Global and Jihad and the Battle for the Soul of Islam

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*The violence of the present global crisis tends to obscure another
battle that is presently underway within Islam, one "for the soul of
the world's Muslims" (Schwartz, 2002:163). While the primary focus
of much current research concerns the threat of the Islamist call to
'Global Jihad', these movements are also seeking to impose a
purified Islam universally across the Muslim world. They are
targeting popular forms of Islam, Sufi mysticism, and the many
diverse forms of traditional Islam that have existed for centuries
across the globe. Given the significance of these religious
phenomena, and especially Sufism, this is a battle with major
implications for the future of Islam and the religious history of the
world. This paper describes and assesses this situation and identifies
some implications for the contemporary study of Islam.*

Introduction

The warfare, terrorism and violence that characterizes the present global crisis
tends to obscure another battle that is presently underway within Islam, one that
may have a far greater long-term impact. At the same time that Osama bin Laden,
Ayman al-Zawahiri and other Islamist terrorist leaders were issuing their 'fatwa'
calling for a "Global Jihad against Jews and Crusaders" (Rubin and Rubin, 2002:
149ff.), another battle was underway. This battle has been described as "a historic
combat for the soul of the world's Muslims" (Schwartz, 2002:163; cf. Pipes,
2002: 27).

Discussion of its various aspects can now be found in many recent studies of
contemporary Islam, especially where the focus is on Islamism and related
movements such as Wahhabism (e.g., Abuza, 2002; Ali, 2002; Benjamin and
Simon, 2002; Bergin, 2001; Esposito, 2002; Gunaratna, 2002; Hiro, 2002; Kepel,
2002; Lewis, 2003; Murphy, 2002; Paz, 2002; Pipes, 2002; Rashid, 2001, 2002;
Rubin and Rubin, 2002; Ruthven, 2002; Schwartz, 2002; Zeidan, 2001). While
the primary focus of many of these works is on the national security threat that
such movements represent to global order or the interests of the USA and the West
(Kauppi, 1998), they also record another conflict. This is the battle being waged
by those Muslims pursuing an ideal of a radically purified Islam, mobilized as a
militant political force to be imposed universally across the Muslim world and
beyond. Aside from the corrupting influences of modernity and the West, its
targets are the popular forms of Islamic religiosity, represented above all by

Sufism and the many diverse forms of traditional Islam that have existed across the globe for centuries. Given the significance of this religiosity, and especially the importance of Sufism, this is an epoch defining battle with major implications for the future of Islam and therefore potentially for the future religious history of the world.

Global Jihad

This conflict is occurring at a time of enormous theological and ideological flux and introspection within Islam, a period of resurgence when the perennial traditions of renewal and reform (*tajdid* and *islah*) are once again re-asserting themselves. Central to this is the invocation of the principle of 'independent analysis' (*ijtihad*) by those claiming the status of *mujtahids*, figures empowered to challenge the presiding tradition of Islamic teachings and jurisprudence (*taqlid*). This facilitates "a potentially revolutionary type of thought or movement that, at the same time, remains rooted within the Islamic perspective," albeit one interpreted in the most literal way (Vol 1, 1983: 40-1). As a result, contemporary "Islamic discourse [has] assumed a great number of interpreting functions" across the Muslim world, and the 1990s witnessed the emergence of "a broad spectrum of Islamic interpretations whose only common denominator was the use of a repertoire of symbols and concepts handed down by Islam," to construct competing visions of Islam (Schulze, 2000: 281).

Increasingly central to this repertoire is the notion of Global Jihad, which has been appropriated by various groups and individuals, responding to the Islamist call. As one of its main ideologues, Omar Abu Omar (aka Abu Qutadah) has stated, its goal is a future world "totally controlled by Islam." (quoted in Paz, 2002: 69). Aside from the USA, Israel and Europe, its targets are also the "evil, heretic regimes in the apostate countries" of the Muslim world (68). It is "a movement of Salafi worldview, perceptions, doctrines, and way ... totally cleansed from any remains of the wrong Sufi doctrine" (69). As John Esposito (2002: 157) observes, jihad has become "the common symbol and rallying cry for holy and unholy wars." It is all-encompassing: "resistance and liberation struggles and militant jihads, holy and unholy wars, are all declared to be jihads ... individuals and groups, religious and lay, seize the right to declare and legitimate unholy wars in the name of Islam." (157)

