Abstract: After 11 September attacks, the violent actions of Al-Qaeda have led to much misinformation about Islam in Western countries. The article studies the intellectual foundations and the origins of such false perceptions of Islam by Islamic military groups, such as Al-Qaeda. According to the hypothesis of this article, the combination of Wahhabism with the ideas of radicals such as Seyyed Qutb, has contributed to the creation of the Al-Qaeda network; the product of this combination is called Neo-Wahhabism. Also, the Islamic Revolution of Iran and the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979 had a key role in its creation.

Keywords: Al-Qaeda, Wahhabism, Islam, Fundamentalism, Qutbism

I. INTRODUCTION

After 11 September attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in the US, extensive propaganda conducted by a wide range of Western media, made terms such as terrorism, anti-modernity, anti-western tendencies, etc., synonymous with Islam. On the other hand, the violent and inhuman behavior of some Islamic military groups such as Al-Qaeda and the acceptance of their ideas by some people have led many who are not familiar with Islam to identify these ideas with Islam. Here, biases and misinformation about Islam reaching Western countries, instead of providing a new solution, redoubles the problem.

According to the hypothesis of this article, the combination of Wahhabism with the ideas of radicals such as Seyyed Qutb, has contributed to the creation of the Al-Qaeda network; the product of this combination is called Neo-Wahhabism. Also, the Islamic Revolution of Iran and the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979 had a key role in its creation.

II. WAHHABISM

Wahhabism is a reformist movement created by Mohammad-Ibn-Abdolwahhab (1115-1201) in the 18th century. He believed that after the third century A.H., Islam had deviated and it should be purged from its superstitions. (The Columbia Encyclopedia, 2001) Abdolwahhab as a sheikh presented an orthodox religious ideology. (Deukmejian, 1985: 244-245)

A. Background of Wahhabism

Ibn Taymiyya

Undoubtedly, in studying the origins of Wahhabism, nobody could be found as influential as Ibn Taymiyya. In fact, Mohammad-Ibn-Abdolwahhab added nothing to the ideas propounded by Ibn Taymiyya other than some extremist views. The person who inspired Bin laden and modern Islamic military groups is Taghieddin Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya, a conservative jurisprudent who lived in 7th and 8th centuries A.H. (Algar, 2002: 8-9) He lived when Mongols had conquered a major part of Islamic territories and some clerics did not permit a holy war against them, because, in their opinion, the Mongol king had converted to Islam. But, Ibn Taymiyya regarded them as infidels. He believed that some Mongolian laws had entered Sharia; therefore conducting a holy war against Mongols was legitimate. (Henzel, 2005: 71)

Ibn Taymiyya in all of his works considers himself the follower of predecessors who were apostles of the second and third centuries A.H. In his opinion, the predecessors understood Quran and Tradition better than so-called scholars and theologians of later periods. He argued that the apostles were the nearest persons to the Prophet, and the Quran was sent in their language to be understandable for them. He asks how God, the Prophet, and his apostles may not have taken some measures for asserting beliefs about God? It would be impossible that the apostles of the Prophet did not know anything about this and those later generations knew more than them. (Zeidan, 2001: 40) So, Ibn-Taymiyya does not agree with rational arguments not relied upon Quran and narrations. In his opinion, reason is only valid when it is not inconsistent with Quran and narrations.

Due to the fact that Ibn-Teymiyya’s opinions were contrary to general beliefs and the ideas of the Islamic sects, they faced the opposition of other clerics. For this reason, he was jailed for a while and bore other hardships. The most important parts of his belief which became later the foundations of Wahhabism are: (Faghi, 1987: 41-110, and see: Ibn Taymiyyah)

1- In Ibn-Teymiyya's opinion, there are two kinds of Tawhid (monotheism): first divinity which is ignored by Muslims who worship something other than God; second, creativity which recognizes that God is the creator of everything. He believes that pagans also recognize the second kind of Tawhid. Therefore, one who believes in Tawhid should also God whatever he wishes rather than resorting to someone else as a mediator.
2- Ibn-Taymiyya enlarged the circle of paganism and atheism; he regarded as heretic some actions which are allowed or even recommended by the majority of Muslims. For example, he regarded as pagan the following persons: those who intend to go to the pilgrimage of the Prophet's shrine and their main goal is not to go to the Prophet's mosque; those who visit the Prophet's shrine or others' graves thereby placing them in a position equal to that of God; those who swear in creatures and are devoted to anything other than God;

3- He believed in seeing God and determined a location for God;

4- He believed that God descended on earth;

5- He believed that the prophets did not necessarily need to be innocent before becoming prophets;

6- He prohibited mourning for the dead and regarded it as a great sin;

7- He said that the buildings located around graves must be destroyed.

