The US's Attitude towards Political Islam
The Determinants and Interests Controlling the Relationship

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Abstract

The political developments on the international arena, since the late 1970s, have made Islamic movements the focus of American politics in the Arab World and the US was forced to take positions on the new player represented in political Islam. The study intends to explore the nature of the relationship between the United States and the movements of political Islam, as well as to identify the US's doctrine strands behind its policy towards political Islam, especially after the events of September 2001. The paper argues that the American vision of the Arab Worldand political Islam does not start from the perspective of the American endeavor to democratize the countries of the region, or for the sake of the peoples' future. The study concludes that the American approach reveals a different vision from the American interests themselves.

Introduction

The rise of political Islam is one of the most important phenomena that attracts the interest of researchers in the political and social fields since the 70s of the last century. Many names have been given to this phenomenon, such as the Islamic awakening, Islamic renaissance, religious revival and so forth. The international developments in the Arab world have increased the importance of this phenomenon. (Ibahrine 2012, 23). These developments particularly include the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the 1940s, the ideological conflict between the East and the West during and after the Cold War, the Iranian revolution in 1979, the events of September 11, 2001 and the Arab Spring in 2011.

These events produced new actors on the scene. One of the most important of these actors was political Islamic movements, some of which managed to reach power after the events of the Arab Spring like Egypt and Tunisia.This was so after parliamentary and presidential elections led to give the political Islamic movements more presence in Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco (El-Kanbouri2017, 65). Although each model differed from the other and was distinguished by the nature of its political behavior, these movements were all put to the test to prove their true ability to build good relationships with major world powers, especially the United States of America.

Although there is some sort of consensus in US foreign policy toward "radical" Islamic movements that espouse violence in political change, specifically al-Qaeda-linked groups, "moderate Islam" represents a real "dilemma" in shaping and defining US policy toward the Arab World, which the main Islamic movements originated in. The situation is more clearly understandable in the last two decades that witnessed US pressure to implement some political reforms in the Arab region like imposing free parliamentary elections on and to improve human rights conditions. For Washington's thinking and decision-making circles, the historical equation that the Arab political regimes are working on is "We -Arab governments- or political Islam." (Schmah2013.

Beginning of the Cold War to the September11 events, the American political choice was clear: preferring allying with Arab friend governments, overlooking human rights abuses, and refusing to allow political Islam to come to power for fear of threatening US interests (the Iranian revolution model and its discourse; as well as Omar Al-Bashir regime in Sudan). However, this political agenda of the US did not prevent the overlapping interests of political Islam with the US at times, as in the case of the "Afghan jihad" against communism, when political Islam, Arab governments and the United States met in a single trench against the Soviet Union.(Al-Sayyid 2003, 188). In the world of politics, friendships turn and relations change according to interests of countries and conditions.

After the events of September11, a new American political awareness was established in think tanks like RAND and Brookings Institutes, and the US administration starting from George W. Bush's second term accepted and made it the centerpiece of its vision for the Arab World.

This awareness is based on the fact that al-Qaeda is a product of overlapping problemsmainly from Arab internal crises and that al-Qaeda is the "flaming ball" that Arab governments threw into the Western world, namely the United States. It is also based on the fact that the most effective weapon in the face of terrorism is throwing that ball back to Arabs and making real pressure to change their situation. Reforming the Arab world is the most effective weapon in the face of terrorism. Political Islam was at the heart of this reform plan, which the United States sought to implement[1]. In this context, Steven Brooke says "While the Bush Administration kept Islamist movements largely on the sidelines, throughout 2006 and 2007 a series of articles appeared which advocated greater engagement between Washington and Islamist movements, particularly in the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. On one side were those arguing that the United States should expand efforts to engage with Islamist groups and bring more pressure on Arab regimes to democratize (Brooke 2013, 18)." And after presenting the debates in these articles on how to deal with political Islam movements Brooke summarizes "Two basic policy recommendations flowed from the accommodationists' analysis. First, the United States should begin a process of reaching out to Islamist groups that have rejected violence. Second, The United States should, at the same time, encourage its regional allies to implement serious democratic reforms, including (but not limited to) allowing non-violent Islamists into the political process. The United States should also take a much more vocal stand whenever Islamists are persecuted and arrested without cause (Ibid 20)."

Based on the above, this study aims to identify the nature of the relationship between the United States and political Islam, and the doctrine through, which the United States moves towards groups of political Islam and Muslim world in general, especially after the events of September11 2001, and then to identify the options of the United States in this regard. The objectives of this study can be formulated in the following questions: What is the doctrine that formed the features of that relationship after September11? How did the United States deal with the movements of moderate political Islam?

In order to answer these questions, the study assumes the following hypotheses: 1) the nature of the relationship between the United States and political Islam in front of it Muslim Brotherhood varies according to each US administration.[2] 2) The US position on political Islam ranges from exclusion to inclusion them in political process, and we build our hypotheses given the reality that the US doesn't treat Moderate political Islam movements as allies like liberal movements (e.g liberal parties in Iraq, Kurdish parties in Syria..ect), at the same time, the US has not designate the biggest political Islam movement (the MB) as a terrorist group.

