

Wahhabism and Global Terrorism

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ABSTRACT: All acts of terrorism are liable to be criticized severely. Terrorism is considered by UNO in its all Millennium Development Goals (MDG) reports as a major stumbling block to the all-round development of humanity. But terrorist activities do not take birth in one day. These activities are the result of a strong ideology which by hook or by crook considers terror activities as legal and just on one hand and promotes them through various Medias particularly through religion on the other hand. Wahhabism is one of such an important ideology in this context. Today many strategic and geopolitical analysts are busy to know how the ideology of Wahhabism is helping in promoting the global terrorism. The ideology of Wahhabism is directly promoted by Saudi Arabia's government as the said country is a place of birth of this ideology as well as the founder of this ideology 'Muhammad Abdul Wahhab'. Wahhabism has promoted a feeling of intolerance for other religions which has led to large scale violence and deaths of countless innocent people of countries of Middle East Asia particularly Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Chechnya region of Russia, Afghanistan, India, Somalia, Nigeria, Libya etc. In the present paper an attempt has been made to know the role of Wahhabism in the rise of global terrorism. What were the causes behind the rise of this ideology? How this ideology is spreading in different parts of world? What would be the geopolitical effects of spread of this ideology? Lastly, what type of measures are required to be taken as well as presently taken by various countries to counter Wahhabi and its associated Jihadist Ideologies?

KEYWORDS: Terrorism, Humanity, Ideology, Medias, Violence and Jihadist.

INTRODUCTION

Wahhabism, which was first introduced in early 8th century, was given a new lease of life and revived by Mohammad ibn Adb al-Wahhab. This ideology was later spread by Saudi dynasty in Saudi Arabia. The ideology of Wahhabism rejects other Islamic sects and faiths and claims that the opponents of their belief must either accept Wahhabi belief or pay tribute. The followers of Wahhabism consider and accuse their opponents of polytheism and blasphemy and consider their property, honor and lives legitimate for themselves. Having such rigid and closed thoughts, Wahhabis destroyed the holy buildings of 'Maqbaratul Baqi' and artifacts of the family and associates of the 'Prophet' following the dominance of Saudi's over Mecca and Medina (1344 AH). The barbaric and fanatical behavior of Taliban in the fields of politics, governance and diplomacy in Afghanistan and destruction of many important manuscripts in 'Ahmed Baba Institute' and many other ancient and unique buildings by Islamist rebels of 'Ansar Dine' group in Mali (Africa), is the true example of their attitudes. The formation and doctrines of Wahhabism have always been rejected by scholars of various Islamic sects. Even 'Ulemas' have also criticized them regarding their approach towards religious issues. It is also said that Wahhabis have paved the way for enemies of religion and Islam. They have fought many ruinous and destructive wars in alliance with colonial states of Britain and U.S.A. and thus they turned to source of arrogance in the Muslim world. The ideology of Wahhabism has its birth in Saudi Arabia, and U.S.A. and Saudi Arabia have had a long-standing political, economic and military alliance. U.S.A. is always serious about protection of the ruling family of the monarchy of Saudi Arabia. In spite of the fact that the Saudi Arabia is governed by an Islamic fundamentalist religious ideology, Wahhabism and repressive authoritarian monarchy, U.S. has always given prime

importance to it while considering U.S.A's interests in Middle East Asia. Many scholars have accused this ideology of "deviat[ing] from [Islam's] core notions of tolerance, pragmatism and moderation"¹.

This has been primarily made possible by the 'Vast Oil Wealth' (or 'Petrodollars') and the purchasing power that the Saudi Arabia has its disposal. This has given the Saudi monarchy the ability to form a strong friendship with U.S. and other Western allies.

But a sharp turn has come in Saudi-U.S. and other Western European allies relationship after September 11, 2001 terror attacks on World Trade Centre in U.S.A. and later on terror attacks in London. These events raised serious questions about the role of Saudi government and their Wahhabi ideology in terrorism associated with earlier Al-Qaida and later on its splinter groups like Islamic State (ISIS former) in Iraq, Ansar Dine in Mali, Al Shebab in Somalia & Kenya, and also many terror groups working against India in Jammu & Kashmir. The terror attacks on U.S.A. and U.K. has shifted the attention of global military and strategic planners over Saudi Arabia because 15 out of 19 hijackers that attacked the World Trade Centre in U.S.A. including Osama bin Laden and other global 'Jihadists', also participated and fought in Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan and Iraq. A majority of these terrorists were Saudi nationals.

