Saudi Wahhabism in American Media:
Sinister Spread or Fearful Fantasy?

by Cody Austin

"Wahhabi money builds almost all new mosques in the USA. Wahhabi imams run them. Each Friday, venomous sermons flood the ears and minds of worshipers. The abject enemy denounced as War on Terror and fought with all the resources of the USA is firmly at home within our borders [*sic*]" (Clark). This quote, from amateur commentator Milo Clark, conjures an astonishing description of American Islam. Milo and other commentators often look to writers like Stephen Schwartz for information about Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia, and American Islam. Schwartz believes "the Islamic communities of the U.S. (dominated by the Saudis) . . . suffer under a totalitarian regime of thought-control" (Schwartz TCS). While Schwartz is quick to say that he doesn't believe the majority of Muslims support Wahhabism, the implication is clear. Saudis control American Muslims; therefore American Muslims share the views of Saudi Arabian Muslims.

Schwartz and writers like him often state that Saudi Wahhabism has "come to dominate Islam in the U.S." (Schwartz Senate 1). They argue that through the funding of mosques, Islamic institutions, universities, and individuals, Saudi Wahhabism is taking over American Islam. Furthermore, American Muslims are portrayed as feeble and unable to resist Saudi encroachment. These commentators are not merely amateur bloggers. Stephen Schwartz's articles have been featured in The New York Post, USA Today, The Guardian, Fox News, and many other conservative and traditional American news outlets. Schwartz has also testified before the United States Senate. Other writers, including Bernard Lewis and Daniel Pipes, have also received national attention. Their claims that Saudi Wahhabism dominates American Muslims are likely to be heard by thousands of Americans and have already been heard by the federal government.

Despite their accusations, there is simply not enough information to prove that Saudi Wahhabism, brought to America in the form of Saudi funding for American institutions and individuals, significantly affects American Muslims. To truly grasp this issue, it is important to begin by examining what Wahhabism means and its position in Saudi Arabia. A brief history of Saudi Arabia and Wahhabism will demonstrate how Wahhabism came to be supported and exported by the Saudi government. Next, the extent of Saudi proselytization and funding in America must be considered. Many authors writing about Saudi financing mistakenly believe that correlation implies causation. They argue that if the Saudis fund a project or establishment, they must be in control of it. Although enormous amounts of Saudi funding exist, the presence of Saudi money does not necessarily mean Saudi control. Afterwards, common accusations about American Muslims will be examined. The accusations that the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) is a front for Saudi Wahhabis will be considered. After that, the supposed Wahhabi control over American mosques will be examined. Finally, a Freedom House study that is often cited in support of Saudi Wahhabi sway over American Muslims will be investigated. These arguments will clearly demonstrate that Saudi Wahhabism does not significantly affect American Muslims.

The History of Wahhabism

To begin this investigation, it will be helpful to examine what Wahhabism means and how the sect's ideology came to be endorsed and exported by Saudi Arabia. I argue that Wahhabism enjoyed support from the Saudi monarchy because of the relationship between Muhammad Wahhab and Muhammad Saud. Its subordinate position in state

affairs was initially determined by Ibn Saud and further established by the incorporation

of the Wahhabi ulama into state bureaucracy. Exportation began in earnest because of

the bureaucratic powers gained by Wahhabis and increased oil wealth in the 1970s.

Wahhabism, or Salafism, is a Sunni Islamic sect based on the beliefs of the

eighteenth century reformer Muhammad ibn Abd ibn Wahhab. Wahhabism views the

Qur'an and the Sunnah as the only authoritative texts in Islam; however, the movement

draws much inspiration from Wahhab's book, *Kitab al-Tawhid,* as well as the writings of

Ibn Tayymiyah. Wahhab preached a return to tawhid: the oneness or unity of Allah.