To address the subject of the study, the following approacheswill be used:The analytical descriptive approach is applied that suits the purposes of the study. This method opens the door to describe and analyze the relationship and its determinants between the Islamic movements and their relationship with the United States.The historical approach also contributes understanding and studying the emergence of political Islam, as well as the history of the relationship of the United States with political Islam.This study doesn't use case study method, it talks generally on political Islam movements and parties, and however, it gives a special reference to Muslim Brotherhood, which is the considered among the biggest Islamic organizations in the world with political agenda.

The study includes two main variables the dependent ones, which are; the US's attitude towards political Islam and the relationship between the two parties while the independent variables constitutes from the determinants and interests of the US controlling that relationship.In a study written by Daniel Byman and Sara Bjerg Moller in 2016 titled "*The United States and the Middle East:Interests, Risks, and Costs*", the authors listed main five goals and interests of the U.S in the region namely; oil, nuclear proliferation, security of Israel, democratization, and terrorism and counterterrorism (Byman and Moller 2016, 7-24).

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[1]This view gotinterests after September 11, 2001 until president Obama first term, but after the MB collapsed in Egypt in 2013and the ISIS appeared in Syria and Iraq 2013-2014, it has declined especially with the presidency of Donald Trump.

[2] For example, Barack Obama took steps to accommodate the MB and its leaders were invited to attend Obama's speech at Cairo University in 2010 while his successor Donald Trump worked to designate it a terrorist group.

In our study we focus on non-violent political Islam movements, and we mean here those movements who used peaceful means to achieve their goals and they accept to participate in political life including elections, and the most notable movement in this meaning the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and its branches worldwide. Violent groups like al-Qaeda-and ISIS are not included and religious and preaching groups who don't have political activities are excluded even though they are peaceful like Tablighi Jamaat and some Salfi groups.

With regard to the theoretical approach of the study, we will rely on the containment theory that goes back to the American historian and diplomat George Kennan, and his theory in the Cold War in the late 1940's under President Harry Truman, specifically in 1947, in his cable on the Soviet behavior, a policy based on attracting the countries of the world to the US side in order not to fall into Soviet influence at the time, and accordingly it is classified according to that understanding as a defense policy, unlike the offensive policy of Eisenhower aimed at extending control over the European colonial influence areas in Africa and Asia to protect imperial interests.

Containment is a pre-emptive action and a procedure followed towards peaceful states and entities in order to avoid the possibility of the emergence of hostility from them. It is thus an action against regional expansion by force aimed at overcoming the influence of rogue states that have a totalitarian system.

The first appearance of the containment theory and policy was in the realist school doctrine of American foreign policy known (as Real Politics), through the most prominent representative of this trend, Henry Kissinger, and it is fair to say that the containment strategy served the US to the greatest extent. This is because it created everything that would reduce the dangers of the potential opponent, eliminate the causes of its dangers, and advance the tactics of dealing with the opponents and confronting their plots and absorbing and taming them.

We will rely on this theory in order to understand the nature of the relationship between the United States and political Islam, as the former tries to contain the later for several reasons especially in light of the war on Islamic extremism.

Shaping the US doctrine on political Islam

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the socialist system led to the emergence of the United States as the power of a dominant imperial empire seeking to dominate, expand and impose a new world order. The strategic transformations witnessed a change in the American conception of international political reality that prevailed during the Cold War era. It was based on two principles namely: the principle of "containment of the geopolitical sphere of communism, and the principle of "deterrence" of traditional Soviet and nuclear power, depending on each case (Milton-Edwards 2005, 49).Thus, the United States fell into an ideological and political vacuum that led to multiple visions of the future. President George H. W. Bush built the idea of a "new world order" to ensure American hegemony and control over the world.

In this context, Francis Fukuyama's thesis seems fitting, which heralds the ultimate triumph of democracy, market capitalism, the proclamation of the end of history and the emergence of radical Islam (Fukuyama 1992, 132). The U.S. foreign policy adopted a new vision of the nature of future threats after the Cold War, the concept of "rogue states'" to designate regimes that employed terrorism as an instrument of state policy and attempted to acquire weapons of mass destruction in pursuit of policy goals such as Iraq, Iran, Libya and North Korea (Blum 2000, 78). This illustrates Samuel Huntington's thesis on the "clash of civilizations," which adopts a culturalist approach that stating the global conflict after the end of the Cold War will be neither economic nor geostrategic, but a civilizational one. Moreover, Huntington states that cultural groups would replace the Cold War blocks, and the lines between civilizations would become the central lines of conflict in global politics. Huntington considered Islam to be the dark power of the world because of the Muslim tendency towards conflict and violence, and he predicted that the future conflict would be between Islam and the West(Huntington1996, 149).This culturalist thesis is compatible with the traditional orientalist view of Islam.Similarly, the famous orientalist, Bernard Lewis, who had a profound impact on the US foreign policy and policymakers in Washington, wrote a letter to the US, after the September 11 attacks, about the Arab World in 2001(Pew Research Center 2006). His letter was simple but strict: "If the peoples of the Arab World continue on their present path, the suicide bomber may become a metaphor for the whole region, and there will be no escape from a downward spiral of hate and spite, rage and self-pity, poverty and oppression" (Lewis 2003, 129). His letter to the US on how to deal with the region was clear and firm: "Be firm or leave the region." Lewis's letter was called "the Lewis Doctrine."

The Wall Street Journal explains Lewis's theory of "implanting democracy in the failed Arab World to eliminate terrorism," a message that would be adopted by neoconservatives who had taken over the reins of administration in the US since George W. Bush took office (Wall Street Journal2004).

