

Session V

The Appeal of Confrontation: The West

Speakers: Dr Martin Kramer, Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies
Professor Fred Halliday, London School of Economics

Chair: Nadim Shehadi, Chatham House

In his introduction, Nadim Shehadi said Dr Martin Kramer had fired the first shot in the battle which was more or less the subject of this conference, when in November 2001 he had published his book *Ivory Towers on Sand* in which he attacked the academic community for not having done its job in warning policy-makers of the possibility of an attack like 9/11. The highly controversial book had been widely reviewed. One of the best reviews was by Professor Fred Halliday, published in the Chatham House journal *International Affairs*.

Dr Martin Kramer

Dr Kramer said it was a pleasure to share a podium with Fred Halliday. He had been invited to join Professor Halliday to discuss how the idea of confrontation with Islam resonated in the West presumably because their perspectives differed. This difference was not in their appreciation of Islam as a religious system, nor in their understanding of Islamism. Dr Kramer had said he had written very critically about Islamism, its misrepresentation by the Western academy and the risks in trying to appease it. Professor Halliday had also written in the same vein.

It was in the degree of salience that they attributed to what Professor Halliday had called anti-Muslimism in the West that they might be far apart. In contrast to Professor Halliday, Dr Kramer thought a lot of the concern about anti-Islamic sentiment in the West was 'overwrought and overdone'. He would argue that what was really interesting is the view of Islam as 'a promise rather than a threat'. The dominant view among Western elites and the current US administration was that Muslims can fully adhere to their religion and be just like us – freedom-loving, peace-

pursuing and free-marketing. 'The dominant mood is not that every Muslim is a potential threat, it is that every Muslim is a potential democrat.'

The core principle of neoconservative ideology, which so many falsely believed to be anti-Muslim, was the rejection of Islamic or Muslim exceptionalism. No special rules governed Muslim societies, and no special exemptions from universal norms applied. Dr Kramer observed an 'ironic convergence' among neoconservatism, neoliberalism and post-orientalism on this crucial point: Muslims had democratic potential, and it was our fault that they had not realized it. Critics of US policy denied the existence of such a convergence and said that the neocons who have influenced that policy had articulated an 'ideology of hate'. In fact the opposite was the case: they had articulated an 'ideology of hope'.

Dr Kramer asked: to whom in the West does the idea of confrontation appeal? He outlined the conventional narrative in which the concept of the so-called clash of civilizations gained traction in the West because the West needed an enemy after the Cold War. The West, driven by the US, identified the new enemy as Islam and the Muslims, who were comparatively easy to cast in the role of 'evildoers' because of the legacy of Western prejudice against Islam.

This narrative was the natural continuation of the proposition of Edward Said that the West needed the East as its negative image. In his book *Orientalism*, Said proposed that the very notion of the 'West' required an opposite 'East' as its foil. Said described Orientalism as the original sin of Western civilization – its demonic invention of an East-West, Islam-West dichotomy.

Although it was possible to find evidence to support Said's thesis, it was also possible to find evidence to refute it. Dr Kramer pointed to the historical record, which showed that Europe rarely united to confront Islam, even when Muslim-led empires launched massive offensives into Europe. History was full of examples of cross-civilizational alliances of convenience, between Christian and Muslim powers. Throughout the 20th century, Europe's own wars took precedence over wars with Muslims, and were waged with a far greater ferocity. Even colonialism was driven more by European rivalries than by a 'crusader' mission of punishing or redeeming Muslims.

And, according to Dr Kramer, Said also omitted the other half of the story: the Muslim invention of the dichotomy between the domain of Islam and the domain of war, the believing and the unbelieving worlds. This idea mandated perpetual war by Muslims against independent non-Muslims until the final triumph of Islam all over the earth. The pursuit of that triumph was called the *jihad*, and it predated and survived the idea of crusade as an operative doctrine.

