

Combating Terrorism Center
Guest Commentary

**Sheikh Abdel-Fatah Al-Khalidi
Revitalizes Sayid Qutb**

Inside the Adversary's Anti-American Ideology from the
Cold War to Operation Iraqi Freedom

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Introduction

Sayid Qutb (1906-1966) is a chief ideologue in modern Islamist militancy whose writings have influenced the thinking of Usama Bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri. Qutb spent two decades perfecting his theory of *takfir* (condemnation as apostates Muslims and non-Muslims who disagree with his world view), and re-defining the old Islamic term of *jahiliyah* (which literally means being in a state of ignorance and which was often used to describe Meccan persecution of Muslims in 7th century Arabia), in order to apply it to all of Egyptian society who disagree with his worldview. Qutb argued that Muslims should remove themselves physically from a *jahili* (un-Islamic and ignorant) society to establish an enclave from which to export revolution and *Salafi* (a return to the pious founders of Islam) ideology to bring about an Islamic state on the Salafi model.

Qutb received his Masters degree in education from North Colorado Teachers College in Greeley. While there, Qutb formulated his contempt for American culture and vision of bipolar conflict between Islam and the United States. Importantly, Qutb's younger brother Muhammad was the keeper of Sayid's legacy after the elder's execution by Nasser in 1966. Muhammad Qutb would be among Usama Bin Laden's advisors and is reputedly in exile in Iran. American military planners and counter-terrorism experts must become familiar with Qutb, his writings and his legacy.

This article will highlight a recent book published by radicalist cleric Sheikh (Dr.) Salah Abdel-Fatah Al-Khalidi entitled "*Al-Harb Al-Amriki bee Manather Sayid Qutb* (The American War from the Perspective of Sayid Qutb)." This 101-page booklet is unique because it both revives Qutb's writings four decades after his death and concentrates all of Qutb's hatred and vitriolic ideology specifically directed against the United States. *Al-Harb Al-Amriki bee Manather Sayid Qutb* revives a 1985 book by Khalidi, reintroducing Qutb in 2003 on the Arab street, in order to justify a total war against the United States on the eve of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The text was published in Amman, Jordan published by Dar-al-Uloom for Printing and Distribution. This review essay exposes Khalidi as a major keeper of Qutb's legacy, having published over 40 books on Islamist radical theory, at least eight of which delve into Qutb and his theories.

Takfiri Ideology: An Enemy of Muslims and Non-Muslims

The current war against Al-Qaeda and Jihadi-Salafism is at its root an ideological one. It is a struggle between those Muslims who will interpret Islam constructively verses those who interpret it destructively. The United States should not be ignorant to the ideas, thoughts, and changes in the discourse of *takfiris*. Aside from their presence on the internet, and on satellite

television, there are numerous books and pamphlets that delve into this destructive ideology in more detail. They are derived from Islamist militant thinkers like Qutb, but can stretch back in history to Ibn Taymiyah in the thirteenth century AD. Booklets like Al-Khalidi's revival of Qutb must be translated and discussed by America's military and national security leaders to begin to understand what ideologically motivates the enemy, and to discover precisely how Islam is being perverted by *Takfiri* groups. Discrediting *takfiri* ideology is a matter of national security not only for the United States but for Arab and non-Arab allies alike. Qutb's work must be understood and then discredited using Islamic law, precedence and history. It is important for Americans to define precisely the subset within Islam that is causing the self-destruction of this long and proud faith that provides comfort and meaning to 1.3 billion people.

Khalidi and the Clash of Civilizations

Khalidi follows the same anti-American and anti-Semitic thought process as Qutb and opens his booklet by saying that the Islamic *Umma* (community) faces a vicious assault from apostates, the Zionist (read Israel)-Crusaders (read the United States). He explains that the United States oppression of Muslims is directed by Jews. Khalidi conceptualizes a bipolar struggle between the United States and Islam and argues that America's goals are to:

- Isolate Muslims;
- Propagate American ideology and *jahili* (philosophy);
- Bring a generation of Muslim youth out of Islam and make them strangers to their own faith;
- Steal Muslim natural resources;
- Redraw the map of the Middle East;
- Prevent Islam in government; and
- Guarantee the Jewish agenda in the region.

