# The Brotherhood

By

Charles A. Kimball

# About This Issue

This issue reminds me of why, 46 years ago, the first directors came up with the name Americans for Middle East Understanding. Understanding, at times, means tackling subjects that lure us back centuries into history.

This is one of those issues. So often we hear of the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaeda, Hizbullah, HAMAS, the Taliban, and the temptation is to round them all up as the usual suspects whenever violence erupts in the Middle East or beyond.

Our feature writer, University of Oklahoma Professor Charles Kimball, advises that, in this case, history is not only instructive—it is imperative.

During our 46 years we have, in a way, formed our own brotherhood—and sisterhood—of over 200 feature *Link* writers, Sadly we report the deaths of three of them.

In 1991 Jerri Bird founded Partners for Peace. The wife of Eugene Bird, a retired foreign service officer, she saw



the sufferings of the Palestinians and, through her organization, worked to tell other Americans how their tax dollars were being spent. Her June-July 2001 *Link* focused specifically on "Americans Tortured in Israeli Jails." Jerri died on Dec. 13, 2012, an activist to the end for peace with justice in the Middle East.

Frank Collins held a doctorate in physical chemistry that may have brought him in touch with the renowned Israeli chemist and human rights advocate Dr. Israel Shahak. To
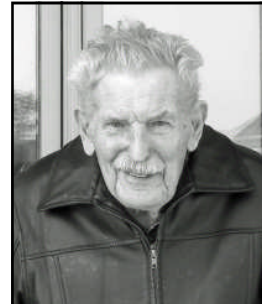


distribute Shahak's translations from the Hebrew press—often more reliable than our own media accounts—Frank founded the Middle East Data Center. In our July-August 1994 *Link*, "The Post-Handshake Landscape," he perceptively foretold what lay in store for the Palestinians.

Richard Curtiss was co-founder and executive editor of *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs.*



(See our tribute on page 14.) Our Sept.-Oct. 1997 *Link* that he wrote on "The Subject No One Mentions: U.S. Aid to Israel" was one of the few issues to go into a second printing. Richard Curtiss died on Jan. 31, 2013.

On page 15 we list books and videos relevant to our feature article.

**John F. Mahoney**
**Executive Director**

For many Americans, the Muslim Brotherhood has become a catch phrase, a convenient category for encapsulating a wide range of images and fears swirling ominously in the post-9/11 world. On many occasions during Q and A following a public lecture, in media interviews, or in private conversations with interested non-specialists during the past decade, a surprising array of people have confidently summarized their perspective with a declarative sentence or rhetorical question: "The Muslim Brotherhood is *the* problem." "It is really all about the Muslim Brotherhood, isn't it?"

When asked to clarify what they mean, a confusing assortment of utterances typically ensues, including: partial and disjointed pronouncements about high profile militants, ominous threats from influential Islamist leaders like Osama bin Laden and post-revolutionary political machinations in Egypt mingle together with dire warnings from well-known television and radio pundits and preachers. The picture that emerges is often one of "detailed ignorance." Substantial issues, particular factoids, and various events conveyed through bloody images are cited but without any coherent frame of reference to interpret these "details."

The end result for many Americans is a generic, Islamophobic worldview in which Islam, the world's second largest religion, is perceived as aggressively militant and Muslims are somehow universally committed—politically and militarily—to world domination.

The breadth of the problem was highlighted with the cover story of *Time* magazine (August 30, 2010) by posing the question, "Is America Islamophobic?" The generic fear of Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood intensified even more less than four months later when unexpected, dramatic events sparked rapid revolutionary overthrows of the long-standing governments in Tunisia and Egypt. In mid-2012, Muhammad Mursi, the Muslim Brotherhood candidate, was elected president of Egypt.

Having been inundated with dramatic media images, fiery rhetoric and gruesome acts by violent extremists claiming inspiration from Islam, revolutionary upheaval in Egypt (and other countries), and non-stop punditry, it is not too surprising to find many Americans resorting to a shorthand way—the Muslim Brotherhood—of summarizing what in the world is going on and why. But such generalizations are not only inaccurate, they are simplistic and dangerously misleading when impacting public policy.

Without question, many things are happening simultaneously at the intersection of religion and politics in various Muslim-majority countries today. Some major developments occur within a specific nation-state context while other, violent activities relate more to transnational groups and organizations. Distinctly different dynamics animate the highly visible events ranging from the attacks of 9/11 and subsequent often gruesome actions by al-Qaeda-inspired groups, a decade of horror in Iraq, extremist policies attributed to the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, clashes amidst ongoing massive protests fueling dramatic changes in Egypt, and so forth.

While the Muslim Brotherhood neither explains nor accounts for most of the multiple, convoluted developments currently unfolding, the profound influence of this movement and its founding figures extends well beyond Egypt. A more coherent understanding of the Muslim Brotherhood is increasingly important today for two reasons. First, it addresses and dispels some of the prevailing presuppositions that fuel widespread Islamophobia in the West. Second, a better understanding of the Muslim Brotherhood helps in clarifying the actions and aspirations of Muslim individuals and Islamic groups operating in Egypt and various other countries.

