

Title: 'Death to America!' or enemy in disguise? Anti-American in Iran and Saudi Arabia, 2001-2011.

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Preface

This thesis is the final research of my Master's study Global History and International Relations at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam. In most recent years I became more interested in the interaction and conflicts between the West and the rest of the world, especially between the Western world and the Islamic World. During the Bachelor's program Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' theory was already part of the syllabus. I was aware of the complexity and controversy of the topic, that was however also a trigger for me to get more familiar with the topic. I was therefore glad that professor Dick Douwes gave me the opportunity for my Master's thesis to examine this theory and combine this theory with anti-Americanism in the Middle East.

I would therefore in particular offer my sincere thanks to professor Dick Douwes. Not only did he encourage me to work my way through the theories and materials, he also helped me with the formulation and translations. I could always count on his feedback. I would also like to thank my co-students of the research workshop. They have offered me some useful articles, books and other materials for my research.

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does not mean dependency. This, according to Mousavi-Tebrizi, is something the Iranians must always be aware of.¹⁷⁵ The same intention was brought up by senior Iranian officials in 2007 when they made statements in favor of negotiating with the US. According to the Iranian Expediency Council Chairman, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, it would in the future be effective for Iran to negotiate with the US, but they must at the same time always preserve the honor of Iran.¹⁷⁶ Whether with ‘the honor of Iran’ Rafsanjani and the senior officials mean the path of Khomeini, and the norms and values of the Islamic Iranian Republic, is unclear.

In 2008, during the US presidential election campaign, supporters of president Ahmadinejad in Iran, advocated talks with the US to settle the nuclear crisis. These supporters saw the benefits of negotiations with the US for Iran. Their perception was clear: if there was willingness to negotiate with the ‘Great Satan’, the US would recognize Iran as a fellow nuclear superpower.¹⁷⁷ Although using the term ‘Great Satan’ does not look like a friendly intermezzo in the US-Iran relationship, it is important to understand that the support for negotiations with the US, is already an achievement. Iran’s representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Ali Soltaniyeh, stated that Iran would welcome a renewed dialogue with America in order to reduce the tensions between both countries.¹⁷⁸ The old Guard conservatives and other supporters of ayatollah Khamenei did however stressed out that there was no room in Iran for conciliation or dialogue with the US ¹⁷⁹

5.4 Conclusion

In Iran the most important typologies of anti-Americanism are issue-oriented and instrumental. The crimes committed by the US in history and most recent events, such as the Iraq War, Afghanistan War and the support of Israel are for most Iranian leaders source of hatred against the US. Especially the US policies and their government –ruled by Zionists- and null chance that this will ever change, is the reason for Iranian leaders to not improve relationships with the US. Important for Iran is the division between conservatives and reformist and their role in Iranian media.

¹⁷⁵ MEMRI: Special Dispatch No. 1117, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/1639.htm> (15-04-2016).

¹⁷⁶ MEMRI: Inquiry & Analysis Series Report No. 237, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/1820.htm> (15-04-2016).

¹⁷⁷ MEMRI: Inquiry & Analysis Series Report No. 477, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/3081.htm> (02-04-2016).

¹⁷⁸ MEMRI: Inquiry & Analysis Series Report No. 477.

¹⁷⁹ Ibidem.

According to Khaled Al-Mushawwah – from the Saudi Ministry of Islamic Affairs – religious leaders in Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Middle East are the problem in the case of terrorism against the US and the West. People with religious knowledge, like imams, preachers and some sheikhs have a great deal of influence on the way of thinking of most citizens. If they preach the extremists views, the majority of the people shall follow this view, according to Al-Mushawwah.²⁰⁸ This idea is shared by many columnists. These Saudi columnists mostly live abroad and can speak freely about the wrongs in Saudi Arabia. According to MEMRI columnist Sa’ud Al-Balawi stated in 2008 that the religious discourse in Saudi Arabia was rooted in the past heritage and was not the spirit of the modern age. This religious discourse insists on choosing the past as a starting point. It dominated the mind and feelings of the Saudi people. This discourse makes it impossible for people to think for themselves.²⁰⁹ If Wahhabi Islamic leaders impose to their people that they should hate the US, the majority of the Saudi people will not doubt this. In 2008 – assumedly because of the US presidential election and the continuous wars in Afghanistan and Iraq - more Saudi clerics made anti-American statements on national television. One of them was Abd Al-Aziz Fawzan Al-Fawzan, who at that time was also a professor of Islamic law at the Imam Muhammed University in Saudi Arabia. According to him the US are collapsing and for this the Saudi Arabians should thank Allah, because the US have started to adopt principles of Islamic economy. When he speaks of Americans he calls them “these criminals”, who want to take over the world, spreading fear and destruction”. To the cleric, 9/11 was set up by the US so they could act like victims and kill millions of people in the following of this event.²¹⁰ This anti-American religious ideology has gone so far that pro- Al Qaeda members in 2008 had plans to assassinate George W. Bush during one of his visits to the Middle East. I am aware that Al Qaeda does not represent the mainstream Islamic religion in Saudi Arabia, but according to MEMRI the following message was published on the Islamic website www.alhesbah.net by an Saudi Arabian who called himself Abu Osama Al-Hazin: “This Saturday Bush will be in Riyadh; Lions of the Peninsula, get ready to cut off his head” was, does make it religious in a certain way. It called for all

