

Int. J. Middle East Stud. 32 (2000), 3–22. Printed in the United States of America

Tamir Moustafa

CONFLICT AND COOPERATION BETWEEN THE STATE AND RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY EGYPT

Al-Azhar, traditionally Egypt's most respected and influential center for Islamic study, adopted an increasingly bold platform opposing Egyptian government policy throughout the mid-1990s. Al-Azhar defied government policy on a variety of sensitive issues, including population control, the practice of clitoridectomy, and censorship rights. Moreover, al-Azhar directly challenged the government in high-profile forums such as the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in September of 1994. This open opposition was remarkable in light of the tremendous capacity that the Egyptian government has shown in the past to manipulate and control al-Azhar. Over the past century, and particularly since the 1952 Free Officers' coup, the Egyptian government virtually incorporated al-Azhar as an arm of the state through purges and control over Azhar finances, and by gaining the power to appoint al-Azhar's key leadership. Presidents Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat, and Hosni Mubarak all benefited from this dominance over al-Azhar by securing fatwas legitimating their policies. Given this overwhelming leverage, what can explain al-Azhar's increased opposition to the government throughout the mid-1990s?

This article argues that the increase in Islamist violence from 1992 through 1997 gave al-Azhar more leverage over the government. Al-Azhar was willing to defend the government from radical Islamist critics, which also threatened al-Azhar's position in Egyptian society, but it took advantage of this situation to press for Islamic policies of a more moderate cast. The government was forced to accept this bargain as it became increasingly dependent on al-Azhar for religious legitimation. Moreover, the government found that manipulating al-Azhar and silencing its opposition to state policy undermined al-Azhar's influence within Egyptian society and therefore its ability to discredit opponents of the government. Finally, al-Azhar won major concessions from the government by forming loose alliances with state officials sympathetic to al-Azhar's interests.

The first part of this article reviews the Egyptian government's increasing control of religious institutions and the impact that government control has had on the

Tamir Moustafa is a doctoral student in the Department of Political Science, University of Washington, Seattle, Wash. 98195, U.S.A.

standing of these institutions in Egyptian society. The next section explores how government domination of religious institutions contributed to the rise of militant Islamist groups that challenged the legitimacy of the religious establishment. And part three examines how al-Azhar capitalized on government–Islamist tensions to challenge the government and to gain major concessions. I end with an analysis of government–Azhar relations since the appointment of Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi and a theoretical conclusion on the paradox of state power and social control.

INCREASING STATE CONTROL OVER EGYPT'S RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

Since its establishment in 973 A.D., al-Azhar has had an uneasy relationship with Egypt's rulers.¹ The university has stood for centuries as an intermediate institution between the state and society, at times cooperating with Egypt's rulers and at other times opposing them. As Egypt's most important religious institution, al-Azhar faced intense pressure from the state to legitimize its rule, but the state did not have sufficient resources to uniformly challenge its autonomy. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, however, the Egyptian state increasingly interfered in the affairs of religious institutions.

Muhammad ʿAli (1805–48) was the first Egyptian ruler to challenge systematically the power of Egypt's religious institutions. As part of his program to build a modern Egyptian state and challenge the Ottoman government for control of the empire, Muhammad ʿAli reorganized land ownership and nationalized 600,000 feddans (623,000 acres) of waqf land² that had previously financed mosques and religious schools and formed the economic foundation of the ulama.³ This action impaired the autonomy of the ulama and made them more dependent on financing through state channels. In addition, Muhammad ʿAli created an independent justice system to circumvent the control of religious institutions. Another significant blow to al-Azhar came with Muhammad ʿAli's founding of a secular school system for doctors, lawyers, engineers, and government bureaucrats.⁴ These new secular institutions left Azhar graduates with fewer opportunities and less influence in the expanding government bureaucracy.⁵

Successive governments gained further control of al-Azhar through reorganization laws in 1896, 1911, and 1930. These laws radically transformed al-Azhar's decentralized structure and its role in Egyptian society. The reorganizations centralized al-Azhar's administration and gave the Shaykh al-Azhar⁶ more authority over its many power centers.⁷ These laws also increased the scope of al-Azhar's authority over religious education by granting it jurisdiction over the Teachers' Training College and the School of Religious Law.⁸ By centralizing authority within al-Azhar, the successive reorganizations facilitated al-Azhar's manipulation by the state. At the same time, however, centralization benefited interests within al-Azhar, such as the less-established *riwāq* and the office of Shaykh al-Azhar. These common interests between the state and influential actors within al-Azhar explain why some Azhar shaykhs were inclined to cooperate with the government despite increasing government regulation of religious institutions.

The greatest government incursions into Egypt's religious institutions in general and al-Azhar in particular came after the 1952 Free Officers' coup. Egypt's new leader,

Gamal Abdel Nasser, understood the importance of gaining control over al-Azhar in order to ensure domestic control and promote his foreign-policy objectives. Within Egypt, Nasser wanted al-Azhar to lend legitimacy to his regime and its program of transforming Egyptian society. Subordinating al-Azhar to the state also would allow Nasser to balance the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood, which threatened to mobilize Egyptians against the government. Moreover, Nasser understood that al-Azhar's influence extended well beyond the borders of Egypt and that government control over the most respected and influential institution of Islamic scholarship would be an important tool in furthering Egypt's leadership of Arab and Islamic nations.

Just as Muhammad ʿAli had done more than a century earlier, Nasser first attempted to undermine the influence of the ulama through the 1952 land-reform law. This law placed all waqf land, which had risen to 12 percent of all arable land since Muhammad ʿAli's rule, under the control of the new Ministry of Endowments (*Wizārat al-Awqāf*).⁹ Through control of waqf lands, the government gained the authority to distribute waqf resources and the power to reward those who followed the lead of the government and punish those who did not. In 1955, Nasser also abolished all shariʿa courts, which had run parallel to the secular courts established by Muhammad Ali in the 19th century.¹⁰ Again, the Free Officers were continuing Muhammad ʿAli's struggle to break the autonomy of Egypt's religious institutions and shape their resources to serve the interests of the state.

Nasser's most ambitious attempt to secure the state's dominance over al-Azhar came in a 1961 law that radically reorganized the institution.¹¹ The reorganization first placed al-Azhar under the formal jurisdiction of the Ministry of Endowments. All Azhar finances were to be directed through the appropriate state channels, giving non-Azhar state officials significant influence over al-Azhar's functions. Under the 1961 law, the Egyptian president and the minister of endowments were also given formal jurisdiction over important issues of appointment, most notably the appointment of the Shaykh al-Azhar. Additionally, the Azhar High Council was reorganized to include three government-appointed "experts in university education" and representatives from the ministries of Endowments, Education, Justice, and Treasury.¹² Finally, the 1961 reorganization expanded al-Azhar considerably from just three colleges of theology, Arabic, and shariʿa to include many secular colleges, such as medicine, law, and engineering. The forced expansion of al-Azhar into secular fields of study ensured that an increasing number of deans representing non-religious fields would be represented in the Azhar High Council. The impact of this reorganization was profound. Al-Azhar was transformed from an institution with a high degree of independence to one with very little autonomy from government interference.

The 1961 law of reorganization was met with strong opposition from within al-Azhar. During implementation of the reorganization law, Nasser was forced to appoint a series of temporary directors from the military.¹³ While very little information is available about the circumstances of the opposition to government intrusion, it is clear that these directors of Azhar affairs were charged with removing all resistance to government control. From 1959 to 1963, the number of faculty at al-Azhar dropped from 298 to 215.¹⁴ It is assumed that the eighty-three Azhar scholars who were removed were the most vocal in their opposition to government control.¹⁵ Moreover, Law 818 of 1963 set up committees that were designed to purge al-Azhar of all faculty who were unwilling to support the programs of Nasser's regime. From

6 Tamir Moustafa

1963 to 1968, these committees purged forty-five more Islamic scholars, bringing the number of faculty down to only 170. Chris Eccel observes that by 1975, the faculty of al-Azhar was almost completely transformed. The vast majority of scholars who received their education prior to the 1952 revolution were replaced by younger faculty members who had received their degrees in the 1960s and 1970s under Nasser.

