
British-Saudi Pan Islamism

Britain's Assault on the Muslim Nation-States and the World

by Hussein Askary

“The horse might have a plan, but the one riding its back has another!”

—Traditional saying

Muslims around the world are disgusted and frustrated by the hijacking of their religion by hordes of fanatic, bloodthirsty terrorists wearing the garb of Islam. Even more frustrating for them are the attacks directed from the Western media against Muslims as a whole and Islam as a whole, due to the perverted acts committed by these so-called Islamic “mujahideen” fighters. Very few comprehend what those are “fighting” against and for whose interest they fight, since most victims of their crimes are Muslims, and those who benefit from the attacks are the imperialists whom they call “infidel”!

We shall try to shed some light on the historical background to this dangerous dilemma.

Since many of the recent terrorist acts have been committed by those who call themselves “Salafi,” the offspring of the Saudi-fostered, British-sponsored Wahhabi religious movement, we shall deal with how this movement emerged and was later used, when the British made the Arabian peninsula a playground for their imperial geopolitics.

The term Wahhabi refers to the founder of this line of Islamic “thought,” Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab, in the middle of the 18th Century, in the central Nejd desert of today’s Saudi Arabia. It was a regressive form of puritanism, and a rejection of reason and any rational interpretation of the meaning of Islam’s holy book, *Al-Quran*, and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. The extreme Wahhabis demand a strictly literal interpretation of the words of the *Quran* and the Prophet. They also view a great deal of the Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad as unfounded, especially when they concern moral and spiritual education.

The Wahhabis, who spread in settlements scattered through the desert, made their living by raiding surrounding villages, trading caravans, and Muslim pilgrims from Iraq, especially those suspected of being followers of the Shi’a sect, whom the Wahhabi considered heretics. Men’s throats were slit, goods and animals looted, and women and children taken as slaves.

With the alliance forged by ibn Abdul Wahhab with the tribal leader Muhammad ibn Saud in the town of Dar’iya in 1744, Wahhabism or Salafism turned from a religious movement to a political one, which it still is. Ibn Saud pledged to spread the Wahhabi teachings, while expanding his power over neighboring regions in eastern Arabia by raiding other tribes.

Enter, the British Empire

The British Empire, which in the middle of the 19th Century had control over wide swaths of Asia, especially India, needed to secure its trade routes from there to Europe. The British concluded protection agreements with tribal chiefs along the trade routes through the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the Persian Gulf, in order to prevent other colonial powers from approaching these local forces. The chiefs of what now are Oman, Dubai, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait were granted financial subsidies by the British government, weapons, and a promise to protect them militarily if attacked by other imperial powers, especially the Turks.

The Gulf itself had no significance before the building of the Berlin-Baghdad Railway in 1907 and the discovery of oil in great quantities in Iraq then, and later in Saudi Arabia. The British used the method of “divide and conquer” perfectly, by pitting each chieftain against the others, intervening at the right time to support one against the other, so as to balance power among the different Arab tribes. This also meant that the tribes became totally reliant on the British.



Abdul Aziz ibn Saud in 1916, with Maj.-Gen. Sir Percy Cox (second from left), the official British Agent in Iraq and Iran. Cox has just presented ibn Saud with a knighthood; the Saudi leader wears the insignia of the Knight Commander of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire.

From the late 1880s to the first decade of the 20th Century, the expanding al-Saud-Wahhabi alliance had started trampling on the toes of the Turks, who were in control of Iraq, al-Sham (now Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan), and the western part of Arabia where Mecca and Medina are located. Lacking modern economic capabilities and means of warfare, the al-Saud chief, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud, relied on the British to provide these. The British did not, of course, give them for free, but used them for larger strategic aims, including in the buildup to World War I, in which the British plan was to carve up and take over the spoils of the Ottoman Empire. Looking today, from the vantage point of what we know about the BAE British-Saudi arms affair (see article in *International*), one can definitely state that almost nothing has changed in this respect for more than a century.

