

'Wahhabi Lobby' Takes the Offensive

By J. MICHAEL WALLER

Radical Islamists take a page from the KGB's playbook and try to shape U.S. policy by politically manipulating policymakers with a well-funded influence campaign.



Totalitarian regimes in the Middle East have targeted the United States with a well-financed influence campaign that is being rooted in American politics. Veteran watchers of the "active-measures" programs of the former Soviet Union say this Islamist propaganda offensive bears an uncanny resemblance to the old Soviet international front operations and the broad parade of fellow travelers who used themes of peace, tolerance and civil liberties to advance Sovi-

Master plan: Oil wealth of the Saudis funds the Wahhabi movement to seize control of global Islam.

et strategic goals by weakening the United States at home and abroad.

"Active measures" is a translation of *aktivniye meropriyatya*, a term of KGB tradecraft that spans the covert-action spectrum from disinformation and propaganda to assassination and sponsorship of terrorism.

Numerous parallels are visible between the totalitarianism of Soviet com-

munist and that of Wahhabism, a Saudi-funded movement to seize control of global Islam, notes Stephen Schwartz, a former leftist, prolific chronicler of communist strategy and tactics and author of the forthcoming book *Two Faces of Islam*. "Aside from their ideological similarities and the common elements in the struggle of each power," says Schwartz, "there is a striking matter of their identical tactics in penetration of the United States."

In a column for *FrontPageMag.com*, Schwartz writes, "The Communist Party U.S.A. claimed to lead and, in effect, represent the entire labor and left movement when its constituency was restricted to a narrow band of fanatics and agents of a foreign regime." The same is true, he says, of campaigns that promote the Saudi brand of Islam, including U.S.-based Muslim political pressure groups he calls the "Wahhabi lobby."

For example, he says, "the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the American Muslim Council (AMC) and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) claim to lead and, in effect, represent the entire community of American Muslims. In fact, its constituency is restricted to a narrow band of fanatics and agents of a foreign regime, the Saudi kingdom."

The U.S. government had a means of predicting, identifying and countering Soviet active measures both at home and abroad. But it is poorly equipped to deal with Saudi-sponsored (and smaller, noncentralized) political-influence operations of militant Islamists against U.S. interests overseas and against the public and decisionmakers domestically. Cold War concerns at least led U.S. officials to focus on Soviet fronts and covert operations, but little notice was taken of the Islamist propaganda development that began in the early 1960s.

Now, with the Soviet Union long gone and the information revolution having empowered small, decentralized groups to battle the United States with methods short of all-out military warfare, researchers at the Rand Corporation's National Security Research Division have taken the lead in defining a new phenomenon they call "netwar." Rand's John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, who coined the term "cyberwar" to discuss the military implications of the information revolution on warfare, also have coined the word "netwar" to define conflicts short of war involving actors who might or might not be military or even government.

Netwar's distinguishing element, they write in their new book, *Networks*

and *Networks: The Future of Terror, Crime and Militancy*, takes advantage of the information revolution to empower small, networked organizations to battle hierarchical governments. Netwar, according to Arquilla and Ronfeldt, is "an emerging mode of conflict (and crime) at societal levels, short of traditional military warfare, in which the protagonists use network forms of organization and related doctrines, strategies and technologies attuned to the information age.

"These protagonists are likely to consist of dispersed organizations, small groups and individuals who communicate, coordinate and conduct their campaigns in an Internetted matter, often without a precise central command." The United States barely is beginning to grapple with the problem, intelligence sources say.

In its heyday, according to a CIA estimate provided to Congress, the Soviet Union spent an estimated \$3.3 billion annually on active measures, including the *Izvestiya*, *Pravda*, *New Times*, *Novosti* and *Tass* propaganda vehicles; Radio Moscow and clandestine radio stations around the world; international Communist parties; more than a dozen international front organizations such as the World Peace Council; and the KGB's entire operating budget for



Victim complex: Wahhabi Muslims present themselves as persecuted and victims of 'ethnic profiling.'

foreign *rezidentura* outposts. The budget included support for guerrilla and terrorist organizations.

