

## The Wahhabi Invasion of Africa

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“Nilikuonyesha nyota na uliangalia kidole tu.”

***“I pointed out the stars to you, and all you saw was the tip of my finger.”—Tanzanian proverb.***

Africa is beset by multiple problems with security issues at the top of the list. Unable to provide the basic needs (which include freedom and justice) for their people, and not being able to exercise full control over their territory, many African countries are falling victims to transnational crimes and terrorism. Extremists have turned people against each other in such a brutal way that restoring harmony has become an impossible task in some countries. From the Gulf of Aden to the Atlantic coast across, from North Africa to the southern end of sub-Saharan Africa, large swaths of territory have become ungovernable. In 2015, 19 of the world’s 25 failed states were in Africa.<sup>1</sup>

This article is not about religion! It is about politics and how religious fanatics want to seize political power and control peoples’ lives. But the greater society refuses to allow this. People are defending their rights to live and exercise freedom of choice. The extremists are well funded, determined and organized. Battles in the war are raging. The war will spread and escalate and chaos risks becoming the norm, an existential dagger driven into the heart of Africa.

This article deals with the role that Saudi Arabia and its brand of Islam (Wahhabism) are playing in destabilizing Africa. The Saudi version of Islam is the product of mid 18 century fundamentalist theologian Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab. He preached a strict interpretation of Islam, condemned other interpretations and innovations. He saw western values and civilization as abhorrently evil. In 1744, Ab al- Wahhab entered into a political agreement with Mohammed bin Saudi, warlord and ruler of Diryah, around today’s Riyadh. This is the foundation of modern Saudi Arabia. Since the independence of Saudi Arabia in 1932, the two families have ruled the country with the Koran as the constitution of the kingdom. Bin Saudi descendants are kings and Imams (spiritual leaders), while Ab al- Wahhab’s descendants are the Ulama, religious advisers to the kings.

‘Wahhabism’ demands conformity to the Wahhabi ideology and unquestioned allegiance to one leader. “Abd al-Wahhab demanded conformity — a conformity that was to be demonstrated in physical and tangible ways. He argued that all Muslims must individually pledge their allegiance to a single Muslim leader (a Caliph, if there were one). Those who would not conform to this view should be killed, their wives and daughters violated, and their possessions confiscated, he wrote. The list of apostates meriting death included the Shiite, Sufis and other Muslim denominations, whom Abd al-Wahhab did not consider to be Muslim at all.

To achieve his aims, Abd al- Wahhab and his followers massacred Shiites, destroyed many Shiite shrines, plundered the tomb of Imam Hussein, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad, and attacked the Holy City of Karbala. A British official, Lieutenant Francis Warden, observing the situation at the time, wrote: “they pillaged the whole of it (Karbala), and plundered the tomb of Hussein...slaying in the course of the day, with circumstances of peculiar cruelty, above five thousand of the inhabitants”<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/17/fragile-states-2015->

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/theworldpost/>

Their overall objective has been to bring people they capture into submission just like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Alistair Cooke notes that “Saudi Arabia was founded with terrorism.....There is nothing here that separates ‘Wahhabism’ from ISIS. The rift would emerge only later. From the subsequent institutionalization of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s doctrine of “one ruler, one authority, one mosque” these three pillars being taken respectively to refer to the Saudi king, the absolute authority of official ‘Wahhabism’...it is this rift –the ISIS denial of these three pillars on which the whole of Sunni authority presently rests-makes ISIS, which in all other aspects conforms to Wahhabism, a deep threat to Saudi Arabia”.<sup>3</sup>

The leader of the grand mosque of Mecca, Adel Al Kalbani, stated on BBC in May 2009 that all Shia Muslims were apostate, unbelievers, and as such should be hunted down and killed.<sup>4</sup> This Wahhabi ideology and its practice in Saudi Arabia has also become the guiding ideology of al Qaeda and its affiliates, Boko Haram, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQIM), al Shabaab, and ISIS. “For five decades, Saudi Arabia has been the official sponsor of Sunni Salafism (Wahhabism) across the globe. Such entities have been lavishly supported by the Saudi government which has appointed emissaries to its embassies in Muslim countries who proselytize for Salafism.”<sup>5</sup>

‘Wahhabism’ and Salafism are distinct in some ways. ‘Wahhabism’ rejects modern thoughts and practices and Salafism attempts to reconcile Islam with modernism. However both adhere to a ‘fundamentalist’ interpretation of the Holy Koran. Although Salafism and ‘Wahhabism’ seem to be distinct in their practice of Islam: “Faisal’s (Saudi king, 1964-75) embrace of Salafi pan-Islamism resulted in cross-pollination between ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s teachings on tawhid, shirk and bid’a and Salafi interpretations of ahadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad). Some Salafis nominated ibn Abd al-Wahhab as one of the Salaf (retrospectively bringing Wahhabism into the fold of Salafism), and the Muwahideen began calling themselves Salafis.”<sup>6</sup>

## **Islam in Africa**

Islam came to Africa at about the same time it emerged in the Arabian Peninsula. The first Muslims immigrated to modern day Ethiopia in 615 AD in order to escape persecution. As the teachings of Mohamed the Prophet became more popular, many tribes in Mecca, including Mohammed’s own tribe, the Quraysh, saw him as a threat to their leadership. When Mohamed refused to stop his preaching, the leadership persecuted his followers, some of whom were forced to leave Mecca.

The Prophet Mohammad “realized that he could not protect his followers from this persecution and told them to go to the Habesha, (modern day Ethiopia and Eritrea).”<sup>7</sup> That was the first “hijra” (migration) in Islam’s history. There has been a continuous Muslim presence in Africa ever since, with the Muslim population, for the most part, peacefully co-existing with local traditions and other religions.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/theworldpost/>

<sup>4</sup> BBC Arabic Live, 28 April 2015

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.globalresearch.ca/why-does-the-u-s-support-saudi-arabia-a-country-which-hosts-and-finances-islamic-terrorism-on-behalf-of-washington/5398408>

<sup>6</sup> Trevor Stanley, Understanding the Origins of Wahhabism and Salafism, Publication: Terrorism Monitor Volume: 3 Issue: 14, July 15, 2005

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.al-islam.org/restatement-history-islam-and-muslims-sayyid-ali-ashgar-razwy/two-migrations-muslims-abyssinia>

Islam's expansion in Africa was largely nonviolent and gradual. Islam came to Africa not to replace or eliminate local traditions, but to use it as a means to establish connections with people who are far away from the Arabian Peninsula, non-Arabs that did not speak Arabic, and were without a monolithic culture. This resulted in the diversity of the practice of Islam in Africa. The kind of Islam that was largely practiced in Africa was Sufism. Sufism accepted and promoted the fusion of pre-Islamic beliefs and new Islamic principles of faith, uniting people of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

In contrast to this traditional practice of Islam in Africa, Wahhabi ideology attempts to reduce a heterogeneous civilization into a monolithic religious culture. Africans are traditionally defined by cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, and find this kind of hegemony offensive. Thus, the Islam that was practiced in Africa became different from what is practiced in Saudi Arabia. Mali's history as the center of Qur'anic studies, as well as the intellectual and spiritual capital of African Islam, makes it a good illustration of this difference. The Malian version of Islam has historically been peaceful, and was the driving force behind the propagation of Islam throughout Africa in the 15th and 16th centuries. Timbuktu was an Islamic center long before the birth of Abd al-Wahhab in the Arabian Peninsula and the birth of the country known as Saudi Arabia. In his study entitled 'The African Vortex' David McCormack writes "In its traditional African form, (Islam) is entirely a part of the African cultural heritage and thus an African reality."<sup>8</sup>

This changed with the discovery of oil in the Arabian Peninsula and the flourishing of the oil business. With access to almost unlimited wealth, Saudi Arabia started its campaign of "Wahhabization" in earnest. In Africa, perhaps more than elsewhere, the Wahhabi brand of Islam became a challenge to the roots of African identity.