The revolutionary changes and societal unrest evident in many of the more than 50 countries with Muslim majority populations almost certainly will continue in various forms for the next few decades. Now, more than ever, we must endeavor to move beyond detailed ignorance and work to demystify sources of fueling Islamophobia in the U.S.; see "Fear, Inc.: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network

in America," a 2011 report by the Center for American Progress.

## Understanding the Muslim Brotherhood

A constructive framework for understanding begins with an awareness of the relationship between religion and politics in Islam.

Ask almost any practicing Muslim about that, and the likely response will be the same: There is no distinction; Islam joins religious, political, social, economic, and legal components into a comprehensive way of life. This understanding dates back to the 7th century and the founding of Islam.

Shortly after arriving in Medina in 622 CE, Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, became the leader of a new religious-political government. An entirely new framework for society was developed around the *ummah*, the community bound by the religious faith and commitment of Muslims, rather than by the traditional Arabian model based on tribal affiliation and loyalty.

The Qur'an identifies Muhammad as "a beautiful model" (Qur'an 33:21) and the authoritative leader: "O you who believe, obey God, and obey the Messenger, and those in authority over you" (Qur'an 4:62). Unlike other major religious figures such as Moses, Siddartha Gautama, and Jesus, it is possible to develop a detailed picture of Muhammad and his decisions from the extensive records of his sayings and actions that have been preserved in the *hadith*. Muslims look first to the Qur'an as the highest authority. Next in importance are Muhammad's words and guidance concerning temporal religious, political, social, and military matters.

Records from the decade Muhammad ruled in Medina (622-32 CE) depict him as decisive in matters of religion and frequently pragmatic in the affairs of governance. Two examples illustrate the point. Khalid Ibn al-Walid was appointed and reappointed as commander of the Muslim armies despite the prophet's displeasure with Khalid's religious behavior. While many Muslim leaders far surpassed Khalid in their personal piety and knowledge of Islam, Muhammad recognized that effective military leadership required particular skills apart from religion.

Another example of political pragmatism is seen in the Treaty of Hudaybiyya. After years of warfare, the Muslims of Medina had defeated their Meccan adversaries. Muhammad planned and led 1500 Muslims on a pilgrimage back to Mecca. Some 200 men came out from Mecca to intercept them. Although Muhammad had the upper hand, he began a negotiation process. He agreed to terms whereby the Muslims would not make the pilgrimage that year and both sides would embrace a ten-year peace treaty. Muhammad returned the following year, entered Mecca peacefully, and cleansed the Ka'ba of its many idols. Despite having a dominant position, the episode demonstrated the wisdom of diplomacy with non-Muslim adversaries even though it required Muhammad to agree to some unfavorable provisions.

Since there were Jewish tribes living in Medina during Muhammad's decade of leadership, structures for governance were developed to include provisions for non-Muslims. Several versions of the "constitution" or "charter" of Medina have been preserved. This document contained rules for the communities living together under the authority of God and God's messenger, Muhammad. The framework Muhammad promulgated included several key components: in order to provide security for the community, Medina was to be free from violence and weapons; religious freedoms and security for women were guaranteed; a tax system was established to support the community's needs, especially in time of conflict with the Meccans; and a judicial system facilitated peaceful resolution of disputes.

The Jewish tribes were considered part of the community of believers since the Qur'an clearly affirmed Jews and Christians as "People of the Book." Each group could practice their religion without in-

terference so as long as the Jews did not impede the Muslims. A well-known passage in the Qur'an underscores the religious rights of individuals: "There is no compulsion in matters of religion." (Qur'an 2:256) Non-Muslims were required, however, to pay taxes to support the cost of war against enemies of Islam, but they were not required to fight in the religious wars against the Meccans.

The Qur'an recognizes religious diversity and even declares it part of God's plan (e.g., Qur'an 5:48). The "People of the Book" also are encouraged with the promise of paradise (Qur'an 2:62; 5:69). The positive theological affinity with and affirmation of God's revelations to the "People of the Book" is set alongside the requirement to proclaim the message revealed through Muhammad and stand up in defense of Islam when it is under assault. Thus, this formative period not only offers models of interreligious cooperation and coexistence, it also includes examples of violent confrontation between Muslims and non-Muslims.

The Qur'an also includes several so-called "sword" verses, revelations that enjoin believers to fight back when there is deadly conflict that threatens the community of believers (e.g., Qur'an 2:190-1). Three major battles with the Meccans who sought to crush the nascent Muslim community stand as prime examples of Muslims fighting in defense of Islam.

