

# Defending the Enemy: Reinterpreting the Prison Writings of Sayyid Qutb

I

## Introduction

In his book *Holy War, Inc.*, Peter Bergen, CNN's "terrorism analyst," profiles the man behind modern Islamic terrorism. Sayyid Qutb, he writes, is "the leading ideologue of the jihadist movement... One cannot underestimate the influence of Qutb on the jihadist groups in Egypt and, by extension, on bin Laden." [1] Qutb, he says, inspired Islamic militants in Egypt, who spread their influence to the rest of the Middle East and eventually inspired al-Qaeda. Berman adheres to the established conclusions; every book and article I read on this subject affirms that Qutb's writings are the foundation of militant Islam. In the West, in the media and in scholarship, we have come to know Sayyid Qutb as the enemy, as the father of modern terrorism.

## FROM MUSHA TO GREELEY

Sayyid Qutb was born in 1906 in the village of Musha in Upper Egypt. He attended a new state school in Musha instead of the kuttab, the traditional Islamic elementary school. The public school did not teach memorization of the Qur'an, but, to prove that his state education was just as good as the traditional village kuttab, he memorized the Qur'an on his own and encouraged his friends to do the same by organizing recitation competitions. [2] By age ten, he had memorized the entire Qur'an. [3] Later, in prison, he would recall the years he spent memorizing the Qur'an as the happiest years of his life.

While Qutb was a child, his father held political meetings in their home. Listening to the adults' discussions, Qutb became politically aware while still very young and sympathized with the nationalist movement against the British colonial presence in Egypt. He attended college in Cairo and then worked as a teacher, ministry official, and literary critic. His work from that period reflects the liberal and secular currents of elite literary culture in Egypt. Like most intellectuals, he joined the Wafd party and supported its articulation of national liberation politics. Although he remained a faithful Muslim, he lost his youthful devotion. His passion was for literature.

Gradually, his attention shifted to political topics. By 1945, he had stopped writing literary criticism all together and focused his writing on political and social problems. During this time, politics in Egypt became increasingly chaotic and corrupt as the British manipulated an ongoing power struggle between the Wafd and the palace in order to support its own interests. In 1942, British authorities had "forced a reluctant King Faruq to install a Wafdist ministry"[4] and by accepting the help of the British, the Wafd permanently soiled its image. The incident humiliated the King and caused a permanent rift between the palace and the Wafd -- neither would ever regain the respect of the Egyptian people. Nasser later wrote that he and the other young army officers "felt humiliated by the British action and as a result became determined to sacrifice themselves to restore the nation's dignity." [5] Though Qutb had supported the Wafd as a young man, he watched in frustration as the party became more and more corrupt and compromised its original goals.

Like most Egyptians, Qutb saw a dire need for reform in Egyptian politics. The wealthiest class controlled the government and the "middle class in 1945-1952 resented the concentration of power in the hands of the king and a few large landowners who dominated Egyptian life"[6] and who controlled the political parties, parliament, and foreign policy decisions. Like most intellectuals and members of the middle class at the time, Qutb abandoned all political parties out of frustration with the corruption of the entire system.[7] Western systems of government would always end in corruption and failure, Qutb believed. Western interference in Egyptian politics led to an unhealthy balance of power. Only by escaping the fetters of the West could Egypt ever solve its problems -- Islam and the dignified cultural history of Egypt could provide all the solutions, he believed. Qutb published condemnations of Western influences: he condemned the king and parliament for cooperating with British, condemned the king's policies that pushed towards Westernization, and criticized the Western-influenced education system. Reportedly, Qutb's criticisms reached King Faruq and angered the monarch. "The king wanted to imprison him," and only Qutb's connections prevented his

incarceration. "Instead he went into a kind of de facto exile." [8] The Ministry of Education sent Qutb to the United States to study the education system there in hopes that this trip would silence his criticisms and teach him to appreciate the Western way of life. [9]