### **Sufism: A Part of African Religious Tradition**

Sufism emerged in the Middle East in the 12th century and then spread to Africa. Sufism's mystical approach to Islam was easily integrated into the African tradition because it permitted, and perhaps promoted, the fusion of pre-Islamic beliefs with new Islamic principles of faith. "In fact the rooting of Sufism in the spiritual landscape began to translate into a very elaborate transaction inexorably intertwined with social structures, matrimonial rules (including the preeminence of matrilineage and power of women in some regions), and with the ties and rituals of local religions."<sup>9</sup>

One leading example of African Muslim philosophers who preached, wrote and spread the Sufi message of peace and tolerance is Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba, founder of the Mouride brotherhood in Senegal. Bamba and his followers reinforced the practice of Sufism as a peaceful, tolerant, yet adaptable Islamic force. As seen in many countries and communities in East and West Africa, Sufism presented Islam as a religion that could peacefully coexist, both with other civilizations and with modernity. Sheikh Bamba writes: "The true warrior in God's path is not he who kills his enemies, but he who combats his ego (nafs) to achieve spiritual perfection...Indeed, the toughest Jihad consists in hindering one's mind from ever involving in aught (thought?) that is not proper."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> David McCormack, *An African Vortex: Islam in Sub-Sahara Africa*, Wash DC, Center for Security Policy, 2005

<sup>9</sup> Mamadou Diouf, *Tolerance Democracy and Sufism in Senegal*

<sup>10</sup> Abdul Azia Mbacke, *Jihad for Peace: Exploring the Philosophy of Shekh Ahmadou Bamba, The African Muslim Leader of Non Violence (1853-1927)*

These principles contrast with the political and violent form of Islamic extremism preached by Wahhabists. Wahhabi ideology is based on the union of politics and faith and requires the enforcement of religious practices through political power. In contrast, Sufism, as practiced in Africa, promotes tolerance and respect for other religions. In Africa as in Pakistan and many other Middle Eastern countries, Sufism has therefore been under sustained attacks by Wahhabis since the times of Abd al Wahhab. In Mali as well as in Somalia the resistance to the Saudi brand of Islam is alive but faces great challenge from the highly resourced sheiks and mosques operating in the communities most vulnerable. The Africa Report writes about these challenges in Mali: “A new group of Sufi leaders has launched a campaign to win over Mali’s young Muslims, who are being courted by a wave of conservative preachers backed by money from Saudi Arabia and Qatar...who have set up clinics and religious schools in Mali and have been winning support from communities frustrated by the lack of government backing for social welfare projects”<sup>11</sup> Locals all over Africa repeat these stories that are being told.

Saudi Arabia has promoted Wahhabism in Africa in numerous ways. One example is through education. Textbooks used in Wahhabi schools all over the world are “virulent and hate-filled.”<sup>12</sup> A book found in the King Fahd mosque distributed by the Saudi Embassy in Washington, DC, and published by the Saudi Government reads: “Be dissociated from the infidels, hate them for their religion, leave them, never rely on them for support, do not admire them in every way according to Islamic law”.<sup>13</sup>

These are the same textbooks that Saudi Arabia exports freely to all its sponsored schools in Africa. The Saudi religious leaders preach and justify slavery as an integral part of Islam. Although the kingdom officially abolished slavery in 1962 under great pressure from the United Nations, the Saudi clergies still believe that slavery is part of Islam. Most recently Sheikh Al-Fewze, a member of the council of clerics, Saudi Arabia’s highest religious body, declared “slavery is a part of Islam” and “slavery is part of Jihad and will remain as long as there is Islam”.<sup>14</sup>

‘Wahhabism’ also violates basic human rights by denying women the rights to freely talk, dress, work, drive, communicate, and play. Additionally, there is nothing resembling religious freedom in Saudi Arabia. The country allows no churches, and no Christians are allowed to worship, while at the same time it builds hundreds of mosques, most notably, in Africa. In 2013, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia - the top Islamic official - declared it necessary to destroy all churches in the region.<sup>15</sup>

Police routinely search houses for Christians holding bible studies in their homes. Human Rights Watch, World Report 2015, listed the violations, primarily systematic discrimination against women and religious minorities...lack of protection of the rights of 9 million foreign workers...unfair trials and arbitrary detention...and criminalization of any form of peaceful criticisms of authorities as terrorism.<sup>16</sup> Many experts and historians have written about the similarities between ISIS and Saudi Arabia in their ideology and methods they use to enforce their brand of Islam.

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<sup>11</sup> The Africa Report 12 August 2015

<sup>13</sup> Saudi Arabia: Friend or Foe in the War on Terror, Hudson Institute, Nov 2005, Nina Shea

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.crethiplethi.com/slavery-is-a-part-of-islam/global-islam/2010/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.mnnonline.org/news/saudi-arabia-declares-destruction-of-all-churches-in-region/>

<sup>16</sup> Human Rights Watch, World Report 2015

## Across Africa – ‘Wahhabism’ is on the Offensive

### *Somalia*

I have lived and worked with rural Somali communities (in the Ogaden) for many years and count many Somalis as my friends. I have found Somalis of all generations to be open and liberal-minded. They practice a flexible version of Sufi Islam and are unique in Africa because they are bonded by one language, and have no tribes but only clans. Located along one of the most strategic places in the world, Somalia had all the ingredients to establish a united peaceful country. However, Somalia’s ambition to unite all Somali people including those living in Djibouti, Ethiopia (Ogaden), Kenya (Northern Frontier District - NFD) into a Greater Somalia has brought it into collision with Ethiopia and to some degree with Kenya and Djibouti, and planted the seeds of clan and religious war which ultimately led to the collapse of the state.

No historian could have predicted that the centuries of unity and open-mindedness of the Somali people would be shattered in such a short, brutal period of time. Yet it happened, with the help of a country that has an tremendous amount of money and is capable of exerting enormous pressure while imposing a rabid version of Islam.

In whatever way Islam first came to Somalia, it has been present since the time of the Prophet Mohammad, where, for the most part, the people of the Horn of Africa coexisted. It is widely known that the model of Islam embraced by Somalis was Sunni, and the most dominant was Sufi mixed with Somali pastoralist tradition. Sharia was never institutionalized and, because of the way of life of the Somalis as pastoralists, the practice of Islam was guided more by customary law than practices prescribed by any single school of thought.

In 1953 an Institute of Islamic Studies run by Egyptian scholars from Cairo’s al-Azhar University was established in Mogadishu. This created the first official contact with the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood in Cairo. After Somalia’s independence in 1960, “Saudi religious and educational institutions—especially the Islamic University of Medina, the Umm al-Qura University in Mecca, and the Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh—joined al-Azhar in offering scholarships to the graduates of these institutions.”<sup>17</sup> The scholars in the al-Azhar were, according to David McCormick, ‘Wahhabi inspired’. Somali students in these universities were treated with generous benefits and financial assistances, including free accommodation and food, pocket money, marriage allowances and yearly round-trip tickets.

Despite this, tolerance and peace continued to be the landmark characteristics of Somali Muslims. Somali women never wore the veil, preferring their own traditional dress while they worked alongside men. In fact, women play a key role in the administration of family and community affairs among Somali nomadic peoples.<sup>18</sup>

Islamism was a gradual phenomenon that appeared after independence in 1960. In the 1980s and 90s, the government of President Said Barre played a role in suppressing Islamist movement wherever it appeared. “As a result of oppression and prosecution, many Islamic activists fled to Afghanistan,

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<sup>17</sup> “Somalia,” World Almanac of Islamism, accessed October 4, 2013. (<http://almanac.afpc.org/Somalia>)

<sup>18</sup> History of Islamic Militancy in Somalia Part 3,” Somali Freethinkers, accessed October 4, 2013. (<http://somalifreethinkers.blogspot.com/2010/09/history-of-islamic-militancy-in-somalia.html>)

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Egypt, and the Persian Gulf states, gaining employment there and education in the Islamic universities in these countries.”<sup>19</sup>

Even in the early 90s, people did not notice radical Islam was spreading its tentacles in the Somali community in typical Muslim Brotherhood-organization style, and waiting for the right moment to strike. Somali journalist Bashir Goth reflects of the period of early 1990s: "The Ulema of Dilla represented a generation and a time when Islam and the Somali culture lived together in perfect harmony... when being Somali and Muslim was an indivisible whole... It was a time when the message of tolerance and peace prevailed... One could pray occasionally, or never pray at all, fast in the month of Ramadan or never fast at all, make a pilgrimage to Mecca or never do it at all; but would forever consider oneself a true follower of Islam, knowing that to be a Muslim is a bond between man and God and that one's faith is not answerable to anyone else.”<sup>20</sup>

During the last days of Siad Barre’s regime, the Islamist took advantage of the chaos and the rise of radical groups like al-Ittihad and al-Islah. These groups surfaced and started preaching openly. After the fall of Said Barre, Somalia disintegrated and degenerated into a state of lawlessness ruled by rival warlords. Many Somalis who had been studying in Saudi Arabia and Egypt returned to join the Islamist groups in the armed struggle to fill the vacuum and take over state power. It was during this crisis and the ensuing clan warfare that ‘Wahhabism’ found an opportunity to mobilize people and unite them under one religious and political power.

After the collapse of the state and the complete disintegration of Somalia, the desperate Somalis looked to the US but were not saved from the onslaught of extremism. America abandoned them after two US Black Hawk helicopters were shot down. The counterterrorism operation launched to destroy the Somali insurgents was aborted and turned into a rescue operation. Surrounded by Somali insurgents, the Americans fought hard but were left with 18 Americans dead, and 70 wounded. The Americans pulled out from Somalia.