The Saudis are outspending the former Soviet Union in their worldwide influence operations, and much of that money has been spent in the United States, intelligence officials claim. At one point in the 1990s, some \$1.85 billion was funneled through a single reputed Saudi

front group in Northern Virginia, the SAAR Foundation, to fund Islamist activity, according to SAAR documents reviewed by *INSIGHT*. Raided by federal agents for suspected terrorist money laundering and now closed, the SAAR Foundation was part of a network of Wahhabi-sponsored political front groups, mosques, charities, educational foundations, youth and student organizations, investment firms and holding companies. Many currently are under federal investigation as part of the Treasury Department's Operation Green Quest to track down alleged terrorist money.

"The Communist Party U.S.A. used labor unions as cover; the Wahhabi lobby uses charities," says Schwartz in his column. "The means and the ends are the same: Each represents the place where the ideological network encounters and seeks to control the masses. Each is used as a recruitment center and cover for terrorists." A leading active-measures expert says that while the Communist Party in the United States was very small and of "limited influence" on policy, "its value to the Soviets was that it provided the cadre to recruit people for front activities to promote Soviet interests."

The most publicized Islamist groups

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 39)

U.S. Fails to Expose Islamist Active Measures

The U.S. government is poorly equipped to monitor and evaluate foreign covert political-influence operations against Americans, and especially against U.S. decisionmakers.

"The reason we were successful in exposing Soviet active measures was that we did it in a coordinated way," says Herbert Romerstein, who founded and directed the Office of Counter Soviet Active Measures at the now-defunct U.S. Information Agency (USIA). "We raised the costs to the Soviet Union of spreading their lies, causing problems that snapped back on them, making it more of a problem to spread their propaganda and disinformation."

With no other government agency taking the lead, the Pentagon created an Office of Strategic Influence (OSI) that would, in part, wage the war of ideas in the Muslim world. *INSIGHT* sources alleged Department of Defense (DoD) spokeswoman Torie Clarke covertly wrecked the OSI by leaking disinformation about the office's mission to the *New York Times* in

February, leaving the government without a single tool for strategic-influence campaigns abroad. Clarke has refused to respond to *INSIGHT*'s many offers to allow her to refute these charges.

U.S. officials, including some supportive of OSI, tell *INSIGHT* that the Pentagon is not the proper venue for an effort to counter pro-terrorist propaganda abroad on a daily basis, or to deal with Wahhabi and other Islamist covert operations inside the United States.

Looking back on the USIA Office to Counter Soviet Active Measures, Romerstein notes, "We don't have an apparatus now to counter the lies being spread by America's enemies in the Arab world." In fact, the United States has nothing in place to do this at home.

The FBI lacks its own analytical unit and its internal database is so antiquated that agents have to write files in long-hand.

The bureau also was stung in the 1980s for investigating communist terrorist activity that operated under the cover

of Christian churches, resulting in the famous CISPES case that cost the careers of key senior FBI antiterrorism officials. As for the CIA, with few exceptions it does not collect intelligence on organizations inside U.S. borders. The mandates of other federal law-enforcement and investigative agencies also are extremely narrow, pertaining to tax evasion, immigration violations, undeclared foreign funding, money-laundering and so forth, with no other agency connecting the dots.

Security experts tell *INSIGHT* that the new Department of Homeland Security, with its planned intelligence-analysis office, must establish a unit dedicated to monitoring and assessing Wahhabi and other foreign-funded influence operations aimed at American citizens and decisionmakers, and to taking appropriate defensive measures.

That's fine, counters Romerstein, but the key to analysis is the actual collection of information. "If you can't gather the data in the first place, you can analyze to your heart's content, but you won't have the information."

— JMW

FBI Draws Line Between Muslims, Terrorists

FBI Director Robert Mueller heaped praise on those Muslims in America who have helped the bureau crack down on domestic and foreign terrorist groups — but what he didn't say was more revealing.