The doctrine underwent many modifications, but according to Dr Kramer it is indisputable that at the root of the traditional Islamic concept of order there was a fully articulated dichotomy between believer and unbeliever. That concept has enjoyed a widespread revival. But Said simply sidestepped – or Said stepped – this dichotomy, since it would have distracted readers from his political purpose of blaming the West for the legacy of Islam–West conflict.

Why blame the West? Why simplify a complex history, why concoct a distorted narrative of a West arrayed against the East, from the time of Homer to the time of Cromer, and up to the present? Dr Kramer asserted that the reason was obvious: the whole thrust of the Saidian project was to extract or extort expressions of remorse and guilt from the West. This guilt, we were told, could only be washed away if we

made concessions on specific contemporary issues, from Palestine to immigration, from Iranian nuclear weapons to academic appointments.

The damaging image of a time-immemorial clash of civilizations did have an appeal in the West: it appealed to the Saidians and their European and American allies, mostly on the left. For where there was damage, there must be compensation; where there was a victim, there must be restitution. Said's Orientalism, and the entire blame-the-West cottage industry, was historical misrepresentation as moral shakedown.

Dr Kramer defended Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington against charges that they were prophets or cheerleaders of confrontation, and part of a 'clash-of-civilizations cottage industry' in the West. It was Lewis who coined the phrase 'clash of civilizations', later turned into a slogan by Samuel Huntington.

He noted two things about Lewis and Huntington in this context: first, in deploying the phrase 'clash of civilizations' they believed they were describing a reality, not prescribing one; and second, they had been ambivalent about it even as a description.

Lewis coined the phrase 'clash of civilizations' in an article in 1958, writing: 'We shall be better able to understand this situation if we view the present discontents of the Middle East not as a conflict between states or nations but as a clash between civilizations.'

He repeated the passage in his 1964 book *The Middle East and the West* and the phrase 'clash of civilizations' in a 1990 essay. In summer 1993 Huntington borrowed the phrase, with credit. Dr Kramer found it interesting that in 1993 Lewis reworked his 1964 book into a revised version, *The Shaping of the Modern Middle East*, and rewrote the passage as: 'We shall be better able to understand this situation if we view the present discontents of the Middle East not as a conflict between states of nations but as an encounter between civilizations.' This was Lewis taking a step back.

The neoconservative view of Islam and Muslims, which owes a great deal to Lewis (much more than to Huntington) was not the pessimistic one of clash and threat. It was the optimistic one of encounter and transformation. Dr Kramer maintained that this had informed not only Lewis's enthusiasm for Turkey and his optimistic view of Iraq's prospects, but the similarly optimistic views of Max Boot, Joshua Muravchik, and an entire bevy of neoconservative intellectuals who had been seized by the notion that there was nothing different, or exceptional, or culturally specific about Islam and the Muslim world. Exporting democracy to the Muslims was not a Sisyphean task, it was eminently possible and it was America's mission.

Dr Kramer added, in parentheses, that this meant doing better than Britain 'which at its height preferred to export hierarchy to the Arabs, by crowning kings, sheikhs, and emirs, and plying them with birthday honours.'

According to Dr Kramer, Washington had become so Islam-friendly of late that some policy-makers and think-tanks had gone even further. Not only was Islam not a threat, but even Islamism was not a threat. And not only was it not a threat, it might even be a solution.

The idea was this: an astute US policy should be able to identify and reach an accommodation with 'moderate' Islamism, and even turn it against the jihadism of

Osama Bin Laden and the old-guard extremism of Iran's leaders. There was even a presumption that Islamist movements marked as terrorist groups, such as the Palestinian Hamas and Hezbollah in Lebanon, could be eased out of terrorism through integration into democratic politics. Dr Kramer said this softening-up of influential opinion in this direction had already begun via the likes of Alastair Crooke, Graham Fuller and Reuel Gerecht.

Because of its democratizing mission, US policy needed Islamism to be certain things: diverse if not divided, ambivalent about the US rather than implacably hostile, and susceptible to moderation through the democratic process. It needed Islamist movements to be the equivalent of Christian Democratic parties in Europe, or at least to be moving in that direction. Ayatollah Sistani and Turkey's Ak party had made the notion credible.