Denying this unity by worshipping anything other than Allah or associating others with

Him is called shirk. Wahhab saw tawhid as absolutely fundamental to Islam and shirk as

the ultimate evil. The shirk displayed in the common religious practices of central

Arabia, or the Najd, disgusted Wahhab. Examples of shirk common in the Najd included

the domes and elaborate architecture of tombs, pilgrimages to tombs, holy trees and

shrines, sorcery, and seeking intercession from the Prophet or Muslim holy men

(Commins Ch. 1). Wahhab also emphasized that the declaration of Allah's unity, part of

the shahada[1], did not make a person a Muslim. The declaration must be accompanied by

the proper moral practices and the rejection of the detestable, especially of shirk (Wahhab

Ch. 4).

Wahhab began to teach his beliefs and gain followers, who used force and

threatened war to stop the denial of Allah's unity. Wahhab became wildly unpopular in

his hometown, Uyaina, after his beliefs spread and he began to destroy local shrines,

trees, and tombs.

After the emir[2] of Uyaina exiled him, Wahhab settled in Diriya, a nearby city in the Najd. In Diriya, Wahhab found support from the local emir, Muhammad ibn Saud, and his wife's two brothers. Wahhab soon proposed that Muhammad Saud aid him in his mission to spread Wahhabism and stop detestable practices across in the Najd. Saud offered to protect Wahhab and support his religious mission on two conditions (Commins 19). First, Wahhab had to promise to support Saud's rule if their campaign triumphed (Commins 19). Second, Wahhab needed to support a tax system that violated Sharia. They came to an agreement after Wahhab convinced Saud to abandon the tax system for the eventual profit from war, further increasing the two leaders' popularity in the area (Wynbrandt Ch. 5). Cooperation between Wahhabis and the House of Saud in modern times flowed from this agreement made by their respective progenitors during the late eighteenth century.

The Role of Wahhabism in Saudi Politics

The alliance between the Sauds and Wahhabis continued throughout the first and second Saudi states that existed from 1745-1818 and 1818-1891 respectively (Wynbrandt). Since the original agreement, whenever the Sauds conquered an area, they installed Wahhabi scholars and enforced Wahhabi practices. Over time, Wahhabism became "naturalized" in the region, although Wahhabis suffered persecution under Rashidi rule (Commins 69). The third conquest of Arabia, undertaken by Ibn Saud, established the modern kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. Wahhabism finally reached religious hegemony when Ibn Saud restored Wahhabi scholars to preeminence, cooperated in eliminating religious dissent and allowed them to regulate "public

morality" (Commins 72). Though the Wahhabis gained much control over Saudi

Arabia's religious affairs, Ibn Saud made it clear that he would pursue modernization and

that they would cooperate or be silenced. For example, Ibn Saud immediately crushed an

attempted uprising by the Ikhwan, an army composed of devout Wahhabis (Commins Ch.

2,3).

The conquest of Arabia under Ibn Saud also illustrates the formation of the

relationship between the Saudi monarchy and the religious scholars, or ulama. Ibn

Saud's regular policy consisted of striking a balance between his desire for modernization

and "international legitimacy" with the Wahhabi desire for morality and "doctrinal

purity" (Commins 205,72). Saud pursued cooperation when possible, but when he

deemed it necessary, he silenced critics. For example, the ulama's desire to "stamp out"

non-Wahhabis harmonized with Ibn Saud's desire to destroy rebel emirs who often held

differing religious beliefs. Cooperation was easy in this case. In other instances,

retaining monarchical power and satisfying the ulama required a difficult balancing act

by Ibn Saud. This difficulty is visible in Saud's administration of the Hijaz, which

includes the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. The ulama demanded that the area be

purged of idolatry and that their prohibitions on singing, playing cards, alcohol, and

tobacco be enforced. Nonetheless, Ibn Saud also had to answer to the relatively liberal

sensibilities of the entire Muslim world. Saud developed a policy of alternating strictness

and slackness. Regulations tightened when Ibn Saud and Wahhabi ulama arrived and

relaxed when they left (Commins Ch. 3).

Ibn Saud supported Wahhabi religious hegemony but tempered them when they

contradicted his goals for the kingdom. In short, "political considerations trumped

religious idealism" (Commins 103). Religious scholars who refused to acquiesce were eliminated, and those who went along with the Sauds were rewarded. Thus, the subordinate position of the ulama in relation to the monarchy was established. Subsequent monarchs of Saudi Arabia generally followed the precedent laid down by Ibn Saud.