This phenomenon reflects various interrelated factors. (1) A shift to the internationalization of conflict following the failure of revolutionary and nationalist movements within individual Muslim states. (2) The rise of virulent anti-Western and particularly anti-American and anti-Jewish views throughout the Muslim world. (3) The Islamist denunciation of "so-called moderate Islam ... that accepts submission to America and the West, and is glad to live in accordance with their [Western] way of life" (Paz, 2002:70) (4). The ascendency of a dualistic view of the world, based on "absolute Manichaean binary dichotomies such as God vs. Satan; Truth vs. Falsehood; Light vs. Darkness; and Good vs. Evil. ... By labelling everything in the modern West ... as satanic and evil, extremists turn

them into legitimate targets for violent attacks." (Zeidan, 2001; 29) (5) The collapse of the Soviet bloc and the socialist ideal as a viable path forward for the Muslim world. (6) The comparatively open, liberal and tolerant attitude of most Western governments, which relieves jihadists operating within their borders of the threat of the draconian security attention that they would face in their own homelands (Dershowitz, 2002). (7) Increased access to international travel and migration coupled with the revolutionary transformation of the global financial, media, and telecommunications systems, especially involving the Internet (Levitt, 2002). (8) The rapid spread of print culture in the Muslim world since the nineteenth century and the consequent "democratization of Islamic knowledge" (Robinson, 1996: 246), that has allowed lay Islamist intellectuals like Mawlana Abul Ala Mawdudi, Hasan al-Banna, and Sayyid Qutb to achieve enormous influence. (9) The relative ignorance of young Muslims regarding key aspects of their faith, which allows them "to accept claims that certain heretical ideas [are] actually the only proper form of Islam" (Paz, 2002: 68). Consequently, concepts otherwise synonymous with terrorism such as jihad and suicidal martyrdom "are now viewed by many in the Islamic world as religious duties." (71)

These last points are associated with the ascendancy of the notions of *tajdid, islah,* and *ijtihad* noted above, and are also closely linked to the disproportionate influence of the militant ideologies of well-resourced Wahhabi and Islamist groups. Here it may be noted that many Islamists (eg., members of Al Qaeda) come from technical backgrounds, such as engineering, and they "seek in holy texts the same rigour and absence of ambiguity they expect to find in technical manuals." (Ruthven, 2000: 387) This literalism requires a radical reduction of the subtlety and nuances of Islamic texts (to which properly trained exegetes would be alert) to little more than a manual of procedures or a list of instructions. Effectively, this literalistic positivism negates "the original spirit of *ijtihad,* which was based on recognition that texts could never yield absolute certainty in the search for truth." (387)

Wahhabism and the Eclipse of Sufism

None of this struggle is occurring in a vacuum, of course. Indeed, after two centuries of struggle, a great challenge continues to face all the competing groups promoting their various formulations of Islam within this fiercely contested discursive space. This is the need to establish the meaning of Western hegemony, modernity, and now globalization for the Muslim world. Various political and ideological responses to this were explored in the latter half of the twentieth century (e.g., modernization, secularization, socialism, nation-state nationalism, pan-Arab nationalism, pan-Islamism, anti-Zionism, anti-imperialism, and Islamism) but one outcome of enormous significance now seems to be assured.

This outcome can be summarized as follows: increasing numbers of the expanding urban Muslim masses and their political leadership are turning from secularist models to militant religious reformulations of Islam while simultaneously rejecting the great mystical traditions of Islam, represented above

all by Sufism: "There has been one clear loser in this age of revolution: it is the mystical understanding of the faith. ... The realm in which the spiritual knowledge of Islam could flourish has shrivelled." (Robinson, 1996a: 246) "For three generations and more, the Sufis have been blamed throughout the Near and Middle east for centuries of stagnation in the Muslim world, and they have incurred hostility from many sides." (Ed-Din, 1985: 237) This is an outcome found on both the modernist and Islamist sides of the struggle over the future of Islam: "Irrespective of ideological or social differences, the Islamic political public [has] almost unanimously turned against popular mysticism, in fact mystical culture was in many respects considered as the expression of an altogether negative tradition that had to be discarded," if modernity and globalization were going to be effectively engaged by the Muslim world (Schulze, 2000: 11).

In the vanguard of this campaign is Islamism and especially Wahhabism, the theological worldview of the Wahhabi sect of Saudi Arabia, numerically a relatively small tendency within Islam (Ruthven, 2002: 177), whose enormous financial support from the Saudi regime nevertheless gives it the capacity to aggressively compete with other forms of Islam throughout the Muslim world and in the West. Its iconoclasm extends beyond mysticism to the popular and indigenous Muslim traditions within which these mystical tendencies are embedded. As John Esposito (2002: 108) has recently noted: "Much as Saudi armies destroyed major Shii shrines in the nineteenth century, Saudi agencies have been responsible for the destruction or reconstruction" of innumerable examples of Muslim popular and indigenous religiosity.

