

US Sponsored “Islamic Fundamentalism”: The Roots of the US-Wahhabi Alliance

By [Benjamin Schett](#)

Global Research, September 07, 2012

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Religion](#)

In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#), [SYRIA](#)

The alliance between the United States and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia helped spread the ideology of fundamentalist Sunni Islam all over the globe. The majority of its victims are not citizens of Western countries, but citizens of countries that U.S. elites consider a threat to their economic and geopolitical interests. Many victims of Sunni extremism (often called Wahhabism or Salafism[1]) are in fact Muslims (often with a secular leftist or nationalist political background), moderate Sunni or members of Shi'ite Islamic faith.

This article addresses the history of Wahhabi fundamentalism and the examples of Afghanistan in the 80s, as well as the current situation in Syria. Both cases illustrate America's responsibility for the destruction of secular, socially progressive societies in the Islamic world and elsewhere.

The Origins of Wahhabism

Wahhabi ideology serves U.S. interests for several reasons. Its followers' archaic perception of society makes them reject any kind of progressive social change. Therefore they are well equipped to push back socialist, secular or nationalist movements, whose independence-oriented policies are a threat to America's geopolitical agenda. Although Wahhabism certainly is not representative of the majority of Sunni Muslims, Wahhabi Muslims are Sunni extremists, which causes them to maintain an extremely hostile stance towards Shi'ite Islam.

After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which brought down the secular-nationalist regime of Saddam Hussein (a Sunni), the influence of Shi'ite-dominated Iran increased and caused a certain power shift in favor of Shi'ite Islam in the region. Due to this strengthened Shi'ite representation, American activities in the Middle East in recent years have been almost exclusively directed against Shi'ite interests. The emancipation of deprived Shi'ite masses in Iraq, Bahrain, Yemen or Lebanon are contrary to aspirations from the side of the U.S., whose main allies in the region (next to Israel) consist of repressive Sunni regimes and terror groups.

In the case of Syria, President Bashar Al-Assad (an ally of Iran) and the secular Syrian society particularly evoke the hatred of extremists. The fact that Al-Assad belongs to the Alawite minority (a mystical religious group and a branch of Shi'ite Islam) makes him unacceptable to Wahhabi purists.

Portraying Syria ruled solely by its Alawi minority (as some mainstream journalists tend to do) would nevertheless be wrong. As Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya pointed out, among the Syrian top officials killed by a terrorist attack on July 18, 2012, Sunnis and Christians could

be found among the Alawites.[2]

It is therefore worth examining the background of these enemies of secularism, multi-faith society and progress. Wahhabism is a puritanical branch of Sunni Islam that was founded in the middle of the 18th Century by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab, a theologian who propagated holy war and the “purification” of Islam. One of his inspirations was Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328), an early Islamic fundamentalist scholar who opposed any kind of intellectual debate that differentiated between the word of god and its interpretation.

Al-Wahhab and his ideas might have been forgotten by history if he hadn’t made a pact with Muhammad ibn Saud, emir of Al-Diriyah and ruler of the first Saudi state in 1744.

According to Robert Dreyfuss, the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance:

“...began a campaign of killing and plunder all across Arabia, first in central Arabia, then in Asir in Southern Arabia and parts of Yemen, and finally in Rhiadh and the Hijaz. In 1802 they raided the Shiite holy city of Karbala in what is now Iraq, killing most of the city’s population, destroying the dome over the grave of a founder of Shiism, and looting property, weapons, clothing, carpets, gold, silver and precious copies of the Quran.”[3]

In order to keep the faith “pure”, influences from Greek philosophy, Christianity and Judaism had to be exterminated. Intellectuals, artists, scientists and progressive rulers were declared enemies with no right to live.

It goes without saying that the idea of representing the pure teaching of Islam was fanatically pursued; in fact, Wahhabi warriors were fighting in order to spread the most archaic lifestyle that could be found within Arab culture.

In the second half of the 19th century, British imperialism discovered the house of Al Saud as a potentially useful ally in its attempt to gain influence in the Middle-East.