Dr Kramer warned that if Islamism turned out not to be these things, the effect of US democracy promotion could be disastrous: the replacement of a despotic order amenable to the US with an equally despotic order hostile to the US. 'But this sort of pessimism is increasingly unfashionable in Washington, where the die has been cast in favour of democracy-come-what-may.'

He advised his listeners not to be 'misled' by the affair of Tariq Ramadan. His exclusion from the US was governed by a very peculiar set of circumstances, and did not mean that the administration had set the bar for Islamic moderation impossibly high. 'In fact, in the Middle East the administration keeps setting the bar for Islamic moderation lower and lower. Today the Da'wa Party gets a pass, tomorrow it might be the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and the day after, it could be Hamas and Hezbollah.'

Dr Kramer responded to the observation made in the second session by Professor Francois Burgat, who recalled that ten years ago a Chatham House discussion had considered the question 'Is Islam a threat to democracy?' Now the question had become 'Is Islam a threat to the West?', and Professor Burgat was afraid that next time the question would be 'Is Islam a threat to humanity?'

In fact the movement was in the opposite direction, Dr Kramer asserted. 'It used to be asked whether Islam is a threat (and the answer was no): then, whether Islamism is a threat (and the answer was not in all circumstances): and now it's asked in the highest places whether Hezbollah or Hamas is a threat (and here, too, the answer coming from President Bush himself, is this: not necessarily).'

Were he to be facetious, he might suggest that the next question likely to be posed was this: is Al-Qaeda really a threat? To that question too, one would find plenty who would answer: well, maybe not.

All this was part of what he had described as a convergence of views from right and left about Islam, Muslims and democracy. It seemed to Dr Kramer that that there was a growing uniformity in the answer to the question 'Is Islam a threat to the West?'. And it was this: where in the world did you get that idea?

Dr Kramer concluded by saying that the US, and West in general, was hedging its bets in the expectation of change. 'So we are now going to test the theories of the ideologues on the universality of democratic values, and of the experts on the infinite adaptability of Islamism. We must all hope these theories prove to be correct. I, for one, will not be surprised if they turn out otherwise.'

Professor Fred Halliday

In his introductory remarks, Professor Halliday spoke of the pleasures of being a professor at the London School of Economics, with its non-conformist and internationalist traditions. There were students from more than 140 countries, including many of the Muslim and Arab countries, as well as Israel, Turkey and Iran, and he very much treasured and wished to protect this cosmopolitan intellectual space, something which was not easily acquired and not easily maintained.

He expressed his implacable opposition and outrage at demands for boycotts of this or that university, whether in Israel or any other Middle Eastern country. 'Our job is to talk, to listen, to argue.' It would also be complete hypocrisy for him to refuse to go to Dr Kramer's centre or anywhere else in Israel, given that he had lectured in Saddam's Iraq, Gadhafi's Libya, General Omar Bashir's Sudan, Ali Khamanei's Tehran and indeed in the Ramallah of Abu Ammar, not the greatest exponent of global governance that we know.'

Professor Halliday congratulated Chatham House and the Khayami Foundation on holding the conference, much as he disliked the formulation 'Islam and the West'. In his view these were non-comparable terms; we should instead be saying 'the Middle East and the West' or 'Islam and Christianity.'

He declared himself much less sanguine than Dr Kramer, and did not take very seriously 'the fashions of the Washington Beltway'. He did not think the people involved 'did their prep', and named as examples Joshua Muravchik, Edward Luttwak and Thomas Friedman.

Professor Halliday thought we were in for a very long haul. There might be more important long-term trends in the world today, such as the rise of China and India, AIDS and global environmental deterioration. 'But for those of us who live in Europe, the Mediterranean or the Middle East, this issue of relations between Europe and the Middle East is the dominant issue, and it is a very complex issue and one for which I think we are singularly ill-equipped.'