In a controversial June 28 appearance before the American Muslim Council (AMC), where he thanked American Muslims for their help, Mueller broke protocol and avoided praising the organization hosting his speech. Indeed, he said this: "Unfortunately, persons associated with this organization in the past have made statements that indicate support for terrorism and for terrorist organizations. I think we can — Muslims and non-Muslims alike — justifiably be outraged by such statements."

'WAHHABI LOBBY' OFFENSIVE

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17)

in the post-Sept. 11 federal raids received notoriety for their covert funding of, and even overt political support for, terrorist groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah and al-Qaeda. So far there have been vocal protests of innocence and no legal proof of guilt, but multi-agency investigations are continuing vigorously. Meanwhile, federal officials have yet to reel in a larger web of political and educational groups that are not suspected of funding terrorism but that do appear to be running Saudi propaganda operations under various guises. U.S. officials are more interested at the moment in tracking direct terrorist financial and operational support activity, but the FBI also has a mandate and a legal precedent to investigate covert foreign political-influence operations aimed at government decisionmakers.

That, however, may be a while in coming. It is against the law to be an unregistered foreign agent, and the U.S. intelligence community defines such an individual as having a clandestine relationship with a foreign intelligence officer. However, current law contains loopholes that allow such individuals to operate without being monitored or stopped. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) inserted one such loophole into the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA).

"Kennedy made it very clear that merely carrying out instructions of a foreign intelligence officer in support of a political objective would not be 'covered' under the law," according to Herbert Romerstein, a former profession-

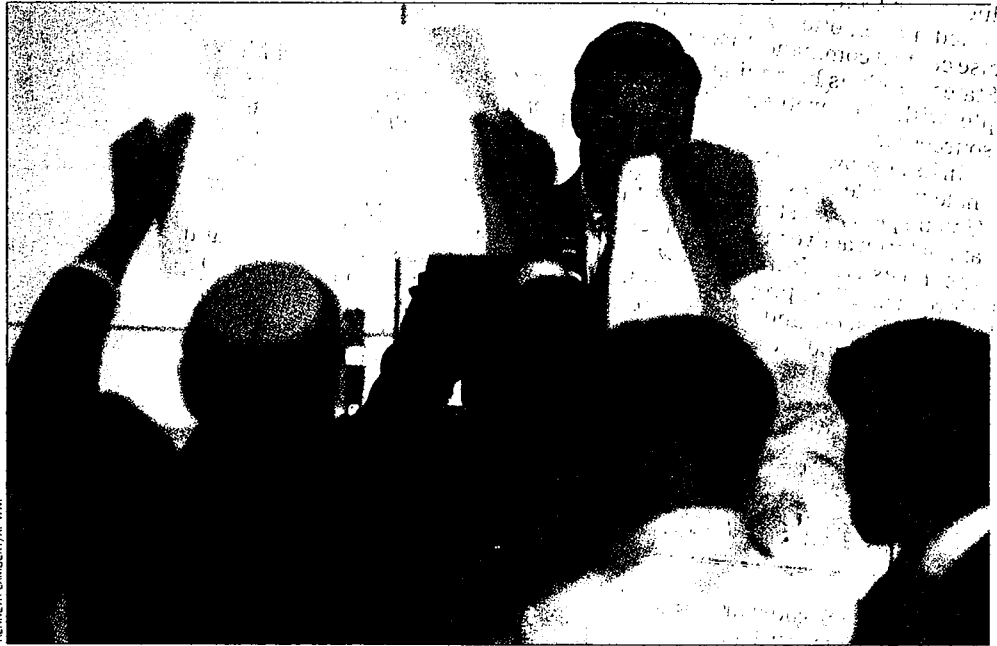
In the week prior to the speech, various TV personalities, including MSNBC's Alan Keyes and Fox News' Bill O'Reilly, tried to get AMC Executive Director Eric Vickers to denounce terrorist organizations such as Hamas, Hezbollah and al-Qaeda. While denouncing acts of terrorism, Vickers avoided denouncing these

notorious terrorist groups themselves.