In addition to more overt forms of coercion, the government pushed through reforms by exploiting ideological cleavages that had existed among Azhar scholars for years. The government created alliances with progressive shaykhs who wanted to reform al-Azhar even if it meant giving up the institution's autonomy. Among those who cooperated with the government was Muhammad al-Bahay, who was later recruited to the position of minister of endowments and director of al-Azhar affairs. Similarly, the government exploited personal rivalries and made alliances with opportunists who sought high offices within al-Azhar.¹⁶

Although many Azhar scholars were bitter about increasing government regulations and al-Azhar's reduced autonomy, the institution gained crucial state resources in the process. From 1952 to 1966 alone, al-Azhar's budget increased more than four times, from 1,537,000 Egyptian pounds to 7,000,000 Egyptian pounds. Financial support from the state allowed al-Azhar to double its student enrollment, increase salaries for its scholars, offer more foreign scholarships, and increase its number of foreign missions throughout Africa, Asia, and the Middle East sevenfold.¹⁷ In addition, budget increases allowed al-Azhar to carry out massive capital projects, such as building a new campus in Madinat Nasr and expanding its nationwide program of primary and secondary education (Figure 1).

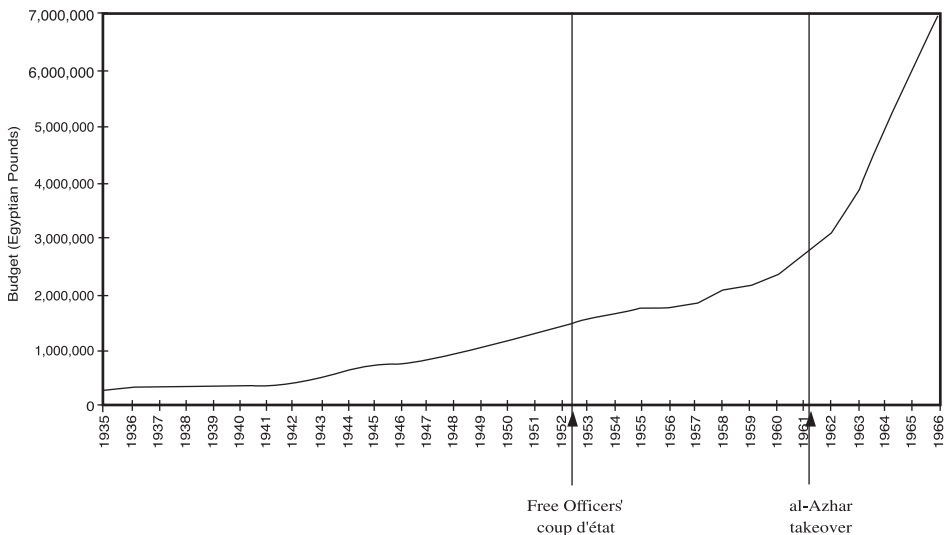


FIGURE 1. Total Azhar budget, 1935–66. The figures for 1949–52 and 1964–65 are estimated. Budget figures were unavailable for these years. To my knowledge, budget figures after 1966 are also unavailable. However new projects and expanded programs suggest that al-Azhar's budget continued to be well funded after this period. Source: Crecelius, *The Ulama and the State*, 442.

With the 1961 reorganization and the subsequent purges of al-Azhar faculty, Nasser gained the valuable endorsement of one of Islam's most influential institutions of scholarship. Nasser used his new leverage over al-Azhar to secure fatwas that supported the regime's increasingly socialist policies, particularly to legitimize the government's commitment to land reform. While securing these fatwas from al-Azhar, Nasser also established the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs, which addressed the supposed connection between Islam and socialism. The Supreme Council's publication, *Minbar al-Islam* (The Pulpit of Islam), ran articles such as "Socialism and Islam" and "The Cause of the National Charter Is the Cause of Islam."¹⁸

Nasser also used fatwas to advance his foreign-policy objectives in the Arab and Islamic world. In the rivalry between Nasser and King Faisal of Saudi Arabia throughout the 1960s, Nasser used al-Azhar's fatwas to legitimize his policies and appeal to the sensibilities of Saudi Arabia's citizens to rise up against their government. Nasser's regime transmitted similar appeals throughout the Arab and Islamic world on Egypt's international radio program "Voice of the Arabs." By 1963, "Voice of the Arabs" was transmitted in twenty-four languages, totaling an estimated 755 hours of transmission per week.¹⁹ In a similar vein, Nasser financed students from all over the Muslim world to study at al-Azhar in order to increase the university's connections with other religious establishments and build its international influence.

Anwar Sadat (1970–81) and Hosni Mubarak (1981–present) also took advantage of their leverage over al-Azhar to secure various fatwas supporting their own policies. Sadat was able to secure fatwas that justified overturning Nasser's land-reform program, his policy of *Infitāh* (economic liberalization), and, most important, his peace treaty with Israel in March 1979.²⁰ Mubarak has relied on similar fatwas from al-Azhar to legitimize Egypt's participation in the second Gulf War²¹ and to condemn Muslim extremists, particularly since the latest wave of violence that began in 1992.

In addition to gaining control of al-Azhar, the Egyptian government has been keen to gain control over Egypt's thousands of mosques. Traditionally, Egyptian mosques have remained outside state control, but with the nationalization of waqf lands, the government has increasingly taken charge of their administration. This is consistent with the government's policy toward al-Azhar. Private mosques outside the government's control could pose a serious challenge to the state. No other societal organization is able to assemble such a large group on a weekly basis with an equal amount of influence over the masses as does the mosque.²² Beginning in 1952 and continuing until today, the governments of Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak have each participated in an ambitious program of subsidizing and nationalizing virtually all of Egypt's mosques.²³ Table 1 illustrates the impressive scale of the nationalization project.

This rapid increase in state ownership of mosques illustrates the government's serious commitment to the nationalization project. Although the government increased the share of state-owned mosques only marginally between 1962 and 1982, it was largely successful in increasing the number of mosques that received state support. State support, at least in theory, increased the amount of leverage that the government could exert on private mosques. Under Mubarak's leadership, however, the government has raised the pace of mosque nationalization considerably and curtailed the number of permits for new private mosques, increasing the share of state-owned

TABLE 1 *Trends in state and private mosque building, 1962–94*

	1962		1982		1994	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
State controlled	3,006	17	6,071	19	50,000	71
Private	14,212	83	26,622	81	20,000	29
With state aid	999	7	7,160	27	N/A	N/A
Without aid	13,213	93	19,462	73	N/A	N/A

Sources: Berger, *Islam in Egypt Today*, 18; Bianchi, *Unruly Corporatism*, 190; *al-Musawwar*, 23 September 1994, 40–42, 80.

mosques to 71 percent of the total. The most intense efforts of nationalization, especially in recent years, have targeted mosques located in the urban centers of Cairo and Upper Egypt, where the majority of extremist violence has been concentrated.²⁴ Although figures are not readily available on the cost of this nationalization project, it is clear that the government has spent a staggering amount of money to bring this number of mosques under its control.²⁵

Along with the nationalization of private mosques, the government has established specific regulations for controlling who preaches in state-owned mosques and what kinds of topics are addressed. In the 1970s, Sadat's administration established a network of district offices in all of Egypt's twenty-six governorates charged with selecting imams for state mosques and monitoring their actions.²⁶ In each district, a committee composed of the local directors of the al-Azhar Institute and the Ministry of Endowments, and the director of education and social affairs, selects among candidates aspiring to be an imam. Candidates are screened by the committee for any radical religious or political sympathies.²⁷ Those who meet the approval of the committee are provided with a license to preach and are assigned to a specific mosque. Similar legislation has also passed through the People's Assembly requiring preachers in all remaining private mosques to be approved and licensed through the Ministry of Endowments.