Why was it so difficult? In the first place, because we were dealing with problems on different timescales. In the short run, the issues at the front of our minds included the situation in Iraq. Whatever one thought of the original invasion, 'only a complete idiot would wish for the success of Mr Zarqawi.' To see somebody like Tariq Ali, who was a socialist, supporting the likes of Mr Zarqawi and saying that the future of the world lay in the alleys of Falluja gave Professor Halliday no pleasure at all, nor did he regard it as any act of friendship to the people of Iraq.

On Palestine, although there was a truce, he was deeply pessimistic. He did not think Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was serious about a Palestinian state and a viable solution to the problem. The situation there was unstable, and there were also questions over what would happen in Lebanon and Syria.

Turning to medium-term issues covering decades, Professor Halliday thought that the insurgency inspired by Al-Qaeda would continue for many years. This was not because the organization, in so far as Al-Qaeda was an organization at all, would survive, but because 'it will inspire' lots and lots of young people for mainly political and intellectual reasons – not for economic reasons, certainly not for religious reasons – to take up violence and to pursue intermittent acts of terrorism here and elsewhere'.

Professor Halliday cited the examples of his native Ireland, and the Basque country in Spain, where 'once these fires start they create a whole generation of younger people who continue and you don't need many to keep continuing it'. In the case of the Al-Qaeda-inspired insurgency, there seem to be quite a lot of people who do want to continue it.

The other main medium-term issue was that of energy. Professor Halliday said that world was moving towards a peak of production, and its energy resources were increasingly concentrated in four or five countries in the Gulf. The world, and its oil companies, had not taken seriously questions of long-term investment in production, refining and so on, and there was a passion for gas-guzzling sport utility vehicles and the like. It looked as if we already had permanent prices of \$50 per barrel of oil, and this would become an even more serious issue in the years ahead. 'The failure of governments, both consumer and producer, over 30 years to work out a sensible regime for managing this appears more and more irresponsible.'

Regarding the long-term issues, Professor Halliday, while respecting the scholarship of his former teacher Bernard Lewis, did not see the issue of relations between the Middle East and Europe as being one of civilization, religion or culture, although these certainly played a role. It was a question of economics, of migration, and of a set of interlocking but discrete political issues. These included not just Palestine, but also Kosovo and the Northern Caucasus, which was also part of Europe and where we would see a lot more fighting.

There was a broad question of how we could accommodate the two regions of the world, while the gap in the standard of living between the Middle East and Europe was growing wider and wider, including the gap between the north and south of the Mediterranean. 'Everybody on the southern side of the Mediterranean knows this and wants to get to the northern side.'

There was an intellectual vacuum in approaching these interlocking issues. Dr Kramer had talked about the mood in Washington, and it was quite correct that we should be informed about it. But Dr Halliday had given up on Washington, and on 'the abysmal nonsense churned out by the think tanks, one politician or statesman jumping up with some half-baked idea which they haven't thought through and the posturing of the likes of Luttwak, Friedman and all the rest of them, not one of whom I take seriously on these issues because they simply haven't done the work. They haven't read the history, learnt the languages, or spent time in those countries and they don't know what they're talking about, but they all scratch each other's backs.'

Professor Halliday shared the hopes of some very cautious people in the Arab world, including Egyptian Saadedin Ibrahim, that some good might come out of the Bush initiative. 'If it does good, even Marxists know that imperialism has contradictory effects.' But he had grave doubts. He asked whether any of it had been thought through, and how long they would stick with it. He found the Bush initiative 'completely innocent of any historical and sociological understanding of the preconditions for democratization. We have all this nonsense in other countries as well – look at what's happening in Latin America where a number of countries are going down the tube.'

He said these things took a long time: it took Britain, France, America 300 years to get it right, and a few civil wars and insurrections on the way. He did not take seriously the approach being used in the Bush initiative.

Professor Halliday said academics could only do their job if there was mutual respect between them and other professions. An academic was not a policy-maker, forecaster or speechwriter, but these distinctions got confused. He thought Dr Kramer in his *Ivory Towers* book confused the different roles of academics, policy-makers and others.