The Wahhabism has generated great interest and debate among academic and defense policy experts. Some said that it is central to the growth of Islamist violence and Jihadism while others insist it as a rigid ideology with illiberal beliefs but not directly linked to violence and Jihadism. Another group of scholars which adopts middle path says Wahhabism is a contributing factor but not the sole factor in violent Islamist extremism.

Therefore, in the present paper an attempt has been to determine the role of Wahhabism and Saudi government in the rise of global terrorism. There is also an attempt made to know whether Wahhabism is a contributing factor in the spread of violent radicalization in the Muslim world and what are the causal mechanisms linking Wahhabism to violence?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To understand the meaning of Wahhabism along with its historical background and present situation.
2. Role of Wahhabism in the spread of violent radicalization and terrorism in Muslim as well as other parts of the world.
3. Role of Superpowers in the spread of Wahhabi ideology.
4. To suggest some necessary measures to counter and neutralize the ill-effects of such ideologies on our present day society.

METHODOLOGY

This paper has used information obtained from various sources including articles from newspaper, magazines, internet and numerous books and research papers.

AREA OF STUDY

Saudi Arabia is a place of birth of the ideology of Wahhabism. Therefore, it is our main area of study but impacts of this ideology on human society will be studied at global level. See the map below

¹ As`ad Abu Khalil, *'The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism and Global Power'* (New York: Seven Stories Press 2004), PP.19.



Source: [The World Factbook - Saudi Arabia](#)

BACKGROUND ON WAHHABISM

Definitions: - “Wahhabism” generally refers to a movement that seek to purify the Islamic religion of any innovations or practices that deviate from the seventh-century teaching of the prophet Muhammad and his companions.”² In the West, the term has been used mainly to denote the form of Islam practiced in Saudi Arabia and which has spread recently in various part of the world. In most of the Muslim nations, however, believers who adhere to this creed, prefer to call themselves as ‘Unitarians’ (in Arabic it is ‘Muwahiddun’) or” Salafiyyun” (singular - Salafi, noun - Salafiyya). The later term Salafiyya has been derived from word ‘Salaf’ which means to ‘follow’ or ‘to precede’, a reference to the followers and companions of the Prophet. Some Muslim scholars believe that western world has used the term ‘Wahhabism’ unfairly which carries negative and derogatory connotations. The main difference between these two terms is that the Wahhabism is in association with a ‘Conservative Islamic Creed’ which is centered in and emanating from Saudi Arabia whereas Salafiyya is a more general puritanical Islamic movement that has developed independently in various places in the Islamic world.

² For more on Islamic religion, see CRS (Congressional Research Service) Report RS21432, *Islam: A Primer*

History of Wahhabism: - It is a puritical form of Sunni Islam and is practiced in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The word 'Wahhabi' is derived from the name of a Muslim scholar, 'Muhammad bin Abdal-Wahhab' (1703-1791AD). He was frustrated by the moral decline of his society. As a result of which he denounced many popular beliefs and practices as idolatrous. He encouraged people to return to the pure and orthodox practices of the fundamentals of Islam as embodied in the holy Quran and in the life of Prophet Muhammad. "In 18th century, 'Muhammad bin Saud', the founder of modern – day Saudi dynasty, partnered with Abdel-Wahhab to begin the process of unifying disparate tribes in Arabian Peninsula. Since the foundation of modern Saudi Arabia in 1932 Ad, there has been a close relationship between Saudi ruling family and the Wahhabi religious establishments."³

Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia Today: - "With the establishment of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism gained new ground and was used as official basis for determining laws and conducts in Saudi society. Wahhabism is the basis for such practices as segregation of sexes, the prohibition of the sale and consumption of alcohol, ban on women driving and a host of other restrictions. Wahhabism has also shaped the Saudi educational structure, and the Saudi school books generally denounce teachings that do not conform to Wahhabist beliefs."⁴

Wahhabism opposes most popular religious practices such as veneration of saints, celebration of the birthday of Prophet Muhammad and practices associated with Sufism. According to the US state Department's 2005 'International Religious Freedom Report' on Saudi Arabia, "In spite of many efforts made by senior Saudi government officials to promote religious tolerance towards other religions and steps to remove some intolerant material from textbooks, not much success has been achieved. Still members of Shiite Muslim minority and other non-Islamic religious minorities suffer political and economic discrimination.