Mohammad-Ibn-Abdolwahhab

Abdolwahhab and similar-minded thinkers believe that the weakness of Muslims and their decline stem from the corruption of their belief. In their opinion, life is worthless unless spent in order to raise the flag of righteousness and to ward off oppression. For this reason, he said, "Islam will be saved only through returning to its primary percepts." Therefore, there is no choice but returning to the earliest time of Islamic life, which consisted of sound Tawhid and genuine dignity; to reach this goal, all innovations and superstitions must be eradicated first through tolerance, moderation, and criticism, and in case of the failure of this method, through force and armed struggle. In his view, if belief and soul were refined, all of the other affairs would be rectified. Due to this fact, he was unaware of the new civilization, the condition of Muslims, and their spiritual as well as their material affairs, or he ignored these considerations. Thus, Abdolwahhab opposed all Islamic sects (except for Hanbali). (Faghi, 1987: 97-98)

Mohammad-Ibn-Abdolwahhab theoretically added nothing to the ideas propounded by Ibn-Taymiyya, but made them operational and, finally, gave them an extremist aspect. The most important parts of his belief are: (Mohsen-al-Amin, 1997: 143-236)

1- Wahhabis did not content themselves to invitation, but treated their opponents with sword and called it commanding people to do the good and prohibiting them from committing the evil as well as struggling against innovation.

2- They destroyed all tombs, shrines, mosques - if there were tombs in them- and marked graves.

3- They expanded the examples of innovations to include whatever did not exist in the Prophet's era, such as coffee and cigarette.

4- They expanded the scope of infidelity; in their opinion, the present pagans (Muslims) are worse than those who were living before Islam, because they only behaved as pagan when living in tranquility, but in hardship they resorted to God, while contemporary pagans behave as such all the time.

III. NEO-WAHHABISM

In the mid-1950s, Jamal Abdul-Nasser's regime expelled numerous members of the Muslim Brotherhood from the Egypt. Also, Saudi Arabia's regime, which has relatively consolidated itself, thanks to huge oil revenues, became the host of these exiled people. They played a major role in establishing the University of Medina. Students from all over the Islamic world were educated in this university. As a result of the expansion of Islamism in the 1970s, an alliance was formed between Wahhabi clerics and Islamist intellectuals, called by Gilles Kepel as "Petro-Islam". The consequence of this alliance was the emergence of dogmatic interpretations of Sharia in political, cultural, and moral dimensions. The writings of Seyyed Qutb were edited and published in Saudi Arabia by his brother, Mohammad Qutb. In addition, during the Cold War, the Wahhabi-Islamist branch sponsored by the Saudi regime prospered in opposition to Nasser and his socialist allies. (Kepel, 2002: 51)

After the acceptance of Wahhabi thoughts by Al-Saud and its spread throughout the Arabian Peninsula, these thoughts did not attract much attention. However, due to the events that occurred since the 1970s, they were suddenly propagated in different places, throughout the Islamic world. This was partly because of the death of Egyptian President, Jamal Abdul-Nasser, considered as a charismatic personality in the Arab world as well as the decline of thoughts such as pan-Arabism and Arab nationalism. The success of the oil embargo against the West by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia in 1973 had also a major role in the growth of this religious movement. On the other hand, the huge increase in the oil revenues of Saudi Arabia, which exports one fourth of the total oil production in the world, was a significant factor in expanding Wahhabism. In addition, the role of Saudi Arabia in establishing the Organization of Islamic Conference in 1969 and the Islamic Development Bank in 1975, an institution which provides loans for poorer Islamic countries, contributed to the rise of Wahhabism. (Olivetti, 2002: 18) Muslim World League also had an effective role in expanding Wahhabism. In 1962, Saudi Arabia established this non-governmental institution with the goal of expanding Wahhabi Islam throughout the world and confronting Nasser's regime. This organization performed its tasks in three ways: First, it sent religious missionaries to every part of the Islamic world; second, it propagated the ideas of Ibn Taymiyya and Mohammad Abdolwahhab which constituted the main ideology of Saudi regime, and third, it financed the establishment of mosques and Islamic institutes. (Kepel, 2002: 52; Roy, 1994: 116)

But the most important factors which contributed to the extraordinary expansion of Wahhabism were the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, whose main slogan was "down with the US", as well as the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union. Both these events occurred in 1979. The latter became an invitation for Saudi Arabia and the US to help "Afghan Jihad". (Rapaport, 2002: 12; Kepel, 2002: 62) In fact, the US, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan created an unofficial alliance to repress both of these threats. The goal of this alliance was to
promote Wahhabism and to create an international Wahhabi alliance to struggle against the Soviet Union and Shiite Iran. (Olivetti, 2002: 16; Roy, 1994: 135) In other words, the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union and the Islamic Revolution of Iran entailed the growth of radical religious-political movements.