The High Council for Islamic Preaching, another district committee composed of the under-secretary of the Ministry of Endowments, the director of mosques, the director of the fatwa in al-Azhar, and senior ulama, has the authority to decide the topics to be covered in state-controlled mosques.²⁸ The High Council drafts a quarterly plan detailing acceptable topics for Friday sermons for distribution to all state mosques. Imams who stray too far from the outlined topics are punished. Muhammad ʿAli Mahjub, Egypt's former minister of endowments, outlined this policy in a recent interview. "When we receive reports and ascertain that a preacher is guilty of violations that harm social peace and security, then we consider that he has moved from preaching to political action. He must be removed."²⁹ When Mahjub was asked who monitors these mosques, he calmly replied, "A report covering any excesses in Egyptian mosques is compiled every week. Don't worry; the mosques are under control."³⁰ Whether state monitoring is as efficient and effective as Mahjub claims is questionable. What is clear, however, is the government's objective of regulating mosques throughout Egypt.

In sum, the Egyptian government has gone to extraordinary lengths to regulate and co-opt religious institutions to use them in the service of the state. It has virtually incorporated al-Azhar as an arm of the state, initiated an extensive program of nationalizing private mosques, and instituted stringent controls upon who can preach at public and private mosques. The Egyptian government sought control of religious institutions both to build its international influence among other Islamic nations and to safeguard its domestic security. The central dynamic throughout this period was one of institutional conflict, although at times Azhar shaykhs cooperated with the government when it benefited their particular *riwāq*, *madhhab*, or even narrower personal interests. Al-Azhar resisted most government assaults on its institutional autonomy, but it was clearly the weaker institution of the two. Over time, the government achieved major concessions through purges of Azhar shaykhs, control of Azhar budgets, and the manipulation of long-standing ideological and personal rivalries.

Despite the loss of its institutional autonomy, al-Azhar gained valuable financial resources that were not previously at its disposal. Access to government coffers was an important institutional achievement, allowing al-Azhar to expand its role in Egyptian society. However, increasing government control would also bring the weakening of al-Azhar's most important resource over the years—its legitimacy among the Egyptian public.

AL-AZHAR'S CRISIS OF LEGITIMACY AND THE RISE OF RADICAL ISLAM

In the aftermath of the Azhar reorganization and its apparent manipulation by the Egyptian government, both institutions were subjected to increasing criticism from a significant spectrum of the Egyptian public.³¹ Shaykh ʿAbd al-Hamid Kishk, a well-known Islamist preacher throughout Egypt and the Middle East, has been an outspoken critic of the government's increasing encroachment on al-Azhar. Kishk, himself a graduate of al-Azhar before the 1961 reorganization, argued that government manipulation has soiled the integrity and position of al-Azhar. According to Kishk, "ever since the reform [of 1961], the leadership of al-Azhar has ceased to render any service to Islam."³² Kishk, like many other Islamists, has condemned the government for its manipulation of al-Azhar and called on the government to return the institution to its pre-1961 status. At the same time, Kishk has condemned al-Azhar for giving in to government pressure and acting as its pawn.

Similar attitudes toward the domination of al-Azhar by the Egyptian government are found in the opposition press. *Al-Shaʿb*, a daily newspaper with Islamist leanings, frequently prints articles condemning the government's manipulation of religious institutions. An editorial by Ahmed ʿIzz al-Din that appeared in *al-Shaʿb* illustrates the diminishing respect for al-Azhar, at least in one section of Egyptian society. In the editorial, the author argues that "since the 'nationalization' of al-Azhar in the 1960s, governments have used the institution as a tool to deceive the public and make it believe that Islam prospers in the country. . . . The government constantly tries to draw the largest possible political gain from al-Azhar."³³ Statements such as these in the Egyptian press confirm Barry Rubin's assessment that "links with the rulers, instances of corruption, and decrees seemingly at odds with traditional Islamic practices eroded respect for al-Azhar."³⁴ Although it is difficult to

ascertain just how much legitimacy al-Azhar has lost among the mainstream of Egyptian society, it is clear that government interference, manipulation, and outright co-optation has considerably tarnished al-Azhar's integrity in at least one sector of Egyptian society.

The government's increasing control of religious institutions was also perhaps the single most important factor contributing to the resurgence of radical Islamic groups, including Jihad, Takfir wa al-Hijra,³⁵ and al-Jama'ca al-Islamiyya, that were intent on overthrowing the Egyptian government through violent means. Studies analyzing the grievances and demands of Egypt's militant Islamic groups suggest that one of the central reasons for the rise of religious militancy has been the increasing subordination of religion to the needs of the government.³⁶ Bianchi argues that "the very success of corporatist policies has served to radicalize those who reject the right of state-appointed religious leaders to bend Islam to the needs of a secularizing regime."³⁷ Ellis Goldberg's comparative study³⁸ of radical Islam and the Protestant movement further suggests that the rise of fundamentalism as a response to the state's strict regulation of religion is not peculiar to Egypt and that we can expect to see the same phenomenon in similar contexts elsewhere.³⁹

Whereas Kishk and more moderate Islamists called on the government to return al-Azhar to its pre-1961 status as a relatively autonomous institution, militant Islamist groups rejected the ulama and al-Azhar's traditional role in Islam outright. The most stunning and extreme symbol of militant opposition to both the government and al-Azhar itself was the abduction and slaying of Shaykh Muhammad al-Dhahabi, a former minister of endowments and al-Azhar affairs, by the Takfir wa al-Hijra group in June 1977.⁴⁰ The assassination shocked the ulama of al-Azhar, as al-Dhahabi was not only a government official but also a learned religious scholar. Moreover, Shukri Mustafa, the leader of the Takfir wa-al-Hijra group, used his trial as an opportunity to declare that "Islam has been in decline ever since men have ceased to draw their lessons directly from the Qur'an and the sunna, and have instead followed the tradition of other men, those who call themselves imams."⁴¹ Shukri Mustafa, like other militant Islamists, argued that the ulama had misguided Muslims with their own interpretations of Islam. According to Mustafa, the only texts that are required to understand Islam are the Qur'an and a dictionary for understanding the meaning of some of its terms. Both al-Dhahabi's assassination and this assertion were clearly fundamental attacks on the traditional role that al-Azhar and the ulama had enjoyed in Egyptian society for more than a millennium.⁴²

At Anwar Sadat's assassination four years later, an internal document of the Jihad group, entitled *al-Faridah al-Gha'iba* (The Neglected Duty), was found, providing another insight into the convictions of Egypt's militant Islamist groups. Like Shukri Mustafa's statement, the document dismissed the legitimacy of both the government and al-Azhar in no uncertain terms.⁴³ According to Muhammad Faraj, author of *al-Faridah al-Gha'iba* and the leader of Jihad, Egypt's rulers must be overthrown because they are apostates and do not rule Egypt in accordance with Islamic law. Further, like Shukri Mustafa, Faraj argued that the ulama have misguided Muslims, and he questioned al-Azhar's role as the sole interpreter of Islam.⁴⁴