Wahhabism was founded in central Arabia by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-92), who deployed the principle of *ijtihad* to call for Islamic revival based on a rigorous monotheism, a strict orthopraxy and a vision of purity and order that was believed to characterize the age of The Prophet. He formed an alliance with a local chieftain, Muhammad ibn Sa'ud that has lasted to the present day and shapes the political and religious life of Saudi Arabia. The iconoclastic program of Wahhabism was all-encompassing:

> It rejected the corruption and laxity of the contemporary decline. It rejected too the accommodations and cultural richness of the medieval empire. It rejected the introvert warmth and otherworldly piety of the mystic way. It rejected also the alien intellectualism not only of philosophy but of theology. It rejected all dissensions, even the now well-established Shi'ah.(Smith, 1957: 49)

The reformist program of Wahhabism was equally straightforward and uncompromising:

> It insisted solely on the Law. The classical Law, said the Wahhabis, is the sum and substance of the faith - and that in its straitest, most rigid, Hanbali version, stripped of all innovation developed through the intervening centuries. Obey the pristine Law, fully, strictly, singly; and establish a society where that Law obtains. This, they preached, is Islam: all else is superfluous and wrong.(Smith, 1957: 49)

Smith (1957: 50) offers a key insight into the Wahhabi form of sectarianism: "Theirs was not a pure idealism in the Western sense: devotion to a transcendent concept, of which all human implementations are necessarily partial and inadequate. This is too Platonic, too Christian." Such a transcendentalist approach implicitly accommodated slippage in the realm of religious observance and compromised the integrity of Muslim orthopraxy. It was also seen as implicated in the seemingly endless philosophical and theological debates that had been condemned by the intellectual forefather of Wahhabism, Taqiy al Din Ibn Taymiyah (1262-1328), for whom "the source of all religious truth ... is the Quran, supplemented by the Hadith and interpreted by the Companions of the Prophet or their immediate Successors. The authority of those early scholars, confirmed by consensus is infallible." (Fakhry, 1997: 102) Moreover, no subsequent generations "can lay claim to infallibility, as the centuries of [inconclusive] controversy in theology, philosophy and mysticism actually demonstrate." (102) Moreover, since the early generations had addressed all the issues that could conceivably concern a truly Islamic community, Ibn Taymiyah believed that "any opinions or practices that have emerged subsequently should be declared innovations or heresies." (102)

Consequently, for the Wahhabis, the single, authoritative source of inspiration was the Quran and the *sunna* - the Quran as implemented, but not as it was implemented actually in history by diverse Muslim communities as they struggled to accommodate their faith to their different lives and indigenous traditions. Repulsed by what they saw as compromise and corruption, the Wahhabis followed Ibn Taymiyah in aspiring to a vision of their faith as they believed it was implemented originally in the time of The Prophet and the first two generations, that is, implemented in the world in its purist and most ideal form:

> Islam for Muslims is not an abstract idea but an idea in operative practice. The Wahhabis rejected the actual practice [of Islam as it has unfolded in history], but not the conception that Islam is a practice, is essentially a divine pattern in this-worldly, historical motion. Their message was a way of proclaiming that what is ultimately right and imperative is not the actual embodiment of Islam in history but the ideal embodiment. (Smith, 1957: 50)

In addition to this insistence on orthopraxy, Wahhabism also practiced the controversial Kharijite principle of *takfir*, or the excommunication of fellow Muslims for unbelief. Wahhabism also extended the concept of *jahiliyya* (the willful pagan ignorance that characterized the pre-Islamic societies) to contemporary Muslim societies, and in this preceded later Islamist ideologues, including the Pakastani, Abul A'la Mawdudi (1903-79) and the Egyptian, Sayyid Qutb (1906-66), who made such notions central to their critiques of contemporary Muslim societies.

Viewed within the frequently tragic and demoralizing history of modern Islam, this Wahhabi reaction to perceived decadence, and their aspirations towards a purity of practice can perhaps be comprehended, as can its attraction for many

Muslims today. However, as the behaviour of Wahhabi-influenced regimes, including the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Islamists in the Sudan, has revealed so vividly, and as aspects of the Saudi regime itself also indicate, the outcome of such sectarianism is a theocratic authoritarianism that can be frequently brutal, corrupt, and fanatical, and even tend towards the totalitarian as it seeks to intervene increasingly in every aspect of life.