Amidst the continuing civil war, Somalia tried to establish a central government. Successive transitional governments failed and in the process a new more radicalized and more organized militant Islamist organization called the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) came to power in 2006. In 2007, the UIC gave way to the emergence of Al-Shabaab and Hizb-al-Islam which changed the entire security and political situation of Somalia and, indeed, the region.

Then began the destruction of Sufi shrines, including graves and mosques in Southern Somalia. The BBC reports, “Since they began to capture large swathes of southern Somalia, radical Islamists have been undertaking a program of destroying mosques and the graves of revered religious leaders from the Sufi branch of Islam.”<sup>21</sup> Many Sufi Muslims were attacked, including the elites, the preachers, and those with great influence were forced to go into hiding resulting in the collapse, both of the traditional system,

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<sup>19</sup> “History of Islamic Militancy in Somalia Part 3,” Somali Freethinkers, accessed October 4, 2013. (<http://somalifreethinkers.blogspot.com/2010/09/history-of-islamic-militancy-in-somalia.html>)

<sup>20</sup> “Wahhabism, the Enemy of Islam?” Front Page Mag, accessed October 4, 2013. (<http://archive.frontpagemag.com/readArticle.aspx?ARTID=15069>)

<sup>21</sup> Mohamed, “Somali Rage at Grave Desecration,” BBC, June 8, 2009. (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8077725.stm>)

and the state apparatus. A US State Department report indicates that two Sufi clerics were beheaded in Balad in March 2009.<sup>22</sup>

During this civil war, hundreds of thousands of Somalis were internally displaced and put out of work, while many others fled in search of food and peace. Unfortunately, some of this help came from extremist groups. For example, Somalis suffering from the civil war have reported that representatives of the Saudi charity organization known as the Muslim World League's (MWL), have pressured Somalis with offerings of humanitarian aid to change their Islamic practices from traditional Sufi interpretations to "the true Islamic way."<sup>23</sup> As a result, the overwhelming majority of Somalis – in one way or another – developed some sort of affinity for Islamic extremism, destroying the tolerance of Somali society.

In Mogadishu the resurgence of Sufism since al Shabaab's recent expulsion is palpable. "With Allah's wish, we are here free and worshipping today," said Sheik Abdullahi Osman, a Sufi cleric. But 'Wahhabism' is alive and thriving in Somalia in many forms, and is now pervasive in Somali society. Somalia has forever changed. The Wahhabists will continue the fight for political power in Somalia and for regional hegemony to ensure that the entire Somali people, in all neighboring countries, will be united under one Islamic 'Greater Somalia' state to be used as a staging ground for their next target, neighboring Ethiopia.

### *Senegal*

Senegal has a slightly different experience with Wahhabism. In Senegal 95% of the population are Muslims and less than 5% are Christians. The two faiths have historically coexisted harmoniously. Despite being part of a minority, when Senegal became independent in 1962, its first President, Léopold Sédar Senghor, was a devout Catholic. Senghor was the first African president to hand his presidency to a democratically elected successor. The presidents that succeeded him were Muslims; their wives were Catholics. In this way, Senegal is a model of inter-faith relation in Africa. This harmony, promoted by Senegal's tradition of Sufism is eroding as extremism infiltrates the region. Senegal has now become very vulnerable to Wahhabi influence.

"More and more, fundamentalist groups, such as al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb [AQIM], are tapping into national causes and giving them a religious spin, to create national ideologies - that is part of their new strategy," said an Imam in the Dakar neighborhood of SICAP Baobab, who preferred anonymity.<sup>24</sup>

Some reports indicate that several Senegalese who have returned home after attending radical Islam schools in Mecca are criticizing the Sufi order and trying to popularize the Wahhabi school of thought. Further, there is a dual school system; one system recognized by the government and the other system established and funded by the private sector, which has created duplicity of education and an opportunity for the Wahhabi school of thought to flourish without restraint.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> US Department of State, "2009 Human Rights Report: Somalia," March 11, 2010. (<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/af/135976.htm>)

<sup>23</sup> Teresa Harings, "The Muslim World League: Creeping Wahhhabi Colonialism?" Tel Aviv Notes, the Moshe Dayan Center. ([http://www.aftau.org/site/DocServer/TANotes\\_Muslim\\_Harings.pdf?docID=17261](http://www.aftau.org/site/DocServer/TANotes_Muslim_Harings.pdf?docID=17261))

<sup>24</sup> Senegal Looking More Vulnerable to Extremism, Instability," IRIN NEWS, May 30, 2013. (<http://www.irinnews.org/report/98122/senegal-looking-more-vulnerable-to-extremism-instability>)

<sup>25</sup> "Senegal between Islamic Confraternities and the Islamist Drift," Invisible Dog, May 17, 2013. ([http://invisible-dog.com/senegal\\_islam\\_eng.html](http://invisible-dog.com/senegal_islam_eng.html))

Saudi Arabia has built many mosques in Senegal and it is mostly through these mosques that the Wahhabi ideology is being preached. One Muslim cleric said, "If we took money from the Saudis to build our mosques, we'd have to pray the way they wanted,"<sup>26</sup>. Money seems to play an important factor in the conversion of many people to 'Wahhabism'. Senegal's failing economy and vast number of unemployed youths has left the country vulnerable to extremists. Extremist elements within the urban areas are propagating the idea that an alternative political system in the form of political Islam can bring economic prosperity to the frustrated population.

### *Mali*

In Mali, Sufi scholars for centuries taught an Islamic message of love, peace and tolerance, a message that was integrated into the local way of life. While Malians never succumbed to Islamic extremism, the country has become vulnerable due to the combination of famine, weak government and a Tuareg rebellion caused by regional instability, specifically in Libya. In early 2013 Sunni Islamists took advantage of the Tuareg rebellion, overtook the Northern part of the country, created an alliance with the rebels, established Sharia law, and destroyed the rich heritage in Timbuktu and in other areas under their control. The ideology of intolerance was Wahhabi and al Qaeda inspired and linked to the usual suspect, Saudi Arabia. Al Qaeda (AQIM) has claimed responsibilities for the most recent attack on Radisson Blu hotel in Bamako, which killed 19 people.

"The people of this country have been religious for over ten centuries," said Imam Mahamoud Dicko, President of the Islamic High Council of Mali, "We have our Islamic system, we worship God. This is nonsense what they are doing in the North — cutting hands, stoning people."<sup>27</sup> Another charismatic leader known as Sheikh Cherif Ousmane Madani Haïdara, who represents the version of Islam most Malians identify with, says: "We don't need their Sharia. We have been Muslims here for centuries. Mali is a secular country. We live with Christians, we live with Jews, and we live with animists. We are all Malians together here [and] Islamists in the north have destroyed historical structures, including centuries old shrines, mosques, schools and libraries, and have amputated limbs, instituted public floggings and beheadings."<sup>28</sup>

New Sufi Islamic leaders have emerged determined to win over young Muslims, who are being relentlessly indoctrinated by a concerted and resourced efforts of preachers who, according to them, are funded by Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Among them is Cherif Ousmane Madani Haïdara who states that "Groupement des Leaders Spirituels Musulmans du Mali (GLSM) is trying to eradicate the mentality that Wahhabi groups are implanting in the future generation..... seeks to persuade the youth that Islam is not this kind of extremism that they [Wahhabi proselytizers] are trying to disseminate".<sup>29</sup>

Thierno Amadou Diallo, the minister for religious affairs, says "wealthy sponsors of the Wahhabi groups are behind their growing influence. For example, the Saudi Arabian-based World Assembly of Muslim

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel Flynn, "Senegal's Muslim Brotherhood Preaches Hard Work," Reuters, May 15, 2007.

(<http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/05/16/us-senegal-religion-mourides-idUSL1540748820070516>)

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/in-mali-imams-and-rebels-clash-over-islamic-doctrine/article4313510.ece>

<sup>28</sup> Thomas C. Mountain, "Mali, Wahhabis, and Saudis: Following the Money Trail," Foreign Policy Journal, January 4, 2013. (<http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2013/01/04/mali-wahhabis-and-saudis-following-the-money-trail/>)

<sup>29</sup> Mali: Faith and the fightback By Rose Skelton in Bamako, The Africa Report, 12 August 2015



Youth (WAMU) has built a huge Islamic education centre in Bamako to propagate the strict Wahhabi interpretation of Islam..... There has been no control of funding from religious organisations..... The state is weak, so religious non-governmental organisations play their part."<sup>30</sup>

Foreign Policy Journal says, "Every Wahhabi movement that has been competently investigated has been tied to the Saudis, in most cases to the almost 30,000 strong Saudi royal family and the Mali Wahhabis are no exception."<sup>31</sup> A Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) report shows the Mali Army with captured documents proving wire transfers from Saudi Arabia to the Islamic terrorists in Mali.<sup>32</sup>

Another report states that, "Islamic militants associated with Ansar Dine, and al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb [AQIM] are "recruiting" young Tuareg boys with promises of food to eat (a luxury for some in Mali) and money, are teaching them to hate the West and use weapons in a network of madrassas or religious schools, funded by our friends in Saudi Arabia and Qatar."<sup>33</sup>

During the invasion of Mali by the radical Islamists from the Northern part of the country, the UN chief Ban-ki Moon discussed the Malian crisis with leaders of Qatar and Saudi Arabia.<sup>34</sup> This is a rather blunt indication of the involvement of Saudi Arabia and Qatar in the conflict in Mali.

