REJECTING AMERICA’S COLD WAR: SAYYID QUTB’S NATIONALIST-ISLAMIST AGENDA AND THE FAILURE OF U.S. EFFORTS TO WIN OVER EGYPTIAN MUSLIMS FOLLOWING WORLD WAR II

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By

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ABSTRACT

Known in the post-9/11 context as one of the fathers of Islamic extremism, Egyptian
author Sayyid Qutb was writing squarely in the mainstream of anti-British nationalism and
Muslim Brotherhood-style Islamism in the early post-World War II period. Despite Qutb’s
public antagonism in the Egyptian press against America, Great Britain, and the Cold War
paradigm, the U.S. government allowed him to spend two years in the United States on an
exchange from the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, it appears that the U.S. government
secretly paid for Qutb’s 1949 treatise, Social Justice in Islam, to be translated into English and
published in 1953. No sources in the existing literature adequately explain either the value of
Social Justice in Islam to the U.S. government or the importance of Qutb’s works from this
period to his own career.

To explain this puzzle, the study combines a close reading of Social Justice and Qutb’s
anti-American articles from 1946 to 1952 with declassified U.S. archives, especially State
Department, National Security Council, Central Intelligence Agency, and Congress, and with
secondary sources spanning early Cold War U.S. foreign relations and intelligence activities, late
19th and early 20th century Egyptian political and social history, biographies of American and
Egyptian figures, and accounts of Islamist organizations and intellectual developments.

This study argues that the U.S. government likely promoted Qutb’s Social Justice
because he was both anti-communist and an emerging religious leader in Egypt. U.S. officials
were looking for Muslim partners who could help sway public opinion in the region against the
Soviet Union, preventing communist takeover. They tolerated a degree of dissonance in the
views of those they promoted, seeing it as a sign of authenticity which would make indigenous
authors more persuasive to the target audience. However, I argue that Qutb was too independent.
Although he wrote against communism, he also rejected the Cold War binary and, inverting the
cold relationship, subjected American propaganda to his own nationalist and Islamist agenda.
By explaining the significance of the interaction between Sayyid Qutb and the U.S. government
during this period, the study adds to our understanding of the impact of early Cold War
American policy in Egypt, the evolution of Qutb’s ideas during this phase of his career, and
nationalist-Islamist forms of anti-colonial resistance in Egypt following World War II.
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INTRODUCTION

Power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations...Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations.

Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1978¹

As World War II came to an end, Egyptians faced the implications of the Allied victory on their political reality. Although Egypt had nominal self-rule through the monarchy and parliament, Britain was to maintain effective control over Egypt’s security which included Britain’s continued military presence in the Suez Canal Zone that exceeded the troop levels allowed under the Anglo-Egyptian treaty of 1936 by a factor of 10.² Egyptians of different political and ideological backgrounds had demanded the immediate departure of British military forces and the establishment of authentic home rule after decades of nationalist struggle that included a thwarted request for independence at the Paris Peace Talks and the Egyptian revolution of 1919 that followed the failure of the Egyptian delegation to win greater autonomy for Egypt in Paris. Anti-British unrest in the form of protest, vandalism, and violence against soldiers was becoming common in post-World War II Egypt.

As the war wound down across the Atlantic in Washington, D.C., U.S. government officials in diplomacy, intelligence, and the military were looking for opportunities in the Middle East to position the United States strongly against Soviet communism, which they saw as a growing threat despite the wartime alliance between the United States, Britain, and the Soviet

Union. U.S. officials agreed with the British assessment of Egypt’s military importance to the West in any future conflict with the Soviets. While sympathetic to Egyptian nationalism, U.S. officials were cautious about encouraging groups that would destabilize the country, usually leading to U.S. support of the British-dominated status quo. In addition to purely military considerations, U.S. officials saw an opportunity to influence Egyptian society to align with the West against the Soviet Union due to shared religious values. Just as members of the U.S. government viewed religious revival in the United States as the best inoculation against communism, they saw bolstering Islam and religious solidarity between Islam and the West as an effective way to halt the spread of communism in the Middle East.

While some of America’s intended Muslim partners in Egypt were receptive, others were not. Literary critic and emerging Islamist thinker Sayyid Qutb wrote harsh critiques of American policy in the Middle East and about what he saw as an American attempt to take advantage of Muslims in the struggle against communism. Not a communist himself, Qutb advocated an indigenous alternative along the lines of what the Muslim Brotherhood was proposing, that is, an independent and just society achieved by returning to the golden era of Islam. Despite Qutb’s antagonism in the Egyptian press against the United States during the period following World War II, the U.S. government allowed him to spend two years in the United States on an exchange from the Ministry of Education, from 1948 to 1950. Qutb came to study curriculum. Rather than transforming him into an ally as U.S. officials would have expected, Qutb’s experience appeared to increase his contempt for America and the West. When he returned to Egypt, he published a
scathing critique of America called “The America I Have Seen.”³ Strangely, three years after he published this diatribe, in 1953, the U.S. government appears to have covertly paid for his 1949 treatise, *Social Justice in Islam*, to be translated and published in English. While excellent analysis exists concerning disparate pieces of this puzzle, no sources in the existing literature adequately explain the value of Qutb’s work from this period to the U.S. government and to Qutb’s own agenda. This study explores, on the one hand, the social and ideological context of Qutb’s anti-American articles and *Social Justice in Islam*, and on the other hand, the largely unsuccessful American attempt to build good will with Egyptians like Qutb during the early Cold War.

This study is divided into three chapters. In Chapter 1, I examine a selection of Qutb’s writings from before and after his stay in the United States for clues to understanding his contempt for America. In Chapter 2, I explore the thinking behind U.S. government outreach to Muslims in the early Cold War and how U.S. policies were implemented in Egypt. In Chapter 3, I use Qutb’s 1949 work, *Social Justice in Islam*, as a lens through which to understand Egyptian nationalist sentiments at the time and Qutb’s Islamist response. I conclude that U.S. officials were seeking Muslim partners like Qutb to further the cause of the Cold War in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East, but they overestimated the U.S. ability to sell a pro-Western worldview at a time when the U.S. government had failed to support Egyptian nationalist causes, and they underestimated the ability of people like Qutb to counter American propaganda and promote a third way.

Methods

This study combines elements of political and intellectual history. Examining U.S. government archives for clues about ideologies and decision making in Egypt and comparing them with accounts of what was going on inside the British and Egyptian governments makes the study a political history, especially of the diplomatic and intelligence variety. However, Qutb was not only an object of interest to foreign governments, he was a forceful writer on subjects of interest to his contemporaries. Examining the development of his nationalist and Islamist rhetoric during this time makes the study an intellectual history as well. While not a work of social history, the study incorporates some of its lessons. Although I do examine the beliefs, words, and deeds of politically influential men, I view them not as “great men” of history, but rather as members and products of human networks: familial, professional, religious, and epistemic. Foucauldian notions of power relations and post-colonial sensitivity led to the structure of this study. In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault argues that power is multidirectional, a “multiplicity of force relations.” It is not “a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state,” nor “a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of rule,” nor is it a “system of domination exerted by one group over another” whose effects “pervade the entire social body.”\(^4\) Foucault sees the reality of power as a complex strategical situation in a society rather than an institution, a structure, or the attribute of strength.\(^5\) This study looks at a particular historical situation in which individuals such as Qutb, Muslim Brotherhood members, U.S. officials in Cairo and Washington, British officials, and Egyptian political leaders directly or indirectly influenced each other, looking for evidence of

\(^4\) Foucault, 92.
\(^5\) Ibid., 93.
power in the interactions, and not taking the power of any actor for granted. Omnia El Shakry offers an example of what these power relations can look like in the Egyptian context. In *The Great Social Laboratory*, she employs the term “translation” to describe how Egyptians adopted and changed European social sciences to suit the national context. In a similar way, this study demonstrates how Qutb adopted certain elements of foreign propaganda but also manipulated both style and specific messages to advocate his own nationalist and Islamist agenda. The study interrogates assumptions about power relations in several places, seeking evidence of their presence in the words and actions of the human and human organizational actors. The study deliberately devotes more than half of its focus – the first and third chapters – to an Egyptian. Focusing the entire study on the U.S. government and its actions in Egypt would probably have been easier, given the availability of archives, a vast corpus of English-language secondary literature on the period, and my own background knowledge from studying and working in the U.S. government. And indeed, there is still much to learn from studying the ideology and decisions of U.S. officials during this time. However, the study’s focus on Sayyid Qutb – primarily through his own words and social context – interrupts the potential for a purely American-focused historiography. The structure of the study, then, seeks to dismantle the divide between global hegemon (the ascendant postwar United States allied to the British Empire) and subaltern (Qutb as citizen of the subjugated Egyptian state); it makes this Egyptian author visible and uncovers his agency.

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6 El Shakry explains, “To formulate a nationalist project of modernity, the indigenous elite often translated (that is, adopted and transformed) colonial social-scientific methodologies (such as ethnographic or statistical techniques), while simultaneously linking their arguments to nationalist claims, such as Arabism.” Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt*, Stanford University Press, Kindle Edition, 2007, 6-7.
Because Qutb was a prolific writer and his writing changed significantly during his career, it was necessary to restrict the time period and topics of study. Anticipating a juxtaposition between Qutb’s writings and the U.S. Muslim world outreach that included him, the initial periodization rationale was to examine what Qutb wrote on “American Islam” and on America more broadly. One of Qutb’s Arabic language biographers, Şalāh ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Khālidī, compiled Qutb’s works relating to the United States into a single volume titled Amrīkā Min al-Dākhil bi-Minzār Sayyid Qūṭb. Examining Qutb’s articles from 1946, 1951, and 1952 in this volume critiquing the United States led to the realization that much of what he achieved in these articles he also accomplished in Social Justice in Islam (1949), even though the United States was not the focus of that book. Discovering this parallel led to the choice to form two chapters around these works. It also influenced the periodization of the study. Taking 1946 to 1952 as the narrowest period of focus based on Qutb’s works, I looked for other Egyptian and American works that covered that time period and for political events that could help guide the periodization.

The literature on the U.S. government would suggest a different periodization. The term “early Cold War” in the literature appears to coincide with the beginning of the Truman administration in 1945 and the end of the Eisenhower administration in early 1961. Historians of the United States look at the period from the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution through World War II as the period in which the origins of the Cold War may be found, but not as the Cold War itself.

7 Author note: This study uses the IJMES transliteration system for Arabic words, except in three cases: 1) high frequency English spellings of well-known figures, such as “Nasser” and his advisor “Heikal,” 2) the Library of Congress’ transliteration for the Egyptian periodical, al-Risālah; and 3) bibliographical information for Arabic works translated into English with non-standard transliteration, such as Khalīd M. Khalīd and al-Ghazzālī.

In *Imagining the Middle East*, Matthew Jacobs sets his period of study to 1918-1967, since this coincides with a phase of U.S. government interest in and attitude toward the Middle East and Islam. In “The Spiritual-Industrial Complex,” Jonathan Herzog never specifies what period he considers to be the “early Cold War,” but the decade of the 1950s is his most frequent area of study.\(^9\)

Sources focused on Egypt suggest still other periodizations. Most closely relevant to U.S. policy in Egypt during the 1946-1952 period, Peter Hahn determines the boundaries of his “early Cold War” history of U.S., British, and Egyptian relations as 1945 and the Suez Crisis of 1956. However, from Qutb’s perspective, the 1956 Suez crisis would likely have been less significant than 1954 when Qutb was imprisoned. Ian Johnson’s intelligence and propaganda history of the Muslim Brotherhood unfortunately largely skips the period 1945 to 1954, picking the story up in 1954 with Hasan al-Banna’s exiled son-in-law, Said Ramadan and his apparent cooperation with the CIA.\(^10\) Richard Mitchell’s seminal work, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, tracks the organization’s history from its founding in 1928 to the group’s suppression in 1954, when six Brothers were hanged.\(^11\) In contrast, the periodization for Barbara Zollner’s history of the Muslim Brotherhood begins with al-Banna’s death in 1949 and end with al-Hudaybi’s death in 1973.\(^12\) In Mohamed Heikal’s account of the Muslim Brotherhood in *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat*, he offers a brief history of the Brothers beginning in 1928 and ending in 1954, echoing Mitchell. Heikal suggests that intellectual leadership for the weakened group then

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moved to the radicals, Qutb and Mawdudi.\textsuperscript{13} Focusing on how the group changed after 1954 and Qutb’s role has merit but does not reflect the importance of Qutb’s earlier work. William Shepard’s comparison of different editions of \textit{Social Justice in Islam} spans the period from its first printing in 1949 to its seventh (posthumous) printing in 1973.\textsuperscript{14} While Shepard’s analysis informed this study, it does not align with its principal sources and aims. Looking at the archival primary sources incorporated in the study, nearly all fall between 1945 and 1954. Although many more documents of interest exist outside of this narrow period, I had to force an end to the exploration. The nine-year period from 1945 to 1954, then, allows us to closely examine the phase in Qutb’s professional life when he was a mainstream and influential nationalist and Islamist intellectual, and it allows us to explore U.S. government interest in Qutb, Egypt, and Islam.

\textbf{Dealing with Archives}

The starting point for the use of archives in this study is that they can be taken as evidence of the views of the U.S. officials authoring the document, with several caveats. Archives are incomplete evidence, for several reasons:\textsuperscript{15} 1) just because a statement exists in an archive does not mean it represents the most authoritative voice at the time, given bureaucratic competition, personalities, and variation in authority over time; 2) the author or speaker may not be stating his or her private views or all that he or she knows; 3) not every document has been preserved; 4) one researcher cannot physically read all of the relevant public and private archival

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Caveats} These caveats are based on my experience so far researching in U.S. archives and working for two years in government. It is by no means an exhaustive list of all challenges working with government archives.
\end{thebibliography}
sources relevant to U.S. government activities, even for such a narrow time period as the one under consideration; 5) even declassified texts often contain sanitized portions; and 6) an unknown number of existing records remain classified. Furthermore, archival evidence from one government may be contradicted by sources outside that government, including governmental or non-governmental sources in another country.

I found several of these dynamics at play in the research for this study. For example, I cite a letter from President Eisenhower to his confidant, the Presbyterian minister Dr. Elson.\textsuperscript{16} Although an ostensibly private letter, it was not classified, and the President was undoubtedly aware that it might enter the public record at some point. Rather than read it as a statement of his authentic private views, which would be to infer too much, I see it as a statement of his views through a filter of awareness of potential public use. Weighing the letter with other sources, it seems to be a straightforward expression of how he implemented one of his policies, that is, outreach to Arabs on the basis of religion, in his daily work. I approached U.S. intelligence reports as inputs into the discussions of decision makers but not as positive proof of decisions, whereas I knew from secondary sources that records from certain National Security Council bodies constituted decision documents and therefore reflected official U.S. policy approved from the top. With similar circumspection, I treat the transcript of a 1952 strategy session on propaganda for the Arab world as a deliberative discussion, including colorful exchanges of ideas and reinforcing of shared understandings of threats and opportunities, but not necessarily

an indication of what happened next.\textsuperscript{17} I also saw power relations at play in some documents, for example, in the record of an appropriations committee hearing in Congress, in which executive branch officials were required to provide testimony, answer questions, and justify their activities in order to continue in operation.\textsuperscript{18} The setting was collegial, and members of Congress clearly deferred to executive branch expertise in some instances, but the balance of authority rested on the Congressional side. In this case, I maintained awareness of the structural incentives, but as the topic was non-controversial, I judged the executive branch testimony to be largely factual. Still, sometimes officials have reasons to lie or obfuscate. In the early Cold War period, covert activities proliferated and Congressional oversight of the Office of Strategic Services and its successor, the CIA, was weak. Ian Johnson deals with the problem of CIA front organizations and conflicting accounts by different individuals involved in them, pointing out where one party appears to be lying.\textsuperscript{19} Proceeding with caution, then, U.S. archives remain a rich source of historical evidence. When corroborated by other sources, they gain credibility. Archives can offer a window into what privileged individuals thought, how they navigated bureaucracies, and ways in which they constructed and perpetuated norms. The classified nature of some documents can be a vehicle for a degree of frankness among colleagues within the professional culture of a given agency.


\textsuperscript{19} In a discussion of Radio Liberty, Johnson demonstrates that someone must be lying about the organization’s CIA backing, see Johnson, 45.
I employed an inductive method to exploring U.S. government archives. The archival search began with a set of questions directed at a single collection, namely, Georgetown University’s collection of U.S. Department of State archives categorized by country (Egypt) and date ranges (1945-49 and 1950-54). I used an inductive approach because I wanted to discover what the data would tell me, rather than prejudge the data by imposing too much structure from above. In the Georgetown collection, I found data that both supported and challenged my hypotheses. I therefore updated my research questions and expanded my archival search to the CIA online reading room and CIA CREST collection at the Archives II location of the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland. As of early 2017, the CIA CREST collection now exists online, which made further research more efficient. CIA online resources uncovered a few documents that became vital to my research. This search then led me to the National Security Archive at the George Washington University, in particular the Sol Chaneles collection focused on CIA book publishing operations throughout the Cold War. This collection provided information on CIA books published in Arabic in Cairo in the early 1950s, and reaffirmed much of what I had learned from the State Department and CIA collections. The weakness of the inductive approach to the archives was the length of time required. Benefits included tapping into sources that remain underused in the secondary literature and the freedom to make fresh connections and discover new insights.

20 From this collection, I narrowed the search to microfilm holding 708, reel 5 and 672, reel 8 in U.S. Department of State. Confidential U.S. State Department central files. Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1986. Microfilm Collection, ed. Michael Davis. Georgetown University.
Literature Review

This study addresses gaps in the literature both through original research and by putting diverse sources in dialogue with one another. An examination of the literature reveals that existing scholarship fails to explain why the U.S. government viewed Qutb and other Egyptian Muslims as valuable partners in the fight against communism during the period studied here, 1945-1954. Furthermore, the existing literature does not investigate how U.S. officials implemented the policy to win Muslim hearts and minds in Egypt. From the perspective of Egyptian history and accounts of Qutb’s life and intellectual development, still more gaps appear. The literature does not adequately explore the development of Qutb’s nationalist and Islamist thought during this period with consideration to his socio-economic context and foreign contacts. It fails to adequately explore the reasons for Qutb’s anti-American sentiments and his ability to advance his own agenda by manipulating foreign propaganda and U.S. government support.

Many sources in the existing literature provided critical pieces of the puzzle. National Security Archive analyst Joyce Battle skillfully documents bureaucratic deliberations concerning U.S. objectives in the Middle East during the early Cold War and the propaganda materials intended to win Arab and Muslim hearts and minds. She dedicates a section of her report, *U.S. Propaganda in the Middle East – The Early Cold War Version* (2002), to the use of religion in U.S. propaganda. Unfortunately, her case studies did not include Egypt.23

Foreign relations historian Matthew Jacobs demonstrates U.S. government interest in Islam as a foreign policy tool in “The Perils and Promise of Islam: The United States and the

Muslim Middle East in the Early Cold War” (2006). However, he only references Egypt in regard to the 1956 U.S.-Egypt split, which Jacobs marks as a turning point in U.S. government interest in Islam, since it coincided with increased U.S. government interest in Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{24} In *Imagining the Middle East* (2011), Jacobs gives more attention to what he calls the “loose network” of Middle East specialists in the United States, focusing on the impact of these individuals and organizations such as the Council on Foreign Relations and the Middle East Institute on U.S. foreign policy during the early Cold War. Jacobs also expands his analysis of orientalism and other reductionist and racialized views of Islam in U.S. policy making during this period. Jacobs’ work invites further exploration of where Egypt fits into the framework he provides.\textsuperscript{25}

Historian and policy analyst Jonathan Herzog examines the U.S. government’s use of religion in the early Cold War struggle against communism in *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex* (2011). Herzog’s study of U.S. domestic policies offers welcome context for other secondary sources which are limited to foreign policy. Further, unlike Johnson in *A Mosque in Munich* (2010), which largely skips the period of interest to this study,\textsuperscript{26} Herzog offers a detailed narrative of the purposes and practice of the U.S. government’s religious outreach in the anti-communist struggle during both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. However, Herzog’s work must be read along with other works that offer more insight into U.S. policies in Egypt during this period.