As evidence of such outcomes the scholars noted above variously cite the Wahhabi hatred of Shi'ism, Sufis, infidels, apostates, moderate Muslims, mysticism, philosophy, music, the worship of saints, adoration of the Prophet, heresy, idolatry, popular religious piety, the 'immodesty' of women, superstitions and religious innovations, intellectuals, other religions and the West. Bassam Tibi (2001: 44), sees Wahhabism as an "archaic, static and purist interpretation of Islam that sees every innovation as a threat to its existential frame of reference," as it pursues its vision of a universalized Islam. Malise Ruthven (2002: 172) describes it as "that version of the faith that insists on the strict observance of outward rules of behaviour (orthopraxy) whilst systematically attacking or undermining the more esoteric or mystical variants of the faith that tend towards widening the religion's appeal whilst facilitating accommodations with modernity." Vincent Cornell (1999: 89) has observed "how the mystical interpretations of Sufism ... have recently been replaced and even anathematized by the hadith-driven scripturalism of Wahhabism." In another assessment, Wahhabism is seen as totalitarian, utterly xenophobic and embodying "a program for the ruthless conquest of power and a war of extermination against 'the other', Islamic as well as Judeo-Christian." (Schwartz, 2002:179-80) Ultimately, in its most extreme forms, Wahhabism is a death cult that "exalts and promotes death in every element of its existence. ... The war against terrorist Wahhabism is therefore a war to the death" (180).

Sufism and various popular forms of Muslim religiosity are the primary targets of Wahhabism as it pursues its ideal of a purified Islam. These traditional forms of Islam are exemplified by a vast array of unique and traditional practices, rituals and observances that historically have prevailed throughout the Muslim world (Lapidus, 2002; Nasr, 1991; Robinson, 1996; Schwartz, 2002). Indeed, it is the Wahhabi antipathy towards such diversity that makes "the battle between Sufis and Wahhabis" exemplary of what is at stake in this increasingly intense and one-sided war "for the soul of Islam." (Schwartz, 2002:241)

Ironically, the mystical and ascetic practices and beliefs that lie at the heart of Sufism and that attract the ire of the Wahhabis and other Islamists go back to the very first generations of the Islamic faithful. Moreover, as the greatest living authority in this field puts it: "The truth and reality of the inner teachings of Islam became crystallized mostly in Sufism." (Nasr, 1991:3) Consequently, they cannot be marginalized or excluded without transforming the very structure and nature of Islam itself.

Nevertheless, even in the early years the contemporary tensions that presently exist between Wahhabism and Islamism on one hand, and Sufism and popular Muslim religiosity on the other were present in embryonic form:

> While the [first] Arab-Muslim elite was engaged in conquest and empire [and] the legalists and the theologians concentrated upon finding out the rules that God had commanded to govern everyday life ... the mystics attempted to acquire an immediate and personal experience of God's reality. ... In religious terms this is a quest for unity with the divine being; in humanistic terms it is an effort to overcome the divided self, to realize the truths by which life must be lived, and to attain wholeness of being. (Lapidus, 2002: 90)

Later, under the influence of gnosticism, philosophy, Eastern religions, metaphysics, theosophy, other non-Islamic tendencies, and profound mystical insight, synthesized by great teachers like Ibn al-'Arabi (1165-1240), Sufism began to stray far from an adherence to a literal understanding of the teachings of the Quran. The Sufi quest for oneness with the divine led to the marginalization of the observance of Muslim laws in favour of a search for states of spiritual intoxication and ecstasy. Communal loyalties and attention to the Shariah and Muslim devotions were set aside in favour of physical (e.g., yogic) techniques and even the use of drugs to attain states of mystical insight. Many Muslims "sought to short-circuit the trying discipline of the Shariah way of life and to directly achieve spiritual redemption by contemplative, miraculous, and magical means." (Lapidus, 2002: 174) Nevertheless, some of the greatest achievements of human spirituality appeared at this time in the poetry of Farid al-Din al-'Attar (d.1230), 'Umar ibn al-Farid (d.1234), and especially Jalal al-Din al-Rumi (1207-73), giving "the most moving expression in verse to the profound emotions of wonder, love, elation, and sheer incomprehension attendant upon the mystical experience" (Fakhry, 1983: 255).

Sufism also played a central role in the spread of Islam. Sufi Brotherhoods operating under the authority of various acknowledged Masters and observing diverse sets of rules, litanies, rituals, forms of meditation, etc., were particularly important, and lodges were established throughout the Muslim world over the last millennium. These adapted themselves to every aspect and nuance of innumerable Muslim communities, although "un-Islamic elements drawn from the folklore of myriad local cultures throughout the Middle East and South Asia crept into Sufi Practices." (Waines, 1995: 148) Nevertheless, Sufism was vital in the integration of "people outside the limited range of manuscript-based culture [into] the Islamic universe." (Ruthven, 2002: 175) Overall:

> Each [Sufi] order emphasized some element of the path and adapted itself to various ethnic and psychological climates in a vast world which included such different human types as Arabs and Berbers, Nigerians and Persians, Turks and Malays. ... As a result, an incredibly rich diversity of spiritual possibilities came into being in the Islamic world. (Nasr, 1991: 4)

