Political Islam and the West: a new Cold War or convergence?

MICHAEL E SALLA

This paper has two aims. The first is to argue that US, and more generally Western, triumphalist explanations for the end of the Cold War will influence foreign-policy responses to perceived challenges to Western liberal democratic norms. This influence will be argued to be most clearly identified in terms of the USA's and its Western allies' response to a contemporary debate concerning political Islam. I will assert that arguments posited by one side of the debate will be viewed more favourably since these arguments are more consistent with the triumphalist underpinning of Western policy makers. The second aim is to suggest that the debate needs to be extended so as to accommodate the view that political Islam offers a challenge to liberal democratic norms at the 'ideational' or 'discursive' levels, rather than solely at the 'contingency' levels. Extending the debate in this way challenges Francis Fukuyama's thesis that liberal democracy represents the 'end of history'. Not to extend the debate in this way, I will argue, is to make the path clear for the triumphalist underpinning of Western policy making to exercise decisive influence in determining policy responses to political Islam.

The essentialist-contingencist debate

The rise of political Islam as a force in global politics has led to numerous depictions of it as a threat to the continued dominance of Western liberal democratic norms in shaping the political, economic, social and cultural life in vast regions of the planet.[1] Patrick Buchanan for instance has written: 'For a millennium, the struggle for mankind's destiny was between Christianity and Islam; in the 21st century, it may be so again. For as the Shiites humiliate us, their co-religionists are filling up the countries of the West.'[2] The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR has given added salience to such assessments and led to claims that the spread of political Islam marks the onset of a new cold war where the West's liberal democratic norms are pitted against the religious revivalist norms of political Islam. As Leon Hadar writes: 'the fear of Islam could embroil Washington in a second Cold War'.[3] It in fact has been pointed out that the very term 'cold war' was first used by a 14th century Spanish writer to describe the conflict between the Christian and Muslim worlds.[4] Not surprisingly, such claims have led to intense debate over the

Michael E Salla is at the Peace and Conflict Resolution Program, School of International Service, The American University, 4400 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20016–8071, USA.

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varying methodologies and assumptions used by the respective authors in reaching their conclusions.

While far reaching in terms of varying foreign policy recommendations and nuanced understandings of Islamic culture and history, it is fair to describe the debate as polarised around two key methodological approaches. On one side are the 'essentialists'—or 'orientalists' as they are pejoratively labelled by their opponents—who use a limited number of conceptual categories and apply these universally in their analyses of political Islam.[5] The main methodological assumption is that the Muslim world is 'dominated by a set of relatively enduring and unchanging processes and meanings, to be understood through the texts of Islam itself and the language it generated'.[6] The leading scholarly figures on this side of the debate are Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, Martin Indyk and Samuel Huntington. Lewis, for example, argues that political Islam 'offers a set of themes, slogans and symbols that are profoundly familiar and therefore effective in mobilising support and in formulating both a critique of what is wrong and a program for putting it right'.[7]

At the other end of debate, 'contingencists' abjure any conceptual framework with a universal application as reductionist, and instead emphasise the contingent nature of the factors behind political Islam.[8] This side is led by scholars such as John Esposito, Edward Said and James Piscatori. Esposito, for example, argues:

> The challenge today is to appreciate the diversity of Islamic actors and movements to ascertain the reasons behind confrontations and conflicts, and thus to react to specific events and situations with informed, reasoned responses rather than predetermined presumptions and reactions.[9]

The debate is not new and elements of it can arguably be traced to the first attempts to study the social and political life of the Muslim world. Indeed, Fred Halliday is correct in arguing that the debate is a species of a broader methodological debate in the social sciences.[10] The debate took on much of its contemporary academic salience with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, which adopted a Foucauldian approach in challenging the dominant methodological assumptions found in the academic study of the Muslim world. The debate gained wider academic and popular recognition in 1993 with Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' thesis,[11] which borrowed the idea from Bernard Lewis's 1990 article, 'The roots of Muslim rage'.[12]

Said's approach, and the support and criticism it has attracted is noteworthy since it demarcates the debate in terms of two antithetical camps with little in the way of a middle ground between them. The difficulty in finding the middle ground in the debate is attested to by the paucity and marginal influence of scholars who have attempted to advocate a middle ground or 'third' position. Marshall Hodgson, for instance, has been considered one who has successfully combined the two methodological approaches in his idea that an essential feature of Muslim civilisation, 'is the continuous search and struggle to achieve the Islamic ideal in practice'.[13] Similarly, Halliday argues a 'third' perspective, one in which analysis occurs 'of what actually happens' in the Muslim world.[14] His suggestion is that the debate is largely about different 'representations' of the Muslim world. While one camp focuses on the role of texts and language in

painting its essentialist picture; the other focuses on 'discourses' about the region. Both camps are therefore charged with ignoring what is actually occurring in the region.

