

State of Mankind

How much do you know?

Excerpts from *How the Specter of Communism Is Ruling Our World*

(53)

The Communist Origins of Islamic Extremism

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, heralded a major shift in world affairs. Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda took front-page news as the threat of Islamic extremism gained prominence.

For the vast majority of people around the world, 9/11 came as a shock and a tragedy. But in China, under the CCP's censorship, reactions were quite different. From internet forums and chat rooms to university cafeterias, large numbers of people rooted for the terrorists, with comments such as "good job!" and "We strongly support the acts of justice against the United States." According to a survey of 91,701 people on NetEase, a major Chinese website, only 17.8 percent of respondents expressed strong opposition to the terrorist attacks, while a majority of people chose "opposition to the United States" or "the best is yet to come" in regard to the catastrophe.

The Chinese who cheered the terrorist attacks had never met bin Laden and his ilk, but the roots of their toxic thinking were the same. The

Chinese have been poisoned by communist propaganda and Communist Party culture since childhood. Logically, however, one would wonder what connection this could possibly have with bin Laden, who had fought against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.

The ideological source of bin Laden's Islamic extremism can be traced back to Sayyid Qutb, the Egyptian pioneer of Islamic terrorism, a man who could be described as the Marx of Islamic jihad and who is often referred to as the "godfather of modern jihad."

Sayyid Qutb: The Marx of Islamic Extremism

William McCants, counter-terrorism expert and former researcher at the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, has observed that Islamic extremists often refer to Qutb's teachings when explaining their motivations, and that many of them regard themselves as his successors. Ayman al-Zawahiri, the leader of Al-Qaeda following the death of bin Laden, regarded Qutb's thought as being the spark to ignite the fire of jihadi extremism.

In 2016, Middle East expert Hassan Hassan published a report with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace called *The Sectarianism of the Islamic State: Ideological Roots and Political Context*. Toward the end of the report, Hassan quoted a popular summary of the Islamic State's essential doctrine: "The Islamic State was drafted by Sayyid Qutb, taught by Abdullah Azzam, globalized by Osama bin Laden, transferred to reality by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and implemented by al-Baghdadis: Abu Omar and Abu Bakr."

Bin Laden and later the Islamic State (ISIS) adopted and expanded on the ideology of Qutb. In a nutshell, Qutbism is the pursuit of violence to destroy the rotten old society, or “jahiliya,” calling upon jihadis to lay down their lives for an ideology that will supposedly usher in human liberation.

This bombastic style calls to mind the writings of Marx and Lenin, and with good reason: Qutb was a member of the Communist Party in his youth, and his ideas were steeped in the rhetoric of Marxism-Leninism. Robert R. Reilly, a senior fellow at the U.S. Foreign Policy Committee, has said that Qutb was actually a Communist International liaison for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Communist Party of Egypt.

Born in 1906, Qutb studied socialism and literature in the 1920s and 1930s. By 1940, he had already studied abroad in the United States for two years, and joined the Muslim Brotherhood after his return to Egypt. Qutb had always had contact with army lieutenant Gamal Abdel Nasser, leader of the socialist-leaning Free Officer Movement.

In 1952, Nasser launched a military coup overthrowing the Muhammad Ali dynasty, a pro-Western monarchy. It is said that this socialist-revolution coup was planned by Qutb and the Brotherhood together with Nasser. However, while Qutb hoped Nasser would establish an Islamic regime, Nasser instead took the path of secularization, and in 1954 began suppressing the Muslim Brotherhood.

Qutb and the Brotherhood prepared to assassinate Nasser. The plot failed, and Qutb was accused of attempted murder and imprisoned. During his three years in prison, Qutb suffered severe torture. Later,

conditions became more lax, and he was allowed to write. He wrote his two most important works while in prison — *In the Shade of the Qur'an* and *Milestones*. These two books, covering his views on the Qur'an, Islamic history, Egypt, and Western society, laid out in full his advocacy of anti-secular, anti-Western extremism.

Qutb was once briefly released from prison. He did not take the opportunity to leave Egypt and was jailed again. In 1966, Qutb was convicted of his involvement in the conspiracy to assassinate President Nasser and was executed by hanging.

Qutb's subversive thinking bestowed the Islamic concept of jihad with a new interpretation. Upon mention of jihad, many immediately think of "holy war." In Arabic, jihad simply means to struggle or to fight. To mainstream Muslims, it can be taken to mean internal conflict (self-perfection) or defensive jihad. Qutb extended this definition to include proactive and unbridled use of violence in the holy war of jihad and laid out its theoretical foundations. Qutb took pride in walking up to the gallows and becoming a religious martyr.

Qutb's philosophy held that any social system that abided by secular laws or ethics was an anti-Islamic "old society" — jahiliya (ignorance of religious truth, originally referring to society before the spread of Islam). Even a society that claimed itself Muslim could still be jahiliya. Qutb considered the Egyptian social system in which he lived to be one in which jahiliya was dominant, and therefore it had to be overthrown.

According to Qutb, jahiliya was the greatest obstruction for both Muslims and non-Muslims, preventing them from fulfillment of Islamic

values and law. He claimed that the old society had been forced on people and in the process, robbed them of their freedom. These enslaved people — analogous to the working class in Marxism — had the right to wage jihad to overthrow the oppression of jahiliya. Qutb advocated jihad as the means of liberation for all mankind, Muslim as well as non-Muslim. When Qutb's books became public, many Islamic leaders thought Qutb had gone too far and regarded his ideas as heresy.

Qutb further borrowed the Marxist concept of “false consciousness,” which refers to the ordinary masses' acceptance of the ruler's ideals and culture. This consciousness thus prevents them from perceiving their own oppression or overthrowing capitalism in favor of socialism. For Qutb, those living under jahiliya don't realize they are slaves, which is why they do not engage in jihad to emancipate themselves.

“What is to be done?” as Lenin put it in his pamphlet by that name. Qutb had the same question, so he looked to Lenin for a solution.