Qutb spent two years in the United States. He arrived in New York and then traveled all over the country, spending most of his time at universities in Washington D.C., Greeley Colorado, and Palo Alto, California. He wrote of his experiences in letters to friends and in articles for Cairo periodicals. He wrote that New York was loud and chaotic, its residents hard-nosed, panicked, and materialistic as they prepared for the holidays without joy. He wrote that he pitied the pigeons that lived lives as joyless and gray as New Yorkers'. [10] He soon left New York for Washington D.C. where he enrolled in classes at the Wilson Teacher's College. There, he improved his English, but grew tired of conversations. He wrote to a friend, "How much do I need someone to talk to about topics other than money, movie stars, and car models." [11]

After leaving Washington D.C., he traveled to Greeley, Colorado to pursue his master's degree at the Colorado State College of Education. When Greeley's founders settled in Colorado in 1870, they planned a utopian community. In 1949, the residents of Greeley still saw their town as a haven of morality and conservative values. Greeley's inhabitants banned alcohol, attended churches, and fostered community spirit. For Americans, Greeley was the opposite of New York City. Qutb, however, was not impressed. The values of the people of Greeley were just as warped as the values he observed in New Yorkers. Residents of Greeley, he noted, seemed obsessed with lawn care and spent all their free time in their gardens.

It was, in his opinion, symptomatic of the American preoccupation with the external, material, and selfishly individual dimensions of life. Rather than engage in the spirited social exchange that is the concomitant of meaningful community interaction, Americans, in Qutb's view, chose instead to live within the confines of closed circles, symbolized by the residential yard, which protected the private spaces of individual homeowners against the unwelcome intrusions of neighbors... Such social behavior was disconcerting for Qutb, who was raised within a nurturing endogamous village community and, as an adult, was accustomed to the vibrant street life of Cairo's closely-packed neighborhoods. [12]

Qutb had been critical of Western values in the years before he traveled to the U.S., especially of the U.S.'s support of Israel, but the longer he spent in the country, the greater his disgust grew. Many recent newspaper and magazine biographies about Qutb describe his experience at a sock hop at a Greeley Church. Hoping to experience the community life of Greeley and American religion,

Qutb joined a church club. After the service one night, the church held a dance that Qutb attended. What he saw appalled him. In 1951, he described the scene in an article for the Egyptian newspaper al-Risala: "The dancing intensified. The hall swarmed with legs. Arms circled arms, lips met lips, chests met chests, and the atmosphere was full of love." Even the pastor contributed to the sexual depravity, lowering the lights to create a "romantic, dreamy effect," and playing 'Baby, it's Cold Outside' on the gramophone.[13] In Colorado, Qutb saw proof of the moral disintegration of Western society.

Qutb compared what he saw in the West with the changing values back home. He feared Westernization and the loss of morality and spirituality in Egypt. In an article entitled "The World is an Undutiful Boy," Qutb wrote that, on the worldwide scale, the hollow materialism and inferior values of the West had eclipsed the superior cultural and spiritual contributions of Egypt.[14] Qutb had criticized Western values before visiting the United States, but his observations in the U.S. reveal growing disgust with the lack of morality and spirituality that led him to reject the Western lifestyle completely. After his experiences in the United States, Qutb embraced Islam renewed with passion and devotion. [15]

## THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

Qutb had renounced political parties, but upon his return to Egypt, he joined the Muslim Brotherhood, and through this alliance his ideas reached millions. He had completed his book *Social Justice in Islam* immediately before departing for the United States. Published the year before he returned to Egypt, this work had caught the attention of the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, an organization founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna as a social welfare and political organization. When Banna, a layman educated as a teacher, began the organization, he had a vision of restoring Egypt socially and politically by establishing a modern, dynamic Shari'a state. He hoped for a return to Islamic government, moral values, and reason that would adapt to modern times to serve modern Egypt.[16] The organization's commitment to social justice and political harmony attracted hundreds of thousands of followers in the 1930s and 40s. Banna claimed that Islam was the only path to social justice and community ethics.[17] The Brotherhood practiced its values: it served as a social welfare organization, offering free clinics, food, shelter, and schools to the poor and marginalized masses of Egypt, services the government could not offer.[18]

