionalist methodology of inquiry and constructiv-

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ism (Finnemore, 1996:3). In any case, the nomenclature of constructivism comes from Nicholas Onuf, the author of World of Our Making: *Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* published in 1989 (Finnemore, 1996:4). Instead of an *a priori* view of actors and interests, constructivism regards them as being the focus of investigation. Constructivism views global politics as a socially constructed phenomenon. It is based on a criticism of the more traditional neo-realist and neo-liberal theories. Constructivists see both these rationalist theories as being tied down to a materialist understanding of international politics. On the other hand, constructivism offers a more social and idea-based comprehension. Finnemore argues that constructivism reverses the causal arrows placed by neo-realism and neo-liberalism. She does however, admit that constructivism is a social and not a political theory, but it remains useful in the sense that it provides a technique for investigating the complex correlations between agentic and structural forces (Finnemore, 1996:27).

Kenneth R. Rutherford in his article "Banning landmines," published in the December 2000 issue of the *International Politics* journal, takes it one step further, by claiming that constructivism is not even a theory, and thus should not be compared to the rationalist theories of neo-realism and neo-liberalism. He argues that it is actually an alternative ontology, which is able to explain why certain behavior is even deemed neo-realist, neoliberalist or even constructivist to begin with (Rutherford, 2000:470). Due to the fact that both neo-realism and neo-liberalism assume the state as the preferred actor, and do not consider the role of non-state actors, they are unable to account for the role of epistemic communities in the shaping of foreign policy. Notwithstanding this deficiency, this author agrees with Rutherford that constructivism does not replace neo-realism and neo-liberalism, as it only complements them in the sense that it explains those factors that are beyond the scope of the rationalist theories (Rutherford, 2000:471).

According to Finnemore, constructivism allows the researcher to acknowledge the false assumption that states and other actors actually know what they want. It allows the researcher to entertain the thought that non-state actors can actually change state preferences (Finnemore, 1996:6). While agreeing with Finnemore on these basic ideas about constructivism, this author, however, is forced to differ with her in so far as the applicability of constructivism is concerned. Finnemore, in her treatment of the concept, is exclusively dealing with international organizations and how they affect state behavior. In doing so, she is highly concerned about the dichotomy of the arguments based on the agent v. structure dialectic. This is the cause behind her pre-occupation with the locus of source of preferences. Since her study is about the role of international organizations as the structure, which influences the state, she does not accept that non-state actors within a given state can be the source that has the ability to supply preferences to the state (Finnemore, 1996:7). She also inaccurately assumes that scholars in the foreign policy area are engaged in single country research studies. It is clearly discernible from the theme of this study, which deals with a phenomenon that is by no means limited to a one particular geo-political region of the world (let alone a single-country). Islam as a political ideology has, over the course of the last two decades, grown into an issue that directly affects even many Non-Muslim states (particularly the core western nations such as US, UK, France, Canada, and Germany) of the world, in part due to recent immigrations trends.

Finnemore also appears to be critical of researchers in the area of foreign policy, because they (in her opinion) are trying to explain foreign policy decisions as the outcome of the politicking and lobbying undertaken by interest groups with state officials. While acknowledging the work of Ernst Haas and others, she fails to make the distinction between epistemic communities and state-centered interest groups, both of which are essentially two different types of groups (Finnemore, 1996:16-17). The concept of epistemic community in fact addresses her concern that forces independent of the state are not being taken into account by foreign policy analysts and comparativists. Being a knowledge-based group, an epistemic community acts as a conduit that channels information from both outside as

well as inside the state, and then articulates it to the policy-making apparatus. In the case under scrutiny, the accommodationist strand of the epistemic community dealing with Islamism is involved with this kind of work.

On the other hand, the confrontationalist faction may warrant Finnemore's criticism since its arguments are based on the neo-realist line of thinking, rooted in the framework of power and security, and material gains (and losses). Notwithstanding this negligible aberration in this case study, the notion of an epistemic community in and of itself is able to alleviate much of Finnemore's apprehensions about a priori and endogenous specifications of actors and their preferences (Finnemore, 1996:9).