In this context, the terms of Islamism and post-Islamism emerged in significant strategic and geopolitical conditions. The events of September 11, 2001 called upon Islamism and beyond to seek a strategy to confront and contain the emerging Islamic Jihadism. The American administration and the European administrations adopted an approach based on the separation between "moderates" and "extremists", with the rise of the neoconservative approach, which emphasized that the dictatorial regimes and religious culture of the Arab region represented a fundamental engine of extremism, violence and terrorism (Abah2004217). Moreover, they concluded that the solution lies in changing the culture of the region and reforming the nature of the authoritarian local regimes in order to restructure the political and religious fields and ensure a safe transition from authoritarianism to democracy. This reform seeks the inclusion of many groups that had been excluded, suppressed or marginalized by previous regimes and governments. Islamists constituted the majority of these groups.

The spread of the post-political Islam after the September 11 attacksclearly indicates that the United States entered the area of political Islam in the framework of post-Islamism transformations. This strategy aims to engage them in the authoritarian national state structure and to push them to accept democracy and pluralism as a protective wall against extremism, violence and terrorism. The theories of political integration were based on the hypothesis of the inclusion of moderates in political and public life. "The hypothesis was discussed at length from the point of view of the inclusion of Islamic parties in the framework of the limited political liberalization processes in the Arab World dominated by the state (Schwedler2006, 115)."

Under the weight of the events of September 11, political Islam in its moderate form has entered within the framework of the national state, with the aim of fighting and containing jihadism. The United States and Arab and Islamic governments dealt with the MB which is the most prominent representative of political Islam with the role of firewall against communist, left-wing communist, nationalist challenges, dangers during the Cold War, radical Islam and jihadism in the age of globalization. According to Eric Trager: "In the decade following the September 11 attacks, Western analysts' search for a "moderate Islamist" alternative to "al-Qaeda" often led them to the MB, whose discourse against terrorism and faith in elections were attractive (Trager 2013, 175).

The perspective of moderation or extremism and the inclusion of moderation would lead to the emergence of post-Islamism within the framework of regimes that became semi-authoritarian. These regimes made democratic electoral changes where political Islam was strongly present in all the post-September 11 elections. The Turkey AK Party won in 2002 and the Islamic Parties Alliance in Pakistan won the National Council elections for the first time in the history of Pakistan in 2002. In Morocco, the Justice and Development Party won 42 seats in parliament and became the largest parliamentary bloc in the opposition in the 2002 elections (Milton-Edwards2011, 121).Moreover, if we follow the list of Arab and Islamic countries in which elections took place after the events of September 11, we will find clear successes for Islamic movements.

Arab and Islamic authoritarian regimes soon regained control of integration paths through the use of moderates. Moderation is long known as an antithesis of radicalism and extremism, thus, regimes subjected moderates to political authority, in an attempt to enter them in its space unconditionally and without change. In theory, moderation requires a process of change that can be described as a movement from radicalism to moderation, every departure from exclusionary practices equates to an increase in moderation. However, the political participation of the MB in the Arab world emphasizes that the benefits from structural openness only lies in the context of a semi-authoritative game control, which is working to includethe group to become part of a system and play according to the rules of the game (semi-authoritarian). As seen easily that rules are determined and controlled by existing regimes (Schwedler2006, 69). This process is what Samuel Huntington calls "the exchange of participation and moderation", a kind of "democratic deal," whereby opposition groups benefit from political openness in case they commit to "moderation in tactics and politics" by agreeing to renounce violence and revolutionary actions, and accept the existing form of social, economic and political institutions (Huntington1991, 240).

The problem of integrating moderates became more complex after the demise of the "September attacks symptoms" and the declaration of the end of the "War on Terror" (Abrahms 2012, 373). This led to the rise of political Islam, where local authoritarian policies returned, which was based on their vision that equalizes Islam with violence and terrorism, and deals with the diversity of Islamic movements as quantitative differences rather than qualitative. This vision made the concept of Islamic moderation worthless, considering Islam as against political modernity, especially democracy.

Islamic moderation, according to the orientalist and culturalist perspective, means abandoning Islam and entering to the horizon of secularization and liberal democracy. This is manifested in Samuel Huntington's theories of the clash of civilizations (Huntington1991, 182), and the theories of Islamophobia, and the allegations of oppression of minorities, as orientalists claim, like Bernard Lewis expresses in his writings (Lewis 2003, 32, 59, 199).

Following the paths of electoral democracy in a semi-authoritarian context reveals the impossibility of full integration of new players including Islamists. According to Nathan Brown, political Islam appears to be participating in pointless elections. They basically engage in the context of the game of participate but not win: "The semi-authoritarian regimes are those who allow some space for the opposition to organize itself and to compete, but deny them any possibility of forming a government (Roy 2017). In a semi-authoritarian environment, independent social organizations may emerge and even flourish, but they are not allowed to step far into the world of politics without risking subject to repression." (Brown2012, 207).

The debate on political Islam is divided into two major categories; the first one includes the supporters of the "They're all the same" theory which views "radical Islam" as a broad, cohesive and deeply rooted movement in religion rather than traditional politics. The second group includes the supporters of the theory of "They are all different" that considers the field of Islamic politics as divided between a wide range of competing ideological and political spectrums (Massad 2014, 152). The proponents of the "They're all the same" theory view "radical Islam" as a cohesive onesimilar to al-Qaeda. They further claim that the MB plays different roles, but ultimately these groups are more similar than being different. The proponents of this theory argue that there may be differences in tactics among these groups, but they ultimately share the same goals in religion and civilization, and pursue the same top strategic goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate (Milton-Edwards 2005, 119).

