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## **The importance of conspiracy theory in extremist ideology and propaganda**

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## Chapter 12: Conspiracy Theory, Qutb, and Sunni Extremism

*"After September 11, 2001, [Qutb's] books were dusted off in Western, particularly U.S., libraries, and thumbed by scholars searching for clues to the inspiration and motivations of jihadist groups like Al Qaeda. In addition to Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, Qutb has become a household name in America as a supposed "philosopher of terror." In this context, too, he has been terribly misunderstood, presented as a caricatured image."*<sup>1</sup> - Fawaz Gerges

*"...[Qutb] greatly helped the Islamic movement to know and define its enemies. It also helped it to realize that the internal enemy was not less dangerous than the external enemy was and that the internal enemy was a tool used by the external enemy and a screen behind which it hid to launch its war on Islam..."*<sup>2</sup> - Ayman al-Zawahiri

*"Never, Never, and in no way can the formation of a society based on Islam be tolerated anywhere in the world, even on one of the most remote islands in the ocean, and in this way they [the Zionists and colonialists] will mobilize all the visible and invisible, massive global forces."*<sup>3</sup> - Sayyid Qutb

This chapter will examine the importance of the Grand Conspiracy Theory in the thought of radical Sunni Islamists and their ideological godfather Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966). Specifically, this chapter will illustrate how these beliefs may have contributed to and/or informed the creation of a strand of violent Sunni extremist groups, particularly Al Qaeda. This chapter will argue that a belief in a global conspiracy theory derived from material from Tsarist-era and probably also the propaganda campaigns of the Nazis and others is an essential part of Qutb's theory of *jahiliyyah* and therefore of his view of history and his prescription for revolutionary action. In fact, this Sunni Muslim variant of the Grand Conspiracy Theory forms a pillar of Qutb's ideas about the state of Islam, and colors his interpretation of the Quran. This chapter will also trace the subsequent effects of Qutb's ideas on the leadership of Al Qaeda, arguably the most successful violent Sunni extremist groups in terms of body count and global political effect.

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<sup>1</sup> Fawaz Gerges, *Making the Arab World: Nasser, Qutb, and the Clash That Shaped the Middle East*, (Princeton University Press, 2018), Kindle edition, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Zawahiri, *His Own Words*, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *ادعائنامه ای علیه تمدن غرب و دورنمایی از رسالت اسلام* (An Indictment of Western Civilization and the Prospects of Islam), Ali Khamenei trans., (Qom, Iran: Tebyan Cultural Institute, 2008). Available at <https://library.tebyan.net/fa/Viewer/Text/92016/274>, p. 274. This book is a selection of Qutb's writings that Khamenei translated. This quote is from Qutb's essay "The Way of Salvation."

This chapter does not have space to deal with the wider phenomenon of *jihad*, and the religious motivations of many Sunni Muslim fighters in Kashmir or Afghanistan today or in the Balkans and Sudan in the 19th century or in earlier eras of Muslim expansion. These do not concern us here. It is not unusual, historically speaking, for Muslims to wage “holy war.” It may be the case, as some have argued, that the idea of holy war has a particular attraction to Muslims in a way that it does not have in Christianity (or perhaps vice-versa?) but this chapter does not deal with these kind of comparisons. What this chapter is interested in is the effect of the European-origin Grand Conspiracy Theory in parts of the Islamic world, and perhaps even suggest some similarities between these effects and the earlier effects the Grand Conspiracy Theory had in 20th century Europe.

There are any number of reasons why a Sunni Muslim might decide to engage in holy war, acting in combinations that are different for each individual: religious, financial, patriotic, emotional, even just family ties. The different motivations of different individuals and local fights means that the modern Sunni jihadist movement, if it can be called a movement, is riven with all sorts of rivalries, based on theology, personalities, strategy, tactics, ethnicity, financial matters, and politics.<sup>4</sup> This chapter is about a particular strain that identifies a vast anti-Islamic conspiracy as its primary opponent. This strain, the leading example of which is Al Qaeda, has engaged in the most spectacular terrorist attacks in the West and also advocated the overthrow of some of the most “conservative” Sunni states in the Arab world. This chapter will examine how Qutb’s ideas influenced the decisions of some Sunni radicals, and also discuss their attempts to justify their decisions using certain Sunni traditions and interpretations of Islamic law.

### **Qutb’s path to *jihad***

Sayyid Qutb is a monumental figure in the history of radical Islamic ideology. An Arab biographer called him “the most famous personality in the Muslim world in the second half of the twentieth century.”<sup>5</sup> His main works cross the sectarian divide. The Supreme Leader of the Khomeinist Shi’a government of Iran Ayatollah Khamenei translated portions of Qutb’s work into Persian.<sup>6</sup> Some scholars have even named him the “founder” of radical Islam.<sup>7</sup> After a brief summary of his biography and historical context, this section will examine the role of the Grand Conspiracy Theory in Qutb’s thought, mainly through examining a collection of his works from the early 1950s *Our Struggle With the Jews* and his monumental Quran commentary *In the Shade of the Quran*, both of which are now available in English translation.

Sayyid Qutb was born and grew up in rural southern Egypt. His father was a landowner who was involved in incipient liberal and nationalist movements in Egypt.<sup>8</sup> Sayyid Qutb received

<sup>4</sup> Fawaz Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, (Second Edition, Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 102.

<sup>5</sup> Ronald L. Nettler, *Past Trials and Present Tribulations, A Muslim Fundamentalist’s View of the Jews*, (Pergamon Press, 1987), p. 25. [Nettler is quoting Mahdi Fagl Allah, *Ma’a Sayyid Qutb Ff Fikrihf al-Siyasf wa al-Dini (With Sayyid Qutb in His Political and Religious Thought)* (Beirut, 1979).]

<sup>6</sup> For example, Sayyid Qutb, *ادعائمه ای علیه تمدن غرب و دورنمایی از رسالت اسلام* (An Indictment of Western Civilization and the Prospects of Islam), Ali Khamenei trans., (Qom, Iran: Tebyan Cultural Institute, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> David Cook, *Understanding Jihad*, (Second Edition, University of California Press, 2015) p. 102.

<sup>8</sup> Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, p. 12.

a solid education at a teacher-training college in Cairo and eventually became employed at the Egyptian Ministry of Education. He did not show signs of radical Islamist beliefs before the 1950s, and in his young adulthood he was a supporter of parliamentary democracy and a budding poet.<sup>9</sup> In 1949-50 Qutb spent some time in the United States, an experience he did not seem to enjoy.<sup>10</sup> This sojourn in the West coincided with a more religious turn in Qutb's literary output.<sup>11</sup> After he returned to Egypt Qutb became involved with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, perhaps initially as a writer for some of their publications.<sup>12</sup> He officially joined the movement in 1953.<sup>13</sup>

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (often referred to as just the "Brotherhood") had been founded in 1928 by the teacher Hassan Al-Banna. The organization was dedicated to returning Egypt and the whole Muslim world to conservative Muslim roots. It also opposed British colonialism and bitterly opposed Jewish immigration to Palestine and the idea of a Jewish state there. The Muslim Brotherhood was mentioned in the previous chapter, mainly in connection with its relationship with the Nazi collaborator and Palestinian leader Amin al-Husseini. As was also mentioned in the previous chapter, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood had greatly expanded its size and appeal through a vociferous "Palestine campaign" in the late 1930s. This campaign included denunciations of British imperialism which was allowing Jewish immigration to take place and fighting the Palestinian revolt. The campaign included fundraisers, leaflets, boycotts against Jewish merchants, and strident attacks against Zionism as a "social cancer." Nevertheless, even during the Palestinian Revolt many writers of the Muslim Brotherhood maintained a real distinction between the Jews of Egypt and the Jews in Palestine. There were even soccer matches between Muslim Brotherhood teams and Jewish teams associated with the Maccabi World Union in 1939. There were no anti-Jewish articles in the publications of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood between 1933 and 1936.<sup>14</sup>

By the time Qutb joined the Muslim Brotherhood in the early 1950s things had changed. Possibly influenced by various propaganda campaigns, the founding of Israel, and the relationship between members of the Brotherhood and al-Husseini, the Brotherhood began to engage in more strident, conspiratorial, anti-Jewish conspiracy theorizing, and Qutb's writing from this period is an example of this trend. There is insufficient clarity about Qutb's role in the ideological evolution of the Brotherhood on this issue, whether he was mainly an "influencer" or an "influencee", whether he acquired his ideas about the Jews and then joined the Brotherhood, or if the Brotherhood encouraged these ideas in him. In his groundbreaking work on Nazi propaganda in Arabic, Dr. Jeffrey Herf speculated that Qutb might have been exposed to Nazi propaganda broadcasts and/or had become familiar with the Nazi anti-Jewish conspiracy theory when he was in contact with the "Pro-Axis intellectual milieu of the radical Islamists in and

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<sup>9</sup> Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, p. 180-182.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Siegel, "Sayyid Qutb's America," NPR, May 6, 2003. Available at <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1253796>. Accessed October 7 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, p. 214-220.

<sup>12</sup> Adnan A. Musallam, *From Secularism to Jihad, Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism*, (Praeger, 2005), p. 130.

<sup>13</sup> Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, p. 222.

<sup>14</sup> Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement 1928-1942*, (Ithaca Press, 1997), p. 243-244.

around Al Azhar University.”<sup>15</sup> As demonstrated in the previous chapter, during the periods from 1939-45 and in the early 1950s Qutb and other Egyptians were being bombarded with anti-Jewish conspiracy theories via radio propaganda, and Qutb could have heard some of these narratives directly from a radio broadcast or from a secondary source. Qutb may also have been introduced to the *Protocols* before he turned to Islamism through his mentor ‘Abbas Mahumd al-’Aqqad, the Egyptian polymath and writer who had written about the *Protocols* in 1948 and who in 1956 produced a propaganda text for the Egyptian government that discussed the *Protocols*.<sup>16</sup> Qutb’s uncle introduced the young Qutb to Mahbud al-’Aqqad and they remained close associates into the mid-1940s.<sup>17</sup>

The question of precisely why and how Qutb embraced the anti-Jewish version of the Grand Conspiracy Theory is ancillary to this chapter, and sources that could provide an answer may not exist. What is clear is that by the early 1950s Qutb was spouting some of the most extreme anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, alleging a grand plot against Islam. What is undeniable is that Qutb took the idea of a massive Jewish conspiracy against Islam (and therefore against the whole human race) very seriously, and he viewed the *Protocols* as an authentic testimony of the machinations of this Jewish conspiracy. The important role that this idea plays in his thought and in the thought of his disciples is evident from a review of his major work or a glance at the rhetoric of his followers today. The continuing popularity of his work ensures that the idea of a grand Jewish conspiracy against Islam and the “proof” of the *Protocols* is constantly re-circulated in radical Islamist circles that take Qutb’s work seriously.

The similarity of Qutb’s anti-Jewish writings and the propaganda spread by the Nasserist propaganda machine, which will become evident when we examine them in closer detail, is not coincidental. Immediately after the 1953 Revolution the Free Officers and the Muslim Brotherhood were on very good terms and mutually supported each other. Qutb, at that time already a recognized Egyptian intellectual, also supported Nasser and the Free Officers, and along with other members of the Brotherhood believed the Egyptian Revolution would eventually lead to an Islamic State. Following the Revolution, Qutb was given an office in the building of the Egyptian Revolutionary Command Council and was assigned the task of creating a new educational curriculum. He may have even been expecting a cabinet position in the new government, though in the end he was just offered the secretary-generalship of the official party of the Revolution, the “Liberation Rally.” Qutb turned down this appointment, probably as a result of his increasing suspicion of the motives and goals of the Free Officers.<sup>18 19</sup>

The Free Officers refused to relinquish power to a civilian government and ignored the Brotherhood’s demands to implement sharia and ban alcohol. The Free Officers refused the demand of the Guidance Bureau of the Brotherhood to give them veto power over any new legislation and they even made a deal with the British to keep some troops in the Suez Canal

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<sup>15</sup> Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, p. 259.

<sup>16</sup> Esther Webman, “Adoption of the Protocols in the Arab Discourse on the Arab-Israeli Conflict, Zionism, and the Jews,” in *The Global Impact of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Esther Webman ed. (Routledge, 2011), pp. 202-203.

<sup>17</sup> James Toth, *Sayyid Qutb: the Life and Legacy of a Radical Islamic Intellectual*, (Oxford University Press, 2013), Kindle Edition, pp. 16, 49.

<sup>18</sup> Toth, p. 75-77.

<sup>19</sup> John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism*, (London: Hurst & co., 2010), p. 185.

zone.<sup>20</sup> Qutb was detained for three months in early 1954 for publicly protesting this deal. As Nasser's power grew and the more pro-Brotherhood Egyptian president Mohamed Naguib was sidelined, the Egyptian state took stronger and stronger actions against the Brotherhood. After an attempted assassination of Nasser in late 1954 the Brotherhood was suppressed and Qutb was thrown in prison.<sup>21</sup> With the exception of 8 months of freedom, Qutb would spend the rest of his life in prison.

