

SAUDI MISCHIEF IN FALLUJAH

By Stephen Schwartz

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IN RECENT WEEKS, most Western media have reported the continuing attacks on U.S. troops in Fallujah, west of Baghdad, as tenacious resistance by defeated Baathists, aided by local Sunni Muslims enraged at the soldiers' alleged mishandling of crowds, which has led to fatal clashes. There is mounting evidence, however, that this is not the whole story.

In a piece dated June 1, the Saudi website alsaha.com, which propounds the extremist views of the kingdom's official Wahhabi sect of Islam, proudly reported the combat deaths in Fallujah of two Saudi subjects, Faisal Sultan al-Rougi al-Otabi and Tahir ash-Shoumani. The writer, Nassim al-Islam (doubtless a pseudonym--it means "wind of Islam"), adopts a tone of adulation: "Congratulations, Faisal, the color is that of blood and the scent that of musk. I wish I were with you to win great honor as a martyr."

Meanwhile, on the ground in Iraq, Newsweek reporter Scott Johnson was also picking up signs of Saudi involvement. In a story in the June 16 issue, Johnson quotes a U.S. intelligence officer in Baghdad as saying that, increasingly, Iraqi sources are identifying the armed men who are organizing to fight the coalition forces as Wahhabis. Johnson explains this term as "Muslims akin to the extremist sect that inspired Al Qaeda." Said the U.S. intelligence officer, "Now, all of a sudden, these Wahhabi guys have been appearing. We're hearing that word a lot more: Wahhabi."

According to Iraqi sources inside the country who insist on anonymity, Wahhabi imams in the Fallujah mosques, as well as dozens of agitators from Saudi Arabia, have begun aggressive preaching of suicide bombings against coalition forces as part of a campaign of guerrilla warfare.

At the same time, in Iraqi Kurdistan, where Saudi-Wahhabi religious organizations were introduced before the war, the Wahhabi militia Ansar al-Islam is again active. Attacked and scattered by U.S. forces during the main offensive in April, it has reconstituted itself and has struck in the towns of Halabja, Biahrah, and Dohuk, according to a Kurdish leader. The car bomb is Ansar's weapon of choice. The group is known to have Saudi participants, and propaganda in its favor appears in the Saudi media.

Most important, the end of the war has, paradoxically, provided the Wahhabis a new pretext for infiltration--namely, humanitarian relief. Despite all the exposure of the misuse of Islamic charities to promote terrorism, the same official Saudi relief organizations that have come under investigation since 9/11 are now

entering Iraq. The International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), for example, investigated by U.S. and other governments for involvement in the funding of terrorism across the globe, is lauded in the Saudi daily Al-Watan (The Nation) for its "relief work" in Sunni districts of Iraq.

These several indications of stepped-up Wahhabi activity in Iraq should raise a red flag--for they conform to a pattern now familiar from Afghanistan, Central Asia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Chechnya.

The Wahhabi power-grab strategy in pursuit of the extremists' mad dream of imposing their "pure" Islam on all Muslims, then launching a jihad against the world, begins with indoctrination. Food, clothing, tents, and other relief supplies are distributed only to those willing to take classes in Wahhabi doctrine. Preachers are sent from the Gulf states with the mission of Wahhabizing local Muslims by opposing "practices of unbelief" alleged to be rife in local Islam. These may include friendship with Jews and Christians; acceptance of women's driving or going to school; traditional customs such as visiting graves (hated by Wahhabis, who believe gravestones are idols and honoring the dead is polytheistic); and devotion to Sufism, the Islamic form of spirituality.

The next step is the establishment of training centers and camps where unemployed youths are trained to fight and lead irregular combat operations, especially suicide attacks. These centers are often directly linked to relief distribution points. Incitement of "martyrdom" against better-equipped, modern forces is a key Wahhabi tactic. Its purpose is to provoke major retaliation. Civilian casualties are useful in inciting orphaned and alienated young people to join the "struggle." A further inducement is the classic offer of stipends for recruits' families if they die in suicide operations. For the displaced victims of war, this may be the only economic reward immediately available.

Then, crucially, Wahhabi agitators seek to eliminate opposition from local religious leaders. New mosques and madrassas are built with Saudi subsidies and staffed exclusively by Wahhabi imams and teachers. The system of madrassas is expanded, where possible to become an independent extremist educational system on the Pakistani model, setting neighbor against neighbor and son against father. Where necessary, established imams are paid cash to "convert" to Wahhabism. Uncooperative imams are boycotted and loudly labeled unbelievers or government spies. Imams who actively oppose the extremists risk their lives--witness the murder of traditional imams in Chechnya, Daghestan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and other countries. At least 200 such murders can be readily documented. This fact by itself explains why anti-Wahhabi imams around the world--even in America--are so reluctant to go public.

Finally, Wahhabi agents often engage in vandalism against local graveyards, historic mosques, and the tombs of Muslim saints. This should be expected in Iraq, where the aim will be to provoke conflict between Sunnis and Shias, which

the Wahhabis will present to the world as Shia aggression against the Sunni minority. This will increase support for the Wahhabis among Sunnis but open the door to Iranian military intervention to defend the Shias--the worst possible outcome. Such was the strategy the Wahhabis used against the Shia Hazara minority in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. It produced massive bloodshed and nearly drew Iran into war with the Afghan regime.

In Iraq, several Sunni and Sufi leaders have expressed alarm at Wahhabi incursions and are prepared to sit down with the American authorities. All of them are in the sights of the terrorists and need immediate protection. In the United States, Sheikh Hisham Kabbani, long known for his denunciation of extremism, has maintained contact with these individuals through the Islamic Supreme Council of America (ISCA). Kabbani, who has a following throughout the Muslim world, has indicated his willingness to go to Iraq to promote a Sunni coalition of Arabs and Kurds dedicated to moderation, peace, and social equality.

When coalition troops come under fire in places like Fallujah, it cannot be assumed that local grievances are the essential explanation. There is a scheme to defeat the American intervention, and it originates in Saudi Arabia. It can be thwarted, with the help of local Muslim leaders. But first the coalition authorities have to take a closer look at who their enemy is.



Stephen Schwartz is director of the Islam and Democracy Program at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies in Washington, D.C.