I think that both Hodgson's and Halliday's attempts to find the 'middle ground' or a 'third position' are unconvincing. As far as Hodgson is concerned, his notion of the 'cultural unity of Islam', is not, as Leonard Binder suggests, the middle ground position of 'pragmatic orientalism', but a notion that is firmly located in the essentialist-contingencist debate in terms of an essentialist categorisation that is sensitive to cultural variation. It is therefore a variant of scholarly approaches that Said recommends in *Orientalism*—what Binder suggests are instances of 'good orientalism'.[15] On the other hand, Halliday dichotomises human knowledge in terms of 'representations' or 'discourses' about reality and what is actually out there—the real (Muslim) world.[16] Such a dichotomy is a critical part of the methodological debate and therefore fails to produce a distinctive third position.

The debate between essentialists and contingencists is not a sterile methodological argument among leading figures in an academic discipline, but is critically important because of the foreign policy directions each camp offers in a post-cold war world. Both camps in the debate are engaged in a struggle to capture the hearts and minds of Western foreign-policy making elites so that policy can be crafted in terms which each camp views as the most appropriate response to political Islam. It is not surprising that so much hinges on the correct policy response to political Islam insofar as it is a cogent force sweeping through the Muslim world: rich as it is with population, territory and natural resources.

This finally takes me back to the Cold War analogy. The Cold War was characterised by antagonistic political forces led by two global hegemons: the USA and the former USSR. Each hegemon viewed the other as the principal representative of, respectively, global economic market forces and a global revolutionary ideology based on Marxism–Lenism. As a consequence, each hegemon engaged in a conflict that covered virtually all spheres of human interaction. The extent of the conflict was demonstrated by children in the 'revolutionary Marxist–Leninist camp' denouncing their parents to party authorities for 'reactionary behaviour'; and children in the 'free world' being indoctrinated by government-sponsored media representations of the inimical threat posed by the 'evil empire'.

The Cold War ended with the dissolution of the USSR, and led to triumphalist explanations of its end by US foreign policy elites. Former US President George Bush, for instance, argued:

> Soviet communism provided no match for free enterprise … its rulers [could not] deny their people the truth … about us … Kremlin leaders found that our alliance would not crack when they threatened America's allies with the infamous SS-20 nuclear missile … they could not divide our alliance … The Soviet Union did not simply lose the Cold War, the western democracies won it … by the grit of our people and the grace of God, the Cold War is over. Freedom has carried the day.[17]

Despite critical examinations of triumphalist explanations proffered by Bush and other US foreign policy elites, it is more than likely that the lessons learnt from

the Cold War experience for foreign policy elites will reflect triumphalist assessments rather than more sober and complex academic accounts.[18] As Ralph Summy suggests, triumphalist explanations have recently been elevated to the level of 'unassailable orthodoxy'.[19] It is therefore likely that the foreign-policy approach taken by the USA and its key Western allies in dealing with the revolutionary Marxist–Leninist threat, will be replicated to varying degrees in dealing with future 'threats'.

What I now propose is that triumphalist explanations for the end of the Cold War provide a conceptual underpinning that will influence the US foreign policy response, and that of its chief allies, to political Islam. David Campbell proposes a similar idea: 'For the United States, the current period in world politics can be understood as being characterised by the representation of novel challenges in terms of traditional analytics, and the varied attempts to replace one enemy with (an)other.'[20] Measuring such a 'conceptual underpinning' will predictably be difficult because of the differing programmes, orientations and emphases of key US policy institutes, eg the CIA, State Department, Pentagon, etc, and their equivalents in the countries in question.[21] Similarly, it would be an oversimplification to argue that everything finally emerging from the foreign policy apparatus reflected the same 'conceptual underpinning'. Nevertheless, I contend that the widespread knowledge of policies that 'successfully' dealt with the former Marxist–Leninist threat will prove influential in the foreign policy that emerges to deal with the threat of political Islam. Since determining the precise influence of this conceptual underpinning raises problems, I will simply refer to this influence in terms of a disposition of US policy makers to 'appreciate' policies that reflect triumphalist explanations for why the Cold War ended.