It was during this time that he wrote his most influential works, the foremost of which is his multi-volume Quran commentary *Fi Zilal al-Quran*, "In the Shade of the Quran." He wrote and revised this enormous work between 1952 and his final imprisonment starting in 1965. According to some Qutb experts, after being imprisoned for the first time (1959-1964) he began to take a more radical, activist approach in his writings and he subsequently revised some of his earlier volumes to reflect this.<sup>22</sup> *Our Struggle with The Jews*, a work he published in the early 1950s,<sup>23</sup> probably before he was put in jail, is filled with the idea of a massive multi-generational Jewish conspiracy against Islam, suggesting that his purported prison "radicalization" did not include an embrace of the grand anti-Jewish conspiracy, which he held beforehand. The following quotation from *Our Struggle with the Jews* confirms that Qutb had already embraced the conspiracy theory of a grand Jewish plot against Islam before he went to prison or mentioned the *Protocols* in his commentary:

The Jews also conspired against Islam by inciting its enemies against it throughout the world.... This has brought the Jews in the latest era to the point of being the chiefs of the struggle with Islam, on every foot of the face of the earth.... The Jews are (also) the ones who utilize Christianity and idolatry in this comprehensive war.... And they are the ones who create the circumstances and make the "heroes" who carry Muslim names. . . . And they attack every foundation of this religion [Islam], in a Crusader-Zionist war!!"<sup>24</sup>

Qutb was imprisoned after the assassination attempt on Nasser in October 1954, and it is unlikely that he published this work after then (though, he did manage to publish *In the Shade of the Quran* while in prison.) Recent Arabic commentary on the work appears to indicate *Our Struggle with the Jews* is a collection of excerpts from Qutb's early 1950s writings in the journal of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>25</sup>

### Qutb's *jahiliyyah*

This section will analyze Qutb's work in light of his repeated references to the Grand Conspiracy Theory and the *Protocols*, specifically with regards to his theory of *jahiliyyah*. This aspect of Qutb's thought that has had the most impact. *Jahiliyyah* was traditionally used in Islam

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<sup>20</sup> Toth, pp. 77.

<sup>21</sup> Toth, pp. 77-79.

<sup>22</sup> William E. Shepard "Sayyid Qutb," in *The Qur'an: An Encyclopedia*, Oliver Leaman ed., (Routledge, 2006), pp. 568-569.

<sup>23</sup> Nettler, p. 29.

<sup>24</sup> Nettler, p. 83.

<sup>25</sup> Amal al-Khuzami, *سيد قطب: في ظلال صاحب الظلال* *In The Shadows of Sayyid Qotob*, (Center of Civilization for the Development of Islamic Thought, 2015), p.110.

as a word describing the ignorance of the world during the pre-Islamic period.<sup>26</sup> Qutb defined *jahiliyyah* not as an era in the past, but as something that can exist in any period of history. He defined it in the fourth volume of his Quran commentaries:

“...*jahiliyyah*, rendered here as ‘pagan ignorance,’ as the term is used in the *Qur’ān*. *Jahiliyyah* means that people are ruled by people, because this signifies that they submit to one another. They refuse to submit to God alone and reject His Godhead, acknowledging instead that some human beings have qualities of Godhead and hence they submit to their authority. As such, the term pagan ignorance, or *jahiliyyah*, does not refer to a particular period of time, but to a certain situation which may come into existence at any time. Whenever it exists, it must be described as *jahiliyyah* which is in contrast to Islam.”<sup>27</sup>

Qutb wrote about two modes of *jahiliyyah*: one - a pre-Islamic ignorance, and another - a contemporary *jahiliyyah* which is active and very aware of Islam’s power and seeks to crush it using its vast resources.<sup>28</sup> Qutb believed that this latter form of *jahiliyyah* was not just a way to describe a non-Islamic society but an active force that had succeeded where the first form of *jahiliyyah* had failed, and managed to successfully destroy true Islamic society and stymie the development of a truly Islamic state. It continually intervened in the politics of supposedly Islamic countries and the theology of supposedly Islamic institutions to maintain this state of ignorance. This is Qutb’s main innovation, and if a Muslim believes that this active, usurping *jahiliyyah* actually exists, one’s primary goal should be to fight against it by any means necessary in order to rescue the world from its clutches.

Qutb’s view of modern *jahiliyyah* was partly derived from the work of Qutb’s contemporary, the Pakistani Imam and jurist Abul A’la Maududi. Mawdudi referred to modernity as the “new *jahiliyyah*.”<sup>29</sup> Qutb adapted this idea of a “new *jahiliyyah*” into his concept of two modes of *jahiliyyah*, and Qutb’s contemporary *jahiliyyah* was globally connected and much more sophisticated than the old one. In *Milestones*, his most widely-read work in the West, Qutb makes clear that when he speaks of *jahiliyyah* he is not speaking about just an idea or an adjective, but of something that can become an active conscious force, under the right circumstances:

“This *Jahiliyyahh* is not an abstract theory; in fact, under certain circumstances it has no theory at all. It always takes the form of a living movement in a society which has its own leadership, its own concepts and values, and its own traditions, habits and feelings. It is an organized society and there is a close cooperation and loyalty between its individuals, and it is always ready and alive to defend its existence consciously or unconsciously. It crushes all elements which seem to be dangerous to its personality.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Vincent J. Cornell, “Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge” in *The Oxford History of Islam*, (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 78.

<sup>27</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 4., M.A. Salahi trans.(?), (Islamic Foundation?), p. 112.

<sup>28</sup> Sayed Khatab, *The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb: The Theory of Jahiliyyah*. (Routledge Studies in Political Islam, Book 2), Taylor and Francis, 2006, Kindle Edition, Locations 334-347.

<sup>29</sup> “Jahiliyyah,” *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, John L. Esposito ed., (Oxford University Press 2003) p. 154.

<sup>30</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, A. B. al-Mehri ed., (Birmingham: Maktabah, 2006) p. 57.



Qutb believed that we are living through one of these “certain circumstances” in which *jahiliyyah* becomes organized and conscious and ceased to be a “theory” in any sense of the word. He described the difference between the tactics of the old *jahiliyyah* and the modern *jahiliyyah*:

“The people of old *jahiliyyah* used to divert the masses away from the Qur’ān, demanding physical miracles. The people of modern *jahiliyyah* try to divert the masses away from the Qur’ān by putting in its place a false bible which they promote through all mass media and information channels.”<sup>31</sup>

The major difference between the old *jahiliyyah* and the new is that the forces opposing Mohammed in the 7th century were local forces fighting a losing battle against God’s prophet, and were doomed to failure. Now, on the other hand, the global forces of *jahiliyyah* are much more ambitious. They have had such success in their multi-generational campaign of deception and subterfuge that they believe that they are about to destroy Islam forever. Qutb was clear about who he believed made up the shock troops of the “forces of *jahiliyyah*” - the Zionists and Christian imperialists:

“Zionism and Christian Imperialism have employed in these modern times various methods of combat, scheming and plotting against this religion which are far superior to what they used over past centuries. In our modern time, they are trying to put an end to the Islamic faith altogether, thinking that they are fighting their final decisive battle. Therefore, they re-employ the methods and schemes they used in the past, in addition to what the present advancements enable them to use.”<sup>32</sup>

The *Protocols* is cited several times in Qutb’s Quran commentary as an important proof of the existence of this grand conspiracy against Islam. Qutb appears to have taken the *Protocols* quite literally, and saw them as an actual blueprint for a massive deception and manipulation of the whole globe by usurping Jews. Take this example when Qutb discussed the history of atheism in the West in his commentary on Sura 6 of the Quran:

“Most probably, the whole concept of atheism started as a manoeuvre to confront the Church. Zionism then exploited it for its own ends, because it tries to demolish the basic foundation of human life, so that no human community other than its own can take it as a basis for its code of living. This they state in the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. The result they aim to achieve is the collapse of humanity so that they can exercise control over it, since they preserve for themselves the source of true power, namely faith.”<sup>33</sup>

While Qutb believed in the authenticity of the *Protocols* and the threat of the Jewish projects of communism, liberalism, republicanism, etc., he also believed that the Jewish/Christian forces of *jahiliyyah* went beyond the plans described in the *Protocols*, and that they had been deliberately and self-consciously conspiring against Islam for millennia. Their plots included seeding disinformation over centuries and infiltrating agents into the Muslim world to clandestinely destroy Islam and lead Muslims astray:

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<sup>31</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 6., M.A. Salahi trans (?), (Islamic Foundation?), p. 263.

<sup>32</sup> Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 6., pp. 197-198.

<sup>33</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 5., M.A. Salahi trans (?), (Islamic Foundation?), p. 31.

[Jews and Christians]... continue to reject the truth of Islam, not because of any lack of evidence and proof, but because of personal prejudices and vested interests... Over the centuries, they have unfortunately been able to plant in Islamic heritage that which has nothing to do with this religion of Islam and which cannot be discovered without Herculean efforts. They have managed to confound truth with falsehood in much of our heritage, with the exception, however, of this Book which God has undertaken to preserve intact for the rest of time. Praise be to God for His limitless grace.

They have distorted much of Islamic history and its events as well as the images of its best men of action. They have also put their alien plants in the field of the *ḥadīth* until God has enabled the great scholars of *ḥadīth* to verify and sift out the true from the false, as much as is humanly possible. Their distortions have also crept into commentaries on the Qur'ān to the extent that it has become very difficult for a student of the Qur'ān to find his clear way to a correct understanding. They have also implanted their own men, hundreds if not thousands, to distort our Islamic heritage. Some of these are with us even today in the shape of Orientalists and their disciples who occupy positions of intellectual leadership in the countries whose peoples claim to be Muslim. They have also implanted in our societies scores of people who are given the status of heroes when they have actually been carefully brought up by Zionism and Christian fanaticism in order to serve the enemies of Islam in a way which cannot be achieved by any open enemy."<sup>34</sup>

The conspiracy that Qutb believed in was incredibly deceptive and powerful, global, and self-consciously usurping, immoral, and against the true religion, i.e. Islam. These Judeo-Christian forces of *jāhiliyyah*, he believed, are engaged in a long-term and massively successful deception against Islam and have given Islamic camouflage to their agents and ersatz Islam to their dupes in order to prevent Muslims from realizing what is really being done to their faith:

"The enemies of this faith who are watching carefully the Islamic revivalist movements of today are fully aware of what may influence human nature, and of the history of Islam as well. Therefore, they are keen to give an outward 'Islamic' appearance to the regimes, movements, values, traditions and philosophies they nurture and support in order to crush the Islamic revivalist movements the world over. They do so, because this outward 'Islamic' appearance may prevent the true advocates of Islam from confronting the *jāhiliyyah* reality that lies behind this false appearance....Some Muslims, including many of those who advocate the need for an Islamic revival, are deceived by this 'Islamic' appearance which is portrayed by present-day *jāhiliyyah*. Hence they are reluctant to unmask these hostile regimes and show them as they truly are. All this impedes an open confrontation with *jāhiliyyah*."<sup>35</sup>

In the above passages and elsewhere Qutb pointed to Zionism and Christian imperialists as joint corrupters of Islam: "They are all working together for a definite objective, that is, the total destruction of the Islamic faith."<sup>36</sup> Qutb wrote in other passages in his Quran commentary that the conspiracy, as per the *Protocols*, is a Jewish endeavor, with duped Christians in tow along with other servants. The schemes of the "crusaders" and "imperialists" form important parts of the forces of *jāhiliyyah*, but he believed the core enemy are the Jews. They are ultimately the more malign force, the orchestrators of the anti-Islamic conspiracy: "No one has

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<sup>34</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 2., M.A. Salahi trans(?), (Islamic Foundation?), pp. 100-101.

<sup>35</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 8., M.A. Salahi trans(?), (Islamic Foundation?), p. 118-119.

<sup>36</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 2., p. 102.

ever worked against Islam during any period of its history, including the Crusades and all forms of colonialism, without having had some help and encouragement from the Jews.”<sup>37</sup>

Qutb's belief in an all-powerful global conspiracy was similar to Hitler's because they both believed that their ultimate enemies were the Jews, and both were evidently influenced by the “Black Hundred” variant of the Grand Conspiracy Theory, and specifically the *Protocols*, that identified the Jews with the forces of liberalism, socialism, and communism. (Qutub mentioned in an aside that with regards to the war against Islam “...Marxism is only an offshoot of Zionism...”)<sup>38</sup> Repeating themes from Nazi/Tsarist propaganda, Qutb blames the Jews for inventing communism as a tool to corrupt Christian civilization, although with mixed success:

“Atheism is simply the result of long suffering at the hands of the Church... The Church resorted to oppressive practices... That long history of suffering, endured for centuries by Europe, was responsible for pushing the Europeans into their professed atheism, simply to flee from their tormentors. Besides, Jewish forces have exploited this historical legacy to tempt the Christians away from their faith so that they spread immorality and its attendant misery among them. This facilitates what the Zionist Jews see as the manipulation of the ‘asses’, to use the expression as contained within the Talmud and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. It would have been impossible for those evil forces to achieve any of this, or to drive people to atheism, without the exploitation which occurred during that grim period of European history. These tireless efforts have been given their most striking picture in the efforts of Communism, itself a Jewish invention.”<sup>39</sup>

The first parts of the Quran contain stories of Mohammed fighting with the Jews of 7th century Arabia, and Qutb extrapolated this conflict into the present, modified with the idea of the modern *jahiliyyah* with much greater abilities of deception. As in the Nazi propaganda broadcasts in Arabic, the Quran's story of the scheming Jews of 7th century Arabia who fought and conspired in vain against Islam is transformed in Qutb's work into a story supporting the idea that the Jews of today have secretly succeeded against Islam, or very nearly so. Qutb believed in a continuity of the war between the Jews and Islam: “The war the Jews began to wage against Islam and Muslims in those early days has raged on to the present day.”<sup>40</sup> He also believed that the Jews were by nature prone to oppose Islam: “Jews as Jews were by nature determined to fight Allah's Truth and sow corruption and confusion. Judaism was by nature defective and corrupted Truth...”<sup>41</sup> The scholar Ronald L. Nettler, who translated Qutb's *Our Struggle Against the Jews* into English, commented that Qutb merged the “metaphor” of the Jews as a “symbol of all great dangers to Islam... a metaphor for the challenges of Western domination and immorality.”<sup>42</sup> with the idea that the Jews were a real, concrete threat. For the Jews, “The line here between metaphor and reality was sometimes even effaced altogether.”<sup>43</sup> However, this merger of the “symbolic” and the “real” Jewish threat did not happen for the first time in Qutb's brain, but likely reflected his intake of European anti-Jewish propaganda.