The most influential and relevant academic and intellectual books published in recent years had not been directly engaged with either prediction or policy advice. The much-abused, but very brilliant, cautious and clever, Francis Fukuyama took a distance from issues in his books, and said really interesting things. The same applies to the historian David Landis, and many others. The best books of Bernard Lewis - not *What Went Wrong* but his earlier works – were really great works, but sadly he had fallen among the neocons.

Professor Halliday challenged the journalist and writer Robert Fisk to a debate. Although Fisk had written two very good books about Northern Ireland, and sometimes wrote very good pieces on the Middle East, Professor Halliday had serious questions about his judgment and the things he reported. He mentioned a recent Fisk article in the *Independent*, attacking academics who had written about the Middle East.

Just as Professor Halliday deplored the campaigns to boycott universities, so he regarded the sort of campaign to which Dr Kramer had lent his name, 'of harassing people in American universities, all this Campus Watch nonsense, all this stuff at Columbia' as 'utterly reprehensible and distasteful, and a distraction from what we should be doing'. Although Professor Halliday held no brief for Joseph Massad, he thought the cranking up of inter-ethnic tension, and the suspicion and vilification in the US, to which Dr Kramer's book had contributed, and probably deliberately so, were not appropriate for an academic of Dr Kramer's standing.

He then turned his attention to certain broader, methodological issues. From a historical perspective, could we talk in a general sense about some long-standing, deep, primordial fault line and atavistic conflict between the Muslim world and the West? Absolutely not, for the reasons Dr Kramer had given.

The Ottoman Empire had allied with Britain and France against Russia, and with Germany against Britain and France. It had traded with European countries: there was no history of Europe and the Ottoman Empire constituting themselves as permanent opponents.

Professor Halliday also concurred with Dr Kramer in tackling head-on the argument that Europe's identity was somehow formed in confrontation with Islam, or with the Turk or Arab. Europe's identity, or rather that of European states, was very largely formed in conflict with each other. 'If there is such a thing as British or English identity, it was wars with France and wars with Germany that forged it, not wars with the Muslim world, and it is the same for France and Germany.' Even for countries, such as Spain or Greece, which were under Muslim rule for a long time, the confrontation with the Turks and Arabs was not really central in the forging of identity.

Furthermore, the identities of main European countries were formed through interaction with their empires. In the case of Britain, whose empire included the US, the experience of over 500 years of external trading, cultural exchange, migration and interaction was much more important than interaction with the Middle East.

'Amidst all this hurly-burly of nonsense being talked about European identity and the European constitution, if it makes any sense to talk about European identity at all – which I have my doubts about – then we ought to tackle head on the idea that it was centrally to do with the Muslim world.'

Another methodological point considered by Professor Halliday was on the question of identity. It was very easy, and perhaps inevitable, to talk about the issue of Muslims in Western Europe, or Muslims in the Middle East, as if people only had one identity. But people did not only have one identity. The idea that Islam defined people's identity was 'complete nonsense'. Not only were Muslims in the Middle East also Egyptian, Persian, Yemenis and so on, they were also Assuitis, Cairenes and so on. This was as important as any common Muslim or Middle Eastern identity.

Professor Halliday examined the relationship between Islam and the foreign policies of the 24 Middle Eastern states. He said that Islam did play a role in so far as it was a form of identity, and also played a role in the identity and policies of the younger generation.

The word *umma* did have some salience, and today the *umma* included Chechnya and Bosnia as well as Palestine and Kashmir. But 95 per cent of the foreign relations of Middle Eastern states were conducted on the basis of state interests.

Iran was an example of how state interest prevailed over religious solidarity for perfectly good reasons. The Iranian constitution was committed to supporting Muslims around the world, but on Nagorno-Karabakh Iran supported Christian Armenia against Shiite Azerbaijan, and on Kashmir it supported India. On Xinjiang, Iran supported China and on Chechnya it supported Moscow.