After World War II, the Brotherhood added a new platform to its ideology, a campaign for national independence. The establishment of an Islamic community, wrote Banna, was the only

way to solve the problems of society, but foreign influence and control prevented the establishment of the this community. Banna wrote to Faruq that Egypt "is 'at the crossroads.' It is facing two directions: 'the way of the West' and 'the way of Islam.'"[19] It was not enough, however, to win political independence. "Banna warned his followers early and often that 'formal political independence was worthless unless accompanied by 'intellectual, social, and cultural independence.'"[20] Free of the corrupt ideologies of the West, Egypt would finally be able to establish an "Islamic order." [21] Creation of an Islamic government, Banna believed would solve social, political, and economic problems that the British, the Egyptian king, and the parliament had been long unable to solve. Meanwhile, the gap between the wealthy and impoverished was growing, leaving almost all the land in the hands of a few absentee landlords. Unemployment continued to rise, leaving many educated youths without futures. The British still controlled the Suez Canal and maintained a military presence in Egypt. Faruq had lost the respect of the Egyptian people with scandalous behavior and submission to British capitulations.[22] The political parties, too, lost credibility. Egyptians saw that the Wafd, the strongest political party and "traditionally a 'middle-class' stronghold, was being dominated in its leadership by men whose interests lay rather with the ruling elite" and was failing to address the needs of the people.[23] In addition, the Wafd had compromised its traditional platform of national independence with "its acceptance of power at the hands of the British" in 1942.[24] With no legitimate advocates in the government, many Egyptians became desperate. The struggle turned violent and "any and all groups wielding a minimum of power, official or unofficial"[25] took up arms and set off a wave of destruction and bloodshed. Like members of other parties, militants among the Muslim Brotherhood joined the violent struggle, attacking British soldiers and assassinating judges. Desperately, al-Banna attempted to ease the tensions between the Brothers and the government and abate the violence, but his efforts proved futile. In 1948, a Brother assassinated Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi al-Nuqrashi. Al-Banna was in no way responsible, but the new Prime Minister blamed him anyway and arranged his assassination in 1949.[26]

This then was the political climate in Egypt when Qutb returned from America in 1950. He published seething criticisms of America and left the Ministry of Public Education. That year, he officially joined the Muslim Brotherhood. At the age of forty-five, he considered this a new beginning: "I was born in 1951," he said.[27] A year later, the Brothers elected him to the leadership council to head the Department for the Propagation of Islam.[28] In this post, Qutb became the principle ideologue of the organization. He began publishing chapters of his monumental undertaking, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, an interpretation of the Qur'an that would eventually span thirty volumes. For a few months, he published sections in a monthly journal, and then decided to release the volumes as books.

In 1952, he published the first volume. One year later, he published the first fourteen out of thirty.[29]

In 1952, the Free Officers seized control of the Egyptian government in a coup. For a brief period, the Free Officers and the Muslim Brotherhood worked together. The regime authorized the release of political prisoners, appointed three Brothers to the Constitutional Committee, and "exempted the Brotherhood from the ban on political parties." [30] In exchange, the Brotherhood supported the Free Officers unconditionally. During this period, Qutb met with Nasser frequently to advise him on Islamic issues. In 1952, Qutb chaired a "conference on 'intellectual and emotional emancipation in Islam' attended by everyone who was anyone in revolutionary Cairo, and was warmly congratulated by Nasser and Neguib, Egypt's first president after the coup." [31] This cooperation between Nasser and the Brotherhood, however, would not last long.

The ruling junta gave the Brotherhood a role in the new government and the Brotherhood attempted to exert its influence and gain a greater say. The regime resisted the Brotherhood's influence and their relationship "devolved into one of unspoken competition." [32] The ruling junta attempted to control the Brotherhood by urging the organization to dissolve into its own political movement, The Liberation Rally. The Brotherhood resisted and tensions increased between the two. [33] The Supreme Guide of the Brotherhood, Hasan al-Hudaybi privately criticized the junta's use of martial law and press censorship, and he "urged the government to rely on popular support, by which he meant the Brotherhood," instead of force. [34]