As the kingdom continued to modernize and the bureaucracy increased, the monarchy incorporated the ulama into the state structure rather than marginalizing them. The Sauds recognized that this inclusion gave the regime more religious legitimacy. Incorporation also allowed the kingdom to control and suppress the ulama when necessary. It also allowed the ulama access to government funds and authority, as well as control over specific areas. The ulama gained control over education, mosques, the judiciary, and religious institutions while Western educated ministers controlled petroleum, infrastructure, and public administration. This incorporation cemented the subordinate position of the ulama and allowed them to move forward toward their religious goals, within defined parameters. These parameters set the stage for mass proselytization beginning in the 1970s (Commins Ch. 4).

The ulama, with their newly acquired state authority and state funds, began campaigns to recapture youth interest in Islam and spread Wahhabi doctrine abroad. Their desires most likely came from genuine religious conviction and from desires to protect the Saudi monarchy they prospered under. By spreading Wahhabism abroad, the ulama attempted to create a religious establishment in other countries favorable to the Saudi regime. This establishment would preach Wahhabism and counter growing tides of nationalism and socialism after WWII. Similarly, genuine conviction and political

shrewdness likely motivated the monarchy's acceptance of proselytization. Aiding

Muslims around the world gave the monarchy an aura of benevolence and Islamic

legitimacy. Additionally, the ulama's goal of spreading Wahhabism did not pose a threat

to the Saudi monarchy; therefore, there was no reason to prohibit it. In the 1970s,

exponential increases in Saudi oil revenues allowed the ulama to greatly increase

proselytization efforts (Commins Ch. 4). Between 1959 and 1970, revenues grew from

$655 million to $1.2 billon. In 1973, oil revenues amounted to $4.34 billion and peaked

in 1981 at $108 billion (Wynbrandt 251).

New proselytization efforts prompted by oil wealth appeared in many ways. For

example, the top religious authority in Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Mohammed, backed a new

Islamic University in Saudi Arabia and the development of the Muslim World League, an

organization dedicated to the spread of Islam outside the kingdom (Commins 112). The

Muslim World League (MLW) and other new organizations spread Wahhabi Islam

abroad by funding institutions, mosques, and distributing scholarships to study in Saudi

Arabia. The government also supported oppressed Muslims across the world. For

example, the government contributed volunteer fighters, $120 million in aid, as well as

150,000 tons of relief supplies when Muslims faced war and genocide in Bosnia. Private

citizens also donated over $200 million to the Bosnians (Wynbrandt 251). Efforts

continued throughout the 1980s and into the present day. However, the extent of

proselytization decreased as government debt increased.

It is now evident that Wahhabism enjoyed support from the Saudi monarchy

because of the relationship between Muhammad Wahhab and Muhammad Saud. It is

also clear that Ibn Saud initially determined the subordinate position of Wahhabism, and

the incorporation of Wahhabi ulama into state bureaucracy cemented it. Finally,

proselytization began in earnest because of the bureaucratic powers gained by Wahhabis

and increased oil wealth in the 1970s. Now that the position of Wahhabism in Saudi

Arabia has been explained, it is possible to examine the extent of proselytization in

America.

Saudi Proselytization in America

Vast amounts of Saudi funding to American institutions can be traced to the

decade after record oil revenues. For example, the "Saudi-controlled Muslim World

League" spent about $10 million in the United States on mosque construction during a

two-year span in the 1980s (Harden). Likewise, the Muslim World League sponsored ten

orthodox imams to be sent to America to provide religious leadership in 1982 (Lahaj

307). Ain al-Yaqeen, a Saudi newspaper, provided more details on the proselytization

efforts in America. These efforts included sending more than one million copies of the

Holy Qur'an outside the kingdom, supporting at least 12 American mosques and a

cultural center, and partially financing mosques in at least six states (Yaqeen). Al-

Yaqeen also reported that King Fahd personally supported the Bilal Mosque in Los

Angeles and funded a chair in Islamic Studies at UCSB and Harvard. They have also

donated to various Islamic Research Institutes and the Middle East and Islamic Studies

departments of at least nine universities (Yaqeen).