Non-Muslim groups are not allowed of freedom of worship whether public or private."⁵

FACTORS ENCOURAGING WAHHABISM

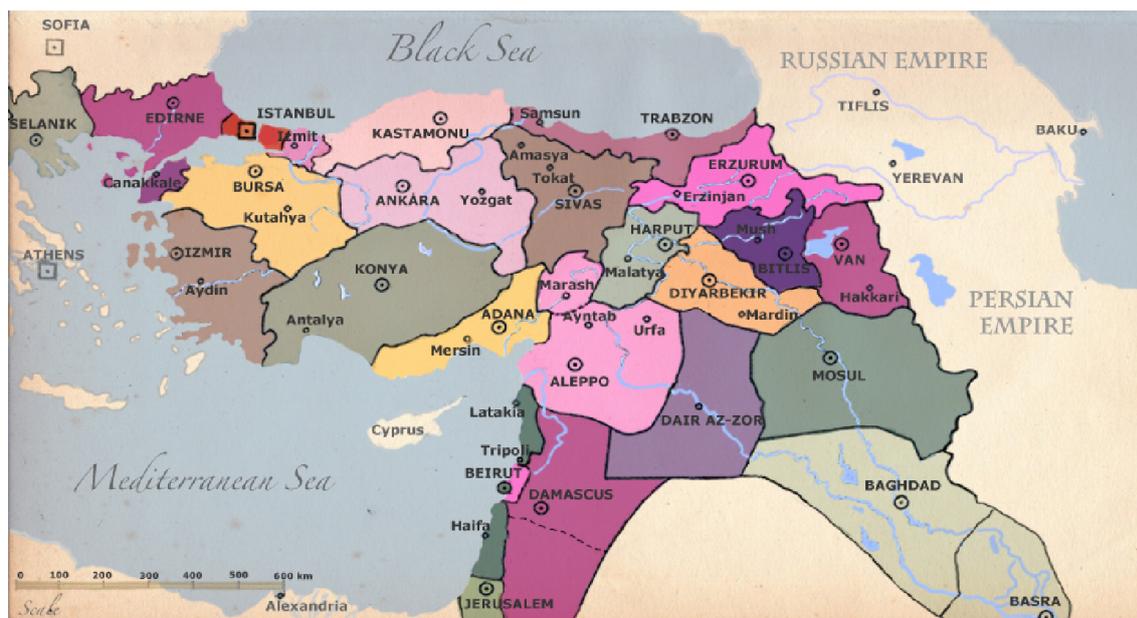
Though there are a number of factors responsible for encouragement of Wahhabism but here we will discuss only important ones. These are as follows:

- 1. Traditional Causes:** - Abdal-Wahhab was very much frustrated to see the moral decline of Muslim society of his country. During his time Muslims used to visit dargahs, and Sufi saints were venerated. He was against all these practices and termed them as idolatrous and useless. He encouraged the pure and orthodox practice of fundamentals of Islam as embodied in Quran and in the life of Prophet Muhammad. He was strictly against the non-followers of his ideas.
- 2. Colonialism:** - The Turks of Ottoman Empire had under them a vast area of western Asia, Northern Africa and some parts of Europe under their control. But after their decisive defeat in Vienna started the process of slow but steady decline of this empire. Eying on many territories of this empire, the British started to undermine the unity of Ottoman Empire. The British, through their Masonic agent sought to destroy the Ottoman Empire from within, by pitting against their own brothers in Islam, the Arabs of Peninsula. See the map of Ottoman Empire below

³ 'Contemporary Saudi Wahhabism combines the teaching of its founder Abd al - Wahhab and other religious and cultural tradition.' Eleanor Abdella Doumato, "Manning the Barricades: Islam according to Saudi Arabia's Texts." *The Middle East Journal* 57, no.2 (2003):PP.230-248.

⁴ Michaela Prokop, "Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Education," *International Affairs*, 79, no. 1 PP.77-89

⁵ 'Approximately two million Shiites are citizens of Saudi Arabia. 'Report available online at [<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2005/51609.html>].



Courtesy: www.houshamadyan.org

It was not legal in Islam for a Muslim to fight another Muslim. Therefore, to create a rift between Arabs and Turks, it was must to create a new interpretation of Islam that would sanction such murder, but under the guise of Islam. This interpretation came to be known as Wahhabism and was founded by British agent, Mohammad Abdul Wahhab.

