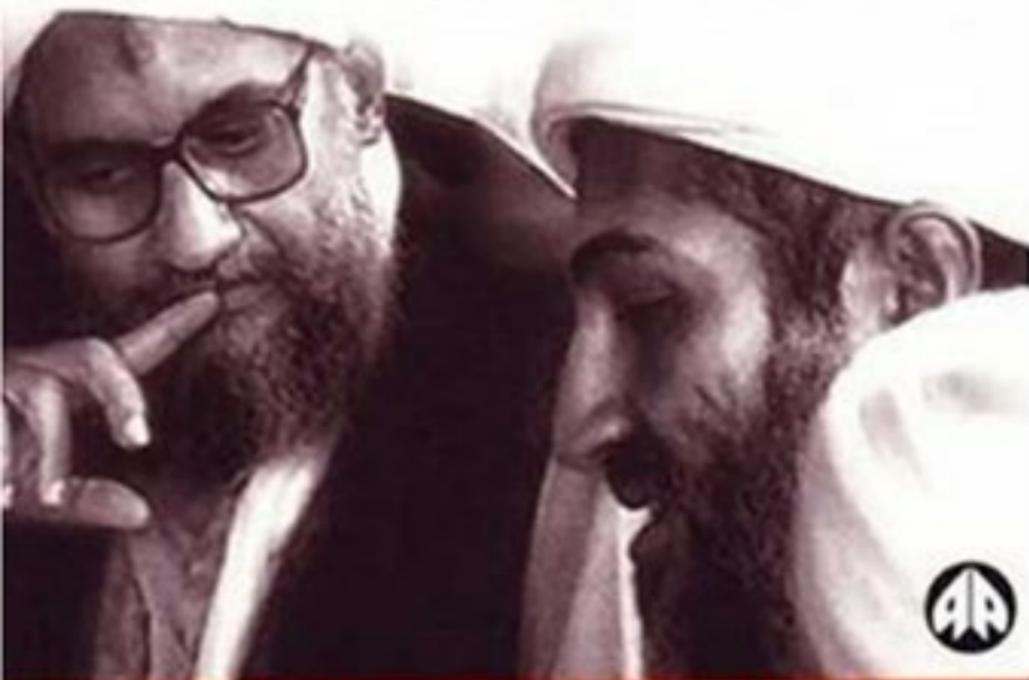


THE ROAD TO AL-QAEDA

The Story of Bin Lâden's Right-Hand Man

MONTASSER AL-ZAYYAT

TRANSLATED BY AHMED FEKRY • EDITED BY SARA NIMIS



With an Introduction by Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi'

CRITICAL STUDIES ON ISLAM

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Series Preface

Critical Studies on Islam
Series editors: Azza Karam
and Ziauddin Sardar

Islam is a complex, ambiguous term. Conventionally it has been used to describe religion, history, culture, civilization and worldview of Muslims. But it is also impregnated with stereotypes and postmodern notions of identity and boundaries. The diversity of Muslim peoples, cultures, and interpretations, with their baggage of colonial history and postcolonial present, has transformed Islam into a powerful global force.

This unique series presents a far-reaching, critical perspective on Islam. It analyses the diversity and complexity of Islam through the eyes of people who live by it. Provocative and thoughtful works by established as well as younger scholars will examine Islamic movements, the multilayered questions of Muslim identity, the transnational trends of political Islam, the specter of ethnic conflict, the political economy of Muslim societies and the impact of Islam and Muslims on the West.

The series is built around two fundamental questions. How are Muslims living, thinking and breathing Islam? And how are they rethinking and reformulating it and shaping and reshaping the global agendas and discourses?

As Critical Studies on Islam seeks to bridge the gap between academia and decision-making environments, it will be of particular value to policy makers, politicians, journalists and activists, as well as academics.

Dr Azza Karam is a Program Director at the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) International Secretariat based in New York. She has worked as a consultant and trainer with the United

Nations and various Middle Eastern and European NGOs, and has lectured and published extensively on conflict, Islam, the Middle East and the politics of development issues. Her books include *Women, Islamisms and State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt* (1998), *A Woman's Place: Religious Women as Public Actors* (ed.) (2002) and *Transnational Political Islam: Religion, Ideology and Power* (2003).