Islamist ‘Pragmatism’

Pragmatism and reliance upon “infidels” and imperialists have become common practices of the Salafi-jihadis, justified if they benefit “the cause.” One of the Salafis who refined this pragmatism was the Egyptian religious scholar Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905). Abduh had participated in the 1882 revolt, led by Egyptian officer Ahmed Urabi, against the British occupa-

tion. He was exiled to Lebanon, where he stayed until 1884, when he was invited to France by Jamal el-Din al-Afghani. The French, who were battling the British over control of Middle East, recruited the two to a French freemasonic lodge and paid them to spread anti-British propaganda. Abduh returned to Egypt and was not only pardoned by the British, but appointed as a judge and later Grand Mufti, in 1889, after promising the British proconsul of Egypt, Lord Cromer, not to deal with politics or arouse the public against the British colonialists.

Abduh’s “political ideas” later had a great impact on the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Hasan al-Banna. The Muslim Brotherhood followed the same fanatic religious beliefs, but also the “pragmatic” policies of collaborating with whoever gives them weapons and support. Thus they too turned themselves into tools of the British Empire. The open collaboration of the “Islamic” mujahideen fighters with the British and U.S. intelligence services, which provided them with weapons, financing, and training in the 1980s, in the fight in Afghanistan against the Soviet “God-deniers,” is another example of sticking to the very “tradition” of which the British have become masters. Hence the perversion of these so-called “Islamists,” who preach hatred of the West, but are constantly in bed with the worst elements of Western imperialism.

The Post-Sykes-Picot World

Following World War I, the British, along with the French imperialists who had become stooges of the British after the Fashoda crisis in 1898 and the Anglo-French entente in 1904, were facing revolts all over the Middle East. This became especially intensive after the 1916 Sykes-Picot secret agreement was publicly exposed (**Figure 1**). The British and the French had planned, while the war was still going on, to divide the remains of the Turkish Empire between themselves, never mind that they had promised the Arabs independence after the war, if they helped fight the Turks! These promises were made to the Hashemite leader al-Sharif

FIGURE 1
The Sykes-Picot Treaty of 1916: Dividing Up the Mideast



www.israelipalestinianprocon.org

FIGURE 2
Saudi Arabia



GNU FDL

The choice was made to limit power to a few tribes, with ever-loyal al-Saud as the main force in the whole of Arabia. Abdul Aziz ibn Saud was armed and encouraged to expand in the desert and crush all rival tribes in the north of Arabia first. With new British arms, vehicles, the telegraph, and other modern communications devices, ibn Saud and his wildly

Hussein of Mecca, the ancestor of the current royal family in Jordan, who was considered a leader by many Arab Muslims in the region. He was also a rival of ibn Saud, when it came to the control of Arabia.

Between 1919 and 1920, the economically exhausted British and French faced armed rebellion in Afghanistan, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. Although the two imperialist powers successfully used brutal force to crush the rebellions, this made the continuation of direct colonial military rule almost impossible. The new strategy followed by the British was to allow a quasi-independent status for the various countries, with Arab kings on top, but under British “custody” or mandate. That made the control more economical! Air forces, rather than masses of troops, were used to crush any town or village that showed resistance, and the British-controlled Arab leaders’ own police and armies were assigned the job of keeping “order” for the British.

In the Gulf, the policy of balancing many tribal chieftains was no longer feasible during World War I.

brutal Wahhabi Ikhwan (a religious and military brotherhood) were enabled to put most of the eastern and northeastern part of Arabia at their mercy. British officers, such as Capt. William Shakespear (!), a British agent in Kuwait, helped ibn Saud with surveillance, logistics, and communications. Shakespear, who forged a close friendship with ibn Saud, was killed on Jan. 24, 1915 in the battle of Jarrab between al-Saud and the pro-Turkish al-Rashid tribe, which were the largest rivals of al-Saud in the region.

