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 Husni 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 moderate cast. The g[...] as it became increasingly dependent o[...] over, the government found that manip[...] to state policy undermined al-Azhar's i[...] fore its ability to discredit opponents [...] major concessions from the governm[...] officials sympathetic to al-Azhar's inter[...]

The first part of this article reviews t[...] of religious institutions and the impa[...]

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 STA
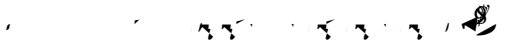
Gamal Abdel Nasser, understood the importance of

With the 1961 reorganization and the subsequent purges of al-Azhar faculty, Nasser gained the valuable endorsement of one of Islam's most in˘uential 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 Aˆairs, which addressed the supposed connection between Islam and socialism. The Supreme Council's publication, *M* ˎ ˎ - ˎ (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 ˜nanced 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 in˘uence.

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 justi˜ed overturning Nasser's land-reform program, his policy of *ah* (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 War[21] 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 govern-

mosques to 71 percent of

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

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, Tak˜r wa al-Hijra,[35] and al-Jamaça 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 study[38] 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 aˆairs, by the Tak˜r wa al-Hijra group in June 1977.[40] The assassination shocked the ulama of al-Azhar, as al-Dhahabi was not only a government o¯cial but also a learned religious scholar. Moreover, Shukri Mustafa, the leader of the Tak˜r 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 Quråan 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. A

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 çAli 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 Eg

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, testi˜ed at the trial of the two suspected assassins. Shaykh al-Ghazzali argued that it is the duty of

Islamist sympathizers had a presence within the Majlis al-Dawla. This example lends credence 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, çAsim 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:

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

In March 1996, Mubarak was forced to make a momentous decision that would aˆect relations between al-Azhar and the government for years to come. Shaykh al-Azhar Jad al-Haqq ¸Ali 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, diˆered 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, T

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 inˇuential 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 beneˇts 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 beneˇt 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 inˇuence 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 diˉcult 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 accommo-
dation 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 le

Majda çAli Salah Rabiç, , *1952 1981* (The Political Role of al-Azhar, 1952–1981) (Cairo: Center for Political Studies and Research, Cairo University, 1992); and Chris Eccel, , (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz V

[24]Bianchi, *U_ _ _*ᵞ *_ _ 9_ _ _*, 191–92.

[25]As 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 Ga^ney, "Changing Voices of Islam," 45.

[26]Ibid., 40.

[27]"Awqaf Minister on Mosque Extremism Controls," *-M_ _* (23 September 1994), 18–19, 40–42, 80.

[28]Ibid., 19.

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

[30]*A -M_ _* (23 September 1994), 18.

[31]This 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 sacri˜ces 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, *_ _*ᵞ *A _ _*, ed. J. P. Mayer (New York: Harper, 1988), 297.

[32]Gilles Kepel, *M_ _ _ _ _ _ 9: _ 9 _ _ _ _ _*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 183.

[33]Ahmad çIzz al-Din, "The Coming Crisis with al-Azhar," *- _ _*, 22 January 1993, 7.

[34]Barry Rubin, *_ _ _ - _ _ _ 9 _ _ _*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 80.

[35]This group refers to itself as the *a - -M_ _ 0* (Society of Muslims).

[36]Bianchi, *U_ _ _*ᵞ *_ 9_ _ _*; Ellis Goldberg, "Smashing Idols and the State," *9 _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _*ᵞ *_ _ _ _*31 (January 1991); Kepel, *M_ _ _ _ _ _ _ 9*; Johannes Jansen, *_ _ _ _ _*ᵞ *_ _ _ _ _ _ _ A_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ M_ _*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1986).

[37]Bianchi, *U_ _ _*ᵞ *_ 9_ _ _*, 179.

[38]Goldberg, "Smashing Idols."

[39]These 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 Eg   v5j /F5 1 Tens 0.s Beber 0 Th

⁴⁵Jad al-Haqq çAli Jad al-Haqq, "＿＿＿" (The Neglected Duty Pamphlet and the Response to It), ＿＿＿ (Cairo: Dar al-Iftaå al-Misriyyah), 10: 3726–92.

⁴⁶Ibid., 3754 (author's translation).

⁴⁷See section VIII, part II, entitled "＿＿" (Islam and Knowledge); ibid., 3752–55.

⁴⁸Ibid., 3753 (author's translation).

⁴⁹Ibid., 3754.

⁵⁰See the section entitled "＿＿＿" (Our Country Is a House of Islam), ibid., 3743–44, and section X entitled "＿＿＿?" (Is Jihad a Neglected Duty?), ibid., 3760–61.

⁵¹Bianchi, U＿＿, 182–83.

⁵²The Muslim Brotherhood (＿＿-M＿＿) 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＿＿＿, 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, ＿＿＿ ＿＿＿ (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 con˘ict. 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 con˘ict. As part of his framework, Gill argues that "if government o¯cials 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, "çAlim and Mujahid in Egypt: Orthodoxy Versus Subculture, or Division of Labor," M＿＿ 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, ＿＿＿xix.

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

⁶⁰Cherif Cordahi, "Egypt: State Sits Uncomfortably Next to Islamic Clerics," ＿＿＿, 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 ＿＿, 17 August 1994, 8, and ＿＿, 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