An 'appreciation' of past policies in dealing with the Marxist–Leninist threat will have a significant impact upon foreign policy assessments of the essentialist–contingencist debate over political Islam. To illustrate my argument, I will now examine three key 'triumphalist' foreign policy 'lessons' purportedly learned from the cold war experience by US policy makers, which contribute to the conceptual underpinning of the US foreign policy-making apparatus. I will then analyse the degree to which these three lessons have been 'appreciated' by policy makers, in terms of likely assessments of the essentialist–contingencist debate over political Islam.

Political Islam as a monolithic threat

First, the USA and USSR crafted their foreign policies in terms of 'threat perceptions' of the other as the front of a monolithic political force that needed to be contained wherever possible and destroyed when the circumstances allowed—respectively, global capitalism and Marxism–Leninism. The end of the Cold War led to triumphalist claims by the foreign policy elite that the real 'hero' was Harry Truman, the architect of the policy of containment. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Adviser to President Jimmy Carter:

The Cold War eventually ended because the West succeeded in combining firm

containment with an active offensive on human rights and a strategic buildup of its own, while aiding the resistance in Afghanistan and Poland … In that regard the historical credit for fashioning the winning strategy and for forging the victorious coalition must go to one man above all: Harry Truman. He committed America because he understood the stakes. Eisenhower then built on Truman regarding NATO; Carter built on Nixon regarding China; Bush built on Reagan regarding the arms race.[22]

Containment was predicated on the perception of Marxism–Leninism as a monolithic threat that needed to be opposed on all fronts. Accommodation was not possible since this only allowed the USSR and its allies the opportunity to manipulate the political life of any country so foolish as to incorporate Marxist–Leninist elements.

As far as political Islam is concerned, the monolithic perception of the Islamic threat and parallels with Marxism–Leninism is championed by 'essentialists' such as Daniel Pipes who writes:

> fundamentalist Islam is a radical utopian movement closer in spirit to other such movements (communism, fascism) than to traditional religion. By nature anti-democratic and aggressive, anti-semitic and anti-Western, it has great plans. Indeed, spokesmen for fundamentalist Islam see their movement standing in direct competition to Western civilisation and challenging it for global supremacy.[23]

Similarly Huntington writes of an Islamo–Confucian alliance capable of challenging 'Western interests, values and power'.[24]

Not surprisingly, 'contigencists' view with alarm such representations of political Islam, and are especially concerned with media portrayals of political Islam as a monolithic threat. Esposito for example writes, 'we must move beyond a monolithic worldview that sees Muslims and the Muslim world (both governments and social movements) as a unity'.[25] As Leon Hardar puts it, the US President should be advised against going 'abroad in search of monsters to destroy'[26]

While both 'essentialist' and 'contingencist' camps are vying for the ears of US and other Western elites, it is the 'essentialists' who have front running thanks to the underlying invocation of the foreign-policy lesson deriving from the triumphalist cold war assessment that 'containment worked'. Such an assessment works as a foreign policy incantation that is the appropriate potion to be applied for all similar threats to the global politic. The essentialist argument that political Islam presents a monolithic threat is thus more likely to be 'appreciated', than contingencist warnings of the self-fulfilling nature of such a policy. Consequently, it is likely that a version of the containment policy will be applied to political Islam in terms of support provided for any regime that opposes political Islam on its territory. Essentialists such as Pipes explicitly call for such a policy and indeed go as far as dismissing any distinction between 'moderate' and 'extreme' Islamic fundamentalists.[27] This takes me to the second foreign-policy lesson.

'Hot wars' and economic exhaustion

The second lesson to be drawn from the Cold War was that its 'hot' aspects were fought out by the two hegemons' respective proxies in the Third World. Vietnam, Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Mozambique are but a few of the countries that were devastated by these proxy wars. The triumphalist lesson learned here was that the debilitating cost of these was a critical factor in the eventual collapse of the USSR, and the discrediting of Marxism–Lenism as a viable alternative economic model to free market economics.[28] Consequently, the foreign policy of the USA and its allies in meeting similar global threats will be to minimise the political cost to themselves in terms of lives and resources while participating in any proxy wars, and instead to highlight the necessity of supporting their clients, and the economic and political costs to their opponents. The underlying assumption is that the economic resilience of the USA and its Western allies will finally drive their 'ideological' opponents into economic exhaustion and final collapse. This assumption receives its starkest theoretical exposition in Francis Fukuyama's essay, 'The end of history',[29] and receives practical exposition in the current US policy against The Islamic Republic of Iran—represented as an important sponsor of political Islam.[30]

In terms of the purported new 'cold war' between the 'West' and 'political Islam', the Muslim world will be the site of any 'proxy wars'. The respective proxies will be Muslim state elites wishing to maintain authoritarian control with the support of the West, and Islamic political movements that are opposed to the continued rule of a political regime deemed to have failed in its development policies, to have fostered endemic corruption, and to have become a pliable instrument of Western governments.