This fundamental attack on al-Azhar's role in Egyptian society did not go unanswered. Shaykh al-Azhar Jad al-Haqq 'Ali Jad al-Haqq prepared a lengthy refutation of *al-Faridah's* position.⁴⁵ Jad al-Haqq argued that al-Azhar plays an important role

in Egyptian society, and that *al-Faridah al-Gha²iba*'s attack on al-Azhar is a "call for illiteracy and primitivism in the name of Islam, which will encourage the youth to abandon their studies."⁴⁶ Jad al-Haqq also cited verses from the Qur²an supporting the argument that the pursuit of knowledge is itself a form of jihad.⁴⁷ In an attempt to justify the ulama's position in Egyptian society, Jad al-Haqq recalled that the Prophet once said, "the superiority of the knowledgeable man over the [simple] worshiper is like my superiority over the lowest of you."⁴⁸ After quoting several more examples from the Qur²an and hadith, Jad al-Haqq concluded that "if we examine all the instructions from the Qur²an and how it urges knowledge, the pursuit of education, and the preference of the ulama over others, we would have needed a book, nay books."⁴⁹ In addition to defending al-Azhar's role in Egyptian society, Jad al-Haqq found himself in the awkward position of defending the government's policies on theological grounds. Jad al-Haqq argued that Islam continues to thrive in Egypt and that, for the most part, the government has fulfilled its duty of safeguarding and promoting Islam.⁵⁰

Immediately after Sadat's assassination, the Egyptian government likewise attempted to discredit militant Islamists in its own way. Mubarak promptly arrested 4,000 suspected members of Egypt's most radical groups and appealed to prominent shaykhs from al-Azhar to engage with them in a nationally televised "prison dialogue." The dialogue failed, however, when the Azhar representatives were either rejected or mocked by prisoners who asked to be released, arguing that they had been reformed by the guidance of the ulama.⁵¹ The government appears eventually to have realized that the Azhar representatives had lost much of their legitimacy, because the government dismissed the Azhar shaykhs and called in the moderate Muslim Brotherhood,⁵² which had more integrity in the view of Islamic extremists and many Egyptians in general.

The lesson that the government has learned from this incident and the increasingly militant response to both al-Azhar and the government was that increased control over al-Azhar is not necessarily in its long-term interests. Although the government was able to secure fatwas from al-Azhar in support of its policies, the manipulation of religious institutions also contributed to the rise of militant Islam. In addition, government control undermined the respect that al-Azhar once commanded from many Egyptians. Just when the government needed al-Azhar to influence society and discredit militant Islamists, the institution was unable to do so. Paradoxically, increased government control of Egypt's religious institutions did not help the government legitimize its rule. Instead, it undermined the legitimacy of both the government and al-Azhar.

FROM CONFLICT TO COOPERATION: MILITANT ISLAM AND THE AZHAR-GOVERNMENT ALLIANCE

With the resurgence of militant Islam, the government and al-Azhar faced a common threat that pushed the two institutions into an uneasy cooperative effort. The government found that its goal of combating militant Islamists and restoring domestic stability depended on a more independent al-Azhar that could provide a credible theological response to its radical Islamist critics. Mubarak could depend on al-Azhar to provide a theological response to militant Islamists even without tight

government control because these groups challenged the authority and integrity of al-Azhar as much as they threatened the government. Statements from the late Shaykh al-Azhar Jad al-Haqq ^cAli Jad al-Haqq exemplified al-Azhar's virulent condemnation of militant Islamists and the recent violence in Egypt. According to Jad al-Haqq:

Those who [commit violence] are not Islamists and do not represent Islam. They are criminals who must be punished. Every individual who challenges public order and the state's authority and power must be punished. Such an individual is not an Islamist at all. Those who make mischief in the land are the enemies of God and his prophet.⁵³

If we consider al-Azhar's institutional interests, it is quite understandable why the ulama would cooperate with the government to discredit militant Islamists. It is safe to assume that throughout al-Azhar's history, it has had three central interests:

1. to maintain its institutional autonomy;
2. to preserve its respected status in Egyptian society by maintaining its informal role as the preeminent interpreter of Islamic texts and traditions; and
3. to safeguard and encourage the propagation of Islam.⁵⁴

In supporting government efforts to discredit radical Islamists, al-Azhar advanced all three of these fundamental objectives. The first of al-Azhar's central objectives, maintaining its institutional autonomy, was for years in direct conflict with the government's desire to control religious institutions. As we have seen, this produced protracted conflict between the two institutions. However, with escalating violence through the early 1990s, the government became increasingly dependent on al-Azhar's orthodox critiques of radical Islamist ideologues.⁵⁵ This gave al-Azhar more leverage vis-à-vis the government than it had enjoyed in years. Al-Azhar's independence was further promoted throughout this period because the government could not interfere in al-Azhar's affairs without significantly undermining its efforts to discredit the claims of militant Islamists. By 1992, al-Azhar was able to take positions on social and political issues that clearly diverged from the government as a direct result of this new leverage.

The second of al-Azhar's central objectives, preserving its respected status in Egyptian society, was distinctly threatened by the rise of militant Islam. As we have seen, militant Islamists dismissed the ulama's traditional role as revered scholars and indispensable interpreters of Islamic texts. To maintain its status, al-Azhar moved to discredit militants on theological grounds and benefited from government efforts to physically suppress militant Islamic groups. Essentially, al-Azhar cooperated in a loose division of labor, with the government ensuring al-Azhar's monopoly on religious leadership through physical coercion and al-Azhar discrediting militant Islamists on theological grounds.⁵⁶ Al-Azhar's increasingly critical stands toward government policies also served to preserve its respected status in Egyptian society. These stands acted as important signals to the Egyptian public that al-Azhar was not a pawn of the government, as radical Islamists claimed.

The rise of a militant Islamic threat also indirectly facilitated al-Azhar's efforts to advance its third central objective of propagating Islam in Egypt. As we have seen, the Egyptian government was forced to grant al-Azhar increased autonomy so

it could provide a credible theological response to militant Islamists. While the government's primary concern was the control of radical Islamic groups that threatened Egypt's stability, al-Azhar took advantage of its new-found space and leverage to pursue broader interests that extended far beyond the role that the government prescribed.⁵⁷ Johannes Jansen has made the general observation that "although al-Azhar and its graduates are essentially loyal to whatever government rules Egypt, al-Azhar is a constant source of 'calm pressure' in the direction of further Islamization of society."⁵⁸ This observation invites us to take a closer look at how al-Azhar was able to manipulate the difficult situation facing Mubarak's government and press for a more pious state and society in contemporary Egypt.

AL-AZHAR TAKES THE OFFENSIVE

From 1992 to 1996, al-Azhar increasingly opposed government policy on a number of sensitive issues. It also achieved some remarkable concessions. An important example of al-Azhar's increased freedom to maneuver was its firm opposition toward Egyptian government policy on clitoridectomy.⁵⁹ In September 1993, the Cable News Network (CNN) broadcast a report on clitoridectomy in Egypt in which a reporter had filmed a graphic scene of a ten-year-old girl screaming and kicking as her genitals were cut as part of a tradition that is observed in Egypt and much of Africa. Although the international coverage prompted the Egyptian government to condemn the practice of clitoridectomy, al-Azhar adamantly defended the practice. Shaykh al-Azhar Jad al-Haqq 'Ali Jad al-Haqq issued a fatwa stating that "if girls are not circumcised as the Prophet [Muhammad] said, they will be subjected to situations that will lead them to immorality and corruption."⁶⁰ Clitoridectomy continues to be a highly contentious issue, with government agencies formally opposed to the practice, most al-Azhar scholars and radical Islamists defending it, and the court acting as a forum to contest the tradition.

