A Culture of Violence:
Lessons from the Pensacola Attack

by Dr. Frank Musmar

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Wahhabism is a fundamentally violent doctrine of Islam. It teaches that people fall on one of two sides: the Wahhabis, the chosen who will ascend to heaven; and the rest of humanity, including all other Muslims—all of whom are infidels who are to be hated, persecuted, and even killed. Wahhabis have killed people in Algeria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, London, New York, and now Pensacola. Their essential, intractable violence must be acknowledged if it is to be effectively dealt with.

On December 7, Second Lt. Muhammad Saeed Alshamrani, a member of the Saudi Air Force training to be a pilot, killed three people and injured ten at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida before he was shot dead by responding officers. The authorities detained three Saudi nationals who were seen filming the entire incident. The shooter had hosted a dinner party earlier in the week where he and three others watched videos of mass shootings.

The Pensacola naval base has long hosted international students from US allies for flight training, including high-ranking Saudi officials. A "couple hundred" foreign students are enrolled in the program, said Captain Timothy Kinsella Jr., the base commander. Unauthorized weapons are not allowed on the base, he said, adding, "You cannot bring a weapon on base unless you are part of the security forces."

President Trump now plans to review policies governing foreign military training in the US. "This has been done for many decades," he said. "I guess we are going to have to look into the whole procedure. We will start that immediately."

Saudi Arabia is still trying to recover from the killing last year of *Washington Post* columnist Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Saudi intelligence

officials and a forensic doctor are believed to have killed and dismembered Khashoggi on Oct. 2, 2018, as his fiancée waited outside the building.

In his book *The Strong Horse: Power, Politics, and the Clash of Arab Civilizations*, American journalist Lee Smith points out that it has always been hard for Americans to understand why peace in the Middle East is so elusive and why violence and terrorism are so pervasive and persistent in the Arab world. What they tend to overlook is that Arab culture in general, not only Wahhabi culture, has deep roots in violence.

Seeking the motivation behind the September 11 attacks, Smith moved to Cairo, where he discovered that the standard Western explanation—that the attacks were the product of a clash of East and West—was off the mark. Middle East conflicts have little to do with Israel, the US, or the West in general, but are endemic to the region. According to Smith's "Strong Horse Doctrine," the Arab world naturally aligns itself with strength, power, and violence.

Arabs have a long and continuing history of blowing up mosques and churches in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Libya. As Smith notes, it was not the US that conducted a campaign of terror in Beirut, assassinating Lebanese politicians, journalists, and civil activists. He adds, "the US State Department sentenced no opposition figures, intellectuals, journalists or bloggers to prisons in Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere around the Middle East, where they were subject to torture, rape, and murder. It was Arabs who did this to other Arabs."

Wahhabism, an Islamic doctrine practiced in Saudi Arabia, is a relatively recent phenomenon: it dates back only as far as the 18th century. But in its short history, Wahhabism has spawned at least two terrorist groups, al-Qaeda and ISIS, each of which has a unique and extreme take on violence. Saudi leaders need to address the problem of violence in the modern Islamic world and address Wahhabism's role in sustaining and encouraging such violence.

In July 2013, Wahhabism was identified by the European Parliament in Strasbourg as the primary source of global terrorism. It is a highly influential doctrine, in part because of Saudi money and in part because of the kingdom's role as protector of Islam's two holiest shrines. Saudi Arabia's fostering of the most violent forms of Islamism must be acknowledged by the West if it is ever to deal with the problem of Islamist violence effectively.

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