Before laying out Qutb's anti-American theories, Khalidi argues that these objectives were tactically accomplished by the United States when it incited or actively initiated three wars in the region. For Khalidi, there have been three important Gulf Wars:

- The First Gulf War was the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War, in which America is viewed as sustaining both sides through weapons sales;
- The Second Gulf War (1990-1991) was Operation Desert Storm, which Islamist militants view as a direct intervention by U.S. forces to attain complete control of oil resources and a permanent presence in the heart of the Islamic world; and

- The Third Gulf War (2003-Present) is Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, which in the Islamist militant mind is the bipolar struggle between Islam and the United States that jihadists have been waiting for. These thinkers believe the war is an attempt to impose American ideology by force and remove Islamist governments like the Taliban under guise of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).

According to Khalidi, the fight in Iraq is a struggle over who will dominate Muslim life economically, socially and politically. To counter his views one must isolate his brand of *takfiri* ideology, and make the argument that if an Islamic state is established many Muslims will not be well served. The question is: whose Islam will reign supreme? If it is Khalidi's interpretation, which is rooted in radical Sunni Salafism, what will Shiites and even the other schools of Sunni practice? What about the Sufis?

An effective counter-argument to Khalidi must repackage democracy in the region as a way of keeping diverse Islamic views represented and to avoid a civil war that would ensue should a militant brand of Sunni Islam reign supreme. Khalidi's simplistic and pseudo-intellectual views must be challenged; they are based on portraying Muslims as perpetual victims in need of a Jihadi-Salafist totalitarian theocracy to rid themselves of all socio-economic and moral problems. The battle is not to convince the likes of Khalidi or others that propagate an unyielding ideology; the fight is for the hearts and minds of people in the Arab street. With a minimal understanding of Cold War history, American government, and even their own Islamic history, these folks could fall prey to the ideas in Khalidi's book.

Neo-Qutbism: Inside Khalidi's Hatred of the United States

In a 1951 book entitled, "*Al-Salam Al-Alami wa Al-Islam*," (Islam and Global Peace) Sayid Qutb wrote that Islam would eventually be engaged in a global war with the United States. That was one of two Qutb books to explicitly target the United States. Nineteen years after Qutb's death, Khalidi compiled Qutb's unpublished writings into a third book entitled *Amreeka Kamaa Ra'aytu*. It was published in 1985 through a publishing house in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The new 2003 edition by Khalidi repackages Qutb's books on America, adding commentary on current events to portray Qutb as a great prognosticator and quasi-Nostradamus figure who predicted the coming clash of civilizations between Islam and the United States. Qutb argued that the United States has pursued war in the name of propagating peace; he writes there will come a time when the Middle East and Muslim oil, persons, and industry will be fuel for American economic exploitation. Qutb's book, as revived by Khalidi, paints the United States as denying Muslims their

rightful place as the chosen community of God, and argues that Muslims are blessed with:

- Mecca being the center of the world;
- Rich agricultural and natural resources (he mentions oil specifically).

This new book claims the United States exploits these gifts by placing troops in Saudi Arabia and pillaging Arab oil resources. Qutb is a major influence on Usama Bin Laden, who levels similar charges on the United States. Khalidi describes Americans as neo-crusaders, playing on selective images with no understanding of the total context of history. Khalidi writes that the mantle of neo-crusader has passed from Europe to the United States, clear evidence that both Europe and America are targets of the jihadist and *takfiri* movements. Khalidi, Qutb and Bin Laden intentionally misrepresent Islamic history as well as modern 20th and early 21st century history. For example, Khalidi lumps together the following wars with no analysis or discussion of the events leading to or the conclusion of each of these conflicts, only to say that these wars represent America's gradual plan for dominance in the Middle East:

- The Partition of Palestine and the First Arab-Israeli War (1948);
- The Six-Day War (1967);
- The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)
- Operation Desert Storm (1990-1991);
- Operation Enduring Freedom (2002-Present); and
- Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003-Present).

Khalidi claims that only jihadist tactics have frustrated Israel's attempt to assign the Palestinians to oblivion. Khalidi describes Palestinians as perpetual victims subject to the whims of history, rather than being accountable for any disastrous decisions on the part of their leaders.