The junta had been unable to dissolve the Brotherhood, but it could foster internal divisions. The regime supported Hudaybi's opponents and sparked controversies and disarray within the party. Nasser played a "dangerous, duplicitous game," cultivating "Hudaybi foes" and almost succeeding in destroying the Supreme Guide's authority. [35] By December of 1953, however, Hudaybi had reorganized the organization behind him and reaffirmed his leadership. The regime needed a new way to destabilize the organization. In January of 1954, it found its reason: a scuffle between student supporters of the Liberation Rally and the Muslim Brotherhood on a university campus. The regime arrested hundreds of Brothers and outlawed the organization. At this point, however, cracking down on the Brotherhood was a propaganda move against Hudaybi and his supporters - "the regime left avenues for future cooperation open." [36] Nasser was not yet attempting to destroy the organization. [37] Qutb was among those arrested and spent three months in prison. But less than one month after the crackdown, the Brotherhood had regrouped and it continued to meet and publish papers. Upon Qutb's release, he

accepted the post of editor-in-chief of the newspaper 'The Muslim Brothers.'

The relationship between the Brotherhood and the ruling junta had by now "deteriorated to the point of unveiled enmity." [38] In October of 1954, a member of the Brotherhood attempted to assassinate Nasser. According to the Brotherhood, however, the regime staged the assassination. Either way, Nasser now had an excuse to destroy the Brotherhood. Immediately following the assassination attempt, mobs composed of members of government-controlled unions ransacked and burned the Brotherhood's headquarters in Cairo and district headquarters all over the country. The next day, Nasser appeared at a rally to launch a campaign against the Brothers. Hudaybi was arrested along with leaders and members all over the country. [39] Many fled into exile, but Qutb refused to leave. He was among one thousand Brothers arrested and tried at the "People's Tribunal." [40] Kepel summarizes the proceedings of the trial as "farcical:" [41] defendants were tortured into confessions, witnesses were confused and coerced, and the trial was "a memorable exhibition of the rights revolutionary governments have and take as regards to the due process of the law. [42] Throughout the trial, the regime turned out propaganda detailing the extensive "conspiracy" it had uncovered. [43] The court found Qutb guilty of conspiring against the government and sentenced him to twenty-five years hard labor. Qutb endured ten years of torture, forced labor, and 22-hours a day of loudspeakers blaring the slogans and speeches of Nasser. Despite these conditions, Qutb continued to write. He completed the remaining sixteen volumes of his commentary, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, and rewrote many of the first volumes in a new style: these commentaries from prison are deeper, more expansive and more radical. This work reflects the torment of the prison. He published these volumes by smuggling the pages out of his cell [44] and, even though he was in prison, he was "the pole around which the remaining supporters of Muslim Brotherhood gathered." [45]

In 1964, Iraqi President 'Abd al-Salam 'Aref, believing Qutb to be wrongfully imprisoned, personally intervened and petitioned Nasser for Qutb's release. Nasser complied and authorized his release, but Qutb knew he was still in danger. He suspected the regime was looking for a reason to rearrest and execute him. [46] Both Iraq and Libya offered Qutb political refuge, but, again, he refused to flee. He had a duty to his followers, he said, to show he was willing to die for his beliefs. Three thousand young men and women followed his teaching, he said, and "he did not want to undo a lifetime of teaching by refusing to give those 3,000 people an example of true martyrdom." [47] The next year, Nasser ordered him arrested again and tried him for treason on the ludicrous charge of attempting to initiate a Marxist revolution in Egypt. The real reason for his execution, the real threat to Nasser, was *Milestones*, the last book Qutb wrote. In *Milestones*, Qutb

denounced modern governments and called modern rulers tyrants. The court convicted Qutb and sentenced him to hanging. Before the scheduled execution, Nasser sent an emissary to convince Qutb to sign a plea for mercy. Qutb refused: "If I have done something wrong in the eyes of Allah, I do not deserve mercy; but if I have not done anything wrong, I should be set free without having to plead for mercy from any mortal." [48] He faced his execution as a martyr.

