

How to be a useful idiot: Saudi funding in Australia — Part II

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This article complements an earlier paper that discussed the implications for Australia of the availability of massive funding, largely secret, from Saudi Arabia and related fundamentalist Islamic regimes.¹ It was noted in that paper that such funding would be likely to damage and even corrupt the university system, especially given the managerialism and *faux* “entrepreneurial spirit” embraced by contemporary university administrations.

This deplorable situation has continued to deteriorate, and recent developments require that the issue be revisited. Consequently, we begin with the situation at Griffith University, where this problem is well advanced, before turning to a discussion of the history and nature of this Saudi program of global proselytisation. We look then at “The Project”, the previously secret Islamist strategy of “financial *jihad*” that guides this program, and finally

we review some explanations for the behaviour of bureaucrats, academics and politicians who play the role of agents of influence or useful idiots, doing the bidding of totalitarian ideological movements, including Islamism.

How to dig a hole

In April 2008 it was revealed that Queensland’s Griffith University “practically begged the Saudi Arabian embassy to bankroll its Islamic campus for \$1.3 million”, assuring the Saudis that arrangements could be kept secret if required.² The issue quickly became a public relations disaster; but while it had elements of farce, the Griffith fiasco illustrates a major problem facing liberal democracies when their academic and other public institutions are confronted with the vast reservoir of petrodollars controlled by the Saudi government and

1. Mervyn F. Bendle, “Secret Saudi funding of radical Islamic groups in Australia”, *National Observer* No.72, Autumn 2007, pp.7-18. Thanks to Dr Christopher J. Ward for his interest and help.
2. Richard Kerbaj, “Top uni ‘begged’ for Saudi funding”, *The Australian*, 22 April 2008, p.1.

super-rich Saudi citizens.

The revelations about Griffith's aggressive pursuit of Saudi funding ignited widespread fears that the university would allow itself to become a centre for the promulgation of Wahhabism, the fundamentalist, exclusivist, punitive and sectarian form of Islam, that is both the Saudi state religion and the chief theological component of Sunni versions of Islamism, the totalitarian ideology guiding most of the active terrorist groups in the world.³

These concerns had first surfaced in September 2007, when it was revealed that Griffith was to receive the Saudi funding, and moderate Muslims expressed an anxiety that "the Saudis [were] using their financial power to transform the landscape of Australia's Islamic community and silence criticism of Wahhabism [and especially] its link to global terrorism and national security issues".⁴

Shortly beforehand, it had been revealed that the Saudis were planning a \$2.7 billion scholarship fund for Australian universities, designed to facilitate the entry of Saudi students into Australia to undertake tertiary education in the face of restrictions

on their entry into the US and UK in the post-9/11 security environment.⁵ More recently, from 3-5 March 2008, Griffith hosted the controversial Islamist ideologue Tariq Ramadan, as keynote speaker at a conference pointedly called "The Challenges and Opportunities of Islam in the West: The Case of Australia".⁶ The event was organised by the university's Griffith Islamic Research Unit (GIRU). The chair of the opening ceremony was the unit's director, whose salary was supplemented by the Saudi grant, while the welcoming remarks were made by the Saudi ambassador.

In the subsequent revelations, documents obtained under freedom of information provisions showed not only had Griffith University "begged" for the funds, but that its vice-chancellor, Ian O'Connor, promoted Griffith as the "university of choice" for Saudis and "offered the embassy an opportunity to reshape the Griffith Islamic Research Unit (GIRU) during its campaign to get "extra noughts" added to the Saudi cheques".⁷ It was also pointed out that Professor Ross Homel, the then director of the Griffith University Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance (*sic.*), had initially denied that the university had

3. Richard Kerbaj, "Uni 'an agent of extreme Islam'", *The Australian*, 23 April 2008, p.1.

4. Richard Kerbaj, "Muslims attack \$1m Saudi gift to university", *The Australian*, 17 September 2007, p.7.

5. Bernard Lane, "Saudis on tertiary mission", *The Weekend Australian*, 17-18 March 2007, p.10.

6. Melanie Phillips, "Tariq Ramadan, master of Islamist doublespeak", *The Australian*, 3 March 2008.

7. Kerbaj, "Top uni 'begged'...", *op. cit.*, p.1.

pursued Saudi funding, but had then admitted it had in fact done so, once confronted with the documents.⁸

Concerns also emerged around the role of the GIRU director, Dr Mohamad Abdalla. Dr Abdulla was born in Libya and lived in Jordan before coming to Australia, where he completed a PhD in “Islamic Science” at Griffith University in 1994-5, after “he began a path of spiritual self-reformation in 1990, and travelled frequently to various countries to learn from reputable Muslim scholars”.⁹ He is co-director of the National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies, and the founding director of the GIRU, which is part of the Key Centre for Ethics, Law, Justice and Governance, and linked to the Centre of Excellence for Policing and Security at Griffith,¹⁰ where Dr Abdulla is an associate investigator in a federally-funded academic facility mandated to produce high-level research and policy advice on terrorism.