\textsuperscript{26} See earlier discussion on periodization in the literature.
Journalist and academic Stephen Kinzer reveals much about the worldviews of arguably the two most important men in President Eisenhower’s cabinet, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his brother, CIA Director Allen Dulles. In *The Brothers* (2013), Kinzer sheds light on the origins of the anti-communist attitudes of these men, dating back to their awareness of the Bolshevik revolution in 1917, and their experience combating communism even before they came to office in 1953. Kinzer tells the story of the U.S.-Egypt split from the Dulles brothers’ perspective, that is, through their antagonism toward Nasser’s neutralism, a topic American studies academic Melani McAlister also briefly covers in *Epic Encounters* (2005). However, despite extensive treatment of John Foster Dulles’ Presbyterian religiosity, Kinzer does not take the opportunity, as Battle, Jacobs, and Herzog do, to discuss the broader U.S. strategy to win over Muslims to the West. Kinzer therefore misses the opportunity to examine the parallel between the reductionist Cold War mentality he documents and reductionist ideas of Islam among U.S. officials. Moreover, due to the organization of his book around six foreign leaders the Dulles brothers tried to destroy, Egypt is not one of his main case studies.²⁷

Histories of the CIA and other intelligence organizations provide much food for thought, but do not contain the level of detail on U.S. covert activities in Egypt that would make this study easier. For example, in *Wild Bill Donovan* (2011), journalist Douglas Waller describes the U.S. military’s World War II program to raise Muslim militias in North Africa as part of Operation Torch, but he does not elaborate on the rationale for the policy, nor does he speculate on why the team sent to raise these holy warriors convinced very few young Muslim men to sign

up. In *Legacy of Ashes* (2008), journalist Tim Weiner briefly recounts U.S. covert interventions in Syria in 1949 and 1957, in the latter case involving the arming of members of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Even more relevant to this study, Weiner claims that the CIA built Nasser’s radio station and later favored subversion, but not assassination, of Nasser when he did not comply with Washington’s wishes. Weiner’s account contradicts Qutb’s claim shortly before his death that the CIA was behind the 1954 assassination attempt against Nasser. These pieces of information are tantalizing but require further analysis.

In *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 1945-1956* (1991), historian Peter Hahn meticulously documents not just U.S. government decision making in Egypt during the period of interest for this study but also provides a comparative government approach concerning British and Egyptian government decision making. The level of detail in this work and its proximity to the topics of this study make it an extremely valuable resource. However, while the book fills many gaps concerning U.S. policies in Egypt, and some gaps in understanding the Egyptian political situation, it is by no means an account of the Muslim Brotherhood’s role in the politics of this era, and lacks a single reference to Sayyid Qutb.

To understand Qutb’s social context and ideology during this period, several sources offer valuable pieces of information. Mitchell’s *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* continues to provide arguably the most reliable account of the organization from its founding through the mid-1950s, but disappointingly little on the topic of social justice. Whereas Mitchell cites Qutb

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30 Weiner, 146-7.
as the best source for Muslim Brotherhood views of social justice, this study is most interested in the social justice discourse in Brotherhood circles prior to Qutb’s 1949 version.\textsuperscript{31}

Combining accounts by Qutb’s recent English language biographers, James Toth and John Calvert,\textsuperscript{32} with Fathi Osman’s memoirs as reported by his daughter, American academic Ghada Osman,\textsuperscript{33} provides a window into Qutb’s social contacts during his adult life. His biographers provide some information on the evolution of his Islamist views, but historian Barbara Zollner provides much more extensive analysis in \textit{The Muslim Brotherhood: Hasan al-Hudaybi and Ideology} (2009) of the organization’s thought in years following al-Banna’s assassination, including a discussion of how Qutb’s views evolved and related to various factions.\textsuperscript{34} Zollner’s sources consist primarily of Brotherhood texts and the rich secondary literature on the Brotherhood, but do not include U.S. archival sources, since her history revolves around the Brotherhood, its members, and ideology. Historian Henri Lauzière provides a much-needed clarification of the origins and use of the term Salafism in 20\textsuperscript{th} century Islamic reform movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, but he does not focus on Qutb’s early Islamic work.\textsuperscript{35}

This study contributes to existing literature, then, by synthesizing information from academic, journalistic, and archival sources on early Cold War U.S. policy in the Middle East and putting them in dialogue with texts by Sayyid Qutb and his Egyptian and non-Egyptian Muslim contemporaries. A handful of archival sources used in this study do not appear in the

\textsuperscript{31} Mitchell 1993, 251, footnote 63.
\textsuperscript{34} See for example Zollner, 41-47.
secondary literature at all despite their relevance to the topic at hand. Only by examining seemingly disconnected pockets of literature can we gain insights into the U.S. government’s interest in Qutb in the early Cold War and Qutb’s ability to write independently of and even manipulate U.S. propaganda despite apparent U.S. government support for his work during this period.
CHAPTER 1: REJECTING AMERICA AND “AMERICAN ISLAM”

The reason for the Americans’ interest in Islam…is that they need it to fight communism for them in the Middle East.

Sayyid Qutb, “American Islam,” 1952

As World War II came to an end, U.S. government officials in diplomacy, intelligence and the military looked for opportunities to position the United States to counter Soviet communism, which they perceived as a growing global threat. One of their conclusions was the need to engage the Islamic world against the dangers of communism. They sought to win over Muslims to the West. In Egypt, the United States deployed a combination of initiatives, including propaganda and educational exchanges, to win hearts and minds. However, some of America’s intended Muslim partners refused to cooperate. Literary critic and emerging Islamist thinker, Sayyid Qutb, was one of them.

This chapter seeks to solve the puzzle of Qutb’s potent anti-Americanism well before the United States became a significant bilateral player in Egyptian security, politics, or economics. The first section sets the scene by investigating anti-American sentiments in Egypt in the early post-World War period. A second section explores three of Qutb’s anti-American works in the periodical al-Risālah from 1946 to 1952. A third section unpacks the logic of Qutb’s anti-American writings and seeks to explain why they may have struck a chord with his readers. A fourth section elucidates the use of Qutb’s anti-American rhetoric from the perspective of his

advocacy of Islam as the solution for Egypt. The chapter concludes with a discussion of what made Qutb’s virulent anti-Americanism particularly ironic during the early Cold War period.

**Egyptian Views of the United States After World War II**

In Egyptian domestic politics, the most important bloc of the first half of the 20th century was the nationalist, secularist Wafd party. The Wafd had won decisively at the polls in 1924, after leading the 1919 revolution that led to the British decision to officially end their protectorate in 1922. However, Egypt enjoyed only partial democracy under the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty (1937-1951), as the British reserved the right to impose martial law in an emergency and continued to station over 100,000 troops in Egypt.

Egyptian sentiments toward the British military occupation may be detected in statistics on anti-British unrest. According to one observer, there were 47 deaths of British soldiers and 3,297 acts of theft or vandalism against British military property in the Canal Zone between October 1951 and June 1954. Hahn describes several instances in which the British asked for American diplomatic support, for example, pressuring the Egyptian government not to bring a complaint about British treaty violations to the United Nations. On one occasion, when U.S. advocacy of a British position emerged in the press, riots erupted. U.S. officials refused comply with the next British request on the basis that the United States needed “to avoid the impression

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38 Hahn, 158.

39 Ibid., 32.
that we are putting pressure on Egypt in the negotiations and are simply playing the British game."**

However, U.S. policies did sometimes anger Egyptians. When the Truman administration voted for partition in Palestine, the U.S. ambassador to Egypt reported “widespread noisy demonstrations” in Cairo. Hahn writes that “a mob of four hundred people stormed the American consulate at Alexandria, destroying the official shield atop the iron gate barring their entry. Ominously, nearby police officers failed to intervene.”**

On another occasion, perceptions that the U.S. government was siding with the British occupation caused protesters to picket outside the embassy in Cairo, shouting “down with America.”**

In this period of frustrated national ambitions and disillusionment, then, Egyptians were suspicious of American intentions.

**America According to Sayyid Qutb**

Sayyid Qutb had become a recognized name in Egyptian intellectual circles by the early 1940s for his poetry, novels, literary criticism, and increasingly for his political and social commentaries including Islamic issues. Qutb wrote his first article about the United States, “The American Conscience and the Palestinian Question” (*al-Ḍamīr al-Amrīkānī wa Qaḍīyyat Filastīn*), at a time when his nationalist and Islamic political commentaries were making trouble with the Palace.**

When Qutb returned from his two-year stay in the United States, he continued his strident political and religious writing. He once again criticized both the institutions of the monarchy and the religious scholarly class, intensifying his calls for religious revival as the

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**Ibid., 33.**

**Ibid., 67.**

**Ibid., 47-48.**

**Toth relates the story of Qutb’s friend, Prime Minister Mahmud Fahmi al-Nuqrashi, intervening with the Education Ministry on his behalf to send him to the United States to avoid his arrest by the Palace. See Toth, 57-58.**
solution to Egypt’s political, economic, and moral decay. His three-part 1951 article titled “The America I Have Seen” and his 1952 article denouncing so-called “American Islam” (Islām Amrīkānī) should thus be interpreted as a minor theme of his political and religious activism during this period. As chapter 3 will explore in greater depth, Qutb’s focus on political reform and Islam as the solution brought him into both the Muslim Brotherhood, where he served as chief propagandist and member of the Guidance Bureau, and into the Free Officers network, allied with the Muslim Brotherhood at the time.\textsuperscript{44}

The three Qutb articles explored here demonstrate a progression in Qutb’s awareness of U.S. policies and American society. In the first article, written two years before he travelled to the United States, Qutb expresses rage at injustices imposed on the Palestinians, and America’s role in their oppression. In the second article, published in three segments, Qutb recounts his few positive and many more numerous negative experiences in the United States. In the final article, he condemns the American policy of supporting Islamic causes because of what he saw as American insincerity and self-interest.

In the October 1946 article, “The American Conscience,” Qutb declared that he hated “those Westerners! All of them without exception! The English, the French, the Dutch, and finally the Americans.”\textsuperscript{45} Qutb warned his readers that those who believe that the American conscience is different than that of the British and the French have been duped (makhdūʿīn).\textsuperscript{46} He pointed to American policies toward the Palestinians as proof that the United States “gambles

\textsuperscript{44} Toth, 74.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 124.
with the destinies of peoples and with the rights of man.”

His condemnation goes on: “Those Westerners are all the same: a rotten conscience, a counterfeit civilization, and a great deception called ‘democracy’ in which deceived people believe.”

Shortly after publishing the first article, Qutb spent two years in the United States. Rather than improving his opinion of Americans and making him an ally who would promote U.S. values and U.S.-Egyptian cooperation, Qutb’s experience sharpened his disdain. In keeping with his career as a prominent commentator, Qutb wrote about his experiences after his return to Cairo in 1951 in a series of articles in al-Risālah called “The America I Have Seen.”

A few examples demonstrate the tone of the articles. Qutb found America's industrial and commercial production impressive, but its people shallow and primitive. He found Americans sensual and brutal, as seen in their mixed gender dances and sporting events. He believed that Americans had lost the meaning of Christianity, using places of worship for everything except worship. Qutb was astonished that the first generation of Americans were not inspired to spirituality by the untouched continent in all its natural beauty. “The Secret of the Deformed American Character,” he revealed, was that America had shut out “faith in religion, faith in art, and faith in spiritual values altogether” in favor of “applied science” and “sensual pleasure. And this is where America has ended up after four hundred years.”

Qutb expressed shock and disgust at various incidents he witnessed involving Americans and death, which he saw as emblematic of an American incapacity for common decency. Qutb

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47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., 124-125.
49 The U.S. government hoped that educational exchanges like Qutb’s would educate people who would be “our best defense” around the world, see U.S. Congress, 12.
50 Abdel-Malek, 19.
51 Ibid., 12-14.
judged that Americans considered weakness “a crime: a crime that cannot be atoned for in any way, a crime that remains undeserving of compassion or care.” Dying was the ultimate crime of weakness, Qutb inferred. Qutb offered several examples of this presumed American indecency around death. He observed hospital staff members laughing at the appearance of an injured and dying man, and a widow of just three days talking calmly about her husband’s death and her good fortune to have taken out a Blue Cross life insurance policy on him, as matter-of-factly as if he had been her dog.

While impressed with America’s scientific genius and “virtues of production and organization,” Qutb concluded that “humanity makes the gravest of errors and risks losing its account of morals, if it makes America its example in feelings and manners.” In his later work, Qutb would reject Western science as well, due to the atheism he saw at its core.

Perhaps even more insidious than the immoral and primitive behavior Qutb witnessed in America was the policy he called “American Islam.” In his 1952 article by that name, Qutb denounced America’s new focus on Islam: “The reason for the Americans’ interest in Islam…is that they need it to fight communism for them in the Middle East.” This new American policy was not based on principle but political expediency. Qutb surmised that “They may go back to smashing [Islam] tomorrow if they can.”

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52 Ibid., 15-16.
53 Ibid., 16-17.
54 Ibid., 26-27.
55 Toth, 166-167.
56 Khālidī, 130.
57 Ibid., 130.
In the same article, Qutb ridiculed what he believed to be an American-sponsored study in Egypt on obligatory charity, or zakat, and social solidarity.\textsuperscript{58} He criticized the Egyptians – university law professors, Al-Azhar scholars, and government officials who participated in this study.\textsuperscript{59} For Qutb, American interest in Islam could never be more than a cynical tool for political and military domination. The Islam that the Americans and their allies want in the Middle East “is not the Islam that resists colonialism, and not the Islam that resists tyranny.”\textsuperscript{60} However, Qutb took solace in the fact that Islam’s protectors, presumably enlightened scholars like himself, could use Islam to confront all three evils: colonialism, tyranny, and communism.\textsuperscript{61} Qutb’s condemnation of Egyptians involved in the 1952 social solidarity study echoes his hatred, expressed in the 1946 article above, not only for all Westerners but for all Egyptians who have confidence in them and in the American conscience.\textsuperscript{62} Rejecting Muslims who had strayed from the true path of Islam became a major theme in Qutb’s later work and inspired the thinking of some of his intellectual heirs in the more violent radical groups, al-Jama‘a al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad.\textsuperscript{63} Qutb strongly believed that the United States was not equipped to guide Egyptians or anyone around the world about religion. Due to the moral depravity and primitiveness discussed already, Qutb assessed that “there is no one further than the American from appreciating the spirituality of religion and respect for its sacraments.”\textsuperscript{64} Qutb sought to convince misguided

\textsuperscript{58} The conference may have been funded by the United States, given U.S. policies on academic exchanges at the time, but no evidence was found at the time of this writing. Battle discusses U.S. government funding for the publication and distribution of Arabic-language works via Franklin Publishing. According to an official guidance document, the goals of this program included “reducing Arab ignorance, suspicion, and resentment of the West and particularly the United States.” Battle, \textit{U.S. Propaganda}.

\textsuperscript{59} Khālidī, 132-133.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 130.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 133.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 125.


\textsuperscript{64} Abdel-Malek, 18.
Egyptians who believed in American superiority to return to their native Egyptian and therefore Islamic spiritual values.

Although Qutb based many of his conclusions about America on the scantiest of evidence, operating under what psychologists would term a confirmation bias, some of his depictions undoubtedly resonated with Egyptian readers. A few of his claims were particularly astute. The section that follows examines some of the reasons behind anti-American sentiments among some in Egypt in the 1940s and 1950s.

The Logic of Rejecting America: Alienation

This section explores the reasons why Qutb and some of his contemporaries viewed the United States negatively during the first half of the 20th century. The first set of reasons explored here concern U.S. government actions, including decisions not to act, in Middle East politics. The second set of reasons concern the heuristic value of an essentialized America (and her consorts, the West and capitalism) to Egyptians who advocated Islam as the solution to the ills of modernity and colonial oppression. In Egyptian political and religious circles, some initially hoped that the United States would be an ally against European oppression, as did many others under colonial rule around the world.65 However, a series of U.S. diplomatic activities and interventions in the Middle East from the turn of the century to the 1950s severely disappointed

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65 For example, Ho Chi Minh had failed to persuade President Wilson to support nationalists in Indochina against the French, but he allied with the United States against the Japanese in World War II. So great was his belief in the United States that he quoted directly from the U.S. Declaration of Independence when he declared Vietnam independent. See Kinzer, 177.
Egyptians, from the failure to fully endorse Egyptian independence from British, to U.S. recognition of the State of Israel, to the British and American coup against Mossadegh in Iran.⁶⁶

**Abandoning the 14 Points**

It would be difficult to overstate the harm to America’s image in the Middle East of not living up to the universal principles espoused in President Wilson’s 14 Points speech, embodied in the League of Nations, and later the United Nations Charter. Groups of politically active Arabs, including the Egyptian Wafd party led by Saad Zaghlul, put their hopes in the United States at the end of World War I. The United States was not prepared to respond with tangible support for many of the nationalist movements that had emerged around the globe. Despite President Wilson’s advocacy for the right of self-rule for all peoples, he applied the principle narrowly and did not intend his message to upset European colonies around the world.⁶⁷ Wilson’s concerns about Bolshevism and interest in maintaining relations with the United Kingdom colored his view of anti-colonial movements, and he refused to meet with several of the nationalist delegations to Versailles, including Zaghlul’s.⁶⁸ Kinzer argues that in addition to disappointing influential young leaders like Ho Chi Minh, Wilson’s double standard provoked

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⁶⁶ Egyptian elites were almost certainly aware of CIA activities at least as early as 1954, because American and international media were discussing them. Weiner quotes a retired CIA analyst who said that the “romantic gossip” of the Iran coup spread “like wildfire.” See Weiner, 104. Nasser’s government saw U.S. actions in Iran and Guatemala and suspected that the CIA might target the Egyptian leader in the future. See Heikal’s account of internal discussions on the relevance of Guatemala to Nasser. Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, *The Cairo Documents: The Inside Story of Nasser and his Relationship with World Leaders, Rebels, and Statesmen*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973, 51-52.

