

## Georgetown to Congressman: No Worries about Our Saudi Petrodollars

Contributed by By Steven Emerson Family Security Matters  
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By Steven Emerson - A \$20 million gift from a Saudi Arabian prince to a Georgetown University academic center has not affected its scholarly work, Georgetown's president said in response to questions from a U.S. congressman.

Since receiving the \$20 million from Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal in 2005, "all activities of the Center have been conducted in the most appropriate manner, and with no outside interference of any kind," Georgetown President John J. DeGioia wrote.

U.S. Rep. Frank Wolf (R-VA), wrote to DeGioia Feb. 14th, saying he was concerned about Prince Alwaleed's gift to Georgetown's Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (which was renamed in the prince's honor) and the affect it had on research. Has anyone at the Center conducted research critical of Saudi educational or human rights policies? Wolf also asked whether the money fueled any of the school's training of current and prospective U.S. Foreign Service personnel.

"[A]ll of us at Georgetown University take very seriously the importance of protecting academic freedom," DeGioia wrote. "I want to assure you that I am completely confident that the Center's work, to borrow your words, 'maintains the impartiality and integrity' that we expect of all research conducted at Georgetown University."

The response misses the point, said Martin Kramer, former director of the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University and a fellow at Harvard and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. The concern is not that Georgetown takes marching orders from a significant donor. It is more a question of how bold scholars choose to be in challenging institutions and governments home to deep-pocketed potential donors.

"No one at such a center could possibly specialize in contemporary Saudi policy, because to do so objectively would not sit well with the Saudi princes who make the gifts," Kramer said in an e-mail exchange. "Replicate this a hundred-fold across academe, at universities that would also like \$20 million for Islamo-this-or-that, and you have killed off the critical study of Saudi Arabia in the academy. This is no small achievement: the political structure and social norms of the Kingdom are not of the sort that endear themselves to the 'progressives' in our universities. But the academics are silent, because they hope and pray that someday, their prince will come."

It's a testament to the Center's value that it works with the departments of State, Homeland Security, Defense and the FBI, DeGioia wrote. To that, Kramer said he is more alarmed than reassured.

"The faculty of the Center have consistently underestimated and downplayed the threat posed by radical Islamism," he wrote. "Prior to 9/11 and since then, they have played a considerable role in obfuscating the dangers facing the United States &ndash; something our officials can ill afford now and in the future."

DeGioia cited Professor John Voll, whose position is endowed by Alwaleed's gift, as someone who "has written extensively about Wahhabism as he has about other Muslim movements. Professor Voll has not shied away from characterizing Wahhabism as being on the fundamentalist, literalist extreme of Islam."

A review of Voll's writings and statements finds he minimizes the influence Wahhabism has in fomenting extremism and violence. At a May 2005 forum entitled "The Global Spread of Wahhabi Islam: How Great a Threat?" Voll minimized the affect Wahhabism has in creating violent jihadists, saying it is not contributing in any greater proportion than other extreme Sunni movements or secular Ba'athists.

"I think it becomes important to distinguish between the violent jihadist ideology, which is a major threat, and the extremist Wahhabi Saudi literature, which I think is also a threat but perhaps a different kind of threat," Voll said.

In November, Voll and CMCU director John Esposito posted an op-ed piece lamenting recent actions in Sudan and Saudi Arabia &ndash; a British school teacher was sentenced to 15 days in prison for insulting Islam by allowing her class of 6 and 7-year-olds to name a teddy bear "Mohammed" (angry protestors called for her execution); and a 19-year-old Saudi woman who had been raped was sentenced to 200 lashes and six months in prison for being in an unrelated man's car at the time of the rape. Her sentence was increased from 90 lashes after she talked to reporters about her case.

As a number of columnists pointed out, the article criticized the actions, but only because of the response they might generate in the West:

At a time when Islam is under siege from Muslim extremists and extremists from the Far Right in Europe and America, the judiciaries of Sudan and Saudi Arabia have managed to reinforce the vilification of Islam and used Islamic law as a weapon rather than a yardstick for justice.