Finnemore acknowledges that scholars differ on what constitutes an 'agent', and what represents a 'structure', however, she criticizes most studies for being heavily slanted towards the agent-orientation. This is also her stated reason for examining the structure side first, and only after isolating the structure from the agent, does she then re-introduce agent into the equation by employing constructivism (Finnemore, 1996:25). In this regard, she tries to assume a middle ground in this debate by recognizing that both are mutually constitutive, for both reinforce each other, since agents participate in the formation of social structures, and in turn, the structures influence the agents in the form of a feedback loop (Finnemore, 1996:24). But ultimately, by describing how international organizations can induce state behavior on issues, she does succumb to the same faux pas that she criticizes others of committing. This is explicit from her statements, "structures not agents are ontologically primitive and are the starting point for analysis." (Finnemore, 1996:14)

Finnemore only parenthetically concedes that inter-disciplinary associations formed on the basis of shared knowledge can offer states with both policy preferences as well as the strategies to pursue them (Finnemore, 1996:15). It can be argued that this in fact is an inadvertent admission on her part that epistemic communities as agents can influence the foreign policy making machinery of a state, i.e., the structure. Thus, by integrating the concept of epistemic communities into the body of constructivist paradigm, it is possible to incorporate both agent and structure simultaneously. By doing so, one can avoid being caught in the dichotomous debate that pits these two elements (agent and structure) in a mutually exclusive type of relationship. But most importantly, this modified constructivist model that I seek to advance, provides for far more explanatory power, which can facilitate the task of examining micro-level activity that informs the making of a particular foreign policy. This, I contend, is a more rigorous alternative than what is offered by neo-realism and neo-liberalism, which simplify the policy process as based on national interest calculations and international regime inducements respectively.

ANALYSIS

A. Divided Epistemic Community:

Fawaz Gerges, professor of international affairs and Middle East studies at Sarah Lawrence College, in his publication, *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Interests*, along with Maria do Céu Pinto, reader in the department of political science & international relations at the University of Minho, Portugal, in her book, *Political Islam and the United States*, identify two dichotomist approaches by which Islamism is being viewed by the "experts" in the United States. Pinto endorses Gerges' assertion that on one side of this debate is the 'confrontationalist' camp that views Islamism as being antithetical to democracy and inherently anti-western. Situated on the other end of this particular epistemic spectrum is the 'accommodationist' camp, which disagrees with the assumptions of the confrontationalists, and argue that Islamism represents a genuine mass movement that has emerged as a response to the failure of secular authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world, which are seen as

being responsible for the socio politico-economic chaos (Fuller & Lessor, 1995:165). It is to be noted that both these rival factions are not formal groups, and hence the appellation 'epistemic community' fits perfectly well on them.

B. The Confrontationalist Faction:

The former group argues that culture and civilization instead of material and political interests, shape the dialectical 'Islam v. West' struggle. It sees Islam, essentially, as a threat to the US national interests, her allies, and global security, similar to that posed by communism during the Cold War. Some of the more noted academicians in this camp are Bernard Lewis, Sam Huntington, Martin Kramer, and Emanuel Sivan. In the policy arena and field of journalism, Amos Perlmutter, Mortimer Zuckerman, Edward Mortimer, Daniel Pipes, Steve Emerson, Yossef Bodansky, and Milton Viorst represent some of the more prominent analysts and journalists. The confrontationalist faction is enigmatically composed of more analysts and journalists than academicians. The confrontationalist camp also has links to powerful political interest groups such as the pro-Israeli lobby in the US (AbulJobain, 1993:18-25).

This faction continues to disseminate the idea, that after the demise of the Communist International, America must now be prepared to meet a new global threat in the form of an Islam International (Hadar, 1993:28). Confrontationalists allege that similar to the Red Menace of the Cold War period, a Green Peril is growing, which is bound to undermine the peace of democratic capitalism, and is therefore a threat for the United States national security interests (Hadar, 1993:70). It recommends that the US adopt a tough posture towards what they identify as "Islamic Fundamentalism" and extend greater support to the stability of the status quo maintained by the pro-western regimes in the Muslim world (Nixon, 1994:147).