²⁰⁸ MEMRI: Special Dispatch NO. 1320, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/1906.htm> (02-05-2016)

²⁰⁹ MEMRI: Inquiry & Analysis Series Report No. 400, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/2428.htm> (02-05-2016)

²¹⁰ ‘Saudi Cleric Abd Al-Aziz Fawzan Al Fawzan: Allah be praised, America is collapsing’, <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1888.htm>. (02-05-2016).

jihadi's to hate 'the Crusade dog, the foolish leader of the worldwide heresy and evil' in reward Allah shall promote them to the highest spheres of paradise.²¹¹ It is uncertain whether this message is factual, since the website has been taken offline, but muslim-fundamentalists such as Al Qaeda are popular among the young population in Saudi Arabia and beyond its borders and can spread antagonistic views and hatred on a large scale.

6.2.4 Pro-Americanism

Like anti-Americanism there is also a substantial group of Saudi Arabians that is pro-America and admit that the US have brought not only trouble and wars, but also freedom and welfare. In 2005 a Saudi columnist, Muhammed Al-Sheikh, wrote in the Saudi daily *Al-Jazirah* that Saudi Arabia has benefited from the relationship with the US. In contrary to Arab nationalism that only brought the Arabs a destructive ideology.²¹² Without the United States Saudi Arabia would never have gained their expertise on oil and the modern state that Saudi Arabia is today would not have existed. Al-Sheikh praises king Abdul Aziz for choosing capitalism after the Second World War instead of communism. According to the columnist the US were "the cornerstone for our development and progress". Not the US, but the Arabs have brought trouble in their world and have conspired against them, attacked them and used all the means to derail their plans for a unity.²¹³

In an interview published April 13th, 2009 in Saudi daily *'Okaz*, one of the reformist thinkers Ibrahim Al-Buleihi expressed his admiration for the Western civilization. To him the US and the West have brought wonderful and amazing things to their world. The Arabs should admit their shortcomings and acknowledge the accomplishments of the West that we are now benefitting from.²¹⁴ The same has been said by Saudi liberal Ali Sa'd Al-Moussa in the Saudi daily *Al-Watan*. According to him the US is the standard-bearer of scientific and technical progress in the world. Without the United states we would regress by 100 years:

²¹¹ MEMRI: Special Dispatch No. 1925, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/2692.htm> (02-05-2016).

²¹² MEMRI: Special Dispatch No.927, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/1403.htm> (02-05-2016).

²¹³ MEMRI: Special Dispatch No.927.

²¹⁴ MEMRI: Special Dispatch No.2332, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/3264.htm> (02-05-2016).

“The math is simple: Assume that all technological and scientific progress attained by man in the past century stands before you like a tall building. Now remove ever American brick from this building that represents a research, experiment, invention or a product. You will see that not only you have removed American bricks, but also half of every brick that the rest of the nations provided”.²¹⁵

A former Saudi navy commodore and US Liaison officer, Abdulateef Al-Mulhim, was also aware of the amazing things the US have accomplished. According to him the US are the most tolerant country in the world, regarding building an Islamic center or mosque. Al-Mulhim stated that Americans, especially before 9/11 had much respect for the Islamic religion. This does not counts for Saudi Arabia where people are not allowed to show respect for or practice another religion than Islam. The plans to built a mosque on the place of Ground Zero (where once the Twin Towers stood) is according to him disrespectful for the Americans. Although most Americans did not object to this, he calls for the Islamic community in the US to carefully consider the place where the mosque will be built. American citizens have showed respect to us for many years and we should do the same now, stated Al-Mulhim in the MEMRI article.²¹⁶