3. **Atrocities Against Muslims in Different Part of World:**- Atrocities against Muslims community in different parts of the world such as Palestinian Arabs in Gaza & West Bank, Chechen Muslims in Russia, Uyghur of Xinjiang province of China etc. have further given strength to this Wahhabi ideology because its principles are very much liked by the Jihadists fighting in these areas. Wahhabists are generously providing money for these terror groups so that these groups can purchase much needed weapons and other war materials to continue their struggle against their respective governments of different countries.
4. **Radicalization of Western World:** - The preachers of Wahhabism and Islamic Jihad has not confined the achievement of their aims within the Muslim world; they want to expand it at world level. Therefore, their targets are western European countries and America. But due to their inability to fight with these mighty powers militarily, they have divided their work between militants and more moderate sounding clerics appointed as Imams. Militants work for the destruction of U.S. and its allied western European powers whereas moderate clerics try to brainwash the Muslims of these countries. The recent involvement of many British Muslim nationals and U.S. nationals in terror activities of Islamic state in Iraq and Syria and their involvement in many suicide attacks in Middle East shows that many of people in western world are influenced by Wahhabi ideology. The promotion of this ideology is equally funded either directly or indirectly by the Saudis and some other Gulf countries.
5. **Instruments of Propaganda:** - Following are the main sources of propaganda used generally by the proponents of Wahhabism.
 - (i) **Satellite Channels:** - Satellite channels are often used by the proponents of Wahhabism. For example 'Vesal', 'Noor', and 'Safa' are the satellite channels used by radical Wahhabis in Southern Iran to promote ethnic divide among Shias and Sunnis. It is important to mention that programs of these channels are completely under the control of ruling Saudi family. (Jafari, 2007. P.98).
 - (ii) **Internet Websites and Social Network Sites:** - Many internet websites and social networking sites are also used to promote Wahhabi ideology. Quoting 'Ayatollah', Jafari Sobhani, Hussein Qazvini writes: "based on most recent information, 40000 Wahhabi websites are working against Shias." (Qazvini, 2007, P.43).
 - (iii) **Publishing Books:** - Wahhabis make their efforts to publish and disseminate books, studies and researches promoting their ideology and sect.
 - (iv) **Promoting Ethnicity:** - They also promote ethnic issues to attract people particularly the youth in their fold.
 - (v) **Exploiting Poor and Hungry People:** - We all know that a hungry man is an angry man. These evil minded people attract the poor and hungry people by giving them lure of money and power. Once they trapped they are brain washed and included in the cadre of terrorists.

ROLE OF SUPER POWERS IN PROMOTION OF WHHABISM

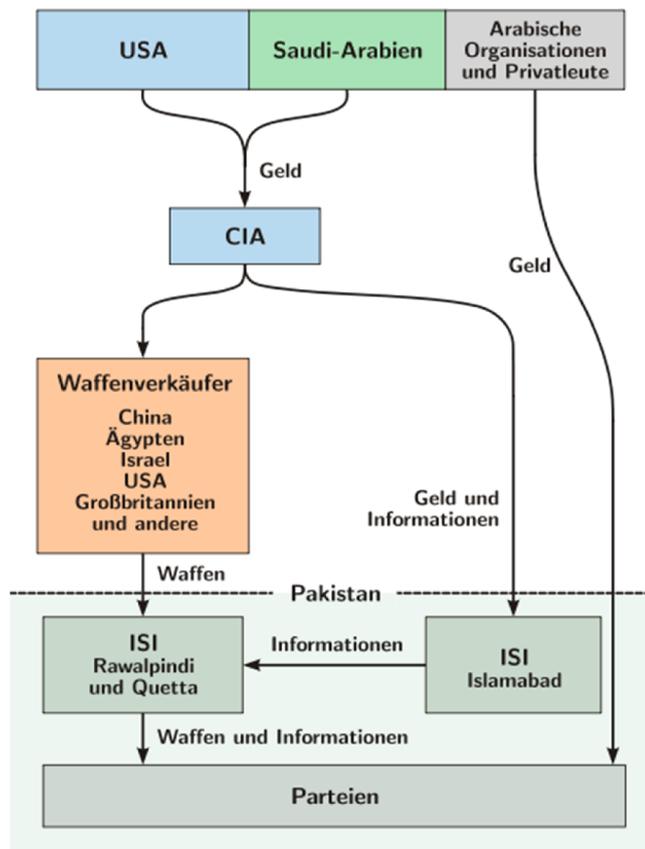
Among superpowers of the world, mainly Great Britain and U.S.A, for their personal interest against their rivals have used to promote and support the Wahhabi ideology.