Another important example of al-Azhar's increasing criticism of government policy was its vocal opposition to the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), held in Cairo in 1994. The ICPD was a great achievement for Mubarak's administration. The week-long conference, which attracted state officials and development specialists from nearly every nation in the world, was a prized opportunity for the Egyptian government to build its role as a leader in the developing world. Unfortunately for Mubarak, al-Azhar issued strong statements against the ICPD every step of the way. Al-Azhar's main objections focused on the conference's platform regarding sexual relationships and abortion rights.⁶¹ The Islamic Research Council of al-Azhar condemned the sections of the draft resolution that advocated homosexual rights, defended premarital sex, and affirmed women's right to abortion.⁶² While Mubarak's government received attention for hosting the U.N. conference, much of the coverage in the international press focused on the conflict between al-Azhar and the Egyptian government. This was not the kind of press that Mubarak was hoping for.

It could be argued that al-Azhar's strong stand on clitoridectomy and its opposition to the 1994 U.N. conference platform was not necessarily an indication of al-Azhar's new-found leverage vis-à-vis the government. Perhaps al-Azhar chose to take these

stands as a last resort against the increasing secularization of the Egyptian state and society, and issues of the family, sexual relations, and reproductive rights were areas in which al-Azhar was simply unwilling to follow the government's lead.⁶³ However, other issues demonstrate that al-Azhar has taken similar stands against other government policies and directives.

One of the most startling stands that some al-Azhar ulama have taken against the wishes of the government has been to declare some of Egypt's most respected intellectuals apostates of Islam. The most publicized of these fatwas was against the Egyptian writer Farag Foda, who was accused of blaspheming Islam after a heated debate with al-Azhar shaykhs at the Cairo Book Fair. Just two weeks after the fatwa was issued by radicals within al-Azhar, Foda was gunned down by Muslim extremists. Surprisingly, Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazzali, himself a prominent member of al-Azhar's Islamic Research Council, testified at the trial of the two suspected assassins. Shaykh al-Ghazzali argued that it is the duty of the government to put to death those who are judged apostates of Islam; if the government does not fulfill this obligation, then others have the right to carry out the sentence.⁶⁴ The Azhar Scholars Front placed similar pressure on the government to ban Yousef Chehine's film *The Emigrant* and the work of the Cairo University professor Nasr Abu-Zeid,⁶⁵ who is accused of blasphemy in his writings on the Qur'an.

Al-Azhar has also achieved significant gains by forming loose alliances with state actors who share its vision of a more pious state and society. Just as the government was able to exploit cleavages within al-Azhar by forming alliances with reform-minded shaykhs, al-Azhar has managed to exploit ideological splits within important state institutions. A recent ruling by Egypt's Majlis al-Dawla⁶⁶ is the most significant example of Islamists in the state who have granted far-reaching concessions to al-Azhar. In July 1993, the Shaykh al-Azhar submitted a letter to the Majlis al-Dawla requesting clarification of which institution had jurisdiction over the censorship of audio and audiovisual productions dealing with Islam.⁶⁷ Although al-Azhar had previously acted as an adviser to the Ministry of Culture, it now sought to gain a monopoly on censorship rights. By February 1994, the Majlis al-Dawla had arrived at a decision in favor of al-Azhar's request for jurisdiction over censorship rights, declaring: "the Honourable Azhar is the final arbiter in the assessment of the Islamic factor, whose opinion is binding for the Ministry of Culture concerning the granting or refusing of a license for audio and audiovisual productions."⁶⁸

Egyptian intellectuals were stunned by the ruling because the Majlis al-Dawla has a long history of supporting liberal values and promoting secular principles. Moreover, the ruling was not in accordance with the general policy of Mubarak's administration. Mubarak himself had demonstrated his commitment to protecting free speech just one month prior to the State Council's ruling by creating the Higher Council of Culture. The Higher Council, composed of twelve writers and journalists, was designed by Mubarak to give a voice to Egypt's intellectuals who faced increasing threats and restrictions from Egypt's growing Islamic movement.⁶⁹

In the wake of the Majlis al-Dawla ruling, attention focused on Tariq al-Bishri, the chairman of the General Assembly of the Board of Legislation within the State Council.⁷⁰ Al-Bishri, a respected judge and former leftist, became a moderate Islamist. Because it was not al-Bishri alone who had made the ruling, it became clear that

Islamist sympathizers had a presence within the Majlis al-Dawla. This example lends credence to the view that the state should be considered not as separate from society but, rather, as an institution embedded within society. The state can often adopt policies that will enhance its "autonomy" from societal influences, but this strategy can never achieve complete success. Bureaucrats and even top decision-makers such as al-Bishri are, after all, members of the societies they govern.

The most astonishing aspect of the Majlis al-Dawla ruling was that for the first time al-Azhar's decisions were to be binding upon the Ministry of Culture. At a workshop sponsored by the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, ^cAsim al-Disuqi, an Egyptian university lecturer, expressed the dismay of many intellectuals and secular government officials, saying: "This fatwa marks a new phase in the relationship between al-Azhar and the state. The state has been using al-Azhar since 1895. . . . The fatwa, however, changes the course of this relationship; it is al-Azhar that is now using the state through its own State Council."⁷¹

The government's reluctance to disregard this ruling and to punish al-Azhar for its increasingly vocal opposition to a wide variety of state policies was due to the uncomfortable situation that the government faced. Although the state had proved its capacity to manipulate al-Azhar in the past, it became increasingly dependent on al-Azhar to discredit radical Islamists on theological grounds. Further, tight government control of al-Azhar lends support to the extremists' contention that the secular state is corrupting and manipulating Islam for its own gain. Naguib Fakhry, chairman of the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, is one of the few who has articulated the changing government policy toward al-Azhar:

The government is trying to outdo the fundamentalists by making itself look more religious, and this is where the Azhar, as an ecclesiastical body imposing its rule, comes in. Men of religion are increasingly gaining ground every day since the government believes that this is the only way to fight fundamentalism, despite the fact that these men of religion may prove to be even more of a threat than the fundamentalists. It is this attempt by the government to play the piety card that has brought the Azhar to the foreground and given it more powers.⁷²

Given these gains, it is open to question whether the government or al-Azhar has gained more from the two institutions' relationship over the years. With its forced reforms, the government clearly achieved the power to manipulate al-Azhar if it so chooses. The government has gained total financial control and the power to appoint al-Azhar's key leaders. The pressing question is whether manipulating these levers, as it has done in the past, is in the long-term interests of the government. The rise of militant Islam in the 1970s and again since 1992, coupled with al-Azhar's inability to provide a credible theological response, suggests that the government can control al-Azhar only at a considerable cost.

On the other side of the equation, al-Azhar has clearly benefited from access to state resources. With financial support from the state, al-Azhar has been able to increase its student enrollment and salaries for its scholars, expand its primary and secondary branches throughout the country, and increase its number of foreign missions. Al-Azhar's reputation was adversely affected by its close association with the government, but at the same time, the rise of militant Islam allowed al-Azhar to distance itself from the government while retaining its privilege to state financial

resources. The threat of militant Islam to Egypt's stability also gave al-Azhar sufficient leverage to challenge the government and even capture important functions of the Ministry of Culture.