The ultimate fate of the three Jewish tribes in Medina was grim. The provisions and requirements for non-Muslims living in the Muslim city-state ended with forced exile or worse. After the first major military victory of the Muslims over the Meccans in 624, the weakest Jewish tribe, the Qaynuqa, were forced to leave Medina, taking some of their possessions with them to Syria. Two years later, a second tribe, the Nadir, were accused of plotting against the prophet of Islam following the second major battle. Muhammad was injured and the battle ended without a decisive winner. The Nadir negotiated terms for their departure with their camels and moveable goods while the Muslims seized and divided up the Nadir's land. The third tribe, the Qurayza, were accused of assisting the enemy in the last great battle between the Muslims and Meccans in 627. Although it is not clear whether or to what extent the Qurayza were guilty of treason, a judge appointed for the task by Muhammad declared them guilty and stipulated an extremely harsh penalty: the men of the Qurayza were beheaded in the central marketplace of Medina; their property was seized; and the women and children were sold off into slavery.

Muhammad's leadership in Medina established a new paradigm that included several distinguishing features. The new societal structure for governance made adherence to Islam, not tribal affiliation, the organizing principle. The authority for guiding the new Islamic state would be derived from the Qur'an and the teachings of Muhammad. Developing guidelines for religious practice were intertwined with pragmatic responses to the daily affairs of governance. The first Islamic city-state provided both a model for peaceful coexistence with non-Muslims and precedent for direct confrontation with whoever is perceived to threaten the community of believers. "People of the Book" living under Islamic rule have their rights and should be protected unless they are guilty of joining forces with the enemies who are attacking Islam and Muslims. In this situation, Muslims are allowed or even required to fight back in defense of Islam.

A great deal depends then on the interpretation of what constitutes an attack on Islam and what constitutes "defense." While the three Jewish tribes in Medina suffered a terrible fate, most of Islamic history reflects the more positive side of coexistence. The vast majority of Muslims did not understand the Jewish presence in their midst as a threat that required a military response. The longstanding presence of large Jewish communities in Iran, Iraq, Syria/Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Morocco, and Islamic Spain illustrates the point. A very different dynamic has been evident, of course, in the six decades following the founding of the Jewish state of Israel in 1948.

## The Spread and Splendor of Islam As a Civilizational System

The first 29 years after the death of Muhammad in 632 are called the period of the *rashidun* ("Rightly Guided Caliphs"). Often described as the "golden era," these three decades under the leadership of Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali, the first four successors to Muhammad as temporal rulers, were far from tranquil.

In the midst of rapid territorial expansion and increasing complex political and military responsibilities, bitter internal disputes fueled divisions among Muslims. The most prominent leaders disagreed on how the Caliph should be chosen, the limits on his power, and what could or should be done if the Caliph was thought to be acting unjustly. Multiple vexing challenges confronted the first four Caliphs and other influential leaders during these early decades.

While their responses to emerging issues varied substantially, they sought both guidance and authority from the Qur'an and *hadith*. Any careful study of these early decades reveals the emerging Islamic state and growing empire as a work in progress.

When the fourth Caliph, Ali, was assassinated in 661, Mu'awiya declared himself to be Caliph and promptly moved the seat of Islamic rule to Damascus.

This marked the beginning of the Ummayad dynasty (661-750). Henceforth, the Caliph was a product of dynastic succession. The stunningly rapid expansion of the Islamic empire shifted into an even higher gear.

By the year 732, just 100 years after the death of the prophet, Muslim armies had moved West across North Africa and crossed the Mediterranean Sea to conquer Spain. The Eastern expansion during this period extended across Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Persia (Iran) and into present day Pakistan and India.

The Ummayads were displaced by a new dynasty, the Abbasids (750-1258), and the seat of the Caliphate moved to Baghdad. After the initial outward thrust, Islam continued to spread through the persuasive power of its message, often carried by merchants, and a vibrant, thriving, and sophisticated Islamic civilization. For many centuries, Islamic civilization led the world in science, engineering, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, architecture, navigation, horticulture, philosophy, and calligraphy.

A cursory survey of Islamic history quickly dispels the popular perception among many non-Muslims in the West, namely that the Islamic religious and civilizational system was somehow inherently backward and anti-intellectual. While many Americans remain oblivious both to the advanced accomplishments of Muslims over many centuries and their contributions to Western civilization as we know it, Muslims know that Islam has provided a rational basis for governance and nurtured a rich civilization that led the world.

At the same time, many Muslims have a somewhat idealized image of these early centuries. In theory, Islam presents a comprehensive system incorporating religion and politics. While a wide variety of Muslim regimes have acknowledged and endeavored to incorporate a comprehensive approach rooted in principles and practices exemplified by Muhammad and early caliphs, the practical necessities of extensive empires necessitated innovative institutional structures. Islamic history reveals that there has been no definitive political system. Rather, structures of government varied considerably over time in different parts of the central Islamic lands.

One constant theme is discernible in virtually every time and place where Muslims ruled: whatever the form or structures of government, it should be informed by a recognized version of Islamic law (*shariah*).