⁶⁷ Kinzer writes that “Wilson…believed that self-determination was the right of people who lived in the collapsing Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires, but not those who lived in overseas colonies.” Kinzer, 29.

four nationalist uprisings around the world in 1919: in Egypt, Korea, India, and China.\textsuperscript{69}

Politically aware Egyptians would not soon forget America’s lack of anti-colonial solidarity. As Muhammad al-Ghazzālī phrased it,

\begin{quote}
We cannot escape the fact that we have been greatly disappointed in the so-called American civilization. We were under the impression that a higher humanity had found its abode in America...This impression had been further confirmed by the attitude of President Wilson in 1919 at the end of the World War...but when the colonizing countries persisted in their vicious treatment of other nations, the Americans turned to isolationism.\textsuperscript{70}
\end{quote}

This early disappointment and cynicism would prove difficult to reverse.\textsuperscript{71} American indifference and paternalism may have been particularly painful in the Egyptian case, where decades of political and social changes seemed to favor autonomy. Egypt had witnessed an intellectual revival in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, part of the larger Arab Renaissance (\textit{Nahḍa}), and continuing in the first two decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Islamic modernists such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh offered Egyptians a path to reconcile religion and modernity, both learning from and adapting –Islamicizing – European gains in the sciences, philosophy, and political systems.\textsuperscript{72}

In addition, the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} century witnessed the beginnings of an independent press in Egypt, despite efforts by the British and their allies in the monarchy to

\textsuperscript{69} Kinzer, 29-30.
\textsuperscript{71} Several decades later, it was not U.S. isolationism but knowledge of U.S. sabotage in Iran and Guatemala that fed anti-American cynicism in Egypt. See Heikal 1973, 45.
\textsuperscript{72} Toth, 257.
censor and suppress this oppositional political expression. Ziad Fahmy traces the evolution and explosion of vernacular mass cultural production in Egypt from 1870 through the 1919 revolution and credits it with playing a large role in fostering Egyptian national identity.\textsuperscript{73} Egyptians were also politically involved at the grassroots level during this period, most powerfully in the nationalist Wafd party, the labor movement and, starting in the 1930s, the Muslim Brotherhood. The same period also saw the growth and maturing of state institutions and bureaucracies and gains in public education. Moreover, Egyptians had more reason than ever to be dissatisfied with British colonial rule, from increased state brutality since 1882 when the British intervened in Egypt to put down the Urabi revolt,\textsuperscript{74} to being dragged into World War I on the British side,\textsuperscript{75} to widespread economic stress.\textsuperscript{76}

Yet although Egyptians won some concessions from Britain as a result of the 1919 revolution,\textsuperscript{77} and further concessions as a result of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, the British still maintained ultimate control over Egyptian political and security affairs. The continued presence of British forces in the Canal Zone represented a major sore point across the Egyptian political spectrum. In response to unrest in the Canal Zone in 1951, President Truman gave Winston Churchill permission to address the U.S. Congress directly in January 1952 to ask for a small U.S. troop presence in the Suez. Although the U.S. government refused to send even a few

\textsuperscript{73} Fahmy, 171.
\textsuperscript{74} The British had killed 3000 and wounded 1500 Egyptians by the end of 1919 in their effort to suppress the uprisings, see El Shakry, 93.
\textsuperscript{75} Eugen Rogan quotes a British officer who was in Egypt at the time Britain pressured the Egyptian government into joining the war effort and described Egyptians’ outrage: “Through an involuntary and despised association with Great Britain, Egypt had been dragged into a struggle, of which the origin was obscure to her and the objectives unknown.” Eugene Rogan, \textit{The Fall of the Ottomans: The Great War in the Middle East}. Boulder, US: Basic Books, 2015, 68.
\textsuperscript{76} El Shakry discusses hardships Egyptians faced under the British protectorate and martial law in 1914, “including conscription among the peasantry and economic hardships for the general populace.” El Shakry, 92-93.
\textsuperscript{77} Beth Baron refers to this period as semi-colonialism rather than a first and ill-fated liberal experiment. Beth Baron, \textit{The Orphan Scandal: Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood}, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014, xi.
troops, the Egyptian parliamentary leadership was aware of Churchill’s request, strengthening their conviction that British troops must leave.\textsuperscript{78} The Americans were not much help against Britain. Up until the 1952 Free Officers revolution, the United States preferred to neither openly assist nor confront the British on what U.S. officials saw as predominantly British concerns.\textsuperscript{79}

\textit{New Colonialists? America’s Security Interests}

Some Egyptians believed that the United States was a new colonial power in Egypt. A more accurate interpretation is that successive U.S. administrations established and perpetuated a pattern of prioritizing America’s security interests over other concerns in the bilateral relationship, leading the United States to support the status quo of British military presence in times of uncertainty. Jon Alterman alludes to the futile efforts of Egyptian opposition leaders, immediately following World War I, to convince the U.S. Embassy in Cairo to act as a counterweight to British influence with the monarchy.\textsuperscript{80} As the United States engaged in the Cold War political, economic, and military (by proxy) confrontation with the Soviet Union around the world, U.S. foreign policy norms solidified in favor of Middle East governments that would cooperate with U.S. aims and enforce stability at home to forestall communist takeovers, which some in the U.S. government feared lurked behind every nationalist movement around the globe.\textsuperscript{81} Only when the Free Officers took over the Egyptian government in 1952 did the United States change course and back the Egyptians. Hahn attributes this change in American policy in

\textsuperscript{78} Hahn, 138-139.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{81} Kinzer discusses the dominant tendency to see communism as monolithic and on the march around the world: “Many in Washington had shared these assumptions for years. ‘Question whether Ho as much nationalist as Commie irrelevant,’ Dean Acheson had written in one cable. ‘All Stalinists in colonial areas are nationalists.’” Kinzer, 179.
part to surprise: in the face of unanticipated events, America’s default position was not to react.\textsuperscript{82}

This did not mean that the United States did not care about British interests, as will be discussed below, but the U.S. government accepted the Free Officers coup as a fait accompli. The other exception to U.S. alignment with Britain in Egypt occurred when Nasser nationalized the Suez canal in 1956 and Britain, France, and Israel responded in a coordinated attack. When Britain and France refused to compromise, Eisenhower forced Britain to stop hostilities by refusing to send emergency oil.\textsuperscript{83}

Nasser confidant Heikal describes the Free Officers’ strategy to gain U.S. backing for the 1952 revolution, which was to court the United States as the up and coming power to replace Britain.\textsuperscript{84} Intelligence historian Sirrs likewise notes that when the coup was underway, coup leaders informed the U.S. embassy immediately via friendly channels and kept U.S. representatives informed in the days that followed.\textsuperscript{85} The Free Officers even used their interlocutors at the U.S. embassy to inform the British that opposition to the coup would result in an insurgency.\textsuperscript{86} In this reactive mode, the United States took a cautious, non-interventionist approach – in fact, inertia was the norm for U.S. decision making on Egypt.

The U.S. government did pursue certain aims in concert with the British, however. Both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations saw Middle East defense pacts as the answer to American security interests in the region. In keeping with the Truman Doctrine of 1947, which stated U.S. intent to patch security gaps left by the British, the United States made multiple

\textsuperscript{82} Hahn, 146.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 233.
\textsuperscript{84} Heikal 1973, 33-36.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 26.
unsuccessful attempts to establish a Middle East defense alliance that would include Egypt. For example, the United States supported the 1951 British proposal for a Middle East Command (MEC). Hahn argues that the British and American “refusal to accept Egypt as an equal power and their insulting censure of Egyptian restrictions on Suez Canal transit…ruined the effort to establish MEC in Egypt.”

The United States then proposed the next iteration of the regional alliance, the Middle East Defense Organization (MEDO), which also failed for much the same reasons. The Americans and British were unwilling to agree to the Egyptian stipulation that the British unconditionally evacuate the Canal Zone. The United States made one more attempt to include Egypt in a defense alliance. Nasser was initially open to the “Northern Tier” alliance (later known as the Baghdad Pact), but lost interest in late 1954. To Britain’s surprise and dismay, the United States decided not to intervene on Britain’s behalf against Nasser in the 1956 Suez crisis. Still, the United States continued to cooperate with Britain in other ways in Egypt. Some Egyptians viewed America’s increasing involvement in Egypt’s security with trepidation. Nasser refused to allow U.S. military personnel to live in Cairo, concerned that it would look like he was exchanging one colonial power for another. Anwar Sadat, one of the Free Officers, wrote in 1953 in an open letter to the United States that America and Great Britain had a “bond

87 Hahn, 94.
88 Ibid., 153.
89 Ibid., 186.
90 Ray Takeyh argues that, contrary to the claim of some Cold War historians, the United States saw a residual British presence as beneficial to U.S. security interests during this period of increased U.S. influence in the region. Ray Takeyh, The Origins of the Eisenhower Doctrine: The US, Britain and Nasser’s Egypt, 1953-57, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000, ix-x.
91 As Hahn tells it, Dulles “offered to send the military advisers in civilian dress, but Nasser refused this concession because the presence of American officers, whether or not in uniform, would stir up domestic opposition.” Hahn, 185.
of blood.” He warned the Americans that following the British example in political affairs was a deadly choice.92

Seeing Islam as a Geopolitical Tool

Although it is unclear where Qutb got his ideas about “American Islam,” declassified U.S. archives reveal that he was in many ways correct about this concept. There is no question that considerations of what would benefit U.S. interests in the Middle East undergirded American outreach to Muslims in the 1940s and 50s, a sine qua non of international relations. To take just one example, U.S. intelligence archives demonstrate U.S. concern for what U.S. officials saw as a volatile and vulnerable Islamic world, as well as a belief in the potential – by means of positive engagement – for the United States to prevent Islam from going over to the enemy camp of communism. A Office of Secret Services (OSS) report in 1943 discussed the danger of foreign meddling in Egypt and other Muslim countries. It stressed the need for countermeasures, warning of Japan’s influence in the Islamic world and of the importance of the “Islamic masses” in geopolitical contests. It urgently advocated a counter-messaging campaign to highlight British and American religious tolerance in contrast to Japan’s “barefaced duplicity.” The report advocated that the U.S. program “dwell on such positive factors as the demonstrable respect of the British and Americans for other religions and the common ideals of democracy and Islam.”93 The reach and influence of this particular OSS report in the U.S. bureaucracy is not known, but the U.S. government did pursue a policy closely resembling this proposal, beginning

92 Alterman, 11.
in the Truman administration and continuing into the Eisenhower administration. The rationale for defeating World War II adversaries reappeared in the U.S. approach to the Cold War.

Herzog explains how Americans came to view communism as a religion requiring a religious response. President Eisenhower saw religion as relevant in the Cold War dimensions of events in Egypt. One of the reasons the British-French-Israeli attack on Egypt enraged Eisenhower was their apparent indifference to the impact on Muslim public opinion. He told a British official, “I must say that it is hard for me to see any good resulting from a scheme…that seems certain to antagonize the entire Moslem world…How could we possibly support Britain and France…if in doing so we lose the whole Arab world?” Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles believed the United States needed to establish the U.S. reputation as leader of the post-colonial world and defender of smaller nations to ensure that the Soviet Union did not seize that ground in the discourse.

The Palestinian Question

Even before Qutb experienced the United States for himself, he stated publicly that he hated it. The reason he gave was America’s duplicity and rottenness in its dealings with the Palestinians. Hahn judges that events in Palestine “severely damaged U.S. interests” in Egypt, since Egyptian nationalists blamed the United States for the establishment of Israel. Palestine represented one of the unifying issues for Egyptians and for the pan-Arab cause. David Lesch notes that although U.S. policy on Palestine was officially evenhanded, holding that no decision

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94 See Battle 2002.
95 This is the focus of Herzog’s second chapter.
96 Hahn, 231-2.
97 Khālidī, 124
98 Hahn, 92.
would be made without consulting both sides, Arab states frequently questioned this.99 In reality, the pro-Zionist100 camp had gained the upper hand in U.S. domestic politics even before the end of World War II, as seen in the 1944 presidential election campaign, when both parties adopted pro-Zionist positions.101

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood played a leading role in providing material support to the Palestinians, from the 1936-9 Palestinian revolt against the British to the 1948 war and beyond.102 Although Qutb was not a Brotherhood member at the time he wrote his 1946 article on Palestine, he had been passionate about the issue for many years. In 1938, before he had reason to link the Palestine issue to American perfidy, he wrote a poem called “Bloody Palestine,” in which he pledged Egyptian support to the Palestinians and encouraged them to keep up the fight.103 The vast majority of Egyptians felt similarly, both elites and non-elites of all political backgrounds. As one nationalist columnist wrote, “the Palestine question is not a local one, but is a general Arab Islamic question.”104 As America appeared more and more firmly on the side of the Zionists, Egyptians like Qutb who supported, sympathized and, on a psychological level, identified with the Palestinians expressed dismay at evidence of U.S. and international indifference to this Arab cause. President Wilson’s inaction in the face of urgent Egyptian nationalist demands in 1919 was now associated with President Truman’s endorsement of the State of Israel in 1948.

100 Author note: The term “Zionist” is used here in the original sense, not as a polemical term. It refers to supporters of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.
101 Lesch, 129-130.
102 Calvert, 99-100.
103 Ibid., 100-101.
104 Ibid., 100.
Not So Secret Wars

By the mid-1950s the United States was gaining a reputation for dirty tricks carried out by its new covert agency, the CIA. Egyptians who were tuned into international affairs realized that the United States had entered global politics with a vengeance. Kinzer reports that the Dulles brothers, leading the U.S. Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency in the Eisenhower administration, had not taken great pains to keep U.S.-backed coups in Iran and Guatemala covert.\(^{105}\) “overthrowing Mossadegh and Arbenz was an open secret in Washington, clear to anyone who could read the Saturday Evening Post.”\(^{106}\)

Egyptians therefore naturally wondered what mischief the United States could be secretly working in Egypt. Heikal reports that President Nasser, originally a willing partner of the United States after the coup, began to distrust American intentions.\(^{107}\) Qutb biographer Khālidī relates a conversation between Qutb and a Sudanese student which revealed Qutb’s concerns about U.S. power in the region and the inability of the Egyptian government to stand up to America. Qutb told the student: “The Americans are determined that no communist regime will arise in the Arab East and they are the ones with influence in the region!” Qutb believed that as an anti-communist, Nasser was “only a tool” for the Americans.\(^{108}\) The latter opinion was hardly fair, as Nasser resisted several U.S. attempts to bribe and influence him\(^{109}\) and pursued policies that antagonized the United States though he was fully aware of the risks. Cynicism about U.S. foreign policy in Egypt had become common by the mid-1950s.

\(^{105}\) On the contrary, following an interview with Allen Dulles (at Dulles’ invitation) in 1954 on the CIA’s first year, the Saturday Evening Post published a three-part special on the agency which directly attributed the overthrow of Mossadegh and Arbenz to the CIA. See Kinzer, 175.

\(^{106}\) Kinzer, 220.

\(^{107}\) Heikal 1973, 45.

\(^{108}\) Khālidī, 201 (Becca Smith translation).

\(^{109}\) Kinzer, 211.
In this America-skeptic environment, it would have been difficult for Qutb’s readers to argue with his claims of innate American brutality and lawlessness. In “The America I Have Seen,” Qutb asserted that just as sporting events arouse the American’s animal instincts and thirst for violence, so Americans follow events around the world:

Their lack of attention to the rules and sportsmanship to the extent that they are enthralled with the flowing blood and crushed limbs, crying loudly, everyone cheering for his team. Destroy his head. Crush his ribs. Beat him to a pulp. This spectacle leaves no room for doubt as to the primitiveness of the feelings of those who are enamored with muscular strength and desire it…And with this primitive spirit the American people follow the struggles of groups and parties, and the struggles of nations and peoples. I cannot fathom how this strange illusion that Americans love peace took root in the world, especially in the East.110

Qutb’s angry rebuke of America encapsulates the hopes, disappointment, and disgust that groups of Egyptians felt toward the United States due to perceptions of American violence against causes they believed in. America’s errors of omission and commission from the 1910s to the 1950s explored above help illuminate the intensity some Egyptians felt toward the United States. However, Qutb’s anti-Americanism also served a rhetorical purpose as he shifted the course of his career from secular literary and political commentary to Islamic commentaries.

The Logic of Rejecting America: The Islamic Alternative

Whether Qutb and his contemporaries based their anti-Americanism on evidence or logic is only part of the story. Just as important, Qutb portrayed what was wrong with America in

110 Abdel-Malek, 14-15.
order to demonstrate what was right with Islam. Qutb was most interested not in correcting America’s many flaws but in restoring a unified and devout Islamic society in Egypt. This section explores Qutb’s use of America and western values as a polemical device.

_East or West?_

Taha Hussein, one of the senior and most illustrious members of Sayyid Qutb’s acquaintance, wrote a controversial treatise in 1938 called *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, in which he advocated that Egypt realize its national potential by identifying with its Mediterranean culture and learning from Europe. Hussein’s tract responded to an Easternist discussion in Egypt that he thought was misguided for its strong identification with the peoples of the Far East.\(^{111}\) Qutb was one of several intellectuals who challenged Hussein on this debate.\(^ {112}\) Calvert paraphrases Qutb’s argument that Egypt, being Islamic, is closer to East than West: “Whereas Westerners attempt to explain the workings of the mind in strictly physiological terms, Egyptians and other peoples of the East emphasize the immaterial realms of intuition, spiritual insight, and deep feeling. This innate spirituality has affected their individual and collective outlooks.”\(^ {113}\) As Qutb developed his views on Islam, his portrayals of the West became harsher.\(^ {114}\) Qutb met the Indian Islamic scholar Sayyid Abu Hasan Nadwi, whose work he admired and who inspired him to read Abu al-A‘lā Mawdudi’s work. Calvert writes that Mawdudi’s concept of _jahaliyya_ helped

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\(^{112}\) Toth, 22-23.

\(^{113}\) Calvert, 95.

\(^{114}\) Calvert notes a change in Qutb’s thinking due to his friendship with Islamic scholar Sayyid Abu Hasan Nadwi, whom he met in 1951. See Calvert, 161-162.
Qutb clarify what was wrong with Western-style modernity, and Qutb used the concept extensively after that.

In his articles critiquing America, as in Social Justice, Qutb painted a picture of what ailed the West – soulless capitalist materialism and the abandonment of religious identity. He likewise discussed what ailed the East, such as the equally materialistic and morally corrupt communism. In Social Justice, the subject of chapter 3, Qutb told the story of Christianity’s decay: “Then God so willed it that Christianity should cross the seas to Europe, taking with it all its sublimity and purity and denial of the material world.” Unfortunately, the reader finds out, “Europe was never truly Christian,” because the nature of the Christian religion did not touch everyday life. The church also made the mistake of attempting to control the state and deny science. By discussing Christianity’s failures in both Social Justice and “The America I Have Seen,” Qutb presented a cautionary tale for Muslims.

**Forbidding Evil and Enjoining Good**

The Qur’an commands believers on multiple occasions to “forbid evil and enjoin good.” To Qutb’s evident fascination and disgust, America offers a stark contrast to the Islamic ideals he grew up with, especially in the area of sexual morality. His descriptions of the song, “Baby, It’s Cold Outside,” and various situations he recounted in “The America I Have Seen” were calculated to shock (and perhaps titillate?) the faithful. Not only did Qutb see a church leader hosting a mixed gender dance party at a church in Greeley, Colorado, but the

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115 Ibid., 158.
minister was the one who chose the 1944 hit song for them to dance to: “Baby, It’s Cold Outside.” Qutb tells his Egyptian readers the plot of the song, in which “The boy took the girl to his home and kept her from leaving.” Inexplicably, Qutb reports with evident sarcasm, the minister then “left the dance floor for his home, leaving the men and women to enjoy this night in all its pleasure and innocence!”

Qutb’s warning for Muslims lies in the perversion of sacred spaces and religious shepherds who lead their flocks astray. Qutb is troubled that the minister in the story does not appear to care that the young people under his protection were celebrating to the tune of implied fornication. The sensuous celebration was clear in the “tapping feet, enticing legs, arms wrapped around waists, lips pressed to lips, and chests pressed to chests” in an atmosphere that was “full of desire.”

It is unclear if Qutb met any of those in American religious conservative circles who would have agreed heartily with the critique. The Greeley church incident confirmed Qutb’s notion that Americans were inherently primitive and their Christianity hollow. Qutb’s message for Egyptian Muslims seems to be that mixing of genders leads to immoral behavior, and that the mosque and its leaders should lead believers to the right path and not abandon religious principles and practices in order to entice the next generation.