In the second half of 19th century, British imperialism discovered the house of ‘Al Saud’ as a potentially useful ally in its attempt to gain influence in the Middle East and undermine the Ottoman Empire. Riyadh was invaded by Ottoman Sultan in 1818AD.

The Al Saud returned to power in 1823AD. Later on British helped the Al Saud to establish a base in its protectorate of Kuwait, in order to reconquer, at that time ruled by the pro – Ottoman ‘Al Rashid’ dynasty.

Later on, Great Britain became the first country to recognize new Saudi Arabia as an independent state, establishing its current borders in 1932 AD. In 1927AD, a treaty was also signed between The British Crown and Saudi Monarchy known as ‘Treaty of Friendship and Good understanding. ‘The chief aim of Britain was to secure the one link of chain passing from Suez Canal to India.

The U.S. interests in Saudi Arabia were earlier confined to use the vast oil reserves of this country. But the period of cold war saw a massive support to this ideology



A German database showing the channeling of the money and weapons, provided by ISI officer Mohammad Yousaf in his book: *Afghanistan – The Bear Trap: The Defeat of a Superpower*

and its promoters by U.S.A. This was period of struggle for world domination between U.S.A. and former U.S.S.R. Here the main aim of U.S.A. to support the so called ‘Mujahideens’ in Afghanistan was to give Russia (then U.S.S.R) its Vietnam. The involvement in the matters of Afghanistan and sending its troops against well trained Talibani and Mujahed soldiers gave a severe blow to the U.S.S.R. which later on became another cause of its disintegration.

Another example of U.S. support to the Wahhabis can be seen in ‘Syria’ where the secular, multi-ethnic and multi-faith society is being targeted by these very same forces, as well as reactionary regimes such as GCC and Turkey as well. Here, the purpose of U.S. involvement is, first to isolate Iran and then once again target Russia.

Russia while on the other hand is helping Syria and its ruler Bashr-al Asad to avoid any loss of her own ground in Middle East. It is so because if the Asad's regime fall in Syria and Iran become isolated then surly, Wahhabis will turn their attention more deeply towards too soft and vulnerable Muslim populated areas of Russia such as Chechnya.

ROLE OF SAUDI ARABIA IN PROMOTION OF WAHHABISM

Saudi Arabia is a chief proponent of this ideology as Wahhabism has taken its birth here. Many scholars of geopolitics and defence analysts held Saudi Arabia and its ruling elite's support to Wahhabism as responsible for the present day terrorist violence in various parts of the world. Over more than two decades, Saudi Arabia has spent around \$100 billion or more on worldwide promotion of the violent, intolerant and crudely puritanical Wahhabist sect of Islam.

Starting in late 1980's Saudi Arabia began dispatching Wahhabist clerics and radical preachers to Chechnya. The spread of Wahhabism resulted in not only a separatist war against Russia but also a good deal of violence among Muslims.

In 2003, a 'United States Senate Committee on Terrorism' bore testimony that in previous 20 years Saudi Arabia has spent \$87 billion on promoting Wahhabism. This includes financing 210 Islamic centers, 1500 mosques, 202 colleges and 2000 madrasas. This money smothers the voices of moderate Muslims and poison flows in to entire Muslim community worldwide.

Geopolitically speaking, Saudis want their domination in Middle East where Iran, Iraq, Syria as well as Lebanon are the countries where religious ideologies are not in conformity with Saudi Arabia. Therefore Saudi Wahhabis have poured millions of dollars to arm and incite the Sunni insurgents of Iraq and generated a terrorist movement which today has assumed the shape of Islamic State or IS (former ISIS). In Syria also, they are arming the anti-Assad regime to topple the present government.

