Terrorism – Studies, Analyses, Prevention, 2025, no. 7: 463–480

https://doi.org/10.4467/27204383TER.25.039.21816

Review

Kim Ghattas, Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Forty-Year Rivalry that Unraveled Culture, Religion, and Collective Memory in the Middle East[1]

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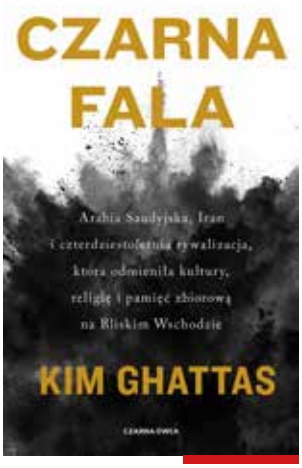

Kim Ghattas is a journalist and writer who was born and grew up in Lebanon and now lives alternately in Beirut and Washington, DC. For 20 years she has reported and commented on events in the Middle East for the BBC and the *Financial Times*. The author is a fellow of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace think tank in Washington, DC and a member of the Board of Trustees of the American University of Beirut.

The reviewed publication was published in English in 2020. Against the backdrop of numerous works on the Middle East, it is

[1] K. Ghattas, *Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Forty-Year Rivalry that Unraveled Culture, Religion, and Collective Memory in the Middle East,* Warszawa 2023, Czarna Owca, 496 p.

an outstanding and unique position as it details the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Shortly after its publication, *The New York Times* named it one of the best non-fiction books.

The author used many different types of sources in the publication, including: archival documents, academic papers and newspaper articles. Particularly noteworthy is the number of interviews she has conducted, including with well-known personalities such as Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal, the leader of the Tunisian Renaissance Party (Arabic: Hizb al-Nahda) Rachid al-Ghannouchi and Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, who was assassinated in 2018. Ghattas has portrayed history not through the prism of only important personalities, but has taken into account the participation of many lesser-known or even unknown political players who nevertheless had a significant impact on events. It is worth noting that such an approach is rare.

The book *Black wave*... facilitates understanding of events in the Middle East from 1979 to 2019. The fact that different countries and periods were covered certainly complicated the work on the book, but it allows the reader to see a broader perspective, covering the whole region. The author has skilfully combined historical, religious, cultural and geopolitical themes, providing extensive knowledge of the relatively little-known (apart from specialists) rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, this rivalry has often been inspired by the United States. In the reviewed book, however, US foreign policy in the Middle East is presented as secondary to the situation in the region, to decisions made in Tehran, Riyadh, Cairo and other capitals, and to the ambitions of local decision-makers. According to the author, the people there are not just victims of Western policy, but suffer the consequences of the decisions of their own authorities. Relations between Sunni-Wahhabi Saudi Arabia and Shiite Iran translate into international relations in the Muslim world and become a source of many tensions, political murders, terrorism and armed conflicts. The author has masterfully combined historical issues with information from witnesses to the events. The book confronts readers with the harsh realities faced by ordinary people in the Middle East, experiencing the tragic consequences of antagonism in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and religious fanaticism in Egypt and Pakistan. The suffering experienced by millions is a proof of how geopolitical rivalries translate into human misery.

Ghattas presented a fascinating gallery of characters whose lives were often intertwined. Many of them ended their lives tragically, others had to flee their country to save themselves. A list with a brief description of 59 key individuals, out of the hundreds of decision-makers, dissidents, participants and witnesses to the events mentioned in the text, is included at the beginning of the book. Thanks to this, while reading it is possible to back to the note about the character you are currently reading about. The list is divided by country. These are as follows: Lebanon, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan and Egypt.

The introduction begins with the question: *What happened to us?*[2] (p. 19), which the rational thinking part of Arab society asks itself. This includes the author, as well as her interlocutors, who remember the days before the black wave[3] and the dramatic change of life when this wave spread in their countries. The question is meant to prompt reflection on when and why religious fanaticism, sectarian killings and amorphous wars spread in the Arab and Muslim world. The book's subtitle: *Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Forty-Year Rivalry that Unraveled Culture, Religion, and Collective Memory in the Middle East* may suggest one of the answers. The author repeats the question towards the end of the book (p. 450) and tries to answer it with a brief summary of the events presented.

The book consists of three parts entitled: *Revolution, Competition* and *War*. These titles, as well as the titles of most chapters, such as: *Darkness, I killed the Pharaoh, No Dupatta* or *Cain and Abel*, clearly indicate that Ghattas did not write it with Middle East experts in mind, but wanted to reach a wide readership. In my opinion she succeeded perfectly. At the beginning of each chapter, in addition to the title and motto, countries and time period covered are listed.