Professor Halliday also gave the example of the construction of a modern identity by Middle Eastern states. He said that identities did not come from history or from atavistic times. Rather, they came from what modern states and opposition movements chose to proclaim as identity. In Islam, everything before the Prophet Mohammad was supposed to be *jahaliya*, ignorant. But in every Middle Eastern country except Saudi Arabia, the pre-Muslim period was a matter of national pride: in Egypt, Iraq, Yemen, Turkey and even Bahrain. There was no contradiction between being a Muslim country and invoking what was supposed to be *jahaliya*.

In his last points on the topic of the conference, Professor Halliday said we should not talk in generic terms about a Muslim community in Europe, a European Muslim identity, or even a Muslim community in the UK, nor indeed about a 'Muslim vote'. There was no such thing as a Muslim vote; it was a politically convenient fiction. Instead, we should look at what individuals and different ethnic communities did, and then ask the academic question: to what extent does an Islamic identity play a role in these voting or social practices and so on? It was an open question, not one to which we should prejudge the answer.

Secondly, if one looked at the history of violence between European countries and the Middle East, one saw that European states had visited far more violence on the countries of the Middle East than the other way around. This was one of the ironies with Gadhafi, when he pitched his tent outside Romano Prodi's office in Brussels in April 2004 and said 'Don't lecture me on human rights, you guys came to our country and massacred tens of thousand of people'.

Professor Halliday said that the French in Algeria killed a million people, the British occupied Egypt in a completely illegal way, they occupied Aden, they sent

mercenaries to undermine the Yemeni republic. Professor Halliday also mentioned the actions of the French and Spanish in Morocco in the 1920s, and asserted that these things should be recognized as fact and not as a basis for guilt politics today.

Thirdly, on the question of terrorism, he asked who created Al-Qaeda. Was it the Prophet Mohammed, Ibn Taymiya, Said Al-Qutb? No, it was Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

This terrorism was a product of the Cold War. Professor Halliday thought the lines of division were very different from the way they were presented. The fundamentalists had been killing people, particularly people of the left or the independently-minded, for the past two or three decades. The attacks of 9/11, in Madrid and so on were a product of this long-term conflict within the Middle East. 'In that sense it is quite right to talk about an alliance of civilizations that cuts across religious lines.'

Professor Halliday said how much he had liked the section of Tariq Ramadan's speech in which he talked about universalism. Professor Halliday said universalism applied, first of all in the sense that the protest movements in the Middle East, whose tactics we might all dislike, were articulating demands and protests that had very little to do with religion or culture.

Even in the case of Al-Qaeda, if one actually read what Bin Laden said, it was on the lines of 'our land is occupied, our wealth has been stolen, our rulers are criminal or unjust, we have been conned by international law' and so forth. There was a 'green Islamic garb to it', but it was within the context of the modern world, and not the product of the Middle Ages or Ibn Taymiya.

Secondly, we had to be universalistic in our criteria of ethical judgment. There was a 'curious contradiction' in solidarity, whereby those who supported other peoples in their struggles for justice were usually blind to the abuses that those peoples carried out. This could be true just as much for those who supported Israel as those who supported the Palestinians. But if the Israelis violated international law they should be condemned, just as the Palestinians should be, if they violated the norms of war. Guerrilla groups should be held to account just as much as governments in terms of international, legal and moral norms.

Professor Halliday had become deeply sceptical about the moral authority of diasporas and of expatriate religious and cultural leaders pronouncing on their countries of origin. 'In general diasporas play a pretty pernicious role in world politics, starting with Ireland, with Armenia. Both the Jewish diaspora and the Muslim community have played a very unhelpful and negative role in regard to solving the Palestine question.'

In conclusion, Professor Halliday said this conference would not be the last on the topic, and he feared we were in for a long haul. 'We need to train many more young people who are competent on these issues. We should stop wasting time on "campus wars" and arguing about Edward Said's book, and we should get on with the job of understanding these societies and what is going on with them, and also understanding the sociology of Muslims in the West. That is going to be a long haul.'

Discussion

One delegate asked what priority the neoconservatives give to the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Dr Kramer replied that he saw an interesting parallel of discourse between those who were focused on first solving the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict and those who were focused on bringing democracy to Iraq. The common denominator was the assumption that there was one pressure point, or one lever which one could pull and thereby change the region as a whole.