Muslims in different times and places have always disagreed markedly on the shape, interpretation, and application of *shariah*. Substantial variations can be discerned not only between but within the four recognized Sunni schools of law (Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, and Hanbali) and various branches of Shi'ite

Islam. As was the case with the multiple forms of government structures employed by Muslim rulers through the centuries, so too do we find a great deal of variation regarding the role of understanding and application of *shariah.*

In short, there have always been notable gaps between the theoretical ideal and the lived reality in particular times and places. The same is true, of course, for practitioners of all religious traditions.

In the middle of the 13th century, Mongol invaders stormed through the central Islamic lands. The Islamic civilizational system entered into a long process of fragmentation and decline. Several powerful empires later emerged—the Safavid Dynasty in Iran, the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East, and the Mughal Empire in India—but over the next 600 years the landscape changed substantially in many areas under Islamic rule.

The subsequent rise of Western Europe and the global domination of colonial powers—most notably the British, French, Dutch, and Portuguese—brought most Muslim-majority lands under European control throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries.

The impact of colonial domination not only prompted renewal and reform movements within Islam, it continues to reverberate in today's world of nation-states. A clearer picture of the Muslim Brotherhood comes into focus when set in the context of both the larger framework of Islamic history and self-understanding and the more recent impact of colonial rule and the emerging nation-state system.

## Renewal and Reform Movements Within Islam

Like every religious tradition, Islam has a long history of renewal and reform movements.

Islam, as we know it, is itself a renewal and restoration of the revelation Muslims believe God sent to humankind through many prophets and messengers, including Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, and John the Baptist. While Islam affirms these prophets

unambiguously, it also stresses how those who came after them changed, distorted or confused the divine revelations. The Qur'an is therefore understood as the final revelation and Islam is the corrected continuation of the truths that guide the other "People of the Book."

A well-known *hadith* indicates that Muhammad recognized the ongoing need for renewal within the community of faith: "God will send to this *ummah* (community of believers) at the head of each century those who renew its faith for it." Many prominent—and many would-be prominent—Muslims have claimed this responsibility over the centuries. Four brief examples illustrate how movements of renewal and reform in the 18th and 19th centuries addressed the challenges of their era and foreshadowed reform movements among Muslims in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1702-1791) and Muhammad ibn Saud (d. 1765) combined efforts to reform Islam in the Arabian peninsula. Abd al-Wahhab promulgated the least flexible version of Islamic law as he called for a return to what he deemed the basics of the Qur'an and early Islam. He encouraged vigorous attacks on what he declared the heretical teachings and practices of Shi'ites and Sufi mystics. Ibn Saud—whose descendants became the Saudi royal family—provided the political leadership for Abd al-Wahhab's severe religious reforms. Together they shaped the religious and political landscape that continues to this day in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Muslims in various lands who advocate the most stringent interpretation and application of Islamic law practiced in Saudi Arabia are labeled as "Wahhabis."

Three other towering figures of the 19th century worked for reform in Muslim-majority lands laboring under European colonial rule. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1937) traveled widely urging Muslims to awaken and reject insidious Western influences from their lands. His call for reform and renewal was rooted both in traditional Islamic values and new insights available through modern science

and enlightened thought.

In India, Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) took a decidedly different approach toward much-needed renewal. Alongside his tireless work for social reforms, Ahmad Khan embraced Western methods and models of education in preference to traditional Islamic schools. While al-Afghani rejected his approach for being too sympathetic to the non-Muslim colonial powers, the legacy of Ahmad Khan's endeavors for modernization and educational reform took root and are evident in many universities throughout the Islamic world today.

Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) also labored mightily for the betterment of society in Egypt. From extremely humble beginnings, Abduh became a leading figure at al-Azhar University in Cairo. In his view, Islam was progressive and able to incorporate science and new methodologies without abandoning the moral and ethical standards derived from Islam. He also shared al-Afghani's conviction that the ability to recover and nurture authentic Islam required the removal of colonial powers from Muslim lands. The Muslim Brotherhood would soon build upon the foundation Abduh established in Egypt.

## The Origin, Growth, and Spread Of The Muslim Brotherhood

The Society of Muslim Brothers (*Jam'iyat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*) was founded in Egypt by Hassan al-Banna (1906-49) in 1928. From a very young age, he was actively involved in charitable work through a Sufi welfare society. He studied at a teacher's training college and at a school founded in Cairo by Muhammad Abduh. When he launched the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna's energy was directed toward religious and charitable work rooted in Islamic moral and ethical values.

The end of the Ottoman Empire and the increasingly powerful roles played by the British, French and other Europeans following World War I fostered important debates among Muslims. Hassan al-Banna, an articulate communicator, was deeply concerned by the growing influence of Western culture and ideas on Egyptian society, even among key Muslim scholars and religious leaders.