In a similar vein, Qutb roundly condemned pornographic advertisements in a 1948 article in the magazine The New Thought (al-Fikr al-Jadīd). The designated evil in this article is capitalism. Qutb promises that the magazine will not be giving its readers “thighs and breasts” (afkhādh wa nuhūd) as the capitalist magazines do in order to sell more copies. Qutb accuses his magazine’s unscrupulous capitalist competition of making Egyptians (and majority Muslim)

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118 Abdel-Malek, 20.
119 Ibid.
readers behave like opium addicts. They spend the money they sorely need for nutritious food feeding their lust and imagination.¹²⁰

Importantly, Qutb repeats an accusation in this article that he made against America in 1946, that is, that addiction to these evils distracts the reader from combatting oppression. Qutb does not specify in the article whether the capitalist magazines are American, European, or Egyptian. Rather, he focuses on what his magazine offers by contrast: “They consider you no more than an animal: a dog, a pig, or a donkey! They think you are only attracted to the basest lusts and instincts. We respect you and believe in you...We consider you a human being who understands human love as a noble passion, not an unclean lust.”¹²¹ Qutb implies that capitalism by its nature degrades, whereas Islam uplifts. His readers would associate capitalism most strongly with the United States, Britain, and possibly the corrupt Egyptian monarchy during this period.

America and associated concepts thus served as a literary foil in Qutb’s writings for Islam and the just society. As vehement as Qutb’s anti-Americanism could be, it served a larger purpose. Rather than an object of study for its own sake, in pursuit of facts and willing to consider contrary information, Qutb’s portraits of America showed his fellow Muslims how not to behave and practice religion. Qutb mused in “The America I Have Seen” that he feared “the wheel of life will have turned and the book of time will have closed, and America will have added nothing, or next to nothing, to the account of morals that distinguishes man from object, and indeed, mankind from animals.”¹²² This statement sends multiple messages to Muslims. By

¹²¹ Ibid.
¹²² Abdel-Malek, 10-11.
referring to the end of time and the book of life, Qutb reminds his readers that Muslims are answerable to God; he tells the reader not to imitate the Americans and reminds Muslims to raise their thoughts above materialism and sensual pleasure. Qutb expands on these themes in *Social Justice*, taken up again in chapter 3.

**Conclusion: The Irony of Rejecting America**

The growth of anti-American sentiments in Egypt and the broader Arab world followed a certain logic based on perceptions of the local people toward Britain and the United States. However, although most U.S. officials in the 1940s and 1950s held reductionist views of Arabs and Muslims, and some were clearly racist against Arabs, they saw Muslims in Egypt and the broader Middle East as potential spiritual, not only geopolitical, allies. President Eisenhower epitomized this paradox. On the one hand, he thought Arabs were inferior. Weiner quotes Eisenhower announcing at an NSC meeting that “If you go and live with these Arabs…you will find that they simply cannot understand our ideas of freedom and human dignity.” On the other hand, we see in his letter to Dr. Elson that Eisenhower saw belief in God as a foundation for cooperation with Muslims. He spoke at the dedication of the mosque on Massachusetts Avenue in Washington, DC in 1953, and regularly stated that “Our form of government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply religious faith, and I don’t care what it is.” In seeking to reach the hearts and minds of Egyptian Muslims, many U.S. officials demonstrated a willingness to engage with different worldviews.

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124 Herzog, 8.
A strong current of sympathy for Arab causes continued in the U.S. government, including support for Palestinian refugee repatriation and statehood. Jacobs quotes a State Department reports from 1945 which warned that “Americans as a whole must realize ‘that these [Middle Eastern] countries are jealous of their political independence’ and ‘are cynical regarding western imperialism.’” Jacobs quotes a 1948 CIA report which told of Middle East and Asian nationalist objections “on the colonial issue and to US economic dominance.”125

Despite the overriding trend of U.S. decisions to support British policies in Egypt, U.S. officials regularly rebuked Great Britain in private. Although Truman was a staunch ally of Israel and remained wary of Egypt and other Arab states, many members of his administration disagreed and influenced U.S. policy. Secretary of State Acheson sent a strongly worded letter in December 1951 to his British counterpart, Anthony Eden, warning that Egyptian nationalist sentiment could not be ignored forever:

“We consider Egyptian nationalism…a deeply-rooted movement which will neither subside nor alter its course by mere passage of time. Although [the] present high pitch national fervor and emotion…may be partially induced artificially, we are convinced that in general it represents [a] substantially accurate expression of popular feeling against the UK.”126

Acheson predicted that current British policies in Egypt were bound to backfire. He advised them to change course.127 Eisenhower’s refusal to support the 1956 Suez war represented the most public divergence, with Eisenhower proclaiming his dissent on American television and

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125 Jacobs 2011, 110.
126 Hahn, 136-137.
127 Ibid., 137.
using the UN General Assembly and oil sanctions against Great Britain to end what he termed an act of aggression that would endanger America’s reputation in the Arab world.¹²⁸

Most Egyptians were unaware of these American intentions and sentiments, since the U.S. government until the 1956 Suez crisis avoided publicly disagreeing with Great Britain on Egyptian affairs. Qutb for his part spent two years in the United States apparently without finding any Americans who sympathized with Egyptian nationalist politics. Rather than improve his views of American values and foreign policy, closer contact cemented his belief that Americans were primitive, materialistic, and colonialist. He told Egyptians who admired America that they were misguided. For Qutb, America acted without conscience around the world, Americans behaved ignorantly and immorally in their own environment, and America’s policy to reach out to the Islamic world was purely a cynical attempt to enlist Muslims to fight communism instead of colonial oppression.

As chapter 2 will address in more depth, the U.S. government played into some of these harsh critiques through its interactions and lack of interactions with Arab political and intellectual elites in the first half of the 20th century. When U.S. foreign policy took an aggressive turn in the Middle East in the 1950s, those who viewed Americans as corrupt and brutal were at times justified. Although America was never Qutb’s primary interest or focus, some of his followers in later decades, such as Ayman al-Zawahiri of al-Jihad and al-Qaeda, took his anti-American writings seriously and attacked Americans directly and sensationally.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Ibid., 231-2.
CHAPTER 2: WOOING EGYPTIAN MUSLIMS IN AMERICA’S EARLY COLD WAR

“I have met people from Egypt who have been to the United States during the last several years...about 75 native Egyptians who had been to America on one or more occasions...Some were in the Government service, and some served in other fields. That group had formed, several years ago, an association of Egyptians who have studied in this country. They are our best defense of the United States, from what they found here.”

State Department official to U.S. House of Representatives
July 17, 1950

This chapter sets out to discover the value of Qutb’s *Social Justice in Islam* to the U.S. government. Why did the United States apparently covertly pay for its translation in 1953? This study sets aside the question of whether Sayyid Qutb knew that the U.S. government was funding his work, for lack of conclusive evidence. Instead, the study answers a related question: why did U.S. officials believe that winning Muslim hearts and minds was a desirable and achievable goal in the early Cold War? It examines forms that this policy took and assesses, to the extent possible, its results. The chapter investigates the U.S. government’s interest in Qutb in the context of its attempt to win over Muslims, Egyptians, and Arabs in the East-West struggle.

The first section sets the stage for U.S. interest in Qutb by looking at U.S. perceptions of the communist threat, both globally and in the Middle East. The second section demonstrates that

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130 U.S. Congress, 14.
131 Qutb says he rejected a CIA offer to translate his book. However, the 1953 English edition by an organization cooperating with the CIA includes this inscription: “The American Council of Learned Societies acknowledges with special gratitude the cooperation of the author Mr. Sayed Kotb in this translation of his work as an element in creating a better understanding among American readers of the thinking and problems of the Near Eastern peoples.” Sayed Kotb, *Social Justice in Islam*, Trans. John B. Hardie, Washington, DC: American Council of Learned Societies, 1953, iv.
the U.S. government was following the example of other Great Power attempts to use Islam geopolitically. The third section looks at Orientalist aspects of U.S. officials’ views of Islam, Muslims, and Arabs. The fourth section demonstrates that senior U.S. officials considered Egypt a key battleground and tried to impact Egyptian public opinion through aid, propaganda, and educational exchanges. Here I examine the evidence that suggests U.S. government funding for Qutb’s book and look at the impact of U.S. policies on Egyptian politics. The chapter concludes that Qutb’s value to the United States in the early Cold War lay in the fact that he was both a religious and anti-communist voice in an influential Arab country.

**America’s Early Cold War**

Many decades removed from the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, it may be difficult to imagine what the world looked like to Americans at the conflict’s beginning. Mutual suspicion characterized relations between the United States and the Soviet Union before the end of World War II, even during a short-lived formal alliance and limited cooperation against the Nazis. In fact, the seeds of the Cold War were sown three decades earlier with the Bolshevik Revolution which horrified several U.S. leaders such as President Woodrow Wilson and his Princeton protégés, the Dulles brothers: future Secretary of State John Foster and his brother, future Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director, Allen.¹³² Listening to communist rhetoric and witnessing the bloody revolution, U.S. political and business elites began to see communism as a threat to free peoples and markets everywhere, and they were not alone. Other governments such as Nazi Germany also watched the Bolsheviks with alarm.¹³³ While Presidents

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¹³² Kinzer, 31-33.
¹³³ Ibid., 52; Waller, 319.
Roosevelt and Truman allied with Stalin to beat back the army of the Third Reich, U.S. intelligence officials and diplomats kept a wary eye on the Soviets.\textsuperscript{134} Donovan told Congress in 1942 that “In a global and totalitarian war…intelligence must be global and totalitarian.”\textsuperscript{135}

Thus, despite the fact that the United States emerged from World War II with unprecedented military, political, and economic strength, senior U.S. leaders were acutely aware of U.S. vulnerability in the face of enemies with few moral limits. Americans had learned from the experience of both World Wars that its opponents, as well as its allies, could be utterly ruthless.\textsuperscript{136} Kinzer relates a chilling episode from World War I in which Allen Dulles handed over his girlfriend to British agents who suspected the woman was a spy. “She was never heard from again.”\textsuperscript{137} The Gestapo tortured and executed both American agents and U.S.-supported dissidents during World War II.\textsuperscript{138} When the United States opened the OSS during World War II, the Soviets immediately began to infiltrate it.\textsuperscript{139} U.S. officials faced a steep learning curve in their dealings with the Soviets. Weiner tells the story of intelligence officer Frank Wisner arriving in Romania in September 1944 to become the OSS station chief in Bucharest. Wisner, who would later become the chief of the clandestine service at the CIA, was thrilled to be one of the first American intelligence officers to socialize with Russian intelligence. But while Wisner had been a spy for one year, Weiner writes, “The Russians had been at the game for more than two centuries…they quickly infiltrated Wisner’s inner circle of Romanian allies and agents.”\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{134} Waller, 221; Weiner, 11, 15-17.
\textsuperscript{135} Weiner, 4.
\textsuperscript{136} Weiner notes Project Artichoke, an experimental harsh interrogation program begun in 1950 under the pressure of the Korean War as an example of the United States copying the tactics of its enemies, see Weiner, 73-74.
\textsuperscript{137} Kinzer, 24.
\textsuperscript{138} The incidents are described in Waller, 228-229, 230, 272, 324.
\textsuperscript{139} Soviet penetration of the OSS began in 1942. Dozens of spies infiltrated U.S. government agencies, including Donovan’s executive assistant. See Waller, 355.
\textsuperscript{140} Weiner, 12.
Wisner witnessed the Russians take over Bucharest, round up tens of thousands of ethnic German residents, and ship them off in twenty-seven railroad cars.\textsuperscript{141} U.S. officials felt, with reason, that the United States was lagging behind other great powers in terms of intelligence gathering and psychological warfare.\textsuperscript{142} In this world of sabotage and treachery, U.S. officials sought to imitate American allies and adversaries.\textsuperscript{143}

Foreign powers, including the Nazis, Soviets, and Western Allies, used Egypt as a regional diplomatic and intelligence capital during World War II. The United States set up an OSS office in Cairo.\textsuperscript{144} In one of the important political developments of World War II, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Chiang Kai Shek met in a hotel at the base of the Giza pyramids, pledging to exact unconditional surrender from Japan and divide up territories Japan held in Russia and China.\textsuperscript{145}

\textbf{Learning from the Great Powers}

U.S. government officials were in an intense learning phase during and immediately after World War II,\textsuperscript{146} and their primary models were other Great Powers.\textsuperscript{147} Declassified U.S.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{142} The 1976 Church Committee report describes the need for better intelligence that became clear during World War II. See U.S. Senate, \textit{Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities, 1976, Foreign and Military Intelligence Book I: Final Report}, Report No. 94-755, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 26, 1976, 324. Furthermore, the report references a House debate in which a Member of Congress lamented that the United States is “extremely weak in psychological warfare, notwithstanding the fact that an idea is perhaps the most powerful weapon on this earth.” See U.S. Senate, 495, footnote 84.
\textsuperscript{143} The OSS considered assassination of Nazi sympathizers in World War II, see Waller, 144.
\textsuperscript{144} Waller, 129, 142.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid, 204.
\textsuperscript{146} Looking back on the early Cold War, a retired CIA director told Weiner, “What you have to remember…is that in the beginning, we knew nothing…We were in the dark about a lot of the world.” See Weiner, 9.
\textsuperscript{147} During a short-lived intelligence exchange with Russia, OSS director Donovan was impressed by Soviet capabilities: “The NKGB had planted an extensive espionage network in Germany before the war and organized hundreds of thousands of partisan guerrillas who harassed Wehrmacht occupation forces and cut rail lines supplying
archives and accounts by historians demonstrate that the U.S. government paid attention to how the British, Japanese, and Nazis employed Islam for geopolitical purposes, and hoped to do the same. In fact, the U.S. military attempted to use Islam to raise an army in North Africa during World War II. U.S. officials also looked at the success of Soviet anti-American propaganda in Egypt and planned to respond in kind.

with the Ottomans. He expected the Sultan, as caliph and leader of the faith, to be able to inspire holy war around the world, including, of particular interest to Germany, in British and French colonies in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. On the British side, Rogan describes nervousness about the potential of losing colonies, and subsequent alliances with other Islamic leaders, such as the Sharif of Mecca, to establish alternate sources of Islamic legitimacy in the war that could be called upon in the war to counteract the Ottoman jihad. In the end, Rogan explains, the only place in which calls for religious war were effective was in Eastern Anatolia and the Caucasuses, where Moscow and Istanbul stoked tensions between Islamic Turks and Christian Armenians in the bloody battles over territory. That said, Britain’s alliance with the Sharif had military value since the Arab Revolt of 1916 opened a new front to Istanbul’s south and reduced the Ottoman ability to send troops to the western front.

The United States learned about reaching out to Muslims from its Japanese and German adversaries as well. According to an OSS intelligence report from 1943, the Japanese had a sophisticated, longstanding, and apparently successful operation to win over Muslims in Egypt and across the Muslim world. Japan had attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor just 18 months prior to the writing of the OSS report. Indeed, U.S. intelligence failures at Pearl Harbor had inspired President Roosevelt to establish the OSS in the first place. The authors of the report express both outrage and admiration at Japan’s apparent ability to manipulate Islam for its

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152 The level of sophistication in the 1943 OSS report on Japan raises the question of its sources. Prior to the U.S. entry into World War II and the establishment of the OSS (in June 1942), then Colonel Donovan acted as a personal envoy to President Roosevelt and established a close relationship with British intelligence, which often provided him with reports, see Waller, 58-59. Donovan passed these reports on to the president, who “suspected he was getting London’s reports under a different wrapper, but never complained,” see Waller, 77.

153 U.S. Senate, 324.
nefarious ends, and recommend that the United States imitate Japan. Similar to the British, Japan apparently drew inspiration from Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid II in 1880 and his ability to attract Turkic and Tatar territories away from Russia by appealing to religion and ethnicity. The report notes glibly that Japan intended to turn “Pan-Islam” into “JapanIslam.”

The U.S. intelligence report describes Japan’s comprehensive strategy for winning over Muslim hearts and minds, elements of which later appeared in the U.S. early Cold War approach. Japanese propaganda in the Islamic world told of large-scale conversions to Islam in Japan, featured pro-Islam statements by the Emperor, reported the opening of Islamic schools and cultural centers, and Qur’an distribution in Japanese. Japan’s propaganda celebrated high profile mosque dedications in the late 1930s involving Islamic heads of state, and exchanges between Japanese students and professors, including to and from Al-Azhar in Cairo in the 1930s. Of particular interest, the OSS report detailed Japan’s success at appealing to Islam against the forces of communism in Asia: the Japanese claimed to Muslims that “Japan alone can free Islam from western imperialist control and the contamination of Communist Russia.”

The OSS report took careful note of Japan’s tools and successes such as positive press coverage and increased exports to Egypt, arguing that the United States ought to beat the Japanese at their own game. The authors urgently advocated a counter-messaging campaign to highlight British and American religious tolerance, to emphasize “the common ideals of

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154 The OSS report describes how decades of Japanese efforts in the Islamic world meant that post-World War I developments (including the end of the Ottoman caliphate) “played straight into Japan’s hands. She was prepared and eager.” The OSS report advocates adopting counter-propaganda that would press home Japan’s “barefaced duplicity,” “clumsy lies,” and “grandiose claims.” See Office of Strategic Services, 7, 18-19.
155 Ibid., 8.
156 Ibid., 6-9.
157 Ibid., 16.
democracy and Islam,” to amplify indigenous Muslim voices and to reveal Japanese “barefaced duplicity” by exposing ugly realities in Japan and Japanese-occupied territories.

The stakes were high. The OSS argued that “the goodwill and cooperation of the Islamic world” might affect not only how quickly World War II would end, but would impact the postwar world as well.

The United States also looked at the German example. In *A Mosque in Munich*, Johnson writes that the Nazis planned to use Islam offensively against the Soviet Union as of mid-1941. The Nazis viewed the Soviet minorities – Muslim Tatars, Georgians, Chechens, Kazakhs, and Uzbek – as “potential ammunition in the fight against communism,” Johnson writes. The Nazi policy toward Muslims was undoubtedly influenced by the German experience in World War I, although with a Nazi emphasis on ethnic determinism. The Nazi bureaucracy planned for the military usage of these groups against the Russian military, and approximately 20,000 Tatars from Crimea did volunteer with the Third Reich. The Nazis succeeded in convincing Muslim Soviet defectors that they would join in the liberation of their territories and become leaders.

Not only did the United States observe Nazi use of Islam in World War II, Johnson reveals, the United States relied on former Nazi officials and networks in Germany as it set up its Cold War campaign to attract Soviet Muslims to defect to the West. He notes the power of the Nazi model: “The rationale of freeing a people from the Soviet oppressors to govern themselves and freely practice their faith would legitimize the entire effort and provide a blueprint for the

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158 Ibid., 18.
159 Ibid., 19.
160 Ibid., 18-19.
161 Ibid., 16.
162 Johnson, 7.
163 Ibid., 26.
Muslims’ new friends, the Americans.”

The United States adopted this approach in its Radio Liberty broadcasts into the Soviet Union from Eastern Europe, a station manned in part by ex-Nazi propagandists.

As tensions with Moscow began to escalate, U.S. leaders naturally watched the Soviet example of Muslim world outreach and copied several elements of Soviet strategy. In 1950, the Chairman of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Educational Exchange, established in January 1948 to oversee exchanges and report periodically to Congress, told a committee of the U.S. House of Representatives that the United States had to follow the Soviet example of identifying thought leaders in other countries to participate in educational exchanges: “we are going to have to work with the key individuals exactly like the Communist group have done in their approach.”

