INTERVIEW WITH INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALIST GERALD POSNER: THE SAUDI-US CONNECTION

'Bush should be careful for what he wishes because he may actually get it'

American investigative journalist Gerald Posner's last two books contain explosive revelations about Saudi Arabia. In his recently released "Secrets of the Kingdom" (Random House, 2005), Posner reports that Saudi Arabia has wired all of its major oil facilities with explosive charges containing Semtex, which have been mixed with radioactive materials so that when the charges explode they will not only destroy the facilities but contaminate beyond repair.

In a remarkable last chapter from Posner's previous book, "Why America Slept: The Failure to Prevent 9-11" (Random House, 2003), the journalist reports that when Abu Zubaydah, the terrorist allegedly behind the bombing of the USS Cole, was captured, he was tricked into thinking he was being interrogated by Saudi investigators. CIA officials were then astonished to hear him explain that three high Saudi officials could vouch for him. To prove it, Zubaydah provided their phone numbers. The big question: has the US government followed up on Posner's reporting, given its implications?

Daily Star columnist Ron Chepesiuk recently caught up with Gerald Posner and asked him that question and others about the Saudi-US connection. Here are excerpts from that interview.

Daily Star (DS): How would you assess Saudi Árabia's record ás a

Gerald Posner: Saudi Arabia's record has been a mixed one. The Saudis have been very difficult to figure out. Now that they are having their own serious battle with terrorists who are trying to take down the House of Saud, they are fighting a serious battle against terrorism to ensure their own

But outside of their borders, I don't think the Saudis have been very helpful. They give up enough intelligence to the US government to keep it relatively happy but not so much that they give up the store.

DS: From your research on your book, did you get a sense of how endangered is the House of Saud because of the terrorism threat?

GP: I think the position of the House of Saud is precarious. Of course. I'm six thousand miles away and the CIA predicted the Shah was safe one week before he was deposed. E It's true that with the rise of the oil prices Saudi Arabia is seeing a windfall, but it continues to have a lot of big problems. The government has run on a big deficit for some time. There is growing unemployment, especially among the young. The Saudis have wasted a lot of money on the military at the expense of the health and education of their citizens. Revolution can be fueled by religious fervour and political ideology, but it can also be fueled by poverty and economics. Still, the money is flowing back into the Saudi coffers again because of surging oil prices, and that should keep them in power and buy time, if they use the money right.

DS: President Bush has talked a lot of about of spreading democracy to the Middle East and the Gulf region. What would happen to Saudi Arabia if it got serious about



Dahran HQ: The US maintains a base in the kingdom

implementing democratic reforms? GP: The elections Saudi Arabia held last February were a tiny step forward, but bringing democracy to Saudi Arabia is a two edged sword. Bush should be careful for what he wishes because he may actually get I'm saying that democratic elections in the Middle East could easily bring governments to power who are hostile to US interests. If you have open and fair elections in the Palestinian Authority, I have no doubt Hamas would win. Hezbollah did well in the recent elections in Lebanon. If we have elections in Jordan, does Bush really think he would get someone elected to power who would be as favourable to US interests as the country's king? The same thing can be said about Mubarak in Egypt. A lot of people in the Middle East are angry with the U.S. because of its policies

that anger. DS: The 9-11 Commission report called Saudi Arabia "problematic, but it didn't explain what it meant by

and the Iraq War has exacerbated

GP: Yes, what a choice of words. You may have a mother-in-law who is problematic, but a government? The weakest part of the 9-11 Commission report is what it said about Saudi Arabia. But in fairness to the 9-11 Commission, it didn't have the time, money or resources to investigate the Saudi matter thoroughly. The Commission had its hands full trying to figure out how the FBI's and CIA's screw up on 9-11.

DS: Was the 9-11 Commission evasive for political reasons? GP: I'm sure the report was glossed over not to embarrass the Saudis. It seems strange to me how the (airplane) flight on September 13 in which the Saudis departed the country two days after the 9-11 attacks, could be described as business as usual. On September 13, no private flights were allowed in US airspace except for the private flight of three Saudis from Tampa. Florida, and Lexington, Kentucky. Four other private planes wanting

to fly that day where brought down

and forced to land by military

Even aircraft that were carrying organ transplants were not allowed to fly on September 13.Ë That flight with the Saudis aboard took place two hours after Prince Bandar met with Bush at the White House. Do you think that's a coincidence? All Bush had to tell the American public was that the Saudi government feared a backlash against its citizens living in the US, so we are going to do them a favour since they assured us that none of their citizens leaving the country had anything to do with 9-11. After all, they are our ally. But Bush didn't do that and that has fueled the

DS: Didn't the FBI claim it investigated?