Although the Muslim Brotherhood was not yet a political party, in the 1930s its advocacy for moral reform rooted in Islamic tradition became a clarion call. In the reformist tradition of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh before him, al-Banna believed European imperialists dominated Egyptians because Egyptians had abandoned Islam as the comprehensive religious, political, social and economic system. As the colonial era was ending and the new nation-state system emerged, the Muslim Brotherhood was developing into a powerful movement intent on combating politicians who failed to see the wisdom of shaping a new version of an Islamic state.

By the mid-1940s, the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood numbered between 60,000 and 80,000 in Egypt. Branches of the Brotherhood were also growing in the nearby Arabic speaking lands of Syria, Jordan/Palestine, and Sudan, though these branches varied a good deal in response to the respective histories and circumstances in each setting.

In Syria, for example, the Muslim Brotherhood began in the late 1930s as part of the movement promoting Islamic morality to guide the emerging state laboring to gain independence from French colonial rule. In the years between Syrian independence in 1946 and the Ba'th Party's ascent to power in 1963, the Brotherhood competed with communists, various nationalists, and secularists (e.g., the Ba'thists) to win the hearts and minds of the populace.

The Brotherhood later fragmented at several points including a major split after Hafiz al-Assad took power in 1971. The Muslim Brotherhood factions in Aleppo and Hama advocated armed struggle against the secular Assad regime while the Damascus-based faction sought common ground with the new government. The hoped-for cooperation in Damascus didn't last long. In addition to the secular

orientation that was an affront to their Islamic values, the Muslim Brothers in Aleppo and Hama cited other reasons for their staunch, militant opposition to the Ba'thist regime, including the Syrian military intervention and occupation of Lebanon and the political domination and economic benefits enjoyed by the Alawites (the Assad family's community), an offshoot of Shi'ite Islam.

The militants not only targeted leading Alawite figures for assassination, they attacked prominent symbols of state power such as police stations, military installations, and Ba'th party offices.

In response, Assad's government announced that anyone affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood was subject to the death penalty. Clashes continued for some six years culminating in a bloodbath in Hama.

After Muslim Brothers claimed control of the city in February of 1982, the full force of Syria's military was unleashed on the city. Government forces killed an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 civilians, and leveled the central district in Hama. Reverberations from this ferocious battle have continued for three decades and are clearly visible in the horrific civil war currently ravaging Syria as Aleppo and Hama have been strongholds for revolutionaries seeking to end the rule of Bashar al-Assad.

There is much more to say, of course, about the history of the Muslim Brotherhood and related groups in Syria during the past 70 years. The brief comments here serve to illustrate key pieces in a larger puzzle. First, there are lines of connection between the movement originating in Egypt and counterpart organizations in neighboring Arab lands. Second, the ways these groups develop and evolve must be understood in their respective contexts. Third, Muslims who seek to draw inspiration and guidance from Islam to reform existing, corrupt government structures disagree substantially on whether and to what extent the use of force is justified or even required.

It is not at all surprising to see how people in power are exceedingly wary of or fiercely resistant to those who challenge their authority and seek to "guide" them in a decidedly different direction.

This was clearly the case in Egypt. By 1939, the Brotherhood revealed plans to run candidates for Parliament. At the same time, al-Banna admonished King Farouk to abolish parties and work for the good of Egypt based on Islamic principles. Under the leadership of Hassan al-Banna the Brotherhood not only permeated various institutions—such as the military and trade unions—it also fashioned a social service network with its own factories, schools, and hospitals. By the late 1940s, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt had virtually become a functioning nation within the nation. This pattern of creating and developing parallel institutions to nurture the ideology and serve the needs particular groups feel the national government is not meeting has been replicated successfully by Hizbullah (the "Party of God"), comprised of Shi'ite Muslims in Lebanon, and HAMAS (the "Islamic Resistance Movement"), composed of Sunni Muslims while living under Israeli military occupation in Gaza.

As conflict intensified in neighboring Palestine, some elements among the Egyptian Brotherhood advocated and pursued what we would today label terrorist attacks against Jewish as well as British targets. The Egyptian government confronted the Brotherhood and announced its plans to dissolve the organization. On February 12, 1949, when the Muslim Brotherhood's supporters may have reached half a million, government agents assassinated Hassan al-Banna in the streets of Cairo.

Three years later, in July of 1952, Gamal Abdul Nasser organized a group of nine Free Officers from within the Egyptian army—one of whom, Anwar al-Sadat would later follow Nasser as Egypt's President—and successfully staged a revolution to end the monarchy.

Early on, some within the Brotherhood held out hope that the Free Officers would embrace their movement in the revolutionary government. Those

hopes were dashed and deadly conflicts ensued during the 1950s and 1960s. Sayyid Qutb (1906-66), a gifted writer and ideologue whose influence would eventually surpass that of Hassan al-Banna, was among the scores of Muslim Brothers imprisoned, tortured, and further radicalized by Nasser's government.