The night before Mueller addressed the AMC, guest host Mike Barnicle on CNBC's *Hardball* asked Vickers to condemn Hamas and Hezbollah. Vickers would not. Barnicle followed, "How about al-Qaeda?"

According to the transcript, Vickers' only response was, "They are involved, in a resistance movement."

— JMW



KENNETH LAMBERT/AP/WIDE

We beg to differ: *Rabbis Avi Weiss, left, and Samuel Herzfeld protested prior to Mueller's address at the American Muslim Council in June.*

al investigator with the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. "That loophole remains in the USA PATRIOT Act," passed after the Sept. 11 attacks as a tough new legal tool to fight terrorism, Romerstein says.

The Saudis began their modern global propaganda campaign in the early 1960s, founding the Muslim World League (MWL) in 1962. Ten years later, the Saudi regime backed establishment of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY) and financed its activities. The MWL has offices around the world, including in New York and Virginia. Wa'il Jalaidan, a cofounder of al-Qaeda, was head of the MWL office in Pakistan. Federal agents raided the MWL Virginia offices in March for alleged ties to terrorism. Abdullah bin Laden, brother of terrorist Osama bin Laden, headed WAMY's Virginia office. *INSIGHT* sources say that an FBI probe into WAMY's alleged terrorist ties has "mysteriously ended."

At press time, the MWL was sponsoring a high-profile tour of the United States to promote Muslim understanding.

Under the wings of the early Saudi international fronts sprang networks of other organizations sharing interlocking leaderships and responsible for a range of activities: one group to coordinate and recruit students on college campuses nationwide, another for political agitation and others for political lobbying, education, cultural and religious outreach, cadre-building; charities (to include fund raising for terrorist organizations); and holding companies, investment funds and tax-exempt foundations to finance the networks.

Many of these active-measures operations reportedly are run through mosques, where they are not subject to IRS reporting requirements and until passage of the USA PATRIOT Act last autumn were practically off-limits to the FBI. Federal authorities raided or shut down at least 17 of the organizations for alleged financial improprieties

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 47)

'WAHHABI LOBBY' OFFENSIVE

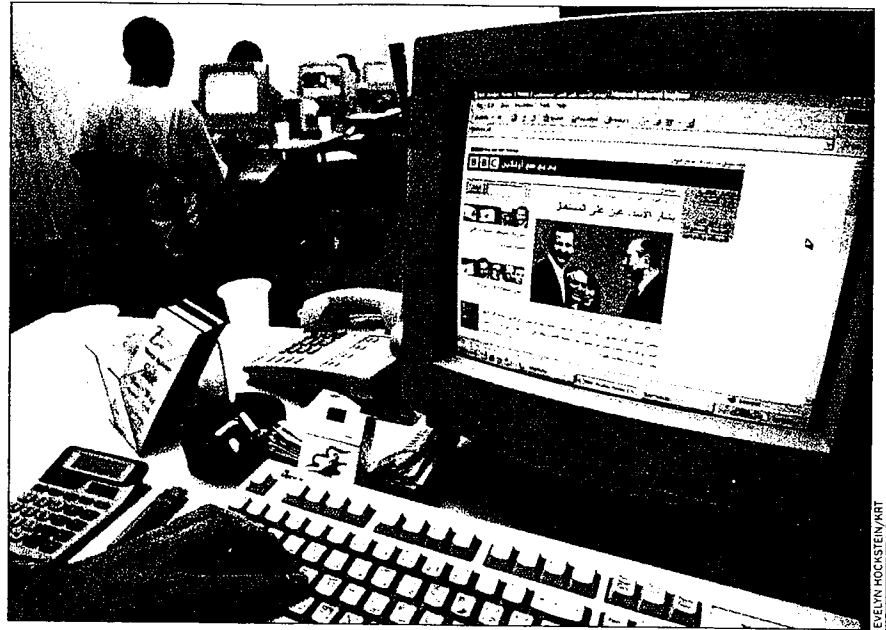
(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39)

since Sept. 11. All the affected organizations maintain their innocence.