Dr Abdulla “refused to be drawn on claims he has connections to the secretive Muslim group Tablighi Jamaat”, while also denying that any such mem-

bership would be controversial.¹¹ For its part, “Griffith University denied Dr Abdalla was a Tablighi leader”.¹² Nevertheless, it was reported that Abdalla is regarded as the Brisbane leader of the Tablighi Jamaat group, and “has been identified as [such] by Muslim community figures, including [a] prominent Islamic leader, who declared emphatically: ‘I know Mohamad Abdalla very well.... He’s the head of Tablighi in Brisbane’.”¹³

While Griffith “praised the group ... as a ‘peaceful movement’ that provided spiritual support to disadvantaged community members”,¹⁴ Tablighi Jamaat has emerged as a shadowy network that plays a significant role in promoting Islamism and channelling members into terrorist organisations. Concern about the group has steadily increased within the West’s intelligence agencies, after initial assessments under-estimated its political militancy:¹⁵

The West’s misreading of Tablighi Jamaat actions and motives has serious implications for the war on terrorism. Tablighi Jamaat has always adopted

8. Ibid.

9. “About GIRU”, Griffith Islamic Research Unit, available at: www.griffith.edu.au/centre/kcel-jag/giru/

10. Clearly, Griffith is a hive of excellence.

11. Richard Kerbaj, “Uni defends Saudi grant”, *The Australian*, 24 April 2008, p.2.

12. Richard Kerbaj, “Jihad body linked to top university”, *The Australian*, 29 April 2008.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Alex Alexiev, “Tablighi Jamaat: *jihad’s* stealthy legions”, *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Winter 2005. www.meforum.org/article/686

an extreme interpretation of Sunni Islam, but in the past two decades, it has radicalised to the point where it is now a driving force of Islamic extremism and a major recruiting agency for terrorist causes worldwide. For a majority of young Muslim extremists, joining Tablighi Jamaat is the first step on the road to extremism. Perhaps 80 percent of the Islamist extremists in France come from Tablighi ranks, prompting French intelligence officers to call Tablighi Jamaat the ‘antechamber of fundamentalism’.

Of the 15,000 Tablighi missionaries reportedly active in America it has been concluded that they “present a serious national security problem. At best, they and their proxy groups form a powerful proselytising movement that preaches extremism and disdain for religious tolerance, democracy, and separation of church and state. At worst, they represent an Islamist fifth column that aids and abets terrorism”.¹⁶

In Australia, it is estimated that there could be between 7,000 to 10,000 followers of Tablighi Jamaat, a comparatively much higher concentration than in the US, and in March 2008 the group was prominent in media reports about a violent power-struggle over control of Sefton mosque in Sydney.¹⁷

Accused of being a conduit for terrorism, Tablighi Jamaat is a secretive and little-known Islamic group.... Now some of its Sydney members are being accused of staging a brash takeover bid for the Sefton mosque, so they can install their own more extremist preacher and wield their fast-expanding influence over its followers. A Sydney magistrate issued an apprehended violence order against an alleged member of the group who tried to evict the Sefton mosque’s imam from his own home and threatened to kill him if he returned. [This episode] comes at a time when the Tablighi group internationally has been identified ... as a recruiting ground for al-Qa’ida and a movement that has been linked to numerous extremists and terrorists.

These include the 2005 London bombers; a Spanish terrorist cell planning to launch a bomb attack in Barcelona; the failed shoe-bomber Richard Reid; Jose Padilla, who was planning to explode a “dirty bomb” in the US; and Lyman Harris who was planning to attack the Brooklyn Bridge. The Australian group has been the subject of “claims and counter-claims about the misuse of funds and the alleged channelling of charity money to terrorist-linked organisations offshore”.¹⁸ An Australian counter-terrorism expert confirmed that the attempted Sydney takeover was a tactic used by hard-line Islamist groups overseas.¹⁹

16. Ibid.

17. Natalie O’Brien, “Acolytes of hate gain a foothold”, *The Australian*, 24 March 2008.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid. A recent study of Tablighi Jamaat in Sydney concluded that “contemporary Islamic revivalism is a defensive reaction to modernity.... Muslims as adherents to a revealed tradition — Islam — are in a serious state of crisis. They are confronted with both material crisis and the

In the face of this multi-dimensional public relations debacle, O'Connor attempted to defend his university's behaviour in an article published in *The Australian*, but this only further fuelled the controversy,²⁰ as it emerged he had only a very limited understanding of Islam and other religions; had taken substantial parts of his article from the Wikipedia website without acknowledgement; and was even forced to deny he had breached his own university's regulations on plagiarism.²¹

An example of O'Connor's limited knowledge was his insistence in his article that the official Saudi state religion should be called "Unitarianism" rather than Wahhabism. In fact, the term "unitarian" is used by Wahhabis themselves to distinguish their sectarian version of Islam from that of mainstream Muslims who, the Wahhabis insist, are not sufficiently "unitarian", i.e., don't adequately recognise the absolute unity and oneness of God, and are therefore not proper Muslims. To adopt such a term, as O'Connor recommends we should, would be to accept this Wahhabi claim and theologically disenfranchise over a billion non-Wahhabi Muslims. (O'Connor's recom-

mended use of the term also came as a shock to the Unitarian Church which is a breakaway from Christianity that rejects the doctrine of the Trinity and is very liberal in theology.)