Amongst the most important Sufi orders are the Naqshbandiyyah and the Qadiriyyah, the two most widespread today, with a presence that extends from West Africa to Central Asia and Indonesia. The Mawlawiyyah, founded by Rumi, are very well known in the West. The Chishtiyyah spread from Afghanistan into

India, where they were very influential. The Shadhiliyyah was prominent in North africa and it witnessed a revival during the past two centuries; it was also a main transmitter of the teachings of Ibn'Arabi, one of the most important figures in Islamic spirituality and philosophy, and a specific target of Ibn Taymiyah. The Kubrawiyyah were important in Persia, Central Asia and India. Sufism in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago has a rich heritage and a prominent Sufi order there is the Rifa'iyyah, which is also important in Africa.

As this resume indicates, at the dawn of the modern era, "Sufi ideas and idioms had penetrated all levels of society and every region where an Islamic presence had become established" (Waines, 1995: 153). And indeed, it was this situation that provoked the protests of Ibn Taymiyah and, later, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and more recently became the primary focus of the Wahhabi and Islamist onslaught. As Stephen Schwartz laments on the basis of his first hand experience in the Balkans and Central Asia, this animosity still exists in all its intensity:

> On one side, there was the bright aspect of Sufi traditionalism, ever renewed, happy, filled with love of God and humanity, seeking to embrace believers in the other monotheistic faiths, always committed to the defence of human dignity. On the other was the ugly visage of Wahhabi fundamentalism, narrow, rigid, tyrannical, separatist, supremacist, and violent (Schwartz, 2002:241).

Wahhabi 'Religious Imperialism'

The various works cited above describe in considerable detail how Wahhabism is expanding its influence in the contemporary era through "Saudi religious imperialism," flowing from Wahhabism's position as the Saudi official religious ideology, and expressing "its hostility to non-Islamic religions, ... anti-Sufism and anti-Shi'ism." (Ruthven, 2002: 173) In his analysis of the Al Qaeda network in Southeast Asia, Zachary Abuza (2002: 428) observes how radical Islam is growing through "...the spread of Wahhabism and Salafi Islam, the failure of secular education, and an increased number of religious students studying in Middle Eastern and South Asian *madrasa* (Islamic schools)." Although a minority, Islamists "have shaped the agenda" (428). In his study of the Taliban, Rashid (2001: 199) remarks that "for 20 years the Saudis had funded hundreds of neo-Wahhabi parties across the Muslim world to spread Wahhabism and gain influence within the Islamic movements in these countries." Esposito (2002: 109) describes how the *madrasa* system of Islamic schools in Pakistan developed from 147 in 1947 to 9000 in 2002, with massive Saudi funding. Many of these are run by the Pakistani Deobandi movement, with "teachers with little knowledge of or appreciation for classical Islam and whose chief task was promoting a militant jihadist vision and culture." (110) Kepel (2002: 72) calls this Wahhabi offensive "petro-Islam" and points out that Saudi public funds derived from the oil industry have financed the construction of more than 1500 mosques around the world in the past half century. Indeed: "Their proliferation from the mid-1970s onward was one of the most visible changes in the landscape of the rapidly urbanizing Muslim

world." This Wahhabi dominance is given extra institutional weight by the "quasi-caliphal role" that the Saudis enjoy as custodians of the Holy sites of Mecca and Medina (Ruthven, 2002:175).

Saudi financial power also means that it can control key Muslim publishing houses, with Sufi, Shi'a and other works being suppressed:

> The Saudi ministry for religious affairs printed and distributed millions of Qurans free of charge, along with Wahhabite doctrinal texts, among the world's mosques, from the African plains to the rice paddies of Indonesia and the Muslim immigrant high-rise housing projects of European cities. For the first time in fourteen centuries the same books (as well as cassettes) could be found from one end of the *umma* to the other; all came from the same Saudi distribution circuits, as part of an identical corpus. Its very limited number of titles hewed to the same doctrinal line and excluded other currents of thought that had formerly been part of a more pluralistic Islam. (Kepel, 2002: 72)

In this fashion, Saudi petrodollars financed the internationalization of Wahhabism and Sunni Islamism, "creating an international Islamist discourse" (Esposito, 2002: 108).