Death did not silence Sayyid Qutb. Nasser banned his books and called him a traitor, but illegal copies of his most influential works, *Milestones* and *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, circulated with immense popularity. "Intimacy with *Milestones* was considered an act of heroism among the youth, a testimony to courage," [49] writes Dr. Ahmad Zaki Hammad in his introduction to *Milestones*. The work inspired readers throughout Egypt and spread to the rest of the Middle East. But Qutb was put to death before he could answer many questions and he left interpretation of many key points to the reader. Qutb's words spread like fire after his execution, but he could not defend his meaning or correct misinterpretations, so his disciples build on his philosophy in any direction they chose. Indeed, "young Islamicist militants interpreted [Qutb's word] in a fashion that hardly conformed to the dominant current of thought within the Muslim Brotherhood." [50] Older members of the Brotherhood, including Sayyid's own brother Muhammad, published commentaries on the martyr's work in which they attempted to steer him away from extremist interpretations. But Qutb himself was untouchable. He both "fascinated and embarrassed" the Brotherhood's reformist wing, but no one dared criticize him directly. [51]

## QUTB'S PHILOSOPHY

Qutb's ideology pivots around a few central themes. In *Milestones*, his most popular work, he excerpts passages from *In the Shade of the Qur'an* and summarizes many points of his commentary. [52] Much of his philosophy rests on a new designation for an old word: jahiliyya. In his prison writings, Qutb explained that a society follows the enlightened inspiration of the Qur'an or descends into a chaos of ignorance and idolatry. He could not envision a secular compromise between an Islamic society and a state of chaos, ignorance, and idolatry, the state he calls "jahiliyyah." [53] Jahiliyya means the "Age of Heedlessness and Ignorance," and traditionally refers to the period in Arabia before the Prophet and the Revelation of the Qur'an. Muslims look at that time with fear and scorn -- Jahiliyya implies polytheism and idolatry, the antitheses of Islam. The jahili culture of pre-Islam Arabia followed a complex system of tribal patriarchy, desert customs, and inherited taboos. [54] The Revelations of the Qur'an

countered ignorance with divine scripture, and the new Muslims of the seventh century based their community on sacred injunctions of the Qur'an.

Qutb created a new set of meanings around the word jahiliyya. Before Qutb, Jahiliyya referred to one specific time period - the time before the advent of Islam - and one specific place - the Arabian Peninsula. Qutb expanded the definition so that jahiliyya could refer to any society, past or modern, anywhere in the world, that is not Islamic.[55] Using this historical term as a metaphor, with one word, Qutb conveys a range of negative connotations to a Muslim reader - one word conveys a society that is backwards, cruel, ignorant, unstable, and lacks true spirituality.

The resemanticization of the word is critical to Qutb's thought. Today, says Qutb, people worship false gods: material possessions, jahili governments, sciences, and their own desires. A society that worships these idols is polytheist and therefore jahili, trapped in the same darkness as the pre-Islamic polytheists. "[The nature of jahiliyya in the world today] is the same as during the first period of Islam," writes Qutb, "and it is perhaps a little more deeply entrenched." [56] Today's societies have fallen more deeply into jahiliyya because, unlike the polytheists of pre-Islamic Arabia who had not yet heard the Prophet's call, jahili societies today have knowingly turned a blind eye to the gifts of the Qur'an and closed their hearts to Islam and the one true God.

At first, Western influence in Egypt concerned Qutb. Jahiliyya threatened Egypt, threatened to eclipse Islamic morality and spirituality in his home country. Later, Qutb came to see Nasser's regime as jahili as well. Human beings, Qutb wrote in Milestones, should never submit to rulers other than God. Qutb believed that man-made laws and all existing governments force mankind to worship and submit to lords other than Allah. [57] No man should rule over another, for this is tyranny, the usurping of God's authority.