Ziauddin Sardar is a well-known writer, broadcaster and cultural critic. He is the editor of the critical international journal of contemporary art and culture *Third Text* and considered a pioneering writer on Islam. He is the author of several books for Pluto Press, most recently *Islam, Postmodernism and Other Futures: A Ziauddin Sardar Reader*, edited by Sohail Inayatullah and Gail Boxwell.

Notes on the English Language Edition

Ahmed Fekry and Sara Nimis

Spellings for Arabic names and words in this text are chosen to facilitate easy pronunciation and reading for the English reader, without bogging him or her down with phonetic symbols. For this reason we have used the English equivalents for those consonants in the Arabic language that have close equivalents in English. Two consonants that have no close equivalents are the *‘ain*, a voiced pharyngeal fricative sound represented in the text by an /‘/ and the *hamza* or glottal stop which is represented by an /’/. Arabic also has a system of long and short vowel sounds, which is a useful guide for stressing the correct syllable in a given word. The long vowel sounds are represented as /ee/, /ū/ and /ā/.

Terms and names specific to Egypt are spelled to reflect their local pronunciation, most noticeable in the use of ‘g’ (in names such as the Gamā‘a al-Islāmiyya) where a classical pronunciation would call for a ‘j’. In less regionally specific (usually religious terms), such as *jihādi*, the spelling reflects the classical pronunciation. For names that are well known in the English press, or that have official English spellings in Egypt common spellings are used. For example, Al-Qaeda rather than Al-Qa’da.

The following are Arabic terms that do not have an English translation that sufficiently captures their meaning in Arabic. Terms in italics are transliterated using the above system, whereas terms in normal print have a standard English spelling.

1. *ameer*: literally “prince,” refers in the text to the leader of an Islamist group

2. *ansār*: historically the inhabitants of Medina who supported the Prophet upon his arrival in their city after his migration from Mecca
3. *awqāf*: religious endowments which go to support mosques and other religious institutions
4. *azhari*: a graduate of the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, a Sunni institution which draws students from all over the Muslim world
5. caliph: from the Arabic *khalifa*, refers to political and spiritual leader of the greater community of Muslims
6. caliphate: the lands falling under the authority of a caliph
7. *da'wa*: literally “call” or invitation”, refers to the efforts of pious Muslims to bring other Muslims to a life guided by Islamic orthodoxy
8. *fatwa*: an authoritative command or proclamation regarding a religious question, issued by a scholar of Islamic *fiqh* (below)
9. *fitnah*: literally “ordeal,” refers to civil strife, or more specifically to fighting between political factions with ideological differences, such as in the time after the death of the Prophet
10. *fiqh*: the science of Islamic law
11. *hadeeth*: The traditions of the Prophet, including his habits and the sayings attributed to him. For Sunni Muslims these traditions are an important component of Islamic *shari'a*
12. hajj: the obligatory pilgrimage to Mecca, which all Muslims should perform within their lifetime; also used as a term of respect for one who has completed the pilgrimage
13. *halāl*: acceptable according to Islamic law or Islamic *shari'a*
14. *harām*: forbidden according to Islamic law or Islamic *shari'a*
15. *hijra*: literally “migration,” refers to the migration of the Prophet to Medina, or more generally, to Muslims leaving communities of nonbelievers
16. *ijtihād*: the use of independent judgment as a source of knowledge
17. Islamic: associated with or having the characteristics of the religion of Islam
18. Islamist: person or organization actively promoting the application of Islamic principals to the political sphere