This is most graphically exemplified in Algeria where the government installed after a military coup is currently engaged in a bloody civil war with Islamic militants. The Algerian government is directly supported by France in its military campaign. Meanwhile, other Western governments have given tacit support by not exerting diplomatic pressure on the Algerian government to honour national elections, in which the Islamist opposition were on the verge of winning, and to end political repression and human rights abuses.

'Essentialists' here argue that the West is correct in supporting the Algerian government, and indeed all Muslim governments that are 'forced' to repress Islamic movements militarily. Pipes argues: 'Governments in combat with the fundamentalists deserve US help. We should stand by the non-fundamentalists, even when that means accepting, within limits, strong-arm tactics (Egypt, the PLO), the aborting of elections (in Algeria), and deportations (Israel).'[31] The 'contingencists', on the hand, argue for accommodation; and, in the case of Algeria, emphasise that electoral outcomes should be honoured irrespective of which political parties and programmes emerge victorious. The argument used here is that, if a democratic political culture is to be promoted in the Muslim world, this cannot be done by violent repression of opposition movements. For instance, Esposito argues: 'if attempts to participate in the electoral process are blocked, crushed, or negated as in North Africa, the currency of democracy as a viable mechanism for political and social change will be greatly devalued in the eyes of many'.[32]

Contingencists further argue that in many Muslim countries political Islam represents the only 'safe' form of political opposition in authoritarian political systems which routinely jail or intimidate opposition leaders, control and manipulate the media, and which oversee failed development policies. Nazih Ayubi, for example, argues that it is a combination of the failed development policies of state elites, and the repression of opposition parties, that is largely responsible for the popularity of political Islam.[33] The implication is that, since Islamist political parties consistently promote a democratic political culture, initial support for them will eventually find its way to secular opposition parties.[34]

The triumphalist foreign policy lesson of the Cold War that economic exhaustion will eventually lead to the collapse of 'ideological' opponents, again favours the universalist analysis in situations where Islamic opposition parties are locked in a political struggle with a government. Even if Islamist military activities are confined to small groups engaged in terrorist acts, as is currently the case in Egypt, political Islam as a whole will be the likely target of state repression or cooptation. As a consequence, the West is likely to provide military and economic support to the governments in question in order to crush Islamic militancy, while providing diplomatic cover for widespread political repression and human rights abuses.

The antithetical nature of political Islam and liberal democratic norms

The third triumphalist lesson to be drawn from the Cold War is that the principal antagonists saw themselves as representing antithetical political forces that could not be reconciled. This was exemplified in 1950 by National Security Council document number 68, which was adopted by the Truman Administration as an authoritative rationale for US foreign policy. The document described the USSR as 'animated by a new fanatic faith, antithetical to our own, and seeking to impose its absolute authority over the rest of the world'.[35] Similar views were propagated by the USSR concerning US imperialism and global capitalism. Put simply, each side viewed itself as the embodiment of a unique paradigm that could not be combined with the other in a Hegelian synthesis. In this sense, as George Kennan argued in 1931, 'there can be no middle ground or compromise between the two'.[36] Marxism–Leninism was depicted in terms of centralised attempts at running the economy and controlling the social life of its citizenry. On the contrary, the West's liberal democracy was depicted in terms of minimal government intervention in both the economic and social spheres.

This triumphalist lesson is exemplified in Fukuyama's theory regarding the collapse of liberal democracy's main rivals on the ideological landscape:

> The century that began full of self-confidence in the ultimate triumph of Western liberal democracy seems at its close to be returning full circle to where it started: not to an "end of ideology" or a convergence between capitalism and socialism, as earlier predicted, but to an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism.[37]

The implication is that political Islam is simply just another ideological alternative to be comprehensively vanquished and discredited on the treadmill of history. What this triumphalist position dismisses is the possibility of convergence between the liberal democratic paradigm as expressed as a set of norms practised and propagated by the West, and political Islam. However, there has been considerable support for the idea that Western liberal democracies and Marxist–Leninist states did in fact converge in a number of critical areas, thereby suggesting that some degree of convergence might be predicted in the case of political Islam and Western liberal democratic norms: a 'new convergence thesis'.