In another hearing on the same 1950 bill in Congress, the Chairman of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Information discussed the Soviet Union’s propaganda successes as a strong model for the United States. He judged that the Soviet propaganda was “doing terrific harm to us with the Arabs.” The U.S.S.R. was exploiting the fact that the United States was allied with governments, especially Britain and Israel, that were unpopular in the region. The State Department official noted the sophistication of the communists in Athens, who “kept labeling American magazines and papers with the monarchist Fascist label. And while they are stupid in

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164 Ibid., 32.
165 Radio Liberty was presented to the public as a private organization run by ex-Soviets and funded by “well-meaning Americans,” see Johnson, 38-39; its cover was blown in 1967, see Weiner, 312.
their over-all labeling, they are very clever to pin on us the monarchical Fascist label.”168 Soviet propaganda was of concern due to its ability to twist truths and fabricate lies. Congressman Daniel Flood from Pennsylvania expressed frustration at the uphill battle of ideas: “The thing I cannot understand is why the impression exists…that we are up against a colossus, up against the greatest propaganda machine in the world of all times, of all kinds, descriptions, and elements, and we are boys.”169 The prevailing sentiment of lagging behind an adept and ruthless enemy led the United States to pursue policies of covert psychological operations.170

While the United States examined other models, it experimented briefly with exploiting religious sentiment to raise Muslim militias against the Axis. As the U.S. military prepared Operation Torch, the name for the assault on Vichy French capitals in North Africa that would open a southern front against the Nazis, military leaders sent a Harvard anthropologist to meet up with an American businessman who had been living in Morocco. The two men would recruit Muslim irregulars in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. In the end, they were not as successful as hoped – they aimed for 10,000171 – but did produce about 400 young Muslim men who helped take over government buildings and infrastructure in Algiers.172 The disappointing results of this U.S. attempt at national-religious uprisings in North Africa should probably have raised

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168 Ibid., 335.
169 Ibid., 329.
171 The OSS official had hoped to recruit “potentially ten thousand native tribesmen…He was counting on resistance groups in French Morocco, Algiers, and Tunisia taking over the local governments for long enough to let the invaders in with minimal fighting,” see Waller 132, 137.
172 Ibid.
questions about the reliability of the tool. In adopting these policies toward Egyptians, the United States was following in the footsteps of other Great Powers, whose leaders tended to view the Muslim mind as an important locus for geopolitical competition.

President Eisenhower had faith in the potential for Western-Muslim alliances against communism. In a planning session in 1957 for a program providing military aid and money to Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq, Eisenhower told his military, intelligence, and diplomatic team that “We should do everything possible to stress the ‘holy war’ aspect.”

Seeking Hearts and Minds in Egypt

U.S. officials had a growing sense of mission and responsibility around the world and in the Middle East. Even as the United States fought World War II, U.S. leaders and strategists looked ahead to the next big threat, which they identified as the Soviet Union and its communist ideology. The top priority for U.S. foreign and defense policy in the late 1940s was positioning the United States to avert or win a future war against the Soviets. U.S. policy in the early Cold War included a vast sense of responsibility to contain communism and protect free peoples, but U.S. presidents also exercised caution, avoiding direct military confrontation with USSR around the world. The United States’ early Cold War involvement in the Middle East relates directly to the U.S.-British alliance. The British announcements in early 1947 that they intended to grant independence to India, end assistance to Greece and Turkey, and relinquish the Palestine

173 Although this study did not find evidence of U.S. government use of the Muslim Brotherhood or other Islamist groups in Egypt for covert action purposes, the CIA armed the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1957 to aid a coup attempt. See Weiner, 159-162.
174 Weiner, 158.
mandate, contributed to President Truman’s speech to Congress that came to be known as the Truman Doctrine.\textsuperscript{176} Hahn explains that the U.S. administration mistakenly believed that the British intended to leave Egypt, which the United States had come to view as vital to any East-West military confrontation.\textsuperscript{177} In fact, Great Britain had decided to retain its military base in Egypt in the face of Egyptian opposition. Although the British government quickly let the United States know their intention to stay in Egypt,\textsuperscript{178} the United States continued to view the Middle East region and Egypt in particular as an important element of American and international security.

U.S.-Egypt relations in the late 1940s cannot be understood without the context of U.S.-Britain relations. Hahn describes three trends in U.S. policy between 1937 and 1946, namely, increasing U.S. commercial interests in Egypt, sympathy for Egypt’s nationalist struggle, and support for Britain’s military base in the Canal Zone that the United States planned to use as needed.\textsuperscript{179} At several points, the three countries became enmeshed in complicated diplomatic maneuvering, with both Britain and Egypt seeking to use the United States against the other at the United Nations, and the United States alternating between intervention and non-intervention. Hahn identifies a pattern: before World War II, the United States challenged British policies in Egypt due to a desire to make room for American business. Between 1940 and 1942, Hahn argues, the threat of the Nazis and Italian Fascists led the United States to close ranks with Britain in Egypt. When the threat to Egypt subsided in 1943, the United States once again

\textsuperscript{176} In his March 1947 speech to Congress, President Truman stated, “Great Britain finds itself under the necessity of reducing or liquidating its commitments in several parts of the world, including Greece” and “can no longer extend financial or economic aid to Turkey.” See Harry Truman, \textit{Address Before A Joint Session Of Congress, March 12, 1947}, Yale Law School: The Avalon Project, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp (Accessed May 10, 2016).
\textsuperscript{177} Hahn, 39-40.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 14.
pursued its commercial interests and supported Egyptian nationalists. However, by early 1946, concerns about the Soviet Union led those U.S. officials who were concerned about access to the Suez base to dominate U.S. policy, while U.S. officials who wanted to support the Egyptians against the British lost favor. U.S. support for British military occupation of Egypt created tension in U.S.-Egypt relations.

Conflicting U.S. objectives in Egypt were consistent with the Truman administration’s somewhat schizophrenic approach to the broader Middle East. A 1952 “National Security Council Staff Study on the Arab States and Israel” outlines U.S. government objectives. The United States would seek to “overcome or prevent instability” that threatened Western interests; “prevent the extension of Soviet influence”; ensure the availability of resources (especially oil) “for use in strengthening the free world”; strengthen Arab states and Israel against potential Soviet aggression; and recognize the desire of these states for sovereignty and status.

American Cold War concerns in Egypt expanded in the late 1940s and early 1950s from preserving military access to preventing the spread of communist ideology. A 1947 CIA report underlined Egypt’s political importance to the region, its advantageous military location, and its potential to influence social trends such as “Nationalism and the pan-Islam movement.”

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180 Ibid., 36.
181 In light of intense British pressure to maintain its military occupation and U.S.-Egypt tensions in the late 1940s over U.S. support for the British position, Egypt’s refusal in the 1950s to join a Western defense pact should come as no surprise.
indigenous Egyptian communist threat was believed minimal at the time, but U.S. officials nevertheless viewed Egypt as susceptible to the allure of communism due to “the great mass of Egyptians whose standard of living is at a bare subsistence level.”

Some U.S. government officials at the State Department and CIA were concerned about the potential for increased communist activity in Egypt and hoped that, by expending a little effort, the United States could win over Egypt to the West. U.S. intelligence documents and Embassy cables from Cairo in the early Cold War years suggest that Egypt was not a top priority for Moscow, but observed growing communist activities in Egypt with some anxiety. One report judges that much of the communist activity in Egypt is “of a ‘home-grown’ variety taking its line from Russian radio broadcasts” and other places. U.S. officials saw Egypt’s vulnerability in its potential for economic and political unrest. “Egypt is not ‘lost,’” Ambassador Caffery wrote in September 1951, “but it is in imminent danger of being so.” He makes an impassioned appeal for significant increases to the U.S. propaganda budget to counteract communism and extremism in Egypt: “It is the spirit or the mind of Egypt that is at stake today. It would be tragic if it were to be lost by default when it might still be won by energetic, whole-hearted application.” Even if outreach tools to the Muslim world turned out to be ineffective, U.S. leaders may have felt that it would be irresponsible not to try when the

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184 Hahn, 57-58.
185 Central Intelligence Agency 1947, 2.
187 American Embassy Cairo 1950, 3.
188 Central Intelligence Agency 1947, 2.
stakes were so high: a Soviet win in Egypt would be a major blow to the cause of freedom as conceived by the U.S. government.

The United States thus stepped into the influence game in Cairo. Facing nationalist anger for the U.S. alliance with Britain and fearing the potential for communist inroads in Egypt, Truman -- and Eisenhower after him\textsuperscript{190} -- approved a range of nonmilitary foreign policy tools in Egypt, including bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, economic aid, military aid, educational exchanges, and propaganda. The U.S. government sought to adapt propaganda to local concerns as it understood them.\textsuperscript{191} A State Department official speaking to Members of Congress at the 1950 hearing on educational exchanges advocated the importance of exchanges to U.S. interests by citing the fact that a group of influential Egyptians who had studied in the United States had created an association in Egypt upon their return for graduates of U.S. educational exchanges: “They are our best defense of the United States, from what they found here. They knew what we were doing,” and went on to teach others what they had learned in the United States.\textsuperscript{192}

In a communique from Cairo, Ambassador Caffery argued that the existing U.S. propaganda targeting primarily the intelligentsia must be enlarged to reach more of the “urban masses, militant orthodox religious groups [that is, the Muslim Brothers] and the fellahin [peasants].” He urged the United States to translate more materials into colloquial Egyptian dialect to spread the values of democracy against the “Big Lie” of communism and discourage

\textsuperscript{190} Kinzer describes Eisenhower’s “New Look” policy in \textit{The Brothers}. Eisenhower believed that defense spending should not bankrupt the country, leading him to make deep defense cuts. The pillars of Eisenhower’s posture were a smaller army, deterrence, and secret unconventional war known as covert action. See Kinzer, 137.

\textsuperscript{192} U.S. Congress, 12. The negative experience of Sayyid Qutb may have been an exception. The same State Department witness later credits an Egyptian from the Ministry of Education (but not Qutb, because the exchange occurred prior to 1948) with influencing the Egyptian government to continue the program (15).
communist revolutionary movements, noting that information activities are the “only effective short term weapon” for countering communism in Egypt.¹⁹³

Thwarting communist activities in Egypt fit into the larger Cold War strategy. The results were mixed, but the U.S. government appeared to focus on the successes which had produced Egyptian advocates for the United States upon their return to Egypt, becoming America’s “best defense” in the war of ideas. While exchanges did not always work, as in the case of the prominent Islamist thinker Qutb, one U.S. official put the success rate at 99%.¹⁹⁴

U.S. interest in Qutb and his contemporaries is reflected in U.S. documents about Saeed Ramadan, exiled Egyptian Islamist leader,¹⁹⁵ and son-in-law of assassinated founder of the group, Hassan al-Banna. The United States wanted to ensure that Ramadan participated in the September 1953 Colloquium on Islamic Culture because of his status as a Muslim Brotherhood leader and someone with trustworthy Islamic credentials.¹⁹⁶ However, as Johnson notes, “Washington was not likely aware of everything Ramadan was doing.”¹⁹⁷ Ramadan was “stubbornly independent”¹⁹⁸ and “would not be controlled by anyone.”¹⁹⁹ Indeed, Ramadan acted independently in organizing a World Islamic Congress at Jerusalem, one of whose political purposes was to oppose “Western attempts to bring the Islamic world into Western alliances until the Palestine question had been solved,” as reported by a CIA source.²⁰⁰ Again, the United States

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¹⁹³ American Embassy Cairo 1951, 1, 10.
¹⁹⁴ U.S. Congress, 333.
¹⁹⁵ Johnson, 161.
¹⁹⁷ Johnson, 162.
¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 162.
¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 163.
took a pragmatic approach: Ramadan’s definite anti-communist views made his actions against American interests tolerable. It may have proved difficult to find pro-American Egyptian Muslim leaders, period. In early Cold War Egypt, the United States deprioritized the objective of promoting America’s image among Muslims in order to amplify the anti-communist rhetoric of prominent Muslim leaders.

Al-Azhar scholars, at the forefront of the religious establishment in Egypt, represented an obvious choice in the U.S. effort to find credible Muslims in the anti-Soviet struggle. The occasional anti-communist pronouncements of Al-Azhar scholars were a godsend to American propaganda, which re-broadcasted and re-printed them for other Muslims. In a November 1952 cable, the U.S. ambassador enclosed a speech by then Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Mohamed Al Khodr Hussein in which the Sheikh criticized communism on the basis of its denial of property rights and the inability of communist governments to protect workers from exploitation. The speech also criticized capitalism, portraying it as only slightly better than communism, but the U.S. government promoted it anyway. Like Qutb and the Muslim Brotherhood, the Sheikh’s thesis was that only an Islamic system provides social and financial justice and protects the liberty of Muslims. Considering the material pragmatically, the U.S. ambassador recommends that “maximum use should certainly be made of” this type of statement. He recognizes “the anti-British and rather generally anti-Western orientation of Egyptian nationalist feelings,” but judges that anti-communist statements “have at least a negative value.”

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202 Ibid.
although Egyptians distrusted both the West and the Soviet Union, the United States can at least work with “the widespread conviction that Communism is inimical to the religious and social tenets of Islam.” This offers an insight into U.S. government funding of the translation and distribution of Qutb’s *Social Justice*.

**Cold War Binaries and “Emotional” Arabs**

Reductionist intellectual frameworks concerning both geopolitics and religion help explain why U.S. leaders pursued Egyptian Muslim allies such as Qutb, Ramadan, and the Azhar sheikh as partners against communism, and why they could not accept Nasser’s neutralism. By adopting a Cold War rationale of inevitable conflict between communism and the West, American leaders ignored the existence of nuance and diversity in Egyptian domestic politics and the ability of anti-communists like Qutb to do the United States harm as well as good. The importance U.S. leaders placed on stability and their inability to grasp or accept neutralism as an option for other countries had significant consequences in Egypt.

The United States borrowed heavily from British and European academic knowledge production on the Middle East. President Eisenhower’s reductionist views of Arabs and Muslims were quoted earlier. American leaders and experts tended to view Muslims as a unitary bloc, a conservative yet irrational group of people, resistant to modernity, whose faith dominated their lives and who might be susceptible to communism. These tropes about Muslims and Arabs colored U.S. views of Egyptians during this period and had implications for policies. The U.S. government unwittingly perpetuated many of the reductionist and instrumentalist views of Islam.

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203 Ibid.
that were embedded in the Middle East policies of other Great Powers of the time. U.S. assumptions about Islam’s cohesiveness led to unrealistic hopes about policy outcomes. This section also explores how the personal faith of U.S. leaders at this time (as far as observers can judge) led them to draw inaccurate conclusions about their Muslim target groups.

Cold War binaries in the U.S. approach led to oversimplifications concerning Egypt’s domestic political scene. Although Embassy officials were occasionally wary of the Egyptian Government’s portrayal of domestic opponents as dangerous radicals, U.S. officials did not challenge the Egyptian government on this, and used the potential for communist activity to request funding from Washington. Despite placing Egyptian communists at the bottom of a list of four potential extremist threats in Egypt in a 1951 cable,\textsuperscript{205} the U.S. ambassador invoked the growing communist threat in Egypt to ask the Secretary of State for significant increases in resources.\textsuperscript{206} This contradiction suggests that U.S. biases about the threat of communism led officials such as the U.S. Ambassador to intentionally or unintentionally exaggerate the communist threat in Egypt despite his views to the contrary.

Hardline Cold War ideology led the United States to see Nasser’s neutralism as a threat. Kinzer writes that Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, one of the dominant voices in Cold War ideology, defined neutralism as

\begin{quote}
\ldots the “immoral and shortsighted” belief that countries could hold themselves apart from the Cold War confrontation. This put him at odds with emerging statesmen like Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India, \ldots and the new Egyptian strongman Gamal Abdel
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{205} Potentially extremist groups “in the order of their present or possible threat are: (1) the Ikhwan al Muslimin (the Moslem Brotherhood); (2) the various Opposition extreme nationalist groups; (3) the present party in power (the Wafd); and (4) the Communists.” See American Embassy Cairo 1951, 3.

\textsuperscript{206} Ibid., 1.
Nasser, who reasoned that there was no reason for Egypt to oppose the Soviets because “we’ve never had trouble with them.”

Far from being a communist sympathizer, Nasser had continued the Wafd government’s repression of Egyptian communists and even extended it. He sought U.S. military and economic assistance but approached the Soviet Union as well, as a hedge. Historian William Blum believes that the framers of the Eisenhower Doctrine, which emerged from the souring of U.S. relations with Nasser, “saw only a cold-war battlefield and, in doing so, succeeded in creating one.” One of the ironies of U.S. concerns about communism in Egypt is that Egyptian communists were few and regularly targeted by the state. The nationalist Wafd government, King Farouk, and the Free Officers all considered Egyptian Marxists a threat, imprisoned most of their leaders, and hindered communist groups’ ability to gather and disseminate ideas. Egyptians were already suspicious of U.S. intentions, as discussed in chapter 1, but U.S. Cold War thinking and decision making in Egypt exacerbated the situation.

Reductionist thinking about communists characterized U.S. views of Muslims as well. U.S. government documents reproduced longstanding tropes about Islam: all Muslims were assumed to be united, Islam was believed to be more inherently political than other faiths, Islam was at once assumed to be static and vulnerable to revolution, and related to this, Islam was seen as incompatible with and resistant to modernity. In short, like many of their time and some still today, U.S. officials saw Islam and Muslims as a large demographic that was both powerful and

207 Kinzer, 128.
208 In a 1953 cable from Embassy Cairo, Ambassador Caffery reports Nasser’s assurance that convicted communists would “be given stiff…jail sentences to remove them from circulation for some years to come.” See American Embassy Cairo, Telegram dated July 9, 1953 [1953b], No. 31, in U.S. Department of State, Confidential U.S. State Department central files, Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1986, Microfilm Collection, ed. Michael Davis, Georgetown University holding 708, Reel 5.
vulnerable. Jacobs points to a 1952 State Department intelligence report titled “Problems and Attitudes in the Arab World,” which contains one articulation of the dominant view. According to Jacobs, U.S. officials believed that “Despite the tremendous diversity of the Middle East, Islam still offered the single greatest unifying factor in the region. It provided ‘the vast majority of Arabs with common religious, political, social, legal, and economic symbols strong enough to enlist the loyalty of the majority of peasants, nomads, and artisans.’”\(^{210}\) Also of note, in a 1952 State Department meeting to discuss U.S. propaganda for the Arab world, one employee described why he felt U.S. propaganda was losing to Soviet propaganda: “We express ourselves in cold and logical terms without the colored words that catch the attention of the Arab. He is emotional. He does not reason with logic…You have to cater to his prejudices.”\(^{211}\) The idea of an emotional Arab mind uniquely prone to prejudices was itself based on prejudice.

U.S. officials had high expectations for a 1953 Muslim-Western dialogue held at Princeton University and in Washington, D.C. The planning documents for the initiative, a Colloquium on Islamic Culture in September 1953\(^{212}\) involving scholars from around the Muslim world, explain how this dialogue will serve U.S. aims: “On the surface, this colloquium looks like an exercise in pure learning. This in effect is the impression that we desire to give…[W]e consider that this psychological approach is an important contribution at this time to both short

\(^{210}\) Jacobs 2006, 712.
\(^{211}\) U.S. Department of State 1952, 26.
\(^{212}\) The conference was held at Princeton University - alma mater of the new Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and CIA Director Allen Dulles - and the Library of Congress. The colloquium involved not only 11 days of meetings; grants to the approximately 30 delegates from Islamic countries would allow 2-3 months in the United States to allow for further exchanges. See U.S. Department of State, “Colloquium on Islamic Culture to Be Held in September, 1953, under the Joint Sponsorship of the Library of Congress and Princeton University,” Memorandum from Wilson S. Compton to David K.E. Bruce, January 13, 1953, National Archives Record Group 59, Records of the Department of State, Decimal Files, 1950-1954.
term and long term United States political objectives in the Moslem area.” The U.S. government sponsors aimed not only to win over Muslims, but even to influence the course of Islamic intellectual movements: “Among the various results expected from the colloquium are the impetus and direction that may be given to the Renaissance movement within Islam itself.” Hosting a conference to “further good will and mutual understanding between Islamic peoples and the United States” was a laudable objective in any case. However, the notion that the United States could or should help steer the course of Islamic history seems hubristic and echoes the 1943 OSS report about Japanese objectives in the Islamic world.