In this context, moderate political Islamic movements have been subjected to a double misunderstanding that has led to a vicious campaign against their ideology and organizational entity. On the one hand, ISIS describes them as hypocrites, accusing them of abandoning their Islamic identity and depending on the West. On the other hand, the international community and the Arab national state describe them with malice and hypocrisy by courting radical Islamic groups (Roy2006, 52). Thus, political Islam is under siege because of confusion and using reductionist approaches to understand them, and seems incapable of dealing with the dual challenge, that is a logical result in the context of the transformation of political Islam. The MB, for example, is a religious movement based on its overlapping religious and political spheres where the group has an interpretive capability that combines reformist and revolutionary approaches.

Political Islam and the most important movements:

Political Islam refers to Islamic political movements that seek power and implement *siyāsīshar'iyya* (doctrine of governance and politics) in harmony with the Islamic rulings in the scope of governance. In other words, the principle refers to the adoption of a philosophy of governance and legislation derived from Islamic law and based on the Quranic texts and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad.

The main idea on which the political Islamic movements converged is that Islam is a comprehensive religious and worldly system, and thus, these movements can exercise political life and access to power through the use of various mechanisms, including democratic means. Political Islam calls to carry out comprehensive reforms from a strictly religious perspective. The calls of political Islam were reflected in their literatures, discourses and slogans, the most prominent slogan is "Islam is the solution" (Al-Ashmawi2020).Based on the historical depth of the process of integration between religion and politics, and the essence of many Islamic groups' discourses that emerged throughout the Islamic history, it can be said that political Islam is not a new phenomenon except in the naming and the way of organization.

On the other side, "non-Islamic movements and ideologies believe that political Islam aims to reach power, exclude other currents from political action, and establish a theocratic state.(Bradley 2012, 52)" Although the combination of religion and politics is a phenomenon rooted in the earliest beginnings of the Islam and it was the foundation to establish the states of Rashidun Caliphate, Umayyads, Abbasids, and Ottomans, the term political Islam refers to modern Islamic movements, and has been expressed with fundamentalist Islamic movements (El-Kanbouri 2017, 68).

As for political Islam in its modern form, it was a result of intellectual conflict and confrontation with different civilizations and belief systems in its direct presence in the Arab region as colonialists, or in its presence as a political ideology adopted by internal groups, but derived from the outside the region. That situation motivated the Islamists to form organizations similar in their structure to the communist, liberal and socialist parties but contradict with them in ideological essence and approaches to deal with internal political, economic, cultural, and social issues (Adams1983, 126) (Pipes 1983, 87).

The MB, founded by Hassan Al-Banna in 1928, is the most prominent movements of political Islam in the 20th century. It aims to establish an Islamic state whose law is derivedfrom Islamic law, which is considered –in their view-superior to all Western laws and institutions (communism or liberal democracy (Al-Abdin 1989, 221).

The MB movement spread rapidly in Egypt and the Arab world and established many branches. Sayyid Qutb is the most important theorists of the movement. The MB'sdiscourse focuses on the intellectual and practical implications and perceptions of the way that conflict management and governance are carried out. The founder of MB says in his message to the Fifth Conference in February, 1939: "We believe that the provisions and teachings of Islam are comprehensive and regulate the affairs of people in the world and the hereafter, and those who think that these teachings only deal with worship and spirituality without other aspects, are wrong, in this thought, Islam is a doctrine and worship, homeland, nationality, spirituality, work, Quran and sword. (Al-Bana) "[3]

In the political matter, most of the movements of political Islam support the vision of the establishment of the Islamic State and the rule of Sharīʻa (Islamic law), although they differ in the legal methodology, jurisprudential principles, textual sources, interpretation methods, intellectual improvements, environmental factors and the evaluation of violence.

Hamas in Palestine, the Lebanese Hezbollah, and the Algerian Salvation Front are the most important movements of contemporary political Islam. At the state level, Saudi Arabia can be counted as a representative of Sunni political Islam while Islamic Republic of Iran is representative of Shiite (Twelver) political Islam[4].

In dealing with the movements of political Islam or with Islamic system of countries, the US adopts an approach that conforms to the pragmatic philosophy, on the basis of which political trends change according to international political circumstances, and according to American goals and paths. According to this perspective, the USA never has a consistent policy towards the movements of political Islam. In the historical context of this vision and policies, the nature of the relationship of the US to political Islam can be divided into three main phases: the first phase, before the events of September 11; the second phase that followed September 11until Obama took office in 2009 and the outbreaks of the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011; and the last phase after the Arab Spring.

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[3] All Hasan Al-Bana's messages can be found in Arabic at the CIA website in the following link: https://www.cia.gov/library/abbottabad-compound/BD/BD9016646485943DB0C28DD2846B548C%E2%8C%90%C2%BD%C6%92%E2%82%A7%CE%98%20%C6%92%CE%98%C2%A5%CE%A9%C6%92%CE%A9%20%C3%91%C2%BD%CE%B4%20%C6%92%CE%98%C3%A1%CE%B4%C6%92.pdf

[4] The main two sects in Islam are Sunni, which represents about 70% of Muslims and it includes different currents such as Wahhabism or Salafism, Sufism, and Asha'ariand the second sect is Shiite, which is mainly concentrated in Iran and Iraq and it includes Twelver, Isma'ilism and Alawites.

