

The Saudi Presence in the United States

The Most Lethal Terror Front of All?

by Robert Spencer

For all the investment the United States has made in prosecuting the “War on Terror” in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Saudi presence in the United States has gone largely unnoticed—although it may be the most lethal terror front of all.

U.S. politicians have been intoxicated by Saudi petrodollars for decades. Saudi greenbacks led Spiro Agnew to fulminate against “Zionist influences in the United States” and Jimmy Carter’s advisor Bert Lance to complain about “the great Jewish ownership of the press.” Carter himself enthused about the wonders of the House of Saud after a wealthy Saudi contributed \$50,000 toward his presidential library. Successive American diplomats have signed on to the Saudi payroll in exchange for their advancement of the Saudi line in Washington.

All of these favors over the years have never put the Saudis in much of a mood to reciprocate. Witness the December 2004 report in the Saudi government organ *Al-Watan*, asserting that

secret European military intelligence reports indicate the transformation of the American humanitarian mission in Iraq into a profitable trade in the American markets through the practice of American physicians extracting human organs from the dead and wounded, before they are put to death, for sale to medical centers in America.

This outrageous libel from a close U.S. “friend and ally” was immediately picked up by papers in Iran and Syria.

Even more ominously, Saudi money has built numerous mosques in America. What is preached in them was hinted at by Sgt. Hasan Akbar, an American engineer from the 101st Airborne Division. After killing Capt. Christopher Scott Seifert and Maj. Gregory Stone and wounding 15 others in northern Kuwait on March 22, 2003, he explained why he did it: “You guys are coming into our countries, and you’re going to rape our women and kill our children.”

Akbar probably learned that his primary allegiance was to Islam, not to the United States, in his mosque. The Bilal Islamic Center in Los Angeles was built with a pledge of up to eight million dollars from King Fahd of Saudi Arabia; an additional \$295,000 for the mosque’s school came from the Saudi Islamic Development Bank. The Islamic Development Bank states that it works “to foster the economic development and social progress in member countries and Muslim communi-

ties worldwide based on the principles of *shari’ah* (i.e., Islamic jurisprudence.)” Presumably, this would include the teaching about the impermissibility of a Muslim fighting another Muslim (as stipulated by the Koran’s Sura 4:92), and the necessity of *jihad* against non-Muslims.

According to journalist Paul Sperry, “Bilal is just one of many black mosques funded by Saudi [Arabia]. Most of them, including Bilal, are associated with Imam W. Deen Mohammed, head of the Chicago-based Muslim American Society, or MAS, which has been credited with helping convert more than a million U.S. blacks to Islam.” W. Deen Mohammed has acknowledged that Saudi money comes with strings. He told the *Los Angeles Times* that “in Saudi Arabia it’s the Wahabi school of thought . . . and they say, ‘We’re gonna give you our money, then we want you to . . . prefer our school of thought.’ That’s in there whether they say it or not. So there is a problem receiving gifts that seem to have no attachment, no strings attached.” When asked if he himself had taken Saudi money, he replied like a nervous schoolboy caught red-handed in a bit of mischief: “Well, I don’t receive any money now, but I have received some and I lost it.” Mohammed added: “I suspected some strings were attached. I said I can’t accept this kind of relationship. They were choosing my friends for me, too. The enemy of the friends who were giving me money was supposed to be my enemy, too.”

Two years before September 11, the Naqshbandi Sufi Sheikh Muhammad Hisham Kabbani testified before a State Department open forum that 80 percent of American mosques were under control of extremists: “Because [radical Muslims] are very active they took over the mosques; and we can say that they took over more than 80 percent of the mosques that have been established in the US. And there are more than 3000 mosques in the US.” After visiting 114 mosques around the country, Kabbani estimated that “ninety of them were mostly exposed, and I say exposed, to extreme or radical ideology.”

Kabbani’s Islamic Supreme Council of America (ISCA) maintains that “the majority of mosques in the United States have been taken over by radicals who preach the dour, restrictive version of Wahhabi Islam financed and championed by Saudi Arabia.” ISCA Vice President Mateen Siddiqui affirmed this recently in the course of a discussion with a journalist about an American Muslim convert, Charles Vincent. Vincent is quoted in the same article as saying: “I do wish the American troops would be defeated. I’m a Muslim first, and I just live in this country.” Asked if he would fight against American soldiers if he were in Iraq, Vincent replied: “If there was a jihad, I don’t see how I could not join in.”

Even the Saudi embassy’s website in Washington spread the message of *jihad* as recently as November 2003. Until public notice compelled the Saudis to modify the site, readers were told that

Robert Spencer is the director of Jihad Watch, author of Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West (Regnery Publishing) and Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions About the World’s Fastest Growing Faith (Encounter Books), and editor of the forthcoming essay collection The Myth of Islamic Tolerance: Islamic Law and Non-Muslims (Prometheus).

the Muslims are required to raise the banner of Jihad in order to make the Word of Allah supreme in this world, to remove all forms of injustice and oppression, and to defend the Muslims. If Muslims do not take up the sword, the evil tyrants of this earth will be able to continue oppressing the weak and [the] helpless.

