

Testimony of

Mr. Stephen Schwartz

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WAHHABISM AND ISLAM IN THE U.S.

Testimony by Stephen Schwartz

Director, Islam and Democracy Program

Foundation for the Defense of Democracies

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Members of the Senate, witnesses, spectators, ladies and gentlemen.

I come before this body today to describe how adherents of Wahhabism, the most extreme, separatist, and violent form of Islam, and the official sect in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia, have come to dominate Islam in the U.S.

Islam is a fairly new participant at the "big table" of American religions. The Muslim community only became a significant element in our country's life in the 1980s. Most "born Muslims," as opposed to those who "converted" - a term Muslims avoid, preferring "new Muslims" - had historically been immigrants from Pakistan and India who followed traditional, peaceful, mainstream Islam.

With the growth of the Islamic community in America, it was clear that there was no "Islamic establishment" in the U.S. - in contrast with Britain, France, and Germany, the main Western countries with significant Islamic minorities. The Wahhabi ideological structure in Saudi Arabia perceived this as an opportunity to fill a gap - to gain extraordinary influence over an Islamic community in the West that itself had immense potential for political and social influence.

This operation, which was largely successful, had multiple goals.

First, to gain control over a significant group of Muslim believers. Second, to use the Muslim community in the U.S. to influence U.S. government and media, in the formulation of policy and in perceptions, about Islam. This has included liaison meetings, "sensitivity" sessions and other public activities with high-level Administration officials, including the FBI Director, that we have seen since September 11th.

Third, to advance the overall Wahhabi agenda of "jihad against the world" - an extremist campaign to impose the Wahhabi dispensation on the global Islamic community, as well as to confront the other religions. This effort has included the establishment in the U.S. of a base for funding, recruitment and strategic/tactical support of terror operations in the U.S. and abroad.

Wahhabi-Saudi policy has always been two-faced: that while Wahhabis preach hostility and violence against non-Wahhabi Muslims, they simultaneously maintain a policy of alliance with Western military powers - first Britain, then the U.S. and France - to assure their control over the Arabian Peninsula.

At the present time, Shia and other non-Wahhabi Muslim community leaders estimate that 80 percent of American mosques - out of a total ranging between an official estimate of 1,200 and an unofficial figure of 4-6,000 - are under Wahhabi control. This does not mean 80 percent of American Muslims support Wahhabism, although the main Wahhabi ideological agency in America, the so-called Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) has claimed that some 70 percent of American Muslims want Wahhabi teaching in their mosques. This is, by the way, a claim I consider unfounded.

Rather, Wahhabi control over mosques means control of property, buildings, appointment of imams, training of imams, content of preaching - including faxing of Friday sermons from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia - and of literature distributed in mosques and mosque bookstores, notices on bulletin boards, and organizational and charitable solicitation. Similar influence includes prison and military chaplaincies, campus activity, endowment of academic chairs and programs in Middle East studies, and most notoriously, to charities ostensibly helping Muslims abroad, many of which have been linked to or designated as sponsors of terrorism.

The main organizations that have carried out this campaign are the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), which originated in the Muslim Students' Association of the U.S. and Canada (MSA), and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). Support activities have been provided by the American Muslim Council (AMC), the American Muslim Alliance (AMA), the Muslim American Society (MAS), the Graduate School of Islamic and Social Sciences, its sister body the International Institute of Islamic Thought, and a number of related groups that I have called "the

Wahhabi lobby."

Both ISNA and CAIR, in particular, maintain open and close relations with the Saudi government - a unique situation, in that no other foreign government directly uses religion as a cover for its political activities in the U.S. For example, notwithstanding support by the American Jewish community for the state of Israel, the government of Israel does not intervene in synagogue life or the activities of rabbinical or related religious bodies in America.

According to saudiembassy.net, the official website of the Saudi government, CAIR received \$250,000 from the Islamic Development Bank, an official Saudi financial institution, in 1999, for the purchase of land in Washington, DC, to construct a headquarters facility.

ISNA operates at least 324 mosques in the U.S. through the North American Islamic Trust (NAIT).

In a particularly disturbing case, the Islamic Development bank also granted US\$295,000 to the Masjid Bilal Islamic Center, USA, for the construction of Bilal Islamic Primary and Secondary School in California. Hassan Akbar, the American Muslim presently charged with the fatal attack on his fellow-soldiers in Kuwait during the Iraq War, was affiliated with this institution.

In addition, the previously-mentioned official website of the Saudi government has reported donations in 1995 of \$4 million for the construction of a mosque complex in Los Angeles, named for Ibn Taymiyyah, a historic Islamic figure considered the forerunner of Wahhabism. It should be noted that Ibn Taymiyyah is considered a marginal, extremist, ideological personality by many traditional Muslims. The same website reported a donation of \$6 million, also in 1995, for a mosque in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The website stated in 2000, "In the United States, the Kingdom has contributed to the establishment of the Islamic Center in Washington DC; the Omer Bin Al-Khattab Mosque in western Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Islamic Center, and the Fresno Mosque in California; the Islamic Center in Denver, Colorado; the Islamic center in Harrison, New York City; and the Islamic Center in Northern Virginia." (Direct quote)

How much money, in total, is involved in this effort?

If we accept the low figure of control, i.e. NAIT ownership of 27 percent of 1,200 mosques, as stated by CAIR and cited by Mary Jacoby and Graham Brink in the St. Petersburg Times, 3/11/2003, we have some 324 mosques.

If we assume a relatively low average of expenses, e.g. \$.5m per mosque, we arrive at \$162m.

But given that Saudi official sources show \$6m in Cincinnati and \$4m in Los Angeles, we should probably raise the average to \$1m per mosque, resulting in \$324m as a minimum.

A radical critic of Wahhabism stated some years ago that \$25m had been spent on Islamic Centers in the U.S. by the Saudi authorities. This now seems a low figure.

Our view is that the number of mosques under Wahhabi control, number at least 600 out of 1,200. Shia community leaders endorse the figure of 80 percent Wahhabi control. CAIR itself claims that approximately 70 percent of Muslims want "Salafism" in their mosques. [We reject this claim.] But we also offer a number of 4-6,000 mosques overall, including small and diverse congregations of many kinds.

It should also be noted that these mosques work in close coordination with the Muslim World League (MWL) and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), Saudi state entities identified as participants in the funding of al-Qaida. Wahhabi ideological control within Saudi Arabia is based on the historic compact of intermarriage between the family of the sect's originator, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and the family of the founding ruler, Ibn Sa'ud. To this day, these families divide governance of the kingdom, with the descendants of Ibn al-Wahhab, known as ahl al-Shaykh, responsible for religious life and the Saudi royal family, or ahl al-Sa'ud, running the state. The two families continue to marry their descendants to one another. The supreme religious leader of Saudi Arabia is a member of the family of Ibn al-Wahhab. The state appoints a minister of religious affairs who controls such bodies as the MWL and WAMY, and upon leaving his ministerial post becomes head of MWL.

The official Saudi embassy website reported exactly one year ago, on June 26, 2002, "The delegation of the Muslim World League (MWL) that is on a world tour promoting goodwill arrived in New York yesterday, and visited the Islamic Center there." The same website later reported, on July 8, 2002 "During a visit on Friday evening to the headquarters of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) [the Secretary General of the MWL] advocated coordination among Muslim organizations in the United States. Expressing MWL's readiness to offer assistance in the promotion and coordination of Islamic works, he announced plans to set up a commission for this purpose. The MWL delegation also visited the Islamic Center in Washington DC and was briefed on its activities by its director Dr. Abdullah bin Mohammad Fowaj."

In a related matter, on June 22, 2003, in a letter to the New York Post, James Zogby, president of the Arab American Institute, a civic lobbying organization, stated that his attendance at a press conference of WAMY in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, had been organized by the U.S. Embassy in the kingdom As documented by FDD and the Saudi Institute, WAMY teaches that Shia Muslims, including the followers of Khomeini, are Jewish agents. This is comparable to Nazi claims that Jewish employers were agents of the Communists or Milosevic's charge that Tito was an agent of the Vatican. The aim is to derange people, to separate them from reality completely, in preparation for massacres.

There is clearly a problem of Wahhabi/Saudi extremist influence in American Islam. Now is the time to face this problem squarely and find ways to enable and support traditional, mainstream American Muslims in taking their community back from these extremists, while employing law enforcement to interdict the growth of Wahhabism and its financial support by the Saudis. If we fail to do this, Wahhabi extremism continues to endanger the world - Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Thank you for your attention.