First phase[5]

The relationships between the US and political Islam date back to the 1950s. President Eisenhower met with senior leaders of MB around the world, including Sa'id Ramadan, son-in-law of Hassan al-Banna, and the father of the academician and philosopher Tariq Ramadan. In Europe in the 1950s and 1960s, the MB was seen as an advanced tool and spearhead in the Arab World to confront communism and the Soviet powers (Abduallah 2019). In 1978, MB thought represented an ideological starting point for many of Muslim fighters "*mujāhidīn*s" in Afghanistan, before they became more radical.

During the Cold War and its end, particularly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the US had an attitude towards political Islam that was formed based on using political Islam -in all its forms- against the Soviets. Saudi Arabia through charitable organizations, Egypt through the official religious agencies of the state, and other countries supported and facilitated volunteers' travel to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets there (Sageman, 2004, 57). These volunteers, known as Arab Afghans, later formed the kernel of al-Qaeda.

American policy in this phase relied on support for these groups, even though there were hostile trends of political Islam and jihadist movements, American policy relied on them because they played a supporting role in the war against the Soviets, that war was the central war of the US at the time. The US strategies were built to counter the dogmatic enemy, and all other sub-policies worked to serve the strategy of confrontation with that enemy, including how to deal with political Islam movements.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the world entered a new phase characterized by American unilateralism and the end of the bipolar phase, the new phase necessitated the reformulation of the US strategy to be based on the new situation, where the enemy (the Soviet Union) disappeared, that situation required reordering priorities.

At the time, the American vision of the movements of political Islam was formed as they would be the next enemy. The theories of the clash of civilizations took a great place in the media and political circulation. Samuel Huntington pointed out that the Cold War was a civil war between parties within one civilization while the next war would be a civilizational conflict between the civilized represented by the US and Europe and the barbarity represented by Islam. In his book *Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington emphasizes the idea of danger based on civilizational difference with its intellectual, ideological and behavioral dimensions derived from it. He further claims that reaffirming Islam -in any sectarian form- means rejecting European and American influence over society, politics and local values and this Islamic awakening is a rejection of the West (Huntington1996, 198).

The predominance of theories of the clash of civilizations and the Islamic threat came for several reasons (Bonney2008) (Dusanic and Plamen2009, 96):

- Absence of the direct enemy, the strategies of the Cold War era with all its political, economic and intellectual ramifications were built on this base. That required finding an alternative enemy to invest and employ the abilities, which had been built for four decades, represented by the interests of industrial capital, especially weapons, trade and even media.
- Confirming the superiority of cultural values achieved by the USA by comparing the self with a backward model according to the American vision.
- Creating a perception of underdeveloped and hostile entity to justify the imperialist spread of the US for different reasons like defending the American model.
- Achieve psychological mobilization of the masses to support the global policies of the US with its military and economic instruments at the international level through the diagnosis of the danger and magnify it (Ibahrine2012, 95). The above reasons are based on political justifications and interests.
- The last and most important reason or the intellectual consideration is that there is certainty based on religious and cultural foundations that the religious and cultural differences are the most important factors to stimulate conflicts. The argument is the basis of Huntington's thesis and the neoconservative current.

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[5]This phase witnessed the emergence and growth of political Islam movements and their roles and influences were not certain because of that it's relatively long phase.

In his book, *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests*, Fawaz Gergespoints out that culture plays an important role in shaping the views and attitudes of decision-makers in America towards the Islamic world. He says: "Although the threat of war from the Islamic world to the West had faded by the end of the seventeenth century, the religious and intellectual challenge of Islam still captured the imagination of many in the West."Fromthe point of view of the writer, most cultural perceptions of most Americans about Muslims and Arabs indicate that they are dangerous, untrustworthy, undemocratic, barbaric, and primitive(Gerges1999, 52)!

Gerges points out that based on opinion polls and measurement of attitudes, many Americans view Islam as a dangerous and hostile culture that threatens Western values and interests,. He further explains: "The American view of Muslims is likely to be rooted, to some extent, in the religious roots of this country. It is probably due to the historical conflict between Christians and Muslims, the confrontation that spread over generations through history, literature, folklore, media and academic lectures (Ibid, 57)."

The civilizational and religious conflict is not a new one, as some Islamic scholars say; it is an extension of the historical conflict between the West and Islam and the Crusades marked the beginning of it. Therefore, the American vision of the currents of political Islam at this stage was based on religious difference and that Islam as a whole is a threat to America. This vision is influenced by the concept of clash of civilizations. This does not mean that the political and theoretical scene in the US is free of currents that do not believe in such theories, but it indicates to the mainstream in dealing with the currents of political Islam.

The Second phase

The events of September 11 marked a turning point in the American vision of political Islam, the religious affiliation of the planners and perpetrators of these attacks as they represented one of the currents of political Islam (jihadist, Al-Qaeda) helped to enhance the existing vision toward political Islam. The attacks came in conjunction with existence of new residents in the White House who have a neoconservative political vision based on ideological perceptions that derive some of its justifications and behavior from religious ideas related to religious conflict and disagreement with the other. The religious doctrine emphasizes that the Kingdom of God on earth considers that America was in the mind of God for specific goals since the beginning of creation and the ensuing apostolic vision to save the world from evils (Anderson 2007, 312).

The two previous considerations were reflected in the way that the movements of political Islam were dealt with by the US administration, which put all these movements in one box, despite the differences between these movements in terms of their adoption of violence or in the geographical scope of their activities, like (Hamas), which has armed activities in a narrow and specific region or (Al-Qaeda) case, which has a transnational international activities and agenda.

Although the main threat came from international organizations, specifically al-Qaeda, which planned and carried out the September11 attacks, the interaction of the neoconservatives' values with the attacks gave rise to a clear tendency towards a single classification of all movements of political Islam and placed them as enemy. This was reflected in the US strategy of preemptive war to avoid new attacks, and the adoption of military option as a priority in dealing with these movements (Halper and Johnathan 2004, 178) (Porch2006, 1072).

The American war on terrorism provided an opportunity for many research centers and think tanks to deeply analyze the phenomenon of political Islamic movements and to find the differences between them, and provide intellectual explanations for the phenomenon of Islamic extremism in order to draw a clearer map of the Islamic forces.

Among these important research think tanks was RAND Corporation , which issued a report in 2004. The report presented a set of recommendations to the US administration, based on a lengthy study in 570 pages, and it was clear that the report took into account a number of issues that distinguish each Islamic current from another. The report also attempted to explain the reasons behind Islamic extremismto the decision-makers and the range of problems with the Islamists' relationship with their regimes, and confirming the existence of moderate political Islamists with national agendas (Rabasa 2004, 246).

One of the reasons for the American pursuit of other scenarios in dealing with political Islam, and the attempt to isolate radical Islam and jihadism, was the awareness of American decision-makers that American society and taxpayers cannot afford to engage US forces in time-open wars and it is unlikely that it will end with a knockout (Fattah 2010, 12).

Accordingly, the long confrontation between the USA and Islamic terrorism requires first to develop a set of solutions that belong to the world of political relations and the field of development, in order to qualify moderate Islam to be able to provide an attractive model for its societies, especially the younger generations. The report suggested providing platforms for Islamist moderates to make them alternative choice to extremist movements.

The most important recommendations in the RAND[6] 2004 study can be summarized as follows:[7]
1- Support and encourage Muslim civil society groups to call for moderation and modernity.
2- Involve Islamists in the political process in their countries.
3- Strengthen Islamists' relations with the armies of their countries.
4- Provide opportunities for Islamists to benefit from information and technology programs.
5- Reform Islamic schools since many schools offer radical education.
6- Create economic opportunities in Muslim countries, especially for the younger generation ((Rabasa 2004, 446).

It is clear that the US moved away from putting all political Islam in one box, namely Islamic extremism. The good relations with the MB allowed some research centers like Rand and others to discuss political Islam from a different perspective, in the interest of enabling moderate Islam to participate in the political process, away from the complexities involved in such a process, and the range of differences between the countries, especially in the Arabic countries (Martini 2012, 28).

In Obama's first term, the new administration's different approach toward political Islam began, this approach would get more complicated due to the developments of the "Arab Spring" and the emergence of new terrorist forces on the scene of the Arab Spring countries represented by "Islamic State In Iraq and the Levant" (ISIS), which would gain pledge of allegiance "Bayʿah" from other Islamic organizations in Arab and non-Arab countries.

The Third phase

The speech of US President Barack Obama at Cairo University in Egypt in June 2009 represented turning point away from the neoconservative policy in his view of Islam as he was delivering his speech from Arab and Islamic land, his conciliatory speech attempts to distinguish between Islam as a religion and Islamic movements that take Islam as a cover to carry out their plans through violence (Gerges 2013, 77).

This speech ushered in a new vision of US engagement with the movements of political Islam imposed by the failure of Bush's strategy in confronting political Islam(Nakhleh 2015). The strategic plan of adopting a policy of "soft power" to achieve the goals of the US, several recommendations were issued by American research centers calling for the transformation of American policy (from demobilization to deradicalization). The latter is the title of a study presented by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding in January 2010[8], which provides an assessment of the strategy pursued by the Bush administration during its eight years at the White House towards Islamic movements. It provides more successful alternative vision for the Barack Obama administration with Islamic movements whose role has recently increased in the political arena of the Islamic world. This study classified the movements of political Islam into two groups, one violent extremist with international dimensions, and the second a moderate who believes in democracy.The study recommends dealing with moderate and anti-violent movements (Fattah 2010, 50).

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[6]RAND Corporation is an American non-profit think tank and it is among top 7 powerful think tank worldwide,think tanks affect American foreign policy-makers in five distinct ways: by generating original ideas and options for policy, by supplying a ready pool of experts for employment in government, by offering venues for high-level discussions, by educating U.S. citizens about the world, and by supplementing official efforts to mediate and resolve conflict. For more details, please refer to the following links: https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/p/rem/15506.htmv and https://thebestschools.org/features/most-influential-think-tanks/

[7] For full text of the study, refer to the following link: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2004/RAND_MG246.pdf

[8] For full text of the study, refer to the following link: https://www.ispu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2010_The-US-and-Political-Islamism.pdf

The wave of Arab revolutions raised fears of the political Islamists taking power in these countries and the potential threats to US interests in the Arab and Muslim worlds. The most influential example is Egypt which is a strategic ally and America's most important country in the Arab World after Israel as Egypt is the biggest country in the region, and historically leads the Arab states' policies in major issues especially the Palestinian issue, its relationship with Israel and its geographic location, in addition to the trade and economic ties with the US. The analysis of the Egyptian political, economic and social reality confirms the rise of the forces of political Islam represented first by the MB, which has broad bases.