There have been at least three strands to the argument that Western liberal democracies and Marxist–Leninist states converged. The first is the Weberian idea that the extensive role of the bureaucracy in administrating modern societies was common to both 'paradigms', thereby suggesting a convergence in this respect as societies became more urbanised and industrialised. The second strand is that the development of the welfare state and Keynesian economics suggested a convergence in both paradigms' expectations of appropriate government intervention in the economic sphere. The final strand is based on the idea that the role of the state in both paradigms was fundamentally similar: the accumulation of resources and capital that made Marxist–Leninist states versions of state capitalism.[38]

Essentialists, at best, would strongly qualify a convergence thesis between political Islam and liberal democratic norms, and indeed go as far as discrediting *all* Islamic versions of democracy, arguing that this is merely a temporary expedient on the road to totalitarian government. Certainly, this is an idea that Lewis proposes:

> For Islamic fundamentalists, democracy is obviously an irrelevance, and unlike the communist totalitarians, they rarely use or even misuse the word. They are, however, willing to demand and exploit the opportunities that a self-proclaimed democratic system by its own logic is bound to offer them. At the same time, they make no secret of their contempt for democratic political procedures and their intention to govern by Islamic rules if they gain power.[39]

On the other hand, contingencists are far more sympathetic to the idea of convergence in terms of indigenous Islamic versions of democracy, and go as far as suggesting that Islamic texts and practices based on the electoral principal of *shura* (consultative council) give explicit support for Islamic versions of democracy. Furthermore, contingencists would argue, the unique constellation of social, economic and political factors that accompanies the rise of political Islam suggests that the policies of Islamic regimes would differ widely and could not be generally subsumed under the category of 'totalitarian'. The 'Islamic totalitarianism' espoused by essentialist assessments of political Islam would not then be a foregone conclusion.

Despite these antithetical approaches to the convergence thesis, both contingencists, explicitly, and essentialists, implicitly, agree that such a thesis is not relevant insofar as the liberal democratic paradigm is concerned. The contingencist argument that Islamic versions of democracy are plausible, is a far cry from

advocating a change in the liberal democratic paradigm—as understood and practised in the West. Both sides of the debate are primarily concerned with the outcome of political Islam in terms of its impact on Muslim societies and on shaping the policy orientation of Muslim governments and future 'Islamic governments', and with the appropriate Western response. The view that there might be some convergence between political Islam and liberal democracy, in the sense of affecting the way liberal-democratic norms are conceptualised and practiced, is not seriously considered in the debate. Put simply, the relationship between liberal democracy and political Islam is unidirectional: political Islam either responds to liberal democratic norms by demonstrating their consistency with the Islamic heritage; or reacts to them as contrary to the Islamic heritage. The essentialist-contingencist debate therefore fails directly to challenge the triumphalist cold war lesson that political Islam and the West's liberal democracy, at least as far as these represent distinct normative paradigms, represent irreconcilable political forces. The policy implication is that Western foreign policy elites are correct in interpreting political Islam as, at best, a temporary hiccup in the spread of the liberal democratic paradigm; and, at worst, a totalitarian form of government in active opposition to liberal democratic norms.

In conclusion, I have argued that, as far as the first two triumphalist lessons are concerned—a 'monolithic threat perception' and participation in 'hot wars' as a means of ushering in economic exhaustion—essentialist analyses of political Islam are more likely to be 'appreciated' by Western policy makers. As far as the third lesson is concerned—the antithetical nature of political Islam and liberal democracy—both camps in the debate can be adopted by policy makers without seriously challenging the idea that, at the ideational or discursive levels, political Islam and liberal democracy are antithetical. This takes me to my second aim in this paper. To highlight a critical deficiency in the essentialist–contigencist debate, and to propose a new convergence thesis.

Taking the 'new convergence thesis' seriously

If the 'new convergence thesis' is to be taken seriously, then analysis of political Islam must not be restricted to exigencies in the Muslim world, but extended to include its relevance for the way liberal democratic norms are conceptualised and practised. This would extend analysis of the relationship between political Islam and liberal democratic norms from a unidirectional model where political Islam is either a reformist response to or reaction against liberal democratic norms, to a bidirectional model where liberal democratic norms are subject to a critique from a political Islamist perspective. To do otherwise is to adopt the preceding cold war triumphalist lesson about the irreconcilability of liberal democracy, as a distinct Western paradigm, and its 'ideological' alternative: political Islam.