Major Muslim organizations like the Organization of the Islamic Conference (established in 1969) and its subsidiary, the Islamic Development Bank and related organizations "have exported Wahhabi Islam to the rest of the Muslim world as well as to Europe and America" (Esposito, 2002: 107). The World Islamic League, founded by the Saudis in 1962 to offset Nasserite visions of Arab socialism, is also a primary Wahhabi vehicle, exercising influence through such bodies as the European Council of Mosques and the Islamic Coordinating Council of North America. It also has major influence (and even effective control) of the Taliban, the Deobandis and the Jama'at al-Islami, the Pakistan affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood, amongst many other organizations. Bergin (2001: 59) describes how Osama bin Laden funnelled Saudi funds to "ultra-Islamist" leaders in Afghanistan, including Abdul Rasool Sayyaf, who "subscribed to the purist Wahhabi Islam dear to bin Laden's heart. Because of his close ties to Arabia, Sayyaf would receive hundreds of millions of dollars in Saudi aid." In the UK, Ruthven (2002: 176-7) details the struggles of British Muslims to resist Wahhabi domination. In the USA, Schwartz (2002: 226-7) describes the "religious colonialism," leading to "the Wahhabi conquest of American Islam." He particularly emphasizes the links between Wahhabism, the Saudi government, the oil industry, US politicians, and ex-politicians employed as lobbyists. He cites several core Wahhabi agencies in the USA, "centrally funded and directed by America's foreign enemies" (231). These include: the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the American Muslim Council, the American Muslim Alliance, and the Islamic Society of North America, "which enforces Wahhabi theological writ in the country's 1,200 officially recognized mosques." (231) Ruthven (2002: 177) cites an estimate that 80% of US mosques are "under the control of Wahhabi imams who preach extremism." Elsewhere, Rashid (2002:223-4) describes how "Saudi Islamic charities have provided Central Asia with missionaries,

scholarships, and Islamic literature ... as the Saudis seek to turn Central Asians towards their own radical Wahhabism." Rashid (2002:10) points out that the ideologies of the leading militant Islamist groups are "based not on the indigenous Islam of Central Asia, the birthplace of Sufism (the tolerant form of Islamic mysticism) ... but of imported ideologies [especially] the extreme Wahhabi doctrine of Saudi Arabia."

In the present era of Islamic history where the battle is between various formulations of Islam, drawing on a repertoire of symbols and concepts derived from the Islamic tradition, Wahhabism is exemplary of "a new type of Islam, one which is highly political, often reduced to a limited number of religious ideas, and stripped of the panoply of religious beliefs, practices, and symbols that have historically structured Muslim life." (Lapidus, 2002:872) Its empowerment through massive financial support threatens to overwhelm the many versions of popular religiosity that have traditionally characterized the Muslim world. Kepel (2002: 73) describes the Wahhabi attempt at global hegemony as follows:

> Under Saudi influence, the notion of a worldwide 'Islamic domain of shared meaning' transcending the nationalist divisions among Arabs, Turks, Africans and Asians was created. All Muslims were offered a new [Wahhabi] identity that emphasized their religious commonality while downplaying differences of language, ethnicity and nationality.

However, as Kepel (2002: 73) observes pointedly: "This proposition did not necessarily correspond to any kind of demand on the part of the people to whom it was presented."

Furthermore, "implicit in the Wahhabis' anti-Sufi iconoclasm [is] an attack on popular and non-Arab versions of Islam." (Ruthven, 2002: 174) As noted earlier, beyond the Arabic-speaking regions Sufism was historically the primary vehicle for the dissemination of Islam and the integration of indigenous cultures into the Muslim world. Indeed, just as important as the spread of Sufism across the Muslim world "was the reflection in Sufi literature of the cosmopolitan nature of Islamic culture. ... Sufis wrote and sang their poems in nearly every vernacular they encountered." (Waines, 1995: 153) On the other hand, Wahhabism,

> by emphasizing the absolute primacy of the Quran, an Arabic text, and the Prophet's 'Arabian' *sunna*, while ignoring the cumulative traditions that had grown up over the centuries under the umbrella of Sufism with its multiplicity of regional variations, was in effect attacking regional identities, subjecting non-Arabs to Arab linguistic and religious authority. (Ruthven, 2002: 175)

This is especially the case where the communities effected are already struggling to bear the brunt of economic and social change flowing from the impact of globalization. This includes most of the Muslim world, from Africa to the Balkans, Indonesia and other parts of South-East, South, and Central Asia.

Wahhabism in Islamic History

The vigorous and highly critical tenor of the various analyses of the role and nature of Wahhabism reviewed here might call for some degree of caution. On the one hand, the various authors cited support their arguments by an examination of many factors, including the history and ideology of Wahhabism: its position as the sole, official, state-sanctioned form of Islam in Saudi Arabia; its promotion around the world by that oil-rich state; its increasingly high profile within the Muslim world, especially in the poorer regions; its control over key, well-resourced Islamic organizations around the globe, including the USA, with its increasing dominance over mosques and Islamic schools, and its strong political, corporate and academic influence; its role in some of the most brutal and tragic contemporary conflicts in such places as the Balkans and Central Asia; its role as the main component of the Islamist ideology of Al Qaeda and related terrorist organizations; and, especially, its theology and general world-view, which Schwartz (2002: 246), for example, sees as utterly nihilistic: "an amoral power ideology that cannot accept the coexistence of Muslim and non-Muslim civilizations".