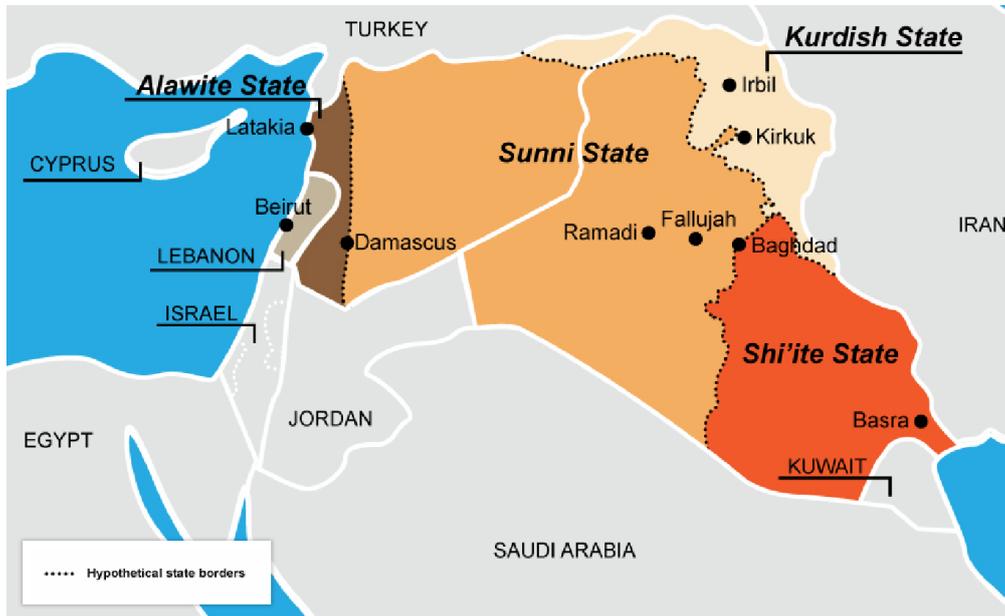
GEOPOLITICAL EFFECTS OF WAHHABISM

Due to sponsorship by oil rich Saudi State, the rigid ideology of Wahhabism is rapidly spreading in various parts of the world. Many scholars are worried about the consequences of the spread of this rigid and intolerant ideology. Some of its possible geopolitical effects are as follow.'

1. **Increase in Mutual Hatred within Islam:** - Wahhabi ideology is intolerant towards other sects of Islam such as Shias, Sufis, Yazidis, and Ahmadiyahs etc. The brutle killings of Yazidis in Iraq by Islamic State terrorist forces recently and atrocities against Shias and Ahmadiyahs in Pakistan is an example of how Wahhabism is encouraging mutual hatred towards coreligionists in Islam.
2. **Increase in Hatred towards Other Religions:** - Wahhabism encourages hatred towards other religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism. The Talibanian acts of destroying ancient Buddhist structures in Afghanistan, hatred towards Jews etc. are the examples that Wahhabism has encouraged worldwide hatred towards other religions .This will have dangerous impacts on world.
3. **Increase in Discrimination against Ethnic Minorities:** - Wahhabism is very intolerant regarding ethnic minorities. Its rapid spread will surely deteriorate the condition of ethnic minorities either living in Muslim states of Middle East or in any part of the world. For example the mass killing of Yazidis, a tiny religious minority of Iraq by Islamic state (former ISIS) militants gives us a burning example of discrimination against ethnic minorities.
4. **Encouragement to Widespread Violence:** - Another geopolitical effect will be increase in terrorist violence supported by this ideology to force a government to bend according to their demands will be encouraged. The widespread violence in Chechnya is due to popularity of Wahhabist ideology among the Muslim youth of that region under Russia. They declared an armed struggle against Russia to attain independence and establish an Islamic State there.
5. **Birth of a Number of Terror Organizations:** - Influenced by Wahhabi ideology, a number of Islamic terrorist organizations have emerged & will continue to have emerge until a full stop is not placed on this large scale expansion of this ideology. Some examples of terrorist organizations are Al-Qaida, Islamic Jihad, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Taliban, Tehrik - I-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jamat-Ud-Dawa (JUD), Ansar Dine, Al Shabab, Boko Haram etc. are all influenced by Wahhabi Ideology.
6. **Threat to The Existence of Nations:-** Many countries, where there is a sizable number of minority Muslim population, may face a challenge of breaking away. For example the rapid spread of Wahhabism in Chechnya has led to an armed struggle between Russians and Islamic terror groups of Chechnya. Similarly, the rapid spread of this ideology, is held

responsible by China for its ethnic unrest in its western province of Xinjiang inhabited by ethnic 'Uyghur' Muslim minority population.

