

Headlines:

- **Spread of Wahhabism was Done at Request of West During Cold War: Saudi Crown Prince**
- **With Trump's Help, Egypt Holds a Farcical Election**
- **Nuclear Security Worries Drive Latest US Penalties on Pakistan**

Details:

Spread of Wahhabism was Done at Request of West During Cold War: Saudi Crown Prince

In a recent interview with the American daily, *The Washington Post*, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) revealed that Riyadh had spread Wahhabi ideology, at the request of its Western allies to counter the influence of the Soviet Union (USSR) in Muslim countries, during the Cold War. The powerful heir to the Saudi throne made the statement during a 75-minute interview with the Washington Post, on March 22, on the sidelines of his first diplomatic visit to the United States since being named crown prince. According to bin Salman, the Saudi-funded spread of Wahhabi ideology began in the second half of the twentieth century after Saudi Arabia's Western allies urged the country to invest in mosques and madrassas overseas during the Cold War, to help counter the influence of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. "Our allies demanded that we use our resources to accomplish this task," Bin Salman said. The Crown prince also admitted that successive Saudi governments have gone astray, and now "we have to get it all back." "Funding now comes largely from Saudi-based foundations," he said, rather than from the government. Wahhabism is an Islamic doctrine and religious movement, named after its founder, an eighteenth-century preacher, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The movement has long been variously described as an ultraconservative and austere faith, in addition of being a source of global terrorism. In an interview with CBS's "60 Minutes" broadcast last Sunday, the crown prince discussed a myriad of topics including his reform efforts at home, lambasting rigid doctrines that have long governed Saudi Arabia in response to the Iranian revolution in 1979, after which Saudi Arabia wanted to "copy the Iranian model." "Saudi Arabia was not like this before '79. Saudi Arabia and the entire region went through a revival after '79. ... All we're doing is going back to what we were: a moderate Islam that is open to all religions and to the world and to all traditions and people," Bin Salman said. "I believe Islam is sensible, Islam is simple, and people are trying to hijack it," he told the Washington Post. The Saudi crown prince, has previously vowed to return the country to "moderate Islam" and asked for global support to transform the hardline kingdom into an open society that empowers citizens and draws investors. [Source: Morocco World News]

After admitting Saudi's role in helping the West to counter Soviet expansions, will the crown prince also admit that the current drive to secularize Saudi society is at the behest of the West.

With Trump's Help, Egypt Holds a Farcical Election

For Egypt's democracy and human-rights activists, Trump is something far different: an enabler of repression who has embraced Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi as he carries out the most repressive crackdown in the country in decades. Three days after taking office, Trump phoned Sisi and effusively pledged his support for the authoritarian ruler. When Sisi visited Washington last spring, Trump warmly welcomed him to the White House, reversing an Obama Administration policy of declining to meet the former general because of his government's sweeping human-rights abuses. Five years ago, Sisi seized power and jailed the country's democratically elected President in a popularly backed military coup that led to the massacre of thousands of supporters of the now banned Muslim Brotherhood. Under Sisi, the government has arrested at least sixty thousand people, handed down hundreds of preliminary

death sentences, and tried thousands of civilians in military courts, according to human-rights groups. Torture, including beatings, electric shocks, stress positions, and sometimes rape, has been systematically employed. After a pair of church bombings by the Islamic State killed forty-seven people last April, Sisi declared a nationwide state of emergency that gave the government sweeping powers to arrest people, seize assets, and censor the media. Trump has made no mention of the repression, called Sisi a “fantastic guy,” and even complimented the Egyptian leader on his shoes. Sisi, in turn, has praised Trump for being “a unique personality that is capable of doing the impossible.” Trump’s embrace of Sisi is not unusual: he has praised authoritarian leaders around the world, but his backing of autocratic regimes is perhaps nowhere more visible than in Egypt. This week, Egyptians went to the polls in a three-day Presidential election that observers described as a farce. Sisi ran against one obscure opponent, Moussa Mostafa Moussa, who is a Sisi supporter himself. Three former high-ranking military leaders who had announced that they would challenge Sisi were arrested or forced out of the race. The President then proclaimed his disappointment that other “distinguished people” were not challenging him. “We are not ready, isn’t it a shame,” Sisi said on national television. On Thursday, state media announced preliminary results showing that ninety-two per cent of Egyptians had voted for Sisi’s reelection. Low turnout, estimated to be at around forty per cent, fuelled speculation about the breadth of popular support for Sisi, who has centralized power in a small circle of generals and security chiefs. “Over the three days of voting, the regime struggled to drum up sufficient interest in voting for a variety of reasons,” Elissa Miller, a nonresident fellow with the Atlantic Council, wrote on Wednesday. “Among them is the reality that Sisi has failed to deliver on a number of promises made over the last four years of his presidency.” Trump Administration officials, meanwhile, praised the vote. The American Embassy in Cairo tweeted, on Monday, “as Americans we are very impressed by the enthusiasm and patriotism of Egyptian voters.” [Source: The New Yorker]

Propping up dictators is business as usual for America. After the removal Morsi, the US has returned to supporting Sisi’s strong-arm tactics to oppress the Egyptian masses and safeguard American interests.

Nuclear Security Worries Drive Latest US Penalties on Pakistan

The Commerce Department this week sanctioned seven Pakistani companies for alleged links to nuclear trade. Their place on an “Entity List” requires them to obtain special licenses to do business with the U.S. This move follows other U.S. penalties against Pakistan, including a successful push to put Pakistan on a “gray list” of countries not doing enough to stem terrorist financing and a freeze on all U.S. security assistance to Pakistan. But Commerce’s action should not be seen as part of the existing campaign to pressure Pakistan to crack down harder on terrorists. Commerce’s move does underscore Washington’s concerns about Pakistan’s nuclear proliferation record — even as nuclear watchdog groups cite improvements in Pakistan’s nuclear security. This was not a Pakistan-specific move — Washington also sanctioned 15 Sudanese companies — and the seven sanctioned Pakistani firms are not exactly corporate powerhouses. Penalizing them won’t produce damaging economic consequences for Pakistan. Yet these concerns recall the saga of AQ Khan, a senior Pakistani nuclear scientist — and father of the country’s atomic bomb — who admitted to sharing nuclear secrets with North Korea and Iran in the 1980s and 1990s. Pakistan is seeking membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group — a prestigious, 46-member club that seeks to reduce nuclear proliferation by tightly managing nuclear trade. Likely concerned about Pakistan’s joining the NSG, Washington may now have dealt a major blow to its membership prospects. [Source: Arab News]

The US is again using nuclear proliferation as an excuse to punish Pakistan. However, no one is punishing Washington for proliferating nuclear technology to India? Such double standards expose America’s duplicity on nuclear weapons, disarmament and nuclear proliferation.