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, two different strategies competed with each other in dominating the Islamic world. Iran's strategy sought to replace the dominance of Saudi Arabia with Khomeinism among Islamic Nation. The second strategy belonged to Saudi Arabia, which sought to reorganize its old system to deal with the threat of Khomeinism and to propagandize its envisioned Islam. Ideological conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia after the Islamic Revolution paved the way for a confrontation between them. Both of them used Islamic groups in favor of their foreign policy. Iran created revolutionary Islamism and Saudi Arabia formed neo-fundamentalism.

The increasing influence of Shiites reduced Saudi Arabia's attractiveness; therefore, it led to a decrease in Sunni interests which was not in favor of Al-Saud, because they considered themselves as the guardians of God's House and the refuge for Muslim Umma. For this reason, in 1986, King Fahd called himself the Guardian of the Sacred Shriners. These threats led the Saudi regime to adopt harsher policies for expanding Wahhabi Islam throughout the world. Along these lines and due to the increase in oil revenues, Al-Saud supported Afghan Mujahids to drive their domestic opponents into Afghanistan and to struggle against the expansion of a Shiites revolution in the Islamic world. (Kepel, 2002: 120; Roy, 1994: 116-117; Burke, 2003: 57)

The experience of war in Afghanistan radicalized Arab-Afghan Mujahedeen. Before the war in Afghanistan, there was little debate about using violence and resorting to Jihad in Islam among contemporary Islamic thinkers. The war in Afghanistan led both governments (including Saudi Arabia) and individual Islamic groups to concentrate on religious legitimacy of the war in order to support easily efforts made by Muslims and volunteers for expelling Soviets. (Wiktorowics, 2001:22)

Also this war had an important role in the cooperation between the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabis, and provided the best opportunity for the alliance between these two groups; Muslim Brotherhood organized humanitarian aid for the resistance movement of Afghanistan and created an "Islamic Front" through Arab volunteers who had taken the leadership of Jihad in Afghanistan and the branch of Muslim Brotherhood in Peshawar led by Abdullah Azam. (Roy, 1994: 118)

Abdullah Azam, the ideological father of al-Qaeda along with Osama-bin-Laden, established the organization of "Maktab-al Khedmat lel-Mujahedeen al-Arab" (MKO) in 1984 in Peshawar, Pakistan. Their goal was training the members of this organization through their offices in 35 countries and also their 30 subsidiaries in the US and giving them financial assistance. After the end of jihad against the Soviet Union, precarious political situation in the Middle East and Afghanistan accelerated the creation of the international network of al-Qaeda. After defeating the evil Soviet empire and returning from international Jihad, Arab and Asian Mujahideen sought radical political and social changes in their societies. They joined political and religious parties and other groups opposing dictators and corrupt regimes (Guanaratna, 2002:3)

Some countries imprisoned the Mujahideen, and others prohibited their entry, or exiled them. Under these circumstances, following political changes in Afghanistan and increasing pressures imposed on Pakistan for expelling the rest of the Mujahideen, "Maktab-al-Khedmat" accepted them as refugees. Even before the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989, al-Qaeda due to its favorable socioeconomic, political, and military situation had co-opted Arab-Afghans through "Maktab-al-Khedmat". As a result, al-Qaeda supported warriors and trained newcomers under the cover of the humanitarian operation of "Maktab-al-Khedmat" and other Islamic organizations. (Guanaratna, 2002: 4-5; Wiktorowics, 2001: 25)

After the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and the presence of US and non-Muslim troops in Saudi Arabia, bin Laden changed his mind about defensive Jihad and prescribed violence against the Saudi government and the US. In the early 1990s, bin Laden emphasized the withdrawal of US troops from Saudi Arabia and declared that the birthplace of Islam and the symbol of union between Islamic societies, the Arabian peninsula, must be free from American troops; hence, his criticizing the Saudi royal family. Following these criticisms, Saudi leaders deprived him of his Saudi citizenship. His extremist ideas were formed during his exile in Afghanistan and Sudan. (Blanchard, 2004: 2-3)