One of the reasons of emerging and increasing the presence of political Islam is the bad economic situations under the ruling regimes including Egypt. In an authoritarian reality that started from 1952 to 2010, the military elite dominated power and controlled wealth whilst the people live in poverty. In Egypt for example, Jalal Amin discusses the economic situation there in his book entitled "*The Story of the Egyptian Economy from Muhammad Ali to the Mubarak Era*" Amin says about Egypt that it was relatively stable economically during the monarchy period that ended with the army coup in 1952, when Egypt fell into a debt trap and approached the brink of bankruptcyat the beginning of the 1990s, as Egypt's short-term debt in 1970 did not exceed US$ 148 million, and it doubled about eight times in five years to reach US$ 1,168 million in 1975 (Amin2012, 65). In that period, Egypt witnessed a harsh economic life, which during witnessed what is known as the 1977 Egyptian bread riots.

In such anxious reality in which disparities emerge sharply and became a breeding ground for the growth of Islamic movements, the Islamists invested in this environment to increase their activities despite the prohibition by the authorities.

At this stage, the US was aware of the influence of Islamic movements especially the MB on the Egyptian streets; because of that the US aimed to balance when it deals with them.The option of open confrontation with Islamists and supporting liberal opposition forces was not a good option to achieve success.This option could lead to strengthen the role of the Islamists and produce radical forces that believe in violence, whichwas not desired by the US (Ibid33).

The US wants an Islamic model similar to the Turkish model, in which the AKP gained power without creating hostility with the West by maintaining the foundations of a secular political system established by Atatürk(Kuru 2013, 22). This prompted the US not to oppose the expansion of Turkish influence in the Arab World that is currently playing roles in political changes and pushes for the adoption of the Turkish model.That was stated by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in his visit to Egypt and then Tunisia on September, 2011 by saying that "Islam and Democracy don't contradict and the success of the electoral process in Tunisia will assure the world that Islam and democracy can go hand in hand. (Ibid16) "Erdogan also clearly stated in Egypt that secularism is the best way for Egypt after the revolution(Egypt Independent 2011).

The American approach after the Arab revolutions is to contain the movements of political Islam in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Syria by trying to preserve the foundations and institutions of the state without drastic change, and without disbanding the military and security institutions and not to create a security vacuum (Wahhab2019). The Americans supposed to learn from the Iraqi experience in dealing with the variables and their attempt to preserve a large part of the state institutions only changing the heads and some symbols.

In Egypt, the army was neutral to compel President Hosni Mubarak to give up power. Here, the logical question seems to be: Why did the military establish control over power? It is likely that any prolongation of the conflict between the authorities and the protesters in Tahrir Square appeared to reach the zero-sum equation. But what is actually considered is that this environment will be appropriate for the Islamists to control the movement of the street, thus pushing the US-backed military institution to be part of the process of control and prevent the Islamic forces to reach power in Egypt.

In another place regarding this phase, it should be notedthat the US administrationdid not mind the existence of a prominent role for the Shiite armed forces in Iraq before or after the US left Iraq (Arango2017). The Barack Obama administration also did not view those militias as representing Islamic terrorism, although they knew that the Iraqi army cannot be relied on to bring about civil peace, and that Iran would tend to use sectarian militias as a proxy and alternative to the Iraqi army.

The rise of the Islamic State during Obama's second term and then the election of President Trump complicated Washington's view of political Islam. During this period, the US was loath to do anything that might offend those countries—Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt—on which it relies for implementing its anti-ISIS strategy. Cooperation on counterterrorism, which in the view of Washington's regional partners includes the MB, was the centerpiece of Trump's Riyadh speech in May 2017 (Hamid 2017).

These developments led to less enthusiasm for dealing with political Islam because of the stumble of the Arab Spring and the plight and fall of political Islam especially in Egypt. So, a tougher stance was taken by Trump towards the Islamic component in general and the political one in particular (Hawley2019). Trump's discourse is filled with clear racist rhetoric against Muslims and so-called "radical Islam," a term that has been increasingly used in Western circles instead of the term used "political Islam."

The hostile attitudes towards Muslims were reflected in the decision to ban the entry of nationals of seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the US, statements against Arab governments, especially Saudi Arabia, and then a close alliance of Arab governments that anti-political Islam such as the alliance with Sisi in Egypt, Mohammed bin Salman in Saudi Arabia and Mohammed bin Ziad in the UAE and pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal signed during his predecessor Barack Obama (The National2018).

During his meeting with the Egyptian president Sisi in April 2019, Trump expressed his openness to designate the MB a foreign terrorist organization (Wall Street Journal 2019).However, the State and Defense departments opposed the idea because of the weak legal justification. Additionally, the MB does not fitthe legal definition of a terrorist group and labeling them as a terrorist organization could have unintended consequences in allied countries where the MB has prominent political parties (The New York Times 2019).