The 1990s had been seen as the moment of the New Middle East, and a chain of reaction was supposed to result from Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking. There would be foreign investment, economic growth, cooperation, which would create middle classes and bring democracy: peace first, leading through development to democracy. But we knew what had happened in the 1990s: the peace process collapsed and with it the entire region.

Remarkably, the same dynamic was projected in Iraq, but in reverse. Iraq as a democracy would bring about a chain reaction of emulation in other places and there would be a whole series of 'Arab springs' producing democracy in various settings. This would create a dynamic for the rule of law, which would usher in foreign investment and economic growth and produce, at the end, a democratic peace (This was the vision of Nathan Sharansky: that no peace was worthwhile unless one first built foundations of democracy).

There was also a projection onto Palestinians or Iraqis of hopes and aspirations which Dr Kramer thought were often more than they could bear. The Palestinians had been seen as the most advanced Arabs, the most educated, those who had the most vibrant civil society because they were not under the apparatus of a state, and therefore the most likely to produce a democracy which would have a knock-on effect in the region.

And then came the Iraq war and the same thing was projected onto the Iraqis. His mentor Bernard Lewis remembered the Iraqis he taught in London in the 1960s, as being the best educated, and the ones with the longest experience of democracy, and he claimed that they would now be immune to the temptations of dictatorship having been under one for so long.

Dr Kramer thought that eventually we would realize that there was no one pressure point and that solving one problem did not necessarily solve others. What we were seeing was a very different dynamic. A conflict in one place could not be resolved by the simple application of pressure or diplomacy or war in another state.

Professor Halliday said the issue of whether the Palestine-Israel question was the source of all the problems in the Middle East should be taken out of the polemic and answered in an academic way. There were, or had been, seven or eight wars going on in the Greater Middle Eastern region: the wars in Algeria (50,000 dead), Sudan (1 or 2 million dead), civil war in Yemen in the 1990s, war between Turks and the Kurds (50,000 dead), the war in Lebanon (150,000 dead) and so on. And of course the Arab-Israeli conflict.

What was the relation between all of these? 'It's a system like the body is, if you have backache it affects the whole body but it isn't the source of all the problems. The Palestine question, or the policies of Mr Sharon, are not responsible for corruption in the Gulf, or war in Sudan – but they certainly have, like a backache, an effect in the region historically.'

The second thing Professor Halliday wanted to say on this question was if there is one broad conclusion to the several books, not just his but those of several other people, which have come out in Britain in the last five years on the international relations of the Middle East, it is a greater recognition of the autonomy and the

independence of manoeuvre of Middle Eastern states, not just now but during the Cold War.

This means that it has been very difficult to for external powers to twist the arm of Middle Eastern states, whether they were dealing with the Shah of Iran, the King of Saudi Arabia, or in this case the Prime Minister of Israel. The idea that the US can deliver an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza if the Israelis object is pie in the sky. Nor can they control the price of oil with the oil producing states.

So the Israelis, and in their own way the Palestinians, are autonomous in a way the outside world cannot override, so there are no levers. None of these states are levers, and have not been for decades. The PLO never had a state but the Russians could not get them to do what they wanted them to with regard to Israel. For decades the Russians tried to get them to, as they said, 'come to their senses'. But they did not do so until very late, too late. 'This makes the ability of the outside world, whether it's my dear friend Mr Solana or, on a good day - and there've only been a few good days - Condoleezza Rice, very limited in what they can do.'

Dr Kramer was asked about his reference to the 'lowering of the bar' for Islamic moderation and about his attitude towards Islamic movements and the Islamic component of the Arab-Israeli conflict. He was also asked whether the conflict was still more inter-ethnic and inter-state than religious.

Dr Kramer said that regarding Islamic movements, he has been compelled to do some rethinking, for the very simple reason that, although he had a view he articulated systematically in the '80s and '90s which was non-engagement with these movements, he now has to face realities. A decision has been made, and there will be engagement at one time or another. It is an inexorable process driven by all sorts of interests, and he will have to adopt himself accordingly.