Furthermore, the kingdom also established the Islamic Academy in Washington

D.C., reporting yearly operation costs as over 100 million riyals. Individual contributions

also constituted a substantial amount of Saudi funds. There are numerous additional

reports about Saudi funding to mosques, Islamic centers, and the American university system but few of these claims have reliable proof. This may result from fabrication by the authors or from legitimate difficulties in obtaining financial information. Nevertheless, the amount of money spent by Saudi Arabia in America is astronomical.

Perceptions of Saudi Influence

The vast amounts of money emanating from Saudi Arabia in the last two decades have garnered much public scrutiny. This is most likely because of a common speculation: if an organization received Saudi funds, the Saudis likely control it. The idea that "strings are attached" to Saudi money is nearly universal in articles and books about Saudi generosity (Kelley 144). Each author has their own opinion about the extent of control Saudis have over institutions they finance, ranging from implied pressure to directly issued orders. To illustrate, Ron Kelley gives a few examples of Saudis installing "loyal individuals . . .in the group's leadership" and political pressure on mosques and Islamic schools (Kelley 144,145). Even so, all of his evidence is anecdotal; it is impossible to accurately speak to the level of Saudi influence without sufficient proof.

The existence of Saudi funding for an institution does not necessarily mean Saudis have complete, or even majority, control over the institution. For example, Fox News pundit Dan Senor accused Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal of funding "radical madrassas around the world." Senor then pointed out that Imam Feisal Rauf, the imam behind the controversial Ground Zero Mosque, had once received funding from a Saudi foundation. In Senor's opinion, this made Rauf likely to carry on the same agenda as

Prince Talal's supposed radical madrassas. As the New York Times helpfully pointed

out that Prince Talal is also the second-largest shareholder in News Corp., the parent

company of Fox News (Mackey). It is unlikely that Dan Senor believes that Fox News

shares the views of Talal's "radical madrassas" because of its links to Saudi Arabia.

Though Fox News has financial ties to Saudi Arabia, they are able to retain their

journalistic independence. In the same way, mosques and Islamic institutions do not

automatically cede control to Wahhabis because of their financial ties to Saudi Arabia.

Authors and writers observe examples of Saudi funding and draw the conclusion

that Saudi Wahhabism has "come to dominate Islam in the U.S." (Schwartz Senate 1).

Such authors have fallen into a logical fallacy, believing that correlation implies

causation. The reality is that there is not enough evidence to prove that Saudi

Wahhabism, coming to America in the form of Saudi funding for American institutions

and individuals, significantly affects American Muslims. The overwhelming lack of

evidence will be apparent after careful examination of the alleged claims about Saudi

domination.

Claims of Saudi Control of American Muslim Organizations

To begin, a frequent example of Saudi domination is the supposed Wahhabi

control of American Muslim organizations. The usual target of these accusations is the

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). CAIR is a well-known Islamic

advocacy group that seeks to challenge stereotypes of Muslims and Islam and provide an

Islamic perspective on issues of public interest (CAIR 1). However, M. Zudhi Jasser

describes CAIR as, "part of the theo-political global Islamist movement in the West and

in the United States, hatched and nurtured by Saudi Arabia" (Jasser). CAIR has also

been described as part of the "Wahhabi lobby" and that the organization "should be

considered a foreign-based subversive organization." (Schwartz Activist). This claim,

like many others, originates from Schwartz and is frequently duplicated.