Recent years have seen a merger between some old Soviet front organizations and left-wing activist groups and Islamic terrorist causes. The New York-based National Lawyers Guild (NLG) — officially cited as having been created in the 1930s under Josef Stalin as the foremost legal bulwark for the Communist Party U.S.A., its fronts and controlled organizations — survived its Soviet sponsors and now is considered by national-security specialists to be the main legal group facilitating terrorists and related causes. Among its projects, the NLG has published brochures advising people how to stand up to the FBI if questioned in terrorist cases. The brochure is available on the NLG Website in several languages, including Arabic, Farsi and Punjabi.

The NLG leadership runs the day-to-day operations of another group, the National Coalition to Protect Political Freedom (NCPFF), founded in the 1960s to provide legal support for domestic terrorist groups such as the Weather Underground, Symbionese Liberation Army, Black Liberation Army and Puerto Rican Armed Forces of National Liberation (see "Domestic Front in the War on Terror," Jan. 7).

The NCPFF's current president, Sami al-Arian, has been identified as a leading figure in the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, on the State Department terrorist list. Confronted publicly about his terrorist connections by Fox News' Bill O'Reilly and others, al-Arian said he was "shocked" that some of his friends turned up in the Middle East as terrorist leaders and protested that "We have been involved in intellectual-type activity."



EVEYV HOCKSTEIN/ART

Asymmetrical warfare: Information Age technology has made terrorist networks formidable adversaries.

The NLG, NCPFF and other reputedly Marxist operations of long-standing, such as the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), defend their clients as being unjustly accused, condemned through guilt by association or simply as misunderstood individuals whose politically unpopular views and actions must be protected under the Constitution. Critics of their clients, as well as law-enforcement agencies and anyone else acting against them, are labeled "racists and bigots" — now favorite terms of agents of the Wahhabi netwar.

This apparently is a 21st century adaptation of defense tactics that have served Soviet operatives well since the 1940s.

"Like the Communists before them,

the Wahhabis have presented arrestees, detainees and indicted suspects as people persecuted because they are 'foreign-born' or victims of 'ethnic profiling,'" says Schwartz.

"In the long term, the communist juridical operation aimed at protecting their terrorist, treasonous and spying activities was successful," Schwartz adds. "It should therefore surprise nobody that when the Wahhabi lobby came under American investigative scrutiny in the 1990s, their response and that of their defenders (including a considerable number of ultrasecularist and leftist Jews) almost exactly reproduced the effort mounted earlier in American history by Stalinist Communists and their protectors. Aside from the claim that they were victims because they were 'foreign-born' or were 'ethnically profiled,' the Wahhabis have recycled a full range of Stalinist techniques for evading the law."

Indeed, the AMC denounced the Treasury Department's March 20 raids on suspected terrorist fund-raising fronts in Virginia. The raids, AMC said in a news release slamming federal agents for "McCarthy-like tactics" in search of "evidence of wrongdoing that does not exist," were anti-Muslim. AMC exhorted, "Brothers and Sisters, this is YOUR community that has been attacked."

Veteran congressional investigator Romerstein urges federal investigators not to be intimidated or fall further into pander mode: "The FBI should be planting informants in these groups and monitoring them."

J. MICHAEL WALLER IS A SENIOR WRITER FOR *Insight* MAGAZINE.

An Islamic Republic in America?

"I wouldn't want to create the impression that I wouldn't like the government of the United States to be Islamic sometime in the future."

— Ibrahim Hooper, director of communications, Council on American-Islamic Relations.

"I think if we are outside this country, we can say oh, 'Allah, destroy America.' But once we are here, our mission in this country is to change it. There is no way for Muslims to be violent in America, no way. We have other means to do it. You can be violent anywhere else but in America."

— The American Muslim Council's Abdurahman Alamoudi.

"The center of gravity of the Muslim world is shifting to this country."

— Faiz Rehman, communications director, American Muslim Council. June 27, 2002.

— JMW