Major-Gen. Sir Percy Cox, who was the Acting Political Agent of British India, continued the work of Shakespear through 1924, when ibn Saud was finally enabled to defeat the Hashemite al-Sharif Hussein in western Arabia. Cox signed the first Anglo-Saudi friendship treaty, giving ibn Saud limitless access to military, financial, and political support from Britain. In November 1916, Cox had conferred knighthood upon ibn Saud, as Knight Commander of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire!

The fall of al-Sharif Hussein was achieved by the British without much fighting. As al-Saud's Ikhwan advanced westward, massacring the residents of many towns along their way to Mecca, Medina, and Jeddah, al-Sharif Hussein begged for help from his controllers at the British Arab Bureau, but to no avail. The Arab Bureau, which was run directly from the Foreign Office in London, had helped Hussein (through T.E. Lawrence "of Arabia") in the fight against the Turks in World War I. Now it seemed that the expiration date of his usefulness for Britain was past. The only response the British gave him was to provide him with a steamer to flee Jeddah and leave everything to al-Saud.

This was a typical British move: Two parties in the region are fighting for power, and the British have two institutions in this case (the British India Army on one side and the Arab Bureau on the other), arming, financing, and guiding both parties. When the right moment comes, one of the two agents is dropped. Al-Sharif Hussein left Jeddah onboard the British steamer *Two Mercies* on Oct. 16, 1924, for his exile in Cyprus.

Abdul Aziz ibn Saud became the ruler of Nejd and Hijaz in 1925. In 1927, after signing the second Anglo-Saudi treaty, he renamed himself King of Nejd and Hijaz. From 1927 to 1932, he consolidated his control over most of the Arabian peninsula, changing the name of his kingdom to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Throughout this period, another British officer, Sir John Philby, became ibn Saud's closest advisor and controller.

1929-30: Turning Point for the Ikhwan

The Wahhabi Ikhwan hordes were going wild, as their and ibn Saud's conquest was succeeding. However, their brutality and their eagerness to go beyond the areas assigned by the British to ibn Saud, territories in Iraq and Syria controlled by the British themselves, made them into a threat rather than an asset. When ibn Saud tried to put a limit to their frenzy in 1929, they turned against him, and demanded that he give orders to fight the British, to show his loyalty to Islam and his animosity to the infidels.

That was the red line for the British, and ibn Saud had to choose between a rebellious mob or the security of British support. As the Ikhwan were out on their own rampage, raiding the Hail region in Spring 1929, ibn Saud and the British decided to finish them off. A final battle was joined on the Plain of Sabbila, about 270 km north of Riyadh. The modern weapons and mobility of ibn Saud's forces quickly defeated the greater part of

the Ikhwan army. Several hundred Ikhwan prisoners were beheaded. The leaders of the "Ikhwan rebellion," Faisal al-Daweesh and ibn Bijad, were wounded, and later surrendered to the British in Kuwait. Although they were pardoned by ibn Saud, they were sent to prison in Riyadh, where they later died.

That ended one episode in the relationship between the Wahhabis and al-Saud. But the Ikhwan were exonerated in the 1960s by King Saud bin Abdul Aziz, when the British fight against Arab nationalism required the use of religious fanaticism. Although the older ibn Saud demolished the Ikhwan as a military force in 1929, he preserved their religious influence and teachings.

FDR's Attempt

Throughout the 1930s and World War II, the British were working to keep the Americans away from Saudi Arabia, especially when Standard Oil of California (Socal) managed to clinch a major concession in 1932 from ibn Saud, who was interested in the revenues that could make him more independent financially from total British control. He was also frustrated by the British attempts to convince him that there was no oil under the sand of his kingdom. The British already had control over most of the world's oil, produced in Iraq and Iran by the British Anglo-Persian oil company, and there was no need for further production in their view.