THE LATEST PHASE IN RELATIONS BETWEEN AL-AZHAR AND THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT

In March 1996, Mubarak was forced to make a momentous decision that would affect relations between al-Azhar and the government for years to come. Shaykh al-Azhar Jad al-Haqq ^ʿAli Jad al-Haqq passed away after heading al-Azhar for more than fourteen years. Under the 1961 law of reorganization, Mubarak was left with the responsibility of appointing a new Shaykh al-Azhar to replace the conservative Jad al-Haqq. After only twelve days of deliberation, Mubarak appointed the pro-government Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi.⁷³

Tantawi, the former Grand Mufti of Egypt, differed from Jad al-Haqq on a number of issues. On clitoridectomy, he argued that the practice is merely a harmful custom that is not in accordance with Islam. Similarly, Tantawi defended the International Conference on Population and Development, which Jad al-Haqq had condemned, arguing that abortion is acceptable in Islam under certain circumstances.⁷⁴ Further, he agreed with government policy on a number of other controversial issues, such as the ability of banks to charge interest under Islamic law and the acceptability of casinos and alcohol within the Egyptian tourist industry. Although Tantawi is praised by many Egyptian intellectuals and human-rights groups for his progressive stand on many issues, he is perceived by radical Islamists as the government's religious mouthpiece.

Mubarak's appointment of Muhammad Tantawi as the new Shaykh al-Azhar has already led to increased conflict on a number of levels. First, his appointment has created discord within al-Azhar. Although Tantawi has support from progressive ulama, conservative scholars have been highly critical of the appointment, which they view as an attempt by the government to reassert its dominance over al-Azhar. Within a year of the appointment, Tantawi took disciplinary action against conservatives who had challenged his appointment and leadership. Shaykh Muhammad al-Biri, president of the Azhar Scholar's Front, and Shaykh Yahya Ism^ʿail Halbush, general secretary of the front, were forced to resign from their posts in April 1998 after they voiced intense criticism of Tantawi's meeting with Israel's chief Ashkenazi rabbi. By June of the same year, Tantawi had completely dismantled the board of directors of the Azhar Scholar's Front after coming under fire for reforming al-Azhar's secondary-education program. Shaykh Fawzi al-Zifzaf, a loyal supporter of Tantawi, was appointed to head the Azhar Scholars' Front, and he promptly moved to de-politicize the front by transforming it into a charitable association.

Tantawi's appointment has also increased tensions between radical Islamists and the government. If we are to understand radical Islamists as more than just the product of economic hardship, demographic pressure, and failure in government policy, as Raymond Baker has suggested we do, then we should take seriously their central grievance that the government is manipulating and corrupting religion for its own benefit.⁷⁵ The appointment of Tantawi and the ongoing struggle within al-Azhar's

ranks only adds to the existing disillusionment of radical Islamists. Moreover, the appointment undermines al-Azhar's ability to de-legitimize radical Islam and lends legitimacy to extremist claims that the government corrupts and manipulates religion for its own gain.

The appointment of Tantawi may be viewed by some scholars as a sign of the strength of the Egyptian state. Mubarak's ability to appoint a progressive, pro-government scholar to head the most influential institution of Islamic study is indeed a testament to the degree of control that the Egyptian state has gained over al-Azhar in the past century. However, as the experience of the past several decades illustrates, this policy will ultimately be self-defeating despite any short-term benefits that the government may gain. Tantawi's appointment should be seen not as a sign of state strength but, rather, as a sign of the government's increasing desperation. Mubarak is well aware of the long-term impact that Tantawi's appointment will have on state-society relations in Egypt. However, at the same time, he has seen the state's control of society erode on a number of fronts, primarily due to rapid economic liberalization.⁷⁶ The appointment of Tantawi indicates that the Egyptian government is desperately seeking ways to shore up its control over society and that it is willing to adopt short-term policies that may eventually undermine its rule.

CONCLUSIONS

The case of religious regulation in contemporary Egypt suggests that government leaders can either attempt to dominate intermediate institutions or seek a cooperative relationship. In consolidating their control following the 1952 coup, Egypt's leaders opted for the prior strategy of domination and engaged religious institutions in a struggle for control. Although the government was able to dominate al-Azhar, such a policy was not in the long-term interests of the state because it led to the growth of radical Islam and the relative decline in the legitimacy of al-Azhar, at least within one segment of Egyptian society. The shift from domination to a cooperative relationship in the early 1990s allowed the government and al-Azhar to confront the challenge of militant Islam and benefit from what Migdal, Kholi, and Shue term "mutual empowerment."⁷⁷ However, the shift to a cooperative relationship was painful and frustrating for the government because al-Azhar's renewed influence meant that the government was forced to bear increasing criticism from an institution that it once dominated. As this criticism increased and al-Azhar scored further victories over state institutions, the government found it more and more difficult to resist a renewed policy of domination. The result was the appointment of the pro-government Tantawi as Shaykh al-Azhar in early 1996.

Gehad Auda has noted a similar pattern of interaction between the government and the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s.⁷⁸ As the government attempted to discredit militant Islamists, it forged a cooperative arrangement with the moderate Muslim Brotherhood that is strikingly similar to the government's subsequent partnership with al-Azhar. During this period, the Brotherhood renounced violence and pledged to work within the political system for moderate Islamic reform. In return, the state allowed the Brotherhood to run in the 1984 and 1987 parliamentary elections in coalition with secular opposition parties and to participate in the elections for a great

number of Egyptian syndicates and associations. Auda argues that “this accommodation found its driving force in the state’s need to create a popular base against radical fundamentalists.”⁷⁹ However, Auda contends that the government soon fell victim to its own partnership as the Muslim Brotherhood took advantage of its political leverage increasingly to criticize and pressure the government from within. Ultimately, the government broke its arrangement with the Brotherhood and again attempted to dominate the organization. Not surprisingly, this change of strategy corresponded to the resurgence of Islamist violence in the early 1990s and the government’s renewed courting of al-Azhar.

Over time, Egyptian government policy toward religious institutions appears to be schizophrenic: its policy toward both al-Azhar and the Muslim Brotherhood has shifted back and forth between strategies of domination and cooperation. These pendulum-like shifts in policy are the result of a paradoxical relationship between state power and social control. The primary goal of many developing states is to maintain social control and pre-empt challenges to the state. Fulfillment of this goal pushes the government toward a policy of domination. When the government has the capacity to control intermediate institutions (particularly those which pose potential threats to the state), it is likely to exert this control. Paradoxically, state domination has a perverse effect on these institutions and the state’s standing in society. These dynamics force the government to reverse direction and enter into cooperative relationships with social forces that share some of its goals. However, as the case of al-Azhar illustrates, cooperative relationships are often fraught with tension because intermediate institutions begin to press for the government to further their own agenda. As this pressure builds, the government is tempted to sever its cooperative relationship and renew a strategy of domination.

This analysis casts considerable doubt on state-centered approaches to politics that are prone to the simplistic assumption that a preponderance of state power over society will inevitably give it the ability to shape society as it wants. The Egyptian case of religious regulation suggests that high levels of state power can paradoxically undermine the state’s control of society. The endemic problem of political instability in the developing world in many cases is not the result of weak political institutions, as many would suggest. Rather, many developing states are simply too strong vis-à-vis intermediate institutions, tempting the strong state to adopt short-term horizons and policies of domination that eventually invigorate opposition and undermine the state’s hold on society.

NOTES

Author’s note: An earlier version of this article was presented at the 1997 conference of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C. I would like to thank Ellis Goldberg, Joel Migdal, Anthony Gill, Arang Keshavarzian, Ben Smith, Julie Taylor, and the four anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on various drafts of this article. Any mistakes are solely the responsibility of the author.

¹For more on the increasing government regulation of al-Azhar and Egypt’s other religious institutions, see Asim Disuqi, *Mujtama’ Ulama al-Azhar fi Misr* (Cairo: Dar al Thaqafah al-Jadidah, 1980); Daniel Crecelius, *The Ulama and the State in Modern Egypt* (unpublished diss., Princeton University, Princeton, N.J., 1967); idem, “Al-Azhar in the Revolution,” *Middle East Journal* (Winter 1996): 31–49; Bayard Dodge, *Al-Azhar: A Millennium of Muslim Learning* (Washington, D.C.: Middle East Institute, 1961);

Majda ʿAli Salah Rabiʿ, *al-Dawr al-Siyasi liʿl-Azhar, 1952–1981* (The Political Role of al-Azhar, 1952–1981) (Cairo: Center for Political Studies and Research, Cairo University, 1992); and Chris Eccel, *Egypt, Islam, and Social Change: Al-Azhar in Conflict and Accommodation* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1984).