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<sup>37</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 3, p. 146.

<sup>38</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 4, p. 185.

<sup>39</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 3, p. 117-118.

<sup>40</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 1, p. 65.

<sup>41</sup> Nettler, p. 36.

<sup>42</sup> Nettler, p. 29.

<sup>43</sup> Nettler, p. 29.

The use of Jewish bogeymen to explain some of the failures of the Islamic community predates the modern era,<sup>44</sup> but Qutb's belief in the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy and the *Protocols* made the supposed Jewish force opposing Islam more powerful than it ever had been imagined before and identified modernity with this conspiracy. Films, liberalism, communism, democracy, imperialism, really anything perceived as negative and alien could be easily worked into a conspiratorial narrative involving the machinations of the Jews and the Crusaders against Islam.

### **Qutb's solution to *jahiliyyah***

In his works Qutb regularly uses rhetoric that appears to be liberal, talking of freedom and referencing the idea that governments must earn their legitimacy. His writings include admonitions for "the freedom of man from servitude"<sup>45</sup> and condemnations of slavery<sup>46</sup> and even against unreasonable searches and seizures.<sup>47</sup> Qutb did write that "...the process of liberating mankind is completed by giving every individual the freedom of choice based on conviction."<sup>48</sup> A former scholar at the Brookings institute and current (as of 2019) professor at the University of Delaware Dr. Muqtedar Khan wrote a 2003 essay that called Qutb the "John Locke of the Muslim World, who advocated freedom - and supported rebellion against tyrannical rulers."<sup>49</sup> The problem with this analysis is that Qutb's discussion of religious "freedom" and what constitutes tyranny cannot be disentangled from his deep belief in a version of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy theory.

Qutb's vision of "freedom" does not just mean freedom from direct coercion, but also freedom from the machinations of the massive international conspiracy:

"Those who adopt the religion of Islam also have the right not to be intimidated or subjected to oppression, in any way whatsoever, so that they abandon their faith. No impediments may be placed to turn people away from Islam. The Muslim community, if subjected to any such aggressive designs, has the right to defend itself by force, in order to protect the community's freedom and security... The Muslim community must pursue this course of *jihad*, or struggle for God's cause, until all threat of oppression is eliminated and people are free to believe in Islam and practice it. This does not imply any sense of compulsion, but it does mean allowing Islam to prevail in society to the extent that everyone is free to accept it and tell others about it without any fear of persecution or intimidation."<sup>50</sup>

So, Qutb endorses *jihad* against any restriction of a Muslim's religious freedom or aggression against Islam, but he makes clear elsewhere that these "impediments" against Islam can include any activities of the supposed massive Zionist/Crusader propaganda and subversion machine. For example, this campaign against Islam supposedly includes the

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<sup>44</sup> Nettler, p. 40.

<sup>45</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 84.

<sup>46</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 1, p. 188.

<sup>47</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 1, p. 230.

<sup>48</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 8, p. 98. (This quotation is more sinister in context, as will be demonstrated later.)

<sup>49</sup> Muqtedar Khan, "Syed Qutb – John Locke of the Islamic World," Brookings, July 28, 2008. Available at <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/syed-qutb-john-locke-of-the-islamic-world/>. Accessed October 8 2018.

<sup>50</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol 1, pp. 227, 230.

increasing sexual promiscuity in modern society. While Qutb allowed that the fact that Europe and America are populated by unbelievers is a sufficient explanation for the “sexual perversion rapidly increasing”<sup>51</sup> in the West, he also asserted in his Quran commentary that this trend was helped on by the Zionist conspiracy:

“The media, often controlled by Zionist interests, is directed to undermine human life through the spreading of immorality and promiscuity. Hence it has been trying hard to stress the misconception that women’s adoption of a position of conservative propriety is the reason for the spread of such abnormal indecencies... Anyone who still wants to argue in the face of these glaring facts should read first, ‘Men’s sexual behaviour’ and ‘Women’s sexual behaviour’ in the McKenzie Report. [sic.] The controlled media nevertheless continues to repeat this falsehood, attributing perversion to women’s religious dress. In this way, they are only fulfilling the aims of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and implementing the recommendations of missionary conventions.”<sup>52</sup>

Qutb believed Arab nationalism was also part of the conspiracy against Islam, despite the appearance that it was a force fighting Western imperialism. Qutb singled out Palestinians as a prime example of a people who failed to resist the unbelievers because “They do not rally under the banner of the Islamic faith, but instead they hoist a nationalist or racist banner.” This was a result of a lack of awareness that “the only method weapon and banner which saw them victorious for a thousand years, and which is certain to make them victorious again...” is Islam. But this is not mere ignorance, Qutb wrote, it is the result of deliberate Zionist and Christian deception: “Such lack of awareness comes as a result of the poison injected in the Muslim community by Zionist and Christian imperialist forces, which try to perpetuate such a state of affairs through the regimes they establish in the Muslim world.”<sup>53</sup> Qutb wrote that the global conspiracy against Islam was involved in trying to wheedle permission for “usury, promiscuity, and other practices that Islam forbids” via twisted modern interpretations of Islamic law.<sup>54</sup> They even worked hard to deceive the world into believing that Kemal Ataturk was not an atheist in order to legitimize his reforms in Turkey.<sup>55</sup>

Qutb wrote that the Jewish attacks on Islam also took the form of slander against genuine Islamic movements: “They manipulate all the media under their control in order to distort the image of every successful Islamic movement anywhere in the world.”<sup>56</sup> Qutb believed the conspiracy was consciously waging a largely successful campaign to distort the image of Islam and misinform people:

“[Modern people] are also prevented from appreciating the Qur’ān by the die-hard Zionist and imperialist opposition that has continued to scheme and plot against this faith and its revealed message for fourteen centuries. They continue with their unceasing attempts to divert Muslims away from the Qur’ān and its directives. This is because the Zionists and the imperialists have learnt through long experience that they cannot be a match for the Muslims as long as they adhere to the Qur’ān in the same way as the first generation of Muslims did.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 6, p. 117.

<sup>52</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 6, p. 117-118.

<sup>53</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 6, p. 193.

<sup>54</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 5, p. 198.

<sup>55</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 5, p. 289.

<sup>56</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 3, p. 153.

<sup>57</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 5, p. 263.

In the face of such a global conspiracy with super powers of deception, real religious freedom in the Western, liberal sense would be impossible. For Qutb, there was nowhere in the world that had religious freedom in the Western sense, though some places may have an ersatz religious freedom, i.e. places where the global conspiracy against Islam has managed to dupe populations into believing that they have freedom of conscience when they are really under the spell of Jewish propaganda.

Qutb believed that the message of Islam is clear and inviting and unstoppable, but that the forces of *jahiliyyah* (and in particular the grand Jewish conspiracy and its servants) had managed to deceive nearly everyone in a massive global conspiracy against Islam. If one unmasks deceptive forces of *jahiliyyah*, more people will turn to true Islam. Indeed, Qutb believed that "This religion of Islam will always be victorious when its advocates, in any generation and any place, achieve a certain degree of awareness of its reality and the reality of the *jahiliyyah* trying to suppress it."<sup>58</sup>

However, as Qutb believed that *jahiliyyah* is a conscious, reactive force, attempts to unmask it purely through propaganda and missionary work would be incredibly difficult. The true Muslims have to fight against an evolving counter-Islamic global strategy created by the forces of *jahiliyyah*. Qutb did not believe that he was fighting against an idea or even "ignorance" in general, but against a "living and active organization"<sup>59</sup> which deliberately supports ignorance, and is dedicated to destroying Islam and capable of adapting and spinning new lies. One is reminded of Metternich suspecting that the Jacobins were shifting from being anti-religious to adopting religious enthusiasm to carry out their revolutionary plans.

A fight against a global, deceptive, multi-generational and super-powerful conspiracy that threatens Islam and therefore "freedom" needs a global counter-offensive, a revolution to remove the deceptive mask of the *jahiliyyah* and allow true Islam to once again establish an Islamic society. However, a conspiracy so powerful, one that has shown itself so competent in history and has successfully re-imposed global *jahiliyyah* would not go down without resistance. The vanguard of the coming Islamic revolution had to work hard to prepare the way for the revolution. This revolution needed a global dimension, because the enemy had global dominion. Even if one laid aside any global vision of Muslim evangelism, for Qutub "Islamism in one country" would be impossible. Any local success of building an authentic Muslim society would be immediately squelched by the vast conspiracy of Zionists and Crusaders, if they have the power and the will. In one of his lesser-known books *Islam and the Problems of Civilization* Qutb lamented that the international anti-Islamic conspiracy would allow all kinds of "Islamic" books to be published, "Islamic" films to be screened, as long as no actual Islamic state or Islamic society is formed. If such an Islamic state/society ever come into existence, then the conspiracy against Islam would quickly try to crush it, no matter how insignificant it might be:

"Never, Never, and in no way can the formation of a society based on Islam be tolerated anywhere in the world, even on one of the most remote islands in the ocean, and in this way they [the Zionists and colonialists] will mobilize all the visible and invisible, massive global forces."<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 57.

<sup>60</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *ادعائنامه ای علیه تمدن غرب و دورنمایی از رسالت اسلام (An Indictment of Western Civilization and the Prospects of Islam)*, Ali Khamenei trans., (Qom, Iran: Tebyan Cultural Institute, 2008). Available at

## The vanguard to fight the conspiracy

Qutb presented a condensed version of his plan for liberating Islam and the world from *jahiliyyah* in his tract *Milestones*, which is a spin-off his Quran commentary.<sup>61</sup> While *Milestones* does not make explicit references to the *Protocols*, the program he lays out is based on the idea of the global conspiracy against Islam that Qutb discusses in *Our Struggle with The Jews* and in his Quran commentary. *Milestones* teaches that an Islamic vanguard had to embark on a long-term program to fight the grand anti-Islamic conspiracy, a program that will fight *jahiliyyahh* across the whole world:

"How is it possible to start the task of reviving Islam? It is necessary that there should be a vanguard which sets out with this determination and then keeps walking on the path, marching through the vast ocean of Jahiliyyahh which has encompassed the entire world. During its course, it should keep itself somewhat aloof from this all-encompassing Jahiliyyahh and should also keep some ties with it..."<sup>62</sup>

In *Milestones* Qutb again stated his belief that this vanguard will be immediately attacked by the forces of *jahiliyyahh*: "...history tells us that the Jahili society chooses to fight and not to make peace, attacking the vanguard of Islam at its very inception, whether it be a few individuals or whether it be groups, and even after this vanguard has become a well-established community."<sup>63</sup> This belief in this powerful conspiracy aggressively attacking Islam (and "freedom") from every angle lends a whole new aspect to ideas about how to fight back, ideas about *jihad*. Classical Sunni Islamic rules distinguish between "offensive" and "defensive" jihad. Offensive jihad to expand the realms of Islam has to be authorized by legitimate Islamic rulers,<sup>64</sup> and it was to be waged by a select group of believers, it does not require the participation of all Muslims. Defensive jihad, on the other hand, has a requirement for unrestricted Muslim warfare against unbelievers who invaded Muslim lands.<sup>65</sup> For Qutb, the distinction between "defensive" and "offensive" jihad was de-facto worthless in this modern age because of the relentless attacks using propaganda and other secret tactics by the global conspiracy against Islam:

"If we must describe Islamic *jihād* as defensive, then we need to amend the meaning of the term 'defence' so that it means the defending of mankind against all factors that hinder their liberation and restrict their freedom. These may take the form of concepts and beliefs, as well as political regimes that create economic, class and racial distinctions. When Islam first came into existence, this world was full of such hindrances, some forms of which persist in present-day *jāhiliyyah*."<sup>66</sup>

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<https://library.tebyan.net/fa/Viewer/Text/92016/274>, p. 274. This book is a selection of Qutb's writings that Khamenei translated. This quote is from Qutb's essay "The Way of Salvation."