"There is plenty of evidence pointing to the fact that Saudi money is financing the various Salafist groups," said Samir Amghar, author of "Le salafisme d'aujourd'hui. Mouvements sectaires en Occident" (Contemporary Salafism: Sectarian movements in the West) and according to Antoine Basbous, who heads the Paris-based Observatory of Arab Countries, "the Salafism we hear about in Mali and North Africa is in fact the exported version of Wahhabism." The Saudis have been financing [Wahhabism] around the world to the tune of several million euros," Basbous told FRANCE 24.

Mali's problem will not be solved by a rushed election that does not take into account the realities and threats of Radical Islam in the region. Mali faces an existentialist threat and this must be addressed not through cosmetic changes of government, but through a strategy that explores the fundamental sources of the problem and an interfaith dialogue to challenge the agenda of Saudi Arabia in Mali and elsewhere in Africa.

### *Kenya*

Radical Islam arrived in Kenya in two ways: the Northern part of Kenya with a sizable Somali population bordering Somalia, known during colonial times as the Northern Frontier District (NFD), and the Eastern coastal city of Mombasa. Since the 1990s, Muslims in Kenya have been exposed to religious radicalism from al Qaeda through its affiliate al-Jihad al-Islam (AIJ), which was fighting to establish a sharia state in Somalia, in the northern part of Kenya and the Ogaden in Eastern Ethiopia. During those times, Kenya

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<sup>30</sup> Mali: Faith and the fightback By Rose Skelton in Bamako, The Africa Report, 12 August 2015

<sup>31</sup> "Saudi Arabia Funds Islamic Terrorism in Mali," The Federalist Blog, January 30, 2013. (<http://thefederalist-gary.blogspot.com/2013/01/saudi-arabia-funds-islamic-terrorism-in.html>)

<sup>32</sup> Murad Makhmudov and Lee Jay Walker, "Islamists in Mali: Funding and Ideological Ratlines Linking Saudi Arabia and Qatar," Modern Tokyo Times, July 2, 2012. (<http://global-security-news.com/2012/07/03/islamists-in-mali-funding-and-ideological-ratlines-linking-saudi-arabia-and-qatar/>)

<sup>33</sup> <http://global-security-news.com/2012/12/24/islamists-start-destroying-more-african-islamic-culture-in-mali-saudi-arabia-and-syria/>

<sup>34</sup> "UN Chief Discusses Malian Crisis with Leaders of Qatar, Saudi Arabia," Xinhua News, July 5, 2012. ([http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-07/06/c\\_123377188.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2012-07/06/c_123377188.htm))

experienced sporadic attacks like the attack on the US embassy in Nairobi in 1998, the attack on the Israeli-owned hotel in Mombasa in 2002, and the Islamist terrorists attempt to bring down an El Al plane with surface-to-air missiles in Mombasa the same year. . AIAI leaders, who later became part of the leadership of al Shabaab, started secretly building networks in Kenya and Ethiopia. Reports indicate that “al Shabaab’s primary source of support in Kenya appears to revolve around the Pumwani Rivdha Mosque, located near Eastleigh in Nairobi. Until recently, individuals at the mosque distributed jihadist pamphlets and articles authored by Anwar al-Awlaqi, the Yemeni American member of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, who was killed by a US drone in September 2011. The cleric and his followers delivered sermons that were considered extremist and inflammatory. The victims of this venomous propaganda were mainly the Somali people in the region.

A UN report indicated that there are "extensive Kenyan networks linked to al Shabaab,"<sup>35</sup> which not only recruit and raise funds for the organization, but also conduct orientation and training events. The recent terrorist act of al Shabaab at the West Gate Mall in Nairobi could not have been conducted without the cooperation of local jihadists linked to this network. It was a terrible wakeup call to the Kenyan government, and indeed to the entire region, of the need to take a concerted coordinated regional approach to prevent such incidents from happening again and ensure that the external supporters of al Shabaab get their share of the blame and responsibilities for this atrocious crime. But it did happen again, via the terrorists attack on Garissa University in April 2015, and the killing of 147 students. The brutal handiwork of al Shabaab.

There is growing extremism at the Kenyan Coast as well, particularly in Mombasa. The Kenyan coast has a large but minority Muslim population. , Due to its geographic proximity to the Arabian Peninsula, Islam there is easily influenced by 'Wahhabists' from across the Red Sea. For years mainstream Muslim leaders have been warning of the rise of Islamist extremism and social tensions. Aboud Rogo Mohamed was on a US sanctions list for supporting Somalia’s al Shabaab militants and had allegedly encouraged local Muslims to engage in jihad. His assassination in 2012 resulted in rioting that left four people dead. In 2013 there was another riot, which resulted in the death of 4 people after Kenyan cleric Ibrahim Omar was killed. Reports from Kenya state that the killing of Ibrahim Omar “is similar to that of Aboud Rogo Mohammed the year before.”<sup>36</sup>

Kenya’s problem, like the other countries in the Horn, is intricately tied with the regional security problems and can be addressed only through regional coordination and policies.

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<sup>35</sup> David Clarke, “Kenyan Muslim Networks Fund Al Shabaab: UN Report,” Reuters, July 28, 2011. (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/07/28/ozatp-kenya-shabaab-un-idAFJJOE76R0C320110728>)

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-24395723>

## Nigeria

In Nigeria, religious radicalism can be traced to Sir Ahmadu Bello, who preached the establishment of an Islamic state in Nigeria and worked very closely with the Saudis to become instrumental in the establishment of the Muslim World League (MWL). He was appointed as the first vice president of the league.<sup>37</sup>

Bello's biographer John Praden notes, "Through this connection, Saudi money designated for religious purposes began to flow to Nigeria. Saudi gifts in 1963 and 1964 totaling \$200,000 for the work of spreading Islam apart from "unofficial donations probably amounting to millions of pounds."<sup>38</sup> With Saudi funding, the MWL has expanded to 17 countries in Africa.<sup>39</sup>

Bello recruited a firebrand preacher, Abubakar Gumi, who, with the support of MWL, established the Society of Removal of Innovation and Reestablishment of the Sunna, (known as Izala or Yan Izala) in 1978. The Izala movement was established to fight Sufism and today is one of the largest Islamic movements, not only in Nigeria, but also in neighboring Niger and Chad. Izala is particularly active in D'awa and education. The terrorist organization Boko Haram and the radical Shia preacher Zakzaky who heads the Islamic Movement Nigeria (IMN - a Hezbollah type organization<sup>40</sup>) are the movement's offspring. The Islam in Africa Organization (IAO) was founded during the OIC's Islam in Africa Conference held in Abuja in 1989. The outcome of the conference, known as the Abuja Declaration insists on "re-instating a strong and united umma" (Islamic community) in Africa and on "restoring the use of Arabic script in the vernacular." In addition: "The Conference notes the yearning of Moslems everywhere on the continent who have been deprived of their rights to be governed by the sharia and urges them to intensify efforts in the struggle to reinstate the application of the sharia (Islamic law)". Islamic intolerance in Nigeria and more generally in Africa, became more aggressive and Saudi Arabia's campaign to 'Wahhabise' Africa started in earnest after this conference and the establishment of the IAO.