On the other hand, despite the comprehensive and detailed nature of the case made by these analysts, one cannot help but wonder if Wahhabism is truly a religious movement of such significance. Over the years it has not enjoyed a very high profile in general historical studies of Islam, and yet it is now presented as the ideological agent of some of the most fundamental changes underway in the Muslim world. Has Wahhabism somehow slipped under the guard of historians and scholars of Islam and religion generally, emerging only now to assume the role in contemporary global history that these analysts insist it currently has? Or have circumstances suddenly changed so greatly that our historical perspective has been transformed and we are now more clearly seeing phenomena that we previously ignored or were blind to? Are we witnessing the emergence of a new paradigm of interpretation of modern Islamic history? A brief review of some of the more prominent general histories of modern Islam is instructive in gaining some perspective on the actual contemporary significance of Wahhabism.

In most of these historical surveys of Islam, Wahhabism is treated as a comparatively minor phenomenon within the history of reform and renewal in Islam over the past three centuries. In his major history of the Arab peoples Albert Hourani (1991) makes less than a dozen minor references to Wahhabism in a work of 550 pages. Ira Lapidus (1988) mentions it even less frequently in some 900 pages, while the treatment provided by Esposito (1999) is similar in scope (although Esposito (1993) does provide a more thorough analysis, as we shall see below). John Voll (1999:518) locates Wahhabism within "the broad spectrum of movements of renewal" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Bernard Lewis (1995), David Waines (1995), and Francis Robinson (1996) treat it mainly in passing. Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1957) offers some brief but important insights, as we saw above. Even the monumental first volume of Martin Marty's and R. Scott Appleby's (1991) study of fundamentalism provides only a relatively short discussion, where Vol 1 (1991:351) presents contemporary Wahhabism as "the

most enduring experiment within the broader mission" to create a modern Islamic society, offering "an important example for others [and] a basic repertoire of concepts and ideas from which modern fundamentalists draw".

Over the past decade there was some change of emphasis within the master narrative of Islamic historical analysis, as the implications of Wahhabism and other forms of Islamism became increasingly apparent even prior to 9/11, particularly after the first attack on the World Trade Center. Two examples of this intellectual shift can be briefly reviewed: the work of John Esposito and Ira Lapidus, two of the most eminent scholars in the historical study of Islam.

Amongst his many works, Esposito published several editions of *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality* during the 1990s, responding to actual and perceived threats to American interests from Muslim nations and militant Islamist groups. In the aftermath of the first Gulf War his outlook was liberal, progressive, and optimistic, explicitly denouncing "exaggerated fears of Islam as a resurgent 'evil empire' at war with the New World Order and a challenge to global stability." (Esposito, 1993: 4) Instead he optimistically declared that "countries in the Muslim world ... are undergoing a process of political liberalization or democratization," although challenges remain (214). He warned against "the risk of creating self-fulfilling prophecies about the battle of the West against a radical Islam," with the implication being that it is the hostile attitudes of the West and not the actual activities of radical Islamists themselves that constitute the principle danger to global order (215). Esposito offered several brief discussions of Wahhabism as one example of Islamic revivalism, "whose goal was the moral reconstruction of society," in face of the decadence produced by a "departure from true Islamic values brought about by the infiltration and assimilation of local, indigenous un-Islamic beliefs and practices." (50) Their solution involved "purification" through the militant political activity of "true believers," bringing about "a return to the fundamental sources of Islam," as defined by the Wahhabis themselves (50).

A decade later, following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Esposito (2002) reiterates his general position on Islam, which involves an assertion of the great achievements of Islam; a call for acceptance and tolerance of Islamic values, including Muslim attitudes towards women; patience with authoritarian Muslim regimes and continued optimism about progress towards some form of democracy and liberalization; promotion of the place of Islam within a globalized modernity; and a condemnation of United States foreign policy as a primary source of difficulty in the Muslim world.

Esposito also now provides a far more detailed discussion of Wahhabism, focussing on Saudi sponsorship of Wahhabism's international expansion as the basis of a pan-Islamic vision, its influence on Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, Jamiyyat i-Ulama-i-Islam, its role in Asia, etc. He recounts many of the events and developments noted above and also claims that Wahhabism cannot be simply equated with Islamism, asserting that a revolutionary like Sayyid Qutb, for example, operates in tension with the ultra-conservatism of Wahhabism. Nevertheless: "That being said, Saudi policies of supporting Wahhabi-oriented

schools worldwide have resulted in unintended consequences as witnessed by the Taliban-bin Laden alliance and jihadi *madrasas*" (Esposito, 2002: 111). He also devotes a considerable part of his book to discussions of Global Jihad and international Islamist terrorism.