<sup>61</sup> Calvert, p. 219.

<sup>62</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>63</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, p. 90.

<sup>64</sup> Dr. David Suurland, *Secular Totalitarian and Islamist Legal-political Philosophy: A Study Into the Applicability of the Totalitarianism Paradigm to Islamist Ideologies and Movements*, Part 1, Phd Dissertation, University of Leiden, 2012, p. 76.

<sup>65</sup> J. M. B. Porter, "Osama Bin Laden, *Jihad*, and the Sources of International Terrorism." *Indiana International & Comparative Law Review*, Vol. 13, No. 3, p. 883.

<sup>66</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 7, p. 10.

Qutb made it clear in his commentary that the reach of the supposed global conspiracy means that the jihad against it must aspire to a similar reach:

“*Jihād* is, indeed, a means of defending the Islamic message and its right to be conveyed freely to everyone, everywhere in the world. It is also the means to ensure that every individual, anywhere in the world is free to accept Islam.”<sup>67</sup>

Here is another example from a different volume that emphasizes that the coming Islamic revolution will necessarily be global in scope, and concerned with power:

“The revolution is not territorial but international, though as a starter the members of the Muslim party, wherever they live, should focus on that place. Their eventual goal should, however, be a world revolution for the simple reason that any revolutionary ideology, which is humanity specific and seeking universal welfare, cannot reduce itself to a particular state or nation. It is innate in its nature to embrace the whole world,... Wherever humans are oppressed, it must come to their rescue... On the one hand, it should seek a global reach for its message inviting everyone to its fold for a better life. On the other hand, depending on its power resource, it should force non-Islamic governments to clean their stables or face the cleansing sweep of Islamic governance.”<sup>68</sup>

Qutb did not only write about revolutionary violence against the reigning conspiracy, *Milestones* was not just a theoretical treatise. Qutb practiced what he preached. *Milestones* was written as a kind of strategic instruction manual for a secret society of violent Muslim revolutionaries that Qutb lead. After the suppression of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's in the late 1950s a few members tried to put together a clandestine paramilitary organization to strike back, and perhaps to overthrow Nasser. The organization was eventually known to the security services as *al-Tanzim al-Sirri* (the Secret Organization.)<sup>69</sup> After some small-scale clandestine organizing *Al-Tanzim al-Sirri* (hereafter, just “al-Tanzim”) reached out to the second in command of the Brotherhood, Abdel Khaleq, and asked him to lead them. According to his testimony, Abdel Khaleq refused, saying this organization “would provide the Nasser regime with a rationale for brutalizing the sons of the Islamic movement further and for perpetrating more bloodshed.”<sup>70</sup>

The conspirators then reached out to the imprisoned Sayyid Qutb, who agreed to lead the organization.<sup>71</sup> According to Dr. Fawaz Gerges, who conducted a number of invaluable interviews with members of al-Tanzim, this secret network along with Qutb's intellectual heft enabled him to virtually control of the Brotherhood and become a second center of power that overshadowed the “official” Brotherhood leadership.<sup>72</sup> According to one member, Qutb “often reminded us that we were the vanguard tasked with replacing the status quo with an Islamic system...” and that “Qutb aimed at violently overthrowing the whole social and political order, not only the Nasser regime... He taught us that all means must be used to change the status

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<sup>67</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 3, p. 224.

<sup>68</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 7, pp. 30-31.

<sup>69</sup> Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, pp. 236, 263.

<sup>70</sup> Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, p. 266.

<sup>71</sup> Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, p. 266.

<sup>72</sup> Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, p. 152.



quo, including violence,... He trained us to be patient and that, once we go on the offensive, we must deploy overwhelming force to tip the balance in our favor... We were a paramilitary organization, not a peaceful protest movement. Qutb was a revolutionary Islamist who believed in revolutionary change.”<sup>73</sup> The organization was dedicated to overthrowing the Nasserist regime that Qutb had once supported, and Qutb’s idea that the Egyptian government was in fact a front of a vast anti-Islamic conspiracy justified its violent overthrow. According to Eid, one former member of al-Tanzim “Qutb told us that initially the army officers had collaborated with the Ikhwan, until evil-minded America recruited him to the anti-Islamic camp. Nasser sold his soul on the altar of political expediency.”<sup>74</sup>

Al-Tanzim was not the first secret paramilitary/conspiratorial organization from the Muslim Brotherhood. In the late 1930s Hassan al-Banna had established a separate secret group: *al-Nizam al-Khass* (the Secret Apparatus).<sup>75</sup> This group was involved in facilitating the Brotherhood’s violent jihad against Jewish settlers in Palestine and later against Israel.<sup>76</sup> In the 1940s members of this group had conducted attacks against British soldiers and some Egyptians. Al-Banna appears to have struggled to control his own creation and eventually denounced at least some of this violence against Egyptians by the end of his life.<sup>77</sup> While al-Banna was obviously not a stranger to violence, certainly not when it came to Jewish migrants or British soldiers, clandestinely-organized violence was not at the center of his program. Al-Banna believed that the first mission of the Brotherhood was to conduct a massive long-term missionary campaign among the Egyptian people and only take power once Egyptians were prepared for the establishment of an Islamic state. While al-Banna’s organization was centrally organized, he believed in a bottom-up strategy of persuasion. Qutb, by contrast, put politics, conspiracy, and violence at the center of his program. The existing regimes were obstructions preventing Muslims from returning to true Islam.<sup>78</sup>

Qutb and his followers dismissed mere propaganda and missionary work as ineffectual, and instead emphasized armed struggle.<sup>79</sup> They believed that continuing a focus on propaganda and missionary work would merely play into the hands of the evil conspiracy, which had resources for propaganda that dwarfed anything the true Muslims could muster. A revolution and continued violence to create a space free of the intervention and meddling of the Jewish conspiracy and their Christian servants was the only way forward. An important first step along this path would be retaliation against those who interfered with true Muslims, to strike them hard enough so these “renegade rulers” under the control of the conspiracy would think twice about troubling true Muslims again. The Qutb biographer Sherif Younis claims that Qutb and his followers were driven by a desire to revenge themselves on Nasser and his state.<sup>80</sup> However, these were just the first targets. As the head of al-Tanzim’s intelligence committee

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<sup>73</sup> Gerjes, *Making the Arab World*, p. 269.

<sup>74</sup> Gerjes, *Making the Arab World*, p. 258.

<sup>75</sup> Alison Pargeter, *The Muslim Brotherhood, From Opposition to Power*, (Saqi Books, 2013), Kindle Edition, p. 27.

<sup>76</sup> Barbara Zollner, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan Al-Hudaybi and Ideology*, (Routledge, 2009), p. 17.

<sup>77</sup> Pargeter, p. 30.

<sup>78</sup> Gerjes, *Making the Arab World*, pp. 142-143.

<sup>79</sup> Gerjes, *Making the Arab World*, p. 243.

<sup>80</sup> Gerjes, *Making the Arab World*, p. 254.

Ahmad Abdel Majid<sup>81</sup> said: “The military junta proved to be a front and a tool for an unholy global conspiracy against Islam.”<sup>82</sup> While Qutb’s organization never appears to have planned attacks against America, the Jews, Western institutions, etc. (some of the main targets of their spiritual descendants today) this was probably because of the limited abilities and targets available to Qutb and his disciples. Qutb is clear in his writing: the Egyptian government might be the proximate enemy, but the ultimate one is the global Jewish conspiracy, followed by its Christian servants.

Al-Tanzim was not successful as a subversive organization. There was at least one abortive plot to assassinate Nasser in Alexandria. This was called off because of disagreements within the organization about strategy.<sup>83</sup> Despite this, the network was still preparing for greater things, gathering weapons and funds and training cadres. It was exposed in 1965, before it could conduct any operations, when one of al-Tanzim’s members was arrested on unrelated charges and told the government about the network while under interrogation.<sup>84</sup> Qutb had been released from prison in 1964, but he was arrested again along with the entire leadership of al-Tanzim and the “official” leadership of the Brotherhood. Nasser’s propaganda machine portrayed al-Tanzim as a terrorist organization supported from abroad that was deliberately planning to create chaos.<sup>85</sup>

For planning violence against Nasser and plotting revolution, Qutb and his disciples have been often accused of one of the cardinal Muslim sins, creating *fitna*, or civil discord. He and his followers insistence that they can rebel against their rulers, even if they are Sunni Muslims, has lead them to be compared to the Kharijites, a splinter group from early Islam who regarded any non-Kharijite as a non-Muslim. A Kharijite was responsible for assassinating the fourth caliph ‘Ali.<sup>86</sup> Orthodox Sunni Muslims regard Kharijites as eternally damned for creating *fitna*.<sup>87</sup> If we adopt Qutb’s conspiracy-theory vision of history, Nasser was not a “true Muslim” ruler, he was a servant of the secret global conspiracy against Islam, and therefore rebellion against him was part of waging defensive jihad against global *jahiliyyahh*. For Qutb and his followers the Islamic society of Egypt was really an ersatz-Islamic society, where “true Muslims” like Qutb and his followers had to conduct many of their activities in secret. During his trial Qutb was asked if “the establishment of a Muslim military underground may bring about a *fitna* or so serious a calamity that Islam may perish.” He responded: “It may well bring about *fitna*, but the blame should be placed at the door of those who interdict open Muslim Brotherhood activity thus pushing Muslims to underground action.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Gerjes, *Making the Arab World*, p. 266.

<sup>82</sup> Gerjes, *Making the Arab World*, p. 258.

<sup>83</sup> Gerjes, *Making the Arab World*, p. 256.

<sup>84</sup> Gerjes, *Making the Arab World*, p. 276.

<sup>85</sup> Gerjes, *Making the Arab World*, p. 277.

<sup>86</sup> Jeffrey T. Kenney, *Muslim Rebels: Kharijites and the Politics of Extremism in Egypt*, (Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 4.

<sup>87</sup> Kenney, p. 122.

<sup>88</sup> John McHugo, *A Concise History of the Arabs*, (The New Press, 2013), p. 212.

Qutb was sentenced to death. Before his execution he wrote one last testament *Why Did They Execute Me?* In it he laid the ultimate blame for his execution on the Zionist-Crusader conspiracy, reiterating the Grand Conspiracy Theory in his final literary act.<sup>89</sup>

### **Analysis: conspiracy theory vs. tradition**

The examples presented above clearly demonstrate the major role played in his thought by a variant of the Grand Conspiracy Theory derived from European anti-Jewish/anti-liberal propaganda. This is especially evident in justifying his rebellion, - what other Muslims decried as *fitna*, though Qutb considered himself an orthodox Sunni. Qutb's belief in a grand conspiracy of Jews and their Christian servants against Islam is the key to his understanding of history and what he considered to be the re-emergence of *jahiliyyahh*. In addition to the undisputable influence of the Pakistani writer Abul A'la Maududi, Qutb's thought is most often associated with Ibn Taymiyyah, the 14th century Sunni theologian and jurist who wrote fatwas justifying resistance against the Ilkhanate (Mongol) king Mahmud Ghazan, despite the fact that Mahmud Ghazan had earlier converted to Sunni Islam.

Ibn Taymiyyah does not appear to be referenced at all in Qutb's Quran commentary or in *Milestones*. Ibn Taymiyyah is probably not omitted out of any special aversion. While his commentary makes repeated reference to the ideas of various Islamic scholars on various points of interpretation, Qutb generally does not have much confidence in the Islamic scholars of the classical tradition.<sup>90</sup> Recall that Qutb believed a powerful conspiracy had, over centuries, "been able to plant in Islamic heritage that which has nothing to do with this religion of Islam and which cannot be discovered without Herculean efforts."<sup>91</sup> The "classical" commentaries and Islamic schools of jurisprudence were themselves suspect in the face of such a grand multi-generational conspiracy to corrupt Islam. The major concern of Qutb is the fight against the new *jahiliyyahh*, and rather than reference potentially suspect "classical" Islamic works in his commentary and other writings, Qutb preferred to reference evidence of the conspiracy's work in history, including evidence found in non-Islamic documents that appear to illustrate this conspiracy (e.g. the *Protocols*).

### **Qutb's successors: the paths to conspiracist-jihad**

The importance of Qutb's work and the conspiracy theory contained in it has grown since his death. Qutb's idea of a new *jahiliyyah* opposing Islam that was directing the apparent and secret enemies of Islam became a key part of radical Islamic ideology in the decades after Qutub's death, not only in Egypt. By the 1990s Qutb's use of *jahiliyyah* was a normal part of the rhetoric and ideology of "Islamic revivalism" even by some who would not be described as

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<sup>89</sup> Sayyid Qutb, لماذا أعدموني □ (Why They are Executing Me). Available at [www.twhead.com/books/sayed-http://lmaza-a3dmonny.doc](http://www.twhead.com/books/sayed-http://lmaza-a3dmonny.doc). Accessed October 8, 2018.

<sup>90</sup> Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Exegesis" in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*, Gerhard Browning ed., (Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 162.