Riadh had been invaded by the Ottoman sultan in 1818. The Al Saud returned to power in 1823, but its area of control was mainly restricted to the Saudi heartland of the Nejd region, known as the second Saudi State. In 1899 the British helped the Al Saud establish a base in its protectorate of Kuwait, in order to reconquer Riadh, at that time ruled by the pro-Ottoman Al Rashid dynasty.

Originally Great Britain’s motivation to gain influence in the Middle-East was caused by their view of Arabia and the Gulf as being “one link in a chain that ran from Suez to India, the two anchors of the empire.”[4] Vast oil reserves would be discovered in the 1930s.

Great Britain became the first country to recognize the new Saudi Arabia as an independent state, establishing its current borders in 1932. A “Treaty of Friendship and Good Understanding” between the British Crown and the Saudi monarch was signed already in 1927. The 1924 integration of the holy sites of Mecca and Medina into the kingdom through military conquest inevitably contributed to firmly entrenching Al Saud’s authority in the Muslim world.

U.S. interest in Saudi Arabia started to grow as well around the same time, and a treaty with the California Arabian Standard Oil Company was agreed upon in 1932. It was the first such agreement created in cooperation with a western oil company.

In the following years and decades, the increasing revenues in oil business enabled the Saudi financing of religious institutions worldwide, propagating extremist interpretations of Islam. The flow of petro-dollars was of great importance to Saudi elites, who adapted a luxurious lifestyle and at the same time maintained an alliance with the Wahhabi base.[5] They also maintained ties to U.S. state officials, who welcomed Saudi oil as well as radical Islam, as long as it was directed against those standing in the way of America's geopolitical agenda.

"Foreign aid" financed by the Kingdom was tremendous, according to U.S. "anti-terror" expert Alex Alexiev (though he doesn't acknowledge the U.S. involvement in spreading Wahhabi terror):

"Between 1975 and 1987, the Saudis admit to having spent \$48 billion or \$4 billion per year on 'overseas development aid', a figure which by the end of 2002 grew to over \$70 billion (281 billion Saudi rials). These sums are reported to be Saudi state aid and almost certainly do not include private donations which are also distributed by state-controlled charities. Such staggering amounts contrast starkly with the \$5 million in terrorist accounts the Saudis claim to have frozen since 9/11." [6]

A report from September 2009, made by the United States Government Accountability Office, points out the historical relevance of U.S.-Saudi relations:

"Relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia have a long historical context. Since the establishment of the modern Saudi state in 1932, and throughout the Cold War, the governments of the United States and Saudi Arabia developed a relationship based on shared interests, including energy production and combating communism. For instance, both Saudi Arabia and the United States became major supporters of the Afghan Mujahideen's struggle against the Soviet invasion in 1979." [7]

Saudi-backed archaic ideology served as an incentive to thousands of confused young men to receive military training in Pakistan in the 1980s, from where they were sent to Afghanistan in order to kill Russians.

America's 'Holy War' against the USSR in Afghanistan

In a famous interview from 1998, former National Security Advisor to President Carter and geopolitical strategist, Zbigniew Brzezinski, openly admitted that the hidden agenda of U.S. involvement in the war between Soviet troops and Afghan Mujahideen (1979-1988) was about "giving to the USSR its Vietnam war." He also admitted that American covert support of Islamist fighters in Afghanistan had already started six months prior to the beginning of Soviet intervention in order to create a trap that would eventually lead to the collapse of the USSR. Nothing about this is worth regretting, according to Mr. Brzezinski, not even the U.S. alliance with radical Islam:

"What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?" [8]

In addition, the former Pakistani regime under General Zia Ul Haq, whose political program consisted of a plan of "Islamisation" of the country, was the main American ally when it came to training Islamist fighters. This happened under close cooperation between the CIA

and the Pakistani intelligence agency ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence). The ideological indoctrination of the people supposed to fight against the Soviets was being delivered by Pakistani madrassas, schools of radical (Wahhabi) Islam, financed by Saudi Arabia.[9]

While U.S. officials justified their support for the Mujahideen by presenting them as some kind of supposed freedom fighters, their Islamist allies showed less restraint in revealing their plans for Afghanistan. One example was the ISI Director General at the time, Akhtar Abdur Rahman Shaheed, who expressed his opinion quite undiplomatically: "Kabul must burn! Kabul must burn!"[10]

While Brzezinski achieved his goal, the fate of Afghanistan is well known: decades of civil war, brutality, analphabetism, the worst possible violation of women's rights, extreme poverty and sectarian violence. Not to mention pollution by depleted uranium causing a sharp increase in cancer rates thanks to the U.S. bombing campaign from October 2001.