Others have even gone to the extent of blatantly stating that Islamic fundamentalism is by nature an anti-democratic, aggressive, anti-Semitic, and un-Western ideology (Pipes, 1995). A recently written advisory piece to George W. Bush, makes the claim that Islamism (another term used as a synonym for Islamism) was not only a threat to the interests of the US in the Middle East, but also to its interests located from the shores of the Atlantic to the Pacific. He goes on to say that, Islamists hate westerners not because of what they do, but for who they are. Thus, there is no possibility of reconciliation with them, and it was necessary to deal with them in a forceful manner (Pipes, 2000). In an attempt to highlight the magnitude of this alleged hostility harbored by Islamists, Yossef Bodansky, says that while Islamists disagree with each other on the issue of the Islamic state, however, they are in perfect synchronization regarding their goal of annihilating the US, and its western allies (Bodansky, 1998:xvii). Bodansky is a highly influential analyst in right-wing congressional circles, and the author of *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War Against America.* It is also interesting to note that Ambassador Jean Kirkpatrick, currently serving on the faculty of Georgetown University's Department of Government wrote an endorsement for Bodansky's book on Osama Bin Laden.

On these same lines, Huntington notes that Islam and not Islamic fundamentalism, is the problem for the West. In his opinion, it is Islam (as a civilization) and Muslims who are in an awe of their cultural superiority, and obsessed with being an inferior power (Huntington, 1996:217). Echoing Huntington's views, Martin Kramer, Director of the Moshe Dayan Institute of Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, is worried that an apathetic West may well succumb to the power of a few like-minded Muslim states coming together on the basis of pan-Islamism (Kramer, 1997:19). Operating from the belief that Islam is inherently incompatible with democracy, this school of thought also proposes that the United States should not call for democratic elections before promote the culture of human rights, promoting civil society, and exporting other Western values. This group sees electoral processes by themselves as the springboard (or the backdoor) through

which many Islamic groups hope to attain power. They contend that once in power, Islamist groups usurp the very process that brought them to power by replacing it with an allegedly absolutist Islamic order. This camp insists that if elections are to work they must be preceded by the above stated prerequisites (Miller, 1993:53).

Miller an influential columnist for the New York Times interviewed the leader and chief theoretician of the Sudanese Islamist movement Dr. Hasan Al-Turabi (a Sorbonne educated intellectual) and the leading ideologue of the Lebanese Hizbullah, Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah. She tries to point out how both men while exhibiting a desire for dialogue with US, secretly harbor a yearning for the decline of the United States (Miller, 1994:133-136). Others in the confrontationalist milieu warn of the threat to international security from the Talibanization of South and Central Asia. The Taliban rulers of Afghanistan are seen as exporting an extremist brand of Islam that has the potential of undermining countries like Pakistan, India, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, etc. as a result of a domino effect (Rashid, 1999:27-31). There are still others, who advise the US government to invest in a policy of counter-exportation. The advocates of this policy are convinced that, only by strengthening the secular educational systems in the Muslim world it would be possible to stave off the threat from radical Islam that appears to be taking over (Stern, 2000:126).

C. The Accommodationist Faction:

This group, basically, rejects Sam Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' theory, and counsels policy makers on the dire need to distinguish between mainstream Islamic opposition groups that represent the majority of Islamists, from fringe radical groups that constitute a infinitesimal minority, and operate on the periphery of the Islamist continuum. It encourages constructive engagement and dialogue with the majority of moderate Islamists, whom they consider as being rational, and not necessarily opposed to democracy, free-market economics, pluralism, and the rule of law. Accommodationists are of the opinion that the whole notion of an Islamic threat is nothing more than an exaggeration of certain localized events (Esposito, John L.). In their opinion, Islamism is the latest manifestation of genuine attempts to address the serious socio-politico-economic problems plaguing the Muslim world. They are highly critical and even ridicule the notion of a monolithic Islamic world trying to undermine the Western civilization (Lowrie, 1995). Another accommodationist critique is that the clash between Islam and the West is a thesis, which is founded on the historical antagonism between Islam and Christianity (Laouhari, 1992:80).