<sup>91</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Quran*, Vol. 2, p. 100.

violent.<sup>92</sup> Qutb's Quran commentaries may be the most influential Quran commentary of the 20th century,<sup>93</sup> which means that the conspiracy theory contained within it has been transmitted to several generations of Muslim students. Dr. Fawaz Gerges reports that he has never met a Qutbian who did not believe in a grand Zionist-Christian conspiracy against Islam.<sup>94</sup>

Qutb's posthumous influence throughout the Islamic world grew, surely partially driven by his surviving disciples in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. His teaching also got a boost through the largess of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia became a refuge for members of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood fleeing persecution, and for a time the Saudi monarchy saw the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood as a useful tool to bolster its legitimacy and Islamic credentials. Qutb's brother Mohammad Qutb, who had also been imprisoned in Egypt, was released in 1972. He moved to Mecca, and became a professor at King 'Abd al-Aziz University. According to Dr. John Calvert he "accommodated" his brother's work to fit with Saudi Wahhabi theology, specifically by de-emphasizing his brother's idea of universal *jahiliyyahh*. After all, to maintain the idea of universal *jahiliyyahh* Mohammed Qutb would have to also attack his Saudi patrons.<sup>95</sup> This accommodation, however, did not include toning down the other conspiracy-theory aspects of his brother's thought. Mohammad Qutb still claimed, as evidenced in a 1983 book titled *Madhāhib Fikriya Mu'āshira*, "Contemporary Schools of Thought" that the Jews had been behind the French Revolution, Darwinism, and had plans to take over the world. The highlighted evidence for this plot was the *Protocols*.<sup>96</sup> This aspect of Sayyid Qutb's work did not have to be modified for the Saudi environment because many of the rulers of Saudi Arabia were themselves aficionados of the Judeo-Masonic conspiracy theory. King Faisal of Saudi Arabia (r. 1964-1975) for example was a believer in the Judeo-Masonic / Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy. He drew a direct line between Communism and Zionism. In 1970 he told an interviewer from *Newsweek* "Zionism is the mother of communism... It helped to spread communism all over the world." When the interviewer pressed him on why Israel and the USSR were then such bitter opponents in the Middle East, the king replied "It is part of the great conspiracy.... Communism, as I have told you, is a creation of Zionism, intended for achieving Zionist goals. They only pretend to oppose each other."<sup>97</sup>

This embrace of anti-Jewish conspiracy theories by the Saudi leadership was probably partially driven by a desire to explain Israel's regular battlefield victories and America's support for the Jewish state, in addition to the sectarian appeal and even just the narrative appeal of the stories. There may also have been a desire to explain the constant creep of elements of modern Western culture into conservative Sunni society as being the result of a vast conspiracy.

Mohammad Qutb and other followers of Sayyid Qutb in Saudi Arabian exile tried to fuse Sayyid Qutb's teachings with Wahhabi currents already present in Saudi Arabia. This fusion

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<sup>92</sup> John Obert Voll, "The Revivalist Heritage," in *The Contemporary Islamic Revival: A Critical Survey and Bibliography*, (Greenwood Press, 1991), pp. 27-28.

<sup>93</sup> McAuliffe, p. 162.

<sup>94</sup> Gerges, *Making the Arab World*, p. 22.

<sup>95</sup> Calvert, pp. 410-413.

<sup>96</sup> Masami Nishino, "Muhammad Qutb's Islamist Thought: A Missing Link between Sayyid Qutb and al-Qaeda?" *NIDS Journal of Defense and Security* Vol. 16, (2015), pp. 121-122. Available at [http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/kiyo/pdf/2015/bulletin\\_e2015\\_6.pdf](http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/kiyo/pdf/2015/bulletin_e2015_6.pdf). Accessed October 8, 2018.

<sup>97</sup> Alexei Vassiliev, *King Faisal: Personality, Faith and Times*, (Saqi Books; Reprint edition, 2013), p. 338.

became known as the Islamic Awakening, or just “Awakening” (*Sahwa*).<sup>98 99</sup> This movement ceded doctrinal questions to Wahhabi interpretations, but on questions of politics and culture ideas from the Muslim Brotherhood tended to predominate, and this included the ideas of Sayyid Qutb. Sayyid Qutb’s ideas eventually dominated the movement, and his brother Mohammed was known as the “sheikh of the *Sahwa*.”<sup>100</sup> This movement at one time enjoyed the patronage of the house of Saud, which saw it as a counterbalance to other more anti-Saudi strains of conservative Islam in the kingdom.<sup>101</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Mohammad Qutb tried to accommodate his brother’s teachings to the Wahhabi environment, which meant that he downplayed some of his brother’s works that dealt with music, art, and socialism, but Qutb’s Quran commentaries and *Milestones* were still promoted and spread.<sup>102</sup> Some of Qutb’s choicest conspiracy-theory laden writings are in his Quran commentaries, and in them he clearly suggested a solution: violent jihad. While Mohammad may have made Sayyid Qutb’s teaching palatable to Wahhabis, Sayyid Qutb’s core teaching about conspiracy theories did not just describe a conspiracy to create Israel or a conspiracy to conquer the modern world, but one that was very long-lasting, perhaps stretching all the way back to the early years of Islam. A conspiracy this powerful would be capable of disguising its agents as anything or subverting nearly any entity, even the royal family of a conservative Islamic state.

## The second generation of the vanguard In Egypt

In Egypt many members of the Muslim Brotherhood were eventually released from prison and even allowed to organize again during the presidency of Nasser’s successor Anwar Sadat. Sadat’s regime had close relationships with some less-radical members of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>103</sup> However, Sadat’s less-than-radical political choices and most notably his agreement to the Camp David Peace Accords between Egypt and Israel in 1978 caused his relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood to deteriorate. The Egyptian state began to repress the Muslim Brotherhood again,<sup>104</sup> and some Qutubian elements of the Brotherhood again responded by organizing a clandestine vanguard. A number of these disparate Qutubist groups coalesced around Cairo under the leadership of an Egyptian engineer Abd al-Salam Faraj, who had been heavily influenced by Sayyid Qutb. In addition to organizing revolutionary violence, Faraj wrote a pamphlet that justified his sedition as resistance against a ruler who did not actually enact Islamic law. The pamphlet *The Neglected Duty* anchored a call to arms in quotations from the Quran and quotations from classic Sunni scholars, drawing from the fatwas of Ibn Taymiyyah.<sup>105 106</sup> The Grand Conspiracy Theory does not make a strong appearance in

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<sup>98</sup> Calvert, pp. 410-413.

<sup>99</sup> Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening*, George Holoch trans, (Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 51.

<sup>100</sup> Lacroix, pp. 52-53.

<sup>101</sup> Calvert, p. 276.

<sup>102</sup> Lacroix, p. 54-55.

<sup>103</sup> Gerjes, *Making the Arab World*, p. 344.

<sup>104</sup> Gerjes, *Making the Arab World*, p. 345.

<sup>105</sup> Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, (Third Edition, University of California Press, 2003) p. 82.

<sup>106</sup> David Sagiv, *Fundamentalism and Intellectuals in Egypt, 1973-1993*, (Franklin Cass, 1995), p. 56.

this text. Nevertheless, in one crucial section Faraj defends his call to jihad against the charge that missionary work would be more effective than violence in bringing the Islamic state closer to a reality. Faraj counters with the claim that all the means of mass missionary work are under the control of those who would not permit true missionary work, including “those who have engaged themselves in war with Allah”:

“Some of them say that the way to establish the (Islamic) state is by da’wah (inviting to Islaam) alone, and forming a wide base (i.e. a large number of practicing Muslims), but this will not do so. Despite that some people have based their abandonment of Jihaad on this point, the truth is that those who will establish the Islamic State are a few believers... how could da’wah alone achieve this large success while all the means of media are under the control of the disbelievers, sinners and those who have engaged themselves in war with Allaah? Thus the useful endeavour is to free these means of information from the hands of those (people). It is known that straight after victory and authority there will be a (great) acceptance of Islaam”<sup>107</sup>

Here we see an echo of Faraj’s ideological forebear Sayyid Qutb, declaring that all media outlets are under the control of powerful anti-Muslim forces, and that jihad to “liberate” these media outlets from these enemies is the only path.

Faraj organized his vanguard into three sections, one devoted to spreading their ideology and recruiting new members, another to financing the movement (including through theft from Coptic Christian shops), and another for gathering intelligence and planning. One of the cells was led by the Qutubist physician Ayman al-Zawahiri, who later became the leader of the more famous terrorist organization Al Qaeda. Faraj and his followers were planning to build up a secret organization capable of seizing power. However, when one member of the group had an opportunity to be near President Sadat in a military parade, the leaders of the organization decided to take a risk and assassinate him.<sup>108</sup>

President Sadat’s assassination on October 6, 1981 was the first time a Qutubist network achieved global attention - brought by a violent act that the Qutubists believed was one of revenge. The Egyptian state cracked down again on the Muslim Brotherhood and anyone associated with the assassination and the clandestine organization behind it, but the organization survived. It eventually became known as Egyptian Islamic Jihad. The organization continued to attack the Egyptian government and produce Qutubist propaganda. The leader of this organization by the mid-1980s was the physician Ayman al-Zawahiri, who was released from an Egyptian prison in 1985. Earlier he had developed ties to fighters in Afghanistan, and he went there to assist in the *jihad* against the communists. During this second sojourn in Afghanistan he met a young wealthy and well-connected Saudi, who was a former student of Mohammad Qutb: Osama Bin Laden.<sup>109</sup> These two built Al Qaeda together.

Bin Laden had come to South Asia to assist foreign fighters going to fight in Afghanistan, and he took part in some fighting himself. In the late 80s, after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, he and some other Arabs founded Al Qaeda, “the base” as an international jihadist

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<sup>107</sup> Muhammad ‘Abdus Salam Faraj, *The Absent Obligation*, (London: Maktabah Al Ansaar, 2000), pp. 41, 43.

<sup>108</sup> Sagiv, pp. 56-59.

<sup>109</sup> *The Theory and Practice of Islamic Terrorism, An Anthology*, Marvin Perry and Howard E. Negrin eds., (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 40, 47-48.

organization. Bin Laden was imprisoned in Saudi Arabia in 1990 for opposing the Saudi Government's decision to invite foreign forces into the Arabian peninsula to fight the First Gulf War,<sup>110</sup> a common complaint against the Saudi government among the ranks of the Sawa.<sup>111</sup> Bin Laden was released, and he again went to Afghanistan and later to Sudan to organize jihad, which included attacks on the Saudi monarchy, the Egyptian government, the United States (specifically, an attack on the World Trade Center in New York), and attempts to establish safe bases from which to organize attacks and subversion. Zawahiri joined Bin Laden in Sudan, and eventually both returned to Afghanistan and built a strong alliance with the Taliban, a radical mainly Pashtun group that was in the process of conquering Afghanistan. Al Qaeda became internationally infamous when it destroyed two US embassies in East Africa in 1998, attacked the US warship the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen in 2000, and most spectacularly, conducted the attacks in New York and Washington DC on September 11th, 2001 which killed nearly 3000 people in one day.<sup>112</sup> The US retaliated by invading Afghanistan and removing the Taliban from power. Bin Laden was eventually hunted down and killed in Pakistan. However, Al Qaeda has persisted, and continues to carry out attacks. As of 2019 the leader is Zawahiri.

### **Zawahiri and Bin Laden, two conspiracy theorists**

The following sections will examine the written works and statements of Bin Laden and Zawahiri to establish their Qutubian belief in a grand Jewish conspiracy against Islam and attempt to discern how this belief motivated their decision to continue to wage jihad and the strategies they chose. Of particular interest is their use of conspiracy theories as justification and perhaps motivation for attacks on Muslim regimes, even the conservative Sunni Saudi Monarchy, and for attacks on targets in the West. This is not the place for an exhaustive history of Al Qaeda, a proper study of which is probably futile without access to still-classified reports from intelligence agencies tracking it. Fortunately both leaders have written and spoken extensively to justify their jihad and the violent acts they have organized and ordered, and journalists, scholars, and intelligence agencies have translated large portions of their work from Arabic. There is a difficulty in analyzing statements of leaders of an organization engaged in subversive war, as sometimes their statements can be deceptive, for example, promising peace to a people if they withdraw from this or that location or by not taking credit for attacks that they organized, as Bin Laden initially did after 9-11.<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, by comparing statements prepared for the public with essays, and books that were destined for the followers of the organization one can get a sense of consistent themes and beliefs that are truly held, and private libraries and papers can give further clues.

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<sup>110</sup> *The Theory and Practice of Islamic Terrorism, An Anthology*, p. 41.

<sup>111</sup> Lacroix, p. 155.

<sup>112</sup> *The Theory and Practice of Islamic Terrorism, An Anthology*, p. 41.

<sup>113</sup> "Usama bin Laden Says the Al-Qa'idah Group had Nothing to Do with the 11 September Attacks," Interview published in newspaper Ummat Karachi, 28th September, 2001. Available at [https://web.archive.org/web/20080516041810/http://www.robert-fisk.com/usama\\_interview\\_ummat.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20080516041810/http://www.robert-fisk.com/usama_interview_ummat.htm). Accessed October 8, 2018.