To compound the impression of deep confusion in this sensitive area, O'Connor also compared Wahhabism to Christian theonomy and reconstructionism, two forms of extremism that are amongst the most reactionary sects in American religious life. Theonomists and reconstructionists call for the universal rule of theocratic republics governed entirely according to Biblical principles, with non-Christians excluded from voting and citizenship. Under such regimes, homosexuality, adultery, blasphemy, idolatry, and "false religions" would be punishable by death. It was an extremely revealing comparison for O'Connor to make, as it confirms by implication the extremely conservative, reactionary, and punitive nature of the Saudi version of Islam whose financial and institutional involvement at Griffith he was promoting.

It also emerged that the article published under O'Connor's name "was based on material provided by senior staff",²² suggesting that this lack of

threat of losing their faith and identity in modernity." Such deep states of alienation frequently lead to extremist political involvement. Ali, Jan Ashik, *Islamic Revivalism: a Study of the Tablighi Jamaat in Sydney*. PhD Thesis, School of Sociology & Anthropology, University of New South Wales, 2006. www.library.unsw.edu.au/~thesis/adt-NUN/uploads/approved/adt-NUN20070123.105540/public/o1front.pdf

20. Ian O'Connor, "Islam and the West need to engage", *The Australian*, 24 April 2008, p.14.

21. Michael Sainsbury, "Uni chief lifted Islam text from Wikipedia", *The Weekend Australian*, 26-27 April 2008, p.1.

22. Ibid.

knowledge extends beyond the vice-chancellor to include those people at Griffith regarded as qualified to advise him on religious matters (presumably including Dr Abdulla). This impression appears to be confirmed by a reported e-mail exchange between a presenter of the ABC Radio National's *The Religion Report* and O'Connor's principal policy adviser:²³

[The principal policy adviser] denied that Australia's universities were secular institutions, on the grounds that they followed the Christian calendar, with holidays at Christmas and Easter, and he added that because we seemed to have no objection to the 'Christianisation' of our universities, we could hardly object to attempts to 'Islamify' them or any other aspects of Australian life.

This statement reveals that, at the highest level of the administration of Griffith University — which, as noted, hosts the National Centre of Excellence for Islamic Studies — it is regarded as inconsequential if Australia is "Islamified" after the Saudi Arabian model, a revelation which does at least explain the demeaning manner in which the university begged the Saudis for funds and behaved in such an obsequious fashion throughout this deplorable episode.

Saudi Arabia and financial *jihad*

Perhaps such sycophancy is only to be expected amongst university bureaucrats and ambitious and ideologically committed academics, given the vast amounts of petrodollars being made available to promote Wahhabism, Islamism, and global *jihad*. This massive, ideologically-loaded largesse in turn reflects a major shift in policy within Saudi Arabia. Theologically, the obligation on Muslims to finance *jihad* arises from a number of verses in the Qur'an, including Chapter 61, Verses 10-11: "you ... should strive for the cause of Allah with your wealth and your lives"; and Chapter 49, Verse 15: "The [true] believers are only those who ... strive with their wealth and their lives for the cause of Allah." And this obligation has been re-asserted by influential Muslim scholars, including the Saudi, Hamud bin Uqla al-Shuaibi: "Financial *jihad* [is even] more important ... than self-sacrificing", e.g., through suicide-bombing.²⁴ While Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the world's most influential contemporary Islamist ideologue, also reiterated this obligation: "collecting money for the *mujahideen* (*jihad* fighters...) was not a donation or a gift but a duty necessitated by the sacrifices they made for the Muslim nation."²⁵

23. Stephen Crittenden, "No defence for ignorance", *The Weekend Australian*, 26-27 April 2008, p.22.

24. Lt. Col. Jonathan D. Halevi, "What drives Saudi Arabia to persist in terrorist financing? Al-Jihad bi-al-Mal. Financial *jihad* against the infidels," *Jerusalem Viewpoints* (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs), no. 531, 1 June 2005. www.jcpa.org/jl/vp531.htm

25. "Profile of Sheikh Dr Yussuf al-Qardawi, chairman of the board of the Union of Good," Intelligence and Terrorism Centre at the Centre for Special Studies. www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/html/final/eng/sib/2_05/funds_g.htm

Nevertheless, the Saudi regime had been comparatively restrained with respect to the large-scale promotion of Wahhabism and *jihad*. This changed in 1979 with the Iranian Revolution and the emergence of Iran as a Shi'ite theocracy among the Gulf States. This had a galvanising effect on the Saudi regime, which subsequently provided massive financial support for Iraq in its war with Iran. And this anxiety intensified when hundreds of dissidents seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca that same year. The seizure was led by scions of powerful Saudi families, theology students, and members of the Muslim Brotherhood and the National Guard who were gripped by the apocalyptic belief that the *Mahdi* (redeemer of Islam) had returned. They proclaimed that the Saudi royal family were apostates from Islam, that the regime was corrupt, that it was allowing Saudi culture to be destroyed by Western influences, and had lost all legitimacy. They called for a return to a rigorous observance of Wahhabism, denounced America and the West and the education of women, and demanded the expulsion of all non-Muslims and the closure of oil supplies to the US.