It is therefore necessary to expand the debate concerning the study of political Islam beyond the methodological approaches of the 'essentialist' and 'contingencist' camps, and into the 'ideational' or 'discursive' realms—depending on one's metatheoretic approach. That is to say, political Islam should be seen as representing a paradigm that is in direct competition with liberal democracy in

terms of the universal appeal and scope of their respective norms. This would lead to the dismissal of Fukuyama's assessment that political Islam is unlikely 'to take on any universal significance'[40] on the grounds that it is normative prescriptions of the world's different religious traditions that in fact contest liberal democratic norms. In Fukuyama's terms, this would constitute the 'return of history' since the liberal democratic paradigm has not been accepted as the last stage of the historical development of ideas on governance by large sections of the global population: those who believe religious norms, whether drawn from the Islamic or other religious traditions, should be part of the policy-making process. For example, with regard to Catholicism and liberalism, James Kurth writes: 'We are likely to see a growing awareness of fundamental differences between the liberal and the Catholic ideals and between US, and papal foreign policies. This would represent not only the return of history; it would be something of a return of antiquity as well.'[41]

The study of political Islam would consequently take into consideration its relevance as a regionally-based normative critique of Western liberal democratic norms having universal scope, thanks to affinities with the tenets of other religious traditions, in both foreign and domestic policy making. This would replicate the way in which Marxism–Leninism provided a theoretical critique that inspired numerous political parties and programmes in the West, and ultimately affected the way liberal democratic norms were conceptualised and practised in the West.

Political Islam would consequently not be viewed solely as an object of political analysis—as Halliday puts it, 'a malaise in Middle Eastern society deriving from the exigencies of the Muslim world'[42]—but would also be viewed as offering a theoretical critique of the West's liberal democratic norms. Viewing political Islam in organic terms as a 'malaise', merely suggests its relevance at the 'contingency' level, rather than at the 'ideational' level. Such a view replicates the essentialist belief that political Islam is but a temporary aberration on the ideological landscape. This is an ideological path already traversed by Western states who are eager to help, but who are handicapped by their colonial past. Moving beyond the organic metaphor for the study of political Islam as a malaise of the Muslim body politic, suggests it needs to be studied in terms of a coherent critique of the liberal democratic paradigm that can be significant for the understanding and conceptualising of liberal democracy at the normative level.

At this point, contingencists may very well object that this is to impose a reductionist framework upon political Islam, insofar as it is predicated on a coherent or distinct Islamist critique of Western liberal democratic norms. This would arguably facilitate the cold war triumphalist lessons of a monolithic perception of political Islam and of legitimating a policy of opposing its manifestation at all costs. I believe such an inference would be incorrect, since it would not be possible to combine the triumphalist lessons of a monolithic perception, and of opposing the manifestation of political Islam at all costs, with the convergence thesis I have proposed. In this sense, the three triumphalist cold war lessons I have described are interconnected to the extent that they either run together or fall together.

As far as the objection itself is concerned, the first point to be considered is

what the objection implies. It suggests, as contingencists would largely contend, that political Islam is in fact a wide array of contingency-based responses to regional problems. In this sense there is no single coherent paradigm or discursive formation that might be called political Islam. There are in fact many versions or discourses of political Islam. On the other hand, liberal democracy is conceptualised by many of the same theorists as a coherent paradigm or discursive formation that arguably has universal scope.[43] Such an objection, if accepted, would suggest a qualitative distinction between political Islam and liberal democracy as subjects of theoretical analysis. Political Islam would thus correspond to the rhetoric used by social movements in distinct regions of the Muslim world without any internal coherency or consistency among its different manifestations, while liberal democracy would arguably remain a coherent political paradigm with contested universal application. I think this conclusion needs to be avoided, since it invites an organic metaphor to be used in discussing political Islam in terms of a malaise inflicting the Muslim body politic. The use of such metaphors suggest that political Islam has little to inform us about the liberal democratic paradigm, and does not represent a viable challenge to liberal democratic norms.[44] Finally, to dismiss the convergence thesis at the ideational or discursive level is to invite triumphalist cold war lessons on the irreconcilability of political Islam and liberal democracy, thereby making it possible for other cold war lessons to be applied in the framing of policy responses to political Islam.