## The enemy: who it is and how they work

A belief in the existence of a secret worldwide Jewish government orchestrating the *jahiliyyahh* is a common idea in the writings and statements of Zawahiri. An essay written by Zawahiri in 1996 in an Egyptian Islamic Jihad publication praised the suicide bombings in Israel “which greatly harmed the Jews, the true rulers of the world.”<sup>114</sup> In Zawahiri’s book *Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner* he twice mentions this belief. One statement about the international plot against Islam begins: “The United States, and the global Jewish government that is behind it...”<sup>115</sup> At another spot Zawahiri call for a future *jihad* led by a re-born Islamic state “against the empire of the United States and the world’s Jewish government...”<sup>116</sup>

Evidence of Bin Laden’s belief in a conspiracy against Islam, carried out by America and orchestrated by the Jews, is clear in his statements as early as 1994. In that year, in the aftermath of the arrest of some radical preachers in Saudi Arabia, Bin Laden declared that this crackdown had been at the behest of the Americans, and that “This has been done in synchronization with the comprehensive Jewish campaign to humiliate the countries in the region and the Muslim people... The Zionists, the Christians, and others are implementing their conspiracy against Islam and the Muslims. By going along with this plan, the Saudi regime is showing its allegiance to the unbelievers, instead of its loyalty to the people of the faith...”<sup>117</sup>

In his essay “Moderate Islam is a Prostration to the West” Osama Bin Laden endorsed the Qutubian idea of a Western crusade against Islam itself. Mocking the call by some Muslim intellectuals for the West to reconsider Islam and open dialogue, Bin Laden, echoing Qutb, insists that the West is well aware of what Islam is, and because of this it has been involved in a massive multi-generational campaign against Islam.

“Although they are intellectuals, they still remain ignorant—or are willfully ignorant—that the West understands their religion and the foundations of their exclusive creed more than the Muslim laity. So they think that the West’s position toward us is due to its lack of understanding Islam, its principles, and its laws. In fact, the West did not treat Islam in this atrocious manner until after it [first] understood the truth about Islam—comprehended its essence and soul. And the West is knowledgeable of all religions, but it would never confront any of them, nor persecute their people. But it is bent on pulverizing the Muslims, since first learning of their enterprise...”<sup>118</sup>

With the phrase “...since first learning of their enterprise...” Bin Laden implied that the campaign against Islam might stretch back some time. If one accepts Bin Laden’s belief here,

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<sup>114</sup> “The First Issue of Characteristics of Jihad Magazine,” Harmony reference number AFGP-2002-600142. Available at <https://ctc.usma.edu/harmony-program/the-first-issue-of-characteristics-of-jihad-magazine-original-language-2/>. Accessed October 8, 2018.

<sup>115</sup> Dr. Ayman Al Zawahiri, *His Own Words: Translation and Analysis of the Writings of Dr. Ayman Al Zawahiri*, Laura Mansfield trans., (TLG Publications, 2006), p. 125.

<sup>116</sup> Zawahiri, *His Own Words*, p. 113.

<sup>117</sup> “Letters From Bin Laden,” Harmony reference number AFGP-2002-003345, pp. 23-25. Available at <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2013/10/Letter-from-Bin-Laden-Translation.pdf>. Accessed October 8, 2018.

<sup>118</sup> *The Al Qaeda Reader: The Essential Texts of Osama Bin Laden’s Terrorist Organization*, Raymond Ibrahim ed and trans, (Crown/Archetype, 2007) Kindle Edition, Locations 1220-1225).



then any attempt to make peace with the West on these terms would in fact be succumbing to the West's successful "peaceful conquest" of the Muslim world. This is a similar thought to the one expressed by the authors of the *Protocols* and other earlier generations of European conspiracy theorists. The idea that the enemy is pushing, be it liberalism, religious freedom, republicanism, or in this case "moderate Islam," is really ideological poison that the enemy is trying to spread. The enemy has no friendly or even just non-confrontational motivations in spreading this poison, it is part of his vast conspiracy against all that is good and true.

### **America and "fake" Muslim regimes, the conspiracy's proxy, and the proxy's proxy, in the war against Islam**

Like Qutb, Al Qaeda's leadership does not view the weakness and moral corruption in the Islamic world as a the result of an internal process of decay, but as a result of past aggression and conspiracy, and one that is linked to current-day, ongoing activities of Western entities and their local agents.<sup>119</sup> They believe in "an all-encompassing conspiracy against Islam which is controlled by 'the West' and demonstrative of 'its' animosity toward Islam."<sup>120</sup> Many of the grievances cited as reasons for Al Qaeda attacks are based on "cultural" aggression against Islam, such as publishing cartoons of Mohammed. These acts are not under the control of any government.<sup>121</sup> However, if one adopts the idea of an international conspiracy against Islam, a hidden Jewish world government, the latest stage of a conspiracy that has been orchestrating a campaign against Islam for generations, then even these cultural aggressions are not mere insults but real attacks, part of a secretly orchestrated campaign. These attacks that are perhaps more damaging than physical attacks. As Qutb himself stated:

"The Free World does not fight us with tanks and guns except for limited periods of time. Instead, it wages a battle against us with tongues and pens. It also fights through philanthropic societies and organizations it establishes, revives, and supports for the sake of controlling the most sensitive centers in our land."<sup>122</sup>

The cultural and political superpower is the United States. The United States has been one of the top targets of Al Qaeda's wrath. This is consistent with reports of Qutb's hatred of America, as a contemporary of Sayyid Qutb stated: "[Qutb] was prophetic about America's imperial designs on the Muslim world,... Long before anyone else, Qutb pointed to America as the chief enemy of Islam and Muslims,"<sup>123</sup>

However, when one reads more of Qutb's works one discovers, as demonstrated earlier, that the "crusader" part of the conspiracy against Islam (that is, the Western, in this case, the American part) is the servant of the Jewish core. Al Qaeda's leaders believe, as Zawahiri stated, that main enemies are the United States, surely, but also its boss: "... the global Jewish

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<sup>119</sup> Donald Holbrook, *The Al-Qaeda Doctrine: The Framing and Evolution of the Leadership's Public Discourse*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), Kindle Edition, location 1564.

<sup>120</sup> Holbrook, location 1606.

<sup>121</sup> Holbrook, location 1616.

<sup>122</sup> Gerjes, *Making the Arab World*, p. 259.

<sup>123</sup> Gerjes, *Making the Arab World*, p. 261.

government that is behind it..."<sup>124</sup> Al Qaeda's leaders do not view the United States as the "main" enemy any more than Barruel viewed revolutionary France as the main enemy. To Barruel the French Revolution was a tool of the Freemason/Illuminati conspiracy. Likewise, Hitler did not see himself as an antagonist against Bolshevism primarily, but rather as an antagonist against a global Jewish conspiracy that used Bolshevism as one of its main weapons.

Bin Laden has endorsed the idea that the Jews "control world forces with these two sciences, sociology and psychology"<sup>125</sup> and in another message complained of "global Zionist oppression"<sup>126</sup> In multiple message Bin Laden made clear that America was the servant of the Jews, using the idea old idea that the Jews had seized control of the American media through their ill-gotten wealth, and then use both their money and their propaganda to manipulate the United States to do their will:

"You [the United States] are the nation that permits usury, though it has been forbidden by all the religions. Yet you build your economy and investments on usury. As a result of this, in all its different forms and guises, the Jews have taken control of your economy, thereby taking control of your media, and now control all aspects of your life, making you their servants and achieving their aims at your expense—precisely what Benjamin Franklin warned you against."<sup>127</sup>

Here Bin Laden is referring to the "Franklin Prophecy" a counterfeit speech against the Jews presented as Benjamin Franklin's. It was first published in an American pro-Nazi propaganda newspaper in 1934.<sup>128</sup> This is not to give the impression that Bin Laden imported his ideas directly from 1930s pro-Nazi propaganda. The idea that a conspiracy of Jews controls the US through the media was common in Saudi Arabia. In one statement from 1998 Bin Laden quoted a prominent Saudi cleric in support of the idea that a Jewish conspiracy controls the US:

"The last homily of the imam of the Prophet's Holy Mosque was nothing but a model for expressing the level of rejection that the nations [sic] feels about the presence of the infidels. In his homily, the Imam of the Mosque displayed the truth about the religious animosity of the Americans towards the Muslims, the level of influence of the Jews in America, the refusal of the Muslims to the presence of the American forces, and the necessity of forcing them out. The Imam said, "servants of Allah, the animosity is religious and America is not in command of anything, because she is totally submissive to the Jews who lead her anywhere they want..."<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Zawahiri, *His Own Words*, p. 125.

<sup>125</sup> Osama Bin Laden, "The Afghan Opportunity." Document captured in the 2011 raid that killed Osama Bin Laden. Available at: <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl/english/Afghani%20Opportunity.pdf>. Accessed October 8, 2018.

<sup>126</sup> Osama Bin Laden, "Message for general Islamic nation." Document captured in the 2011 raid that killed Osama Bin Laden. Available at: <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ubl/english/Message%20for%20general%20Islamic%20nation.pdf>. Accessed October 8, 2018.

<sup>127</sup> *The Al Qaeda Reader*, locations 3527-2528.

<sup>128</sup> *The Al Qaeda Reader*, locations 4909-4916.

<sup>129</sup> "Letters From Bin Laden," Harmony reference number AFGP-2002-003345, p. 99. Available at <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2013/10/Letter-from-Bin-Laden-Translation.pdf>. Accessed October 8, 2018.

Bin Laden is quoting a sermon by Ali Bin Abdur Rahman Al Huthaify, a prominent Saudi Cleric who enjoyed state support as one of the preachers at the grand mosque.<sup>130</sup> Bin Laden's quotation of a cleric spreading Qutubian conspiracy theories is in no way an endorsement of the Saudi regime that sponsored this cleric. The Saudi regime has been one of the main targets in Bin Laden's rhetoric since the earliest days of Al Qaeda. Bin Laden regularly accused the Saudi regime of being the cat's paw of the global conspiracy. According to Bin Laden, Saudi Arabia "in all truthfulness is a U.S. state, subject to U.S. jurisdiction."<sup>131</sup> Bin Laden was born and raised in Saudi Arabia, received a conservative Sunni Muslim education there, including for a time under the tutelage of Mohammed Qutb, who lived in Saudi Arabia at government expense. Bin Laden was evidently a consumer of sermons preached at mosques, all paid for and supported by the government. Nevertheless, he believed the government of Saudi Arabia was part of a grand conspiracy against Islam, and must be combatted. The hyper-deceptive hyper-manipulative conspiracy has managed to suborn even the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and should this be a surprise? The *Protocols* and Sayyid Qutb describe a super-powerful Jewish conspiracy, able to cloak itself as both capitalist and communist. If one accepts the existence of such a conspiracy, then the idea that it can infiltrate and take over Saudi Arabia is not a large logical leap. This is a repeat of what happened in 1817, when the conservative and formerly pro-Austrian Salis-Soglio brothers prepared a revolution against the Austrian Empire because they believed it was controlled by the Illuminati. The government which spread the conspiracy theory became a target of the true believers. (This was discussed in chapter 4.) Bin Laden believed that the use of Saudi Arabia by the American conspirators was not just about corrupting the people of the Arabian Peninsula. In one broadside he attacked the Saudi government for funding the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which Bin Laden describes as part of a grand plot against all true jihadi movements:

"...you donated \$100 million to Yasser Arafat's secular authority, which was formed to do what the Jewish occupational forces had failed to achieve—the oppression of the Muslim Palestinian people and the war on its jihad movements, chief among which is the Islamic resistance movement, Hamas. You did not refrain from supporting Arafat's authority and greeted him in Riyadh, even after his hostility during the Gulf War and his ostentatious support for Saddam Hussein. You swallowed this insult in order to indulge America's sponsorship of this false peace process."<sup>132</sup>

Hamas is the Islamist terrorist group fighting Israel that gets positive mention in Bin Laden's writing, while the PLO is depicted as an instrument of oppression. Zawahiri uses the example of how mixing with non-Islamist "resistance" groups and countries during the wars against Israel led to the defeat of Islam. This is very likely a reference to Egypt (among other countries) which under Nasser was certainly anti-Israeli but still (according to Zawahiri and Qutb) part of the grand conspiracy against Islam:

"The Muslim youths began to have doubts about who was the enemy. Was it the foreign enemy that occupied Muslim territory, or was it the domestic enemy that prohibited government by Islamic shari'ah, repressed the Muslims, and disseminated immorality under the slogans of progressiveness, liberty, nationalism, and liberation. This situation led the homeland to the brink of

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<sup>130</sup> A transcript of the original sermon is available at <http://arabic.islamicweb.com/Shia/khutba.htm>. Accessed October 8, 2018.

<sup>131</sup> Brad K. Berner, *Jihad: Bin Laden in His Own Words - Declarations, Interviews and Speeches*, (Amazon, 2009) Kindle Edition, locations 602-603.