The uprising was suppressed after a two-week battle that left hundreds dead, with some 70 rebels being executed later. Fearing a revolution or coup, King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, who ascended the Saudi throne

in 1982, bowed to many of the rebel demands; vigorously courted the Wahhabi religious establishment; adopted the title of "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques"; entrenched the position of Wahhabism as the Saudi state religion; and initiated massive spending programs to promote this form of sectarian Islam across the Muslim world and beyond. Consequently, "in the mid-1980s, Saudi Arabia began to openly support and finance an ideological assault to spread Wahhabism [and] embarked upon the most extensive missionary campaign in history, effectively exporting Wahhabism to the four corners of the globe", largely under the guidance of the World Muslim League.²⁶

In order to ensure that the Muslim world knew of the scale of the regime's commitment, the Saudi government English weekly *Ain Al-Yaqeen* published an article in March 2002 on the "billions spent by Saudi royal family to spread Islam to every corner of the earth". This provided extensive details about the Saudi royal family's efforts to spread its Wahhabi version of Islam across the globe. The article explained how "the determination of the Kingdom to support Islam and Islamic institutions to the best of its ability was evident from the formation of the Kingdom ... but it was only when oil revenues began to generate real wealth that the Kingdom could fulfil its ambitions of spreading the

26. Evgenii Novikov, "The World Muslim League: agent of Wahhabi propagation in Europe", *Terrorism Monitor* (The Jamestown Foundation), Vol. 3, Issue 9, 6 May 2005. www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369686

word of Islam to every corner of the world.”²⁷

The article confirmed that the cost of then King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud’s efforts in this field “has been astronomical, amounting to many billions of Saudi riyals. In terms of Islamic institutions, the result is some 210 Islamic centres wholly or partly financed by Saudi Arabia, more than 1,500 mosques and 202 colleges and almost 2,000 schools for educating Muslim children in non-Islamic countries in Europe, North and South America, Australia and Asia”.²⁸ As a result, in 2005 it was estimated by the former director of the CIA, R. James Woolsey, that the Saudis had spent some \$90 billion since the mid-1970s to export Wahhabism on a global scale, and there has been no evidence of decreased activity in this proselytising effort.²⁹

With respect to terrorism, Stuart A. Levey, the US Treasury’s Under-Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, and head of the Office of Terrorist Finance and Financial

Crime, testified to the US Senate finance committee on 1 April 2008 that “Saudi Arabia today remains the location where more money is going to terrorism, to Sunni terror groups and to the Taliban than any other place in the world”.³⁰ As Levey further testified, Saudi Arabia is the leading financial supporter of Al Qaeda and other terrorist networks, and huge amounts of money are channelled through complex networks of private, government and charitable organisations. Moreover, the Saudis have failed to implement vital measures requested by the US to stem the flow of funds: “We continue to face significant challenges as we move forward with these efforts, including fostering and maintaining the political will among other governments to take effective and consistent action [and] our work is not nearly complete”.³¹

While the Saudis had displayed aggression in the suppression of terrorist cells within Saudi Arabia because of their threat to the regime, they had not fulfilled promises to establish a

27. Middle East Media Research Institute, “Saudi government paper: ‘billions spent by Saudi royal family to spread Islam to every corner of the earth’”, *MEMRI Special Dispatch Series*, No. 360, 27 March 2002. www.memri.org/bin/opener.cgi?Page=archives&ID=SP36002

28. *Ibid.*

29. Evgenii Novikov, *op. cit.*

30. Josh Meyer, “Saudis faulted for funding terror”, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 April 2008. Levey also heads the Office of Intelligence and Analysis, the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, the Office of Foreign Assets Control, and the Treasury Executive Office of Asset Forfeiture. His office co-ordinates the US Treasury Department’s policy, enforcement, regulatory and intelligence efforts against the financial systems that support not only international terrorists, but also narcotics traffickers, proliferators of weapons of mass destruction, and other threats to US national security.

31. *Ibid.*

financial intelligence unit capable of tracing the money trails between terrorists and their financial backers, and had not established a commission to supervise the complex system of Islamic charities suspected of channelling donations to terrorist groups and other extremists. They had also failed to publicly hold accountable those Saudi citizens who have been the subject of enforcement actions by the US and other authorities.

Aside from official government investigations, the Saudi role in funding international terrorism has also been the subject of various books and articles, based on extensive investigations.³² For example, it has been estimated that “more than 400 Islamic financial institutions currently operate in 75 countries [holding] more than \$800 billion in assets [and] growing 15 percent annually”; while one wealthy Saudi family “have built their terror-funding-affiliated \$3.5 billion [corporate group] to service the *shari’a* [including] business, finance, and media sectors incorporating agriculture, communication, health care, real estate, tourism, trade, transportation, [media] and finance

companies”.³³

Given this wealth of information from a range of reliable sources, it is inconceivable that the relevant parties at Griffith University would not have been aware of the issues and dangers associated with soliciting and accepting Saudi funding for academic programs.