²Eccel, *Egypt, Islam, and Social Change*, 73–74.

³Patrick D. Gaffney, “The Changing Voices of Islam: Professional Preachers in Contemporary Egypt,” *The Muslim World* 81 (1991): 30.

⁴Very similar policies were adopted in Iran by Reza Shah and in Turkey by Atatürk. Although there is a rich body of literature on each of these cases, a comparative study including the experiences of all three countries is necessary. Such comparative research could focus on the various motivations and constraints of state leaders, the various defensive strategies employed by the ulama, and how these alternative state–ulama strategies influenced the process of state-building.

⁵Gaffney, “Changing Voices of Islam,” 29.

⁶Director of al-Azhar.

⁷Prior to reorganization, al-Azhar was extremely decentralized. The Shaykh al-Azhar was charged with managing the institution as a whole (including maintenance, appointing various shaykhs to lead prayer, and acting as a figurehead). However, key roles were delegated to other Azhar officials. For example, the leading shaykh of each *riwāq* (residential unit) was responsible for guiding and disciplining the students under his direction, and the head of each *mathhab* (code of jurisprudence) was responsible for classes related to his legal system. For more on the early, decentralized structure of al-Azhar, see Dodge, *Al-Azhar*.

⁸Robert Bianchi, *Unruly Corporatism: Associational Life in Twentieth-Century Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 180.

⁹Gaffney, “Changing Voices of Islam,” 30.

¹⁰Morroe Berger, *Islam in Egypt Today: Social and Political Aspects of Popular Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 45.

¹¹Law 103 of 1961 can be found in Wizarat al-Awqaf, *al-Azhar: tarikhuhu wa tatawwuruhu* (Cairo, 1964), 447–503.

¹²Eccel, *Egypt, Islam, and Social Change*, 499–500.

¹³Creelius, *The ʿUlama and the State*, 346. The temporary military directors were Kamal al-Din Rifʿat (11 February 1959–23 October 1959), Ahmad Abdallah Tuʿaima (24 October 1959–17 October 1961), and Husayn al-Shafiʿi (18 October 1961–23 October 1962). All three of these figures were Free Officers and important officials during the Nasser years. Tuʿaima in particular was earlier appointed by Nasser to organize and mobilize the Liberation Rally and to solicit trade-union support following the 1952 coup. Tuʿaima’s success in organizing the Liberation Rally and his later appointment as the military director of al-Azhar indicates that Nasser was serious about the need to control and co-opt al-Azhar.

¹⁴Eccel, *Egypt, Islam, and Social Change*, 509.

¹⁵Eccel notes that this attrition rate cannot be attributed to the retirement of Azhar scholars because many of al-Azhar’s oldest scholars were not removed during this period.

¹⁶This was a strategy that state leaders had pursued well before the 1952 coup. See Creelius, *The ʿUlama and the State*, 290–327, for a discussion of the rivalry between Mustafa al-Maraghi and Muhammad al-Zawahiri.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 441–47.

¹⁸John Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 130.

¹⁹A. I. Dawisha, *Egypt in the Arab World: The Elements of Foreign Policy* (London: Macmillan Press, 1976), 164.

²⁰See Derek Hopwood, *Egypt: Politics and Society 1945–90* (London: Routledge, 1993), 119, for excerpts of al-Azhar’s fatwa supporting peace with Israel.

²¹See Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, “Operation Desert Storm and the War of the Fatwas,” in *Islamic Legal Interpretation: Muftis and Their Fatwas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 297–309.

²²Iran’s Islamic Revolution of 1979 is perhaps the best example of this fact. While there were several movements that opposed the Shah’s rule, the ulama proved to be the most organized and effective force in mobilizing public opposition. The Iranian Revolution illustrated the continuing influence of the ulama in Iranian society despite decades of secular rule. Clearly, the Iranian Revolution figures prominently in Egyptian government policy toward mosques.

²³The government has pressed a similar policy of subsidizing and nationalizing Coptic churches throughout Egypt.

²⁴Bianchi, *Unruly Corporatism*, 191–92.

²⁵As with the government reorganization of al-Azhar in 1961, there has been resistance to the nationalization of private mosques. In several cases, forced government nationalization has led to mass arrests and rioting. See Gaffney, “Changing Voices of Islam,” 45.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 40.

²⁷“Awqaf Minister on Mosque Extremism Controls,” *al-Musawwar* (23 September 1994), 18–19, 40–42, 80.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 19.

²⁹Mahjub estimated that about 20 preachers are penalized per week throughout Egypt.

³⁰*Al-Musawwar* (23 September 1994), 18.

³¹This was certainly not a phenomenon peculiar to the Egyptian case of increasing religious regulation. More than 150 years earlier, Alexis de Tocqueville commented that “there have been religions intimately linked to earthly governments, dominating men’s souls by terror and by faith; but when a religion makes such an alliance, I am afraid to say that it makes the same mistake as any man might; it sacrifices the future for the present, and by gaining a power to which it has no claim, it risks its legitimate authority.” See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer (New York: Harper, 1988), 297.

³²Gilles Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaoh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 183.

³³Ahmad ‘Izz al-Din, “The Coming Crisis with al-Azhar,” *al-Sha‘b*, 22 January 1993, 7.

³⁴Barry Rubin, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Egyptian Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 80.

³⁵This group refers to itself as the *Jamā‘at al-Muslimīn* (Society of Muslims).

³⁶Bianchi, *Unruly Corporatism*; Ellis Goldberg, “Smashing Idols and the State,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31 (January 1991); Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*; Johannes Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat’s Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1986).

³⁷Bianchi, *Unruly Corporatism*, 179.

³⁸Goldberg, “Smashing Idols.”

³⁹These approaches provide an important corrective to the majority of studies on radical Islam that fail to examine the central grievances of Egyptian Islamic groups, choosing instead to focus on economic stagnation and social dislocation (e.g., Saad Eddin Ibrahim, “Anatomy of Egypt’s Militant Islamic Groups: Methodological Note and Preliminary Findings,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12 [1980]: 423–53; Mamoun Fandy, “The Tensions Behind the Violence In Egypt,” *Middle East Policy*: 11 [1993]: 25–34); the delegitimation of Nasser’s socialist and Pan-Arabist policies following Egypt’s defeat in the 1967 war (e.g., Tareq and Jacqueline Ismael, *Government and Politics in Islam* [London: Frances Pinter, 1985]; or Sadat’s policy of aiding radical Islamic groups from 1970–73 to counterbalance Nasserists in Egyptian universities, labor unions, and professional syndicates (Eccel, *Egypt, Islam, and Social Change*).

⁴⁰See Anthony McDermott, *Egypt From Nasser to Mubarak: A Flawed Revolution* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1988); 190–95.

⁴¹Kepel, *Muslim Extremism in Egypt*, 79.

⁴²Goldberg’s comparison of radical Islamic groups and the Protestant movement again reveals an interesting similarity in the way these two movements attempted to undermine the legitimacy of the established order. According to Goldberg, “both movements transferred religious authority away from officially sanctioned individuals who interpret texts to ordinary citizens.” There also seems to be a strong relationship between radical Islamist rejection of the ulama and the rapid increase in literacy in post-1952 Egypt. When the vast majority of Egyptians were illiterate, the ulama had unique access to the Qur’an and other Islamic texts. However, as the literacy rate increased and followers gained access to these same holy texts, it became possible for militants to challenge the respected status of the ulama in Egyptian society. Similarly, Protestant efforts to transfer religious authority away from established religious institutions depended on increasing rates of literacy in Europe.