Reductionist views were significant in the early Cold War because many U.S. officials believed that Islam could be harnessed through America’s powers of persuasion. President Eisenhower wrote to a friend that “the religious approach offers, I agree, a direct path to Arab interest” despite differences over Palestine. In order to counter lies on the “Cairo and Moscow radios” about U.S. intentions to dominate the Arabs, Eisenhower identified “the need for a better and more consistent operation of our information services throughout the Arab region and indeed, through all the Muslim countries.” A U.S. Middle East expert crystallized Islam’s global potential for good or ill: “If [Moslems reacting to the Palestinian question] should turn away from the Christian powers, the Moslem countries would seem to have two alternatives: (1) an alliance with the atheistic communist bloc, or (2) creation of an isolationist pan-Islamic union.”

213 U.S. Department of State 1953.
214 Ibid.
215 Ibid.
216 Eisenhower, 2.
217 Ibid.
218 Clifton Daniel, “The Moslem World watches Palestine: Talk of Pan-Islam is heard again, but the forces dividing the 221,000,000 Moslems are still strong,” New York Times, June 13, 1948, SM15.
Intellectual frameworks concerning Islam lead also to questions about the role of Christian worldviews in U.S. policy in Egypt. Understandings of Christianity held by certain U.S. officials lead them to hold optimistic views of interreligious compatibility with Islam. Despite Muslim-Christian confrontations in some segments of Egyptian society, U.S. officials who were practicing Christians saw a potential for fruitful interreligious relations with Muslims. In Eisenhower’s letter to his friend Dr. Elson – a Presbyterian minister\textsuperscript{219} – he points out the potential for U.S.-Arab cooperation in the Middle East due to “the spiritual factor in our relationships. I have argued that belief in God should create between them and us the common purpose of opposition to atheistic communism.”\textsuperscript{220} Eisenhower was not the only American leader thinking this way. Jacobs refers to a U.S. government report from the 1950s which argued …that Islam, Christianity, and Judaism were “variations of a single ideology which includes the unity of God, the brotherhood of man, and the importance of submitting to the will of God for the purpose of establishing order in human affairs.” Based on this shared system of beliefs, the Muslim world and the United States “should be natural allies against atheistic communism.”\textsuperscript{221} U.S. officials’ views of Muslim-Christian relations impacted U.S. policies in Egypt. U.S. leaders believed that cooperation with Muslims was possible and that differences could be overcome.

**The Egyptian Battleground**

Did the U.S. government fund *Social Justice in Islam* as part of its policy of supporting Muslim allies against communism? Following the trail in U.S. government archives and

\textsuperscript{219} Johnson, 127.  
\textsuperscript{220} Eisenhower, 1.  
\textsuperscript{221} Jacobs 2006, 732.
secondary sources, it seems that the entire series of Arabic translations published by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) in the early 1950s was produced either at the direction of the government or provided by the private sector in consultation with the government on its needs. The series complemented another CIA-funded translation venture begun in 1953 called Franklin Publishing, which translated English-language books such as the U.S. Constitution and George Orwell’s Animal Farm into Arabic and other languages.\(^{222}\) The ACLS Arabic-to-English series covered a diversity of views on the topic of the future of Muslim societies. Capturing multiple sides in this debate, it included Khalīd M. Khalīd’s From Here We Start, Taha Hussein’s pro-Western Future of Culture in Egypt, Kotb’s (Qutb’s) Social Justice in Islam, al-Ghazzālī’s Our Beginning in Wisdom, and others.\(^{223}\)

Investigating the parent organization reveals U.S. government ties at minimum. ACLS was created in 1924 as a federation of 24 professional organizations largely in the humanities. It is not entirely clear what percentage of ACLS activities were funded by the U.S. government at any given time, because private money was often paired with covert government money, and even private funders were sometimes covert funnels for government funds. As Hugh Wilford explains in The Mighty Wurlitzer, “The typical CIA operation in this theater of the cultural Cold War, then, was a joint public-private venture.”\(^{224}\) An open source study recorded in the CIA


CREST archives notes that the Rockefeller Foundation gave ACLS a 3-year grant of $393,750 starting in 1951 and more specifically, that an ARAMCO grant was funding the (also multi-year) Arabic, Persian, and Turkish book translation program\(^{225}\) of which Qutb’s book was a part. ARAMCO was at least informally tied to the CIA during this period, since one of its top officials, former intelligence officer William Eddy, reported regularly to the CIA from the time he joined ARAMCO in 1947 and throughout the 1950s.\(^{226}\) Whether ARAMCO was funneling government funds to ACLS or merely funding the project out of a shared public-private interest in Arab-American relations, further documentation suggests that ACLS had also established a cooperative relationship with U.S. intelligence agencies in 1950 and continued its intelligence contacts at least until 1956. A 1950 CIA memorandum conveys the CIA Director’s order for one of his staff to talk to ACLS about their recent offer to support U.S. intelligence efforts.\(^{227}\) A 1956 document from the same archive contains a contract for Russian translation services between “the Government” – here one may probably insert “CIA” where the authors were too bashful – acting through the State Department, on the one hand, and the Social Science Research Council and ACLS on the other.\(^{228}\) Lacking direct documentation of U.S. government funding of Qutb’s book, then, the archives nevertheless strongly suggest that this was the case. They point to ongoing communication and financial transactions between ACLS and government agencies.


It appears, then, that the U.S. government hoped to win hearts and minds in Egypt by promoting thought leaders like Qutb. However, despite some successes in the U.S. information struggle in Egypt, U.S. policies in the region often undermined the U.S. objective to win Muslim hearts and minds. Although many in the U.S. government believed that all that was needed to win friends in the third world was to properly present the “truth” about America, others understood the risks to the U.S. image in Egypt of pursuing certain policies in the region.

Many U.S. officials were aware that U.S.-support of the colonial British presence in Egypt created problems for the United States. State Department propagandists, believing that America’s reputation was enhanced by putting pressure on colonial regimes and promoting democratic values, were frustrated with military arguments to support the British. One official in a 1952 meeting summarized what works with the Arabs: “Lincoln’s Gettysburg address—they swallow that hook, line and sinker—United Nations, freedom, away with slavery, and that sort of thing.” However, U.S. policies and rhetoric promoting universal values came into competition with other U.S. policies that thwarted some aspect of these values.

President Truman’s prompt U.S. recognition of the Israeli state in 1948 did not represent the views of U.S. officials as a whole, though it provoked outrage in Egypt. U.S. government archives contain much ambivalence about Israel and its relative benefit and harm to U.S. interests. State Department propagandists for the Arab world lamented in a 1952 meeting how many points the United States lost in the eyes of the Arabs by allying with Israel and “dying

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229 One State Department official observes that “America was a great hero” for Wilson’s 14 points and Roosevelt’s Atlantic Charter, which promoted systems “good for all men, including the Arabs.” See U.S. Department of State 1952, 7-8.

230 American classics like the Gettysburg Address were extremely popular among Arab audiences, according to a State Department propagandist. See U.S. Department of State 1952, 24.
empires” like Great Britain.\textsuperscript{231} In a 1950 hearing on funding U.S. information operations, Ohio Congressman Cliff Cleverger asks the witness: “The Palestine action lost us the friendship of a couple of hundred million; did it not?” The witness, Mr. Ethridge, replies: “It did not help it.”\textsuperscript{232} There were other objections to the new U.S. policy in Palestine as well. In service of the U.S. objective to “reduce tensions and fears between Israel and the Arab States,” one policy document reveals U.S. intentions to “(e) show the Israelis the…moral necessity, of repatriating a certain number of Arab refugees; (f) urge Israel to compensate Arab refugees for their properties,” and - following a redacted bullet (g) - “(h) strengthen the influence of the moderate elements in world Jewry and in Israel….”\textsuperscript{233} That said, the United States never wavered in its commitment to Israel’s existence. A 1954 National Security Council document indicated that the United States would “Make clear to the Arabs that we cannot accept their negative attitude toward proposals involving recognition of the existence of Israel.”\textsuperscript{234}

U.S. sabotage of Nasser in the late 1950s and 1960s also backfired. At first, the relationship between the United States and the RCC was cooperative. According Weiner, when Nasser came to power, the CIA paid him millions of dollars, built him a “powerful state radio station,” and promised military and economic assistance.\textsuperscript{235} Nasser cooperated with U.S. objectives, both in crackdowns of Egyptian communists, as referenced above, and by disseminating U.S. propaganda on Egyptian radio. In September 1954, the Army Attaché

\textsuperscript{231} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{232} U.S. Congress, 335.
\textsuperscript{235} Weiner, 146-7.
reported that the Egyptian government had given the “green light” to “hard-hitting anti-Communist material” from the U.S. Information Service, “for use domestically and on Voice of Arabs beamed abroad.”236 The arrangement couldn’t have been better for American propaganda objectives. Nasser’s “Sawt al-Arab” quickly gained a wide following across the Arab world. The United States would have benefited from Nasser’s popularity had the cooperative relationship continued.

However, when Secretary of State Dulles began to see Nasser’s neutralism and Arab nationalism as threatening the regional and global balance in the U.S.S.R.’s favor,237 the United States attacked Nasser and the Egyptian economy through Project Omega. The retaliation for Nasser’s ambivalence toward the Soviet Union appears to have harmed the United States far more than Nasser himself, as Nasser responded to U.S. rejection by establishing military and economic ties with the Soviet Union and becoming a vocal critic of the United States. By sabotaging a regional hero, the United States lost a significant opportunity to impact Arab public opinion. U.S. leaders had made a choice to abandon one aim in favor of another.

**Conclusion**

The successes, and more often, frustrations of U.S. initiatives in Egypt provide insights into the broader American experience in the early Cold War Middle East. One of the driving intellectual frameworks of the Cold War, reflected across U.S. government documents surveyed for this study, was the assumption that instability anywhere around the world could lead to

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237 Kinzer, 202-203, 211-213; McAlister, 34.
Soviet exploitation and control, regardless of the country-specific context. U.S. officials were correct to anticipate domestic unrest in Egypt due to unemployment, urbanization, low standards of living, and a wealth gap. The first half of the 20th century witnessed several dramatic political transitions, including the 1919 nationalist revolution and the 1952 Free Officers coup, as well as periodic violent clashes among political factions. However, the belief that instability would make Egypt “easy picking for the communists” was wrong. On the contrary, communists in Egypt had many powerful enemies, chief among them the head of government, despite changes in leadership, and the security services.

The problem was and still is that not all Muslims act or think alike. Had U.S. officials known to look for nuance, postwar Egypt alone could have demonstrated that being Muslim would not prevent Egyptians from acting according to a variety of political orientations, schools of thought, social pressures, and economic interests. Such a realization may have freed the United States to engage Egyptian partners in different ways. In the process, it is possible that the United States would have gained useful insights about Arab, Muslim, and regional politics. However, under the existing ideological frameworks, U.S. officials blamed setbacks in the Arab world on Soviet disinformation and Arab anti-Americanism. U.S. optimism about its ability to influence Islamic religious sentiments and attract Muslims to ally with the West was misplaced. The United States did not control the output of the Islamic leaders it promoted, which on the positive side allowed for more authentic voices to be heard, and on the negative side, occasionally became embarrassing. A U.S. official in Cairo reported in 1954 that Qutb was

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238 American Embassy Cairo 1950.
239 It is fair to inquire whether the communists might have become a more powerful force without U.S. pressure, but this ignores the Egyptian government’s enduring interest in repressing groups with revolutionary platforms.
writing anti-American material.\textsuperscript{240} To their credit, U.S. officials acknowledged that some U.S. policies were to blame as well.\textsuperscript{241} Yet they did not question the premise concerning monolithic Islam.

Moreover, the United States learned lessons from other governments that did not always serve U.S. interests well. Oversimplified understandings of Islam played a large role in the frustration of U.S. goals. Some U.S. government initiatives were undoubtedly worthwhile in their own right and generated some good will toward the United States. However, U.S. officials exhibited an unrealistic set of expectations about capturing the hearts and minds of the world’s Muslims and influencing the course of Islamic history toward a harmonious path with the Western powers. U.S. efforts to build a cohort of pro-American Egyptian Muslims through exchanges with young leaders – seen as America’s “best defense” when they returned home to Egypt – faltered in the face of U.S. policies that alienated the Egyptian population. U.S. officials’ understandings of a unitary, global, and implacably hostile communist adversary obscured actual domestic trends in Egypt and led the United States to support a succession of repressive leaders. Efforts to control political outcomes backfired in Egypt, provoking Nasser into relying on the Soviet Union for financial support and military equipment. The United States had by its own actions lost hope of a powerful pro-American ally.


\textsuperscript{241} For example, a State Department witness acknowledges to Congress that propaganda has not always been sensitive to local politics, something his agency is trying to correct. See U.S. Congress, 324.
CHAPTER 3: QUTB’S *SOCIAL JUSTICE* AS NATIONALIST-ISLAMIST PROPAGANDA

We may go the Islamic way, or we may go the communist way; one of these two we must inevitably follow in the end. Or there are also Europe and America to whose social systems we adhere in preference to our own Islamic social system. But finally these systems also run out into communism, over a short or a long period.


In the first chapter, I argued that Qutb had made up his mind about America before living there for two years and that he used America as a foil for the just and moral Egyptian society he was promoting. In *Social Justice*, the topic for chapter 3, we see further evidence that Qutb was depicting Europe, England, America, Christianity, capitalism, and communism not as serious objects of study but for the sake of his nationalist-Islamist polemics. In Chapter 2, I argued that Sayyid Qutb’s value to the U.S. government in the early Cold War lay in his potential to be a semi-independent ally against communism, and that U.S. officials were willing to tolerate a degree of independent thought for the sake of an authentic local anti-communist struggle. However, by examining *Social Justice* in greater detail, we begin to understand the value of Qutb’s work during this period to his own career. The purpose of chapter 3 is to demonstrate what we can learn from *Social Justice* about Qutb’s political acumen and his talent as a propagandist for Islamist reform in Egypt. I make the case first by examining how Qutb positioned himself socially and intellectually next to rising nationalist and Islamist leaders in Egypt. I then examine the propagandistic elements of *Social Justice* to demonstrate that as early

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242 Qutb 2000, 318.
as 1949, Qutb was already skillfully promoting an alternative agenda that put him beyond the reach of American Cold War rhetoric.

By nationalism I do not mean a disembodied force with a life of its own. Rather, I refer to the pattern of demands by Egyptians during this period for an end to foreign occupation, the establishment of authentic self-rule, and the need for reform, however differently defined. Nearly all political actors in Egypt were nationalist in the early post-World War II period.\(^{243}\) Thus Colonel Nasser’s nationalism, born of his experience as a child during the 1919 revolution\(^{244}\) and his sense of humiliation at British colonial rule,\(^{245}\) shares some attributes with Qutb’s nationalism, as expressed in Qutb’s anti-colonial writing and condemnation of inequality in Egyptian society. Other prominent Egyptians had similar experiences and interests. Muslim Brotherhood founder Hasan al-Banna had participated in protests during the 1919 revolution, which undoubtedly factored into the enduring nationalist component of the Muslim Brotherhood platform.\(^{246}\) Nationalist conviction, political strategy, and the simple fact of overlapping networks brought the Free Officers movement together with the Muslim Brothers in the months prior to the 1952 revolution. The Muslim Brotherhood was both nationalist and Islamist, promoting independence from Britain and Islamic reforms for Egypt, though they also aspired to the eventual transcendence of national borders in favor of an Islamic nation.\(^{247}\) I propose that Qutb was well aware both of the Muslim Brotherhood platform and nationalist politics in Cairo and wrote *Social Justice* to straddle these prominent themes in the discourse.


\(^{245}\) Heikal 1973, 17.


\(^{247}\) Ibid., 50.
The term propaganda often connotes deception, but it has a larger meaning as well, that is, the practice of persuasive rhetoric leading to particular political outcomes. According to Anthony Rhodes, Americans are comfortable with commercial advertising but not with “any attempt to influence them politically, particularly in foreign affairs.” The U.S. government conducted propaganda both during the two World Wars, but not in between. There are multiple types of propaganda, broadly characterized for the purposes of this discussion as positive (to highlight the desirability of one’s own cause), negative (to highlight the undesirability of another cause), and in U.S. and British government terminology, “black” (covert authorship, usually by a state) as contrasted with “white” (overt state information campaigns). The term “propaganda” applies to Qutb’s *Social Justice in Islam* for three reasons: first, several scholars translate Qutb’s official role with the Muslim Brotherhood as “Chief Propagandist,” and although the Arabic term can also mean “proselytizer” or “evangelist,” both senses of the word fit the role he played when he joined the organization; second, Qutb borrows both style and content from Muhammad Asad’s *Islam at the Crossroads*, which I argue is itself a brilliant piece of Islamist propaganda; and third, I refer to *Social Justice* as propaganda to highlight the irony in the fact that translating *Social Justice* in 1953 was an apparent act of American black propaganda, yet it more concretely served Qutb’s own political and intellectual agenda. Comparing propaganda to proselytizing makes sense historically, as well. Herzog points out that origin of the term “propaganda” was in religious war. The Catholic Church distributed

248 Rhodes, 139.
249 Ibid., 139-141.
250 Calvert, 188. Compare Toth’s description of propaganda and da’wa: Toth, 75.
“Congregatio de Propaganda Fide,” or “Sacred Congregation for the Spreading of the Faith,” during the Thirty Years War.\textsuperscript{251}

The first task of this chapter is to establish how \textit{Social Justice} positioned Qutb socially and intellectually in the company of rising nationalist and Islamist leaders in Egypt. Three related lines of inquiry address this question: near to which other authors did Qutb position himself, against which authors did he position himself, and where did he fit in the Muslim Brotherhood-Free Officers alliance in the months leading up to and following the July 1952 revolution.

\textbf{Social Justice as Entry to Islamist and Nationalist Networks}

Qutb’s \textit{Social Justice} is far from an original work, but it served as an effective business card or portfolio for him. Writing \textit{Social Justice} was possible given the context of decades of intellectual ferment in Egypt and in the broader Middle East, and discussions about Islamic social justice in particular in Muslim Brotherhood circles in the late 1940s. Qutb’s version is the best known,\textsuperscript{252} but he owed much to the people he interacted with and whose work he read. A full accounting of Qutb’s intellectual debts would take volumes; what follows represents a brief cross-section. Scholars often point to the influence of the Islamic modernists Muhammad Abduh, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, and Rashid Rida on Islamists of Sayyid Qutb’s generation. Albeit with different areas of emphasis, these men sought to reconcile Islam and modernity, and were the first Salafists in the sense that they advocated modeling personal and social life on the example of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, \textit{al-Salaf al-Salih}. Lauzière clarifies that the term

\textsuperscript{251} Herzog, 134.
\textsuperscript{252} Mitchell 1993, 251, footnote 63.
Salafist came into use only in the 20th century and evolved into two principal trends, modernists and purists. Lauzière counts Qutb among the radical purist Salafists of the 1950s and 60s.253 This is a fair characterization of Qutb’s later work, especially as he developed his use of the term *jahiliyya* against other Muslims, but using Lauzière’s taxonomy, the first edition of *Social Justice in Islam* belongs in the purist Salafist mainstream, with traces of modernist Salafist influences. This put Qutb in intellectual proximity to the Muslim Brotherhood. If he was angling for a job with the Brothers, which it appears he was, *Social Justice* served as an excellent writing sample.