“The Project”

The issue of how universities are to respond to the challenges inherent in the ready availability of massive amounts of petrodollars is becoming ever more important as the realm of culture moves to centre-stage in the war on terror, and an awareness spreads that conventional forms of military and counter-insurgency need to be augmented by attention to the “soft power” of culture, within which, of course, universities play a central role. There has been a realisation that the war on terror requires careful attention to how financial *jihad* operates within the realms of culture, ideology and politics within Western societies. As one prominent analyst of the global financing of terrorism observes:³⁴

32. Rachel Ehrenfeld, *Funding Evil: How Terrorism is Financed and How to Stop It* (Chicago: Bonus Books, 2005); J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins, *Alms for Jihad: Charity and Terrorism in the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Both these books were the target of legal action undertaken in Great Britain by Saudis to suppress them, resulting in *Alms for Jihad* being withdrawn and destroyed (see below).

33. Rachel Ehrenfeld and Alyssa A. Lappen, “Fifth generation warfare”, *FrontPageMagazine.com*, 20 June 2008. <http://frontpagemagazine.com/Articles/Read.aspx?GUID=5BF32F00-2C8F-47CF-8C69-93644CCFA710>

Originally published in Jeffrey Norwitz (ed.), *Armed Groups: Studies in National Security, Counterterrorism, and Counterinsurgency* (Newport, Rhode Island: US Naval War College, 2008), Chapter 28.

34. *Ibid.*

The United States and the West cannot win the war against radical Islam [even] with the most sophisticated military strategies. Winning requires understanding the [development of] a global ideological and political movement supported by a parallel ‘Islamic’ financial system to exploit and undermine Western economies and markets. This movement is the foundation and the major funding source for the political, economic, and military initiatives of the global Islamic movement.

And, as Mark Steyn has observed:³⁵

How will we lose the war against Radical Islam? Well, it won’t be in a tank battle. Or in the Sunni Triangle or the caves of Bora Bora. It won’t be because terrorists fly three jets into the Oval Office, Buckingham Palace and the Basilica of St Peter’s on the same Tuesday morning. The war will be lost incrementally because we are unable to reverse the ongoing radicalisation of Muslim populations in South Asia, Indonesia, the Balkans, Western Europe and, yes, North America.

Steyn goes on to ask the rhetorical question: “Who’s behind that radicalisation? Who funds the mosques and Islamic centres that in the past 30 years have set up shop on just about every Main Street around the planet?”³⁶

This vast program is directed by various agencies within Saudi Arabia or

associated with it, under the influence of an Islamist theological, ideological, and political outlook derived from the experiences of the first Islamist organisation, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), founded in 1928 by the Egyptian, Hassan al-Banna, who recognised the need for a sophisticated financial infrastructure to support global *jihad*. Its motto is: “Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. The Qur’an is our law. *Jihad* is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope”, while its oath of allegiance declares, “I believe that ... the banner of Islam must cover humanity”.³⁷ Pursuing this universalistic goal, al-Banna saw the need to establish an Islamic financial system based on Qur’anic principles that could compete with and eventually supersede that of the West on a global scale. This vision was developed and nurtured by subsequent Islamist ideologues such as the late Sayyid Qutb and Said Ramadan, and Yousef al-Qaradawi, who is the head of the Department of Islamic law at the University of Qatar and the most influential Islamist ideologue in the world today.

Al-Qaradawi has been banned from entering the US since 1999 because of his outspoken advocacy of terrorism and associations with terrorist organisations, and in August 2004 he issued a *fatwa* declaring that “all

35. Mark Steyn, “The vanishing jihad exposés”, *Orange County Register*, 5 August 2007. www.ocregister.com/opinion/mark-steyn-jihad-1797347-exposs-column#

36. *Ibid.*

37. Lorenzo Vidino, “The Muslim Brotherhood’s conquest of Europe”, *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 1, Winter 2005. www.meforum.org/article/687

the Americans in Iraq are soldiers. There is no difference between enlisted soldiers and civilians.... The kidnapping and killing of Americans is a [Muslim religious] obligation".³⁸ He is also the author of *Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase* (1990).³⁹ This in turn derives much of its material from the mysterious document "Towards a World Strategy for Political Islam" (a.k.a. "The Project"), which was prepared in 1982 by the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood as a blueprint for their global strategy for Islamist supremacy. Its likely principal author was Saïd Ramadan, who was the son-in-law and personal secretary of Hassan al Banna and who has been described as "the ideological grandfather of Osama bin Laden".⁴⁰ He was also the actual father of Tariq Ramadan, the keynote speaker invited by Griffith University to lead its conference in March 2008, as mentioned above.