It is noticeable that the Trump administration's policy in the Arab World was influenced by the proposals and approaches of the neoconservatives. It might be assumed that his approach confirms his connection with one of the symbols of this trend, one of his advisers, Lebanese-American WalidFares, contributed strongly to Trump's campaign (Lynfield2016). It should be emphasized in this context that the neoconservative dominance of the administration promises to repeat the past mistakes, despite the accumulation of practical and knowledge expertise on the Middle East (Weilandt2017).

Conclusion:

The US position on the movements of political Islam varied in several phases. The driving force behind the intellectual vision of remaining constant is that Islam poses a danger and a structure that generates violence and contradicts with the cultural values of the West.

From the initial stage of American interferencein the region to the increasing strategic and economic interest after World War II, the US was not against political Islam in its traditional form such as authoritarian regimes or organizations such as the MB in Egypt, Sudan, or the religious authorities in Iran. The US encouraged these movements to stand up in the face of communist expansion or balancing nationalist currents.

In the late 1970s, the first variable emerged with the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the hostage crisis at the US Embassy in Tehran. This prompted a policy of dual containment of Islamic Iran and national Iraq to encourage war between them (Franssen and Morton2002). On the other hand, the US supported jihadist political Islamic movements in Afghanistan in cooperation with traditional Islamic regimes to drain the Soviets.

With the American unilateralism in the 1990s and the Americans' attempt to redistribute areas of influence and hegemony and reorganize regimes, the clash of civilizations emerged as an intellectual and theoretical framework for an alternative enemy of the Soviet Union, that alternative carries the roots of hostility to Western civilization.

With the rise of the neocons coinciding with the events of September11 2001, the US adopted a obvious hostility toward Islamic movements and entities, the wars in the Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the White House speech, behavior and political trend showed that hostility. In October 2005, the US President George W. Bush, in a speech addressed to the American people and the world media, explained the general outlines of his government's foreign policy, stressing that fighting global terrorism will require more American sacrifices, and accusing Islamic militants of trying to control Iraq as a step towards establishing a "militant Islamic empire." "the militants believe that controlling one country will rally the Muslim masses,

Enabling them to overthrow all moderate governments in the region, and establish a radical Islamic empire that spans from Spain to Indonesia" Bush said in his speech to the National Endowment for Democracy(White House 2005). The politics of war and direct confrontation with Islamists in Afghanistan and Iraq were costly for the Bush administration and included many mistakes. These mistakes prompted Obama administration to adopt a conciliatory discourse with the forces of political Islam, Obama's speech at Cairo University was its most important moment.

Throughout his first four years in office, Obama was reiterating his commitment to rapprochement with Muslims and changing their negative attitudes toward the United States. The new American president used to repeat over and over again that "the United States is not, and never will be, in conflict with Islam." In his early efforts to rapprochement with Arabs and Muslims soon after his inauguration, Obama gave his first television interview to Al Arabiya.

In his June 2009 speech at Cairo University, Obama touched upon critical challenges and proposed a new way to manage relations between the United States and the Muslim world. And when Obama embarked on his first term in office, he had to repair the damage the Bush administration had inflicted on the United States' relationship with Muslims worldwide. Obama sought a fresh relationship "based upon mutual interest and mutual respect" and "based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive, and need not be in competition (NPR2009)."

The period of the Arab revolutions and the emergence of fears of the dominance of political Islam on the regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen or Syria called for dealing with the movements of political Islam and trying to contain them.The security institution in these countries was a barrier against this domination in casethe containment policy fails.

The previous political phases in dealing with the movements and forces of political Islam, despite the different necessities and interest, do not negate the intellectual vision based on the ideological, religious and cultural rejection of Islam, especially its political form.

The American vision of the Arab World andpolitical Islam does not start from the perspective of the American endeavor to democratize the countries of the region, or for the sake of the peoples' future. And it is uncertain that the current and future transformations, in the foreseeable future, will lead to positive results for the benefit of the peoples of the region. This American approach reveals a different vision from the American interests themselves, the decline of the importance of old alliances and the conviction that opening the way for regional conflicts will relieve the US, for a long time, of global Islamic Jihad.

The strategy, which has been used by the US since Obama era towards the Arab World in general and political Islam in particular, is based on three points, while Obama separated Islam and political Islam from terrorism, Trump administration always combines them and tries to put them in the same basket, that is represented in his speech and decisions he took as mentioned previously.

1- The need for moderate Islamic forces to participate in governments in the Arab and Islamic World.
2- Islamic extremism can only be fought from inside the Muslim communities themselves.
3- Criminalize the idea of "jihad" in Muslim societies.

Certainly, it is not possible at this moment to assess the overall outcome of this strategy, nor to expect the potential risks on the future ofUS interests in the regionbut that strategy was the conclusion of an experience that has been a lot of debates within the corridors of decision-making in the US, and witnessed severe criticism.

However, what is certain is that this vision has deprived the jihadist forces from inflicting casualties on American soldiers, as happened in Afghanistan, the atrocities committed in the name of jihad have changed a lot in the Islamic public opinion towards the idea of "jihad" and the victims are no longer Westerners and Americans living thousands of miles away, but the people of their communities, and sometimes their religion and sect. As we can see that, the number of American casualties in Afghanistan has decreased since 2012 (Wu 2020), while the casualties in the Afghani side increased according to Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Haltiwanger2018).

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