Back home in Riyadh or Jeddah, such talk would hardly raise eyebrows. In a 2002 interview with Al-Jazeera, Saudi Sheikh Mohsin Al-Awaji, former imam of the Great Mosque at King Saud University in Riyadh, criticized Osama bin Laden for targeting “innocent people, and I refer to the innocents on the face of the entire earth, of every religion and color, and in every region.” Nevertheless, he still found himself able to praise the mastermind of September 11 as “a man of honor, a man who abstains [from the pleasures] of this world, a brave man, and a man who believes in his principles and makes sacrifices [for them].” Indeed, “the Saudi people love every Jihad warrior, every fighter, and every man of honor, whether in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Kashmir, or southern Sudan.” Opined another Wahhabi Sheikh, Dr. Muhammad Al-Khasif: “There are dozens, even millions, who lift up their eyes to Osama bin Laden as a savior.” A recent CNN poll found that “Almost half of all Saudis . . . have a favorable view of Osama bin Laden’s sermons and rhetoric.”

Sounding uncannily like that “savior,” the Saudi Embassy website called for a restoration of the caliphate, discussed by James Jatras in this issue of *Chronicles*. The Saudi embassy website said: “Today’s false idols, which dominate over the entire world, are Democracy, Capitalism, Socialism and Communism. Islam instead calls for a Khilafa (Caliphate) based on consultation, and a just economic system based on Zakat and a prohibition of usury.” Sayyid Qutb, the intellectual godfather of Islamic terrorists around the world today, could not have said it better. In his *Milestones*, a manifesto for modern-day *jihad*, Qutb declares:

Democracy in the West has become infertile to such an extent that it is borrowing from the systems of the Eastern bloc, especially in the economic system, under the name of socialism. It is the same with the Eastern bloc. Its social theories, foremost among which is Marxism, in the beginning attracted not only a large number of people from the East but also from the West, as it was a way of life based on a creed.

Qutb concludes: “It is essential for mankind to have new leadership!” That new leadership would come from Islam.

The Saudis have spread this kind of thinking in the United States through the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). According to the *St. Petersburg Times*, “ISNA is subsidized by the Saudi government. An ISNA subsidiary called the North American Islamic Trust owns about 27 percent of the estimated 1200 mosques in the United States, says a report by the Council on American-Islamic Relations.” It is intriguing that CAIR itself acknowledges that there are more than 300 mosques in the United States funded by Saudi Wahhabis, since they have taken a vocal stance against any attempt to determine if jihadist violence is being preached in those mosques.

CAIR and the Saudis are engaged in quite similar efforts to obscure American awareness of the Islamic roots of *jihad*

terrorism. This was exemplified recently by CAIR’s “We have more in common than we think” campaign directed at American Christians. In it, CAIR’s Ibrahim Hooper lays a fine trap for the ignorant and unwary, quoting verses from the Koran that appear to be positive toward Christians, while neglecting to offer any positive ways to ameliorate the effects of many negative ones (which, of course, he does not mention) or to deplore the increasing persecution of Christians in Islamic lands. It was a sleight-of-hand worthy of the most sophisticated of advertising firms—which, in fact, the Saudis engaged.

Not long after September 11, the Saudis secretly hired a prominent public-relations firm, Qorvis Communications, to combat American perceptions that the House of Saud was behind the global rise of *jihad* terror. Qorvis initiated a slick series of radio ads—under the name of the Alliance for Peace and Justice—attacking the Israeli military and lauding Saudi Prince Abdullah’s peace proposals. Now, after pursuing an outrageously supine policy toward the Saudis for years, American officials seem to be awakening to what the Saudis have been up to. According to *Newsweek*’s Michael Isikoff and Mark Hosenball, “Federal prosecutors are seeking to determine whether the Saudi Embassy’s PR firm, Qorvis Communications, made false statements to the Justice Department and violated the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA)—a 1938 law requiring full disclosure of foreign-sponsored propaganda in the United States.”

Last summer, the FBI, INS, and the Joint Immigration Task Force raided the Northern Virginia offices of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), which was founded by Osama bin Laden’s nephew, Abdullah bin Laden. It was not the first raid on a Saudi-funded organization in Northern Virginia (where there is an unusual proliferation of Wahhabi-linked groups). While these raids are much more encouraging than White House and State Department embraces of Prince Abdullah, the oily Adel Al-Jubeir, and their gang, they threw into particular relief the extent of Saudi penetration into the United States and revealed just where Saudi loyalties really lie.

Those loyalties should be abundantly clear to any objective observer. On March 17, 2004, on the Saudi government-controlled *Iqraa* TV, a Saudi sheikh named Said Al-Qahtani spoke of September 11 as a tactical error that postponed the Saudis’ ultimate goal for the United States by arousing American ire:

We did not occupy the U.S., with 8 million Muslims, using bombings. Had we been patient, and let time take its course, instead of the 8 million, there could have been 80 million [Muslims] and 50 years later perhaps all the US would have become Muslim . . . What should a Muslim do if he is attacked in his country, on his land? In this case, there is no choice besides defense, self-sacrifice, and what religious scholars call—Defensive *Jihad* . . . We attacked their country, and this caused them to wake the dormant enmity in their hearts . . . Especially since there is global Zionism, the enemy of Islam, and Judaism, and fundamentalist Crusaders . . . They interpret this whole incident as only the beginning and thus there is no choice but a preemptive strike.

Yet the Joint Chiefs and the Department of Defense have declared that the stability of the House of Saud will be a top American priority in 2005. If only the Saudis would return the favor.

Islam: Africa's Religion of War

Cries From the Dark Continent

by Doug Bandow

If there is one characteristic that seems to define Christian societies today, it is tolerance. In Western Europe, home of the papacy and the Reformation, Europeans hesitate even to refer to their Christian heritage. In America, organs of liberal power, especially the courts, attempt to empty the public square of any mention of religion.

The Muslim world is dramatically different. There are, or at least long were, a few outposts of relative religious liberty: Until recently, Turkey ruthlessly suppressed the slightest hint of political Islam. Middle Eastern states such as Bahrain, Kuwait, and Oman allow Christian worship, though evangelism is not encouraged.

Far more Muslim countries persecute non-Muslims. Saudi Arabia is essentially a totalitarian state. Iran is little different, though younger Iranians are straining against rigid religious law. (Ironically, there was far greater religious freedom in Iraq than in either of these two countries.) Pakistan imprisons those who blaspheme the "prophet"; private violence, unconstrained by the state, is also common.

More surprising, perhaps, is the situation in Africa. Muslims make up at least half of the population of 25 of Africa's 56 states. North Africa is no surprise, but large and sometimes overwhelming majorities in Chad, Comoros, Djibouti, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, and Senegal are Muslim. "Africa has been a confluence of" three civilizations—the West, Islam, and indigenous Africa—writes Ali Mazrui of the State University of New York at Binghamton.

In the parts of Africa dominated by animists and Christians, religion usually plays only a small role in the violence that so tragically afflicts that continent. In Muslim states, however, religious violence is common and persistent.

Some of the worst violence occurs largely within the Muslim community. In Algeria, for instance, the military's 1992 suspension of elections for the National Assembly because of the victory of a militant Islamic party ignited a civil conflict that resulted in an estimated 100,000 casualties over the following eight years. Islamic radicals assassinated Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and employed terrorism against tourists to undermine the nation's economy. Extremist forces are active, though of less influence, in countries such as Morocco.

The problem of Islamic political activism extends to terrorism. Although a minor front in the "War on Terror," two U.S. embassies were attacked by Al Qaeda. In a detailed report for the Congressional Research Service, Ted Dagne notes: "For over a decade, Sudan has been a safe haven for a number of terrorist organizations, including Al-Qaeda, Islamic Group, Hezbollah, and Palestinian Is-

lamic Jihad. . . . Terror groups from the Middle East have established a presence in Somalia, Kenya, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda."

Routine violence by African Muslims against African Christians has been even deadlier. Mobs kill more people than bombs. These problems are the most devastating where religions "reinforce pre-existing divisions of other kinds," writes Mazrui, such as tribal identity in Nigeria. The link often is complex, but its malicious effect is clear.

The home of a Christian Church that goes back to the fourth century, Ethiopia is not an hospitable home for Christians. At least part of the cause of the three-decade-long conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea was religion; there is a strong Islamic influence in the former.

Problems have been more sporadic than systemic. International Christian Concern reports:

While there are no established extremist groups perpetrating acts of violence, there are incidents of harassment. These incidents are often as racially motivated as religiously. Tensions have erupted into harassment, intimidation, and violence between Muslims and Christians in the Oromiya and Somali regions.

The September 11 attacks and Washington's response have exacerbated tensions between the two faiths. For instance, mobs have destroyed churches and beaten Muslims who have converted to Christianity. In 2002, Fikru Zeleke, evangelism and missions secretary of the Meserete Kristos Church, worried about escalating violence: "Muslims in this country have targeted the evangelicals as number one enemy." Complaints of government discrimination against groups seeking land for cemeteries and churches, bans on religious-oriented parties, and restrictions against the entry of religious workers are common. (Alas, there have also been intra-Christian incidents between Copts and Pentecostals.)

Of particular concern is the presence of some Muslim fundamentalists. The State Department reports that "Leaders of the Ethiopian Islamic Affairs Supreme Council struggled with Wahhabist fundamentalism within their ranks." The council is worried about "the growing influence of radical elements within Islamic communities in the country, aided by funding from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states for mosque construction and social services."

In Somalia, problems are limited in scope but real. Happily, the lack of an effective national government prevents serious official discrimination. Popular antagonism toward the U.S. government remains a serious problem, however. For instance, shortly after the United States attacked Afghanistan, mobs in the town of Argessa destroyed church buildings, and

Doug Bandow is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute.