

# In Bed with the Reactionary Saudis

The U.S.-Saudi alliance is no longer just an anachronism. It has become a dangerous anachronism with the Saudis implicating the United States in their brutal sectarian conflicts, such as the wars in Yemen and Syria, and in their reactionary human rights policies, as ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar explains.

By Paul R. Pillar

Saudi King Salman visits Washington amid disagreement between the United States and Saudi Arabia on a broad range of issues. Moreover, the disagreements are rooted in fundamental characteristics of the anachronistic Saudi regime.

Many regimes around the world, and the political and social systems of which they are a part, are markedly different from what is found in the United States, but the Saudi polity is one of the most different. The anachronism that is Saudi Arabia represents a major problem for U.S. foreign policy, both because of the impact Saudi-related matters have on the Middle East and beyond and because of the close association between Saudi Arabia and the United States that has come to be taken for granted.

Little of this has anything to do with the just-completed agreement to restrict Iran's nuclear program, despite the attention that subject has been receiving. Riyadh is more likely to accept the agreement as a done deal, and already has publicly indicated its formal acceptance, than the accord's opponents in the United States and Israel.

The Saudis will continue to look for ways to discourage others, including the United States, from developing warm relations with their rival across the Persian Gulf, but this will not preclude the Saudis themselves, along with the other Gulf Arabs, from undertaking their own rapprochement with Tehran, just as they have done in the past.

In hot spot after hot spot in the Middle East, U.S. and Saudi objectives and priorities diverge, even if in some loose sense they are considered to be on the same side. In war-torn Syria, the United States and Saudi Arabia have never agreed on whether the ouster of the Assad regime or the containment of ISIS should be the main objective.

Saudi priorities are based on a variety of considerations that are specific to it and not to the United States, including hatred of the Assads for whatever role they may have played in the assassination of Lebanese prime minister Rafic Hariri, a special friend of the Saudis. Reflecting the different priorities and objectives is disagreement over selection and vetting of Syrian rebels to be

deemed worthy of support.

In Iraq, Saudi priorities are influenced by some of the same sectarian motives that shape Saudi policy toward Syria. And again, such motives are quite different from U.S. interests. Desired overthrow of the regime is not the factor that it is in Syria, but distrust of the Shiite-dominated government in Baghdad is a major part of the Saudi approach toward Iraq.

In Yemen, the United States has allowed itself to become associated with a destructive and misguided Saudi military expedition, and thus also with the humanitarian tragedy that the operation has entailed. The main Saudi objective is to show who's boss on the Arabian Peninsula, another objective not shared with the United States. Saudi Arabia's operation has shown itself, more so than Iran, to be a destabilizing force intent on throwing its weight around in the neighborhood.

In his most recent column Tom Friedman identifies what may be the most worrisome thing about Saudi Arabia for U.S. interests: "the billions and billions of dollars the Saudis have invested since the 1970s into wiping out the pluralism of Islam, the Sufi, moderate Sunni and Shiite versions, and imposing in its place the puritanical, anti-modern, anti-women, anti-Western, anti-pluralistic Wahhabi Salafist brand of Islam promoted by the Saudi religious establishment."

Friedman notes that Islamist extremist groups that the United States has come to consider preeminent security concerns, including Al Qaeda and now ISIS, "are the ideological offspring of the Wahhabism injected by Saudi Arabia into mosques and madrasas from Morocco to Pakistan to Indonesia."

The specific terrorist consequences of what the Saudis have done is justifiably an immediate concern for U.S. policy-makers. But the underlying bargain that Ibn Saud, the founder of the current Saudi kingdom, reached years ago with the Wahhabis also underlies much else that makes Saudi Arabia what it is today, and makes it the problem that it is. The kingdom's troublesome characteristics are inextricably linked to how Ibn Saud's offspring are trying to claim legitimacy and thus to cling to power.

Consider some of the chief characteristics of the kingdom. Saudi Arabia is a family-run enterprise in which the distribution and exercise of political power are every bit as medieval as they ever were in any country ruled by the Plantagenets. There is no religious freedom. Human rights in many other respects are sorely lacking. Women are still subordinated. It was considered a big deal when they recently were told they could vote and run as candidates, in elections to local councils with scant power and in which the king will still appoint half the members, but women still cannot function as independent persons in many

aspects of daily life. They still are not allowed to drive.

It ought to be astounding that a place this far removed from the liberal democratic values with which the United States likes to be associated, even without considering the aforementioned divergence of objectives elsewhere in the region, still is considered a close partner of the United States. The usual, and to a large degree valid, explanation is that, as Friedman puts it, “we’re addicted to their oil and addicts never tell the truth to their pushers.”

But there is another American attitude involved, which persists even in the shale-fracking era. Once a nation is considered a partner or ally in a region that is perceptually divided into allies and adversaries, the perceived line-up tends to stay fixed until and unless there is a political alteration sufficiently great to be labeled regime change.

And regime change would be the most troubling chapter of all in the Saudi story. Some Saudi leaders, including the late King Abdullah, seem to have recognized the need to move in the direction of modernization and liberalization, even if only at the glacial pace that is possible in a Wahhabi-committed family enterprise.

It is an open question whether the regime will be able to keep this kind of change ahead of demands for change of a more drastic and radical sort. If it fails to do so, and the revolution comes, then the association of the United States with the *ancien régime* will be an even greater problem for U.S. policy-makers than what they face now.

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## Muslim Memories of West’s Imperialism

**Special Report:** American politicians know little about history, so they lash out at people from formerly colonized Third World nations without understanding the scars that the West’s repression and brutality have left on these societies, especially in the Muslim world, as historian William R. Polk explains.

By William R. Polk

One result of the great transformation we call the Industrial Revolution in the

northern hemisphere was the increasing scale of the European commercial, political and military domination of societies and states scattered from Morocco to Indonesia and from Central Asia deep into Africa. For convenience, because of their location, their relative weakness and their Islamic orientation, I called these Afro-Asian societies “the South.”

Because of the scale of the issues and peoples I am considering, I cannot hope to deal with all aspects of my subject, or indeed with any part of it in satisfactory detail, but I will endeavor to provide enough to give the reader a basis to get an overview of the growth of thought in “the South.” [For the first part of this three-part series addressing the ancient roots of Muslim grievances see Consortiumnews.com’s [“Why Many Muslims Hate the West.”](#)]

So, here I begin where Muslim thinkers and political activists began with their perception of the disparity in power, wealth and knowledge between the North and South. At various times from the late Eighteenth Century, throughout much of Asia and Africa, some individuals set forth their analyses of the challenges they perceived and what they thought they needed to do to meet them. At first, the most important of these movements were religious.

Then, in the early years of the Twentieth Century, nationalism replaced religion as the dominant theme of political thought. At first nationalism was regionally or linguistically divided; then increasingly commentators broadened the scale of their thought ethnically and linguistically. Europeans led the way. First Turks, then Arabs and later other peoples followed.

Nationalism reached its high point in mid-century when it incorporated social, educational and economic programs. Toward the end of the century, when socially active nationalism failed to produce the reality of power or the sense of dignity that were its goals, disillusionment set in.

There were many reasons for failure insincerity, rivalry or corruption of leaders, imbalance of military and civic components of society, the magnitude of the tasks to be performed with insufficient means and, above all, foreign military threat and intervention but a growing number of politically active people concluded that, regardless of the causes of failure, failure itself was starkly evident.

Next, I will bring this account to the present. With nationalism and socialism no longer judged to provide a “roadmap” in the early years of the Twenty-first Century, opinion makers particularly in the Arab lands returned to – but dramatically altered and implemented – the dominant theme of the Nineteenth Century politics, the quest for power and dignity through religion, leading to the United States, Russia, China and the several Middle Eastern governments

engaging in counterinsurgency programs.

Overall, I aim to show how the reactions of “the South” incorporated common themes despite the enormous social, cultural and geographical diversity of the peoples. Only if we take into account the scale of the events can we hope to understand them and move toward “affordable world security.”

## **Islamic Revival**

*Salafiyah* is the Arabic name given to Islamic revivalist movements. The word masks a complex concept. Even native Arabic speakers usually translate it as “reactionary.” But the word *salafi* in classical Arabic means a person who stands both in the rearguard and in the vanguard – Arabic delights in such contrasts. Muslim thinkers meant by it the process of going back to the beginnings in order to find a firm or “pure” base upon which to build a theologically correct system of thought and action for the present and the future.