Boko Haram has many overt connections to Saudi Arabia and has a constant presence there. The group was originally led by Abubakah Lawan, who later left the country to study at the University of Medina in Saudi Arabia while the next leader, Muhammad Yusuf, found refuge in Saudi Arabia to escape a Nigerian security crackdown in 2004<sup>41</sup>. Boko Haram's spokesman, Abu Qaqa, has also claimed that their leaders "travelled to Saudi Arabia and met al-Qaida there" in August 2011<sup>42</sup>. Although Ibrahim Zakzaky is now Shia, he began his political career as a Sunni fundamentalist student leader, and was first influenced by the works of Sayyid Qutb, the intellectual force behind Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, whose ideas form the basis of al Qaeda's ideology today.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.blackpast.org/gah/bello-alhaji-sir-ahmadu-1910-1966>

<sup>38</sup> African Vortex

<sup>39</sup> "External Offices," The Muslim World League, accessed October 4, 2013. (<http://en.themwl.org/MWL-external-offices>)

<sup>40</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic\\_Movement\\_\(Nigeria\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Movement_(Nigeria))

<sup>41</sup> Jacob Zenn, "Boko Haram's International Connections," CTC Sentinel, January 14, 2013. (<http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/boko-harams-international-connections>)

<sup>42</sup> Monica Mark, "Boko Haram Vows to Fight Until Nigeria Establishes Sharia Law," The Guardian, January 27, 2012. (<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/27/boko-haram-nigeria-sharia-law>)

<sup>43</sup> Ely Karmon, "The Iran/Hezbollah Strategic and Terrorist Threat to Africa," March 28, 2012. (<http://www.ict.org.il/Articles/tabid/66/Articlsid/1060/currentpage/1/Default.aspx>)

In 1999, the governor of Zamfara in Northern Nigeria declared his state to be governed by sharia law with a senior Saudi official standing by his side. Eleven other states, all of whose judges are sent to study Sharia law in Saudi Arabia, followed close.<sup>44</sup>

Because of its relationship to the Saudi state, the MWL does not receive the scrutiny that other aid organizations do. This is particularly disturbing in light of allegations that the MWL's subsidiaries have been involved in terrorist financing. In 2003, the Wall Street Journal reported the discovery of links between the MWL and al Qaeda during a raid in Bosnia, including a "handwritten account" of a meeting attended by "the Secretary General of the Muslim World League and bin Laden representatives."<sup>45</sup> MWLs record is replete with accounts of its relationship with terrorists and activities on the propagation of the Wahhabi ideology.<sup>46</sup>

#### *Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Burkina Faso and the Central African Republic*

In Cameroon, Chad, Niger and the Central African Republic extremism and religious conflicts are on the rise. The International Crisis Group (ICG) reporting on the crisis in Cameroon writes: "the rise of Christian revivalist (born again) and Muslim fundamentalist movements is rapidly changing the religious landscape and paving the way for religious intolerance"<sup>47</sup>. The government's response has been military directed on Boko Haram, which has recently been operating in Cameroon with destructive effects.

Niger is also plagued by cross border violence from Boko Haram and the Mali based movement for Oneness in West Africa (MUJAO) and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQIIM). The incidents of violence have increased since Niger sent troops to the regional force to fight Boko Haram.

Burkina Faso, which just emerged from a protracted internal crisis, has recently been struck by one of the affiliates of AQIIM (al-Murabiton), which is headed by the notorious extremist Mokhtar Belmokhtar responsible for many terrorist attacks in the region. The group seized one of the big hotels in Ouagadougou killed 28 people, kidnapped a few mostly foreigners and injured many others.

The violence in the Central African Republic (CAR) after the SELEKA rebels took power, has taken a religious dimension between the Muslim in the North and the Christian South. CAR had never a functioning government since independence but has been tolerated and exploited by France for many years. France contributed funds to the crowning of Jean-Bedel Bokassa, a demented former French colonial army orderly, as Emperor in 1977, in the image of his idol Napoleon Bonaparte. CAR has been, besides France, the playground of many countries in the region. It has been the staging ground of coups and counter coups in Chad and Sudan. It can be said, CAR can only be what France and its neighbors, nine of them, want it to be. In this latest crisis a wedge is being driven in the religious divide and it is said that Sudan's government, a Wahhabi funded and inspired government, has a hand in the emergence of radical groups in the country.

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<sup>44</sup> The Guardian News Service, 28

<sup>45</sup> <http://listserv.tau.ac.il/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind1204&L=taunotes-l&P=1304>

<sup>46</sup> Teresa Harings, "The Muslim World League: Creeping Wahhhabi Colonialism?" Tel Aviv Notes, the Moshe Dayan Center. ([http://www.aftau.org/site/DocServer/TANotes\\_Muslim\\_Harings.pdf?docID=17261](http://www.aftau.org/site/DocServer/TANotes_Muslim_Harings.pdf?docID=17261))

<sup>47</sup> ICG AFRICA Report no 229, September 2015

## *Tanzania*

Zanzibar, part of the Republic of Tanzania, is composed of a group of islands in the Indian Ocean. Zanzibar is a popular tourist destination because of its history, natural beauty and pristine beaches. Its people are extremely friendly and traditionally practice a moderate version of Islam. In the last decade this has changed, and there is growing concern that they, too, have become victims of radical Islam.

An example is the al-Noor charity, set up a few years ago in Tanzania with money from Saudi Arabia. Every year, the organization pays for students and teachers to study in Sudan, Abu Dhabi, and Saudi Arabia. It is estimated that Saudi Arabia alone spends \$1m a year on Islamic institutions in Zanzibar.<sup>48</sup> The preaching of this new ideology has created a fundamental shift in the practice of Islam in Zanzibar. People are increasingly intolerant of other forms of Islam, as well as Christians. In May 2012, a mob stormed a church and burned the 500 seats inside. There was a huge demonstration following this incident, and it left a mark of fear and suspicion on an island that has been practicing moderate Islam for years.<sup>49</sup>

The Association for Islamic Mobilization and Propagation, better known as Uamsho, has threatened to behead all church pastors in Zanzibar.<sup>50</sup> It has also stated that it is fighting to secede from Tanzania to establish its own state based on political Islam. These statements did create an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty affecting tourism, which is the backbone of the Zanzibar economy. The rise of radicalism in Tanzania is very clear but the manner in which successive governments have handled the situation is very commendable. They have encouraged inter-faith dialogue and rarely used force. Tanzanians are highly integrated, cultured and tolerant people and this virtue will eventually triumph in containing extremism and interfaith conflicts.

## *Ethiopia*

As many as one-third of Ethiopia's 85 million people are Sunni Muslims and, for the most part, have lived peacefully with Christians. These groups have lived as one people in unprecedented harmony. However, in the last two decades, this peace and tolerance has been challenged by the arrival of new breeds of Muslim radicals and the policies of an ethnocentric government that rules by dividing the population along ethnic and religious lines. The Wahabists have seized upon this advantage and recruited and radicalized many young Ethiopian Muslims.

A WikiLeaks cable showed that the United States is aware of the Saudi strategy. In the cable, former US Ambassador to Ethiopia Yamamoto wrote, "Arab Wahhabi missionaries, mainly from Saudi Arabia, continue to make inroads into the Ethiopian Muslim community, but are meeting increasing resistance in doing so. .... As a result, Ethiopia's delicate Muslim/Christian balance and historic attitudes between the faith communities regarding tolerance and mutual respect are being challenged, thereby

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<sup>48</sup> "Saudi Arabia Funds Islamic Terrorism in Mali," The Federalist Blog, January 30, 2013. (<http://thefederalist-gary.blogspot.com/2013/01/saudi-arabia-funds-islamic-terrorism-in.html>)

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Howden, "Trouble In Paradise As Radical Islam Grown In Zanzibar," The Independent, October 30, 2012. (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/trouble-in-paradise-as-radical-islam-grows-in-zanzibar-8231626.html>)

<sup>50</sup> <http://morningstarnews.org/2013/05/anti-christian-hostility-high-in-zanzibar-as-tanzania-mainland-also-heats-up/>

undermining US interest in the region. Sufi Muslim leaders want support from the US to counter this pressure.”<sup>51</sup>

Many exiles who left Ethiopia for political and economic reasons to neighboring countries have been inducted in madrassas and Islamic schools, in Sudan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and other places and sent back to Ethiopia. Of these, many have been influenced by the Wahhabi school of thought. The American Foreign Policy Council wrote in 2011 that those who supported the construction of mosques, schools and associations in Ethiopia were World Association of Muslim Youth (WAMY) and the Alawiyah School Mission Center, owned since 1993 by the Saudi controlled World Muslim Leagues. The International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO) is very active in Ethiopia and the US Treasury Department has formally designated IIRO as an institution facilitating terrorism.

For now, the people endure. Alem Zelalem from Ethiopia writes; “We did not struggle against every conceivable colonialist and imperialist power in the past, and to come this far, only to succumb to Saudi Arabian Wahhabis. That would be an insult to our history and culture. The system that prevails in Saudi Arabia may be good for Saudi Arabia, but not for Ethiopia. We find it offensive to human freedom and dignity. It is absolutely unacceptable to our way of life. Wahhabism has no place in our society. The sooner the ruling circles in Saudi Arabia realize this fact and leave us alone, the better.”<sup>52</sup>

However, with a government that is determined to end religious and ethnic disputes by force, the future seems bleak. In many cases extremists and criminal gangs thrive in a climate of political crisis and instability. The experiences in other countries show that sleeping cells of extremists take advantage of the grievances of people and present them with a choice. They are fed, trained and brainwashed with an ideology of hate and intolerance and given arms to fight for that cause.