"The Project" has been described as "revealing a top-secret plan developed by the oldest Islamist organisation with one of the most extensive terror networks in the world to launch

a program of 'cultural invasion' and eventual conquest of the West that virtually mirrors the tactics used by Islamists for more than two decades"; this involves "a totalitarian ideology of infiltration which represents, in the end, the greatest danger for European societies".⁴¹

It came to light after police raided the Bank Al Taqwa in Switzerland in November 2001 at the request of US security agencies, and experts recovered a copy of it from the computer belonging to the bank's CEO. Initially, access to "The Project" was limited to Western intelligence agencies, and it only came to public attention through the efforts of the Swiss investigative journalist Sylvain Besson, who regards it as one of the most tightly guarded secrets in the history of Islamism, and analysed it in his 2005 book *La conquête de l'Occident: Le projet secret des Islamistes* ("The Conquest of the West: The Islamists' Secret Project"), which has been described as possibly "the most important book on the rise of Islamism in Europe".⁴²

"The Project" can be summarised as follows. It outlines a covert strategy

38. Ehrenfeld and Lappen, "Fifth generation warfare", *op. cit.*

39. An online version of *Priorities of the Islamic Movement in the Coming Phase* is available at: www.youngmuslims.ca/online_library/books/poimitcp/index.htm

40. Robert Dreyfuss, "Cold War, Holy Warrior", *Mother Jones* (San Francisco), January/February 2006. www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2006/01/holy_warrior.html

41. Patrick Poole, "The Muslim Brotherhood Project," *FrontPage Magazine*, 11 May 2006. www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/Read.aspx?GUID=%7B67736123-6864-4205-B51E-BCBDEF45FCDE%7D

42. John C. Zimmerman, "Review of: Sylvain Besson, *La Conquête de l'Occident: Le Projet Secret Des Islamistes*", in *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 20, No. 1, January 2008, pp.141-143.

for the gradual and secret promotion of Islamism on a global scale, within which it is easy to see how useful idiots and agents of influence play essential roles in the West. This strategy involves a complex process of organisational development, involving mosques, community groups, schools, hospitals, charities, advocacy groups, academic centres, Islamist think-tanks, and publishing companies, all of which are to be linked internationally. The latter are to be used to produce books, magazines, pamphlets, and other publications and media (e.g., cassette tapes, and now videos, CDs, DVDs, and computer software) legitimising and promoting the broad Islamist ideological position, and attracting, cultivating, and promoting Islamist intellectuals.

The strategy also involves ordinary political activity in existing structures (e.g., political parties), and alliances with “progressive” Western organisations (e.g., NGOs) that share attitudes and goals with Islamism (e.g., anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism, anti-Americanism, anti-Zionism, etc). It requires extensive network-building, and the infiltration of existing or potentially sympathetic organisations — Muslim and non-Muslim — while avoiding open alliances with publicly known terrorist groups; always promoting a public profile of moderation, coupled with a relentless insistence on Muslim “victimhood”, with a special focus on the situation of the Palestin-

ians, which is to be dramatised at every opportunity.

All target organisations are to be gradually realigned ideologically in accordance with the principles of Islamism and *jihadism*, using whatever tactics of proselytising, re-education, subversion, manipulation, deception and dissimulation are required. During this stage of development “The Project” emphasises that it is vital to avoid or minimise any conflicts with or within Western societies that might provoke a backlash and lead to restrictions on Islamist activities. In the longer term, the aim is to develop “security forces” that will protect Islamist organisations and intimidate enemies. All of this is to be promoted through the media, which has to be carefully cultivated and monitored, while extensive use is to be made of strategically placed agents of influence and useful idiots in the media, universities, etc. Central to this strategy is the establishment of strong financial systems, along with the necessary administrative and ancillary staff, and computer and communications facilities, capable of supporting these many activities in the West and globally.⁴³

On one hand, the existence of such a strategy is not in itself unusual or surprising as such comprehensive plans of subversion have been developed to various degrees of sophistication and implemented by various revolutionary movements over the past 200 years, notably by the Soviet Union, which

43. An English translation of “The Project” can be found at: Patrick Poole, “The Muslim Brotherhood ‘Project’ (continued)”, *FrontPageMagazine.com*, 11 May 2006. www.frontpagemag.com/articles/Read.aspx?GUID=61829F93-7A81-4654-A2E8-FOA5E6DD3DC4

used the Communist International, the KGB and various espionage agencies and front organisations to exploit sympathetic organisations, useful idiots, and agents of influence in the West. On the other hand, the presence of “The Project” and the pace of its implementation are extremely impressive:⁴⁴

What is startling is how effectively the Islamist plan for conquest outlined in ‘The Project’ has been implemented by Muslims in the West for more than two decades. Equally troubling is the ideology that lies behind the plan: inciting hatred and violence against Jewish populations around the world; the deliberate co-opting and subversion of Western public and private institutions; its recommendation of a policy of deliberate escalating confrontation by Muslims living in the West against their neighbours and fellow-citizens; the acceptance of terrorism as a legitimate option for achieving their ends and the inevitable reality of *jihad* against non-Muslims; and its ultimate goal of forcibly instituting the Islamic rule of the caliphate by *shari’a* in the West, and eventually the whole world.

Agents of influence and useful idiots

We have discussed the Saudi funding of international Islamism, and associated terrorist organisations, focusing on what has been called the “financial *jihad*” and the strategy behind it, as

detailed in “The Project”. In this final section we explore the role of useful idiots and agents of influence, the ideologically autistic functionaries and opportunists located in key educational, political and media positions that such strategies require if they are to be successfully implemented in Western societies.

Despite its obvious pejorative connotations, the concepts of useful idiot and agent of influence are to be understood in a technical sense as closely related political and sociological categories that have received insufficient attention in analyses of how totalitarian ideologies and movements develop support in Western societies, especially in connection with the “unholy alliance” that has recently emerged between Islamism and the political left.

The term useful idiot is attributed to V.I. Lenin who used it contemptuously to describe those Western politicians, intellectuals, public figures, and other agents of influence who allowed themselves to be used to provide invaluable support for the Soviet Union and international communism while denying, discounting, or remaining wilfully ignorant of the atrocities that were being committed in pursuit of the millennial dream of a socialist utopia.

More recently, it is applied to those who defend Islamism as it pursues its own millennialist fantasies of a reborn “Caliphate” and ultimate world

44. Patrick Poole, “The Muslim Brotherhood ‘Project’”, *op. cit.*

domination:⁴⁵

Islam enjoys a large and influential ally among the non-Muslims: A new generation of ‘Useful Idiots’, the sort of people Lenin identified living in liberal democracies who furthered the work of communism. This new generation of Useful Idiots also lives in liberal democracies, but serves the cause of Islamofascism — another virulent form of totalitarian ideology.

While Australia obviously has its share of useful idiots, the situation is far more advanced in Britain, as Anthony Browne has lamented in *The Times*:⁴⁶

Elements within the British establishment were notoriously sympathetic to Hitler. Today the Islamists enjoy similar support. In the 1930s it was Edward VIII, aristocrats and the *Daily Mail*; this time it is left-wing activists, *The Guardian* and sections of the BBC. They may not want a global theocracy, but they are like the West’s apologists for the Soviet Union — useful idiots.

As he laments, both forms of totalitarianism “are evil in both their ideology and their methodology, in their supremacism, intolerance, belief in

violence and threat to democracy”, but nevertheless they find supporters amongst leftists, progressives and liberals.⁴⁷

Explaining this phenomenon of “useful idiocy” is a challenge: “Why people who enjoyed freedom and prosperity worked passionately to destroy both is a fascinating question, one still with us today”, as Western societies confront Islamism, another political, ideological, and increasingly militarised totalitarian movement explicitly committed to their destruction.⁴⁸

Sheer ignorance, naivety, and complacency are tempting explanations for the persistent desire of free citizens in liberal democracies to support attacks on the foundations of their own rights and liberties, while rationalising, excusing, and even extolling the external and internal enemies that seek their destruction. And, of course, totalitarian ideologues are masters of deception, disinformation, dissimulation, propaganda, and lies (and, moreover, contemporary Islamists are able to take advantage of the theologically-sanctioned practice within Islam of *taqiyya* — dissimulation or lying to those Muslims consider enemies⁴⁹).

45. Amil Imani, “Islam’s useful idiots”, *American Thinker*, 7 August 2006. www.americanthinker.com/2006/08/islams_useful_idiots_1.html

Soeren Kern, “‘Useful idiots’ convene in Madrid”, *The Brussels Journal*, 17 July 2008. www.brusselsjournal.com/node/3422

46. Anthony Browne, “Fundamentally, we’re useful idiots: As the rest of Europe acts, extreme Islamists take advantage of British naivety”, *The Times* (London), 1 August 2005.

47. Ibid.

48. Bruce S. Thornton, “The chorus of useful idiots”, *FrontPageMagazine.com*, 1 November 2002. <http://frontpagemag.com/Articles/Read.aspx?GUID=C37E0CB6-A91A-4FA9-91DF-C49D54D0476E>

Nevertheless, the excuse of ignorance cannot be accepted, because ample evidence of the utter corruption, injustice and mass violence inherent in the world's various communist societies was not hard to discover, especially as their history unfolded over 80 years; and the same applies today for those societies blighted by any notable level of Islamist presence (e.g., Sudan, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Palestine, Algeria, Somalia, Egypt, Iraq, etc.).

Moreover, an even more inexcusable situation exists in the realm of ideology, where nobody could be in any doubt about the nature of Islamism. While communism at least expressed an alleged commitment to Enlightenment ideals that may be acceptable in themselves, Islamists propound an extremely reactionary ideological mish-mash of anti-Western, anti-Christian, anti-Semitic, anti-modern, anti-intellectual, genocidal, misogynistic, homophobic, barbaric, violence-laden, theocratic and millennialist drivel — all of which is readily accessible to anyone who takes the time to read, listen to, or watch the masses of Islamist material that have been produced over the past three decades and that are increasingly freely available on the Web. Any non-Islamist lacking an intellectual impairment who examines this material would have to be

appalled at its primitive quality — so why is Islamism defended by so many useful idiots on the political left?