This group disproportionately consists of more academicians than journalists and policy analysts. John L. Esposito, John O. Voll, Yvonne H. Haddad, Edward Sa'id, Charles E. Butterworth, Louis Cantori, John P. Entelis, James Piscatori, Richard Bulliet, and Dale F. Eickelman are some of the more prominent names in academia. Graham Fuller, Ian O. Lesser, Leon Hadar, Eric Margolis, and Robert Fisk are those who represent the policy think tanks and the media. The accommodationist camp points to the linguistic, ethnic, cultural, theological differences amongst the 1.2 billion Muslims as factors that suggest a bitterly divided Muslim world. As an example, it has been suggested that the US has suffered greater difficulties at the hands of secular Iraq and Lebanon than by Iran or Sudan. It is also being argued by some in this camp that the coming to power of Islamist governments does not necessary translate into a threat to US national interests (Karabell, 1996-97:86-90).

After the end of the cold war in 1990, United States foreign policy has not followed any set formula or doctrine. This is primarily due to the nature of the world after the implosion of the U.S.S.R. and the 'democratic revolutions' that ousted the communist regimes in the eastern European countries of the former Soviet satellite system. This withering away of the communist states effectively ended the bi-polar nature of the international system that had existed since the end of World War II. Some experts suggest that what has existed since 1991 is essentially a 'uni-multi-polar' global system,

with the United States as the only remaining global hegemon and several regional powers aspiring for increased global influence. The unexpected and sudden collapse of the Soviet Union has left many policy makers and academicians searching for a new over-arching doctrine for this new world order, as proclaimed by the then president George Bush Sr. after the end of the Gulf War.

In such a global atmosphere, the perception of an Islamic threat could entangle Washington in a Cold War II, which would unfortunately be based on purely fictitious assumptions (Hadar, 1993:27). Hadar points out that among those engaged in this propaganda of an Islamic threat, are the governments of countries like Egypt, Israel, Sau'di Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan, all of whom have an axe to grind, in that they are trying to preserve their strategic value in the post-Soviet era. Hadar further comments that these, other such governments, and their lobbyist outfits in Washington rely on a campaign of misinformation and disinformation, to issue these warnings of an impending danger from the global Islamist nexus.

However, contrary to popular belief, Islamist organizations are not inherently antidemocratic in nature, as they too have suffered at the hands of authoritarianism (Fuller, 1994:392). These images of Islamism saturated in conspiracy theories in the American psyche are conjured up not only by a deliberate acts of misinformation, but also as a result of ignorance and confusion, which is due to the lack of an educational curriculum designed to addressing the non-Christian religious tradition in American educational institutions (Von Der Mehden, 1983:19-20). Enver Masud, director of the Wisdom Fund has chronicled key events since the Gulf War in 1991 to the year 2000, which involved the stereotyping of Islam in the American media. He provides numerous examples where Islam has been the target of media hype. He offers compelling evidence by means of which he is seeking to substantiate his assertion that the US government is following an imperial policy as far as the Muslim world is concerned. (Masud, 2000:151).

The only formal policy outlined by the United States government toward Islamism was unveiled during the Bush Administration by the then Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern & South Asian Affairs Edward Djerejian who was retained by the Clinton Administration. In his famous speech now remembered as the Meridian House' declaration, he clearly stated that America is not against the religion of Islam but is opposed to extremism, and violence. Referring to Algeria' s ill-fated democratic experiment in 1991, he clarified the position of the US as based on a concern that Islamists upon coming to power through the gate of elections would then close the door behind them (Djerejian, 1997:33). It is this cautious approach, which is the hallmark of US foreign policy toward Islamism, which is a manifestation of the interplay of influences from both the accommodationist and confrontationalist camps. This remains the official guiding principle of US foreign policy even today with the return of Republican control of the White House.