Some believe that the thoughts and goals of Osama bin Laden and his followers are simply religious and have no political aspect. However, taking a glance at bin Laden's declarations shows that it is not the case. In fact, he has some specific interests suggesting what he wants and how he wants to reach it. Osama bin Laden issued in 1996 a declaration of Jihad against the US, citing their occupation of a territory where two sacred places are located. This declaration is called the first manifest of al-Qaeda. In this Fatwa, he emphasized the same points advocated by Ibn Taymiyya and Mohammad- Ibn-Abdolwahhab. In fact, he has used three sources in formulating his Fatwa: Quran, tradition, and Ibn Taymiyya. Osama bin Laden describes the reasons for issuing such a Fatwa as injustice, poverty, cruelty, rejecting Sharia and replacing it with man-made laws, insulting human rights, occupying the land of two sacred places by the US, imprisoning innocent clerics, and inability of Saudi government in protecting the country. But the most important reason in his view is that the Saudi regime is the puppet of the US. In other words, he seeks the root of problem not in Saudi Arabia, but in the US. In his opinion, as long as a tree is not destroyed, its shadow exists. For this reason, he invites Muslims to leave aside smaller dangers (differences between them) to be able to ward off the main source of infidelity. He considers war for defending religion and faith as a duty of all Muslims, which entails driving out Americans from Islamic territories. In addition, he invites the youth to martyrdom and urges housewives to boycott American goods. (Bin Laden, 1996) With a glance at bin Laden's declaration, it can be concluded that he has combined two
major political goals: protesting Saudis, relying upon Wahhabi teachings, and inviting Muslims to Jihad for liberating Islamic territories occupied by foreigners, under the influence of Seyyed Qutb’s ideas.

Qutb serves three important functions for current radical Islamist movements. First, his writings provide an intellectual justification for extreme anti-Western sentiment on a cultural as well as political level. Second, he provides a justification for establishing an Islamic society based on sharia, Islamic law. Third, he formulated a justification for overthrowing all world governments, including those governed by Muslims, by means of a worldwide holy war. Osama bin Laden has a direct link to Qutb. Bin Laden studied under Mohammed Qutb, Sayyed’s brother. Who edited and published his brother’s writings in Saudi Arabia. (Zimmerman, 2004: 223, 240) Bin Laden may have considered Al-Qaeda the Vanguard that Qutb called for in Milestone to carry the message of Islam across the world. (See Qutb, Milestone, Ch. 5)

IV. CONCLUSION

This article argues that the ideology of Osama-bin-Laden and his organization is the combination of two ideas. On the one hand, he has been influenced by Wahhabi thoughts and on the other hand, the thoughts of Seyyed Qutb have had an undeniable effect on him.

Since the 1970s, extensive links created between Wahhabism and Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In 1979, the occupation of Afghanistan and the Islamic Revolution of Iran helped the rising of radical religious and political movements throughout the world.

The alliance between Qutbism and Wahhabism culminated in Afghanistan. Generally, it was the result of coming to power of a dominant anarchic state in this country in the 1990s with the withdrawal of the Soviet army from Afghanistan, Qutbist and Wahhabi radicals and al-Qaeda found fertile ground for their activities. Due to the domination of the Taliban ultra-conservatives over most of Afghanistan, al-Qaeda created a government within a government.

Then, it can be concluded that Neo-Wahhabism is the product of extremist interpretation of the teachings of Seyyed Qutb rather than Wahhabi thoughts. In other words, Neo-Wahhabism was the result of a combination of two groups: cultural and social conservatives advocating Wahhabism, on the one hand, and political radicals advocating Qutbism, on the other hand, leader and financial supporter of al-Qaeda, Osama-bin-Laden, was the representative of Wahhabism, and Ayman-al-Zawahiri, leader of the Islamic Jihad in Egypt -and main ideologue of al-Qaeda- is the representative of Qutbism in this organization.

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Behnam Bahari; M.A. Graduate of Islamic Law form Tehran Branch, Islamic Azad University. He is the Senior Research Fellow, Ardabil Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ardabil, Iran.

Mehdi Bakhshi Sheikh Ahmad; M. A. Graduate of Political Thought in Islam, from Allameh Tabatabaei University of Iran, Tehran. He is the Senior Research Fellow, Ardabil Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ardabil, Iran. (Corresponding Author) email: mbakhshi79@gmail.com