To counter such a scenario the preferred alternative would be inter-faith and inter-ethnic dialogue that identifies the enemies, both domestic and foreign, and make people understand their real agenda. The government must build on the commonalities and the factors that have united these people for centuries if it wishes to prevent a civil war (religious and ethnic) and the breakup of this historic nation that has remained united despite so many kinds of invasions and adversities.

The wide spread unrest by the Oromo ethnic group on its own might not transform into a widespread religious and ethnic violence but beneath this surface there may be dark forces financed and encouraged by foreign elements who have a different agenda. While the struggle for genuine change goes on, all indications are that the destabilization process is also in the making. If the government is to cling on to power by all means could lead the country into civil war, producing the likelihood of its ignominious end. In a civil strife the government will lose power but the people could lose their country. Looking beyond what the finger points is the responsibility of the leaders of this nation who need to use wisdom and common sense so that Ethiopia avoids the fate of falling under the yoke of religious extremists.

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<sup>51</sup> [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ADDISABABA1674\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ADDISABABA1674_a.html)

<sup>52</sup> Alem Zelalem, “Saudi Arabia’s Wahabism and the Threat to Ethiopia’s National Security,” Ethiomedia, September 26, 2003. ([http://www.ethiomedia.com/press/wahabism\\_threat\\_to\\_ethiopia.html](http://www.ethiomedia.com/press/wahabism_threat_to_ethiopia.html))

## *Yemen*

Yemen is geographically part of the Middle East but politically it has more to do with the politics and security of the Red Sea and countries of the Horn of Africa. Whatever happens in Yemen directly affects the Horn. Historically Yemen has been a strategic commercial route and recently piracy, human and arms trafficking have made it the most dangerous maritime zone in the world.

With the coming of sectarian war in the Middle East it has now become the center for the proxy war between Iran (Shia) and Saudi Arabia (Sunni, Wahhabi). Saudi Arabia has formed a ten-nation Arab Sunni alliance which has been pounding one of the poorest countries on earth - all to assert Sunni (Wahhabi) supremacy in the region. In yet another surprising move, Saudi Arabia has invited back Hamas from Gaza. "The visits by the Islamist organization is the latest sign of an about-face in Saudi policy, which is now seeking a rapprochement with the regional Muslim Brotherhood movement, to which Hamas belongs"<sup>53</sup>.

All indications are that the new king Salman bin Abdulaziz is more conservative than his predecessor. This was underlined by the execution of 47 Saudis at the beginning of this year including a dissident outspoken Shiite cleric Nimir al-Nimir under a seriously flawed trial, according to Amnesty International. The Saudi government took this step despite the warning of the international community particularly Iran. The UN, Europe, the US and many others have condemned the executions. It was a reckless move, which is another demonstration to what extent Saudi Arabia is prepared to go to protect its unchallenged rule of the Saudi people and assert its position as the head of the Sunni Muslims across the globe and the defender of the Wahhabi ideology and at the same time use it as an excuse to further clamp down dissent in Saudi Arabia. A disturbing factor in this sordid episode is that, reportedly, King Salman suffers from dementia and is unduly influenced by his son, the arrogant, hawkish defense minister, Prince Mohammad bin Salman.

The war in Yemen will not end until Saudi Arabia and its allies ensure that the Houthi minority submits to the rule of the majority, the Sunnis. But the issue is more than just a democratic exercise of the majority. It is more to do with ensuring that the Saudi Arabia's neighbor becomes more than just a neighbor but a firm ally that defends its western and southern flanks and suppresses Shia dissent along its border.

## *Eritrea*

It is reported that Saudi Arabia's King has hosted Eritrea's President Isaiyas on April 28 of 2015<sup>54</sup>. It has also been reported that the Eritrean government has entered into an agreement with Arab Alliance to send troops to Yemen. The UN Tribune reports, "400 Eritrean troops are embedded with UAE forces battling Houthi rebels.... and that the UAE has leased a key Eritrean port (Assab) for 30 years and along with its Gulf Allies, Saudi Arabia has established a military presence in Eritrea in return for monetary compensation and fuel supplies"<sup>55</sup>. If what has been reported is true, Eritrea will be the second non-Arab African nation, after Senegal, to contribute troops to the Saudi-led alliance against the Houthi rebels in Yemen. Eritrea used to support the Houthis in Yemen. With the overall shift of alliances in that

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<sup>53</sup> July, 2015 New York Times

<sup>54</sup> UN Tribune 11.02.2015

<sup>55</sup> <http://untribune.com/un-report-uae-saudi-leasing-eritean-port-using-eritrean-land-sea-air-space-and-possibly-troops-in-yemen-battle/>

part of the world, Eritrea has now joined the alliance against the Houthis. Eritrea being a crucial player in the politics of the Horn and the Red Sea, its participation in this war could be a game changer both on the ground and in the politics of the Red Sea and the Horn in general. Saudi Arabia will be well positioned to pursue its other agenda of infiltrating more aggressively in to the heartland of Ethiopia through its insidious means. To use Assab as logistics base to control the Red Sea and prevent Iran from any kind of operation along the coast of Yemen, will be a big strategic coup for the Arab Sunni Alliance. After all, it has been the dream of the Arab World to make the Red Sea an Arab Lake and to 'Arabize' and 'Wahhabise' the Horn.

The Eritrean government, unlike the Ethiopian government, has managed to successfully establish inter ethnic and religious harmony. It has focused on building a national unity and in this it is a success story though its policies to suppress dissent has been widely condemned. Its alliance with Saudi Arabia will certainly come to haunt it if it does not exercise wisdom because it is as vulnerable as Ethiopia is to extremism. I want to believe that the Eritrean government understands the risk it is taking and its decision is a calculated one. No other government would understand better than Eritrea itself how and why such a move would escalate the tension that exists between it and Ethiopia and its severe consequences. If Yemen becomes the puppet of Saudi Arabia the next move would be towards Ethiopia and Eritrea. Sudan, and Egypt, as firm allies of the Saudi and the Arab Alliance would be convenient tools to create pressure all along their borders with Eritrea and Ethiopia. The strategy could be to make the two countries weak and ungovernable and use them as foothold and stepping-stones for the grand Arab ambition (to connect the Arab Peninsula to East and West Africa); a dream that has eluded pan Arabism for years. In the end both Eritrea and Ethiopia need to realize that their destiny is tied by geography and history and they have no other option than to jointly fight the expansionist policy, extremism, terrorism and transnational crimes. The consequences of not doing so are very grave: the Horn can become another region for a proxy war much larger, much more complex, than can be imagined.

For decades The Horn has been the most volatile, most militarized region in Africa and perhaps in the world. It has the largest number of liberation movements as well as one of the most destructive terrorist organizations (al Shabaab). With the Yemen situation being more complicated and internationalized the region is entering another phase leading to a perfect storm, the Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan syndrome. The problem with this region as a whole is that one cannot talk about security in one country without talking about security in the entire region. Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, north and South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Central African Republic, Mali, Chad, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, DRC, Burundi and all the North African countries along the Mediterranean Coast have serious security problems, which are intertwined.

The Gulf of Guinea comprising 15 countries has been categorized as the most dangerous maritime zone in the world. Guinea Bissau has been branded as the narco capital of the world where FBI arrested the admiral in charge of the navy for drug trafficking. The new preferred cocaine route from South and Latin America has now been the Gulf of Guinea north through the barren land towards the porous North African borders to the Mediterranean coast. Though these transnational crimes may not seem to be related to terrorism, in many instances they have become the source of financing for terrorists. Terrorists operate and thrive in situations where governments don't function properly and West Africa and Central Africa is a classic example. Because of weak and sometimes corrupted governments, porous borders and common ethnic and religious groups that spill across national borders, without addressing issues of governance and agreeing on common regional policies and strategy no one country can solve its security problems on its own.



African governments need to boldly address the underlying factors for the rise of terrorism and violent extremism in Africa and question the motives of players such as the Saudis who are pump cash into the coffers of individuals and dubious organizations in their respective countries. The seriousness of the religious and ethnic divide that has been built up over the last decades are very worrying to say the least. In summarizing the security challenges of Africa, AISSS had this to say in its concept document.