Khalidi's Discourse on the *Sahwa* (Islamist Re-awakening)

Khalidi, like Zawahiri and Bin Laden, is obsessed with the 1967 Six-Day War, and marks this event as the start of the *Sahwa* (Islamist Reawakening). *Sahwa*, like *Takfiri*, is another word American military leaders should understand. *Sahwa* is a movement that argues for the imposition of uncompromising Islamist politics as a remedy for the failures of secular ideologies. This is the movement that created Bin Laden and Zawahiri, and began the process of globalizing jihadist efforts around the world. Khalidi writes that the *Sahwa*, which used the defeat and humiliation of 1967 to infuse segments of youth with the jihadist spirit that led to the:

- Eviction of Soviet forces from Afghanistan;
- Taking the Afghan War into Chechnya and fighting the Soviets there;
- 2000 Palestinian *Intifadah* (uprising) and the ascendancy of Hamas;
- Confronting Serbian forces and fighting with the Bosnians;
- Ejecting the United States from Somalia;
- Confronting what he calls the crusader (Manila Government) in the Philippines (Basilan Island and Mindanao); and
- Attacking the United States in the heart of its economic and military centers on September 11, 2001.

Khalidi gloats about September 11th, and discusses how the United State's awesome power has failed to apprehend Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader in Afghanistan. He argues that America has forsaken its democratic freedoms for all practicing Muslims and that all practicing Muslims have effectively become terrorists. Khalidi completely distorts the reality of Muslim-American life by lumping together American Muslims living their daily lives in peace with those Muslims in American custody in Guantanamo Bay. This selective story-telling, in which events, places, people, and even 1,400 years of Islamic law and thought are reduced to sound-bites is a favored ideological tactic of jihadist ideologues aiming to incite the uneducated. *Fatwas* instead of legal opinions usually done by a Mufti (he who issues fatwas) and with consultation with scholars and jurists, have now reduced this instrument into taking a contract out on Muslims and non-Muslims alike deemed *kafir* (apostate).

Khalidi's introduction to Qutb's writings ends with the familiar accusations that the United States:

- Dominates the region's raw material;
- Propagates Jewish (Khalidi as well as Qutb was anti-Jewish) interests in the region; and
- Stifles the freedom to fight and suppressing Islamist movements by preventing *darwa* (evangelism), charities, jihadist spirit, suppressing the *Sahwa*, stripping new generations of their Muslim identities and penetrating the region philosophically and ideologically.

Khalidi purposefully uses *Islamiyoon* (Islamist), Islam and Muslim interchangeably in his book to lump all Muslims together as means of inducing the clash of civilizations he desires. Khalidi ends with a powerful and violent appeal to his readers that the United States wishes to prevent the restoration of the caliphate and will mobilize all elements of national power to achieve this objective. He then makes his final sentence in true jihadist and *takfiri* sermonized fashion, "...what does your God desire?" "He desires that which

transcends time, that these lands remain Muslim and to prepare for jihad and torn this land into a graveyard for your enemies."

Khalidi's superficial discussion and emotional symbolism sidesteps even a cursory discussion of Islamic history that would expose the shallow manipulation Khalidi is attempting. For example, the caliphate is an institution born out of pre-Islamic Arabian tradition. In Al-Tabari's *History of Prophets and Kings*, written late ninth century AD, one learns that upon Prophet Muhammad's death the question as to who succeeded him was heavily influenced by the tribal political customs of the time. This included Omar ibn al-Khattab posturing Abu Bakr to succeed Muhammad using threats, negotiation and compromise. Pre-Islamic societies typically designated a *Khalifa* (successor) that ruled the tribal confederacy from an urban center. The institution was Islamized upon the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632AD and remained until 1924 when it was abolished by Kamal Ataturk, who deposed the last Ottoman Sultan and Caliph. The word *Khalifa* simply means successor; the institution of the Caliphate was Islamized by the *Sahaba* (companions of Muhammad)—Omar, Abu Bakr, and Ali with little guidance from the Prophet. When asked how Muslims should govern, Prophet Muhammad's typical response was that if you feared God, you would make the right choices or come together in consensus. Neither the Quran nor the Prophet's sayings indicate how Muslims should govern themselves. After Muhammad's death, Omar negotiated, threatened and co-opted two other factions (the Quraysh in Mecca, and the Medinese) who felt Muhammad's successor should come from their ranks and successfully postured Abu Bakr to succeed Muhammad. Khalidi's modern interpretation of Qutb's writings demonstrates why it is incumbent upon United States military planners to read, understand and, with our Muslim allies, work towards a policy of discrediting this work. Khalidi's rhetoric, and that of Qutb's before him, corrodes Islamic society, culture and history. They are both a clear danger to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Why is Sayid Qutb Relevant to the Global War on Terrorism?

Qutb's writing, in particular his infamous *Maalim Fee Al-Tariq* (Milestones Along the Road), his political manifesto, and this lesser known anti-American work revived by Sheikh Khalidi are among the most important works in Islamist militant discourse. Islamist militant leaders use Qutb to indoctrinate the more vulnerable members of Muslim society to their ideology of hatred, victimization and the violence. American military planners should be aware of Qutb, as he writes extensively about the United States.

From 1948-1950, Qutb was in the United States on behalf of the Egyptian Education Ministry to the United States. He was tasked to acquire an

advanced education and to observe the American education curriculum to see if elements could be incorporated into the Egyptian primary education system. Qutb expressed grudging admiration for America's industrial and economic might, as well as its management and organizational styles, but he wrote that despite America's industry it does not possess civil rights or equality among the races: *"The material supersedes the human element in America, and there are distinctions between the races, humankind and even the animals."*

Qutb comments on America's Founding Fathers by noting that the concept of the pursuit of happiness supersedes the collective good and leads to selfishness." In addition, the origins of America's Founding Fathers are of an English imperial nature. Qutb only has cursory knowledge of American history and does not understand the evolution of American society or its political institutions.

Qutb on Controlling America's Lust for War

Qutb writes that the concept of a world without war is a fantasy created by the United States to reserve for itself ultimate military power and preeminence. He argues that America's essence is one of competition and constant tension. He believes that the war for independence was an unwarranted revolt against the U.S.' mother country (England), the Civil War was about economic dominance of the South, and World War I, World War II, and Korea were aggressive wars of choice. The idea that American people love peace is a fiction. Qutb does not contextualize these events, even ignoring the fight against fascism in World War II. It is as if history is completely at the whim of the United States.

Qutb believes Americans are morally corrupt and dedicated to the pursuit of pleasure and leisure. For Qutb, Americans are steeped in a culture of cheating and deception. He calls the United States a false civilization, and democracy the biggest deception propagated by America. In a letter written to Abbas Khidr while Qutb was in the United States, he wrote, "America is a global factory, its purpose is to Americanize the world, and thereby transform the globe into a large factory which would be the biggest human crisis."

In another letter from Qutb to Anwar al-Midawi, he explained that, "There is deep isolation, real isolation, isolation of person, thought, body and soul here in this large factory they call the New World."

In an article published in the December 1949 of the Egyptian journal *Al-Kutab*, Qutb further explored the weakness of the West:

“I have spent a year in this large factory they call the New World. Having traveled from New York, Washington DC, Denver and Greeley, Colorado, I have not found a human face that expresses what it means to be human. I have found the highwayman and deceiver everywhere. There only obsession is money and lust. The fixation with the dollar is all consuming.”

Within a year of his return to Egypt, Qutb wrote two anti-American booklets. The first was the *Battle of Islam and Capitalism* and the second *World Peace and Islam*. His radical ideas cause his dismissal from the Education Ministry and Qutb immersed himself into the radicalism and revolutionary politics of the *Ikhwan Al-Muslimeen* (Muslim Brotherhood). In his two published books on America, Qutb was influenced by the events of the Korean War and the threat of a nuclear standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union. He saw the United Nations as failing to restore world peace and wrote that, *“alignment of the Globe into Islamic principles would guarantee world peace.”* Qutb felt that there was only one sanctioned war and that was for the sake of God, to raise God’s word and propagate God’s faith. Qutb believed that war conducted Islamically was to liberate mankind from worshipping other than God. He felt the Islamist agenda would first bring peace to the conscience, then the home, then society and finally to the world. He added that the United States prevents peace at all four levels highlighted. Qutb argued that America needs wars to sustain its economy and capitalist system and wrote that the Korean War employed a million Americans. Qutb was convinced that the United States wanted to draft Arabs as fuel for a war against the Soviets.

Qutb and his Militant Salafi Views of the Cold War

Although Qutb had a destructive obsession with the United States, he was even more venomous toward the Soviet Union. Writing that the Soviets possessed a naked and uninhibited hatred for Islam, Qutb reminded readers that the USSR recognized Israel even before the United States. Qutb never explained Stalin’s reason for doing this, which was to undermine England. Stalin misjudged the threat and revised his stance in later years to focus his efforts on the United States. In Qutb’s view, both the United States and Soviet Union victimized Islam and Muslims. Khalidi argues that Qutb’s most prescient explanation of what is happening today is that:

“The wars between the Soviets and United States will occur in our lands, in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Pakistan, Afghanistan and North Africa. It will be waged in the petroleum fields of Iran and Arabia. It will destroy our (Muslim) exports, ruin our lives and sow destruction on our own lands.”

Qutb, and his revivalist Khalidi, selectively mix histories melding the Cold War with events today selectively to incite those with little knowledge into a life of active and perpetual jihad against both the United States and Muslims who disagree with their world view.

Qutb proposed that Muslims should take a hands-off approach to the Cold War, saying:

- I. Islam opposes participation in Cold War intrigues.
- II. Islam forbids aiding those nations that have fought Islam and expels Muslims from their lands such as the Soviets, the United States, France, Britain and Israel.
- III. Islam compels the Muslim to Jihad declaring a state of war between Islam and these nations.
- IV. No material support should be provided to these enemies.

Qutb ignored the complex political relationships and treaties that Prophet Muhammad himself engaged in and the long history of alliances and practical politics engaged by the caliphs over centuries. Qutb simply advocated the isolation of all Muslims from the world, hoping this isolation would encourage violent radicalism directed against the United States, the former Soviet Union and Europe. He wrote, "*Nations should withdraw into the salvation of Islam, by applying its laws in government.*" Aside from an unhealthy and irrational call for global isolationism, Qutb calls for governments to institute Islamic laws in while purposefully sidestepping the question: who will interpret these laws? Whose Islam will they interpret? Qutb sums up by saying that Muslims united could oppose Cold War superpowers and that an Islamist bloc should be created as a counterweight to the capitalist and communist blocs.

Khalidi's Conclusions on Qutb's Writings against America

Khalidi tells his readers that Qutb offered an Islamic explanation for the events of 9-11, Operations Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, 52 years before these events came to pass. Khalidi glorifies Qutb, saying he predicted that Arab alliances with the Soviet would fail, and the United States would impose its order upon the globe. He goes on to discuss the inevitability of the clash between Islam and the United States and argues that Usamah Bin Laden and Mullah Omar are rallying points and mechanisms to strike at the United States.

Khalidi ends his revival of anti-American Qutbism by distorting American pre and post Cold War history with a list of the United States' crimes:

- Inciting wars of aggression;
- Paying Europe to wage war against the Soviets;
- Conducting reconstruction and the Marshal Plan for its own selfish agenda of global dominance;
- Using alliances, aid and instruments of national power to sustain conflict, and;
- Relying upon the Arab ruling elite and not the people in order to sustain conflict against Islamist groups.

Conclusion

It is vital that American policymakers understand the ideology of our adversary and explore books circulating in Arab streets, especially those that offer a twisted version of Islamic, American, pre and post Cold War history in order to justify, incite, and recruit Muslims to the cause of Militant-Salafism. Assessing these works in our military war colleges and academies will help future military leaders understand the threat and the ideology that sustains jihadists. In addition, these books demonstrate the arguments used to sway impoverished, uncommitted, and frustrated groups to the temporarily empowering, yet socially destructive, jihadist movement. Qutb went even further in his Islamist political manifesto *Milestones Along the Road*, declaring all modern Arab governments to be in a state of *jahiliyah*, and condemning all Muslims that do not subscribe to his doctrine as apostates. The current war demands that we not neglect the words Qutb wrote four decades ago, or those Khalidi writes today. American military planners should also understand the vocabulary of Militant Salafism to gain an appreciation for their adversary in operational and tactical situations. From a strategic perspective, Qutb is a major influence on Bin Laden and Zawahiri and his writings reflect the global nature of the Militant Salafist agenda that transcends solutions to regional problems. We must assess these writings with the same vigor as Russian tracts on communist ideology and global strategy during the Cold War.

LCDR Aboul-Enein has been highlighting Arabic books of military significance for several years. His work appears primarily in the U.S. Army's Infantry Journal and Military Review. LCDR Aboul-Enein wishes to thank the John T. Hughes Library in Washington DC and Harvard University's Widener Library for making Khalidi's book available for analysis. He would like to thank Mr. Brian Fishman of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, whose discussions and edits enhanced this work.