Schwartz and other authors provide numerous "facts" about the Saudi control of

CAIR. Schwartz, testifying before the Senate, claims a CAIR survey found that "some

70 percent of American Muslims wanted Wahhabi teachings in their mosques. This is a

claim we consider unfounded" (Schwartz Senate). In fact, Schwartz's claim is

unfounded. A CAIR survey entitled, "The Mosque in America: A National Portrait," is

likely where Schwartz drew his accusation from. The 2001 survey asked Muslims "How

important are the following sources of authority?" 16 percent related that "the teachings

of the righteous salaf" are "absolutely foundational." 44 percent said they are "very

important." Schwartz likely added the two numbers to reach 70 percent and extrapolated

"salaf" to mean Wahhabism. In fact, the term "righteous salaf" describes "the first three

generations after the Prophet" (CAIR Mosque 29). Muhammad Wahhab, who was born

around 1703, does not fit into this category (Wynbrandt 113). Five other major surveys

conducted from 1994 to 2006, the date of Schwartz's Senate testimony, do not mention

Wahhabism or Saudi Arabia (CAIR Reports). Only one survey mentioned Salafism,

reporting "less than half of one percent [of American Muslim Voters] said they are

Salafi" (CAIR American). Schwartz's proclamation that CAIR believes 70 percent of

American Muslims want Wahhabi teachings is misleading. Additionally, CAIR also

provides data that shows the miniscule adherence to Salafism-Wahhabism among

American Muslims.

Others contend that Saudi Wahhabis control CAIR through their funding of the organization. For instance, critics point out the $250,000 donation from the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) to finance a headquarters for CAIR in 1999. Schwartz explains that the IDB is Jeddah-based and "an official Saudi financial institution" (Schwartz Senate 3). Schwartz's evidence for the extremist tendencies of the IDB include their support of the Masjid Bilal Islamic Center and School in California. Hassan Akbar, an American Muslim soldier arrested for murdering fellow soldiers in Iraq, had ties with the Bilal institutions.

Schwartz's reasons for condemning the IDB and Masjid Bilal are doubtful at best. First, the Islamic Development Bank is an international financial institution whose membership includes 56 countries. The Board of Executive Directors that is "responsible for the direction of the general operations" does not exclusively consist of Saudis (Islamic). Saudi Arabia, along with Iran and Libya, are the largest shareholders, but by no means are they the sole financiers. Second, an article about Akbar describes him studying at the Masjid Bilal mosque in high school. This article also reports that he is remembered there as a loner (Reid). This may suggest that others at the mosque did not develop his anti-American views. Regardless, Akbar's association with the mosque does not necessarily mean he began to develop a hate for America there.

Detractors similarly overstate the significance of other instances of Saudi funding. An example is the $500,000 donation made by Saudi Prince Talal, who has been accused of funding radical madrassas. Talal's donation was for the CAIR Library project, created to "distribute a set of books on Islam, the majority of which are written by non-Muslim academics, to libraries so that people can learn more about Islam." (CAIR Urban 10).

The contents of the library package include books by John Esposito and Jack Shaheen as well as the PBS documentary "Islam Empire of Faith" (CAIR Decade 62). The program Prince Talal donated to remains unstated in Pipes's accusation of CAIR. Pipes manipulates the connotations of a secret donation to make Talal's contribution seem suspicious.

The organization has also received reproach for accepting a $5,000 payment from the Holy Land Foundation (HLF) in 1994. The HLF was designated a "Global Terrorist" entity by the Treasury Department after September 11. Authors like Steven Emerson and Daniel Pipes fail to mention that "public concern" about the HLF did not exist before 9/11 (CAIR Urban 6). They refuse to accept the possibility that CAIR took the money in good faith, instead assuming that CAIR knew all of the HLF's inner-workings and motivations.

Critics also charge CAIR has employed terrorists. For example, Daniel Pipes lists Rabih Haddad as a "CAIR fundraiser" (Pipes & Chadha). Authorities accused Haddad of funneling money to Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations and deported him in 2001 (Swarns). Haddad was the chairman of the Global Relief Foundation (GRF), another charity designated a Global Terrorist entity by the Treasury Department (U.S. Dept. 5). GRF's activities included funding Saudi preacher Omar Abdi Mohamed, now accused of funding terrorism himself (Ottaway). Pipes fails to mention that Haddad was a CAIR fundraiser to the extent that he was a "one-time speaker at a CAIR chapter dinner" (CAIR Urban 4). As discussed earlier, the presence of Saudi funding does not necessarily mean Wahhabi control. In summary, Micheal Rolince, a retired FBI counterterrorism official, accurately sums up the allegations against CAIR: "Of all the groups, there is probably

more suspicion about CAIR, but when you ask people for cold, hard facts, you get blank stares" (MacFarquhar).

