

The Islamic Movement in Egypt: Perceptions of International Relations 1967–81

By Walid M. Abdelnasser. London: Kegan Paul International, 1994, 308 pp.

The author of this book is a member of the Egyptian diplomatic service with a Ph.D. from the University of Geneva. This study employs carefully defined concepts, the most important one being Islamism as the politicization of Islamic symbols. In addition, however, he defines the boundary between the internal world of perceptions and the external world that is being perceived as the *ummah*. In so doing, the author logically raises the question of the universalism of Islam and the particularism of Egyptian nationalist foreign policy perceptions. It is this carefulness that allows the author to tell the story of Islamic ideological perceptions objectively and without raising controversies of theological interpretation.

The book begins with a historical treatment of the Islamic perception of international relations from the foreign policy of the Prophet Muhammad to the formulations of al-Afghānī, 'Abduh, and Riḍā. He includes in this survey the organizational development and points of view of the al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn, the al-Jamā'at al-Islāmiyah, and the clandestine organizations, (e.g., Shabāb Muḥammad, al-Takfīr wa al-Hijrah, and al-Jihād). He then goes on to identify the positions of these organizations on the internal issues of the Muslim world, e.g., the Iranian revolution, the Muslim world in general, and the attitude toward particular Muslim countries. On the question of the Iranian revolution, the Ikhwān initially supported it but, as the Iranians attacked it and its leader, al-Tilmasānī, this support cooled. The Ikhwān had less concern with the Shi'ism of the Iranian revolution than did the remaining more extreme groups in Egypt. These supported the revolution but had doubts about its Shi'ism.

The "external" issue of the Israeli Zionist threat also provides evidence of relative moderation by the Ikhwān. It initially opposed the Egyptian-Israeli peace but then tacitly came to accept it. It also was totally opposed to the normalization of relations with Israel. As the author notes, this position was very much in conformity with Egyptian public sentiment. The other groups, on the other hand, remained adamantly opposed.

In general, the Egyptian Muslim organizational point of view of foreign policy naturally responded to international forces. Thus, they were uniformly opposed to communism and especially the Soviet invasion

of Afghanistan. The Egyptian mujahidin who went to Afghanistan to fight resembled those who went to fight in Palestine in 1936-39 and 1948-49. With communism having passed from the scene, the attention of those groups is now focused upon the peace process and the United States. One conclusion of the author is that the Ikhwān is adjusting and accommodating to the peace process while the other more radical groups do not have Israel as a primary concern; rather, they challenge the Muslim credentials of their political leadership. In other words, peace with Israel is not as divisive an issue as one might think.

This book is an important scholarly contribution both substantively and also in terms of its prodigious research in (primarily) Arabic sources. An important question largely undeveloped is that of the relationship of Egyptian foreign policy objectives to those of Islamism. Implicitly, it seems that it can be argued that Egypt's policy coincides with both the process of furthering Egyptian nationalism and Arab nationalism and the reinforcement of Islamism. In other words, is Egypt's effort at regional hegemony, the seeking of international rents (e.g., foreign economic assistance, worker remittances), and national security compatible with Islamism or not?

Finally, the author has been ill served by a publisher who has failed to edit the book properly; sentence structures are faulty and arguments are repeated. As an illustration, the content of the historical section is repeated in the latter chapters. In addition, the transliteration of Arabic words is idiosyncratic, e.g., *Shikh* for *Shaykh* (p. 63) and *Shi'y* for *Shi'i* (p. 116).

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