## The Writings and Influence of Sayyid Qutb

Sayyid Qutb was a well educated literary critic who wrote fiction and poetry in the 1930s. He was active in political parties and served in Egypt's Ministry of Education. Between 1948 and 1951, Qutb studied in the United States at three institutions: Wilson's Teachers' College in Washington DC, the Teachers' College at the University of Northern Colorado, and Stanford University. This extended time in America was life changing for him. While he appreciated the scientific and technological advancements, he found the rampant racism, sexual permissiveness, and systemic support for Zionism repulsive. He abandoned his literary pursuits and zealously focused his energies on his religion.

Returning to Egypt, Qutb's writing skills were readily put to use. In 1953 he became the editor of the Muslim Brotherhood's weekly publication. He quickly ascended in the leadership ranks and was invited to serve on the organization's most important committees.

Imprisoned for three months in 1954, Qutb and many other Brotherhood leaders were arrested again in 1955 and sentenced to 15 years. He spent most of that time in the hospital due to poor health.

The torture and murder of many Brothers while in prison led Qutb and others to support violent resistance against the corrupt government brutalizing those who followed the path of true Islam.

Sayyid Qutb was released from jail in mid1964 only to be arrested again a year later and charged with terrorism and sedition. His execution on August 29, 1966, elevated him to the status of a martyr in the eyes of those who are inspired and guided by his writings. His most influential books—*Social Justice in Islam* and *Milestones*—have been and continue to be widely read in various parts of the predominantly Muslim lands in Arabic as well as Turkish, Farsi, Urdu, and English translations.

Well-known Islamic images and themes are at the heart of his clarion call to action. In Qutb's view, Muslim societies had lost their way and were living in the "time of ignorance" (*jahiliyyah*, a term referring to the situation in Arabia into which Muhammad brought God's revelation). The antidote was clear: return to the Qur'an, restore the *ummah*, and be guided by *shariah* law.

Qutb presupposes the sacred text of the Qur'an provides believers with a comprehensive way of life that can and should be implemented at all times and places. His prescriptions are not only idealistic, they are unencumbered by Islamic history. Like fundamentalists calling for reform in various religions, the ways thoughtful people of faith have sought to interpret and apply religious principles and truths in different times and places are of little or no consequence. The task, in Qutb's view, is simply to embrace the timeless truths in one's setting.

The goal of recreating the "ideal" time by applying the timeless truths in a contemporary setting may be understandable and even appealing, but it is highly problematic. Reformers like Qutb who proffer such an approach fail to understand that their hoped-for "ideal" time is more imagined than real. As indicated above, the "golden age" of the "Rightly Guided Caliphs" was actually an era replete with major disputes and civil strife—even bloodshed—over all types of theological and practical matters. Put another way, from the earliest days of Islam, Muslim leaders—like their counterparts in other religions—have always had to interpret and reinterpret the principles and practices of the faith in real-life circumstances. They were far from united on what their faith and their religion required.

Qutb was not trained or educated as a scholar of

Islam. Missing from his writings are extended reflections on the long histories of theological discourse, varied traditions of Qur'anic interpretation, scholarly study applying sophisticated methodology to clarify and grade the thousands of *hadith* that came to be attributed to Muhammad. Qutb barely mentions Muslim religious scholars who devoted themselves to the nuances and argumentation present over many centuries of jurisprudence. It is far easier for Qutb to simply posit an ideal—Islam provides a comprehensive way of life and the Qur'an provides the guidance needed—and then go to the authoritative scripture to selectively find support for the ideal.

Qutb's experiential encounter with and revulsion for Western decadence combined compellingly with the disdain he had for the corrupt so-called Muslim leaders (like Nasser and later Anwar al-Sadat and Hosni Mubarak) who rejected Islam and brutalized would-be reformers.

His writings became a blueprint for change employing violence when necessary. Some of the best-known violent extremists are among those who were inspired by his call to action: Khalid al-Islambuli, the leader of al-Jihad, the group that assassinated President Sadat in 1981; Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Egyptian physician who was second in command of al-Qaeda until the death of Osama bin Laden (at which point he became the ostensible leader of al-Qaeda); and Osama bin Laden.

## The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt From Sadat to the 2011 Revolution

When Anwar al-Sadat became president of Egypt in 1970 he moderated significantly the harsh policies of his predecessor. While Nasser had declared the Brotherhood party illegal, Sadat made overtures to win support from it, releasing many from prison, including Umar al-Tilimsani, the man who led the Brotherhood from 1972 until 1986. During the eleven years of Sadat's rule, he played something of a cat and mouse game with al-Tilimsani and the Brotherhood. While the group was not allowed

to function as a political party, they were mostly tolerated.

The Brotherhood was not involved or implicated in Sadat's assassination. On the contrary, under al-Tilimsani's leadership the Muslim Brotherhood openly identified itself as a movement opposing the ruling powers but committed to nonviolence.

Increasingly during the 1980s, the Brotherhood became more centrist as they embraced parliamentary democracy and the reality of political pluralism. Since they were not allowed to be an official political party, the Brotherhood aligned with different parties who opposed Mubarak's National Democratic Party at different times.