One of the purist Salafist influences detectable in *Social Justice* is the work of the Austrian Jewish convert to Islam, Muhammad Asad. Qutb’s English language biographers consulted for this study are oddly silent on the influence of Asad on Qutb’s worldview. Asad, born Leopold Weiss, six years prior to Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb, traveled the Middle East as a journalist in 1922-26, including two trips to Egypt. He converted to Islam in 1926 and married in Cairo in 1927. It is unclear whether Asad had any contact with either al-Banna or Qutb during his stays in Egypt, but his 1934 work *Islam at the Crossroads* was published in Arabic a few years later254 and its impact can be felt in the writings of both al-Banna and Qutb. Asad’s prescription for fixing the problems of societal decay and colonial oppression resembles that of other purist Salafiyya thinkers and movements, that is, that Muslims must rid their faith of foreign influences and return to the pure Islam found in the Qur’an and the Sunna. In addition to echoing major themes and terminology of *Islam at the Crossroads*, Qutb republishes multiple

253 Lauzière, 164.
254 Asad indicates in the introduction to the 1982 edition that the Arabic translation was published a few years after the original edition. Muhammad Asad, *Islam at the Crossroads*, Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1982, 7.
pages of Asad’s work in *Social Justice*, with no commentary other than to state his agreement.255 This study argues, then, that *Social Justice* would not have been possible without Asad’s popular polemical work and its currency among members of Qutb’s social network, including the Muslim Brothers. In an apparent reference to *Islam at the Crossroads*, al-Banna adopted the “crossroads” rhetoric in a speech advocating Islamic reform in Egypt.256 *Islam at the Crossroads* was a model of anti-Western Islamist propaganda that resonated with Egyptian Islamists. However, Asad’s work does not link to a particular modern state, whereas al-Banna and Qutb framed their reformist agenda in terms of the ills of Egyptian society.

At the time he wrote *Social Justice*, Qutb had known about the Muslim Brotherhood platform for two decades. Sayyid Qutb and Hasan al-Banna were born in 1906 in different towns and came into contact with each other as young adults. Both chose to attend teacher’s college at Dar al-‘Ulm rather than Al-Azhar. Al-Banna graduated in 1927, one year before Qutb started and one year before al-Banna founded the Society of the Muslim Brothers.257 Qutb remained in secular literary circles for another decade, and although he shifted his focus to Islamic topics and Islamism around 1940,258 he did not officially join the Brothers until 1953. But Qutb could not help a degree of familiarity with the organization, since student groups of Brothers were beginning to associate at Dar al-‘Ulm the year he began his studies there. Qutb for his part attracted the Brothers’ attention when he began to write on Islamic topics, and the Muslim

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255 The first time Qutb quotes directly from Asad, he quotes three full pages without mentioning Asad by name. See Qutb 2000, 270-273. A little later, Qutb quotes three full pages again from Asad, this time mentioning simply that the passages are from *Islam at the Crossroads* and that Qutb finds them “completely satisfactory. See Qutb 2000, 280-282.
257 Toth, 13, 262.
258 Toth, 36-37.
Brotherhood gained Qutb’s permission to reprint *Social Justice in Islam* when it came out, in the official Muslim Brotherhood periodical at the time.

Members of the Muslim Brotherhood were discussing Islamic social justice as a counterpoint to communism for at least three years before Qutb published on the topic. One of the leading voices on the topic was young Brotherhood preacher Fathi Osman. Fathi joined the Muslim Brotherhood in 1942 at age 14, quickly became a preacher and evangelist (same term used for propagandist or proselytizer), and in 1946 at age 18, wrote a book on social justice titled “Islam Fights Poverty.” The Brotherhood chapter in Minya published 1000 copies. Fathi had first encountered the idea of social justice in Islam through the Brotherhood’s morality plays. As stage manager at the Minya chapter’s play operations, he had occasion to internalize the message of equality. His biographer reports, “The notion that a religion-centered society could guarantee rights for everyone, rich or poor, was very appealing.” He wrote a weekly, then daily, column on social justice in 1946, culminating in his book. Supreme Guide al-Banna also preached on social justice in 1946, three years before Qutb’s *Social Justice*. Osman writes that “Islam Fights Poverty” adopted an anti-communist approach that was current among the Brothers at that time: “Marxist propaganda was rampant in the streets, particularly among workers in the big cities…To counter the growing Communist trend, many in the Society had focused on socialist themes within Islam, with social justice being the prime one.” As Qutb would do three years later, al-Banna argued that neither socialism nor capitalism was the

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259 Osman, 28.
260 Author note: I attempted unsuccessfully to locate a copy of Osman’s 1946 book for this study.
261 Ibid., 55.
262 Ibid., 28-29.
263 Ibid., 55.
264 Ibid., 56.
265 Ibid.
solution.\textsuperscript{266} As his daughter tells it, Fathi’s social justice treatise was well-researched and included quotes from H.A.R. Gibb and Louis Massignon. Probably not a coincidence, Qutb quoted H.A.R. Gibb and other foreign authors in \textit{Social Justice}. As a well-read and well-published author active in Egyptian nationalist discourse who was beginning to write about Islamic topics, it is likely that Qutb had either read Osman’s 1946 work, read Osman’s column, or attended an al-Banna lecture on social justice. In other words, when writing \textit{Social Justice}, he was entering a discussion he knew was important to the Brotherhood.

Examining al-Banna’s economic platform, it seems probable that Qutb had al-Banna in mind when writing the legislative reform section of \textit{Social Justice}. Al-Banna viewed social justice as part of a larger framework of moral economic behavior.\textsuperscript{267} Mitchell explains al-Banna’s views: “economics without reference to ‘social justice and the principles of morality’ violated the fundamental teachings of God…His concern with ‘unity’ in the nation led to a strong affirmation of Islam’s revulsion from ‘economic class conflict’.”\textsuperscript{268} Al-Banna was concerned not just about the Egyptian economy but also about “foreign economic control.” Mitchell notes that al-Banna’s followers such as Qutb, ‘Awdi, and al-Ghazzālī built on the basic framework al-Banna established. Though we do not know for certain that Qutb was a disciple of al-Banna’s as early as November 1948, when he submitted \textit{Social Justice} for publication,\textsuperscript{269} a side-by-side analysis with a text from al-Banna from this period suggests that Qutb was using al-Banna’s platform as a point of departure. For example, in an open letter to King Farouk over a year before Qutb wrote \textit{Social Justice}, al-Banna expressed the urgency of making zakat

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{266}{Ibid.}
\footnotetext{267}{Mitchell 1993, 250.}
\footnotetext{268}{Ibid.}
\footnotetext{269}{Toth, 38.}
\end{footnotes}
mandatory. In *Social Justice*, Qutb argued for mandatory *zakat* and went further, specifying the suitable range of percentages for the tax, his hopes for a broad tax base to raise armies, and what other sources of revenue must be considered if the *zakat* were insufficient to cover state expenses. As depicted in the table below, Both al-Banna and Qutb covered issues of wealth redistribution, excessive luxury, public health improvements, ending usury, prostitution, gambling, and the consumption of alcohol.

Although Qutb offered more detail than al-Banna in his reform proposals concerning social justice, he did not use the work to promote all aspects of the Muslim Brotherhood’s social and political program.

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<tr>
<td>Organizing the <em>zakat</em> from income for use in benevolent projects and strengthening the military</td>
<td>Legislating the <em>zakat</em> as a compulsory tax; Taxing the rich to replenish the state treasury or fund the army, in the tradition of Imam Malik</td>
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<td>Making better use of natural resources, such as uncultivated land, neglected mines, etc.</td>
<td>Legislating mutual responsibility in the form of wealth redistribution, allowing the poor to use public land, and fixing wages sufficient for living costs</td>
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<td>Transfer of economic projects from foreign to national sectors and giving work to unemployed citizens in them; “protection of the masses from the oppression of monopolistic companies”</td>
<td>Nationalization of natural resources according to the <em>shari’a</em> so that the poorest can afford them, because private individuals or companies should not have a monopoly on public goods</td>
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<td>Use of luxury items for “necessary projects,” Reducing the number of government posts, distributing work equitably among civil servants, and narrowing the gap between junior</td>
<td>Prohibiting disproportionate luxury and removing extreme poverty by providing work for all, adequate wages, social security, and relief; free medical care and education for all</td>
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271 Compare Euben and Zaman, 74-78 with Qutb 2000, 303-305.

272 Euben and Zaman, 56-78.

273 Qutb 2000, 303-313.
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<th>and senior civil servant salaries</th>
<th>Enforcing <em>shari’a</em> in estate law</th>
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<tr>
<td>A restoration of Islamic legislation in every branch of the law</td>
<td>Enforcing <em>shari’a</em> in estate law</td>
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<td>Prohibition of usury, and organization of banks to this end</td>
<td>Forbidding usury, permitting Islamic banking and insurance only</td>
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<td>“An end to gambling in all its forms”</td>
<td>Prohibiting gambling</td>
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<td>“An end to prostitution, both clandestine and overt”</td>
<td>Prohibiting prostitution while simultaneously addressing the root problems of “excessive wealth and humiliating necessity”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“A campaign against drinking, as there is one against drugs: its prohibition, and the salvation of the nation from its effects”</td>
<td>Prohibiting alcohol</td>
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The similarities between this section of *Social Justice* and al-Banna’s economic platform are too numerous to be accidental. Since Qutb was in the process of entering the public conversation in Egypt on Islamic topics and al-Banna was arguably the most prominent Egyptian Islamist at the time, it is safe to assume that Qutb was borrowing from al-Banna rather than the reverse.

It is also notable that both works, while Islamist, propose reforms in the context of Egypt. Al-Banna had addressed his letter to the Egyptian monarch; he wanted the Egyptian military to be stronger and proposed increasing revenue through the religious tax; he proposed nationalization to boost native Egyptian employment; and he wanted the benefits of service in the Egyptian government to be shared with more Egyptians. Qutb echoed all of these points. Although “Islam” is the main protagonist in *Social Justice in Islam*, Qutb regularly seems to conflate Islam with his experience of life in Egypt. He aspires to speaks to and for the Islamic world as a whole but condemns Egyptian social and political problems, such as monopolies. Although he proposes “Islamic” solutions, he advocates changes such as jobs, education, and
distributing resources to the poor, that have particular meaning in the Egyptian context.\footnote{274}{For comparison, in the opening paragraph of \textit{Social Justice}, Qutb writes, “here in Egypt and in the Muslim world as a whole, we pay little heed to our native spiritual resources and our own intellectual heritage; instead, we think first of importing foreign principles and methods,” Qutb 2000, 19.}

Looking back on the Muslim Brotherhood’s rise, Nasser confidant Heikal writes that the organization filled a void in nationalist leadership in the 1930s.\footnote{275}{Heikal 1983, 121.}

Al-Banna and Qutb condemned foreign influence in Egypt, especially European but also Soviet political philosophy. Neither al-Banna nor Qutb believed that communism could fix Egypt’s (or Islam’s) problems. As Islamists they believed that proper understanding and practice of Islam was the only solution for the problems of poverty and inequality. Had al-Banna lived longer, the U.S. government would no doubt have viewed him as a useful Islamic partner, as they did with Qutb and later with al-Banna’s son-in-law, Said Ramadan.\footnote{276}{The U.S. government’s interest in Ramadan is one of the main arguments of Johnson 2010.}

By writing \textit{Social Justice}, Qutb aligned himself with the Free Officers movement as well as the Brotherhood. The themes of nationalizing critical natural resources and industries and alleviating poverty, inequality, and corruption placed Qutb in proximity to the socialist aspects of the officers’ movement. Like Qutb and the Muslim Brotherhood, the Free Officers movement sought to right economic wrongs in Egypt, but did not accept communism as the means to achieve it. The way Heikal tells it, President Nasser was “attracted to the ideas of Communism but finally rejected it as a way of life on two grounds: nationalism and religion.”\footnote{277}{Heikal 1973, 13.} In fact, several of the younger generation of Egyptian officers had joined the Muslim Brotherhood in the mid-1940s, including Nasser.\footnote{278}{Joel Gordon 1992, 45.} Nasser was a member of, or personally acquainted with
members of, the militant Secret Apparatus. Still, Joel Gordon argues that “Too much may be made of such affiliations. To a great extent these young men followed the flow of the crowd in a turbulent period.” The Free Officers and Brothers shared nationalism and a “generic sense of social justice that entailed narrowing the gap between social classes,” but Gordon points out that this was a common theme among all reformist forces in Egypt at the time.

However broad their common values, Qutb interacted socially with the Free Officers in 1952. Hamid Algar, editor of the revised 1953 English translation of Social Justice, repeats a claim by Khâlidî that Qutb had a greater status among the officers than other Brothers:

Sayyid Qutb was prominent among the members and associates of the Brethren who collaborated with the Free Officers. According to [Khâlidî], leaders of the coup including ‘Abd al-Nasir, visited Sayyid Qutb in his home a mere four days before the coup…About one month after the coup, Sayyid Qutb delivered a lecture on “Intellectual and Spiritual Liberation in Islam” at the Officers’ Club in Cairo, and ‘Abd al-Nasir was in attendance. More significantly, Sayyid Qutb was appointed cultural advisor to the Revolutionary Council, established by the Free Officers, and was the only civilian to attend its meetings.

Although the closeness of the connection is reported differently by different authors, there is no doubt that by the time of the revolution, Qutb had established himself in the overlapping

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279 Osman says Nasser was in the Secret Apparatus, see Osman 110-111. Compare Zollner, who writes that the memoirs of Anwar al-Sadat and Muhi al-Din “show that Anwar al-Sadat, Gamal ‘Abd al-Nasir and Muhammad Naguib were personally acquainted with leaders of the Brotherhood’s Secret Unit and with Hasan al-Banna,” Zollner, 26.
280 Gordon 1992, 49.
281 Ibid.
282 See editor’s introduction in Qutb 2000, 4-5.
networks of the Brothers and the Free Officers. All parties shared a commitment to nationalism, Islam, and social justice, and antipathy for communism.

By the end of 1953, despite years of membership and interaction, President Nasser came to see the Muslim Brotherhood as a major obstacle to his political agenda. During the same year, Qutb cemented his ties with the Brotherhood by joining and becoming Chief Propagandist. His timing was inauspicious from the point of view of obtaining a high ranking government job. When someone associated with the Brothers attempted to assassinate Nasser in 1954, the government threw nearly all Brotherhood leaders, secret apparatus members, and hundreds of rank and file members and suspected members in prison, including Qutb.283 By this time, Qutb had moved solidly into the Brotherhood’s camp. During his 12-year imprisonment at the hands of Nasser’s government, Qutb became an outspoken critic of Nasser. When he suggested in Milestones that the Egyptian government was an apostate regime liable to removal by force by an Islamic vanguard, Nasser’s government charged him of treason and executed him.

This chapter began with an overview of how Qutb successfully joined the Muslim Brotherhood and revolutionary officers networks after returning from the United States, thanks in part to his status as the author of Social Justice in Islam. The next task is to investigate the mechanics of Social Justice, that is, how it functioned as nationalist-Islamist propaganda.

**Social Justice and the Triumph of Qutb’s Propaganda**

I argue that reading Social Justice as nationalist-Islamist propaganda demonstrates that Qutb was able to write in a way that not only advanced his career in the near term but advanced

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283 This is a rough estimate based on Zollner’s description of events and her analysis of conflicting sources. See Zollner, 37-8.
his brand of Islamist ideology over the long term. He was so effective at this endeavor that I argue he benefited far more from Social Justice than the U.S. government did, even though the work was anti-communist. To appreciate Qutb’s genius as a propagandist, we now explore how he appealed to Egyptian nationalist causes through an Islamist lens, subverted foreign propaganda, and inspired his readers with hope and confidence. Qutb’s condemnations of communism in Social Justice must have appealed to U.S. officials, but he also broke free of the U.S. anti-communist narrative.

Social Justice served as effective propaganda first because Qutb spoke directly to Egyptian concerns of poverty and inequality. Qutb writes that inequality in Egypt and among Muslims has reached immoral dimensions: “when millions of a nation cannot find a mouthful of pure water to drink, it is undeniably luxury that some few people should be able to drink Vichy and Evian, imported from overseas.” Millions cannot afford shelter other than “tin cans and reed huts,” and some lack even rags to cover themselves. Qutb condemns symbols of decadence in matters of religion, such as the gold-embroidered Ka'ba coverings in Mecca, when fellow Muslims live in such poverty.284 Qutb refers to America favorably here to shame Muslims. That is, even Americans, condemned elsewhere in Social Justice for their materialism and support for the Jews in Palestine, do not have such extreme gaps between rich and poor. Since Qutb had not yet visited the United States at the time he wrote Social Justice, it is notable that he was confident of this fact.285 Whatever the case in America, Qutb believed that wealth disparity in Egypt was a sign that Egyptian society had abandoned Islamic ideals. Modern Islamic society, by which he meant primarily Egyptian society, is “not Islamic in any sense of the word.” He quotes

285 Ibid., 161.
the Qur’an: “‘Whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed is an unbeliever.’ (5: 48)”

Qutb’s evidence for modern Islamic society’s fall from grace is evidently drawn from the Egyptian legal system:

[O]ur laws permit rather than punish oppression; the zakat is not obligatory and is not spent in the requisite ways. We permit the extravagance and the luxury that Islam prohibits; we allow the starvation and the destitution of which the Messenger once said: “Whenever people anywhere allow a man to go hungry, they are outside the protection of Allah, the Blessed and the Exalted.”

By not providing for the destitute, then, Egyptian authorities and other rich Muslims sin against God. The correct social order, in contrast, balances individual responsibility with mutual responsibility. Qutb quotes the Qur’an again: “‘We have given nobility to the sons of man…We have given them provision of good things, and have given them great preference over many of the things, which We have created.’ (17: 72)” He clarifies that while every man must strive to earn a living by his own hand, he must also “receive his share from the public monies when for any reason he is unable to work.”

Qutb speaks, then, to matters of concern to his Egyptian readers, linking material deprivations of his countrymen to a spiritual imbalance.

Qutb writes in *Social Justice* about the British occupation in a manner intended to undermine British propaganda. He warns Egyptians to be on their guard against Britain’s subtler forms of control, especially the spread of British education. Instead of directly confronting Muslim ideas, as France did in its North African colonies, Qutb notes, “England took a more devious and tortuous road to the same end in Egypt, that of education. Her aim was to encourage

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286 Ibid., 262.
287 Ibid., 262.
288 Ibid., 163.
the growth of a general frame of mind that would despise the bases of Islamic life, and even of Eastern life.” A new generation of teachers would then spread new manners and customs “and would banish all elements of an Islamic education from the policies of the Education Ministry.” As a longtime Ministry of Education official and participant in debates over the future of Egyptian education, Qutb was highly sensitive to British influence in Egyptian education and wished to eradicate it and replace it with Islamic education that he saw as authentically Egyptian.

Qutb also demonstrates his skill as a propagandist by inverting Orientalist language. Timothy Mitchell indicates that well-educated Egyptians of the early 20th century had access in Arabic to the works of prominent European Orientalists such as Gustave Le Bon, who wrote *La Civilisation des Arabes* (1884) and other works that were highly influential among the emerging bourgeoisie. Mitchell demonstrates the presence of European Orientalism in Egyptian government schools, where Qutb himself was educated. In an act of rhetorical force, writers like Qutb and Muhammad Asad recognized and rejected Oriental themes in Egyptian education as a tool of foreign domination. Taking on the paternalistic tone of some Orientalists toward the “Orientals” they studied, Qutb inverts the power relationship in *Social Justice* by using the term “Occidentals” to comment on Western ignorance and duplicity. Such inversions recall Foucault’s notion of “power from below.”