‘A growing nexus between organized criminal gangs and terrorist groups has turned Africa into a new theater of violence and terrorism. The crisis created by the activities of organized criminal groups is one of the most serious challenges to regional and global peace, stability, economic development and peaceful co-existence. Governance and the rule of law, corruption and dysfunctional institutions, weak civil society, poverty and horizontal and vertical inequality, porous borders, radical interpretations of religions and other extremisms, have coalesced, leading to the rise of violent militant groups and criminal gangs. In many parts of Africa the absence of hope for a better future has created uncontested environment for recruitment and indoctrination. The fate of several African countries hangs in the balance as conflicts ravage parts of the continent, mostly in North, West, Central and the Horn of Africa, and spreading steadily southwards.’ (Africa Institute for Strategic and Security Studies (AISSS) concept document: [www.africaiss.org](http://www.africaiss.org))

### **The West and Saudi Arabia.**

In his inaugural speech on 21 January 2013 President Barack Obama stated “We will support democracy from Asia to Africa, from the Americas to the Middle East, because our interests and our conscience compel us...” However, John Kerry stated in his nomination hearing for Secretary of State: “more than ever, foreign policy is economic policy, which means global competition for resources and markets will outweigh every other consideration”.

But it was Samantha Power, US ambassador to the UN, who said it best: “Foreign policy is an explicitly amoral enterprise.”<sup>56</sup> It seems it was taken from Machiavelli’s, *The Prince*: “Politics have no relation to morals.” That may be why successive US administrations have established close ties with Saudi Arabia, an immoral, repressive, corrupt and one of the most backward governments on earth - a government that administrative officials, in rare moments, have identified as the “kernel of evil.”

These are policies which are mutually exclusive and always pose a challenge in striking a balance. Washington has historically been willing to sell the democratic aspirations of 28 million Saudi citizens for barrels of oil, arguably the most tragic externality of the nearly 80-year relationship with the Saudi monarchy.<sup>57</sup>

The United States is Saudi Arabia's largest trading partner, and it is also the largest US export market in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia is one of the leading sources of imported oil for the United States, providing more than one million barrels per day (bpd) to the US. According to Citibank, shale oil and new Arctic oil fields may see US production doubling to 14.2m bpd by 2020. That could “leave the US

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<sup>56</sup> <https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/2013/06/26/as-un-ambassador-samantha-power-represents-real-danger-to-us-and-middle-east/>

<sup>57</sup> Martin Michaels, “Exclusive Series: The House That Oil Built, Unspoken yet Powerful Saudi Lobby in Washington,” Mint Press News, December 17, 2012. (

free to become a net exporter, to the tune of 4.7 bpd of oil and LNG.”<sup>58</sup> In other words the current need to import from Saudi Arabia may not exist.

But the relationship with Saudi Arabia is more than just about oil. Saudi Arabia buys billions of dollars’ worth of weapons and the powerful lobby of military industrial complex ensures that this relationship flourishes. More importantly, Saudi Arabia is the greatest ally next to Israel in maintaining the strategic, security and economic interest of the US in the Middle East. During the last few years, the ever shifting alliances in this part of the world has defied textbook explanations of foreign policies and national interests. The US and its allies are fighting groups that are funded and supported by Saudi Arabia. Turkey and Saudi Arabia “are actively supporting a hardline coalition of Islamist rebels against al-Assad’s regime that includes al-Qaeda’s affiliate in Syria, Jabhal al Nusra, an extremist rival to ISIS which shares many of its aspirations for a fundamental caliphate”.<sup>59</sup>

Saudi Arabia and Israel are now de facto allies in the fight against the resurgence of Iran (Shiite) power in the region. The internationally acclaimed and award-winning journalist Robert Fisk believes that “Saudi Arabia is financing and arming ISIS and other organizations.”<sup>60</sup> US Vice President Joe Biden stated that the Saudi regime, along with others from the Middle East had “poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens of thousands of tons of weapons to anyone who would fight Assad”, naming al-Nusra and al Qaeda as beneficiaries.<sup>61</sup>

It is indeed strange times where alliances are fast changing and contradictions and inconsistencies in foreign policies have become routine as allies and enemies sleep in the same bed. The strong funding that the Sunnis are getting from Saudi Arabia is systematically dismantling Iraq. The West goes on fighting Sunni extremists in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan with the enemy inside its belly. It was the Saudis who funded the Mujahedeen and enabled the creation of the Taliban. It was the Saudis who funded the madrassas in Pakistan to make it one of the largest radicalization centers in the Middle East. It is the Saudis, according to regional and American reports, who helped create ISIS in Syria and Iraq again by funneling arms and cash. It was the unelected despotic Saudi regime that, terrified by the implications of the Arab Spring, opposed pro-democracy movements in Egypt and elsewhere and energetically assisted in the brutal suppression of Shia Muslim reformers in Bahrain. The Bahrain uprising showed to the Saudis that kings are no more infallible and sacred. Completely shocked by the effects of the Arab Spring, the Saudi monarchy sent troops to Bahrain and started implementing a very stringent anti-terrorism law at home.

On the anniversary of 9/11 a Saudi millionaire gave 10 million dollars to Yale University for the establishment of Center of Islamic Law and Civilization. “But the Saudi-Yale deal is about more than Yale or 9/11, much more. It is about elite institutions constantly prostrating at the feet of the Saudi Royal family. The family has given Harvard and Georgetown \$40 million. They have funded research at leading scientific institutions to maximize Saudi oil output. They have donated to leading foundations, including the Clinton Foundation. They have paid for fundamentalist Imams in American prisons. From California

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<sup>58</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/27/saudi-arabia-and-the-west-how-cosy-relationship-turned-toxic>

<sup>59</sup> The Independent, 12 May 2015

<sup>60</sup> The Independent, June 2014

<sup>61</sup> BBC, 7 October 2014

to India, they have erected a mammoth infrastructure of Wahhabi madrassas which indoctrinate impressionable young men to the virtues of their cause.”<sup>62</sup>

Saudi Arabia has this year formed a coalition of 34 mainly Muslim countries including powers such as Egypt and Turkey to coordinate a fight against "terrorist organizations". Saudi Arabia fancies that it is indeed the leader of the Sunni Muslims in the world due to its custodianship over the two Holy Mosques in Mecca and Medina.

Saudi Arabia's regional rival Iran and its allies, Syria and Iraq, were excluded from the alliance. In addition to Saudi Arabia, the coalition include Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Benin, Turkey, Chad, Togo, Tunisia, Djibouti, Senegal, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Gabon, Guinea, the Palestinians, Comoros, Qatar, Cote d'Ivoire, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Maldives, Mali, Malaysia, Egypt, Morocco, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Yemen.

This of course flies in the face of all what we know about Saudi Arabia as a leading funder of terrorism globally. The largest number of this coalition is from Africa, many of them impoverished states that cannot in any way contribute meaningfully to the military operation envisaged by the coalition. Nigerian papers reject Nigeria's inclusion in this coalition because it raises serious question; "Nigeria is not an Islamic State ..... Opens the door to more attacks..... Have we gained anything from Saudi? Do we want to be part of the Sunni-Shiite dispute?"<sup>63</sup>

Comoros has a Muslim majority but it is strategically significant because some of its islands are very close to Zanzibar and can be used as a springboard for extremists. Wahhabi control of Comoros would pose a serious security threat to both Zanzibar and the mainland. It is important to note that Cameroon was not included in the coalition though it has been a target of repeated attacks by Boko Haram and has a sizable Muslim population. The head of state is a Christian. Gabon does not have a Muslim majority but was included as member of the Saudi coalition. Gabon is relatively wealthy and does not gain anything from being a member of the coalition. But the President of Gabon is a Sunni Muslim. Togo, Benin, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Guinea are impoverished countries and not in a position to play any role but they will probably get financial and other benefits from Saudi Arabia. Gambia, recently declared as an Islamic Republic, has not been included in the coalition.

Most of these African countries have governments who preferred not to condemn Saudi Arabia for its flagrant abuse of African migrants who have been discriminated, called names, abused, flogged, deported, treated like slaves, executed. In September of last year Saudi Arabia's al-Arabia TV reportedly quoted the head of the central Hajj committee that Africans were to be blamed for the stampede that resulted in the death and injury of hundreds of pilgrims. There was an outrage of blatant racism but nothing went beyond that.