Claims of Wahhabi Control of American Mosques

A common claim is that Wahhabis have taken control of over 70 percent of American mosques. This bold claim is supported by startlingly little evidence. Articles claiming this statistic usually cite Steven Schwartz and his book, *The Two Faces of Islam: The House of Saud from Tradition to Terror,* or Schwartz's testimony before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology, and Homeland Security.

In his book, Schwartz says that, according to Shaykh Hisham Kabbini, the president of the Islamic Supreme Council of America (ISCA), "80 percent of American mosques are run by Wahhabi imams directly subsidized by Saudi Arabia" (Schwartz 259). Despite his claims, Schwartz lists no supporting documents or evidence in the book's bibliography. Apparently, this statement originated in Kabbini's testimony before a Senate Committee in 1999. His testimony, or any other evidence, is not available from government websites or the Islamic Supreme Council of America, an organization headed by Kabbini. Even Kabbini, the ultimate source of these claims, offers no proof of his statements. The claim that Wahhabis control the majority of American mosques is clearly unfounded.

Schwartz's claims that a majority of American mosques are under the control of the Saudi government and Wahhabism are unsubstantiated (Schwartz). Nevertheless, his assertions about the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) do have some evidence. Schwartz claims ISNA and its subsidiary, the North American Islamic Trust (NAIT)

operate "at least 324 mosques" and that the organization is "one of the chief conduits through which the radical Saudi form of Islam passes into the United States" (Schwartz Senate 3, Klein). According to the NAIT website, the organization holds the titles to "approximately 300 properties of Islamic centers and schools." With the estimated total of 1,879 mosques in America, this leaves NAIT with the deeds to six percent of American mosques, rather than 80 percent (Pew). As to their level of control over the mosques, NAIT states that they do "not administer these institutions" or interfere with their daily management. Nevertheless, the agreement also "requires NAIT to preserve [the mosque] to serve the Muslim community in the cause of Islam" (NAIT). This preservation has taken different forms, though Schwartz claims that this clause means NAIT, and therefore Saudi Wahhabis, can dictate how the mosque is operated. Schwarz and others portray Wahhabis as initially gaining control through "mosque takeover." Accounts of this phenomenon are told in dramatic narratives with little evidence.

The typical story begins when "Saudi representatives offer . . . to subsidize a new mosque" that may include a school or community center. The Saudi representatives then offer a "maintenance subsidy" and begin to take over the board of directors (Alexiev). Saudi-Wahhabi chosen imams are installed, literature is distributed, and speakers are brought in to "further radicalize the members" (Alexiev). The Wahhabis then direct zakat funds towards terrorism or their proselytization efforts. This particular anecdote was taken from the testimony of Alex Alexiev before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology, and Homeland Security. Alexiev offers absolutely no evidence or even specific examples of "mosque takeover" by Saudi-Wahhabi Muslims. Though a

description with few details epitomizes the usual accounts of mosque takeover, a report from the Chicago Tribune is the exception.

The Tribune article provides a similar description of a takeover occurring at the Bridgeview mosque in Chicago. A group of Palestinian immigrants began to fundraise locally to build a mosque in the area, but they completed the mosque only after large donations from Kuwait, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. Eventually, the original leadership was voted out and the mosque's title was given to NAIT. A more conservative-leaning leadership took power, including an imam who receives a $2,000 stipend from the Saudi government and was educated in Saudi Arabia. Even though the original leaders were voted out, the new leadership has proved widely popular (Ahmed).

The presence of Saudi money and education is verified, but it is unclear to what, if any, extent Saudi Wahhabis orchestrated the events at Bridgeview. Even so, it seems from this example that some version of Alexiev's model of mosque takeover occurred in the Bridgeview mosque. Thus, there is proof of Saudi money funding a conservative mosque. Nevertheless, correlation does not imply causation. This anecdotal incident has only been clearly documented once on American soil. One incident does not justify statements that declare Wahhabis "have come to dominate Islam in the U.S." or that methods are needed to aid "mainstream American Muslims in taking their community back from these extremists" (Schwartz Senate 5). These statements exaggerate the amount of mosques associated with the ISNA and the level of control they exert. Furthermore, these types of statements imply that Muslims are powerless to direct the course of their theology and mosques. It would be constructive to examine institutions

with proven Saudi ties and the true impact of those connections, rather than relying on assumptions.

Claims made by a 2005 Freedom House Report

Next, an important document cited in support of the position that Saudi Wahhabism significantly affects American Muslims will be investigated. This document claims to be the constructive investigation of Saudi influence on American Islam mentioned before. In 2005, Freedom House published a document entitled "Saudi Publications on Hate Ideology Invade American Mosques." The study was commissioned in response to "publicly raised concerns about Saudi state influence on American religious life" (Freedom 2). The study states that over 200 documents were obtained, 90 percent of which were printed in Arabic, in "more than a dozen mosques" from Oakland, Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, Houston, Washington, and New York (Freedom 2). Publications were only included in the study if they had at least two links to Saudi Arabia. Accepted links to the Saudis included if the publication was an "official publication of a government ministry, distributed by the Saudi embassy, written by religious officials in appointed state positions within Saudi Arabia, or disseminated by a Saudi-sponsored mosque or representative of the established Wahhabi ideology of Saudi Arabia (Freedom 3).

The authors admit that they "did not attempt a general survey of American mosques" and that they made no determination whether mosques "endorsed any of these materials" or "were even aware of their presence" (Freedom 2,78). These caveats aside,

the study describes Saudi literature as a "principal educational resource on Islam for Muslims in America" and that such literature is found "coast to coast and now fill[s] the libraries and study halls of some of America's main mosques" (Freedom 1,12). The study goes on to say that these publications are "being mainstreamed" and "demonstrate the ongoing indoctrination of Muslims in the United States" as well as "pose a grave threat . . . to the Muslim community" (Freedom 16,12,14). Though the authors excuse themselves of speaking to the conditions in American mosques, their statements clearly show that they believe Saudi publications are widespread and significantly affect many American Muslims.

The publications obtained in the study preach against Muslims living, befriending, or celebrating with Jews and Christians. Judaism and Christianity are condemned, as well as Sufi and Shia Islam. The literature obtained also promotes jihad[3] and encourages Muslims to live in the land of the infidels only if absolutely necessary. Others told Muslims not to become American citizens or wear graduation robes. The publications also address Jewish conspiracies and the subordinate status of women (Freedom). While the evidence that Saudi hate literature exists and is prevalent in American mosques seems convincing at first glance, a closer look at the study reveals many problems.

To begin, the scope of the study must be addressed. The authors listed that over a dozen mosques were surveyed; in fact, the authors surveyed three additional mosques for a total of 15 out of almost 2,000 mosques estimated to exist in America (Pew 1). Furthermore, a CAIR document, published in response to the Freedom House report, listed the number of books cited in the report as 41 and listed the total number of books in circulation at the mosques in question as 29,500 (CAIR 6,7). A study of less than one

percent of American mosques and less than one percent of the literature at those mosques cannot accurately speak to Saudi literature being "the principal education resource on Islam."

Next, the content of the material should be examined. While some excerpts from the selected literature are shown in context, many are not. For a truly accurate understanding of the Saudi publications, it is necessary to explain the context of cited quotes and any positive statements. Furthermore, most of the publications studied were in Arabic. Freedom House obtained translations from "two independent translators" not listed in the report because of security concerns (Freedom 1). The report also states the Arabic documents are available from Freedom House, but they are not available for download on their website (Freedom 5). [4] Allowing public access to the Arabic documents would allow other groups to verify the accuracy of the translations.

