

Girma Yohannes Iyassu Menelik

The Emergence and Impacts of Islamic Radicalists

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Abstract

This book is a partial outcome of a project conducted from 2006 to the end of October 2009 and we will continue to publish some other partial results to the end of the year. The second series on the pipeline is “ *Europe: The Future Battleground of Terrorism*”

As the US and the Western world accused the governments of Libya, Iran, Syria, Iraq... etc as potential sponsors of terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was not mentioned, despite several of its charity organizations are supporting the radicals under the cover of humanitarian assistance. Saudi Arabian officials show down has tried to break the chains of terrorism and condemned Al-Qaeda's actions against the United States. The alleged Al Qaeda attacks of November 9, 2001, have dramatically distorted the political environment between the Muslim and the Western world. In the Muslim world, religion, politics, and culture are intertwined in complicated ways.

The implications of jihadists' activities in the Middle East/Persian Gulf region are much worrying. The wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan continuously inflamed violent acts that have dramatically increased in intensity and scope. Today, to access to the technologies for the production of chemical weapons is likely to become easy. The development of “micro reactors,” or machines, only a bit larger than an average desktop computer, that are designed for pharmaceutical industries will allow chemical companies to produce chemicals in smaller quantities on short order.

After the dramatic 9/11 tragedy, the Bush Administration came out along with a bundle of strategies and advocated to democratize the Arab world. The main strategy and rationale behind the US government security interest in promoting freedom and democracy is to reduce anti-American terrorism. According to their calculus, the more democracy promoted in the Middle East the less terrorist attack on the US targets take place; but it failed.

Another phenomenon we observe today is the emergence of modern terrorism at sea. Al-Qaeda affiliate pirates of Somali clan leaders have discovered the economy and profitability of hijacking commercial and private ships to finance their weapons to support the radical Islamic unions.

I. SAUDI ARABIA'S WAHHABISM

As the US and the Western world accused the governments of Libya, Iran, Syria, Iraq... etc as potential sponsors of terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was not mentioned, despite several of its charity organizations are supporting the radicals under the cover of humanitarian assistance.

Saudi Arabian officials show down has tried to break the chains of terrorism and condemned Al-Qaeda's actions against the United States. They made a hard move towards terrorism and have captured and arrested more than 600 activists (mostly suspected foreigners), claimed to have killed several terrorists, allegedly destroyed their bases and almost all financial resources. They even went so far and forced the leading ideological master-minders from the cleric to renounce their radical views live on television. About 1,400 imams were recalled who were well known about their deviating opinions, and took a variety of measures to strengthen the security with additional spies all over the government agencies, offices, super markets residential and air port areas.

Despite such strong actions the government has still some worries. Observations suggest that conservative group of Islamists of the Kingdom have vowed to link their campaigns with, Egypt, Palestine and Iraq.¹. As it is well known, Sunni Islamists, who are the strongest Iraqi insurgents, may try to retreat one day across the border for operations in Saudi Arabia or Jordan and try to destabilize the Security. This is possible, because history has recorded that insurgents organized themselves in Syria to attack targets in Saudi Arabia in 1996 was designed in the same way. The other fear is the possible creation of tribal and fundamentalist alliance that might bring a revolution in Saudi Arabia to overthrow the government.

The current terrorism threat in Saudi Arabia is more or less accompanied with other tensions, problems and sometimes with short and small appraisals. The lack of secularism in the Kingdom, and the bargain struck between the political powers and the Wahhabi ideology, are the significant problem. In its place, we might interpret that bargain as an *a priori* condition, and look instead to the imbalances arising since the outbreak of the Islamic Awakening in the early 1990s and the simultaneous emergence of global Islamic radicalism.

¹ . John Walsh, "Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Winter 2003

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Currently the Kingdom is occupied with two key objectives. The first is to improve the strategy of counterterrorism measures, and second, to reduce tensions between with the United States. Leaders of both countries have also implied that democratization is of utmost importance in the region and recommended political reforms in the Kingdom. International observers agree and are ready to help if necessary.²

1.1. Wahabism: The Core Ideology Of Saudi Arabia

Generally Islamic principles, practice, and discourse vary from country to country. As the main ideological master-plan of Islamism in Saudi Arabia, the Hanbali school of law (*madhhab*) is mostly followed by the believers. The Madhhab represents the views of Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, a religious reformist and supporter of the Saudi royal family in the 18th century and the father of the present Wahabism. Despite some oppositions existing to it, Wahabi became the established version of Islam in the Kingdom. Both the royal family and today's *salafi* opposition are Wahhabis, hence Wahhabism is not necessarily a unified ideology in terms of its proposals regarding the state.

Non-Wahhabists describe the sect as highly conservative, for Abd Al-Wahhab sought to purify his belief from degrading innovations (*bid'a*) that had been assimilated, according to him, from non-Islamic customs or mores. These included practices precious to the hearts of many Muslims such as the adoration of the Prophet Muhammad's grave and those of other holy individuals, including the teachings and rituals of Sufi Muslims (the mystics of Islam), and the *Shi'a*. The Wahhabis condemned tomb worship to be polytheistic, a form of *shirk*—because something other than God is sacred. They were offended by the Shia conception of the imamate (the legitimate spiritual rulers of the Muslims) and the Sufi search for union in this lifetime with God, as well as the practices of the “ecstatic” Sufi orders.

The Wahhabis also damned the Ottoman rulers of their era for their corruption, obsession to luxury, use of prayer beads imitating themselves as kings, and other for Wahabi unacceptable practices. The Saudi Shia comprises about 40 percent of the population of the eastern oil-rich province of the Kingdom, and is approximately 10 percent of the indigenous Saudi population.

Wahhabi radicals attacked the Shia in both Saudi Arabia and Iraq during the time of ibn Abd Al-Wahhab's day. The Wahhabi claim that the Shia is apostates renders their status difficult

² Gershon Baskin, “Fragmented Beyond Repair?” *Jerusalem Post*, July 25, 2005; Khaled Duzdar, “Moving Backwards,” *IPCRI News Service*, July 23, 2005. Israelis carried their opposition to the Gaza withdrawal into the streets, with orange banners and clothing, while the pro-withdrawal side wore blue. The Palestinians worry that no meaningful Israeli-Palestinian negotiations will follow disengagement.

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in Saudi Arabia, and has led to discrimination against them. The Wahhabi rulers forbade various rituals, Shia mosque construction and their doubled call to prayer; and this antipathy created tensions between the Kingdom and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Driven by the ambition of expanding their philosophy, Ideology, practices and world view, Wahhabism caused Saudi Arabia to create a quasi foreign and cultural policy of *dawa*, or Islamic foreign mission. This spirit of proselytization and reform can be, with all of the usual indistinctness, traced to early Islam.

Critics from the side of more liberal Muslims find it antithetical to the ethos of the Muslim world in later periods, and they cite Surah Hud of the Quran, “If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind one People: but they will not cease to dispute” (11:118) or Surah Al-Baqarah, “Let there be no compulsion in religion” (2:256) to explain their aversion to supporters.

Being a Guardian of the Holy Islamic Cities and as a part of its *dawa* policy , Saudi Arabia has created or financed in various sorts of Islamic institutions, from the Muslim World League and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, to the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which includes the International Islamic Court of Justice (ratified by only a small number of states), and a long list of affiliated groups, banks, and federations.³

Saudi Arabia supports Islamic academies and academic chairs at Harvard, University of California, Santa Barbara, University of London, and University of Moscow. On to of that there are supports for institutes, mosques, Islamic centres in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Canada, the United States, Australasia, and Europe⁴.

These are, on the one hand, expressions of *zakat*, which is not merely charity, but furtherance of Islam. On the other, these endeavours are an aspect of Saudi Arabia’s foreign policy, disseminating various Wahhabist principles to the point that today many Sunni Muslims see them as a norm.

Critics accuse these efforts and institutions of supporting Islamists in other Middle Eastern nations, and in Europe. Saudi Arabia’s religious officials have even been able to obstruct with secularizing reforms by directly or indirectly pressuring local religious leaders or other Saudi-influenced constituencies, as it happened in Lebanon in 1999 with the tabling of the new optional civil law of personal status. The core idea of cleansing Islam from foreign influences

³ . Khaled Abu Toameh, “ Hamas Mass Wedding: Check the Bride at the Door,” *Jerusalem Post*, July 29, 2005.

⁴ Scott Wilson and Molly Moore, “Egypt Inquiry Slowed by Lack of Evidence; Home-grown Cell Inspired by Al Qaeda is Suspected in Attacks on Red Sea Resorts,” *Washington Post*, October 23, 2004

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is not exceptional to the Wahhabis. Many other parallels exist between Wahhabism and other streams of Muslim with or without fundamentalist thought.

A range of critiques of Wahhabism exist; one characterizes the sect as an oddly conservative and puritanical trend in the otherwise tolerant and multicultural tradition of Islam. Wahhabism in such a view is a distinct sect or reactive movement and not really a part of mainstream Sunni Islam. The writings of ibn `Abd Al-Wahhab were very meagre, limited to a small booklet. He gave it the title *Kitab Al-Tawhid* which means the Book of oneness of God. The *tawhid* (oneness of God, sometimes translated as monotheism) is divided in three key principles. One should keep in mind that Christians Buddhists or any non-Muslims should understand that not only the Wahabis, but all Muslims of the world, are committed to *tawhid*.

1.2. The Tawhid Philosophy

The *tawhid* principles are the fundamental philosophy of all Muslims and are generally expressed in Islamic art, literature, devotion, indeed in every facet of what can be termed Muslim culture. Based on the general *tawhid*, Abd Al-Wahhab wrote about three other points. The *tawhid Al-ibada* (unicity of worship), *tawhid Al-rububiyya* (God's unique attribute of creator of and dominion over the world), and *tawhid alasma wa Al-sifat* (the idea that God's different names or attributes that may be found in the *Quran*, solely apply to God and should not be applied to others).⁵ *Tawhid* became so central to the followers of Abd Al-Wahhab that they called themselves *muwahhidun*, means, those who support monotheism. Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab's extremism was due to his followers' enforcement of *tawhid Al-ibada* which they equated with attacks on polytheism, or *shirk*. Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab thought that other Muslims who were insufficiently devout, or associated "others with God" by virtue of their sect or orientation, were equivalent to polytheists, and thus subject to attack by true believers. As other Muslims acknowledge *tawhid*, the concept itself does not distinguish Wahhabism, rather it was ibn `Abd Al-Wahhab's idea that he could deny the Muslim identities of others and pronounce them unbelievers, if, after God's proof was communicated to them, the other persisted in alternate forms of worship, or failed to uphold Islamic duties. This classification of abuse is called *takfiri* and its presence or absence is a way of determining the "extremism" of any given Islamist group. In the whole history of the Islam, the Sunni abused Shia, or vice versa as a *takfiri*. (*takfir* in Arabic, meaning to call someone a *kaffir*, or unbeliever).

⁵ New York: National Committee on American Foreign Policy, 1998, 2002, p. 199.