For the advisors to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, energy security was a crucial part of the war effort, and also for the post-war period. However, FDR's view of working with Asian and African nations was different from that of the British imperialists. He wanted to give "something back" to those nations in return for raw materials, as he told British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. His meeting with ibn Saud in February 1945 was one in a series of meetings with Third World leaders to discuss the prospects of different international relations in the post-war era. However, with FDR's death, what remained of that U.S. policy was the blind hunt for oil and money in that region. U.S. policy became tainted by the corruption that was engineered by the British. U.S. oil companies became junior partners in the larger British imperial scheme.

Pan-Islamism vs. Nationalism

Although the British had played the Islamic card earlier in the 19th and 20th centuries, it was with the Suez Canal crisis of 1956 that the modern form of British-Saudi pan-Islamism entered the global scene. When

President Dwight Eisenhower forcefully insisted that the Anglo-French-Israeli aggression against Gamal Abdul Nasser's Egypt be ended, the Muslim Brotherhood and other religious movements became key to the destabilization of Egypt and any other Muslim nation that aspired for freedom from colonialism.

Nasser's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal company, wresting it from British control, and the defeat of the trilateral aggression with the help of the United States, made Nasser a hero in the Arab world. When the republican, anti-colonial movements spread from Egypt to Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Tunisia, and Algeria, the British were risking loss of all their control over Southwest Asia, to forces that were actually sympathetic to the United States and its republican traditions. Things became worse for the British when republican officers overthrew the Sultan of Yemen, Imam Ahmed ibn Yahya, in 1962. The republicans were supported by Nasser and actually indirectly by the Kennedy Administration, which recognized the Yemeni "republic" immediately after the coup. The Imam fled to Saudi Arabia and launched a fight across the border with the help of the Saudis and weapons flown in from Britain, through the emerging weapons dealer Adnan Khashoggi, of whom more would be heard in years to come.

The major problem with the U.S. policy towards the anti-British forces was the Cold War ideology which made every anti-imperialist look like a "communist." This was part of the Churchill-instigated Iron Curtain policy, which, with the help of anglophile Presidents like Harry Truman and influential advisors to U.S. Presidents like John Foster Dulles, George Shultz, and Henry Kissinger, the United States moved to the side of the British-backed feudal monarchies in the Third World, and against the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which was also called Ikhwan, became a thorn in the side of Nasser and every other Arab nationalist government, especially those of Syria and Tunisia. Syria had forged an alliance with Nasser's Egypt, the United Arab Republic. The Saudi Kingdom, the Jordanian Kingdom, and the Iraqi Kingdom forged an alliance, on behalf of the British Baghdad Pact, to confront the Egypt-Syrian front. In 1958, King Saud ibn Abdul Aziz paid £2 million British to agents in Syria to assassinate both Syrian President Shukri al-Quwwatli and Egypt's Abdul Nasser, and run a coup in both countries. The attempt failed, but the Arab world was split for decades to come. The Muslim Brotherhood wrought havoc but was defeated in Egypt,

Syria, and Tunisia. Interestingly, the leaders of these three Brotherhood organizations still live in Britain: Ali al-Bayanouni (Syria), Rashid al-Ghannoushi (Tunisia), and Kamal al-Halabawi (Egypt). They are all still active in subversive activities against their own governments.

In the 1950-60s, the British started mobilizing the Islamist forces all over Southwest Asia, with the pretext that the nationalists were actually God-denying communists. In 1969, the Saudis took up a new role, with their new-found oil wealth. With reportedly Israeli terrorists burning the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem in August 1969, the first pan-Islamic outcry occurred, and Saudi King Faisal called for establishing a pan-Islamic movement which became the Organization of the Islamic Conference, with its headquarters in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The hope was that pan-Islamism would replace anti-colonial nationalism.

Saudi Arabia became a major supporter of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, and many of the Brotherhood's leaders fled to Saudi Arabia in the 1950s-60s, when Nasser was ridding Egypt of its operations. According to defectors among the Brotherhood leaders, the Saudis supported several assassination attempts against Nasser, helping smuggle weapons and gold from Sudan to Egypt.