GP: All the FBI did was conduct a few cursory interviews and check the names on the passenger manifest against the names on the passports. Given those procedures. the 20th hijacker could have left the

DS: In your book, "While America Slept," you end with a chapter about the interrogation of Zubadyah what he supposedly reveal about the Saudi-terrorist connection? Has the US checked out your explosive revelation to see if it's true?

GP: No, not at all, and what's remarkable is that there has been no public pressure from the US public and the media to do so. But it Zubadyah had named four Iranians or four Syrians, I have no doubt we would be seeing an investigation.

DS: In "The Secrets of the Kingdom," you write about the Saudi lobby in the US. When we think of powerful lobbies in the US, we think of the Israeli lobby, but the Saudi lobby is one of the most effective lobbies in Washington, isn't it? GP: Yes, no lobby in Washington is more powerful than the Israeli lobby, but Saudis lave learned from the Israelis. The Saudis have spent a lot of money to show how issues that are good for them can be good for the US. They have been effective, but since 9-11 it has been increasingly more difficult for them to be so.

DS: In "Secrets of the Kingdom, you report that the Saudi Arabia may have wired all of its major oi facilities with explosive charges containing Semtex. What has been the US government's reaction to this revelation?

GP: It's really amazing. It's been zero. You would think Congress would pick upon the story, given its importance, and say let's investigate to see if it's true. The Bush administration continues to give the Saudis a free ride, and I don't think that's good for US interests.

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LEST WE FORGET

Professor Sydur Rahaman

An uncompromising voice against religious extremism

HASAN TARIQUE CHOWDHURY

UGUST 28, 2005 was the 18th death anniversary of eminent philosopher and educationist Professor Sydur Rahaman. He was an uncompromising voice against religious extremism. He was one of the vanguards that shown the way to freedom of thinking in hard communal Pakistani days. Devoting the golden period of life he struggled with his sharp pen to establish the secular and progressive ideas in this country as well as in former Indian subcontinent.

Despite being born in an ordinary peasant family of Rasullahbad, an interior village of Brahmanbaria district, on 15th May 1909, he marked excellent position of merit in every sphere of his educational career. In 1931 and 1932 he passed BA (Hons) and MA with first class in philosophy from Dhaka University.

In his vibrant professional life he served as a professor in Dhaka College, Eden College, Sylhet MC College, Chittagong College and Jagannath College. He was also professor of Philosophy Department, Dhaka University. As an educationist and social worker he closely observed the 2nd World War, the Famine, the brutal communal riot of Kolkata, creation of Pakistan, 52's Language movement, and founding of independent Bangladesh following a great liberation war. These historical events strongly influenced his psychology and thinking. Which finally had driven him towards secularism and socialism. But he recited the holy Quran from his childhood and even did job as an Imam of a mosque in Dhaka for few days. Nevertheless he had been



'communist' by some critics for nurturing progressive ideas. At present 'secularism' has

vanished from our constitution. But as an activist for building secular Bangladesh he had been harassed by the Pakistani government. Even he was forced to resign from the chair of principal of Jagannath College due to political differences with the despotic East Pakistan governor Monaem Khan. Recently in Bangladesh, religious extremism and fundamentalism has emerged as an immense danger for the nation. The serial bomb blast of 17th August and other sabotages over the recent period has shown the cruel face of religious extremism. At such time we feel more the need of people like Prof Sydur Rahaman who continued his struggle against the dark forces.

Professor Sydur Rahaman was a prominent scholar from Muslim community who explained religions with their secular and humanitarian facades. His writings always included the concept of modern

science and logic. His famous book 'An Introduction of Islamic Philosophy' has widely known to the society. Being thoroughly a modern man, he felt pain for the backwardness of our society and especially for the Muslim community. He wrote, "In many cases Muslims have not changed their 'old value' following, have not adopted with modern science and the inherent query of philosophy, have not awaken their question sleeping in deep-heart. So they become blind. irrational and reactionary. In many countries of the world they are under spell of superstitions, poverty, idleness, anti-development and undemocratic conditions. For this reason they often create themselves a hopeless nation." He also wrote in this regard "We should not push our society 1000 years back." Without a few exception, his remarks had been justified. And when religious extremism is hitting at the existence of our civilisation in renewed way, his writings could be more relevant to combat this

Professor Sydur Rahaman was in constant touch with many of our national leaders. They are Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy, Mowlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, Bangabandhu Sheikh Muiibur Rahman, Comrade Moni Singh and Professor Muzaffar Ahmed. They all esteemed him with his intelligence.