A useful explanation is contained in an analysis by Daniel Pipes of the long-standing “unholy alliance” between communists, leftists, liberals and now Islamists. Pipes identifies four main reasons for this alliance, and these help explain why useful idiots might allow their political and personal sympathies and fantasies to be exploited:⁵⁰

- 1) The left and Islamists believe they share the same enemies: Western civilisation, especially the US and Israel; and international capitalism, which is identified with Jews and Zionism.
- 2) The two groups share important political goals, e.g., an American defeat in the War on Terror, Afghanistan, and Iraq; the destruction of Israel, and increased Muslim immigration and multiculturalism in the West.
- 3) Islamism has strong historic and philosophic ties to Marxism-Leninism, especially in their shared expectation of the imminent collapse of the capitalist West. This finds expression in the view that Islamist terrorism is finally fulfilling the long-standing Marxist-Leninist

49. See, e.g., Andrew Campbell, “Iran’s nuclear deception: *taqiyya* and *kitman* (part I)”, *National Observer*, No. 67, Summer 2006, pp.8-25.

50. Daniel Pipes, “[The Islamist-leftist] allied menace”, *National Review* (New York), 14 July 2008. www.meforum.org/article/pipes/5720

See also: David Horowitz, *Unholy Alliance: Radical Islam and the American Left* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2004).

prediction of a Third World revolt against the West, with Islamists serving as the “new slaves” of capitalism who are uniting with the working-class to destroy the imperialist system.

- 4) Leftists and Islamists recognise that they have more power and influence operating together in an alliance, mutually supporting each other’s ideology and political goals.

Another explanation of the unholy alliance and the useful idiots that serve its purposes takes up some of the elements of Pipes’s analysis and focuses on how they find expression in a form of religious Manichaeism that was implicit in millennialist communism and is now explicit in millennialist Islamism:⁵¹

For years communism was the opiate of the secular materialists, an apocalyptic creed which filled the chosen with assurance of their righteousness and election. So too with anti-Americanism.... This doctrine knows the font of evil in the world — the West and especially America — whose deadly sins of ‘imperialism’ and ‘colonialism’ and ‘racism’ have created a fallen world of suffering and exploitation, a world whose redemption depends on battling the power and influence of the wicked

militarists and global capitalists.... America is guilty and must atone for its sins by abandoning its power and pouring vast sums of money into its Third World victims, for only then will the golden age of peace, equality, and universal tolerance come about.

All these explanations are valid and useful, but it is important also to emphasise that there are also some more prosaic and venal reasons for the availability of useful idiots promoting and supporting totalitarian ideologies and movements. Throughout the history of the Soviet Union a complex intelligence system, operating under the direction of the KGB and other espionage agencies, identified and cultivated useful idiots and agents of influence by the use of financial enticements and the provision of various forms of assistance for their careers and political advancement, and by exploiting their personal characteristics and vulnerabilities, e.g., through blackmail, vanity, ambition, sexual favours. While the literature on this topic with respect to international communism is extensive,⁵² it is at present less developed with respect to international Islamism, partly reflecting the use of the courts in certain countries to suppress the publication of relevant information.⁵³ Neverthe-

51. Bruce S. Thornton, “The chorus of useful idiots”, *op. cit.*

52. See, for example, Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990); Stephen Koch, *Double Lives: Stalin, Willi Münzenberg, and the Seduction of the Intellectuals* (London: Harper Collins, 1996); Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Mitrokhin Archive: The KGB in Europe and the West* (London: Penguin, 2000); Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

less, we can assume that most of the forms of enticement and entrapment used by the KGB and associated agencies can be used by Islamist and related organisations to identify and exploit useful idiots and agents of influence occupying key positions, including, of course, universities.

Conclusion

Tragically, given vast sums of petrodollars and the availability of useful idiots and agents of influence in strategic positions, it is unlikely that Australian universities will resist Saudi funding, however it might find its way

into the system. Nor is it likely that they will resist pressure to guide their teaching and research in an Islamist direction, especially in connection with the war on terror, the history of Islam, the Middle East conflict, Islam and the West, and the role of women. Consequently, it will only be continuing public and academic vigilance and political pressure that will protect Australia's tertiary education system, moderate Muslim communities and liberal democratic traditions.

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53. Rachel Ehrenfeld, *Funding Evil: How Terrorism is Financed and How to Stop It* (Chicago: Bonus Books, 2005). This book became the target of what has come to be called "libel tourism", which involves forum shopping (especially involving British courts) by people (principally Saudis and other Gulf State billionaires) accused of associations with terrorist organisations. It has resulted in the suppression, withdrawal and destruction of a number of books describing how international terrorism is financed. One such book was J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins. *Alms for Jihad: Charity and Terrorism in the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Libel tourism prompted the passage of laws in New York protecting authors and publishers from such actions. See Mark Steyn, "The vanishing jihad exposés", *op. cit.*