At first sight the concept appears to outside observers as wholly exotic or even incomprehensible. But there have been historical and are contemporary movements in Christian societies that are comparable. Thus, a first step in understanding *Salafiyah* is to observe what Muslim movements and thinkers had in common with Christian movements and thinkers.

The counterpart to Islamic *Salafiyah* in Christianity is the Protestant movement we associate with Martin Luther and John Calvin. Their thought was adopted, modified and spread by the English and Welsh Puritans during their exile in Holland and their mission in Massachusetts where they founded a fundamentalist theocratic state.

The quest for “purity” or “fundamentalism” is today represented by dozens of Protestant sects, whose members include the 40 or so million Americans who call themselves “Born Again” Christians.

Clearly, the word *Salafiyah* makes the Muslim movement sound more exotic than it really is. If we go to the essentials it should be comprehensible to us. So what is it really all about? What was it trying to deal with? What were its main ideas? Why were people attracted to it? Answers to these questions must be sought because they matter today. To move toward answers, I begin with a short look at history.

In the Quran and in the sayings of Islam’s Prophet Muhammad, Islam was described as the religion common to Jews, Christians and Arabs. As the Quran put it, it is “the Religion of Abraham,” but unlike Judaism and Christianity, Islam was delivered in the Arabic language so that the Arabs could understand it. (Quran 39/27-28).

Muslims believe that Islam was religion as God meant it to be. That is, they believe, that the Quran *corrected* innovations and perversions Jews and Christians made to the original message. For example, the Quran denies that Jesus could have been the "son" or God or a god himself although he was accorded a special relationship to God and was himself regarded as a prophet senior to Muhammad.

The original message was the religion Muhammad proclaimed in Madinah. The Islam spelled out in the Quran and acted out in Madinah is a worldly religion, focused on what the individual should do in this life. It provides a detailed system of law, social organization and deportment. It has few ambiguities, is authoritative but many of its followers have found it to be austere. It is not filled with solace for misery and presumes security, dominance and social homogeneity.

Then, as Islam spread afield from the area around Madinah in the Seventh Century, Muslims encountered peoples of vastly different cultures. Within a few centuries, millions of the inhabitants of large areas of Europe, Asia and Africa had come to think of themselves as Muslims. But, while having adopted the core features of Islam, most of the converts retained elements of their previous faiths and ways of life.

In this way, Islam also resembled Christianity. For example, in Mexico, Catholicism incorporated the ancient gods, renaming them saints, and converted their temples into churches. Islam similarly found ways to incorporate many of the ideas and practices of the converts.

### **Islamic Customs**

The formal, textual and original elements of Islam often sat lightly on the shoulders of the converts: Bedouin tribesmen continued to deal with one another, as they had done in pre-Islamic times (the time of "ignorance," *jahaliyah*), in accord with their custom. Afghan Pushtuns similarly followed their own pre-Islamic code, the *Pushtunwali*, and their legal system, the *Ravaj*, so that, for example, their women did not inherit property even from their husbands as they should according to the *Shariah*, and vengeance (Pashtu: *badal*) was mandatory even against fellow Muslims although it is specifically forbidden in the Quran (4/92-93).

Mongol converts to Islam continued to be guided by the *Yassa*. In India and Sumatra, Hindu practices were brought into Islam by converts, with Muslims even making pilgrimages to Hindu shrines (*durgahs*), while in Africa animistic customs similarly continued to be practiced in the name of Islam.

Other customs were introduced as a result of changing circumstances. A prime example is the veiling of women. Veiling of women was probably not practiced in the time of Muhammad and is nowhere specifically ordered in the Quran. The closest the Quran comes to mentioning the veiling of faces is in verse 24/31 which orders "believing women" to cover their breasts and not to flaunt or reveal their [physical or bodily] "ornaments" (*zinat*) except to their husbands or other specified close relatives or impotent men and slaves.

It is not practiced in a number of Muslim societies, including the Kazaks, Tajiks and Kirghiz of Central Asia, the Malays and Javanese of Southeast Asia and the Kurds and Iranians of the Middle East and the Berbers of North Africa. It was common, however, in Christian Byzantium at the time of the Arab invasion, and was adopted presumably from them by free-born, upper-class Arab women. It is not altogether clear why and for whom veiling was mandatory. My hunch is that it was seen to be practiced in more advanced societies (Byzantium and Safavid Iran) by the aristocracy and also was a means to differentiate high-borne (Arab) women from native slaves.

Thus, both geographically and temporally, Islam was modified. An austere religion, it was everywhere "invaded" by manifestations of popular desire for emotional contact with the Divinity. The cult of saints spread and to visit them and urge their blessings Muslims made pilgrimages that rivaled the obligatory Hajj. Particularly in times of distress, as in the wake of the devastating Thirteenth-Century Mongol invasions, mysticism offered an escape from misery and fear.

When the traditions of Islamic law grew weak in the Middle Ages, moves were commonly made to reestablish contact with the cultural and legal core of the community. Thus, for example, the great Fourteenth-Century Muslim Arab traveler Ibn Batuta was everywhere welcomed as a recognized scholar and practicing judge of the Sharia.

Aware of contradictions of text and practice, a few Muslim theologians, like the Christian Puritans, sought to return to the earliest manifestations of their faith to find theologically solid bases (*usul*) upon which they could rebuild. Both the Muslim Fundamentalists and the Puritans regarded deviations from textual ordinances as sins.

The first major Muslim thinker to preach fundamentalism was Muhammad bin Hanbal (Ibn Hanbal) who was born in Baghdad 780 AD. His life work was the gathering of *hadiths*, the tales passed down generation after generation from contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad.

What he was seeking, and what his followers sought, was a means of evaluating

and purging the contemporary manifestation of Islam by recourse to what the Prophet had actually done or said during his lifetime. That was, of course, a dangerous challenge to the ruling establishment. Rulers, warlords and judges had formed their own system of belief and had built into it their own privileges and status.

So they reacted to Ibn Hanbal's challenge by subjecting him to the Islamic version of the Inquisition (*Mihna*) which condemned him, throwing him into prison and torturing him. Unbowed, he died in Baghdad in 855 after having gathered about 28,000 *hadiths* which next only to the Quran form the "fundamentals" of the Islamic religion.

### **Rise of the Wahhabis**

The man who took what Ibn Hanbal gathered and formed it into the interpretation of Islam adopted in our times by the austere sect of the Saudi Wahhabis, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Caliphate was Taqi al-Din ibn Taimiya. Ibn Taimiya was born in 1263, almost 500 years after Ibn Hanbal, at Harran (on what is today the Syrian-Turkish frontier). As a small child he fled from the terrible Mongol invasions to Damascus where he studied and later taught the rite or legal school (*madhhab*) of Ibn Hanbal.

Like Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Taimiya argued that returning to Islam (as the Prophet and his immediate circle had practiced it) was crucial, but it was the clear and present danger posed by the foreign invader that captured much of his thought and action. In this he set a theme that has echoed down to our time.

In his time, it was the Mongols who were destroying Islamic societies and killing Muslims. Resisting them was a vital interest for his community. He was rewarded when they received one of their rare defeats at a battle near Damascus. With their threat removed, he turned his efforts against the off-shoots of Islam – Ismailis, Nusairis and others, whom he regarded as heretics and so, "domestic invaders."

Throughout his life Ibn Taimiya was a dedicated "striver for the faith," a *jihadi*, but his zeal led him, as it had Ibn Hanbal and would lead many of his followers, into conflict with the Establishment in his own community. He was several times imprisoned, rehabilitated and again imprisoned.

During one period of imprisonment, he wrote a commentary on the Quran, thereby setting a style that would be copied by later prisoners of conscience. One of his Twentieth-Century followers, the Egyptian cleric Sayyid Qutub also wrote a commentary on the Quran while in prison.

In the Thirteenth Century, Ibn Taimiya, like his long-dead mentor Ibn Hanbal,



spent his life inveighing against such innovations as the cult of saints and the then highly popular Sufi mystical movement. To try to silence him, the rulers clapped him into prison and, when that did not keep him from reaching out to the public, they took away his paper and ink.

Unable to communicate, he soon died. But the rulers were too late. So popular was he in Damascus that reportedly virtually the entire city, some 200,000 men and 15,000 women, attended his interment which was held, ironically, in the Sufi cemetery.

While Ibn Hanbal had seen the danger to Islam to be its own worldly success, Ibn Taimiya saw the deadly threat to be both internal laxness and foreign invasion. Their messages were heard but made relatively little impact for the next 500 years: rulers governed, scholars wrote learned commentaries and the public went about its business.

Then what has been called the "impact of the West" began and their messages took on a new urgency. As Ibn Hanbal had told them, they found their societies to be weak and their faith corrupt, and as Ibn Taimiya demonstrated in his fight against the Mongols, foreign invasion must be stopped before the community itself was destroyed.

What to do? What was needed, a few Muslim thinkers began to assert, was both to purge corrupt practice and to make the original, "pure," texts available beyond the closed, sophistic, ossified circles of the religious scholars. Only if their societies were internally strong, the reformers argued, could Muslims cope with the foreigner.

The first prominent figure in the long parade to follow to propose this answer was the Indian theologian Imam Quá¹b al-DÄ«n Aá,¥mad WalÄ« AllÄ«h, who was regarded by Muslim contemporaries as their greatest scholar and who is commonly known as Shah Valiallah ("the Devotee of God") and he lived mainly in Delhi from 1703 to 1762. (The Arabic word *imam* means "one who stands in front" and is applied to the person who leads the prayer.)

Qutb al-Din's scholarship impressed millions of Muslims, but perhaps more important were his efforts to popularize the basic religious text, the Quran. He translated the Quran into the then lingua franca of South Asia, *Farsi* (Persian), so that it could be read, discussed and understood by the whole society. Today, he is often thought of as the spiritual father of Pakistan.

### **Foreign Intervention**

Following the time of Qutb al-Din, increasing numbers of foreigners arrived and foreign activities penetrated Islamic societies more deeply.

Consider these events:

–In Eighteenth Century India, Englishmen paid a sort of homage to local customs. They dressed in Bengal style, smoked hookahs and even kept harems (*zenanas*). Then, province by province, they took over and finally in 1857, after the revolt of the Muslim Sepoy army, they destroyed the Mughal Empire and came to despise and segregate the Indians.

–In the Crimea the Russians invaded, impoverished or drove away much of the previously thriving population. In the Crimea, Russians also fought the destructive war that Tolstoy recounts in two of his novels.

–In Java, the Dutch clamped a colonial regime on the natives and, when they tried to reassert their independence, killed about 300,000 “rebels” between 1835 and 1840; they also fought Sumatra “rebels” between 1873 and 1914.

–In Algeria, after the bitter 15-year-long war that began in 1830, the French stole the lands and imposed an apartheid regime on the survivors.

–In Egypt, less violently but pervasively, the English looted the country. As David Landes wrote in *Bankers and Pashas* (p.316), the Egyptian treasury was plundered “of untold amounts for indemnities, fraudulent and semi-fraudulent claims, exorbitant prices to purveyors and contractors, and all manner of bribes, designed to buy cheap honours or simply respite from harassment.” Of all this, the ruler of Egypt had little understanding and could, in any case, do little because of the pressure of the European powers.

Everywhere, by the middle of the Nineteenth Century, all foreigners enjoyed more privileges than do modern diplomats: foreigners charged with crimes could appeal their cases to courts in Europe and even if their crimes were against natives, the local government had no jurisdiction over them.

The speed of the transformation astonished the natives. It is illustrated by two events in the Levant: Whereas in 1830, a British consul had not been allowed to enter the city of Damascus, ten years later in 1840, another British consul actually chose the governor of Lebanon.

As the evidence of their weakness, sometimes demonstrated on the battlefield but also in the market place, came to seem more shameful, the Muslim search for guidance in the Quranic phrase the *sirat al-mustaqim* (the road of those who would be virtuous) became urgent. When they didn't find this guidance, a guide came looking for them.

## **An Influential Thinker**

By far the most influential Muslim thinker of the Nineteenth Century was a much more worldly figure than even the Indian Muslim Qutub al-Din and inevitably more controversial. Controversy, indeed, began with the attachment (*laqab*) to his name that usually designates where a person comes from. (In this style, I would be called William Polk Texan.)

Jamal al-Din's *laqab* was "al-Afghani" although he was probably born in Iran. Why did he switch his birthplace? The usual explanation, which I believe to be correct, is that he wanted to be thought of as a Sunni or Orthodox Muslim (as the ruling ethnic group of Afghanistan was) rather than a Shii or minority-group Muslim (as most Iranians were). That is, he wanted to put himself into the mainstream of Islam.

Putting himself in the mainstream of contemporary affairs, Afghani certainly did in a career that took him over much of the Muslim world from Afghanistan to Egypt and from Istanbul to India. (Professor Nikki R. Keddie has written a number of works that touch on Afghani's career. One of the best deals with the controversy Afghani was partly responsible for provoking, *Religion and Rebellion in Iran* (London: Frank Cass, 1966). Keddie uses the published catalogue of Afghani's papers to correct the version he and his Arab followers put out on his life. As she sums up his career, "Through most of his life, he was consistent in working for the independence of Muslim states from foreign rule, but his emphasis was almost always particularly anti-British, perhaps because of early experiences in India." His tactics were based on his appearing to be an Orthodox religious figure as shown in his book *Refutation of the Materialism*.)

In contrast to what appear to have been frustrating and unsuccessful encounters with the sultans, shahs and pashas, Afghani exercised a profound influence on Muslim intellectuals and theologians in Afghanistan, Iran, India, Turkistan, Ottoman Turkey and Egypt. His message to them was in essence simple: Muslims must get back to the origins of their religion if they hoped to free their lands from imperialism. And they must do it themselves since no foreigner would help them.

During his years teaching in Egypt, Afghani made common cause with the Egyptian cleric Muhammad Abduh. (Still the best book on Abduh is Charles C. Adams, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A study of the Modern Reform Movement inaugurated by Muhammad 'Abduh* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

Although, in later years, Abduh would become eminently "respectable" as the rector of Azhar University which was the heart of Islamic scholarship, and the chief judge (*Mufti Am*) of the Egyptian Islamic court system, he and Afghani then just tolerated outsiders. They oscillated between audiences at court and exile.

Then, just before the 1879-1882 nationalist uprising led by the Egyptian officer Ahmad Arabi against British rule, Afghani was sent out of Egypt and Abduh was sent into internal exile in his village. When the British suppressed the uprising, Afghani and Abduh moved to Paris where they founded the short-lived but immensely influential journal, *Al-Urwa Al-Wuthqa*. Its message was that *both* European domination and Oriental despotism must be ended and that the way to do it was to reinvigorate Islam and establish it as the ruling doctrine.

The magazine's name is difficult to translate. It means something like a stirrup (which upholds one) that cannot be broken. It was one of three dissident and more or less clandestine journals of the time. Also in Paris, Aleksandr Herzen founded *Kolokol* (The Bell) that similarly influenced a generation of Russians.

At roughly the same time as Afghani and Abduh were holding forth, a sequence of Tatar or Turkish intellectuals in and around Bukhara began a similar mission. The most significant of these men was Ismail Bey Gaspirali who, like Jamal al-Din and Muhammad Abduh, founded a journal, *Tarjuman* (Turco-Arabic: "translator"), which was read throughout the Ottoman Empire, Russia and India. It provided a running critique of what many Turkic peoples had come to see as the source of their weakness, an ossified Muslim clergy which was unable to halt, and actually abetted, the advance of Russian imperialists.

(The Bukhara movement began with Abu Nasr Kursavi (1783-1813) who was followed by Ahmad Makhdum Danish (1827-1897), and he by Ismail Bey Gaspirali (1851-1914). While they disagreed among themselves on the degree to which they could use Western skills and power to the advantage of their peoples, they all sought to "purify" their religion in order to protect their heritage. See HÃ©lÃ¨ne CarrÃ©re d'Encausse, *Islam and the Russian Empire: Reform and Revolution in Central Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).)

It wasn't only the Russian Tsars who were imperialists in Central Asia. At roughly the same time as Catherine the Great was pushing into Western Muslim lands, the Qing (Manchu) emperors of China were moving into the sheikhdoms and principalities of Turkistan. There they virtually wiped out the Buddhist Dzungar people and installed Muslim Turks (Uighurs) as puppet rulers.

In 1864, the Uighurs revolted and set up an independent Turkish kingdom. When their state was recognized by Britain, the Ottoman Empire and Russia, the infuriated Chinese overthrew the kingdom and put the population into what amounted to a "reservation" (*Hui Jiang*). Under oppressive Chinese rule, the Uighurs were not able to produce either significant Islamic scholars or national leaders and still today are trying to assert their national existence both by resisting the Chinese and by participating in the armed struggles of other Muslims. We will see them again in the Islamic Caliphate.

Overall, these Turks, Arabs, Persians and Indians restricted themselves to sermons, slogans and scholasticism, but others began to try to implement similar thoughts in direct action. I now turn to them.

### **A Militant Revival**

The first of the militant revival groups did not aim at the Europeans because, except for a few intrepid travelers, there were no Europeans in Arabia. Called into action by the theologian Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1787), the *Wahaibyah* or as they called themselves "Unitarians" (*Muwahhidun*), were, and are today, Sunni Muslim followers of the teachings of Ibn Hanbal as interpreted by Ibn Taimiyah.

They think of themselves as essentially a continuation of the mission of the Prophet Muhammad. They like to point out, that, just as he found a haven in Madinah when he was driven out of Mecca, so Abd al-Wahhab was given refuge in the town of Dariyah. It was in Dariyah (now a suburb of Riyadh) that Abd al-Wahhab acquired the ally who assured his worldly power.

The marriage of Ibn Saud's son to a daughter of Abd al-Wahhab was the beginning of a partnership that has lasted to this day. Muhammad ibn Saud, himself a townsman, was recognized by the nearby Arab tribes as a natural leader and Abd al-Wahhab addressed their religious needs.

Like the tribesmen whom the Prophet had organized in the Seventh Century for the wars of the Conquest, they were wild and warlike. Managing them required a clear and acceptable code, astute diplomacy and the deflection of their hostilities abroad. The result, as the great Arab historian Ibn Khaldun wrote of Islam, was to "turn their faces in the same direction."

The direction where the faces of the recently united tribesmen turned in 1802 was the Shia city of Karbala, which in Bedouin style they sacked and in Hanbali style, since the inhabitants were heretics, they massacred.

Heretics were not their only targets. In the next few years, the Wahhabi-led tribesmen conquered Jiddah, Mecca and Madinah. In each place, they destroyed the tombs of saints. Everything that was not specifically authorized by the Quran was considered an illegal innovation (*Bida*). Religious fervor (*jihad*) was combined with the Bedouin tradition of raiding (*ghaza*). It was a fearsome combination and, as it did in the days of the Prophet Muhammad, it swept all before it. By 1811, the Wahhabi-Saudi-tribal empire extended from Aleppo to the Indian Ocean.

Possibly the nonchalant Ottoman government would not have reacted to this attack on its Arab provinces, but the Wahhabi conquest of Mecca could not be tolerated

because the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph was also the guardian of Islam's Holy places. So in 1812, he authorized his nominal vassal, the already powerful Albanian ruler of Egypt, Mehmet Ali Pasha, to dislodge the Wahhabis. That action began a long series of wars through which the Wahhabi-Saudi-tribal combination survived to the present.

A generation later, in 1837, another Islamic revival movement was founded by a Berber who had been born in what is now Algeria about 1790. Muhammad bin Ali al-Sanusi was a scholar who spent much of his early life studying in the libraries of Fez, Cairo and Mecca.

Strongly influenced by Islamic mysticism, Sufism, he tried to push aside worldly concerns to devote himself to prayer. But, in the North Africa of his time, he could not. The French invasion of Algeria in 1830 blocked his return from pilgrimage to his homeland and forced him to create a different sort of "homeland" in Libya. What he created was the *Sanusiyah*.

Realizing that a revivalist movement, as he planned for the *Sanusiyah* to become, could not exist without popular support, Muhammad bin Ali also realized that a people ignorant of Islam could never be relied upon to protect it.

His solution was similar to what the Prophet had done: it was to graft onto the tribesmen who merely "submitted to Islam" (the *Muslimun*) a brotherhood of true believers (*Muminun*) who would be their religious guides (*imams*). He set about creating this brotherhood in the university he founded in a Libyan oasis.

### **Founding Lodges**

As the brotherhood grew, its missionaries founded scores of "lodges" (*zawiyahs*) throughout the deserts and steppes of North Africa through Egypt and all the way into the Arabian Hijaz. They covered an area larger than Europe. A typical *zawiyah* was a more or less permanent encampment composed of a mosque or prayer room, a dormitory, a guest room and a school.

Virtually all of the people reached by the Sanusi "brothers" in this vast area were nomadic tribesmen on whom the requirements of Islam rested lightly. [The best account of the relationship of the *Sanusiyah* and the Bedouin is E.E Evans-Pritchard's *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949). He had been the Political Officer in Cyrenaica of the British army for two years during the Second World War and when we became friends he was Professor of Anthropology at Oxford and a Fellow of All Souls College. His student and follower, Emrys Peters, also a close friend, carried on his studies and became Professor of Anthropology at Manchester University.]

What made the unlikely combination of religious scholars and nomads work was

that the Bedouin got two things they wanted an overarching but not oppressive unity (or at least occasional intertribal truce) and the codification of religion in easy to understand terms that did not violate such popular religion as they already practiced.

Muhammad bin Ali, unlike the more theoretical reformers, chose not to challenge the innovations (*bida*) that had become their way of life but sought only to refine them. Probably, that would be nearly all one would have to say of the *Sanusiya* had it been left alone in the vast Sahara. But that was not to be.

After the conquest of Algeria which the French completed about 1860, they moved deeper into Africa. Theirs was an unrewarding advance there were no rich prizes like Algeria in the vast interior but their advance was inexorable. Finally, at the village of Fashoda on the White Nile, they bumped into the British who also were moving south and west into the African interior from Egypt.

The two Powers divided Africa between them in the 1898-99 Anglo-French Partition Agreement, which legitimated, at least in European law, the French advance into "their" area. There, the French ran into the *Sanusiya*, and in 1902 they destroyed the first of the Order's lodges. As the French advanced, they destroyed each lodge that they encountered. Much worse was to come.

While the French were advancing from the south, a newly "awakened" Italy had discovered nationalism and began to think of itself as Rome Reborn. Contemporary Italians knew that their ancient ancestors had farmed the coastal plain of Cyrenaica (now eastern Libya) and thought they could meet the needs of their growing population by colonizing it.

So, like the French in Algeria, they moved in to seize the land. Driven by nationalist fervor, the Italians also wanted to win status among the European Powers by acquiring an African empire. In 1911, they landed their first troops. The Sanusi leadership did not want to fight, but organized by the Sanusi creed, the Bedouin resisted. The Italian invasion began a war that lasted nearly 30 years.

Evans-Pritchard wrote, the Grand Sanusi was "anxious to avoid any action which might enable those powers [France and Italy] to accuse him of political designs. He wished only to be left alone to worship God according to the teachings of his Prophet, and when in the end he fought the French it was in defence of the religious life as he understood it. In its remarkable diffusion in North and Central Africa the Order never once resorted to force to back its missionary labours. He even refused the aid asked for by 'Arabi Pasha in Egypt in 1882 and by the Sudanese Mahdi in 1883 against the British. But when the French invaded its Saharan territories and destroyed its religious houses, and when later the

Italians, also without provocation, did the same in Cyrenaica, the Order had no choice but to resist.”p. 27-28.

### **An Italian-Driven Genocide**

As carried out by the Italians, the 30 years’ war soon became genocide. The Bedouin, calling themselves “protectors” (*muhafizat*) and called by the Italians “rebels” (*rebelli*), fought as guerrillas while the Italians used counterinsurgency tactics to try to create “furrows of blood” (*solci di sangria*) among the tribes, hoping to incite them to fight one another.

What the Italians called *politico-militari* tactics – which phrase Americans translated and tactics largely copied – did not work because as the Italian military commander wrote, “the entire population took part directly or indirectly in the rebellion.” [General Rodolfo Graziani, *Cirenaica Pacificata*, (Milano, 1932), p. 60/]

As counterinsurgency failed, the Italians turned to genocide. Within a few years, they killed nearly two-thirds of the population of Cyrenaica. Among the casualties were virtually all of the Sanusis. But, as the Englishman who knew them best, Evans-Pritchard, has written, “With the [Italian] destruction of the Sanusiya the war continued to be fought in the name of the religious order. It then became simply a war of Muslims to defend their faith against a Christian Power. Deep love of home and deep love of God nourished each other. Without due appreciation of the religious feeling involved in the resistance it would be, I think, be impossible to understand how it went on for so long against such overwhelming odds.” [Evans-Pritchard, *Op. cit.*, 166]

In place of the Sanusi family, who abandoned the Bedouin to their fate, a remarkable figure who combined the best of the Bedouin and Sanusi attributes came to the fore. Umar al-Mukhtar, known as “the Lion of the Desert,” became a hero to his people in his resistance to the Italians.

Al-Mukhtar carried on the tradition begun by Sharif Abd al-Qadir al-Jazairiri (“the Algerian”) in the Algerian struggle against the French and as Amir Abd al-Karim al-Khattabi would lead the Berbers of the Rif in their war against the French and Spanish. What they held in common was their religious faith and the determination to keep their societies free and independent.

Umar al-Mukhtar emerges out of obscurity for Western viewers in the 1981 film *Lion of the Desert* where he is portrayed by Anthony Quinn. Abd al-Karim’s war in the Rif was the subject of Vincent Sheean’s reportage that subsequently became his 1926 book, *An American among the Riffis*. I got to know Abd al-Karim in Cairo, at the end of his long exile in 1954 and wrote a short account of his



life in *Perspective of the Arab World: An Atlantic Monthly supplement*, 1955.

These were not the only struggles fought in the name of Islam against imperialism. For instance, when the Muslims of Java tried to win independence, the Dutch killed about 300,000 of them between 1825 and 1830 and they suppressed the people of Sumatra in a similarly brutal war from 1873 to 1914. But the one struggle that stands out, particularly in English memory, is the *Mahdiah* war in the Sudan.

### **Hunting for Slaves**

From the beginning of the Sixteenth Century, the northern Sudanese Funj sultanate converted to Islam and began to use the Arabic language. Then in 1820, Mehmet Ali Pasha, the ruler of Egypt, decided to monopolize the hunt for African slaves and invaded the country.

Having limited resources, Mehmet Ali's grandson and successor hired Europeans to administer the Sudan. One of them, General Charles Gordon, was a vociferous exponent of Christianity who looked upon the native Muslims as pagans and was determined to stamp out their customs. Sudanese anger built against him and the Egyptians.

Finally in 1881, another of those figures we have seen all over the Islamic world came to the fore. Muhammad Ahmed reached back into Muslim legend and proclaimed himself the *Mahdi*, a man sent by God to rectify injustice (*zhulm*) and return the people to the true path (*sunnah*). He organized his followers into armed zealots called the *Ansar*.

The choice of the name *Ansar* is an allusion to the men who made possible Muhammad the Prophet's flight from Mecca. So Muhammad al-Mahdi was putting himself in the position of the Prophet and his 30,000 to 40,000 followers in the center of the Muslim tradition. But, while he acted in the name of Islam he proclaimed himself to be virtually the equal of the Prophet Muhammad. Despising his claim and underestimating his power, the Egyptian government allowed itself to be defeated in small encounters by the Mahdi's followers. They, in turn, took their victories as proof of God's favor. So, by the time the British, who were effectively running Egypt, decided to suppress the *Mahdiah*, it had become a national movement.

Fortunately for the British, the Mahdi died of typhus, but the *Mahdiah* lingered on. Finally, in the spring and summer of 1898, the British attacked, destroyed the Sudanese army and absorbed Sudan into the growing British empire.

(I have dealt with the Sudan in more detail in my book *The Arab World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980). More detailed is Peter Holt, *the*

*Mahdist State in the Sudan 1881-1898* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958). The government the British imposed on Sudan was patterned on their administration in India which was made up primarily of graduates of Cambridge who had excelled in athletics (known as "the blues") so the contemporary joke was that the Sudanese government was "the rule of the Blacks by the Blues.")

Muslims in the Philippines were never able to organize a mass resistance to the Sixteenth Century Spanish invasion nor to the Nineteenth Century American invasion. Under the Spaniards, the population of most of the northern islands was converted to Catholicism while the Muslims retreated to the south.

To try to stop the American troops, the Muslims fought as guerrillas. Not having modern arms, they often fought with agricultural tools in suicide attacks that became a feature of modern guerrilla warfare. To stop the suicide attacks, the American government adopted the relatively heavy pistol, the .45 that became the standard officers' weapon for the next century.

While Britain and Russia were often on the brink of hostilities, and in the Crimean War actually fought one another, they shared a determination not to allow the peoples they conquered to move toward freedom. Their common opponent was the "Pan-Islamic" movement.

Fear of Pan-Islam played a role in shaping British and Russian policies toward much of Asia and French policy toward Africa. Like the French and the Russian empires, the British had conquered and ruled over millions of Muslims, and, like the French and Russians, they were sure that the Muslims were always on the point of revolting.

### **A Russian 'Domino Theory'**

British security officers, like army generals, were always preparing for the last war and their text was the 1857 "Mutiny." Their fears were echoed by the Russians who imagined a sort of "domino theory" in which its Central Asians would rise and one after another topple the imperial structure. And the French had reason to fear the same thing as a result of their brutal policies in Algeria and Morocco.

All was based on rumor and much was myth but apprehension was real. The mood may now be best judged not in sober (or not so sober) diplomatic dispatches but in the then wildly popular novel, a precursor of the James Bond series, John Buchan's *Greenmantle*, which cast sinister Turkish and German agents from whom the civilized world was saved only by intrepid British agents. Buchan gave us "007" long before Ian Fleming invented him.

But the danger of Pan-Islam was largely a figment of the imperial powers'

imagination. Muslims did not even conceive such a movement as Pan-Islam. A few like Afghani and Ismail Bey Gaspirali reached out beyond their immediate neighborhoods but most reformers were strictly local. And very few did more than write or talk.

Armed rebellions in the name of Islam were rare. Indeed, all over the Muslim world, reformers and militants were admitting at least to themselves that, regardless of aims, tactics and dedication, religion-based nationalism had failed to stop foreign intrusion.

So, in a ragged pattern, disillusioned Muslims from Central Asia to Sudan and from Java to Morocco began to search for new ways to defend their societies, cultures and religion. To a growing number and finally to most, the answer seemed to be found not in their own background but in the West.

To be "modern" and strong, they were coming to believe, required adoption of the mainly secular ideology of the West. To what Asians and Africans made of western style nationalism I now turn.

### **Western Modernism**

Arabic did not have a word for "nation." Had you asked a Nineteenth Century Egyptian what was his "nation," he would have given you the name of his village. The Bedouin would not even have understood the question.

In Persian, Turkish and Berber as in other African and Asian languages, no word fit the new need. The word that the Arabs first pressed into this service was *watan*, but *watan*, like the French word *pays*, meant village. It took not only a linguistic but also a mental leap to change village to nation.

Farsi (Persian) and Turkish use a word for nation that is derived from the medieval practice of assigning minority peoples of a common faith, often called a "confession," a separate status. In Farsi, it is *mellat* and in Turkish it is *millet*. Both are derived from the Arabic word *millah* which in classical Arabic meant rite or [non-Muslim] religion. The majority community members referred to themselves not as a *millah* but as Muslims.

Thus, ironically, the word for a separate, non-Muslim minority community was adopted as the word for the whole population. In Central Asia, the Uighurs and other Turkic peoples used either a religious (Muslim) or a linguistic (Turki) designation. Malays use the Malay word, *Bangsa*, while the Indonesians used a borrowing from Dutch, *nasion*.

In the North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, it was the Ottoman Empire that started the transformation. The Ottoman Empire had few trained men, little

industry, a weak army and almost no financial resources, but it was able to govern a vast, heterogeneous empire a feat beyond the capacities of its richer successors.

Its strategy was to tolerate other loyalties. Religious or ethnic communities (*millet*s) governed themselves, apportioned and collected the taxes that were due the Empire and judged themselves according to their own customs. Each was, in effect, a miniature nation-state.

The aims of the imperial government were limited to collecting sufficient taxes in an economical way and to protecting its frontiers. It even tolerated successful rebellion. Its administration was loose: its provinces had none of the restrictions of nation-states, as European Powers recast them into Syria, Iraq or Palestine at the end of the First World War. The "Syrian," "Iraqi" or "Palestinian" moved as easily between Baghdad, Damascus, Mecca, Jerusalem, Istanbul or Cairo as the American would from Dallas to Los Angeles.

*Watan*-defined or separate state nationalism (*wataniyah*) was dedicated to breaking up this polyglot, multinational, religiously tolerant empire. It did this first in the Ottoman Balkans in the Nineteenth Century: Greeks broke loose from 1821; Serbians, 1868; Montenegrins, 1878; Romanians, 1878; and Bulgarians, 1879.

It was the challenge of these movements and of the Armenians, who fought a guerrilla war and engaged in urban terrorism to try to create their own nation-state, that stimulated the Ottoman Turks to develop what came to be called Turkism (*Turkçuluk*).

Turks, who had not thought of themselves as a national group (*millet*) like the various minorities in their empire, could not distinguish themselves from Arabs or Kurds by identifying themselves as Muslims. They shared that designation. Their only unique feature was language.

### **Language as Bond**

As Turkism's ideologue, Mehmet Zia Gökalp wrote, language is a bond "superior to race, populism, geography, politics and desire. While still in the cradle, with the lullabies he hears, [the child] is under the influence of the mother tongue. All our religious, ethical, artistic feelings, which give existence to our soul, are taken by means of this language. Our way living is totally an echo of this."

[Zia Gökalp (1876-1924) was a leading Turkish intellectual who is best known for his book (written in the old Ottoman Turkish) *Turkçuluk Asasleri* (The bases of Turkism) which was published in 1920. Himself influenced by European

sociologists, particularly by Émile Durkheim, he provided the rationale and stimulus for Kemal Atatürk's brand of secular, language-based, single state nationalism in place of pan-Islamism, pan-Turanism and Ottoman identity.]

Not only among the Turks, but also among the Arabs language is fundamental to national identity. Even illiterate Bedouin relish classical poetry as not even the most erudite Western audience could be said to relish Shakespeare's sonnets. Politically more important, shared language overcame separate religion. *Arabiyah* seemed to Christian Arabic-speakers the road toward participation in the dominant community.

Among those Arabs excited by the reform movement in the Ottoman Empire were young Christian Arabs in Lebanon and Syria, many of whom were associated with the American Protestant schools. At first, their writings were mainly anti-Turk. The first was a book in French by a Syrian Christian called *Le Réveil de la Nation Arabe*, but he had few readers. Most Arabs were still anxious to join the Turkish opposition to European invasion.

Thus, linguistic and by extension cultural preservation came to be equated with preservation of the nation. It is difficult for English speakers to evaluate the importance of this statement because secure in the imperialism or even colonialism of English which has conquered and settled whole vocabularies of German, French, Latin and even Arabic most of us scorn what appear to be just pedantic linguistics. However, not only the embattled natives but also their foreign rulers grasped well the political importance of linguistics.

Look first at the French: A key element in the *mission civilisatrice*, the politically correct French term for imperialism, was the suppression of Arabic and its replacement with French. In Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon and Syria, street signs were posted in French; laws were promulgated in French; transactions in government offices and law courts also were in French. And bright young students were encouraged to study in France so that they would think in French. If one wanted to get ahead, the path was signed in French.

### **The Russian Language**

The same policy was practiced by the Russians in Central Asia. Russian was the language that led to good jobs in commerce and was necessary for postings in government. That was the pattern already set under the Tsars, but, to the Soviet government, it was only the first step.

The Communists rightly saw that language was a weapon as well as a tool. In 1926, they implemented a policy to widen the gaps among the various Turkic peoples. By dropping the use of the old script (*Osmanlu*) and putting Azeri

Turkish into the Latin alphabet, as they did in 1926, and then into Cyrillic as they did in 1936, they cut the upcoming generation off from its cultural and historical roots. Young people could no longer read what the Nineteenth Century reformers had written.

The second step was to divide the common written language by dialects, forming a new written language of each, so that an Uzbek could no longer read what a Tajik or an Anatolian Turk was writing.

When this policy did not work fast enough or completely enough to satisfy Josef Stalin, he followed the plan first set out by the Germans during their occupation of the Crimea to expel the natives. He arranged the shipment of 191,044 Crimeans, mainly women and children, deeper into Central Asia. Shipped by unheated and unprovisioned cattle cars, many died en route to forced labor camps.

The government then razed the departing population's cultural relics including mosques and graveyards, renamed thousands of towns and villages, burned Turkic language books and manuscripts and erased mention of the people in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*.

Chinese policy under Chiang Kai-shek toward the Turks in Turkistan (Xinjiang) went even further. Following revolts in 1933 by the Kazak people and in 1944 by the Turkish people of Ili who proclaimed the short-lived "East Turkish Republic," Chiang denied that there were such people as the Turks, saying that they were just part of the "greater Chinese race." As Chinese, the Turks should give up Turkish and learn Chinese. [Linda Benson, *The Moslem Challenge to Chinese Authority in Xinjiang* (Armonk, New York: Sharpe, 1990), 27.]

Malay nationalists were gripped by something like Chiang's ethnic policy. For the British, Malaya was a vast rubber plantation and to work it the British imported cheap, indeed almost slave, labor from India and China.

To keep the peace with the politically more active members of these groups, they hit on the idea of amalgamating them into the feeble Malay nationalist movement. That provoked a reaction. Fearing the loss of their nation (Malay: *melayu* from the Turkish *millet*) the tiny nationalist party, led by Ibrahim Yaacob sought to ally itself with Indonesia.

Neither the British nor the Dutch would tolerate such a program and he was forced out of public life. For the moment Malay nationalism went down without even a whimper, but the idea of some sort of southeast Asian entity would resurface and is alive today.

Malaya would not have gained much strength from an association with Indonesia.

Indeed, until about 1920, there was no conception of an “Indonesia;” it was only then that the dissident native elite began to try to overcome their divisions into Java, Bali, Sumatra and the other islands. Before that time, what passed as nationalism was a polite, Dutch tolerated, move to better educate the population.

What was remarkable about it was that one of its early advocates and publicists was a Muslim woman, Raden Kartini, who lived from 1879 to 1904 and who was also a pioneer of women’s liberation. The Dutch were in favor of the educational programs she encouraged because, like colonists elsewhere, they were trying to build an inexpensive native bureaucracy.

But nationalism had no part in this effort and the Dutch vigorously opposed it. They not only fought uprisings but successfully kept the various small societies apart from one another.

It was only in 1927 that Achmed Sukarno founded the secular Indonesian National Party (*Partai Nasional Indonesia*). The Dutch promptly put him in prison. He was released by the Japanese a decade later when they invaded the islands. Then, when the Japanese surrendered, the Dutch returned and, with British support, tried to reestablish their rule. For five years, they fought vicious battles against Indonesian guerrillas before giving up and recognizing Indonesian independence in 1950. [See M.C. Ricklefs. *A Modern History of Indonesia*, (Hampshire, England: Macmillan, 1981) and Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

### **The Indian Struggle**

In India, the struggle against British imperialism lasted much longer than the Indonesian struggle against the Dutch. In India, there was an empire to the reckoned with.

Like the Ottoman Empire the Mughal empire was decrepit, but Britain treated them differently. Whereas the British saw the Ottoman empire as useful in blocking a Russian break out into the Mediterranean, the Mughal empire had few any redeeming features in British eyes. Piece by piece they dismantled it using its own subjects as their helpers. Finally, the helpers turned against them in the 1857 Sepoy “Rebellion,” Sepoy being Anglicized Persian for Sipahi (soldiers).

The rebellion was a viciously fought war in which the British took few prisoners and wiped out whole villages. When the British with their Indian allies put it down, they both destroyed the Mughal empire and set aside the Muslims as disloyal natives. It effectively ended not only the Mughal empire but also the remaining British toleration of the Muslim community Muslims were banned from

the British armed forces and the sharp turn to relative support of the Indian Hindus with great implications for the future.

Having lost the status they had previously enjoyed, Indian Muslims, then about 40 million in number, transferred their loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan-Caliph as the actual spiritual and potential political leader of the Muslim world.

So when, in the First World War, Britain attacked the Ottoman Iraqi provinces, the Sultan responded with just what Britain most feared, call for a holy war, *jihad*. To the surprise of the British, however, the Indian Muslim response was muted. Meanwhile, the relationship of Muslims to Britain and to Hindu society was undergoing both cosmetic and profound changes.

Perhaps the most profound change in Muslim-Hindu- British relationships was that lower caste and untouchable Indians who were condemned to perpetual slavery in Hinduism continued converting by the millions to Islam. While far less numerous than the Hindus, Muslims had become a major political force which both the Hindu nationalist movement and the British sought to use for their own ends.

Also politically important were the links established by the Muslim elite directly with England over the heads of the British rulers in India. Two leading figures demonstrate this trend. The first was the Aga Khan who was the immensely rich leader of the Ismaili community.

When the middle-class Englishmen who made up the membership of the British clubs in India did not welcome him, he shrewdly found a way into the top crust of English society. He saw that the royal family and the aristocracy were addicted to horseracing so he used his money, connections and skills to become an outstanding breeder and racer of horses. He was everywhere sought after in England and could take his political arguments direct to decision makers.

The second Indian Muslim was a product of the best of English education. Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) read law at the Inns of Court in London. The British found him a formidable adversary precisely because he was so powerfully "English." He treated the British civil servants, the members of the Indian Political Service, as though in a debate at the Oxford Union and parlayed his forensic skills, his Muslim identity and his popularity into a major role even in the Hindu-dominated Indian National Congress.

At the same time, Jinnah created an independent power base as the leader of the All-India Muslim League. Originally, he sought to work with the Hindus against the British and toward a united India, but, by 1940, he had come to believe that Muslims and Hindus would never be able to work and live together in a single state. Thus, he espoused the idea of a separate Muslim state. He would become



the “father” (*Babu-i Qawm*) of Pakistan.

Jinnah’s legal skills were comparable to those of the Kashmiri Hindu, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who studied at Cambridge University and read law at the Inner Temple in London. He was at least as “at home” in English as in Hindi and was very close to the English aristocracy, even having an affair with Lady Mountbatten, the wife of the last British High Commissioner.

### **An Egyptian Uprising**

Meanwhile, among the Arabs, a major nationalist revolt broke out in Egypt in April 1919. Egypt then had a small wealthy, educated elite that had become accustomed over a generation to working with the British authorities. During that period, the British had reluctantly and slowly allowed the children of the elite to attend Cairo’s sprawling university.

There, they turned away from the ideas that were permeating Turkish and Arab societies. Many of their leading figures like Taha Husain, the blind religious scholar and novelist, had begun to argue that Egypt was not an Arab land or indeed even a part of the Middle East but rather a member of the Mediterranean cultural zone.

It was in this context a growing sense of capacity and a growing sense of being part of what I have called “the North,” that Egyptians heard the Allied, and above all, President Woodrow Wilson’s, proclamations of a new era of peace and independence. Riding this wave of hope, a sober and theretofore British approved member of the elite, Saad Zaghlul, led a delegation (*wafd*) to respectfully request permission to attend the Paris Peace Conference and present its case for independence.

The British were not amused. They turned him down and warned him that he was breaking martial law. Given that he was a former minister in their puppet regime, the British were astonished when Zaghlul began to organize resistance among the university students.

The British, who had a low opinion of Egyptian will and courage, cracked down, arresting and exiling Zaghlul. The students responded with terrorism. Push led to shove. After three years of sporadic violence, the British wisely offered a compromise: they would agree to limited independence. So, limited independence under a docile monarchy and a contented aristocracy was what Egypt lived under until the end of the Second World War.

Meanwhile, in Iraq, on June 30, 1920, a minor incident set off a revolt of the tribes that then made up a large part of the population of what had been the Ottoman provinces (*pashaliks*) of Baghdad and Basra. It was a spontaneous

outburst of anger and does not seem to have been motivated by any sense of nationalism although religious sentiment played a significant role.

The tribesmen, with no overall leadership and no announced goals, derailed trains, killed 1,654 soldiers (at a cost to themselves of about 10,000 people). As T.E. Lawrence was quick to point out, the cost to Britain was six times as much as the British had spent stimulating the wartime "Revolt in the Desert."

The cost was too high and the benefit too low so the young Winston Churchill did something that did not seem ever to occur to an American president: he organized a meeting to plan a new policy. That new policy resulted in the creation of quasi-independent states in Iraq, Trans-Jordan, Palestine and Egypt. The new order was sufficient to give Britain a satisfactory degree of control at minimal cost for a generation. [Aaron S. Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970)]

What the new order which was partially copied by the French in Syria and Lebanon allowed was a brand of national identity appropriate to separate nation-states. That was the local or state based nationalism known as *wataniyah*, which was always unsatisfactory to the younger Arabs. But they were at yet unsure even who they were: Iraqis, Syrians, Lebanese, or more vaguely, Arabs.

### **Defining a Nation**

Meeting in Brussels in December 1938, an assembly of the most gifted Middle Eastern students tried to reach agreement on the meaning of the words "Arab" and "Arab nation." An Arab, they decided, was pretty much anyone who thought he was an Arab and who spoke Arabic.

What was different in this meeting was that for the first time, they used a word to replace the current term *wataniah*. They decided that it was national sentiment (*al-shuur al-Qawmiyah*) that was the key element. So let me dig into the meaning of *qawmiyah*.

What the students were trying to emphasize is that if the Arab people were split into artificial states, as the French and British had done in the Mandate system they constructed at the Paris Peace Conference, the Arabs could never achieve independence, power or dignity. Only if they recognized a pan-Arab loyalty could they move toward those fundamental objectives.

And, as always among the Arabs, the word chosen was crucial. So what was *qawmiyah*? It is the quality living by the terms appropriate to a *qawm*. To understand what that means, consider the basis of the Arab experience, the tribal or desert background.

In desert conditions, survival is a group activity. A lone individual cannot survive. But pasture for animals and water for humans, which are always meager, depend upon irregular rainfall. So the group cannot be large. It ranged in size from about 50 to a hundred or so people, usually descendants of a single man.

Among the Arabs, this group was not the tribe (*Qabila*), which might number hundreds or even thousands, and so could rarely assemble, but to the clan (*qawm*). To the *qawm* the individual owed total loyalty and from his membership in it derived social identity, legal standing and protection. He was absolutely honor bound to protect fellow members and to avenge any wrong to any member.

These were the sentiments the young Arab nationalists wanted the members of their movement to exemplify. To them, the granting of quasi-independence under the League of Nations was not a step forward but a reinforcement of foreign control carried out by local puppets among an artificially divided people.

If the young nationalists needed any proof of the result, it was provided by the weakness, cowardice and disunity made manifest in the 1948-1949 Arab-Israeli war. In their petty jealousies and conflicting aims, the Arab governments had allowed almost the entire Arab population of Palestine to lose what the Arab League had proclaimed to be an integral part of the Arab World.

The defeat was a humiliation of unprecedented proportions. The most memorable critique of the separate or *wataniyah* Arab leadership was by the Syrian Christian diplomat and educator, Constantine Zurayq, who wrote: "Seven Arab states declare war on Zionism in Palestine, stop impotent before it and then turn on their heels [content only to make] fiery speeches but when action becomes necessary, the fire is still and quiet" [*The Meaning of the Disaster (Maana al-Nakba)*, Beirut 1949.]

His words would echo down the years and still sound loudly today.

### **The Rise of Nasser**

One of the men who watched the war under fire was the Egyptian officer Gamal Abd al-Nasir (aka Nasser), who came out of the battle gripped by two ideas: the first was that the only hope for the Arabs was an overarching sense of *qawmiyah* or pan-Arab unity. The second was that the existing "old regimes," starting with King Faruq (aka Farouk) of Egypt must go.

Except in Egypt where exiling Faruq was easy, he failed to accomplish his first objective the old regimes were deeply enmeshed in systems of privilege, custom and corruption and remained in power in most of the Arab states. Seeing this, he slowly realized that that change must be profound to be effective. Indeed, it required a social, economic and intellectual revolution.

To achieve his goals or even to survive, Nasir (Nasser) thought that he had to create what I have called "new men." They were not a separate class but existed in each social class. Usually, they were "graduates" of the army, acquired a sort of uniform, were encouraged by special privileges and were able to earn several times the income of traditional workers.

Unfortunately for his regime, his social revolution was deflected and stopped by his "Vietnam," his involvement in the Yemen revolution of 1962, and the ensuing 1967 war with Israel. But, during his short life (he died in 1970 at the age of 52), he personified the Arab quest for Qawmiyah.

Very different was the experience of the men who led the Algerian struggle for independence, but they shared a slow evolution of nationalism comparable to Egypt's. Like the Egyptians who thought of themselves as part of a Mediterranean culture, prominent Algerians sought to "evolve" into Europeans. Algerian *Évolués* put aside Arabic to be admitted on equal terms into France. Their best known leader, Farhat Abbas, even denied that there was such an entity as the Algerian nation.

But many Algerians concluded that becoming sort-of French was not an option. As some of the Vietnamese Communist leaders experienced, from working and living in France, they knew that the French would not accept them on any terms. The leading Algerian in this group was Messali Hadj.

Messali Hadj was not a member of the French tolerated Algerian elite. He was a working man and his target was the Algerian worker population of France, the laborers who actually wielded the shovels and did much of the hard work on French roads and in French factories. His first move was to form a club for them, for which crime the French put him into prison.

When he got out in 1937, he organized the first real political party, calling itself the *Parti Progressiste Algérien*. But, only the name was French. It demanded full independence and the redistribution of lands taken by the settlers. Those were nearly capital crimes. During the Second World War, he was condemned to 16 years of hard labor and the party was outlawed. Bullets soon replaced bars.

### **Post-War Hopes**

At the end of the Second World War, a euphoria swept the colonial world inspired by Franklin Roosevelt's "ringing" words about freedom, much as the Egyptian had reacted to similar pronouncements at the end of the First World War. The words of others, such as Winston Churchill, were less ringing and those of Charles de Gaulle were much more guarded and vague, forecasting a French effort "to lead

each of the colonial people to a development that will permit them to administer themselves, and, later, to govern themselves.”

The Algerians organized for freedom. Indeed, some thought they had already become free. Among them were the people of the little Algerian town of SÅ©tif who gathered to celebrate. Their originally peaceful manifestation was broken up by private Frenchmen, the French police and the French army. And some 40 villages in the area were bombed by the French air force. Estimates of Algerian casualties range from 10,000 to 45,000.

That tragedy may be taken as the seedbed of modern Algerian nationalism. Messali Hadj reemerged to reform his party which won the municipal elections of 1947 but was overwhelmed by fraud and intimidation in the next round of elections. He was again arrested and deported. This action was an early case of what today is called “decapitation,” but it was not successful. A new generation of Algerians, many of whom had served in the French army during the Second World War, concluded that they could gain nothing with ballots and began to think in terms of bullets. Among the new leaders was Ahmad ben Bella.

Ahmad ben Bella was a decorated soldier and favored violent action. Electrified by the French defeat in Indochina, he and a group of colleagues formed the “Front de LibÅ©ration Nationale (FLN). Nov. 1, 1954 was the effective beginning of the Algerian war.

The French accepted the challenge. In the first major engagement, French soldiers were ordered to kill every Arab they met. They did. French soldiers massacred about 12.000 Algerians.

The brutality was returned in kind. In the first three years of the war, the *militants* killed more than 7,000 “turncoat” (*Harki*) Algerians. Some of these killings were used as an indoctrination ritual that, like the Mau Mau “oathings,” was meant to convert an untested recruit to commit an act from which he could not turn back. Above all, the FLN like other Arab guerrillas and terrorists feared disunity. Today, the Islamic Caliphate is apparently using the same tactics.

The war was fought on three “fronts.” One was in Europe and America where efforts were made to get the United Nations and the other Powers to press the French to give Algeria independence; a second was in Cairo, Tunis and Rabat where Ben Bella and his colleagues gathered funds mobilized men into an “external” army that never fought but was prepared for the conditions of independence. The third was in Algeria where small bands (*wilayas*) actually fought the French army.

The principal guerrilla leader, Ramdane Abane, decided on a bold and nearly suicidal campaign: the Battle of Algiers. It began with the general strike of Jan. 28, 1957. To put it down, the French army used all the tactics of counterinsurgency. Militarily the army won, but politically their campaign was a disaster.

Special Forces (paratroop) use of torture and murder revolted the French. But it was not French opinion that caused de Gaulle to give up: it was the French army's threat to overthrow the French government itself. De Gaulle was so frightened that he ringed the presidential palace with anti-aircraft cannon and he left Paris secretly for the safety of a French army group in Germany.

Having survived an attempted coup, De Gaulle was so infuriated that he sent 20,000 French soldiers with tanks, artillery and aircraft into the European suburb of Algiers where they killed a large number of French citizens. With them beaten down, the French government was able to bring the war to a close in the Evian Accords of March 17, 1962. (During this time, I was the head of the "Interdepartmental Taskforce on Algeria" in the U.S. government.)

### **The Palestinian Struggle**

Very different was the struggle of the Palestinians at the other end of the Mediterranean. About 800,000 Palestinians had been driven out of their land before and during the 1948-1949 war. While, for years, Israelis denied their involvement, Israeli government documents prove that the forced exodus was deliberate, well planned and brutal. It left scars which have shaped Arab nationalism and today shape Arab guerrilla warfare and terrorism. More narrowly, this Israeli action ironically created the first "international" movement of the Arabs.

Internationalization of the Arabs happened in two interrelated ways. On the one hand, the international community decided that the Palestinian refugees could not be left to die. So in the summer of 1950 a new United National organization (UNRWA) was created to care for them.

I first visited several refugee camps in 1950, and in 1963, while a member of the Kennedy Administration, I was offered the job of Deputy Commissioner General of UNRWA, but the State Department would not release me to take it.

While the most employable, the best educated and the lucky among the Palestinian refugees found temporary or permanent homes in Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Libya and even further afield, the vast majority were assembled in about 50 what were assumed to be temporary camps in Gaza, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. They were to be supported given food, shelter, medical care, schooling and clothing at a per

capita subsidy of \$27 yearly.

If the material diet was insipid, it was sustaining. The emotional diet was noxious. It was a blend of exaggerated memories, unrealistic hopes, enforced idleness and real angers. Within a decade over half of the Palestinians had never lived outside the camps. They blamed their hosts, the Arab governments and peoples, for the loss of their homeland.

And, in turn, their hosts felt insulted. Worse, their hosts used them as sources of cheap labor and that increased both their sense of misery and anger. To would-be leaders, they were raw material. Inevitably, the more radical turned to what I have called violent politics. Reports of the 1950s and 1960s are filled with hijackings, kidnappings, murders. [I provide a record of these events in my book *The Arab World Today* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), Chapter 16.]

Actions replaced words and thoughts. Unlike the other national movements, this one gave rise to no definitions or programs of nationalism. All thought of the Palestinians was directed toward the sole goal of Return. How to accomplish that goal was always elusive; what was clear was that at least in their experience, "internationalization" was not conducive of pan-Arab unity.

Pan-Arab unity remained avidly sought. The last of the nationalist groups to espouse it was the "Resurrection" (*Baath*) Party formed by the French-educated, Greek Orthodox but personally secular Syrian intellectual, Michel Aflaq (1910-1989).

From 1932, he went through several major changes in style and organization. At first, he espoused Communism, but when the Communists opportunistically endorsed French colonialism, he broke with them and, together with a fellow Syrian (Salah Bitar) who also has studied in the Sorbonne, set out to create an Arab socialist national party. He dissolved the party when in 1958 the Syrian army decided to merge Syria into the Nasserite United Arab Republic (the UAR).

When the UAR broke up in 1961, Aflaq's reputation declined in Syria. During the 1966 coup d'État (that led eventually to the seizure of power by Hafez al-Assad), Aflaq fled Syria and went to Iraq. There, two years later, one of the men whose thought he had influenced, Saddam Hussein, seized power. Hussein welcomed and publicly honored Aflaq but did not allow him much political influence or action.

Saddam did, however, publicly proclaim his regime's support of Baathism as part of his rivalry with Assad. Thus, ironically, while the basic idea of Baathism was Arab unity, it became itself an example of the pressures that led to Arab

disunion.

### **Failed Nationalism**

In summary, it became evident to the younger generation that nationalism and "Arab Socialism" had failed in the tasks they had assumed to protect the Arab "nation" and to create a sense of national unity and dignity. As I wrote above, there were many reasons for failure insincerity, rivalry or corruption of leaders, imbalance of military and civic components of society, the magnitude of the tasks to be performed with insufficient means and, above all, foreign military threat and intervention but a growing number of politically active people concluded that, regardless of the causes of failure, failure itself was starkly evident.

With that recognition that nationalism had failed to produce the reality of power or the sense of dignity that were its goals, disillusionment set in. What remained was only the heritage of religion. I will address its contemporary manifestations in my next and final essay.

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