The Brotherhood remained steadfast in calling for Islamic reforms and the implementation of *shariah* law. At the same time, their commitment to pluralism and democratic rule became evident during the 1980s when their agenda formally advocated full rights and obligations between Muslims and their Coptic Christian brothers.

As the Brotherhood assumed a more visible role on various matters of public discourse, the group enjoyed popular support at times, but its members were always subject to intimidation or arrest. While the group had moderated dramatically in the 20-30 years following the execution of Qutb, its leaders were still part of the opposition to the iron-fisted rule of Hosni Mubarak. When they strongly opposed Egypt's participation in the coalition fighting Saddam Hussein's Iraq during the Gulf War of 1991, for example, their weekly publication was banned for a time.

The Brotherhood protested the ruling party's decision to appoint Mubarak's son, Gamal Mubarak, as general secretary in 2004. This move presaged the plan for dynastic rule as Gamal was being primed to succeed his father as president. The pattern of dynastic succession remains with monarchies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. But, a quick look around the region reveals the pattern of political succession from fa-

ther to son—or the plan to do so—in Syria, Iraq, and Libya.

Though Muslim Brotherhood candidates had to run "officially" as "Independents," they won a stunning 88 seats—20 percent of the total—in the 2005 parliamentary elections.

Their growing support as the most compelling representatives of the opposition to Mubarak's party and rule was in clear view. Their candidates won five times the number of seats claimed by the next leading opposition party.  Looking back at the 2005 parliamentary elections through the lens of both the 2011 revolution and Muhammad Mursi's election as president is instructive.   In a crowded field, the candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood had a strong base of support that was years in the making.

And, it was not the support of the more radical elements who cited Sayyid Qutb as their guide. Rather, many Egyptians had come to see the Brotherhood in light of its second 40 years of existence and advocacy in Egypt. By the time of the first post-revolutionary presidential elections, the Muslim Brotherhood had positioned itself as a nonviolent opposition group, committed to pluralism and parliamentary democracy while, at the same time, calling for renewal and reform based on Islam and *shariah*.

Muhammad Mursi, a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood running as the candidate of the Freedom and Justice Party, was elected President in June of 2012 with 51.7% of the popular vote. Who is this man and what does his longstanding relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood portend?

He has been a college professor for most of the past quarter century.  After receiving bachelors and masters degrees in engineering at Cairo University in 1975 and 1978, respectively, Mursi moved to the U.S. where he completed his Ph.D. in engineering at the University of Southern California in 1982.  He served as an assistant professor for three years at Cal State-Northridge before returning to assume a professorial post at a university in Egypt, a position he

held from 1985 until 2010.  Between 2000 and 2005, Mursi served as an "Independent" member of the Egyptian Parliament.

Many Egyptians see Mursi as the embodiment of the moderate, centrist group that the Muslim Brotherhood has been in Egypt since the 1980s. Others, in Egypt and elsewhere, have voiced concern that Mursi and the Muslim Brotherhood may take inspiration from Sayyid Qutb.

On November 22, 2012, Mursi stoked that fear when he announced that he, as president, had unparalleled "powers to protect the nation." More than a hundred thousand Egyptians poured into the streets in protest. By December 8, 2012, Mursi had been forced to annul the decree of essentially unlimited power.

## The Next Ten Years

At a gathering of religious leaders convened to identify the multiple obstacles to interreligious understanding and cooperation in the future, one seasoned participant summarized the challenges on the road we are traveling together:  "The next ten years will be *the* most difficult … they always have been!"

The perpetual truth conveyed poignantly with humor is all the more true in the second decade of the 21st century.  In our increasingly interdependent world of nation-states, ecological, economic, and medical problems are further complicated by proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, violent assaults by extremist groups, and rapid changes spurred by revolutionary movements demanding an end to dictatorial rule and new forms of participatory democracy. Many of these rapid changes are transpiring in the more than fifty countries with Muslim majority populations.

The next ten years—perhaps twenty years—will be the most difficult.  There are no easy answers or simple solutions. But there are reasons for hope as people rise up against tyranny and seek new and better ways to organize and govern their nation-states. While some Islamist leaders speak in grandiose terms about a new form of Islamic rule, the over-

whelming majority of Muslims operate in the context of the nation-state system. What has been unfolding in Egypt in post-revolutionary Egypt is a case in point.

Islam is not now nor has it ever been monolithic. The Muslim Brotherhood is certainly not monolithic. A substantial majority of Muslims in the Islamic world, however, believe that Islam can once again provide the basis for an effective government in their country. While this hope is widespread and heartfelt, there is nothing approaching a consensus on what precisely an Islamic state should look like.

There are many Muslims today—from Tunisia and Turkey to Iraq and Indonesia—who are working diligently and debating vigorously to put forward a viable plan in their particular setting. While many variations on contemporary participatory forms of governance are visible in this multi-layered process, so too are more extreme positions in the mix. One has only to consider the differences between the governments of Turkey and the Taliban in Afghanistan to get the point.