Finally, Freedom House's assumption that Saudi literature significantly affects American Muslims needs to be reexamined. Freedom House reported that 90 percent of the publications studied were in Arabic (Freedom 2). An estimated 767,000 Americans are fluent in Arabic, and there are an estimated 5 million Muslims in America (U.S.). Assuming, incorrectly, that all Muslims are fluent in Arabic, we are left with only 15 percent of Muslims fluent in Arabic. [5] Since 90 percent of the publications studied were printed in Arabic, it is impossible that the majority of American Muslims have read them when visiting the mosques in question.

Another way to examine the affect of Saudi literature is to compare the content of the literature found in a mosque and the practices of its leaders and members. Publications found at the Muslim Community Center (MCC) in Chicago argued that

moderate Muslims "march to change what is left of religious civil laws, under the claim of the freedom of women and their equality with men" (Freedom 34,72). Assuming accurate translation and proper contextual reading, this publication declares women inferior to men. Even though this publication can be found at MCC, four women sit on the board of directors (CAIR 5). The presence of women board members shows that this mosque does not preach the inferiority of women just because there is a publication in the mosque that does.

Next, the Islamic Society of Greater Houston (ISGH) can be considered. The report found that the mosque contained literature such as *Islamic Guidelines to Reform the Individual and the Society*. This publication states that supporting "Jews, Christians, and communists against Muslims" nullifies one's Islam (Freedom 22). Another article found in Houston argues that verses in the Qur'an that seem favorable to Christians "only pertain to a group . . . and the cursing of Christians is still acceptable, same as the cursing of the Jews" (Freedom 28). Again, accepting the translation as accurate and reading without any context, it is a fact that anti-Christian publications were found in the ISGH. Nevertheless, the presence of these publications is not a predictor for the behavior of the society's leaders or members. In fact, the ISGH has hosted 25 interfaith meetings and took part in a food drive with local Christian churches, raising a total of 6,000 pounds of food (CAIR 5).

The authors admit that they made no effort to tell if the 15 mosques studied supported the documents or knew that they existed. Likewise, they did not utilize a representative sample but relied on broad generalizations. It is impossible for a study that claims not to have investigated the mosque's position on Saudi literature to say such

literature "demonstrate[s] the ongoing indoctrination of Muslims" (Freedom 12). Though the authors rightly suggest that the effect of the literature of American Muslims is beyond the scope of the study, they simultaneously make statements that imply the opposite. The Freedom House report exemplifies the inaccurate portrayal of Saudi Wahhabism dominating American Muslims.

Accusations from writers such as Pipes and Schwartz are unconvincing in their efforts to show Saudi Wahhabi domination of American Muslims. Although enormous amounts of Saudi funding exist, the presence of Saudi funding does not necessarily mean Saudi control. The fictitious claims that CAIR is a front for Wahhabis and that Saudis control American mosques have been examined and found unconvincing. Furthermore, the notion that hateful Saudi publications are a major educational resource for American Muslims is false. The principal error of writers who make such claims rely on inadequate evidence and the fallacy that correlation implies causation. By examining common allegations, it becomes plainly clear that there is simply not enough evidence to prove that Saudi Wahhabism, brought to America in the form of Saudi funding for American institutions and individuals, significantly affects American Muslims.

Footnotes

1. The shahada, or Profession of Faith, is a declaration of a Muslim's belief in the unity of God and the acceptance of Muhammad as God's messenger. The declaration is included in the Muslim call to prayer and is one of the Five Pillars, or core practices, of Islam (PBS).

2. Emir is an Arabic term that means prince, ruler, or commander.

3. Jihad is an Arabic term that means struggle. The role of the concept of jihad is hotly debated among scholars of Islam. Some Muslims stress that jihad refers only to an internal struggle against evil. Others believe that Muslims are called to use violence against non-Muslims, and some also believe that violent jihad is only acceptable in the defense of Muslims after an aggressive attack. Jihad is not necessarily violent and is interpreted differently by different Muslims.

4. There was no data available on the number of American Muslims who are fluent in Arabic. I found 15 percent by dividing the number of Americans who spoke Arabic fluently by an estimate of the number of Muslims in America. While estimates on the number of Muslims in America vary, I believe my calculation is accurate.

5. I was unable to find the source documents on Freedom House's website. They also did not respond to an email I sent requesting access to the files.

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