On the occasion of his 18th death anniversary we deeply felt his absence, specially at this point of time. We believe his memory will be our brawny inspiration.

Hasan Tarique Chowdhury is a peace and

France has to start saying oui

DENIS MACSHANE

Polish electrician named Lech Walesa negotiated an agreement with a communist government establishing a free and independent labour union in the Soviet bloc. The world has never been the same since. Within a decade. Sovietism had been swept into the dustbin of history Hundreds of millions found free-

or political moves forward until France learns to say oui to the new economy and to new ideas about how a modern society should be run. dom and market economics. The

The France of nonistes -- no-sayers -- is now a major

problem for Europe. There can be no European recovery

two decades more Chinese have been lifted out of poverty than ever before in the Middle Kingdom. The impact in Western Europe was enormous. Whether in Thatcherite Britain or socialdemocratic Scandinavia, politicians got out of running business.

always in European history: France. There, President Francois Mitterrand swept banks and a portfolio of companies into state ownership. In pre-globalisation, pre-Internet days it was just possible to justify such economic nationalism. VCRs and Walkmans from Japan were made to transit through a provincial customs post in the hope

of Europe. The nation that has done more than any other to define and shape Europe is still locked in denial on the reforms that need to be undertaken. France remains beautiful. Its pleasures continue to seduce; 70 million tourists will have had a great time this summer and go back to London or Frankfurt thinking that maybe France is not doing so badly after all, as will the country's own political and busi-

Today France runs a substantial trade deficit. Despite high income taxes, every cent paid by French citizens goes into debt

repayments and not into renewing the country's infrastructure. other big communist centre --Unemployment has been stuck at China -- decided that to survive it had to go capitalist, and in the past

The one shining exception, as

that a French company would rise and do better than Sony or Toshiba.

Today France is the weak man

ness leaders. They are wrong. The French invented the trompe l'oeil painting, which tricks the viewer into thinking he sees something that isn't there. So with the French economy after more than a decade of low growth and high unemployment. The belle France that visitors experience is the fruit of the long years of tough leadership by the first presidents of the Fifth Republic, from Charles de Gaulle to Valery Giscard dEstaing. They undertook unpopular decisions, such as making the currency strong and bringing in nuclear power to offset French dependency on oil. De Gaulle rigged European agricultural policies to ensure an ample trade surplus for French food exports: wine, cereals, butter, and beef -- what the French call their "green oil," all buoyed by generous price subsidies. That poorer countries suffered by exclusion from the European market mattered little as long as France was getting rich. But the world has moved on. Other countries learned the trick of making good wine, and French citizens themselves learned to like driving Nissans or buying goods, leisure, and travel off the

10 percent or more for a decade. Only one in four workers under the age of 25 has a job. The biggest growth industry in France has been the Restaurants du Coeur -- soup kitchens for the new poor who are growing in number in every French city. The new French prime minister.

Dominique de Villepin, ha appealed to the "economic patriotism" of his countrymen. A former diplomat and chief of staff to President Jacques Chirac, he produces more books than France produces jobs. (One, on Napoleon's 100 days, questions whether Waterloo was indeed a defeat.) Named PM after the French crushingly voted no on a European constitution, drafted by former president Giscard dEstaing, de Villepin promised a Napoleonic 100 days of action to get France back on its feet. But unlike Napoleon or even de Gaulle. France's leaders are not prepared to break out from the statist ideology that permeates all

Today's France appears to know only how to say no. Union bosses say no to labour-market reform even though high unemployment has reduced union membership to an historic low. Business leaders say no to tax reforms or breaking up corporate cartels that keep house sales expensive for citizens.

The Paris media say no to any idea that comes from the dreaded Anglo-Saxons, even though Spain, Eastern Europe, and the Nordic countries have shown how to cut unemployment. Chirac says no to allowing Polish plumbers or Czech nannies to come and work freely in France. The French socialists say no to Europe, leading to their party's marginalisation and possible split. French professors say no to getting private money into universities. Chirac says no to any reform of the European Union or world trade rules that require reform of agricultural protectionism. De Villepin says no to Turkey's starting EU membership talks until the Turks accept conditions set by Greek politicians in Cyprus.