⁴³Muhammad ‘Abd al-Salam Faraj, *al-Faridah al-Gha‘ibah*, reprinted in “*Kutayyib al-farida al-gha‘iba wa al-radd ‘alayhi*” (The Neglected Duty Pamphlet and the Response to It), *al-Fatawa al-Islamiyyah*, vol. 10 (Cairo: *Dar al-Ifta‘ al Miṣriyyah*, 1982). For a translation and analysis of *al-Faridah al-Gha‘ibah*, see Jansen, *The Neglected Duty*.

⁴⁴Faraj’s stand echoed the position taken by Sayyid Qutb in *Ma‘alim fi‘l-Tariq*, probably the most important foundational text of the radical Islamic movement in Egypt. Qutb was executed in 1966 shortly after he wrote *Ma‘alim fi‘l-Tariq* (Cairo: Dar al-Shourouk, 1980).

⁴⁵Jad al-Haqq ‘Ali Jad al-Haqq, “*Kutayyib al-farida al-gha’iba wa al-radd ‘alayhi*” (The Neglected Duty Pamphlet and the Response to It), *al-Fatawa al-Islamiyyah* (Cairo: Dar al-Ifṭā’ al-Misriyyah), 10: 3726–92.

⁴⁶Ibid., 3754 (author’s translation).

⁴⁷See section VIII, part II, entitled “*Islam wa Ilm*” (Islam and Knowledge); *ibid.*, 3752–55.

⁴⁸Ibid., 3753 (author’s translation).

⁴⁹Ibid., 3754.

⁵⁰See the section entitled “*biladuna dar islam*” (Our Country Is a House of Islam), *ibid.*, 3743–44, and section X entitled “*hal al-jihad fariḍa gha’iba?*” (Is Jihad a Neglected Duty?), *ibid.*, 3760–61.

⁵¹Bianchi, *Unruly Corporatism*, 182–83.

⁵²The Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwān al-Muslimin*) was founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna. Although it has exhibited extremist tendencies at times, since the 1970s it has formally renounced the use of violence and has worked within the political system to achieve its goal of a more pious Egyptian society.

⁵³*Al-Jumhuriyah*, 23 February 1995, 2.

⁵⁴These central aims can be generalized for religious institutions in many other contexts. For a good theoretical framework of church–state relations, see Anthony Gill, *Rendering unto Caesar: The Political Economy of Church–State Relations in Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

⁵⁵Since early 1992, Egypt’s political climate has been marked by increasing violence between the state and militant Islamic groups, leaving thousands dead. Assassination attempts against the president and the minister of interior underline the scale of the threat to the government.

⁵⁶Anthony Gill’s work on the political economy of church–state relations in Latin America provides an interesting comparison with the Egyptian case. Gill’s work suggests that the Roman Catholic church sought a cooperative relationship with the state in several Latin American countries when it faced increasing competition from Protestantism. However, unlike the Egyptian case, Latin American governments were reluctant to cooperate with the Catholic church because the state’s vital interests simply were not threatened. As a result, church–state relations were marked by increasing conflict. Based on his research in Latin America, Gill has also generated a theoretical framework that explains the conditions under which state and religious institutions will cooperate and when they are likely to come in conflict. As part of his framework, Gill argues that “if government officials consider the religious or ideological challenge as threatening, they will be willing to cooperate with the church and church–state relations will remain friendly.” This has been precisely the case in contemporary Egypt.

⁵⁷It should be noted that al-Azhar’s goal of propagating Islam is not inconsistent with the goals of radical Islamists. This has led some to conclude that al-Azhar and radical Islamists cooperate in a loose division of labor. See Chris Eccel, “‘Alim and Mujahid in Egypt: Orthodoxy Versus Subculture, or Division of Labor,” *Muslim World* 85 (July 1988): 189–208. Al-Azhar’s ulama do indeed share some goals with their radical Islamist counterparts, but, as we have seen, radical Islamist groups also threaten al-Azhar’s position in Egyptian society, forcing al-Azhar and the state to cooperate. These overlapping interests are often overlooked in the literature on Egyptian fundamentalism.

⁵⁸Jansen, *The Neglected Duty*, xix.

⁵⁹This practice is also referred to as female genital mutilation.

⁶⁰Cherif Cordahi, “Egypt: State Sits Uncomfortably Next to Islamic Clerics,” *Inter Press Service*, 29 April 1995.

⁶¹Under Jad al-Haqq’s leadership, al-Azhar also opposed the government’s program on population control in general.

⁶²For statements of al-Azhar’s position toward the International Conference on Population and Development, see *al-Wafd*, 17 August 1994, 8, and *al-Ahram*, 11 August 1994, 7.

⁶³Indeed, an interesting parallel can be drawn between al-Azhar’s refusal to compromise on these fundamental issues and similar circumstances with the Catholic church. In fact, the Catholic church issued many of the same statements as al-Azhar leading up to the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development.

⁶⁴This is perhaps the clearest example of a “division of labor” that may exist between radical Islamists and al-Azhar shaykhs. By condemning Foda as an apostate, al-Azhar essentially issued a death sentence to be carried out by radical Islamists. Shaykh al-Ghazzali’s defense of the assassination further highlights the mutual interest of radical Islamists and some of the more radical Azhar shaykhs.

⁶⁵See “The Case of Abu Zaid,” *Index on Censorship* 4 (1996): 30–39.

⁶⁶The Majlis al-Dawla (State Council) is an administrative court within Egypt's judicial system. One of its main functions is to deal with questions of jurisdiction within the administrative apparatus of the executive branch of government.

⁶⁷Audiovisual productions include artwork, films, and musical recordings.

⁶⁸Egyptian Organization for Human Rights (hereafter EOHR), *Freedom of Opinion and Belief: Restrictions and Dilemmas, Proceedings of the Workshop on the Azhar's Censorship of Audio and Audiovisual Productions* (Cairo: EOHR, 1994), 30.

⁶⁹Deborah Pugh, "Egypt's Islamists Go on Cultural Offensive," *The Guardian* (London), 7 March 1994, 7.

⁷⁰For an analysis of Tariq al-Bishri's early writing, see Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

⁷¹EOHR, 43.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 43.

⁷³For an excellent overview of Tantawi's background and his most important fatwas as Grand Mufti, see Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dar al-Ifta* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 251–94.

⁷⁴Tantawi asserts that early abortion is acceptable in Islam because the shari'c requires that the mother retain the embryo from the first day she feels its presence. Tantawi further argues that a woman should have the right to abortion at any stage during pregnancy if the life of the mother is threatened. Further, Tantawi supports the government's population-control policy in general.

⁷⁵Raymond Baker, "Afraid for Islam: Egypt's Muslim Centrists Between Pharaohs and Fundamentalists," *Daedalus* (Summer 1991): 41–68.

⁷⁶For more on this, see Rex Brynen, Bahgar Korany, and Paul Noble, ed., *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World, Theoretical Perspectives* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995); Ibrahim Oweiss, ed., *The Political Economy of Contemporary Egypt* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1990); Dennis Sullivan and Iliya Harik, ed., *Privatization and Liberalization in the Middle East* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

⁷⁷Joel S. Migdal, Atul Kohli, and Vivienne Shue, ed., *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁷⁸Gehad Auda, "The 'Normalization' of the Islamic Movement in Egypt from the 1970s to the Early 1990s," in *Accounting for Fundamentalism: The Dynamic Character of Movements*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 388.