Just as the Western liberal democracies and Marxist–Leninist states achieved a degree of convergence in their respective views of the proper extent of government intervention, role of the bureaucracy and size of the market sector—a convergence that Western policy elites were unwilling to concede in their triumphalist analyses of the collapse of Marxist–Leninist states—so too I believe a 'new convergence thesis' can be proposed between political Islam and Western liberal democracy as rival paradigms or discourses with universal appeal. In this sense, political Islam would be viewed as the promulgator of a universal moral order; similar in perspective, if not content, to other religious traditions and to policy making based on natural law arguments.

While it is not my purpose here to describe in detail the convergence between liberal democratic norms and political Islam, I can attempt to delineate its main contours in the normative realm. In the social arena, convergence might be reflected in terms of an incorporation, to some extent, of (Islamist) religious norms in the domestic policy-making process. This would suggest that there is an underlying normative framework embodied by religious norms that cannot be ignored by policy makers. In the political arena, there would be an effort to entrench religious norms in the constitutional framework in terms of either explicit clauses 'protecting' religious norms and/or a constitutional mechanism designed to preserve the religious normative framework. And in the economic sphere, a more extensive state welfarism and a more equitable international trading system would be probable normative outcomes. This would parallel the social justice ethic of papal encyclicals issued to celebrate anniversaries of the 1891 document, *Rerum Novarum*, the most recent of which is the 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus.* Thus convergence might lead to Western govern-

ments taking on reforms that incorporate aspects of the programmes of political Islam; and by taking a more ethical approach to international trading inequities.[45]

Greening of the West?

Environmental concerns have made such an impact upon Western policy making that the 'greening' metaphor has been liberally used to describe this process. Similarly, I suggest that the 'green' of political Islam, in the sense that religious revivalism is a global phenomenon and concern, can lead to a similar policy impact upon normative behaviour in Western societies. This is exemplified in the idea that the Catholic Church and its Protestant Evangelical counterparts will be engaged in a great struggle in the next century 'with the United States, which, by carrying liberalism to its individualist extreme, represents the idolatry of the self'.[46] Consequently, rather than political Islam being a dangerous monolithic force that has to be contained in the same way as Marxism–Leninism, it represents a regional variation of a global religious revivalism that promulgates a normative perspective critical of liberal democratic norms.[47] Just as Marxism–Lenism drew attention to the deficiencies of unfettered capitalism, and thus provided a cogent theoretical critique that supported the creation of the welfare state and more comprehensive efforts to address the inequities of the global economic system, so too political Islam draws attention to the deficiencies of liberal democracy in the normative sphere, and provides a theoretical way for religious revivalist norms to enter the mainstream of the global body politic.

Finding the likely points of convergence between Western liberal democratic norms and political Islam (as with any regional variation of the global religious revival) is likely to be just as controversial and difficult as it was between Western liberal democracy and Marxism–Leninism. For example, there will be no easy solution to the problem of how secularism can accommodate religious normative frameworks. Despite these difficulties, the appropriate response to political Islam lies not in a renewed Western policy of 'containment', which opposes this 'threat' wherever and whenever it raises its head, and which posits a clear conceptual divide between two irreconcilable political forces; but in a genuine attempt to recognise how Islamist critiques of the West's liberal democratic norms represent a legitimate reopening of questions concerning the appropriate political framework for (post)modern societies. Islamist critiques are essentially attempts to reopen the 'end of history' debate through the notion of a 'new convergence thesis'. Such efforts will not be easy, given the triumphalist cold war assumptions that underpin Western foreign policy making.

Notes

[1] For a definitional discussion of political Islam, see William Shepard, 'Islam and ideology: towards a typology', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19, 1987 pp 307–335.

[2] Quoted in John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, p 175.

[3] Leon Hadar, 'What green peril?', *Foreign Policy*, 72(2), 1993, p 27.

[4] See David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992, p 34.

[5] I will use Fred Halliday's distinction between 'essentialists' and 'contingencists' in describing the debate: 'Review article: the politics of "Islam"—a second look' *British Journal of Political Science*, 25(3), 1995, p 400.

[6] Ibid, p 401.

[7] Benard Lewis, 'Rethinking the Middle East' *Foreign Affairs*, 71(4), 1992, p 116.

[8] Halliday refers to three strands of the contigencist position, 'Review article: the politics of "Islam" ', pp 401–402.