The France of nonistes -- nosavers -- is now a major problem for Europe. There can be no European recovery or political moves forward until France learns to say oui to the new economy and to new ideas about how a modern society should be run.

Denis Macshane, a British Labour M.P., was Britain's Europe minister from 2002 to 2005. (c) 2005, Newsweek Inc. All rights reserved. rinted by arrangement

The political economy of fundamentalism-II the stultifying confines of

ABDULLAH A. DEWAN AND GHULAM RAHMAN

UNDAMENTALISM is a form of ignorance, which originates from ignorance of the basic principles of true religion. Thus to fight religious extremism is to fight ignorance. The best inoculants against any form of ignorance are education, countrywide seminars, and debates.

Back in high school we learned: "One who walks in the path of knowledge walks in the path of God." That knowledge was nowhere meant to be limited to religious education only. In addition to developing spiritual faculties, we must also learn to modernise our agriculture. fisheries, industries, businesses, healthcare and all other economic activities with new and innovative methods of productions and opera-

Religious education and spiritual development may make one an honest and compassionate citizen with the promise of eternal heavenly rewards hereinafter, but such education makes no promise of a productive income

There are about 15,000 Qawmi madrasas under Private Madrasa Board with their own curriculum, in addition to about 9,000 state registered ones, with numerous more yet to be registered or enlisted. The number of general educational institutions, which receive state funds, has increased 9.74 percent against a 22.22 percent growth of madrasas from 2001 to 2005.

The number of students in general educational institutions rose 8.64 percent while the madrasas saw a 10.12 percent increase in enrolment during this period. Economists argue that madrasas have negligible contribution in creating skilled human capital in the country while squandering nearly 11.5 percent of the total education budget in the last few years.

"It needs modernisation. I feel the madrasa students should learn the same core subjects that the general educational institutions teach up to the higher secondary level," says the Education Minister. We also wonder how he felt when nearly 50 percent students in SSC exams failed, and not a single student passed from over 400 high schools in the last two consecutive years? A balanced academic curriculum

includes choices of all subjects such as physics, chemistry, mathematics, biology, sociology and of course business and economics, along with Religious extremists can cause irretrievable damage to life and property, bring economic ruin by expelling foreign

religious subjects. If one wants to be a Hafiz in Qur'an, and specialise in religion, that choice must be supported, but his/her curriculum must also include basic principles of business and economics and certain amount of science courses. Economics, business, and science teach critical thinking with evidence. With the power of critical thinking any deceiving tricks of religious extremists are quickly disposed while injecting no prejudices about the tenets and teachings of religion. Once students are taught logic,

reasoning, and critical thinking skills, as embodied in economics and science, they will decide for themselves what they will be. This should be done beginning with the earliest grade possible and by fifth year, the formal elements of logic and reasoning can be introduced at a very basic level. This will slowly help them recognise, and reject fallacious thinking. Pursuing this with honesty and consistency throughout the educational process will bring about a generation that will think logically as a matter of norm, rather than accepting pre-digested doctrines blindly. Once the student is aware of the nature of true religion, religious extremism, disrespects for other humans of different faiths and the devious subtlety of its appeals will disappear.

Alongside a balanced education. the other effective way to counter religious extremism is to teach humility. Students must be taught that without the virtues of humility they can't maintain an open mind to be successful spiritually, academi-

cally, and socially. Historically madrasas were an integral part of the Ottoman Empire's social foundation and the political powers that governed them. Ottoman Empire, the longest and most diverse Empire in history, used madrasas to produce its scholastic output and individuals who became the backbone of the empire. Official documents of Ottoman Empire indicate that the purpose of education geared for the pursuit of science and wisdom alongside an explication of virtue, religion and the sharia. The madrasas were structured to

Growth: madrasas vs general educational institutions (DS August 6, 2005) <u>1996-2000</u> 2001-2005 Institutions General 28%, Madrasa 17% General 10%, Madrasa 22% General 16%, Madrasa 13% General 12%, Madrasa 17% General 33%, Madrasa 58% General 9%, Madrasa 10% Students





Fundamentalists protesting terrorism

provide a common education, culture and shared world-view among the mosaic of Muslim people of multitude of ethnic origins. These institutions also functioned to ensure equality of opportunity in education for the individual, as well as providing dynamism among the various echelon of society.