D. Application of Constructivism and Epistemic:

There exists a plethora of literature on interest groups seeking to influence foreign policy matters; however, studies on how epistemic communities seek to influence foreign policy remain a rare commodity. This is perhaps due to the pre-dominance of the neo-realist and neo-liberalist approaches to the study of foreign policy making. It is only thru the constructivist approach that the understanding of the role of the epistemic community in the influencing of US foreign policy toward Islamism (or for that matter any other policy issue) can be assessed. This is so for this paradigm is willing to take into account the interaction of various non-state actors, i.e., academicians, journalists, and policy analysts, with the foreign policy bureaucracy. It is within standard operating procedures (SOP) of the United States foreign policy machinery to consult experts, and seek advice on constructing a policy towards matters that fall within the domain of foreign policy (Allison & Zelikow, 1999:147-148). In the case of Islamism, the experts provide for the foreign policy officialdom, a host

of preferences and strategies on how to deal with Islamic groups seeking power in the Muslim world.

This exchange allows the agent(s) 'scholars, journalists, and analysts' to shape the identity and interests of the structure [state]. As far as this issue is concerned, it seems as if the media and policy analysts associated with the confrontationalist faction have been able to secure more influence with the government. This explains Washington's tough attitude towards Islamist movements. This is due to its ability (as Ernst Haas explains) to present a more convincing argument than the accommodationists whose position has not found much reception with the policy-making elite. Furthermore, the confrontationalists have been able to build coalitions with certain powerful political groups such as the Israeli and Indian lobbies in Congress.

Islamism or political Islam remains a relatively new sub-field in comparison to other areas such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, India-Pakistan relations, Turkish Studies, etc. Thus, knowledge in this area remains highly specialized and limited to a handful of experts. There are hardly any experts employed on a full-time basis in the State Department, the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, and other federal agencies and departments, who wield a command of this issue. This situation forces the government to contract individuals and rely on policy analysts associated with think tanks, and most of all the media to provide them with the necessary feedback information on how to deal with Islamist activity, for example, in Egypt, Sau'di Arabia, or Pakistan, etc. This solicitation of expert advice in turn, opens up access points for the epistemic community to advance their views on a particular situation, and thus impact the eventual policy position. Those who subscribe to constructivism are of the opinion that a government formulates its policy on the basis of a social interaction between the state and other non-state actors. Additionally, it requires going beyond the focus on material aspects to the non-material ones, which can also be knowledge and information. According to Nicholas Onuf, the interaction between an array of agents, e.g., individuals, NGOs, and states offers a much more nuanced appreciation of international politics (Rutherford, 2000:461).

The information supplied by both factions of this epistemic community to the US government informed the US government that the rise of Islamism is a development that warrants serious attention. Initially, it is the intelligence community that gathers information since they are out in the field. Their unique position in the proverbial frontlines allows them to transmit early warnings regarding developments that may have potentially serious implications for the United States interests in a particular country or even a specific region. Media corporations are mostly second in line as far as the reception of information is concerned. They too channel the information in the context of policy implications. This initial input of information sets the foreign policy apparatus into motion. It is at this point when the policy-makers solicit counsel from the epistemic community. This is by no means a uni-directional process.

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

The confrontationalist faction is able to obtain a better reception from official ears, therefore, official US policy is reflective of an unwillingness of the government to engage, proactively, in negotiated settlements with Islamist groups. Hence, the attitude is one of extreme distrust even towards moderate Islamist groups that are willing to seek power through constitutional means. Obviously, when two different rival groups are trying to influence a government on a single issue, the resultant policy is a hybrid based on some configuration that contains an input from both schools of thought. Thus, in principle, it is presented as a balanced viewpoint. In reality, however, it remains deeply influenced by the dominant group.

The down side to the notion of an epistemic community is that, it can be inveigled into serving government and corporate interests. Edward W. Sa'id, a professor of comparative literature at Columbia is also a prolific writer regarding matters related to Islam and Palestine. He has written extensively on the correlation between knowledge and power. In a scathing attack on the proto-confrontationalists back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, he states that no other religious or cultural group been accused has so aggressively of being a threat to Western way of life than Islam (Sa'id, 1981:xii). Sa'id attacks the dominant stream of orientalist scholarship for advancing misleading information about Islam, and for being co-opted by government and the corporations. Notwithstanding the methodological and intellectual problems with this type of discourse, Sa'id points out that for the right, Islam has come to represent barbarism, for the left it is nothing more than medieval theocracy (Sa'id, 1981:xv). This in his opinion is due to the political saturation of the study of Islam (Sa'id, 1981:xvii).