The British had earlier used Brotherhood assets for dirty operations such as the 1948 assassination of Yemen's Sultan Yahya (father of the above-mentioned Imam), who was in a fight against the British in Aden.

In 1973, with the oil crisis orchestrated by Henry Kissinger and the British, King Faisal became the "hero" of the Islamic world. The United States and Israel became the new "enemy image" instead of the imperial British. The British crept to the background, concentrating on financially benefitting from the crisis-generated petrodollars.

The 'Arc of Crisis'

Towards the end of the 1970s, a series of upheavals, military coups, and assassinations swept throughout what U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski termed "the Arc of Crisis," paving the way for the Afghanistan War and the Iran-Iraq War.

In Pakistan, the strongly anti-imperialist Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was jailed in the 1977 coup against him, and assassinated in 1979 by Gen. Zia ul-Haq, who played a crucial role in turning Pakistan into a logistical center for drugs-for-weapons and Islamic mujahideen transfer to the war against the Soviets in Af-



Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

Nationalist Egyptian leader Gamal Abdul Nasser was a strategic threat to the British, who hit the ceiling when he nationalized the Suez Canal in 1956; they joined with France and Israel for a military attack. President Dwight Eisenhower demanded that the tripartite assault be called back. After that, the British let loose the Muslim Brotherhood to destabilize Egypt. Left: Nasser with Soviet General Secretary Nikita Khrushchev at the Aswan Dam; above, Eisenhower during the Suez crisis.

In the meantime, the British struck the al-Yamamah deal with Saudi Arabia.

With the outbreak of the Afghan War, the United States, Great Britain, and Saudi Arabia organized support for the proxy war, through the native Afghan warlords, and the non-Afghani mujahideen who became known as the Afghansi. Most of the international focus was later placed on CIA operations in the area, but little is known about the workings of Britain's MI6.

ghanistan, which was provoked the same year. The effects of this, in corrupting large sections of the Pakistani military and military intelligence, remain to this day.

Between 1978 and 1979, in preparation for the Afghan War against the Soviets, many Saudi charities and relief organizations were established. The International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) was established in October 1978, as an arm of the Saudi-based World Muslim League; this was two months after the deployment of the Soviet 40th Army to Afghanistan. The IIRO still focusses most of its activities on Pakistan.

In 1979, the Islamic Revolution of Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, and a religious state was established in Iran. That same year, "socialist" Saddam Hussein made a palace coup in the Ba'ath Party ranks and took over the Presidency in Iraq. As if automatically, the Iran-Iraq War broke out in September 1980, crushing both countries to irrelevance, turning both into a crucial part of the global weapons trade run by British and Israeli interests, in collaboration with the United States.

In October 1981, Anwar Sadat, the Egyptian President who was the first Arab leader to sign a peace treaty with Israel, was assassinated by members of the Islamic Jihad organization, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Emergence of 'Jihadi' Terrorists

Many bitterly protest, including the Afghansi themselves, that the CIA and the United States "abandoned" the mujahideen as soon as the mission was accomplished and the Soviets were forced to withdraw from Afghanistan in 1988-89. That is correct to a large extent. But, it is here that the British, the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), and the Saudis together found a new deployment job for the "soldiers without a cause." While the Afghan warlords waged civil war against each other over power in Kabul, the volunteers from other Arab and Muslim countries regrouped in Peshawar, Afghanistan. Their mission became one of a global Islamic "crusade."

Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian who was the spiritual leader of the Afghansis, was killed in 1989 when his car was blown up in Peshawar. Azzam was a Muslim Brotherhood member, studied in al-Azhar (Egypt), and taught at King Saud University in Jeddah in 1980, before going to Pakistan to teach at the International Islamic University in Islamabad, and then moving to Peshawar. He was a key recruiter and propagandist for *Jihad* in Afghanistan. He frequently attended conferences and festivals in the United States and Europe to raise support for the mujahideen. Some among the mujahideen suspected that Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri (an Egypt-

tian) were behind the killing of Azzam; it was they who took leadership of the mujahideen camps in Peshawar after Azzam's death. In the early 1990s, many of the Afghansi moved back to their home countries, where they were met with skepticism by their secular governments, and some ended up in prison. Many of them fought in the war in Bosnia; others sought asylum in Britain and other European countries.