It is safe to predict that a wide variety of experiments with government structures will be fashioned and tested as more unrepresentative leaders in various Muslim majority countries are displaced. Some efforts will prove heartening while some, no doubt, will fail and be rejected or significantly refined.

The next ten years will be very difficult no matter what happens in Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, or Iran. The prospects for a more hopeful and healthy future will be significantly enhanced as more and more citizens and decision makers in the U.S. are able to move beyond detailed ignorance and generic assumptions about the motivations and aspirations informing the more than 1.5 billion Muslims in a rapidly changing world. □

## Our Author

Charles Kimball is Presidential Professor and Director of Religious Studies at the University of Oklahoma. An ordained Baptist minister, he received his doctorate from Harvard University with specialization in Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations. Between 1983 and 1990 he served as the Director of the Middle East Office at the National Council of Churches, based in New York. His most recent book is *When Religion Becomes Lethal: The Explosive Mix of Politics and Religion in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,* available through AMEU (see page 15).

# Richard H. Curtiss

# (1927-2013)

Delinda Hanley, Dick Curtiss's daughter, told me that her father, right up to the end, even in the nursing home, proofread each issue of *The Washington Report*.

At 3 p.m. on May 24, 1982, Richard Curtiss, a retired chief inspector of the United States Information Agency (USIA), and British Ambassador Edward Henderson visited our New York office. (Yes, I keep old calendars.) They came to discuss the magazine they, along with U.S. Ambassador Andrew Killgore, had just launched. Today, that publication, *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, is a full-color, 80-plus page magazine that goes to bookstores, libraries, homes and businesses around the world.

Over the years we have plugged each other's publication, although I remember once telling our *Link* readers that if they had to pick two magazines to take to a desert island, *The Washington Report* definitely should be their second choice. One has to keep one's priorities.

Dick Curtiss, in a preeminent way, gave WRMEA its reputation for excellence, integrity—and credibility. And credibility not just to WRMEA, but to all of the outlets he wrote for. When he authored our 1997 *Link* on the hidden as

well as the direct costs of U.S. aid to Israel, we made a point of highlighting the fact that our writer had received the Edward R. Murrow Award for Excellence in Public Diplomacy, the USIA's highest professional recognition.

AMEU never divulges the names of its subscribers. But here's an exception. Over the years Richard and Donna Curtiss never failed to send in their annual subscription to *The Link*.

I cannot think of a better way for our readers to honor the memory of this extraordinary man than to take out a $29, one-year subscription to "his" magazine; the address is: WRMEA, 1902 18th St., NW, Washington, DC 20009-1707.

To the Curtiss family, to Dick's wife Donna and their three children, the Directors and staff of AMEU offer their profound condolences.—**John F. Mahoney**

# AMEU's Book &Video Selections

## All AMEU Prices Include Postage & Handling

☐ Abdul-Rauf, F., "What's Right with Islam," cloth, 2004, 314 pp, AMEU: $12.00.

☐ Armstrong, K., "Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths," paper, 2007, 439 pp, AMEU: $16.50.

☐ Bailey, B. & J., "Who Are the Christians in the Middle East?" paper, 2010, 227 pp, AMEU: $15.95.

☐ Baltzer, A., "Life in Occupied Palestine," 2006, DVD, 61 minutes, AMEU: $20.00.

☐ Esposito, J., ed., "The Oxford History of Islam," cloth, 1999, 749 pp, AMEU: $35.00.

☐ Esposito, J., "Unholy War and Terror in the Name of Islam," cloth, 2003, 196 pp, AMEU: $19.95.

☐ Kimball, C., "When Religion Becomes Lethal," 2011, cloth, 233 pp, AMEU: $19.95.

☐ Ramadan, T., "In the Footsteps of the Prophet," cloth, 2009, 242 pp, AMEU: $16.95.

☐ Trip'ol'ii Productions, "Occupation 101," 2007, DVD, 90 minutes, AMEU: $10.00.

☐ Wagner, D., "Dying in the Land of Promise," paper, 2001, 300 pp, AMEU: $17.95.

## To Support *The Link*

**A $40 voluntary annual subscription is requested to defray cost of publishing and distributing *The Link* and AMEU's Public Affairs Series.**

Contribution to AMEU (tax deductible)

Please Send Recent *Link* Issues

A check or money order for $_____ is enclosed, payable to AMEU.

Name _____

Address _____
_____
_____

Zip+4 _____

---

# Please send a gift subscription* of *The Link* in my name to:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name | Address | City | ST | Zip |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name | Address | City | ST | Zip |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| Name | Address | City | ST | Zip |

Mail with $20 for each gift subscription to:
AMEU, 475 Riverside Drive, Room 245,
New York, New York 10115-0245.

*One yr. sub. + free copy of "Burning Issues,"
AMEU's 440-page anthology of best *Links*.

4/13