[Jahiliyya] attempts to transfer to man one of the greatest attributes of Allah, namely sovereignty, by making some men lords over others. It does so not in the simple and primitive ways of the ancient Jahiliyya, but in the more subtle form of claiming the right to create values, to legislate rules of collective behavior, and to choose a way of life rests with men, without regard to what Allah has prescribed. The result of this rebellion against the authority of Allah is the oppression of his creatures.[58]

Human beings, Qutb explains, become slaves to tyrants when they are forced to submit to man-made laws. In this slavery, humans lose their natural dignity and fall into sorrow and immorality. Allah explained the only right laws, the Shari'a, in the words he revealed to Muhammad, and those words are preserved

in the Qur'an. Allah knows His creation and therefore established the only perfect, natural laws for mankind to follow. "The growth of a human being, his conditions of health and disease, and his life and death are governed by the system of natural laws that comes from Allah...Therefore he should also follow Islam in those aspects of his life in which he is given a choice." [59] Shari'a is natural because, like the other laws of the universe and man himself, it comes from God. "If a man follows shari'ah, it results in a harmony between his life and his nature." [60] By this reasoning, any law but Shari'a law is unnatural, and to follow man-made laws is to live in a form of slavery.

No nation in the world, he believed, was truly Islamic, even those nations with the most severe forms of Islamic regime. No nation truly follows the laws of God because jahiliyya invades peoples' minds. "Our whole environment," he wrote, "people's beliefs and ideas, habits and art, rules and laws - is jahiliyyah, even to the extent that what we consider to be Islamic culture, Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy, and Islamic thought are also constructs of jahiliyyah!" [61] Jahiliyya, he said, had overtaken every nation in the world.

Every modern government is jahili and blinds and enslaves its citizens. The jahili powers hide the truth from the people, tell lies about Islam, and force people to accept a fallen social system. But, says Qutb, "[Islam] has a right to destroy all obstacles in the form of institutions and traditions that restrict man's freedom of choice." [62]

The Qur'an offers release from the pain and hollowness of modern life. Man, Qutb believed, can find freedom through submission to Allah alone. [63] Suffering in prison, guilty only of opposing Nasser's dictatorship, Qutb developed his critique of modern jahili regimes while also envisioning the ideal society, an Islamic utopia. Islam was the one and only path to real social justice, he wrote. Only the pure divine knowledge of the Qur'an could offer mankind freedom from centuries of slavery and confusion, exactly as the revelations of the Prophet had brought light to the Arabs. The few true Muslims who understand this have a duty, he says, a duty to establish and spread Islamic community and Shari'a and free mankind from the slavery and darkness of jahiliyya.

Qutb dreamt of a time when the light of Islam would vanquish jahiliyya and free mankind from its delusions. "Only in the Islamic way of life do all men become free from the servitude of some men to others..." [64] Much of his work focuses on the path to establishing a society that lives the Islamic life. The title of his book, Milestones, refers to the markers along this road. He defines the steps that every Muslim must undertake to spread Islam and defeat jahiliyya.

Muslims fulfill this duty through jihad, a personal struggle in the service of Allah that takes different forms at different times. Jihad, he stresses, is always active, not a battle of theories or a defensive war. Muslims must strive and radiate Islam outward to destroy the tyranny of jahiliyya. These beliefs form the foundation of Qutb's ideology.

## PERCEPTIONS OF QUTB

Qutb appears frequently in the post-September 11th discussions of Islamic terrorism. Qutb is the reason for militant Islam, many journalists explain. Articles trace al-Qaeda back to Egypt, to the Tura prison, to Qutb. In the New York Times, Paul Berman explains that Qutb is "the intellectual hero of every one of the groups that eventually went into Al Qaeda, their Karl Marx (to put it that way), their guide." [65] He continues, "[Al-Qaeda and other militant fundamentalists] are in possession of a powerful philosophy, which is Sayyid Qutb's." [66] Robert Irwin credits Qutb as "the father of Islamic fundamentalism." He asks, "Is [Qutb] the man who inspired Bin Laden?" He goes on to answer this question,

[The] most useful insights into the shaping of Bin Laden may lie not in the rugged mountains of Afghanistan, or the rampant materialism of 1970s Saudi Arabia, but the biography of a long dead Egyptian fundamentalist scholar called Sayyid Qutb. Qutb, regarded as the father of modern fundamentalism and described by his (Arab) biographer as 'the most famous personality of the Muslim world in the second half of the 20th century,' is being increasingly cited as the figure who has most influenced the al-Qaeda leader.[67]

Though different journalists attribute varying levels of influence to Qutb, agreement is clear in every article I found that discussed Qutb: the Muslim who reads and implements Qutb's philosophy into action is a radical fundamentalist, a terrorist.