<sup>132</sup> Berner, Locations 586-591.

the abyss of domestic ruin and surrender to the foreign enemy, exactly like the current situation of the majority of our (Arab) countries under the aegis of the new world order.”<sup>133</sup>

This new world order, probably referring to President George Bush Sr.’s description of the post-Cold War world “where diverse nations are drawn together in common cause to achieve the universal aspirations of mankind -- peace and security, freedom, and the rule of law”<sup>134</sup> is believed by Zawahiri to be the plans for a global conspiracy against Islam. Zawahiri warned in 2006 that giving in to this peaceful conquest by the Crusader-Zionist conspiracy would condemn Muslims “to live on the margins of the New World Order and international law and under the control of the arrogant enemies of Islam, dishonored, humiliated, plundered and occupied, with them meddling in your beliefs and true religion, sticking their noses in all your foreign and domestic affairs, and you living the life of a vassal, lowly, disgraced and defiled”<sup>135</sup>

## Fighting the enemy

Now that we have established the reality of the grand conspiracy against Islam in the minds of the leaders of Al Qaeda, we ought to discuss how this belief affected their strategy against their imagined enemy. This enemy, the Zionist-Crusader alliance led by a Jewish conspiracy, is not susceptible to reason or pure persuasion and propaganda. Reflect upon its tiered structure, though: A Jewish conspiracy has managed to gain control of the United States, which has managed to set up and/or support various regimes in Muslim countries, including Saudi Arabia. This perceived tiered structure of how the conspiracy works is important to understanding Al Qaeda’s strategy

Al Qaeda’s leaders believe that setting up an Islamic state in the Middle East is not feasible at the present time. Any nascent Islamic state would immediately be attacked or subverted, as Qutb wrote. The conspiracy would not countenance the re-birth of true Islam. In the early years of Al Qaeda, Zawahiri was still focused on targeting the Egyptian government, while Bin Laden insisted on primarily attacking the United States. During this period Zawahiri was still in control of the separate terrorist organization Egyptian Islamic Jihad, though he was involved in planning Al Qaeda attacks as well. He faced criticism from within Egyptian Islamic Jihad for supporting an organization that was not focused on Egypt before two organizations were officially merged in 2001.<sup>136</sup> Zawahiri used to be an opponent of attacking the “far enemy” that is, the United States, and through the 1980s and 1990s he urged that the vanguard concentrate their attacks on the Egyptian government. However, after repeated failures to topple the Egyptian government, Zawahiri conceded and adopted Bin Laden’s strategy of attacking America first.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Zawahiri, *His Own Words*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>134</sup> George Bush “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 29, 1991. Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=19253>. Accessed October 8, 2018.

<sup>135</sup> Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, “Realities of the Conflict Between Islam and Unbelief,” December 2006, p. 6. Available at [https://www.cia.gov/library/abbottabad-compound/67/67BD026383A5C82BEBB2AD11BB31A1E9\\_Dr\\_Aiman\\_Reality\\_of\\_the\\_Conflict\\_En.pdf](https://www.cia.gov/library/abbottabad-compound/67/67BD026383A5C82BEBB2AD11BB31A1E9_Dr_Aiman_Reality_of_the_Conflict_En.pdf). Accessed October 8, 2018.

<sup>136</sup> *The Theory and Practice of Islamic Terrorism, An Anthology*, p. 48.

<sup>137</sup> Gerges, *The Far Enemy*, p. 26.

It would be of no use to design an Islamic state or even just an authentic Islamic revival that is no threat to national interests of the United States (so as to prevent it from intervening) or to try to bribe it or even to work as its local enforcer and ally. The United States is not its own. Its shadowy Jewish masters and the Americans at the pinnacle of the conspiracy are dead-set against true Islam, and they will manipulate their dupes to carry out their will.

The solution that Bin Laden and his confederates latched onto was to jam-up the Jewish tool, the United States, and take out the tier of the conspiracy that enables the maintenance of pseudo-Islamic regimes in the Middle East. However, they believe the conspiracy is not in charge of the US the way that a commander is in charge of his troops. Remember, they believe the US is controlled by a conspiracy, a massive deception and manipulation, not by chains and direct orders. Even if America is just a beast being led by its masters, it is still an animate instead of an inanimate tool. This being the case, it would be possible to inflict so much pain on the United States that it would recoil. If the American people are punished for the activities they are manipulated into supporting, they will no longer respond to their manipulators and will avoid such activity out of fear.

The American retreat from Vietnam in the 1970s seems to play an important role in Bin Laden's strategic imagination. Bin Laden would have been 16 years old when the US pulled out of Vietnam in 1973 and 18 when North Vietnam finally crushed South Vietnam two years later. According to Bin Laden, this American defeat was made possible by the American people "rising up" against their government and demanding an end to the war. In a November 2001 appeal to the United States, Bin Laden called on Americans to repeat this:

"I ask the American people to force their government to give up anti-Muslim policies. The American people had risen against their government's war in Vietnam. They must do the same today. The American people should stop the massacre of Muslims by their government."<sup>138</sup>

This might be interpreted as a call for civil resistance, a peace-mongering appeal to "end the war," but it was issued just a few months after 9-11. A 1993 audio recording of Bin Laden, probably recorded in Saudi Arabia shows that the Vietnam experience is his model for forcing the US to get out of the Middle East:

"That's the disbelievers' principal: they understand nothing without painful strikes directly against their heads, their economy, and their selves. That's the case with America: she will not understand dialogue. These are a feeble people! For more than fifty or sixty years they were subjugated: first to the colonial British and then to the Jews. What kind of freedom is mentioned by America, in all its hubris, when it went to the peoples of the East, to Vietnam thousands of miles away, to bomb them in airplane sorties, slaughter them, and kill them.

What freedom is this? The Americans left Vietnam only after they suffered terribly, these wretched people. More than 60,000 American soldiers died, their wealth having been spent and their resources exhausted, all of which caused the American people to raise a din in their homeland. Through numerous demonstrations they asked their criminal and despotic government to bring their sons home from Vietnam.

That's the situation today. America won't cease their support of Jews in Palestine who are killing Muslims until we smash them adequately and raise the banner of Struggle. They will not desist until

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<sup>138</sup> *The Al Qaeda Reader*, locations 4553-4555.

we struggle against them. The malefaction of disbelievers will not cease except through Struggle; justice will not be achieved except through Struggle; the tails of apostates will never be severed except through Struggle; falsehood will never be eradicated except through Struggle.”<sup>139</sup>

Based on this recording, Bin Laden believed in 1993 that the key to getting the American people to rise up against their “criminal and despotic” (and only supposedly democratic) government was to inflict massive pain on them. In the case of Vietnam it took 60,000 deaths. Al Qaeda’s strategy is to similarly inflict punishment on the Americans so great that the people will demand that their state stop supporting Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other regimes in the Middle East. It is a strategy of punishment, meant to train a US populace domesticated by the Jews to ignore their conditioning and cease any involvement in the Middle East. The alternative would be the continued success of the conspiracy against Islam. As Bin Laden urged Muslims: “If you do not punish them for their sins in Jerusalem and Iraq, they shall defeat you because of your failure. They will also rob you of the land of al-Haramain [Mecca and Medina]. Today [they robbed you] of Baghdad, and tomorrow they will rob you of Riyadh and so forth unless God deems otherwise.”<sup>140</sup>

This is the motivation for Al Qaeda’s continued attempts at conducting mass-casualty attacks in the United States and the West in general: striking out at the main tool of the grand conspiracy against Islam in an attempt to disable it politically. Al Qaeda’s leaders believe that if it succeeds, and the United States pulls out of the Middle East in order to stop the pain, then the next stage of the struggle will begin. In his autobiography, Zawahiri talks hopefully about how the “spirit of jihad” would force the United States out of the region, which would lead to the creation of an Egyptian Islamic state that will then carry out jihad against the West:

It [the Egyptian regime] was also convinced that this spirit of jihad would most likely turn things upside down in the region and force the United States out of it. This would be followed by the earth-shattering event, which the west trembles at the mere thought of it, which is the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Egypt.

If God wills it, such a state in Egypt, with all its weight in the heart of the Islamic world, could lead the Islamic world in a jihad against the West. It could also rally the world Muslims around it. Then history would make a new turn, God willing, in the opposite direction against the empire of the United States and the world’s Jewish government.”<sup>141</sup>

Perhaps one can see another idea here: the shift from defensive to offensive jihad. In addition to justifying rebellion against Muslim rulers, the conspiracy theory popularized by Sayyid Qutb provides a path around the distinction between offensive and defensive jihad. Like Qutb, Al Qaeda’s leaders believe in the distinction between defensive and offensive jihad, and point out that they believe that are currently fighting a defensive one.<sup>142</sup> According to them, the Jewish-led conspiracy against Islam is in the process of invading Muslim lands and occupying and subjugating Muslims, though it is accomplishing this under the cover of a massive

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<sup>139</sup> Flagg Miller, *The Audacious Ascetic: What the Bin Laden Tapes Reveal About Al-Qa’ida*, (Oxford University Press, 2015) Kindle Edition, p. 183.

<sup>140</sup> Berner, Locations 6243-6245.

<sup>141</sup> Zawahiri, *His Own Words*, p. 112-113.

<sup>142</sup> Suurland, part 1, p. 76. Also Porter, p. 883.

deception. This means they believe that the jihad against this conspiracy is defensive, and not subject to the rituals and rules of offensive jihad, so among other things it does not require the sanction of a political authority, nor is it to be waged only by a small elite. Waging unrestricted defensive jihad is incumbent on all Muslims.<sup>143</sup> Bin Laden endorsed this idea in a fatwa from 1998, which he issued along with the leaders of other extremist Sunni groups. The authors of this statement “Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders” begin with a litany of grievances against America, including “occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors, and turning its bases in the Peninsula into a spearhead through which to fight the neighboring Muslim peoples” and also the sanctions against Iraq. They wrote that these actions are motivated by a desire to “serve the Jews’ petty state and divert attention from its occupation of Jerusalem and murder of Muslims there...” The statement then issues an order for defensive jihad:

“...ulema have throughout Islamic history unanimously agreed that the jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys the Muslim countries. This was revealed by Imam Bin-Qadamah in ‘Al-Mughni,’ Imam al-Kisa’i in ‘Al-Bada’i,’ al-Qurtubi in his interpretation, and the shaykh of al-Islam in his books, where he said: ‘As for the fighting to repulse [an enemy], it is aimed at defending sanctity and religion, and it is a duty as agreed [by the ulema]. Nothing is more sacred than belief except repulsing an enemy who is attacking religion and life.’

On that basis, and in compliance with Allah’s order, we issue the following fatwa to all Muslims:

The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies -- civilians and military -- is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque and the holy mosque [Mecca] from their grip, and in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam, defeated and unable to threaten any Muslim... We -- with Allah’s help - - call on every Muslim who believes in Allah and wishes to be rewarded to comply with Allah’s order to kill the Americans and plunder their money wherever and whenever they find it. We also call on Muslim ulema, leaders, youths, and soldiers to launch the raid on Satan’s U.S. troops and the devil’s supporters allying with them, and to displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson.<sup>144</sup>

As indicated in the Zawahiri quote just previous, after the American forces are repulsed, and a proper Islamic state is founded, then it would be time for a “return” to offensive jihad.

## **Al Qaeda and Israel**

Given Al Qaeda’s roots in Qutubian thought, which was heavily anti-Jewish and anti-Israel, and the role that the Jews play in the conspiracy-theory rhetoric and propaganda of Al Qaeda’s leadership, Al Qaeda’s lack of effort against Israel may seem incongruous. Its consistent attempts at mass-casualty attacks against the West in general and the United States

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<sup>143</sup> Michael G. Knapp, “The Concept and Practice of Jihad in Islam,” *Parameters*, 2003, Vol. 33, p. 9. Available at <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/parameters/articles/03spring/knapp.pdf>. Accessed October 8 2018.

<sup>144</sup> “Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders,” Statement from the World Islamic Front, 3 February 1998. Available at <https://fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>. Accessed October 8, 2018.

in particular have not been matched by similar efforts against Israel, though there has been plenty of anti-Israel rhetoric, especially following Al Qaeda's repeated failures and defeats in the late 2000s.<sup>145</sup> In March of 2001, in a recorded meeting in Afghanistan, Bin Laden was asked directly about this discrepancy. He replied:

"...it is no secret that the Crusader-Zionist alliance is like two banknotes of the same currency. We must strike them both. Breaking the back of Zionism will come from breaking the back of the Crusaders, with God's permission, Glorious and Exalted is He. America is foremost among them. Striking Zionism will set limits on the Crusader-American advance. We ask God, Glorious and Exalted is He, to assist us in striking them both."<sup>146</sup>

According to the reasoning expounded by Bin Laden, while striking "Zionism" is good, striking America is paramount, and the path to "breaking the back of Zionism" will be through destroying the Jew's main tool, the Crusaders (the West/America.) In the mind of Bin Laden, if one had asked him why he is attacking the United States and not Israel, it would be the equivalent of asking general Eisenhower in June 1944 why he was attacking Normandy and not Germany.