Saudi prince Turki Al-Faisal, former ambassador to the US and head of the Saudi intelligence, justified the war in Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. In an interview aired on *Al-Arabiya TV* he called the world a safer place after Bin-Laden got arrested by the United States. When the US forced to ousting the Taliban in Afghanistan after 9/11 this was totally justified, because the attacks on New York not only come from Afghanistan, but was “orchestrated by someone who had found refuge in Afghanistan”, according to Al-Faisal in MEMRI.²¹⁷ The interviewer asked him if he ever doubt the narrative about Bin-Laden’s involvement in 9/11. The prince never doubted this. According to him there is just too much evidence to back it up. Bin Laden did this and nobody else, stated the prince.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ MEMRI: Special Dispatch No.3258, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/4632.htm> (02-05-2016).

²¹⁶ MEMRI: Special Dispatch No. 3303, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/4680.htm> (02-05-2016).

²¹⁷ MEMRI: Special Dispatch No. 4147, <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/5657.htm> (15-04-2016).

²¹⁸ MEMRI: Special Dispatch No. 4147.

6.3 Conclusion

Similar as in Iran, Saudi Arabia also deals with a division in pro-American and anti-American followers. The complexity in Saudi Arabia is however that the liberal royal family wants to reform the state in a political, economic and social way, while the conservative Wahhabist leaders do not. The latter only seem to care about the doctrine that allows no freedom of religion or freedom of speech. This is highly convenient for the leaders, since they do not have to fear a subversive majority of the crowd that want to limit their power. US influence in Saudi Arabia can however lead to more freedom and openness (in a social, economic, political and religious way) and that is why anti-American propaganda is spread by Wahhabist leaders. Most of the royal members are indecisive whether they should follow the conservative Wahhabist doctrine, or chose the progressive reformist side. That is why in my research most of the royal members did not had a clear opinion about the United States. Pragmatism is perhaps more important to them and therefore they like to benefit from both the Wahhabist conservatism and the economic and political ties with the US. Choosing for the United States will lead to economic benefits and less (political) power in the Saudi state, while with abandoning the US they maintain their power, but lose one of the largest economic allies of Saudi Arabia. According to the sources I researched for this study, anti-Americanism in Saudi Arabia was issue-oriented, instrumental and religious. Similar as in Iran leaders target specific US goals and events. After 9/11 this was turned into instrumental anti-Americanism. To purify the Saudi state and to protect the elites that funded Al Qaeda, anti-American propaganda was used on a larger scale and Saudi Arabia came up with the conspiracy theory that Israel and America were behind 9/11. According to Saudi's that left Saudi Arabia and now live in the West, I could conclude that especially Wahhabist leaders and their religious doctrine are responsible for most of the anti-American propaganda, spread through social media, schools and public speeches. The way in which this is done is however not as openly as in for instance the speeches of religious leaders of Iran. After Saudi Arabia was attacked by the United States in 2001 for being responsible for the funding of Al Qaeda and committing 9/11, more anti-American propaganda was spread throughout Saudi Arabia and the Islamic World.

however large demonstrations and actions launched by the Iranian leaders for the Iranian citizens to demonstrate against the US and to show their respect for Bin Laden and his followers.

So, to what extent is the anti-American discourse in Iran and Saudi Arabia a reflection of the clash of civilizations theory? Huntington stated in his thesis that after the Cold War clashes would not emerge between states but between civilizations and the nature of this clash would be cultural, not political, ideological or economic. His thesis is based on civilizations, not states but Iran and especially Saudi Arabia are very influential states for the Muslim world at large and the US for the Western world. The conflict between both US-Iran and US-Saudi Arabia are however based on political and ideological matters. Islamic countries are anxious for American hegemony and American domination in their state or region. American support for Israel and several American interventions in the Middle East during 2001-2011 are to them a confirmation for this anxiety. The leaders are not opposed to American citizens or cultural values, solely to American policies, interference and hegemony. The clash or conflict is not cultural, but political or based on power. The anti-American typologies of Iran and Saudi Arabia is therefore not a clash of civilizations, but a conflict of politics or a conflict of power.

