

## ***The Power of Nightmares: The Rise of the Politics of Fear, written and produced by Adam Curtis (2004)***

### ***Part I: Baby, It's Cold Outside [1949-1983]***

*These notes summarize the argument of the first part of "The Power of Nightmares," and add some additional historical information.*

#### **Radical Islamists**

**Sayyid Qutb** (1906-1966): ["In 1939, he became a functionary in Egypt's Ministry of Education (*wizarat al-ma'arif*); from 1948 to 1950, he went to the United States on a scholarship to study the educational system, receiving a master's degree from the Colorado State College of Education (now the University of Northern Colorado). Qutb's first major theoretical work of religious social criticism, *Al-'adala al-Ijtima'iyya fi-l-Islam* (*Social Justice in Islam*), was published in 1949, during his time overseas. -- The perceived racism, materialism, and 'loose' sexual conduct that he saw in the United States is believed by some to have been the impetus for his rejection of Western values and his move towards radicalism upon returning to Egypt. Resigning from the civil service he became perhaps the most persuasive publicist of the Muslim Brotherhood. The school of thought he inspired has become known as **Qutbism**." — *Wikipedia*.]

**1954**: Qutb arrested, tortured; develops ideology of *Jahiliyya*, "which originally referred to humanity's state of ignorance before the revelation of Islam, to modern-day Muslim societies. In his view, turning away from Islamic law and Islamic values under the influence of European imperialism had left the Muslim world in a condition of debased ignorance, similar to that of the pre-Islamic era (or *Jahiliyya*)" — *Wikipedia*. Qutb later writes books calling for the formation of a **vanguard** to rise up and kill corrupt leaders on the grounds that they are **no longer true Muslims**. ["His radicalization culminated in a little book published in 1964 which was based on the ideas he had written in notes and letters during his time in prison. This is the famous *Ma'alim fi-l-Tariq*." — *Wikipedia*.]

**1966**: Qutb is arrested, tried, and executed on Aug. 29, 1966. On Aug. 30, Ayman Zawahiri forms a cell that he hopes will become one of Qutb's vanguard; Zawahiri will be Osama bin Laden's mentor.

Late 1970s: Egypt has become "a modern Westernized state."

**Ayman Zawahiri** [1951- ? (present whereabouts unknown)], from a prominent Saudi-Egyptian family, is secretly the leader of an underground cell. Qutb's ideas are spreading because of widespread corruption in **Anwar Sadat's** regime (which Sadat always denied as Soviet propaganda). When Sadat is persuaded by Kissinger to play a role in the Israeli peace process, Zawahiri and associates regard it as proof that he has completely betrayed Islam and is no longer "Muslim."

**1979**: Islamic revolution in Iran puts Qutb on a postage stamp. The West's notion of "freedom" is rejected as a source of corruption.

End of 1980: Zawahiri, who has become a doctor but still heads a secret cell, helps form "Islamic Jihad" to kill Sadat spectacularly.

After Sadat's assassination [on Oct. 6, **1981**], there is no uprising. Assassins arrested and executed. Zawahiri arrested and sentenced to three years; tortured. Develops theological view that the failure to rise up signifies that the masses themselves have become so corrupt as to cease to be true Muslims, and therefore they can be killed by the vanguard for salutary effect — "to kill our way to perfection" as one expert paraphrased.

#### **American Neoconservatives**

**Leo Strauss** (1899-1973), taught at the University of Chicago from 1949 to 1968. He regarded liberal society as doomed to nihilism in the absence of salutary myths, and regarded the breakdown of civil order in the United States in the **1960s** as a symptom of this malaise. Attracted disciples — **Irving Kristol**, **Paul Wolfowitz**, Francis Fukuyama, **William Kristol**, Harvey Mansfield, Stanley Rosen. Idealists who aim "to stop the social disintegration they believed liberal freedom had unleashed . . . One of the great influences in doing this would be the theories of Leo Strauss . . . They would set out to recreate the myth of America as a unique nation whose destiny was to battle against evil in the world, and in this project the source of evil would be America's cold war enemy, the Soviet Union, and in doing this they believed that they would not only give new meaning to people's lives but they would spread the good of democracy around the world" (Adam Curtis).

*Bête noire* of the neoconservatives: Henry Kissinger (born 1923), because he was committed to realpolitik and relativism.

**1972**: Nixon/Kissinger begin era of détente. **June 1, 1972**, Nixon's speech on ABM treaty, beginning of end of post-1945 era of fear. Neoconservatives, including **Donald Rumsfeld** and Dick Cheney, set out to destroy Henry Kissinger. CIA dismisses Rumsfeld's view of the Soviet Union, but in **1976** he persuades Pres. Gerald Ford to set up "Team B" to examine evidence from another set of assumptions. "Team B" headed up by **Richard Pipes** and Paul Wolfowitz. "Team B" develops suspicious views based on the notion that evidence of absence is not absence of evidence, argues for the existence of undetectable weapons systems. [For more on "Team B" see Anne Hessing Cahn, "Team B: The Trillion-Dollar Experiment," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (April 1993).] Their ideas were "all wrong" (**Anne Cahn**, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, 1977-1980). But their views contribute to the formation of the Committee on the Present Danger, which was founded nine days after Jimmy Carter was elected president in **1976**. Ronald Reagan joins; propaganda is produced describing an America facing a radical threat from "a concentration of world evil" (Solzhenitsyn). "This nightmarish vision was beginning to give the neoconservatives great power and influence" (Curtis).

**1981**: Neoconservatives mobilize religion; Republican Party forms alliance with the religious right. Wolfowitz, Perle, Pipes get policy positions in Reagan administration.

**1981-1983**: Reagan converted to neoconservative line, with the help of William Casey. **Michael Ledeen** as an example of someone who comes to believe his own propaganda (the report given to Reagan to prove that the Soviet Union was behind most of the terrorism in the world was largely based on the CIA's own black propaganda, acc. to Melvin Goodman, Head of the Office of Soviet Affairs at the CIA, 1976-1987).

*[Others interviewed in Part I of "The Power of Nightmares," not mentioned above: John Calvert, Azzam Tamimi, Gen. Fouad Allam, Roxanne Eugen, Stephen Holmes, Omar Azzam, Kamal Habib, Gilles Kepel, Paul Weyrich.]*

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**You are invited** to a brown-bag discussion of **the politics of fear** in UC-206 on Wednesday, Sept. 14, at 12:30 p.m. — the first of many Wed. 12:30 p.m. brown-bags at PLU. Bring your lunch and participate in an interesting conversation!