There is even some indication in the works of Zawahiri of the idea that Israel is a tool of the United States, which is in turn the tool of a deeper Jewish conspiracy. This would stand to reason in Qutbian thinking, because the Jewish plot against Islam extends back hundreds and hundreds of years before Zionism even existed. In his *Knights Under the Prophet's Banner* Zawahiri writes that Israel "is in fact a huge US military base..."<sup>147</sup> and in a section on Israel Zawahiri describes it as a tool of Western invaders:

"The establishment of Israel has been a western objective for over two centuries. The Israeli presence in the region was considered a basic guarantee for serving the western interests. Israel separates between Egypt and Syria, the two regions that for several centuries served as a wall of steadfastness against the Crusades and the Tartar conquests..."<sup>148</sup>

Zawahiri describes the motivation for the Balfour Declaration and early British support for a Jewish state in then-Ottoman Palestine as dictated by British needs for a non-Arab barrier in the heart of the Arab world, combined with Jewish influence in England.<sup>149</sup> We might see here an echo of the Soviet idea of Zionism as a tool of Imperialism in the Middle East. However, one can't get a clear answer on this issue from the available writings and statements of Zawahiri and Bin Laden, and their own beliefs could be admixed with the use of anti-Zionism as a powerful rhetorical tool for propagandizing Arabs. Sufficient information about the precise contours of Zawahiri's beliefs regarding the relationship between the global Jewish conspiracy, the United States, and the state of Israel may never be available, or only available to the public after he dies, is killed, or captured.

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<sup>145</sup> Barak Mendelsohn, "Al-Qaeda's Palestinian Problem," *Survival*, Vol. 51 no. 4, August–September 2009.

<sup>146</sup> Flagg, p. 351.

<sup>147</sup> Zawahiri, *His Own Words*, p. 121.

<sup>148</sup> Zawahiri, *His Own Words*, p. 177.

<sup>149</sup> Zawahiri, *His Own Words*, p. 185-190.



## Motivating the fight and justifying the fight - between the conspiracy theory and Shari'a, Qutb and Taymiyyah

Ever since the Egyptian engineer Abd al-Salam Faraj wrote *The Neglected Duty*, justifying subversion against Sadat's regime by citing Sunni fatwas, many analysts have taken these violent extremist Sunnis at their word, and explained the wave of violent extremist Sunni activity that started in the 1980s as a re-emergence of a strain of violent Sunni behavior that stretches back at least to Ibn Taymiyyah, and perhaps to the prophet Muhammad himself. This section will argue that the importance of the works of Ibn Taymiyyah and other classical Sunni texts and ideas in the theories and activities of Bin Laden, Zawahiri, and their ilk is much smaller than they claim, and that their ideas and actions far more influenced by Qutb's teachings and 19th and 20th century European conspiracy theories.

The Quran has been with us for over a thousand years, and Sunnis have at times waged violent jihad since then, conquering territory at different times all the way to Vienna, the Pyrenees, India, and the Pamirs. However, the current strain of Sunni violent extremism a-la Al Qaeda is new to Islamic history, as the jihadis are waging war against their own Muslim governments, indeed, against Saudi Arabia in particular, one of the most conservative Sunni states on the globe. Attempts to describe Al Qaeda leaders and fighters, many of whom like Bin Laden are from Saudi Arabia, as radical Wahhabis are flawed. Wahhabism has generally been against non-state violence, declaring it as *fitna*, a capital sin, an invitation for chaos. Even if a ruler was unjust, then criticism of the ruler must be private to avoid *fitna*. Al Qaeda, on the other hand, legitimized and encouraged jihad against Islamic states, even in lands which were not under attack or occupation by non-Muslim armies.<sup>150</sup>

This is not to deny that Wahhabis are capable of violence. There have been revolts by Wahhabis and other Sunnis before, including a Wahabbi revolt against the House of Saud in the 1920s. However, history does not record a previous insurrection in which Sunni rebels fought against a Muslim government because they believed their government was secretly a Jewish pawn.

The examples most often pointed to by radical extremists Sunnis like Al Qaeda justifying their *fitna* are the fatwas of Ibn Taymiyyah. Ibn Taymiyyah has been a staple of Sunni theology for centuries, but his work was not previously used as a justification for revolt against Sunni rulers as being secretly aligned with apostates. Ibn Taymiyyah's 14th-century anti-Mongol fatwas attacked the sincerity of the conversion of the Mongol Ilkhan who was in the process of invading Syria, then ruled by the Mamluk sultans of Egypt. In his fatwas from this period Ibn Taymiyyah argued that whereas the Mongol rulers of Iran, while outwardly Muslim, they still used Mongol common law in addition to Shari'a and therefore they were still unbelievers and had to be treated as unbelievers. Those who were subservient to them were given the status of being subservient to an unbeliever.<sup>151</sup> However, when it came to his own rulers in the Egypt-

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<sup>150</sup> Thomas Small, Jonathan Hacker, *Path of Blood: The Story of Al Qaeda's War on the House of Saud*, Overlook Press, 2015, p. 107.

<sup>151</sup> Yahya Michot, *Mamlūks, Qalandars, Rāfidīs, and the "Other" Ibn Taymiyya*, University of Indiana, The 13th annual Victor Danner Memorial Lecture, April 15, 2015, p. 3-4. Available at

based Mamluk Sultanate, Ibn Taymiyyah was in the mainstream of conservative Sunni thought, and always urged that Muslim subjects of a Muslim ruler avoid *fitna* at all costs, and never to rebel.<sup>152</sup> Here is a quote from one of Ibn Taymiyyah's writings where he urges patience even with a tyrannical Muslim ruler:

"Among the fundamentals of the truth, for which the texts {to which one refers to know the religion} provide proofs, there is that people with a tyrannical (jā'ir) and unjust (zālim) leader are commanded to show patience (sabr) in the face of his tyranny, his injustice, his oppression (baghī), and not to fight him. The Prophet likewise commanded that in more than one hadīth. He did absolutely not authorize the pushing back of oppression by fighting (qitāl) {it}. Quite the contrary: as fighting is the source of dissension (fitna), he prohibited the pushing back of oppression by this means and commanded patience."<sup>153</sup>

If a Muslim had to speak out against a ruler who was going astray, then Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized that this must be limited to speaking: "...it is incumbent upon him to be patient. And, if he is harmed for [the sake of] God, then this is the way (sunna) followed by God with the Prophets and their followers."<sup>154</sup> In fact, the Mamluk sultanate even concluded a peace treaty with the Mongol rulers of Iran in 1323,<sup>155</sup> after the Mongol king had become Shi'a, a group that Ibn Taymiyyah described as "the worst of the innovators" in his second anti-Mongol fatwa.<sup>156</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah did not renounce his loyalty to his rulers because of these dealings with Shi'a Mongols, or their refusal to continue waging "defensive" (as they occupied "Muslim lands") jihad against them after 1323. (He died in 1328.)

The use of Ibn Taymiyyah's anti-Mongol fatwas to denounce the Saudi Royal family or other Muslim governments requires one to first establish that they are secretly non-Muslim or that they are somehow servants of anti-Islamic entities. Especially in the case of Saudi Arabia, a state that proudly champions the most conservative versions of Sunni Islam, the idea that they are secretly non-Muslim or secretly in hock to an anti-Islamic powers requires that there exist an anti-Islamic conspiracy with superpowers of deception. This conspiracy has to be able infiltrate and/or support fake-Islamic governments, which to all appearance are actually Islamic, even super-Islamic, like that of Saudi Arabia.

The use of Ibn Taymiyyah's fatwas in this manner is made possible by the conspiracy theory expounded by Sayyid Qutb, which is itself dependent on the early 20th century European Judeo-Masonic conspiracy theory. In his writings Zawahiri is clear that Sayyid Qutb, not Ibn Taymiyyah or some other medieval Muslim thinker, is the inspiration for his violent jihad. Zawahiri describes him as "the most prominent theoretician of the fundamentalist

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[http://www.indiana.edu/~nelc/events/documents/Danner/danner\\_lecture\\_2015.pdf](http://www.indiana.edu/~nelc/events/documents/Danner/danner_lecture_2015.pdf). Accessed October 8, 2018.

<sup>152</sup> Michot, p. 5.

<sup>153</sup> Michot, p. 5.

<sup>154</sup> Michot, p. 6

<sup>155</sup> "Mamluk," in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, C. E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, B. Lewis, and Ch. Pellat eds., Vol VI, (Leiden: Brill, 1987) p. 315.

<sup>156</sup> Denise Aigle, "The Mongol Invasions of Bilād al-Shām by Ghāzān Khān and Ibn Taymīyah's Three "Anti-Mongol" Fatwas," in *Mamluk Studies Review*, no. XI (2) 2007, (Middle East Documentation Center, University of Chicago), p. 108. Available at [http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/MamlukStudiesReview\\_XI-2\\_2007.pdf](http://mamluk.uchicago.edu/MamlukStudiesReview_XI-2_2007.pdf). Accessed October 8, 2018.

movements,...”<sup>157</sup> and describes in great detail the importance of Qutb’s thought: “[Qutb] greatly helped the Islamic movement to know and define its enemies. It also helped it to realize that the internal enemy was not less dangerous than the external enemy was and that the internal enemy was a tool used by the external enemy and a screen behind which it hid to launch its war on Islam...”<sup>158</sup> Zawahiri was not inspired by Ibn Taymiyyah to begin organizing a vanguard to fight the Egyptian government. As was discussed earlier, the history of Islam is not full of Taymiyyah-inspired Sunni rebellions against Muslim rulers.

While the link between Qutb’s thought and Bin Laden’s ideas are not as direct as with Zawahiri, the link between his ideas and those of Ibn Taymiyyah are weaker still. When US commandos killed Bin Laden in his Pakistani hideout in May 2011, they captured the small personal library he had accumulated in the 6 years he had lived at that location. The library did not contain compendiums of Islamic law and the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah and histories of the Mamluk fight against the Mongols, but instead the holdings included a Quran, a few volumes of hadiths, various books produced by other Muslim extremist groups (many of them with a conspiratorial bent), one book by Sayyid Qutb,<sup>159</sup> and a selection of conspiracy-theory literature such as *Bloodlines of the Illuminati*, *The Secret teaching of All Ages*, and books like *Black Box Voting*, *Ballot Tampering in the 21st Century* and *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy* (which allege that American democracy is a sham run by a shadowy group of manipulators.)<sup>160</sup>

This suggests that these violent extremist Sunnis are not reformers, returning to an older, purer form of Islam by going back to the primary texts, or reviving the thought of a great medieval Muslim thinker and then acting as he would have them act. Rather they were inspired to act against an imaginary foe by the ideas of Sayyid Qutb and other Muslim (and perhaps non-Muslim) conspiracy theorists, and then they ransacked Islamic history in order to justify their violent departure from centuries of Sunni tradition. They have found some quotes, stripped of context, that can justify violent rebellion against “fake” Muslim rulers, but that only function the way the extremists desire if one first accepts the premise that there is a massive conspiracy against Islam. Unfortunately, probably partially due to decades of propaganda from Europe and the Middle East and the popularity of the work of Sayyid Qutb and his ilk, today’s Muslims have been bombarded with narratives about and “evidence” of the existence of such a conspiracy.

## Conclusion

This chapter has described how the idea of a grand conspiracy against Islam, including a belief in the authenticity of the *Protocols*, was adopted by Sayyid Qutb. Through him the idea of a massive Jewish conspiracy against Islam became common among radical Sunnis in the Arab world, mainly through his concept of *jahiliyyah* and his repeated statements about a massive anti-Islam conspiracy in his Quran commentaries. Like the Salis-Soglio brothers, the Union of the Russian People, and the Nazis, Qutb believed that this massive conspiracy was

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<sup>157</sup> *His Own Words*, p. 137.

<sup>158</sup> *His Own Words*, p. 47.

<sup>159</sup> Several audio lectures of Sayyid Qutb were captured at one of Bin Laden’s compounds in Afghanistan after the American invasion in 2001. See Miller, p. 59.

<sup>160</sup> “Bin Laden’s Bookshelf,” Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Initially released May 20, 2015. Available at <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/features/bin-laden-s-bookshelf>. Accessed October 8, 2018.

usurping the legitimate political and moral authorities. He responded by organizing violent subversion against what he viewed as a massive campaign of subversion, a conspiracy against a conspiracy. The effects of Qutb's ideas can be seen not only in his own subversive activities against the Nasserist Egyptian government, but also in the activities of Al Qaeda, which took Qutb's ideas about fighting a *jihad* against the clandestine Jewish enemy and applied it globally in ways that Qutb was not able to do in his day.

Al Qaeda's strategy, as articulated by its previous and current (as of 2019) leaders, is predicated on the belief in a massive Jewish conspiracy against Islam, a massive conspiracy that has also managed to gain control of the United States. The United States is considered by them to be a weapon wielded by the Jewish conspiracy, and using the model of Vietnam Al Qaeda's leaders believe they can knock this proxy out of action through mass-casualty attacks against Americans. Because they believe a massive conspiracy is bearing down on Islam, they view this activity as defensive in nature.

Al Qaeda's activities also include violent rebellion against Sunni authority and pursuit of a revolutionary vision of eventually establishing a new "Islamic state" to wage offensive jihad. Their justification of this vision, like Qutb's, is based on the idea of a massive usurping conspiracy, which must be violently overthrown. This is a repetition of a pattern now familiar from European history, conspiracy theories motivating even erstwhile "conservatives" to embrace radical violent subversion in order to fight an ultimate enemy that does not exist.