19. *jihad*: literally “struggle” or “battle,” refers to the duty of all Muslims to struggle against wrongfulness and fight those who threaten Islam
20. *jihādi*: supportive of or promoting the importance of jihad; in the text it refers to those supportive of militant action to achieve Islamist goals
21. Koran: The holy book of Islam
22. *muhājireen*: literally “migrants,” originally refers to those who followed the Prophet in his migration from Mecca to Medina. The term is also used in the text to refer to the Arab Afghans, or Arabs from various countries who moved to Afghanistan to participate in jihad
23. *mujāhideen*: Those who are fighting jihad. In the text refers to those fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan
24. *‘omra*: a minor pilgrimage
25. *redda*: literally “to turn away,” refers to conversion from Islam to another faith, or ceasing to believe in the tenets of Islam
26. *shari’a*: literally the Islamic “path,” refers to the guidelines by which good Muslims should live
27. *shura* council: high level decision-making body in Islamic organizations and governments which takes decisions through consensus
28. *sunna*: prophetic traditions, including habits and sayings attributed to him
29. Sunni Muslims: Muslims who derive their understanding of Islamic *shari’a* from the *sunna* or traditions of the Prophet. The majority of the world’s Muslims are Sunni
30. *umma*: The Islamic nation or community of believers, the greater nation of all Muslims. Originally referred to the followers of the Prophet, now is also used to mean nation generally

The translators have added explanations of regionally specific references to the original Arabic version. This material is found in the text in brackets, and in the endnotes.

Preface

Montasser al-Zayyāt's critical biography of Ayman al-Zawahiri is an important resource for unlocking the mysteries of the Al-Qaeda organization, and the international Islamist movement. Zawahiri is today one of the most wanted people in the world, known as the second in command in the Al-Qaeda organization after Osāma bin Lāden. He is considered by some experts to be the brains behind its operations. It is significant that an Egyptian has taken this role. Egypt has a long history of both forceful modernization schemes, and fierce resistance to them, usually charged with an Islamist ideology. Egyptian Islamists are numerous and have much experience in the strategies of confronting the powers that be. Zayyāt's writing is both a psychological biography of Ayman al-Zawahiri and a history of the Islamist movement in Egypt, both of which were pivotal in the development of Al-Qaeda. Thus, the book gives a unique insider's view into the pressing questions of the origins of the Al-Qaeda organization, its objectives and strategies, and what should be expected from its adherents in the twenty-first century.

Montasser al-Zayyāt's status as an insider to the Islamic movement in Egypt dates back to 1975 when the movement was gaining new popularity among Egypt's youth. He first met Ayman al-Zawahiri when he was imprisoned by the Egyptian authorities in 1981 as a suspect in the assassination of then Egyptian president, Anwar al-Sadāt. His historical project expanded upon publication of Ayman al-Zawahiri's book *Knights Under the Banner of the Prophet*, which was written somewhere in the caves near Tora Bora during the American strikes on Afghanistan, then published in December of 2001. Zawahiri's book contained ideological rants and stinging critiques and accusations of Zayyāt and others. Zayyāt addresses many of those ideas and accusations in his writing.

The publication of the original Arabic version of Zayyāt's history and response to Zawahiri in 2002 was surrounded by some controversy

from its Egyptian readership. Zayyāt emphasizes that this was not due to any disagreement regarding the validity of the information contained in it. Rather, some Islamists disagreed with the timing of the book, because it was published during the United States military strikes against Afghanistan. Egyptian Islamists saw the strikes as unjust and in the service of cynical American interests. They feared that the criticisms in the book would serve to justify American aggression. For this reason, Zayyāt decided not to print a second edition in Arabic.

The English version of Zayyāt’s book comes at a critical time, when Ayman al-Zawahiri is coming to the fore as the deputy head of the Al-Qaeda organization. In January of 2003, Zawahiri sent an email to the website of Zayyāt’s organization, the Future Center for Studies, praising the September 11 attacks, and issuing what the *Cairo Times* called a “cyber call” for continuing attacks against Americans (January 16–22, 2003). Zayyāt’s close relationship with Zawahiri in earlier days, and his continued contact with him, makes his psychological biography of Zawahiri a key piece in understanding not only the philosophy of the second most wanted man in the world, but the general phenomenon of militant Islamism and the new trend toward targeting the United States and its allies.

As a history of Islamist movements in Egypt, Zayyāt’s book is an important resource for English language readers and researchers who are interested in the details of the activities of the various Islamist groups in Egypt. Because of the repressive political environment in which they function, and the resulting secrecy of these organizations, even experts on the subject are deeply confused about the dynamics of the multiple organizations that make up the movement. As an insider, Zayyāt has become an invaluable resource for Western academics and journalists seeking a deeper understanding of the issues at stake.