He distinguished two types of Islamic movements. There are those for whom integration into the political system is a step up, and those for which it is a step down. It is a step up for those movements which have historically been excluded over a long period of time and which have, during the course of that exclusion, in a sense transformed their discourse, and sometimes have had changes in leadership as well. Such movements are willing to pay the price to enter the political system.

In this regard, certainly in Washington, the Ak Party is seen as a model. The historical experience of the Da'wa Party in Iraq means that for that party participation in the political systems is a major step up. And for that they are quite willing to pay a price.

Then there is a series of groups for which participation in the political system is a step down. They include groups that have weapons or control territory or have access to lots of resources, sometimes because of long-standing partnerships with states in the region. For them, the appeal of a few parliamentary delegates in exchange for these assets is not particularly great. In those instances, the cost of engaging them and incorporating them is very high. Professor Halliday thought this was particularly true of Hamas and Hezbollah, and perhaps the Saudi Islamists. There are also a few grey cases that he hasn't yet made up his mind about.

In drawing up this kind of typology, he looked not so much at ideas- he did not think there was a great deal of variety in ideas between different groups- but at historical experience. And he came to the plain fact that the major policy disasters of the US in

the course of the past 25 years have been a result of the misplotting of the trajectories of Islamic movements.

The decision to leave the American embassy in Tehran after the Iranian revolution was based on such a misperception of the trajectory of that revolution. The whole dynamic that created the first World Trade Centre bombing, in 1993, was a result of something similar. One can argue similarly about 9/11 also. He was fully aware that there will be unintended results to any policy – sometimes academics don't appreciate that, they think policy making should be a clean and straightforward business, but it is a messy process.

On the Israeli –Palestinian conflict, Dr Kramer said that although it is still inter-ethnic and inter-state conflict, it certainly has a religious dimension on both sides. It is often said that Israel somehow created Hamas, but it seemed to him presumptuous to assume that in a region where there are Islamist movements of force and power in every setting, the Palestinians would be an exception. He thought it was part and parcel of a region wide trend, driven by many of the same forces, and that it portended bad things for the future.

He would simply say this: 'if democratisation becomes the theme of the region and as a consequence Hamas is introduced into the system, and takes a major piece of the parliamentary and political pies, and if this is replicated in several other neighbouring states, I think we've seen probably the last Israeli-Arab peace agreement' He did not think it will necessarily destroy the ones we have, but it will be the last one for some time to come.

Professor Halliday said that on the issue of Orientalism, he had expressed his thoughts on this years ago, in one of his books. After it was published, Edward Said had refused to speak to him and indeed the last time he had seen him was in this very room. 'When I got up to speak he walked out and said 'I am not going to be in the same room and listen to Fred Halliday talking nonsense.'" Professor Halliday greatly respected Edward Said's intellectual courage in other domains, and his work as a literary theorist, 'but as an expert on the Middle East, no'.

Professor Halliday added: 'This is a broader issue: the preoccupation with methodological questions, which are quite proper questions, about bias and perception, and concepts and discourse and all these things. All of these should be discussed in philosophy departments; our job is actually to discuss what's going on in these countries. Not to speculate endlessly about methodology. And that I think has been the big price that we have had to pay for this debate.'

Professor Halliday was asked about the idea that suicide bombing as a technique is something that encourages the classic 'clash of civilisations' theory that he's so much against. Professor Halliday thought 'suicide bombing' is a mistaken term in Palestine, or among the Tamils who also do them. 'These are attacks which target civilians and I see very little difference between blowing up a nightclub in Tel Aviv and blowing up a fish and chip shop on the Shankill Road in Belfast. And therein lies the fundamental problem. As to whether these serve the Palestinian cause – No. I have said and I'll say it again, I strongly support the Palestinians but I think the second intifada's been a political disaster and I think those who urged them on to this end are no friends of the Palestinians whatsoever.'