With the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq, bin Laden became a special case, because he started to agitate against the al-Saud family, who, he protested, had "invited the infidel Americans" to the holy Saudi land to fight Saddam Hussein, after the Iraqi leader invaded Kuwait in August 1990. Bin Laden managed to recruit a large number of Wahhabi scholars to his call for "reform" of the Saudi Kingdom. The al-Saud family ridiculed him and imprisoned many of the scholars who supported his manifesto. Some of them escaped and sought asylum in Britain, such as Saad al-Faghih and Muhammad al-Masa'ari, who ran propaganda operations for bin Laden from an office in London. They were sending communiqués signed by bin Laden from the office of the Committee for the Defense of Legal Rights (CDLR), denouncing the Saudi government and challenging its power. The communiqués issued in 1994 were signed by bin Laden himself.

Later, the Wahhabi scholars struck a deal with the al-Saud family and were released from prison, in return for abandoning Bin Laden's childish demands. Their activities were redirected to supporting *Jihad* in Bosnia, Chechnya, Kashmir, etc. Bin Laden later directed his activities against the United States, including attacks on U.S. bases in Saudi Arabia (such as the Khobar Towers bombing in 1996).

Of course these actions had the implicit sympathy of the Wahhabi clergy, but it should not be ruled out that the bombers got some help from people in the security forces or the military. The supporters of Bin Laden at the CDLR in London were publicly bragging about the support they were receiving from security and military officers. The Saudi government did not do much to shut down the London offices of those who allegedly wanted to overthrow them, and even refused an offer from the Sudanese government to extradite bin Laden to Saudi Arabia in 1995! The Saudis reportedly asked the Sudanese government to send him to Afghanistan, which had come under control of the Taliban.

U.S. intelligence sources have confirmed a report by

author Lawrence Wright, that Jamal Khashoggi, an advisor to Saudi intelligence minister Turki al-Faisal, paid a visit to bin Laden in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s, seeking to strike a deal with him whereby he would abandon his campaigns against the al-Saud dynasty, in return for Saudi support for his activities in other directions. While Wright reports that bin Laden ultimately rejected the offer, U.S. intelligence sources contend that a de facto truce was reached, and the Saudi money spigot did open up shortly afterwards.

Al-Qaeda was "born" in 1997, with the declaration by bin Laden and al-Zawahiri to launch a *Jihad* "against Americans and Zionists." The 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam were the first major operations signed "al-Qaeda." Al-Qaeda joined bin Laden's Wahhabi operations, together with other organizations from Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Sudan, and other countries; all of them are offspring of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the majority of them have recruitment, fundraising, and logistical bases in Britain.

Born in London

Terrorist operations against Egypt, Libya, Jordan, Turkey, Iran, Russia, and other nations were documented, by the governments of these countries, to have their origin in London.

In 1998, the British Parliament made it clear that it was not going to change its policy of harboring Islamic terrorists. Parliament defeated a proposal to change the law that allows terrorist organizations to plan, finance, and recruit for armed acts against other nations, as long as these acts do not harm British interests! Up to this date, Britain has refused to cooperate with other nations to stop well-known terrorists and terrorist organizations operating in Britain. The only exceptions are when pressure is exerted by U.S. authorities, to demand that the British government investigate such activities.

Since 1995, *EIR* has thoroughly documented the operations run out of Britain to destabilize other nations. Most of the victim nations targeted by this British/Saudi-sponsored terrorism are actually Muslim nations. This seemingly paradoxical alliance between the "infidels" and the "mujahideen" becomes comprehensible, when more light is shed on the history of the methods used by the British Empire to manipulate religions in the service of its larger strategic goals. That Empire is still in existence today, and its methods are becoming more and more refined.