Islamism

Islam has many contemporary forms, sects and offshoots. Ideas of what the “true” Islam is in this day and age vary greatly among the different groups. Only a minority of believers in Islam (Muslims) are also proponents of the modern political philosophy that has come to

be called Islamism. This political philosophy can be defined in the broadest sense as one promoting the application of Islamic *shari'a* (Islamic principles) to modern governance. Within the Islamist movement, there are many divisions regarding not only the structure and nature of the ideal Islamic government, but also the appropriate means for achieving it. Below is a brief overview of the tenets that are common to most Islamist groups, and that distinguish them from the general population of Muslims, as well as some of the main points of disagreement among Islamists.

In the Islamic tradition, the Prophet himself, along with some close companions who ruled after him, was a political, military and economic leader. According to this tradition, it was this leadership, guided by a prophetic understanding of divine justice, which enabled the wealth and greatness of the Islamic empire to emerge from the harshness of life in the war zone that was the Arabian peninsula in the time of *jahiliyya* (literally “ignorance”), meaning paganism. For this reason, a fundamental unifying idea among Islamists is that Islam is not only a way of life, but a way of just leadership in the spheres of politics and economics. Thus, for Islamists, real Islam is not possible under secular leadership.

It is from this vision of their history that Islamists understand political rule by Islamic *shari'a* to be the only guarantor of prosperity and harmony on earth, and paradise after death. The military weakness and economic hardships of people of the Muslim world, through the colonial period to the present, are attributed by Islamists, as well as much of the general population, to the error of following Western hegemony instead of Islamic *shari'a*. This history of defining good politics through religious reference has infused Islam with a distinctly political character throughout its historical development. Faith in the benefits that would flow from government in the tradition of the Prophet is at the root of Islamist intolerance for national policies that are controlled by a dependence upon American aid, or by the need to maintain good trade relations. The most often cited example of the folly of bowing to American pressures in regional politics is the situation of the civilian population in the Palestinian territories. Television news in the Arab world is flooded with pictures of Palestinian women and

children, unprotected by any army, throwing themselves bodily against the Israeli tanks that continue every day to roll into new neighborhoods.

While most Muslims would agree that Western hegemony has produced a sad state of affairs in the Arab world, Islamists are distinguished from the general population by their beliefs about what is the practical and correct response. In Egypt, Muslims can be divided roughly into three groups in terms of their perspectives on the appropriate response to the present situation of political disempowerment in the Arab world: mainstream Muslims, Islamists who support what they call a *da'wa* approach to social transformation, and Islamists who support a *jihādi* approach.

As stated above, most mainstream Muslims generally agree with the complaints that more radical Islamists have against American hegemony. However, unlike Islamists, most Muslims consider direct confrontation with the powers that be as something to be avoided. Their reasons range from a strong preference for peace and stability to a sense of weakness in the face of international power politics. Besides a general resistance to resorting to armed struggle among mainstream Muslims, there is a clear consensus that attacks against civilians are *harām*, or forbidden by Islam. One reason for this position is that most Muslims assume that American citizens are not directly responsible for the harmful or unjust activities of their government. Even for those who do blame the American public for the country's unfair foreign policies, almost all Muslims agree that the prophetic traditions clearly forbid attacks against civilians under any circumstances.

Islamists are distinguished from mainstream Muslims because they are politically active in promoting a government based on Islamic principals. Islamists who believe in using the *da'wa* approach seek to achieve social change through a bottom-up approach. The term *da'wa* means literally "calling" and refers to the practice of Muslims calling others to the right path, or a life guided by Islamic orthodoxy. Based on an Islamic principle that advises Muslims to begin social change with themselves, these activists work to live a good life, and to spread their ideas through their communities, hoping eventually to create an Islamic state by transforming the population at large into a pious community. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is the most well-known

contemporary organization concerned with the *da'wa* approach, though many more exist. The most direct participation that members of this organization take in impacting government policy is to run for seats in the People's Assembly as independent candidates (the Brotherhood is outlawed as a political party in Egypt). There is general agreement among Islamists who follow a *da'wa* approach that it is *harām*, or forbidden by Islam, to target civilians of any nationality or religion.