[9] Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, p 169. See also Hadar, 'What green peril?', p 31.

[10] Fred Halliday, ' "Orientalism" and its critics', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 20(2), 1993, pp 145–146.

[11] See Jacinta O'Hagan for discussion over the debate concerning the 'civilisations' argument in international relations. 'Inter-civilisational conflict: a critique of the Huntington thesis', *Working Paper 1994/1*, Department of International Relations, Australian National University, pp 1–19.

[12] Bernard Lewis, 'The roots of muslim rage', *Atlantic Monthly*, 266(3), 1990, pp 47–56.

[13] Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p 107.

[14] Halliday, ' "Orientalism" and its critics', p 150

[15] See Edward W Saul, *Orientalism*, London: Routledge & Kogan Paul, 1978 pp 326–328; and Binder, *Islamic Liberalism*, pp 97–103.

[16] Halliday asserts his own 'enlightenment' pedigree in ' "Orientalism" and its critics' p 146.

[17] Quoted in Ralph Summy, 'Challenging the emergent orthodoxy', in Ralph Summy & Michael Salla (eds), *Why the Cold War Ended: A Range of Interpretations* Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995, pp 5–6.

[18] See Summy & Salla, *Why the Cold War Ended*.

[19] Summy, '*Challenging the emergent orthodoxy*', p 1.

[20] Campbell, *Writing Security*, p 8.

[21] For discussion of the various departments involved in the US foreign policy-making process, see J A Nathan & J K Oliver, *Foreign Policy Making and the American Political System*, Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1987.

[22] Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'The Cold War and its aftermath', *Foreign Affairs*, 71(4), 1992, pp 45–46.

[23] David Pipes, 'There are no moderates: dealing with fundamentalist Islam', *The National Interest*, Fall 1995, p 48.

[24] Samies Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations', *Foreign Affairs*, vol 72, no 3, 1993, p 45.

[25] Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, p xiv.

[26] Hadar, 'What green peril?', p 41.

[27] Pipes, 'There are no moderates', pp 48–57.

[28] For discussion of the economic cost of the Cold War as a critical factor in the demise of the USSR see chapters by Dennis Phillips, Keith Suter Rick Kuhn in Summy & Salla, *Why the Cold War Ended*.

[29] Francis Fukuyama, 'The end of history', *The National Interest*, Summer 1989, pp 3 ff.

[30] The US government has passed legislation that punishes foreign-based companies that do business with Iran. Companies such as Siemans of Germany, and BHP of Australia are unable to participate in projects in Iran and thus join US based companies who have already been banned from working in the Islamic Republic.

[31] 'There are no moderates', p 57.

[32] Esposito, *The Islamic Threat*, p 189. See also John Esposito & James Piscatori, 'Democratisation and Islam', *Middle East Journal*, 45(3), 1991, pp 427–440; and Hadar, 'What green peril?', p 42.

[33] Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World*, London: Routledge, 1993, pp 175–77.

[34] *Cf*, Hadar, 'What green peril?' p 38.

[35] Quoted in Campbell, *Writing Security*, p 25.

[36] Ibid, p 27.

[37] 'Futuyama, The end of history', p 3.

[38] For discussion of this argument, see Rick Kuhn, 'Whose Cold War?', in Summary & Salla, *Why the Cold War Ended*, pp 153–170.

[39] 'Islam and liberal democracy', *Atlantic Monthly*, 269(2), 1993, p 91. See also Pipes, 'There are no moderates', p 49.

[40] Futuyama, 'The end of history', p 14.

[41] 'The Vatican's foreign policy', *The National Interest*, Summer 1993, p 41.

[42] Halliday, 'Review article: the politics of "Islam" ', p 413.

[43] For such a view of the universal application of liberal democracy, see Esposito & Piscatori, 'Democratisation and Islam',

[44] Such metaphors may also be candidates for the Orientalist dogmas which Said discusses in *Orientalism*, pp 300–301.

[45] For discussion of an ethical approach to North–South problems, see *North South: A Programme for Survival: The Report of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues under the Chairmanship of Willy Brandt*, London: Pan Books, 1980.

[46] Kurth, 'The Vatican's foreign policy', p 52.

[47] For further discussion of 'global fundamentalism' see Bronislaw Misztal & Anson Shupe (eds), *Religion and Politics in Comparative Perspective: Revival of Religious Fundamentalism in East and West*, London: Praeger, 1992.