See the map of terror Organization ISIS in Iraq and Syria



STRATEGIES & WAYS TO COUNTER TERRORISM GENERATED BY WAHHABISM

There has been a deceive shift in the thinking of nations in the world, towards the Wahhabist ideology and its related terrorist activities, after 9/11, attack of terrorists on U.S.A. Countering terrorism as well as to stop the expansion of Wahhabi ideology has become a first priority of nations to ensure the security to their population. Thus, the intelligence and the security systems of countries of the world must consider following measures in order to expand fundamental capacities of national security before offences of Wahhabi sect and its associated terrorism:

1. **To Address and Eliminate Soft Threats of the Cyber Space:** There should be proper strategic management of soft security. Modern technology should be applied for raising the security index of cyber space. The main part of propagation of Wahhabi ideas is done through cyber space. Therefore, strict actions should be taken against such internet sites, satellite channels and other Medias of cyber space which display the ideas of Wahhabi sects. A strict ban should be imposed on them.
2. **Compiling a Table of Risks of Terrorist Organizations Affiliated to Wahhabi Movement:** - The intelligence, security, military and police authorities of nations should first prepare a list of sectarian terrorist organizations of their respective countries. After this, they should analyze what possible harms these sectarian terrorist outfits can do. After a careful analysis of these organizations, the weak points of governments own security systems should be removed and strict counter actions should be taken against the activities of such organizations.
3. **Studying the Causes behind the Spread of Wahhabi Ideology in a Country:** - Governments as well as security system of countries worldwide first study the real causes behind the rapid spread of Wahhabism in their countries. After a careful study of these causes, efforts should be made to eliminate, those causes. For example, if unemployment is a main cause of youth joining Wahhabi sponsored terrorism in a country, then the government of that country should generate employment facilities and self-employment guarantee programs so that youth of all sections of society can be protected from indulging in anti-social activities.
4. **Plug the Sources of Funding to the Terror Organizations:** - Government of all the countries should first identify fund sources of the Wahhabi influenced terror organizations then fund sources should be banned so that no financial aid should reach to the terror organization. This move will hurt terrorist organizations badly.
5. **Strengthening the Feeling of Unity in Diversity:** - Governments of countries should consolidate the feelings of cultural as well as communal harmony among their countrymen. If people of a country have these strong feelings in their mind then such ideologies cannot break the unity of a country.

6. **Turning a National Strategy in to a Coalition Strategy:** - Countries should join together in international efforts to eliminate terrorism and defeat all such ideologies which encourage mutual hatred and incite a man to murder his fellow men without any guilty. Therefore 'a joint war' against Wahhabi ideology sponsored terrorism should be launched' to eliminate it from this world and save millions of precious human lives.
7. **Immigration Laws and Its Enforcement Should be Strict:** - Those immigrated organizations as well as individuals who are caught promoting Wahhabi ideology should be immediately banned, their visas should be cancelled and they must be prosecuted as per the law of land of that country where they are caught. In this context there should be an international treaty among the nations.

CONCLUSION

The act of terrorism in any of its form whether small or large is condemnable and those ideologies which encourage terrorist activities are too equally condemnable. No religion teaches to show cruelties in the poor and weaker sections of society. But when religious teachings are interpreted & exploited in such a way that they serve the vested purposes of a particular section of a society and render others i.e. weaker and minor section of society from their basic rights, then clashes between followers of different ideologies or thinking emerge. Similarly, the vested interests of British colonialism forced Britain to support the al-Wahhab's ideology and along with this just like Britain, the United State of America's personal interests in Middle East Asia also compelled U.S. to support Saudi sponsored Wahhabi ideology to teach former U.S.S.R, a lesson and to defeat the ideology of communism through Mujahideens in Afghanistan. But these two superpowers' unawareness and blind support to this ideology is now inversely hurting them. Now these two superpowers are also suffering from terrorist attacks in their own countries. To kill an innocent is a biggest sin considered by all religions. Therefore, the need of hour is that all nations of the world should unite together to fight against this evil of terrorism generated by Wahhabism. Such ideologies should not be allowed to popularize among the masses. Finally, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia should introspect itself and must realize that to support such an intolerant and rigid ideology may hurt them badly one day.

In the end, it can be said that Wahhabist ideology is a huge threat to the existence or integrity of nations of the world. Therefore, all efforts should be made to discourage its spread in a nation particularly among the minority communities.

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