"In 2011 the US sold a record of \$66.3 billion in weapons to countries abroad. Saudi Arabia bought \$33.4 billion worth of arms the most by any country".<sup>64</sup> In 2012, the US came to an agreement with Saudi Arabia on a \$60 billion arms deal, the biggest deal of its kind in US history.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/omer-aziz/wahhabism-saudi-arabia->

<sup>63</sup> <http://venturesafrica.com/four-reasons-why-nigeria-should-not-join-saudis-alliance/>

<sup>64</sup> Martin Michaels, The House that Oil Built Unspoken yet Powerful Saudi Lobby in Washington, MPN, 2012

<sup>65</sup> Adam Entous, "Saudi Arms Deal Advances," The Wall Street Journal, September 12, 2010. (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704621204575488361149625050.html>)

William Hartung, the director of the Arms and Security Project at the Center for International Policy and author of *Prophets of War* says “the volume of major deals concluded by the Obama administration in its first 5 years exceeds the amount approved by the Bush administration in its full eight years in office by nearly 30 billion. That also means that the Obama administration has approved more arms than any US administration since World War II...Saudi Arabia tops the list at 46 billion in new agreements.”<sup>66</sup>

This and the role that Saudi Arabia continues to play in the Middle East is crucial in formulating US foreign policy. It would be a great dilemma for the US to disengage itself from the close relationship it has with Saudi Arabia. Though many might say that this does not warrant compromising the principles that this nation has stood for since its founding; that would be considered as simple naivety in current politics. The essence of international politics is to say something and do exactly the opposite. Socrates once said “I was really too honest a man to be a politician and live”. With the UK getting more business contracts, Saudi Arabia continues to be one of the closest ally of the UK. UK continues to lobby to get more business contracts from the world’s most notorious human rights abusers. The Guardian states that Saudi Arabia and Egypt are among the biggest markets for UK arms despite human rights breaches.<sup>67</sup>

People have asked why the US has a policy of protecting civilians in many parts of the world but not the people of Saudi Arabia. Why oppose the extremist ideas of ISIS, Iran or the Taliban, but remain silent while Saudi Arabia uses its wealth to spread extremist ideology around the world? These are hard questions but no easy answers. It is indeed true that US relationship with Saudi Arabia is the epitome of hypocrisy. Former CIA Director James Woolsey told Congress: "One analogue for Wahhabism's political influence today might be the extremely angry form taken by much of German nationalism in the period after World War I.... Just as angry and extreme German nationalism of that period was the soil in which Nazism grew, Wahhabi Islamist extremism today is the soil in which al Qaeda and its sister terrorist organizations are growing."<sup>68</sup>

In a leaked cable, former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, said, “Donors in Saudi Arabia constitute the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups worldwide,” and that it is “an ongoing challenge to persuade Saudi officials to treat terrorist financing emanating from Saudi Arabia as a strategic priority.”<sup>69</sup> Why has it become an impregnable challenge to stop this alliance with a country that is waging war on humanity, and particularly on people that have recently emerged from centuries of colonialism?

It seems that this foreign policy is partly driven by the powerful Saudi lobby. Saudi ‘donations’ to hundreds of universities, think tanks and academic institutions in the US are used to influence and appropriate academic discourse<sup>70</sup>, while senior government officials aspire to work in Saudi-owned or influenced business organizations when they leave public service. Recent research indicates that 50% of

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<sup>66</sup> <http://guidetravel.biz/saudi-arabia/are-obama-and-39;s-record-arms-sales-to-saudi-arabia-yemen-egypt-and-iraq-fueling-unrest-in-middle-east-70203.html>

<sup>67</sup> The Guardian, 23 June 2014

<sup>68</sup> Susan Katz Keating, “The Wahhabi Fifth Column,” Front Page Mag accessed October 4, 2013. (<http://archive.frontpagemag.com/Printable.aspx?ArtId=20523>)

<sup>69</sup> [https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09STATE131801\\_a.html](https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09STATE131801_a.html)

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2008/march/saudis-multi-million-dollar-pr-agenda-/?mobile=false>

Senators and 46% of Congressmen become lobbyists when they retire<sup>71</sup>. Indeed, the Saudi ability to offer financial gains translates into an environment where many have a vested interest in the Saudi status quo, and are either reluctant to take principled positions, or are outright defenders of Saudi interest. "Overall in the last decade Saudi Arabia has recruited two dozen US firms as foreign agents and spent nearly 100 million dollars on American lobbyists, consultants and public relations firms. These hired guns have attempted to rebrand the Saudis as allies in the war on terrorism than as the leading purveyors of radical Islamic views through schools in the US and around the world".<sup>72</sup>

Fifteen out of the 19 9/11 hijackers were Saudis. Bin Laden was a Saudi and so were most of the individuals who funded this project. The US Congress' 9/11 reports when completely declassified are expected to reveal more about the involvement of Saudi Arabia.<sup>73</sup> According to Iraqi journalist Abdulkhaliq Hussein, in his Arabic-language book *The Western Impasse –The Awareness Deficit*, Saudi Arabia has spent US \$87 billion on spreading Wahhabism around the world<sup>74</sup>. Mitchell Bard writes "The Saudi budget more than \$4 billion annually for Islamic activities a total greater than the Soviet Union spent on subversion during the cold war".<sup>75</sup>

In the month of January of this year the Telegraph reported that the German vice-chancellor has publicly accused Saudi Arabia of financing Islamic extremism in the West and warned that it must stop. It is reported that he said that the Saudi regime is funding extremist mosques and communities that pose a danger to public security.

"We have to make clear to the Saudis that the time of looking away is over. Wahhabi mosques all over the world are financed by Saudi Arabia. Many Islamists who are a threat to public safety come from these communities in Germany." These are encouraging signs that the West is slowly understanding that its own security is at stake because of the policies of Saudi Arabia. The recent historic decision to lift sanctions and normalize relationships with Iran and the steps that the two countries (US and Iran) have taken to ease the tensions, together with other considerations, might introduce a new era when the West, primarily dictated by its own security and economic interest, might pull the rug from under the feet of the Saudi autocrats. If this happens and it is translated into action it would mean condemnation of Saudi Arabia's policy of sponsoring violent extremism and the US spearheading a multilateral (UN, EU, AU.etc.) effort to sanction and isolate Saudi Arabia until it changes its policies both at home and sponsoring violent extremism across the globe.

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.breitbart.com/big-government/2013/07/29/half-of-retiring-senators-become-lobbyists-up-1500-in-40-years/>

<sup>72</sup> Mitchell Bard, *The Arab Lobby*, Broad Side Books, New York, 2010

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.grovetatlantic.com/>

<sup>74</sup> <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3600/arab-ideologies>

<sup>75</sup> Mitchell Bard, *The Arab Lobby*, Broad Side Books, New York, 2010, page 157

Conclusion.

Africa has enormous potential in oil, gas and other strategic minerals, but is also potentially lucrative in the areas of trade and investment. The strategic importance of West Africa's Gulf of Guinea is hard to overstate: "the stretch of coastline spanning from Gabon to Liberia that includes 15 states which have huge economic importance to the United States and the West – is hard to overstate..... Indeed, 70 percent of Africa's oil production comes from the Gulf of Guinea. And with the recent discovery of offshore hydrocarbon deposits, these numbers are only going to rise....The Gulf of Guinea is now a key route for arms and drug smuggling to Northern and Western Africa".<sup>76</sup>

Situated between Yemen and Somalia, the Gulf of Aden connects the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea with 21,000 ships crossing the Gulf annually<sup>77</sup>. However the Gulf of Aden and the Gulf of Guinea have become the most dangerous maritime routes in the world because of militant activities, mainly Wahhabi inspired.

The Mediterranean coast and the porous borders of North African countries have become convenient corridors to drug and arms traffickers and a primary route for illegal immigrants pushed out of their countries for security reasons and economic hardships. Europe will have to expect a lot more than it has already unless it cooperates with African countries in addressing the underlying reasons for the chaos that is gathering speed in Africa.

The fast-paced changes in the demography of the continent will have a direct effect on the security and economic sustenance of the US and the rest of the Western world. The Millennium Development Goal projects that by 2050, Africa will have an estimated 2.5 billion people and could overtake Asia as the most populated continent by the end of the century.<sup>78</sup>

When one takes into account these demographic figures in addition to the rampant poverty, Africa's position is tenuous. The proportion of people living in poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is the world's highest, and almost half of all Africans live on less than a dollar a day. In simple terms, ***how can the rest of the world expect to live in peace while extremists, terrorists and criminal gangs operate aggressively in a region where one billion people live in abject poverty?***

There is quite a long list of what African governments need to do to prevent people from taking extreme decisions; fleeing from their countries and making the torturous journey to Europe, becoming victims of violent extremism, or joining the criminal gangs and terrorists. Some of the important reasons for these have been indicated above.

The West's alliance with its adversaries is dangerous, and the next generation of terrorists will be its products. While Wahhabi activists are busy preaching and training Jihadists, America and Europe refuse to see the problem that Saudi Arabia and its brand of religion is creating. Even as the US and the developed world continue to see foreign policy as 'amoral enterprise', there must be a degree of sanity injected into this principle of greed and short sightness to save Africa from war and devastation and from the enormous impact this would have on the security and economy of Europe and America. ***But for now the powers that could make a difference only see the fingers that point to the skies.***

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<sup>76</sup> <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2013/03/05/why-we-should-be-watching-the-gulf-of-guinea/>

<sup>77</sup> <http://www.studymode.com/essays/Strait-Of-Hormuz-And-Gulf-Of-1046560.html>

<sup>78</sup> [http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/publications/files/key\\_findings\\_wpp\\_2015.pdf](http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/publications/files/key_findings_wpp_2015.pdf)

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