The second example of recent historical scholarship exhibiting a greater concern with the role played by Wahhabism and Islamism and their implications for contemporary Islam is the work of Ira Lapidus. Lapidus differs from Esposito in possessing a more profound grasp of the depth of structural change underway in the Muslim world, and this makes it possible for him to envisage the fundamental transformation of Islam presaged by the 'battle for the soul of Islam' being discussed here.

In the second edition of his *History of Islamic Societies* (2002), Lapidus recasts the framework of his initial analysis, rewriting entirely his discussion of the past two centuries of Islamic history to emphasize an emergent "fourth phase" of Islamic revival. Lapidus sees this as overlapping the previous phase shaped by the Muslim encounter with Western imperialism. Whereas the Muslim response in its third phase encounter with imperialism was dominated by secularist reforms of varying success, the fourth phase is characterized by religious revival:

> The revival is manifested in a wave of reformist, Salafi or Wahhabi-type movements, which teach a return to the teachings of the Quran and the Prophet. It is manifest in widespread missionary, educational, and community-building movements, and above all it is manifest in political action. Muslim politics varies from pacific and cooperative to oppositional and violent, but the hallmark of the revival is the drive to create Islamic states in place of the failed secular states of the mid- and late twentieth century (Lapidus, 2002:xxvii-xxviii).

For Lapidus, the revival exemplified by Wahhabism is a response to external forces of globalization that are breaking down the foundational, millennia-old, institutional structures of Islamic society. Wahhabi and Islamist ideologies are also working to transform Muslim societies - but from within. They deploy a new type of highly politicized Islam, reduced to a limited number of religious ideas, concepts and values, and denuded of the great variety of religious symbols, beliefs, and practices that traditionally structured Muslim life. "In many respects," Lapidus (2002: 872) remarks, "the new Islam would be hardly recognizable to past generations." For Lapidus, it appears the ancient structures of Islamic society are giving way under the impact of the globalizing forces of modernity and are being replaced by new forms of Salafi or Wahhabi-type Islam, raising doubts as to "whether Muslim peoples still constitute, and will continue to constitute, Islamic societies as known to history" (872).

If we compare more closely the two editions of Lapidus's book we can detect other aspects of this shift in outlook. This is encapsulated in his final 'Concluding remarks', which are comparatively brief in the 1988 edition and significantly more extensive in the 2002 edition. In the first edition, Lapidus (1988: 915) notes while the past two centuries have seen profound changes, "the structures of lineage, religious, and state institutions ... are enduring, though modified, templates for

the contemporary evolution of Islamic societies." (916) In the second edition (Lapidus, 2002:871), this conclusion is qualified by the observation that "today these ancient templates are being transformed by two fundamental forces," the first being integration into the global economy, and the second the emergence of Islamist movements noted above. Whereas Lapidus spoke initially of templates structuring and giving a consistent and predictable form to Islam over the centuries, he has now come to speak of these templates themselves being transformed.

Wahhabism and Islamism are rising to prominence because change in the Muslim world is no longer just occurring <u>within</u> the perennial structures that date from pre-Islamic times and that were exemplified by the role played by Sufism and popular religiosity. Instead, the primary changes that are now occurring is to these foundational structures <u>themselves,</u> and this appears to leave little room for these traditional forms of spirituality. It is this profound shift that forms the context for the battle for the soul of Islam that is our concern here.

Conclusion

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 there has been a paradigm shift in the study of Islam. Prior to then there was little focus on Wahhabism as a significant factor in modern Islamic history, although there was some growing awareness in the 1990s. Now however, the analytical focus is comparatively less on the general history of Islam and its place within the modern world, and increasingly on the ideological and material origins of the Islamism of Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations and their relationship to the campaign for a Global Jihad. Recent texts on Islam now give Wahhabism and Islamism much greater significance than was granted before and their role is now subject to interpretations that place them much closer to the centre of modern Muslim history. This shift parallels the fundamental changes that have occurred in the foreign and domestic policies of the USA and other Western societies that are being targeted by these groups. It may be characterized as the 'National Security Paradigm'.

What has to be emphasized as this new paradigm develops is that Wahhabism and Islamism also represent major challenges to the traditional structures of Islam itself, especially in the areas of popular religiosity and spirituality, which otherwise enjoy insufficient attention and may continue to be marginalized by an overwhelming concern with national security issues such as terrorism and the spectre of Global Jihad.

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