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289 Ibid., 274.
290 Le Bon’s sociological work, *The Crowd*, was translated into Arabic in 1909; two of his Orientalist works were also published in Arabic and widely read in Egypt: *La civilisation des Arabes*, and *Les premières civilisations*. According to Mitchell, “These works profoundly influenced the new nationalist historiography that writers of this class were starting to produce. Le Bon, in sum, was probably the strongest individual European influence in turn-of-the-century Cairo on the political thought of Egypt’s emergent bourgeoisie.” Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991, originally published Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 122-125.
Examining Le Bon’s *La Civilisation des Arabes* highlights an element of Orientalist rhetoric that Qutb successfully inverted in “The America I Have Seen,” as discussed in chapter 1: the term “primitive.” In a description of the Arab’s inborn tendency to war and pillage, Le Bon writes that “their primitive instincts remained unvarying, for the character of a people hardly changes but manifests itself in new forms.” As cited above, Qutb uses the term “primitive” to describe the brutality of Americans both in their sporting events and in their foreign policy. Similarly, in *Social Justice*, Qutb inverts the rhetoric of “civilized” and “humane” people versus “barbarians.” In Qutb’s alternate historiography, the barbarity of the Crusaders is exemplified in the fall of Jerusalem in 1099. The Crusaders committed atrocities in the al-Aqsa mosque, including “the raping of women, mutilation of the living, and torture of the old women and the children.” However, when the tide turned against the Crusader “barbarians,” Muslims did not respond in kind. On the contrary, “their treatment at the hands of the Muslims was imbued with the Islamic spirit, which was strong enough to check the desire for vengeance in Muslim hearts and to keep them within the bounds of humanity and religion.” Qutb explains with no little condescension that Islam advocates defensive war only, not aggression.

Like Le Bon but in reverse, Qutb argues that the violent European mentality can never change. Europeans cannot overcome the corrupting legacy of the Crusades. Qutb quotes Asad: “the ancient antipathy itself still remains as a vital element within the European mind.” Although Qutb quotes Asad’s caveat that there may be some variation in the intensity of hatred for Muslims, “that it exists is indisputable.” Indeed, Europe’s dealings with the Islamic world bear

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293 Abdel-Malek, 14-15.
294 Qutb 2000, 267.
295 Qutb offers a Qur’anic justification for defensive war, see Qutb 2000, 118.
“clear traces of that genocidal force” exhibited in the Crusader era. As proof that the Crusades are ongoing, Qutb writes that “General Allenby was no more than typical of the mind of all Europe, when, entering Jerusalem during the First World War, he said: ‘Only now have the Crusades come to an end.’” Social Justice succeeds as propaganda, then, because Qutb skillfully manipulates Orientalist rhetoric to suggest that Egypt and more broadly, “Islam,” will never be safe as long as Europeans are in charge.

Moreover, Social Justice serves to some extent as counter-propaganda, especially against the British occupation. Given the European record of unabated hostility toward Islam demonstrated in the Crusades and the modern colonial period, Qutb warns his compatriots not to be fooled by their “pretended respect for freedom of religion.” He argues that British duplicity on the issue of Islam was clear from their policies in the Sudan, where “the supposedly tolerant English empowered Christian missionaries in the Sudan and would not let Muslims travel through the country.” Qutb shares an anecdote in which a Muslim official finds he is stuck in Sudan, but solves his predicament by chanting the Muslim call to prayer, prompting the British authorities to kick him out. Social Justice makes clear that Egyptians should be very suspicious of British professions to respect and protect Islam. In chapter 1, Qutb mocked American Christianity in “The America I Have Seen,” and warned against American use of Islam to fight communism in “American Islam.” In Social Justice, it becomes imperative to ask whose religious propaganda is more effective? Chapter 2 demonstrated that the 1953 translation

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296 Qutb 2000, 273. Note that Muhammad Asad later softened his rhetoric slightly on Europe, dropping the term “genocidal.” See Asad 1982.
297 Qutb 2000, 270.
298 Ibid.
299 Ibid.
300 Abdel-Malek, 18-21.
of *Social Justice* was very likely a work of American black propaganda as part of a broader effort to boost religion to inoculate populations against communism. Yet the text of *Social Justice* demonstrates Qutb’s ability to portray British rhetoric about defending religious freedom as a wolf in sheep’s clothing. That is, in *Social Justice*, Qutb is also inoculating his readers against believing in British (and by extension American) professions of friendship based on common religious values.

Qutb does not merely reject the notion of a common religious cause against communism; he rejects the notion that an East-West conflict exists. Like the political neutralism that Nasser would later develop, Qutb refuses in *Social Justice* to accept the Cold War binary. Qutb acknowledges that people say and think that the world is divided into two blocs, communist and capitalist, but this is false:301 “We need not be deceived by the apparently hard and bitter struggle between the Eastern and Western camps. Neither of them have anything but a materialistic philosophy of life and in their thinking they are closely akin.”302 He restates this assertion three more times in Chapter 9.303 By refusing to accept the American narrative of East v. West, with implications for Egypt, Qutb establishes an independent path. This stance clarifies that the U.S. government faced an uphill battle in winning Qutb over as a Muslim ally in the Cold War.

Lauzière points out the incomplete nature of the type of empowered Islamist rhetoric Qutb uses in *Social Justice*. Referring to purist Salafists, the term he uses for the Muslim Brotherhood and which fits Qutb’s Islamism in 1949, he writes that “Ironically, their efforts to expose the aberration of colonialism—often by using the Europeans’ own intellectual weapons—

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301 Qutb 2000, 315.
302 Ibid., 316.
303 Ibid., 315-7.
prevented them from rejecting Western philosophical modernity altogether. There is truth to this. Qutb contradicts himself in several ways in *Social Justice*: he calls for the rejection of all foreign influences, yet he borrows European and American rhetoric in service of his triumphalist Islamist rhetoric. He also quotes European and American authors’ positive statements on Islam as proof that Islam is superior, betraying a belief that foreign voices carry some weight. Qutb is thus guilty of the same offense for which he attacks other authors in *Social Justice*, namely defining Islam’s and Egypt’s greatness in alien terminology. However, the propaganda value of *Social Justice* rests in part on the visibility of Qutb’s rhetorical inversions. Had Qutb completely eschewed Western rhetoric in *Social Justice*, the work likely would not have become so popular. This is because skewering the British, Europeans, America, materialism, and communism could best be done by, so to speak, hoisting them with their own petard.

Qutb uses *Social Justice*, then, to address Egyptian grievances that may be solved by a return to Islam; he neutralizes foreign propaganda in Egypt by appropriating the rhetoric of powerful actors, portraying them as both hostile and inferior, and by warning his compatriots against foreign attempts to corrupt and coopt them. Finally, Qutb shows his brilliance as a propagandist by offering his readers hope and confidence in themselves and the future that is possible for them by means of Islamist reform.

That is, Qutb does not simply condemn the wrongs of history; he casts a positive vision of the independent Islamic state that will succeed where West and East have failed. Qutb argues that the comprehensive and practical nature of Islam offers a better defense against the

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304 Lauzière, 24.
305 For example, as cited above, Qutb writes that “we pay little heed to our native spiritual resources and our own intellectual heritage; instead, we think first of importing foreign principles and methods,” see Qutb 2000, 19.
materialism of both West and East to which all “spiritual religions – and Christianity most of all – are opposed.” It is important to note that this type of statement would have been palatable to U.S. officials at the time, if indeed they read it. As discussed in chapter 2, American thought leaders, encouraged by the federal government, were likewise condemning materialism and secularism and promoting “true” religions during this period in an effort to counter communist influence. Qutb continues addressing his fellow Muslims: “we possess a universal theory of life far higher than any held in Europe or America or Russia. We can offer to mankind this theory whose aims are a complete mutual help among all men and a true mutual responsibility in society.” In contrast to Christianity, which Qutb believes “has no essential philosophy of actual, practical life,” he points out that “Islam is a perfectly practicable social system in itself.” For this reason, Islam is the only hope for the world. In the context of American officials’ promotion of other religions against communism, even these statements would be seen as serving that purpose.

Qutb goes further still. He suggests that the West cannot fight communism without the help of Islam. He rejects the notion that Western civilization is alone capable of defending freedom of religion, including Islam, against atheistic communism. Qutb posits instead that Islam is the only hope for mankind:

The capitalists and the profiteers realize what communism means, and they shrink from its very name as a superstitious man shrinks from genii and demons. Let them

306 Ibid., 316.
307 See for example, consideration of communism as a materialistic religion. See Herzog,5.
308 Qutb 2000, 318.
309 Ibid., 317. This statement is in keeping with Qutb’s view, largely borrowed from Muhammad Asad, that true Christianity – for better and worse – is anti-material, ascetic, monastic, and requiring that its adherents renounce the world rather than live in it and enjoy its benefits as Muslims are encouraged to do.
understand, then, that neither they nor humanity as a whole can have any defense against communism except Islam; the true, real Islam, the principles of which we have outlined here.\textsuperscript{310}

That is, Qutb informs his Muslim readers that they are the protectors of everything that matters to human civilization, rather than the recipients of protection as the British colonial government would have them believe. In \textit{Social Justice}, Qutb suggests a kind of special providence often associated with the United States as beacon on a hill. “The import of these words is not that we should adopt a position of isolationism in regard to thought, education, and science; all these are a common heritage of all the peoples of the world, in which we already have a fundamental part.”\textsuperscript{311} In effect, Qutb is arguing that Muslims should be confident of their positive impact on mankind. Because of this, Qutb believes that Muslims ought to be leaders, not followers, in every aspect of human progress. “[O]ur true place is not at the tail of the caravan,” he writes, “but where we may grasp the leading rein.”\textsuperscript{312} By the end of his treatise, then, Qutb has built up his Egyptian Muslim reader. By offering a positive vision of Muslims helping and protecting the world, Qutb completely inverts the reader’s standing, from colonized subject into proud citizen of a new indispensable nation: Islam.

This triumphalist vision of Islam and assertion of the native capacity of Muslims to lead the world likely contributed to the popularity of Qutb’s book with Egyptian nationalists and Islamists. Qutb’s mastery of the tools of propaganda ought to have given American officials pause. Beyond destroying the European character, establishing Muslim moral and physical superiority, and suggesting an Islamic global destiny reminiscent of American rhetoric, in a final

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\textsuperscript{310} Ibid., 318.
\textsuperscript{311} Ibid., 286.
\textsuperscript{312} Ibid., 318.
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tour de force, Qutb writes America and Britain right out of the narrative. Both East and West are irrevocably set against Islam, he writes: “This is the common factor that links together communist Russia and capitalist America.”\(^{313}\) However, Qutb predicts capitalism’s fall. Echoing both Karl Marx\(^ {314}\) and Muhammad Asad’s variation on Marx,\(^ {315}\) Qutb argues that capitalism will inevitably lead to communism, specifically among American workers, since they lack a spiritual philosophy of life and will become prey to communism as the solution for their oppression by capitalists.\(^ {316}\) Whereas Asad referred to his treatise as “the case of Islam versus Western civilization,”\(^ {317}\) Qutb declares that the real struggle will be between Islam and communism. By identifying communism as the ultimate adversary for Islam, Qutb has made the West completely irrelevant.

**Conclusion**

Although Sayyid Qutb seemed to be a good candidate for the role of anti-communist Muslim partner for the United States, I argue that he was too good a propagandist in his own right to reliably serve this American objective. The “strategical situation” between Qutb, the British and American governments, and other players demonstrates power in multiple directions, with Qutb doing his best to invert the colonial status quo. Upon closer examination, *Social*

\(^{313}\) Qutb writes that each imperialist state seeks to “throttle” Islam, see Qutb 2000, 274-5.


\(^{315}\) Asad opines that “the Communist experiment is but a culmination and a fulfilment of those decidedly anti-religious and – ultimately – anti-spiritual tendencies of modern Western civilization. It may even be that the present sharp antagonism between the Capitalistic West and Communism is, at its root, due only to the different pace at which those essentially parallel movements are progressing toward a common goal.” Asad, 46.

\(^{316}\) Qutb 2000, 315-6.

\(^{317}\) Asad, 12.
Justice in Islam appears to have benefited Qutb even more than covert support of the book helped the U.S. government’s Cold War struggle. Qutb was certainly anticommunist, but so were the majority of Egypt’s dominant political groups at the time, making Social Justice’s value to the U.S. cause less certain. The work raised Qutb’s status as a nationalist-Islamist spokesman in Egypt upon his return from the United States, and facilitated his entry into the overlapping networks that were the Muslim Brotherhood and Free Officers movement. This was no small accomplishment for someone who was a prolific author but neither the best known nor most highly regarded in literary circles. While Qutb foreclosed further advancement in Egyptian politics when he joined the Brotherhood in 1953 and went to prison in 1954, I argue that Social Justice helped him get as far as he did. As counter-propaganda, Social Justice, Qutb gained the upper hand against America’s Cold War rhetoric. He proselytized for the nationalist-Islamist cause by telling fellow Muslims that they had the capacity to govern themselves through an Islamic system. Rather than giving the West status as an adversary to Islam as Muhammad Asad had done over a decade earlier, in Social Justice Qutb eliminated Europe and the United States entirely from his triumphalist Islamist future.

Qutb was neither the first nor the last Islamist to write about social justice. Muhammad al-Ghazzālī, also a mid-career convert to the Brotherhood and who unlike most Brothers had been trained at Al-Azhar, wrote about social justice in al-Islam wa’l-manahij al-ishtirakiyya (Islam and the Socialist Curricula, 1951) and al-Islam al-muftara ‘alayh bayn al-shuyu’iyin wa’l-ra’smaliyin (Islam slandered between communists and capitalists, 1953).318 However, Qutb’s Social Justice continues to be more widely read than Ghazzali’s, Osman’s, or al-Banna’s work.

318 Mitchell 1993, 251, footnote 63.
on the subject. Qutb’s success can partly be explained by the fact that he became even better known through his later works and execution. Many of his religious works are well regarded by a cross-section of contemporary Islamic groups. Some of his more extremist admirers include Al Qaeda, which brought Qutb increased attention in the late 1990s and following the 2001 attacks. Still, Social Justice deserves scholarly attention in its own right. Although the work was not particularly original, Qutb synthesized the subjects well and emerged as a mature, passionate political rhetorician, easily the equal of the most skilled propagandists in the Eastern or Western camps in the early post-World War II period.

In prison, Qutb continued to employ the polemical skills he had honed in Social Justice to further the Muslim Brotherhood cause, and when he diverged from Supreme Guide al-Hudaybi later on, he continued to write as “radical purist” Islamist in the Lauzière taxonomy. However, in focusing on Qutb’s later works, such as Milestones, the book that the Nasser government cited as cause for his execution, scholars may miss the relevance of Social Justice as an anti-colonial, anti-Western, Islamist manifesto during a period of nationalist political upheaval. This nationalist-Islamist quality played an important role both in Qutb’s popularity among Egyptian Muslim readers and in his ability to evade American attempts to win him over to the Western anti-communist cause.

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319 Mitchell explains that he relies largely on Qutb’s Social Justice in his discussion of social justice, since Qutb is the best known Muslim Brotherhood author who wrote on the topic, see Mitchell 1993, 251, footnote 63.  
320 Zollner, 46-7.
CONCLUSION

I argue that in many ways, Sayyid Qutb was exactly the sort of Muslim leader that the U.S. government was looking for during the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, but by rejecting the Cold War paradigm and ably advancing his own nationalist-Islamist agenda, he partially obstructed U.S. aims in Egypt. Why did the U.S. government take an interest in people like Qutb and what did Qutb get out of his writings on America and Social Justice? In order to understand the value of Qutb’s work to the U.S. government and the value of Qutb’s own works during this period, I broke the discussion into multiple sections. In the first chapter, I discovered that Egyptians in the late 1940s and early 1950s had multiple grievances against the United States in the form of the frustrated nationalist movement after World War I, the U.S. government’s ultimate acquiescence to the British military occupation in Egypt, and U.S. support for the cause of Israel. I found that Qutb’s anti-American writings from this period both expressed these frustrations and began to serve an additional purpose, namely, nationalist polemics and the demonstration of proper society by means of its American opposite. I suggested that Qutb’s description of “American Islam,” the notion that Americans needed Muslims to fight the Cold War for them, was close to reality.

In chapter 2, I argued that the U.S. government’s interest in people like Qutb was not so strange as it first appeared. As World War II came to an end, the United States faced what officials felt was a global mission to halt the spread of communism. Studying what other countries had attempted in the Middle East, the U.S. government sought to win Muslim hearts and minds over to the Western cause. Officials in the Truman and Eisenhower administrations saw communism as a phenomenon that could be defeated in part by strengthening religious
forces around the world, hence the interest in Qutb and *Social Justice*. Qutb fit the U.S. profile of a potential Muslim partner in the early Cold War period: he was an established thought leader, Egyptian, anti-communist, religious, with an independent and authentic voice, and had spent two years in the United States. Where U.S. officials went wrong was in believing that Muslims would behave a certain way politically as a group due to innate characteristics or sensitivities, or due to instructions from Islamic leaders. They also erred in believing that Nasser’s neutralism was necessarily a sign of incompatibility with U.S. interests. There is no doubt that Qutb was anti-communist, a trait the U.S. government valued, but concerns about communism ignored the intense pressure communists were already under in Egypt and the continued weakness of the movement. From this perspective, investing in local Egyptian leaders who could help inoculate the population against communism may have been a waste of American resources. In chapter 3, I argued that *Social Justice* helped advance Qutb’s career and established him as a talented propagandist. He was more than a match for pro-Western propagandists and used *Social Justice* to advance his nationalist-Islamist vision for Egypt. For Qutb, America was a useful foil, but reforming Egyptian politics and society through Islam remained the dominant feature of his narrative during this period.

This study has brought two divergent histories of the post-World War II moment into dialogue. It is thanks to this intersection between two vantage points that a fuller picture of the motives, capabilities, interests, relationships, and efforts of individuals and groups emerge. Seven decades removed, historians have the luxury of making connections that were not visible at the end of World War II, during Egypt’s nationalist struggle and the early days of America’s Cold War. Qutb’s *Social Justice* and anti-American articles become even more vivid when
juxtaposed to the stated intentions of U.S. government officials to reach out to Muslims through anti-communist propaganda and through educational exchanges with young thought leaders from Muslim countries. The irony is unmistakable.

Despite the fact that America was only of secondary importance to Qutb, his writing on the United States gained prominence with some of his more extremist admirers, including eventually Al Qaeda, whose anti-American ideology echoed themes from “The America I Have Seen” and whose antipathy toward apostate Muslim regimes echoed Qutb’s later work, Milestones. Since Qutb was known to have spent two years in the United States, his writing on American moral depravity had credibility for his followers. Qutb’s claim that the CIA tried to recruit him and that he refused no doubt added to his stature. Further research is required to determine if Qutb understood that the American Council of Learned Societies was cooperating with U.S. intelligence at the time that it translated and published Social Justice in Islam.

The case of Sayyid Qutb and U.S. government outreach to Muslims in the early Cold War has significance for historians of U.S. foreign relations, Egyptian Islamism, and anti-colonial resistance. Many questions remain. Much could be learned from a more comprehensive study of Qutb’s social networks during this period, from his family connections to his professional contacts at the Ministry of Education to his evolving relationships with the Free Officers and Muslim Brotherhood. In terms of intellectual influences, a study of Qutb’s other writing and sources during this period would further illuminate how his nationalist and Islamist views came together. More detailed exploration of foreign propaganda in Egypt in the early Cold War era would also be both beneficial and possible, given the accessibility of government

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321 See English translation of Al Qaeda publication by Ayman al-Zawahiri, “Knights Under the Prophet’s Banner,” no date, no longer available, 13-14.
322 Wright, 19-20.
archives for this period. This much is certain, however. Despite the U.S. government’s interest in winning hearts and minds against communism in Egypt, and despite the fact that Qutb skewered communism in his post-World War II writings, he was too adept at promoting an alternative narrative that best advanced his own causes. He was not America’s “best defense” in Egypt.
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