The curriculum of the Ottoman madrasas was different from those of previous Muslim states. In comparison to one or two religious subjects, students during the Ottoman administration were taught morphology, syntax, and logic. These were followed by a study of Hadith and commentaries of the Qur'an. Studies in elocution, preaching, rhetoric, philosophical theology, philosophy, jurisprudence, inheritance, tenets of faith, legal theory, and methodology were also

The charter of madrasas included the requirement that teachers be both well versed in religious studies and in the "rational" sciences, which included logic, philosophy, and mathematics. Since hospital establishments were found alongside certain madrasas and sites for astronomical observation were found to exist next to others are an indication of interest in medicine and astronomy at those particular madrasas

principles and skills of entrepre-

Introduction of business curriculum in our madrasas, teaching the

neurship is consistent with Islam which is considered the most probusiness of all the world's major religions. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as businessman engaged in extensive commerce during the years before devoting himself exclusively to religious affairs in the year 611. Even during subsequent years, the Prophet continued his support for business and the free market mechanism. For example, he forbade the imposition of price controls, asserting that prices were in God's hands and that he wished to meet God without having to stand before Him for some injustice and unfairness that he might commit in this respect. In his pro-business stance, the Prophet forbade the imposition of special taxes on markets pleading what he called market "a charitable endowment" and those taxes were to be collected directly from individuals, instead of The Holy Qur'an is filled with

passages that can be interpreted as favoring commerce. For example, the Qur'an states, "O you who believe! Squander not your wealth among yourselves in vanity, except it be a trade by mutual consent. And who does that through aggression and injustice, we shall cast him into Fire." For this reason, scholars have long looked upon Islam as fundamentally pro-capitalism. As Maxime Rodinson wrote in "Islam and Capitalism" (1966): "Economic activity, the search for profit, trade and consequently, production for the market, are looked upon with no less favour by Muslim tradition than by the Qur'an itself." This is one reason why the Muslim world was the most vibrant on earth during the latter part of the Middle Ages. By contrast, Europe was repressed by the economic doctrines of the

Catholic Church. Moroccan sociology professor Fatima Mernissi argues that Muslims who worked with foreign interests are usually the wealthier citizens and proposes that the fundamentalism among the poor people results from the desire to define oneself as still having a place in society. "Can it be that the most dispossessed in our societies cling to Islam because they fear being forgotten by their own people, who have found another identity and are involved in other networks, especially those very strong ones that create profit on an

international scale? But starting in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, Islam and Christianity reversed courses in economic progress and social reform. Under fear and pressure from a series of invasions, the Islamic countries looked inward and took refugee in fundamentalism. From that period onward, economic and scientific progress in that region slowly decelerated and came to a halt. By contrast, the Protestant Reformation salvaged Europe from

Catholicism Even today, the resistance to modernity in most Muslim majority countries is growing intense in the

more enlightened parts of the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia. UAE, Egypt, and so on. Thus many scholars believe that the hatred of capitalism is less based on Islam's affinity for socialism, than on its fear of modernity. Capitalism is just one of many things that the religious extremists hate and fear as intrusions upon their religion and their lives. Western science and technology are just as threatening to the -- some would say stagnation -- of Muslim life as are Western economic ideas in the form of capitalism. Looking back we feel that one of the greatest miscalculations that Islamic world committed some 500 years ago with respect to modernisation and accepting scientific advances that still drags on with fanaticism and rejections among a few seriously misguided souls even Religious extremists can cause

irretrievable damage to life and property, bring economic ruin by expelling foreign trade, foreign investment and commerce and the progress of science and new techniques of production. This will only aggravate miseries of the poor masses and eventually impoverish the already beleaguered country. To bring change religious extremists should follow the religiously grounded altruism of their counterparts in other countries. For example, in Egypt, Islamic extremists have provided health-care and educational facilities as alternatives to expensive private outlets and inadequate state institutions. In Turkey, they got involved building housing for the poor and worked in strengthening civil society. In Lebanon, they have organised farm cooperatives and provided facilities and services for the welfare of children, widows, and the dispossessed. In Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait and elsewhere, they have run for parliament seats. Engaging in such social services will win them the hearts and minds of the people and help them win elections to create their own power base to the demise of the "merry-go-round" corrupt and morally bankrupt politicians whom all of us despise.

The authors are, respectively, Professor of Economics, Eastern Michigan University and former Secretary to the Government of