United States and Saudi Arabia against Secular Syria

Many other scenarios involving CIA/Saudi-sponsored terrorism took place in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union (e.g. in Chechnya, Bosnia, Libya etc.).

Currently, Syria's secular, multi-ethnic and multi-faith society is being targeted by these very same forces, as well as reactionary regimes belonging to the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) and Turkey. As with the war in Afghanistan in the 80s, U.S. involvement in the Syrian crisis is intended to isolate Iran and, once again, target Russia. In conjunction, Wahhabi extremists are carrying out the same work as their forefathers in the 18th Century, namely fighting all tolerant forms of Islam.

Might this have been the reason why insurgents killed the youngest son of Syria's highest Islamic authority, Grand Mufti Ahmad Badreddine Hassoun? Indeed, the position of the Grand Mufti is not aligned with Wahhabi extremism, as was clearly shown in last year's interview with *Der Spiegel*:

"I see myself as the grand mufti of all 23 million Syrians, not just Muslims, but also Christians and even atheists. I am a man of dialogue. Who knows, maybe an agnostic will convince me with better arguments one day, and I'll become a non-believer. And if I'm enthusiastic about the opposition's political platform, I also might change sides."[11]

In addition, several events that took place on the day this particular interview are worth noticing:

"During the late afternoon, the grand mufti has other appointments: condolence visits with a Christian and a Muslim family. In the evening, he will have to comfort his wife once again, who is completely distraught over the death of Saria. He was the youngest of the couple's five sons, and the only one still living at home. Saria's fellow students are holding a vigil at his stone sarcophagus, even now, four weeks after the murder. The young man's last resting place can be found in the courtyard of a modest mosque. Sheikh Hassoun visits this sad place every day."[12]

This certainly does not correspond with the Western media's picture of fanatical Islamists, who consider the death of their sons a sign of honour and martyrdom, as long as they have died under circumstances that caused the death of "infidels" as well. Such behaviour is

encouraged by Saudi Arabia, as can be seen on a shocking video available on YouTube. The shocking footage features a father in Jeddah, selling his son to be sent to Syria as a suicide bomber. Even if one questions the authenticity of the video, the ongoing suicide bombings in Syria are undoubtedly real:

Conclusion

To be sure, the religion of Islam poses just as much or little a threat to the world as the religions of Judaism or Christianity. Nevertheless, certain radical pockets exist who use and abuse religion to justify their disgust for dissent and whose totalitarian practices can only be classified as fascist. Their attempts to destroy reason, progress and humanist ideals make them ideal tools for the most aggressive imperialist factions within the U.S. establishment to push for regime change and implement their exploitative impoverishing agendas.

Notes

1 “Wahhabi” is a term usually used in a critical context by Muslims. Salafi means “ancestor” and is most often a term used by Sunni fundamentalists to describe themselves.

2 <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=32134>.

3 Dreyfuss, Robert: “Devil’s Game: How the United States helped unleash fundamentalist Islam”, New York 2005, S. 37.

4 *Ibid*.

5 See: Anhalt, Utz: Wüstenkrieg – Jemen, Somalia, Sudan in der Geostrategie der USA, S. 32.

6 http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/congress/sc062603_alexiev.pdf.

7 <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d09883.pdf>.

8 <http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/BRZ110A.html>.

9 http://www.fpiif.org/blog/wikileaks_saudi-financed_madrassas_more_widespread_in_pakistan_than_thought.

10 See: “Silent soldier: the man behind the Afghan jihad General Akhtar Abdur Rahman Shaheed”, by Mohammad Yousaf, Karachi, 1991.

11 <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/interview-with-syrian-grand-mufti-assad-could-step-down-after-free-elections-a-796363-2.html>.

12 *Ibid*.

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Benjamin Schett](#), Global Research, 2012

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Benjamin Schett](#)

About the author:

Benjamin Schett is an independent Swiss-based researcher and student of East European History at the University of Vienna. He can be reached at schettb@gmail.com

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca