

Wahhabism – Wahhabis

Throughout history, political extremists of all faiths have willingly given up their lives simply in the belief that by doing so, whether in bombings or in other forms of terror, they would change the course of history, or at least win an advantage for their cause. Japanese kamikaze pilots in the Second World War were not Muslims, but they flew their fighters into US aircraft carriers.

The numerical preponderance of Muslims as perpetrators of many recent terrorist attacks, including that of 11 September, causes us to ask: what has so galvanized violent tendencies in the world's second-largest religion (and, in America, the fastest growing faith)? Can it really flow from a quarrel over a bit of land in the Middle East?

For Westerners, it seems natural to look for answers in the distant past, beginning with the Crusades. But if we ask educated, traditional but forward-looking Muslims what has driven their global community in this direction, many will answer with one word: Wahhabism. This is a strain of Islam that emerged – not at the time of the Crusades, nor even at the time of the anti-Turkish wars of the 17th century, but less than two centuries ago. It is violent. It is intolerant, and it is fanatical beyond measure. It originated in Arabia, and it is the official theology of the Gulf States. Wahhabism is the most extreme form of Islamic fundamentalism, and its followers are called Wahhabis. This is the virulent form of Islam President Bush and the news media allude to without so naming.

Not all Muslims are suicide bombers, but all Muslim suicide bombers are Wahhabis – except, perhaps, for some disciples of atheist leftists posing as Muslims in the interests of personal power, such as Yasser Arafat or Saddam Hussein. Wahhabism demands punishment for those who enjoy any form of music except the drum and severe punishment up to death for drinking or sexual transgressions. It condemns as unbelievers those who do not pray, a view that never previously existed in mainstream Islam.

It is stripped-down Islam, calling for simple, short prayers, undecorated mosques, and the uprooting of gravestones (since decorated mosques and graveyards lend themselves to veneration, which is idolatry in the Wahhabi mind). Wahhabis do not even permit the name of the Prophet Mohammed to be inscribed in mosques, nor do they allow his birthday to be celebrated. Above all, they hate ostentatious spirituality, much as Protestants detest the veneration of statues and saints in the Roman Church.

Ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-92), the founder of this totalitarian Islamism, was born in Uyaynah, in the part of Arabia known as Nejd, where Riyadh is today. Mohammed himself notably warned that this place would be a source of corruption and confusion (Anti-Wahhabi Muslims refer to Wahhabism as *fitna an Najdiyyah* or "the trouble out of Nejd"). From the beginning of Wahhab's dispensation, in the late 18th century, his cult was associated with the mass murder of all who opposed it. For example, the Wahhabis fell upon the city of Qarbala in 1801 and killed 2,000 ordinary citizens in the streets and markets.

In the 19th century, Wahhabism took the form of Arab nationalism against the Turks. The founder of the Saudi kingdom, Ibn Saud, established Wahhabism as its official creed. Britain unwittingly supported the Wahhabi Arabs in their revolt against the Ottoman Turks. Arab hatred of the Turks fused with Wahhabi ranting against the "decadence" of Ottoman Islam. The truth is that the Ottoman khalifa reigned over a multinational Islamic global community in which vast differences in local culture and tradition were tolerated. No such tolerance exists in Wahhabism, which is why the concept of US troops on Saudi soil so inflames bin Laden.

Osama bin Laden is a Wahhabi. So are the suicide bombers in Israel. So are his Egyptian allies, who exulted as they stabbed foreign tourists to death at Luxor not many years ago, bathing in blood up to their elbows and emitting blasphemous cries of ecstasy. So are the Algerian Islamist terrorists whose contribution to the purification of the world consisted of murdering people for such sins as running a movie projector or reading secular newspapers. So are the Taliban style guerrillas in Kashmir who murder Hindus.

The Iranians are not Wahhabis, which partially explains their slow but undeniable movement towards moderation and normality after a period of utopian and puritan revivalism. But the Taliban practice a variant of Wahhabism. In the Wahhabi fashion they employ ancient punishments – such as execution for moral offences – and they have a primitive ungodly view of women. The same is true of Saudi Arabia's rulers.

None of this extremism has been "inspired" by American fumbblings in the world, and it has little to do with the tragedies that have beset Israelis and Palestinians since the 1917 Balfour Declaration or the 1948 formation of the free state of Israel. Such extremism has been around for nearly two centuries before any of this came about.

But the Wahhabis have two weaknesses of which the West is largely unaware; an Achilles' heel on each foot, so to speak. The first is that the vast majority of Muslims in the world loathe Wahhabism for the same reason any patriarchal culture rejects a violent break with tradition. And that is the point that must be understood: bin Laden and other Wahhabis are not defending Islamic tradition. They represent an ultra-radical breakaway that most Muslims despise. Thus, although they have much in common with Bolsheviks, they are best described as Islamo-fascists.

The Bengali Sufi writer Zeeshan Ali has described the situation: "Muslims from Bangladesh in the US, just like any other place in the world, uphold the traditional beliefs of Islam but, due to lack of instruction, keep quiet when their beliefs are attacked by Wahhabis in the US who all of a sudden become 'better' Muslims than others. These Wahhabis go even further and accuse their own fathers of heresy, sin and unbelief. And the young children of the immigrants, when they grow up in this country, get exposed only to this one-sided version of Islam and are led to think that this is the only Islam. Naturally a big gap is being created every day that silence is only widening." Divided between tradition and the call of the new, the young opt for "Islamic revolution" and commit themselves to their own self-destruction in conjunction with mass murder.

The same influences are brought to bear throughout the seven-million-strong Muslim community in America (as well as those in Europe). The Sufi Hisham al-Kabbani (born in Lebanon and now living in the US) estimates that 80 per cent of mosques in the US are under the control of Wahhabi Imams who preach extremism.

This leads to the second point of vulnerability. Even though bin Laden has sworn to destroy the Saudi royal family, Wahhabism is subsidized by Saudi Arabia. The Saudis have played a double game for years, more or less as Stalin did with the West during the Second World War. They pretended to be allies in a common struggle against Saddam Hussein while they spread Wahhabi ideology everywhere Muslims are to be found, just as Stalin promoted an "antifascist" coalition with the US while carrying out espionage and subversion on American territory. The motive was the same: the belief that the West was or is decadent and doomed.

One major question is never asked in American discussions of Arab terrorism: what is the role of Saudi Arabia? The question cannot be asked because American companies depend too much on the continued flow of Saudi oil, while American politicians have become too cozy with the Saudi rulers.

Another reason it is not asked is that to expose the extent of Saudi and Wahhabi influence on American Muslims would deeply compromise many Islamic clerics in the US. But it is the most significant question Americans should be asking themselves today. If we get rid of Osama bin Laden, with whom do we then have to deal? The answer was eloquently put by Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, professor of political science at the University of California at San Diego, and author of an authoritative volume on Islamic extremism in Pakistan, when he said: "If the US wants to do something about radical Islam, it has to deal with Saudi Arabia. The 'rogue states' [Iraq, Libya, etc.] are less important in the radicalization of Islam than Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is the single most important cause and supporter of radicalization, ideologization, and the general fanaticization of Islam."

From what we now know, it appears not a single one of the suicide pilots in New York and Washington was Palestinian. They all seem to have been Saudis – citizens of the Gulf States, Egyptian or Algerian. Two are reported to have been the sons of the former second secretary of the Saudi embassy in Washington. They were planted in America long before the latest Palestinian outbreak; in fact, they seem to have begun their conspiracy while the Middle East peace process was in full, if short, bloom. Anti-terror experts and politicians in the West must now consider the Saudi connection.

Condensed and adapted by Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D., from: Stephen Schwartz, the author of *Intellectuals and Assassins*, published by Anthem Press.