Jihādi Islamists are the minority within the Islamist movement who believe in a militant approach to social change. They seek to transform Muslim societies from the top by fighting leaders who use political power to lead Muslims away from the path of righteousness. Their goals are generally to eliminate the Western influence in the region and reclaim the governance of areas already populated with a Muslim majority for Muslims who intend to rule by Islamic *shari'a*. In earlier stages, *jihādi* organizations tended to target key military or official personnel in local modernizing regimes and not civilians. There is a recent trend, however, toward shifting targets from local Western-oriented institutions toward the Western power centers themselves.

Jihādi groups such as Zawahiri's Egyptian Islamic Jihad and the Gamā'a al-Islāmiyya found much support among *jihādi* Islamists for armed strikes on military and government personnel. Still, the question of attacks against civilians remains a sticky point in the ideology even of these groups. As will be described in the following chapters, to whatever degree civilians, Egyptian or foreign, became the targets or accidental victims of these attacks, *jihādi* groups witnessed a corresponding decline in their popularity. The Luxor attacks perpetrated by the Gamā'a al-Islāmiyya led to internal divisions in the group and eventually to its famous ceasefire initiative, in which Zayyāt was a key player. Still, the issue continues to be a source of controversy and disputes even within the most militant groups. The multiplicity of perspectives among *jihādi* Islamists, coupled with the sense that any ideological deviation is *harām*, or forbidden, has assured the continued splintering of groups and breaking of alliances.

Osāma bin Lāden distinguished himself and the Al-Qaeda organization from many *jihādi* Islamists on the questions of targeting civilians and targeting the West when, in February of 1998, he issued a *fatwa*,

or a religious judgment meant to be binding on all Muslims (published in its entirety by *Al-Quds al-'Arabi* in Arabic), calling for continued attacks against Americans anywhere in the world. He justified his call with the argument that civilians in the United States and other allied countries use their tax dollars to support policies that have led to the deaths of Muslim civilians, and that for this reason they can be considered combatants. Perhaps the most important function of the Al-Qaeda organization is its ability to manage the divisions between *jihādi* groups, and internationalize the *jihādi* movement into one unified organization made of discrete units each with its own leadership. The characteristics unique to the Al-Qaeda organization are discussed in greater detail below.

Developments in ideology and strategy

Zayyāt brings out several turning points in the development of the ideology and strategy of Dr. Zawahiri that have important implications for the phenomenon of militant Islam in general. Zayyāt points to the death of the Egyptian activist Sayyid Qutb as an event that had a deep impact on Zawahiri and other young Egyptians, who were disgruntled with what the revolution had brought them. Qutb was famous for his book *Milestones* in which he charged modern Muslim regimes with *jahiliyya*, or the ignorance of being non-Muslim. He argued that modern institutions and ideologies were innovations to be rejected as a whole and that Islamic *shari'a*, as a divinely dictated way of life, should be implemented in its completeness. Zawahiri, like many young Egyptians, was drawn to Islamism when the Nasser government made a martyr of Qutb by putting him to death by hanging on August 29, 1966 for his radical views. Qutb's guidelines for activists are seen by many Islamists to be the foundation of the contemporary movement.

Zayyāt describes Zawahiri's experience of torture at the hands of the Egyptian authorities after the assassination of Sadāt as a devastating blow in Zawahiri's life. In his account, the Zawahiri that lived in Egypt, before the torture that led to his flight to Saudi Arabia, is a soft-spoken, modest and thoughtful person. There are many indications that the radicalization of Zawahiri, which has landed him in his

present situation as an international outlaw, developed after his experience of torture at the hands of the Egyptian regime. Torture was and still is considered by the Egyptian authorities as a means of fighting terrorism: it is effective in eliciting information from suspects regarding possible future attacks, and in apprehending other activists. According to an article in the *Guardian*, issued January 24, 2003, many human rights activist have observed the link between the humiliation and trauma of torture, and militant political activity. This element of Zayyāt's narration deserves special attention as a clue to the sources of the general phenomenon of militant activity, especially in reference to the Islamist movement.

Another important shift that Zayyāt's narrative witnesses in Zawahiri's ideology is the changing of the focus of verbal and military attacks from local regimes to the international system, and more specifically its main power center in Washington. A few decades ago, many Islamic groups were struggling against what Zawahiri named the "near enemy," meaning governments consisting primarily of Muslims ruling a Muslim majority, but using Western institutions and cultural forms. These have lost credibility among Islamists, usually due to their accommodation of the interests of their Western allies, many of whose policies appear to be biased against the interests of the masses in the region. These are enemies because they are unable to rule by the requirements of Islamic *shari'a*, and because they appear to be cynically uninterested in the opinions of their people.

It was believed that the goals of eliminating foreign influence in Muslim lands could best be achieved by eliminating the regimes that were their mouthpieces in the East. In Zawahiri's terminology, such regimes were set in opposition to the "far enemy," meaning the governments of non-Muslim populations who actually benefited from their dominance of the world order. From a practical perspective, it must have seemed an impossible task to put even a dent into the armor of either of the two superpowers who dominated world politics through the early days of Zawahiri's involvement in the movement. However, his signing of the alliance with bin Lāden that formed the International Islamic Front for Jihad on the Jews and Crusaders in 1998 marked the

shift of emphasis from the local to the global picture, and the beginning of his direct confrontation with the United States and its allies.

Zayyāt sees the change in Zawahiri’s ideology as a result of his relationship with bin Lāden, whose sites were already set on his enemy across the Atlantic. Zawahiri was in such need of bin Lāden’s good connections with the Taliban, and more importantly his financial resources, that he was compelled to adopt his ideological perspectives. This development coincided with a parallel shift in the *jihādi* Islamist movement on the international level. An important source of the new boldness and conviction of the necessity, and now, the possibility, of launching a global jihad against the United States may have been the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Arab Muslims from all over the Middle East (primarily Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Algeria) were moving to Afghanistan to fight the Soviet occupation, and with it, the “Evil Empire” of Soviet atheism. These immigrant fighters, called Arab Afghans, or *mujāhideen* (literally “jihad fighters”) were at this time supported by American supplies of weapons and expertise in their struggle against a mutual enemy. Their final victory over the Soviets was to them a victory over domination by modern economies, armies and institutions. Indeed, to the Arab Afghans, the fall of the Soviet Union, which swiftly followed their retreat from Afghanistan, was a direct result of a righteous jihad, fought by a small team of believers against the Soviet Goliath. There is much to suggest that this victory gave the Arab Afghans a taste for the possibility of victory over Western hegemony on the global level.

The Islamist Movement in Egypt

Zayyāt sees the collapse of the Ottoman caliphate and the ensuing Westernization of the Arab world as the main event that marked the beginning of the Islamist movement in Egypt. This is when segments of society began organizing themselves to bring about a return to Islamic traditions and values through the rejection of Western lifestyle and political organization. This goal was originally pursued through *da’wa*, or preaching to other Muslims to live a life guided by religious values.

Zayyāt sees the Islamist movement in Egypt as a response to the colonial experiences of these areas and the continuing tensions caused by Western hegemony in the region. The movement was subjected to the measures taken by Gamāl ‘Abdel Nasser, as a component of his modernization program, which began almost immediately after he took power in 1953, to crush Islamist organizations as a presence on the Egyptian political scene. The most prominent of the Islamist organizations at the time was the Muslim Brotherhood. Zayyāt notes that the popularity of these movements increased as faith in Nasser’s aspirations dwindled. Specifically, the disappointment caused by the failure of the 1967 Six Day War was a turning point in the popularity of the Islamist movement. The loss resulted in the defeat of the Egyptian forces by Israel and the seizure of the Sinai Peninsula. The Islamist movement offered a different vision that appealed to the disgruntled Egyptian youth.

After Nasser’s death in 1970, Anwar al-Sadāt took the reigns of government. He attempted to win the support of religious groups by lightening up restrictions on their political activity. Many more organizations emerged during the Sadāt era with the goal of overthrowing the regime and establishing an Islamic state. The membership and leadership as well as the titles of these organizations developed with the formation of coalitions and splintering along ideological lines. It was also during this period that the movement developed into a call for instituting Islamic *shari‘a* as the basis for law and government of the country. Militant action by groups, especially against the Egyptian government, was seen by such groups as a necessary step to replacing the regime with one that would impose an Islamic way of life upon its citizens. Among the first militant groups attempting to change the regime in Egypt was the organization Al-Takfir wal-Hijra, headed by Shukry Mustafa, who held hostage an Egyptian party head in 1977, in an attempt to win the freedom of some imprisoned members.

Today, a few *jihādi* or militant Islamic groups exist in Egypt. The most prominent among them are Islamic Jihad and the Gamā‘a al-Islāmiyya, both of which cooperated in the assassination of Sadāt in 1980. The Gamā‘a al-Islāmiyya was known as one of the most fierce *jihādi* organizations in Egypt because of the infamous attack on tourists which took place in Luxor in Upper Egypt in 1997. Following that

attack, the policies of the group changed radically, leading to the ceasefire agreement of 1999. Although some group members outside of Egypt are believed to have ties with the Al-Qaeda organization, no attacks have been perpetrated by them in Egypt since the agreement to cease attacks against the government. Although Tāha Mūsa (Refā‘i Ahmed Tāha), a leading figure in the Gamā‘a al-Islāmiyya, appeared in a video in late 2000 with bin Lāden and Zawahiri and vowed to carry out attacks on the United States and Israel, the Gamā‘a al-Islāmiyya itself has no official ties with the Al-Qaeda organization. There remains much confusion regarding these groups and their ideologies. As an insider to the movement during the periods he covers, Zayyāt offers an excellent resource for understanding this critical period in the development of the Islamist philosophy that would eventually find its way to Afghanistan and Al-Qaeda.

The book also calls into question the common misconception that religious movements result from poverty and lack of economic opportunities. Zayyāt’s detailed description of Egyptian members problematizes this conclusion, reminiscent of the Cold War conception of guerilla movements, by demonstrating that the Islamist movement in Egypt has been driven by well-educated individuals, who had other opportunities that they sacrificed for their cause.

The Al-Qaeda organization

Al-Qaeda (literally “the base”) has become the most infamous Islamist organization in the world, due to the many attacks attributed to its members, as well as to outside organizations and groups which have links or sympathies to Al-Qaeda. Some of the attacks that have been attributed to the group include the attack on the American military base in Khobar, Saudi Arabia, the 1995 attack on the Egyptian Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, the August 7, 1998 bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and the infamous attacks on the twin towers in New York City, and on the Pentagon building in Washington, DC.

The Al-Qaeda organization originated in Afghanistan from an earlier organization established to recruit sympathizers from Arab countries to join other “Arab Afghans” by volunteering as *mujāhideen* to fight

the secular Soviet presence. It was as a part of this movement, in the 1980s, that Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osāma bin Lāden, heir to millions in Saudi Arabia, joined in what is called by Islamists the Afghan jihad. Ironically, the jihad in Afghanistan was at this time provided with material and logistical support, in the context of Cold War strategy, by the American Central Intelligence Agency.

It was during the fighting against the Soviets in Afghanistan that the relationship between Zawahiri and Bin Lāden was forged. This relationship became official in 1998 upon the signing of an agreement that united Egyptian Islamic Jihad with Al-Qaeda by the formation of the International Islamic Front for Jihad on the Jews and Crusaders. The group aimed to chase out the American presence in the Arabian Gulf, end the embargo against Iraq and seize the holy places in Jerusalem from Israeli control. Many of the details of the organization of Al-Qaeda are as yet mysterious to analysts and experts on the subject. According to Rohan Gunaratna in his book *Inside Al-Qaeda, Global Network of Terror*, the organization consists of political parties, terrorist groups and underground cells which are coordinated and provided with various forms of support through the organization's central leadership in Afghanistan. The degree of organization in the group, and the amount of control that its leadership in Afghanistan has over individual attacks, are still unclear to analysts. For this reason, the inside experience and knowledge contained in the following pages are an important beginning for understanding the root of some of the most pressing obstacles to real security in the contemporary world.