Newspapers and magazines are not the only publications to share this consensus --scholarship on political Islam also casts Qutb as a figure who inspires violence. In his book on Muslim extremism, Gilles Kepel refers to as Qutb a "militant." [68] And in an article for the journal *Terrorism and Political Violence*, John Zimmerman writes, "We may never know what the 19 Al-Qaeda hijackers of 11 September 2001 were thinking as they steered the airplanes toward the twin towers of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and an open field in Pennsylvania. However, we can be certain that they were immersed in the ideas of Sayyid Qutb." [69]

Western scholars and analysts, however, do not need to open Milestones to learn that Qutb's philosophy is fundamental to

these fundamentalists: many radicals quote him, credit him, and draw on his ideology in their speeches. We know Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri as Usama bin Laden's right hand man, the ideologue of al-Qaeda. Zawahiri quotes Qutb extensively with great respect. In his 2001 autobiography,[70] Zawahiri writes, "Qutb was the most prominent theoretician of the fundamentalist movements." [71] Qutb's message of the "oneness of God and the supremacy of the divine path...fanned the fire of Islamic revolution against the enemies of Islam at home and abroad." [72] Zawahiri describes himself as a disciple of Sayyid Qutb with pride. Qutb, says Zawahiri, inspired him to fight and kill. Zawahiri writes, "Qutb said, 'Brother push ahead, for your path is soaked in blood. Do not turn your head right or left but look only up to Heaven.'" [73]

\* \* \*

I question the one-dimensional picture the Western media paints of Sayyid Qutb. The picture is sensationalist, pointing fingers at an innocent man for shock value and dramatic headlines. In addition, I question al-Qaeda's interpretation of this philosopher. Al-Qaeda, I argue, twists and distorts Qutb's philosophy to justify terrorism. Both the Western media and the terrorist organizations read Qutb selectively through the lens of their own agendas.

What does Sayyid Qutb really say and how does he say it? Why is his philosophy so easily misinterpreted? Is there a way to follow his path, his milestones to his utopian civilization? To answer these questions, I will focus on his prison writings, especially Milestones, his most famous work, and volume seven of In the Shade of the Qur'an, the work in which he discusses jihad in the context of the Battle of the Badr Wells.

In the end, I will show that violent interpretations of Qutb ignore the fundamental message of his life's work. Qutb does not command violence against non-Muslims or Muslims who do not follow his teachings. He claims to love all human beings because they are inherently moral, though many are misguided. Believers have a duty, he says, to combat jahiliyya, to free humans from tyrants and false idols, and to strive towards an Islamic utopia. The battle, the jihad, towards this goal is never violent in Qutb's philosophy. Through a series of steps, he aims to save people, not kill them.

All utopias, however, are impossible, and, in the end, his entire ideology is based on paradoxes that collapse in the light of reality. He writes to his own situation, assuring himself in the face of impending death. From this perspective, his only focus is paradise, in this world or the next. The danger of Qutb's philosophy lies not in evil-intentions or an inherent call to violence, but in its contradictions. His complete philosophy is impossible to implement, so followers pull pieces out of context. I will examine

the actions and ideologies of Qutb's disciples and those groups that claim to follow his teaching.

Terrorist organizations that actually practice Wahhabism claim to follow Qutb. He articulates a tolerant, embracing spread of Islam: he voices what they claim to do, what they would like to publicize. Qutb is an idealist philosopher who wants a better world without killing. He articulates a definition of jihad without violence at its core. However, the radiant Islamic energy of Qutb seized in the minds of al-Qaeda becomes an evil inspirational force, a perversion of his devotional genius. Al-Qaeda, wanting to kill and seize power, needs a philosophical base to seem inspired. They steal it from Qutb.