In his letter, Wolf, a Georgetown alumnus who is known for his fight against human rights abuses around the world, asked whether anyone at the center ever "produced any analysis critical of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for example, in the fields of human rights, religious freedom, freedom of expression, women's rights, minority rights, protection for foreign workers, due process and the rule of law." He also inquired whether the center studied the Saudi education system and whether it contributes to anti-Americanism and other forms of extremism.

The answer? No, but&hellip;

If they haven't engaged in any critical research of the Saudi government, or the Wahhabi brand of Islam it underwrites throughout the globe, that's because they never intended to.

The Center "is not organized in such a way as to be home to scholars and researchers who are country-specific experts," DeGioia wrote.

In an interview with the Georgetown Voice , Voll laid out the same argument DeGioia later repeated for Wolf: "The Center has not published any study of Saudi Arabia that has been extremely favorable and positive or any study that has been negative or critical because that is not the particular expertise of our scholars," Voll said. "It's not the expertise of the scholars to study particular contemporary Saudi policy."

The Center is not organized in such a way as to study criminal law, either, but that didn't stop Voll and Center Director John Esposito from weighing in on legal setbacks facing former University of South Florida Professor Sami Al-Arian in the April 2007 issue of the Washington Report for Middle East Affairs, a publication with a history of support for Hamas, other terrorist groups and individual terrorists. Al-Arian worked with both academics during the 1990s, a time when he vehemently denied having anything to do with the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Those denials proved to be lies and Al-Arian is an acknowledged member of the PIJ who pled guilty to conspiring to provide the terrorist group with goods and services. He faced a series of civil contempt citations which effectively froze time on his 57-month prison sentence because of his refusal to provide immunized testimony before a federal grand jury investigating terror financing in Northern Virginia.

"The current attempt to put Al-Arian on the stand in an unrelated case and his imprisonment for declining to testify is unfair and vindictive," they wrote. "It is time for a modicum of justice to be served and for Sami Al-Arian to be allowed to leave the country with his family who have also suffered so much."

Esposito seemed perturbed by Wolf's letter, suggesting in the Georgetown Voice article that the congressman should have contacted him more discreetly. He also seemed to question Wolf's motives:

CMCU Director John Esposito said that the underlying message that pervades Wolf's letter is one of "guilt by association."

"You have people like Osama bin Laden, who are terrorists and barbarians, and then there are those Saudis [that] are connected to 9/11," Esposito said. "You don't want to say that's true for all the citizens in the country. And I'm not sure if Wolf is actually saying that, but there seems to be that tone."

According to Esposito, Alwaleed is a prominent global investor, philanthropist and a respected individual in the international community.

Alwaleed's \$10 million donation to the Twin Towers fund just after the 9/11 terrorist attacks was rejected by New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani after the prince suggested U.S. policy contributed to the attacks. Alwaleed called on the U.S. to "adopt a more balanced stance toward the Palestinian cause."

Esposito defended the Prince's statement , saying "He was expressing his enormous sympathy with the United States but also trying to give people the context in which this [terrorist attack] occurred."

Wolf has yet to comment on the letter. But DeGioia's response, defensive in parts, coupled with Esposito's and Voll's "reasons" for their center's failure to sufficiently comment on the policies of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the tenets of Wahhabism, greatly responsible for not just the extremist ideology within Saudi Arabia but the global jihadist culture, rings incredibly hollow. It seems Prince Alwaleed can consider his donation to be money well spent.

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FamilySecurityMatters.org Contributing Editor Steven Emerson is an internationally recognized expert on terrorism and national security and the author of five books on these subjects, most recently "Jihad Incorporated: A Guide to Militant Islam in the US." Steve also writes for the Counterterrorism Blog.  
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