He questions the objectivity of those engaged in scholarly research on Islam for purposes of government policy (Sa'id, 1981:22). In this regard, Leonard Binder, former professor of Middle Eastern studies at UCLA agrees with Sa'id in that the motive behind the development of area studies in the United States is political (Sa'id, 1981:133). Writing almost 20 years ago, Sa'id remarks that the media, government, geopolitical strategists, and the academic experts on Islam are all in consensus that Islam is a threat to the Western civilization. He argues that the media is a profit-seeking industry, which promotes certain specific images of Islam within a political context.

While the emergence of the accommodationist school has definitely contributed to a more balanced view of Islam, nevertheless, Sa'id's arguments are still valid for the confrontationalist school that continues to dominate the policy making process. Furthermore, the intricate web entangling academia, media, analysts, government and special corporate interests that Sa'id exposes, remains very much a reality even today. Sa'id' s contribution to this discussion about epistemic communities being able to influence foreign policy is that he provides a poignant confirmation to many of the postulations advanced in this theory.

E. Critique of Rationalist Theories:

Neo-Realism and Neo-Liberalism are both rationalistic approaches do not consider nonstate actors, i.e., NGOs, social forces, as being able to affect state behavior in the international arena, especially when the issue is perceived as a security matter. Another drawback with the rationalist perspective is that they are reductionist in nature. They operate on the tapered assumption that state behavior is guided by materialistic egocentricity. This prevents the rationalists from realizing that epistemic communities can actually wield a strong influence on the foreign policy apparatus. Both the neo-realist and neo-liberal frameworks view the governmental decision-making process in terms of a monolithic black box that is generating decisions. What they do not explain is that that this box is a complex set of machinery composed of gears and levers in a highly differentiated decision-making configuration. These decisions are the end result of several and often times conflicting actions by individuals within the government circles, and the ability of outside forces to influence the final pol-

icy (Allison & Zelikov, 1999:5). They both are unable to offer a micro-level explanation for why the United States has a certain policy toward the rise of Islamism. Neo-realism assumes the international system to be anarchic and take a state-centric approach to the behavior of states, whereas, Neo-liberalism relies heavily on the idea of institutions playing a role in international affairs. Thus, both cannot offer any explanation on how an epistemic community can play a vital role in the constructing of foreign policy.

EPILOGUE

The role of expert advice in the making of official state policy is by no means, a new matter. However, this paper divulges how non-state actors such as academic scholars, journalists, and research analysts can be a persuasive catalyst in the process of manufacturing foreign policy decision-making toward a global phenomenon. It is an attempt at contributing to the existing body of literature on foreign policy decision making, by explaining how non-state actors can have a major impact on the policy making process. The constructivist paradigm along with the notion of epistemic communities facilitates this investigation in the sense that combined together, they provide a framework that allows the researcher to take into account variables that the rationalist paradigms (neo-realism, and neo-liberalism) are not even willing to recognize as participants in the making of foreign policy.

This paper also proposes a new theoretical approach for examining foreign policy making in other issue areas as well. Furthermore, it can serve as a benchmark to gauge the effectiveness of epistemic communities in being able to influence, in any meaningful manner, the process of foreign policy making. In a sense, it is also widening the locus of foreign policy making. It is taking it from the level of being a small vertical elite of politicians and bureaucrats, to a much more horizontally situated larger group of individuals. Academicians, journalists, and analysts, through their often times contradicting positions, actually bring issues to the public front, thereby contributing to the cause of attentive citizenry and public affairs. It also underscores the need for nonstate actor involvement in issues where the state on its own may not possess the ability to deal with, especially in age of increasing specialization.

Exactly what should be the United States foreign policy toward the contemporary resurgence of political Islam remains a question that divides the concerned epistemic community and it will surely continue to be an intensely debated issue for several years to come. The impact of this divided epistemic community will also undergo much metamorphosis, as the phenomenon is undoubtedly an evolving one. It will nonetheless, require knowledge-based communities to continue to explore the issue. In essence, this is where constructivism will still be a relevant paradigm, whereas neo-realism and neoliberalism will become increasingly marginalized.

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