Part I of the book contains four chapters. In the first, entitled *Cassette Revolution*, the author presents the events unfolding between 1977 and 1979 in Lebanon, Iran, Iraq and France. She devoted chapter two to Iran 1979–1980, chapter three to Saudi Arabia in 1979 and chapter four focused

[2] The quotes come from the electronic version of the original: Kim Ghattas, *Black Wave: Saudi Arabia, Iran and the Forty-Year Rivalry that Unraveled Culture, Religion, and Collective Memory in the Middle East* (New York, 2020), Kindle version. The review is about the Polish translation of the book.

[3] The term comes from the colour of the flags used by Muslim terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda or the Islamic State. Fighters of the latter organisation flew them as they seized city after city in Iraq and Syria.

on the bloody events unfolding between 1979 and 1980 in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Afghanistan. The history starts in Lebanon in 1977, when there was a civil war in the author's homeland. Before it happened, the state was home to oppositionists, revolutionaries and terrorists from various countries. Among them were Palestinian militants from Al-Fatah (Arabic: Harakat at-Tahrir al-Filastini) and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO, Arabic: Munazzamat at-Tahrir al-Filastiniyyah), local armed nationalist and religious groups, and secular nationalists from the Freedom Movement of Iran (Persian: Nehzat-e Azadi-e Iran) headed by Mostafa Chamran, who had established contacts with local Shiites. He urged the Shah of Iran Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to relinquish the throne. Chamran played a very important role in the subsequent Islamic Revolution and was the first Minister of Defence in post-revolutionary Iran. Another Iranian refugee, Musa Sadr, founded an organisation in Lebanon called the Movement of the Disinherited (Arabic: Harakat al-Mahrumin) to defend the interests of the Shiite population, which is the poorest religious community in the country. He also established the Supreme Shiite Council (Arabic: Al-Majlis al-Alam ash-Shia). The Iranian revolution, accompanied by mass protests in the streets, activated not only oppressed Shiites in Lebanon, but also French Marxist intellectuals such as Michel Foucault and Jean-Paul Sartre. They wondered whether the waning tide of Arab and European socialist revolution was now being supported by a Persian revival.

In October 1978, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini arrived in France with some activists of the Freedom Movement of Iran, who were forced to leave Iraq. Saddam Hussein took over there and reignited hostilities between Arabs and Persians as well as between Sunnis and Shiites, and in 1980 declared war on Iran. In France, Khomeini was able to enjoy freedom to speech and unlimited access to the world press. There he recorded calls for the overthrow of the Shah, then sent to Iran and played in mosques. His stay in Neauphle-le-Château in the suburbs of Paris lasted less than four months. On 16 January 1979, the Shah and his family left Iran for exile. Two weeks later, Khomeini triumphantly returned there and after ten days declared the victory of the Islamic Revolution. The first foreign leader to meet with him was Yasser Arafat – chairman of Al-Fatah and the PLO. He arrived in Tehran on 17 February on a plane lent to him by Syrian President Hafez al-Assad. The course of this visit is described by Ghattas in interesting detail.

The Saudis were very concerned about the revolution in Iran. Events in their own country were also of great concern to members of the ruling dynasty and religious officials. On 20 November 1979, several hundred Islamic extremists, led by Juhayman ibn Muhammad al-Otaibi and Muhammad ibn Abdullah al-Qahtani, overran the Grand Mosque in Mecca (Arabic: Al-Masjid al-Haram). Al-Otaibi subjected Riyadh's policies to criticism – he accused the monarchy of apostasy and alliance with Christians. He demanded that foreign experts, engineers and military advisers leave Saudi Arabia. He called for the introduction of "pure" Wahhabism, which he claimed the Saudis and pro-government Muslim scholars had abandoned. He proclaimed that his companion, al-Qahtani, was *the mahdi*, or messiah. The rebellion was brutally suppressed by the authorities. It took two weeks for government forces, supported by French commandos, to retake the mosque. The permission for the French infidels to enter the shrine was given by the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia and his supreme religious authority Abdel Aziz bin Baz, whose vision of Islam was no less conservative than Khomeini's. The French soldiers, of course, had to accept Islam first. Bin Baz then used the whole event to force the royal family and the public to live according to the precepts of Islam, as demanded by the rebels occupying the mosque. After the events in the Grand Mosque, which resulted in the deaths of all the rebels (some during storming of the shrine, others in executions), the Saudi Arabian authorities, fearing further revolts launched by religious fanatics, began to implement the demands of their leaders and made many changes to the legal system in accordance with Sharia rules. After 1979, women were barred from hosting television programmes, banned from publishing photos in newspapers and advertisements featuring them and from being employed, as well as forced to cover their entire bodies in public spaces. Clubs and cinemas were closed. The religious police, i.e. officers of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (Arabic: Hayat al-Amr bi al-Maaruf wa al-Nahi an al-Munkar), were given ample funding and autonomy of action. The radical imams and preachers who inspired al-Otaibi, and later Osama bin Laden and other terrorists, have led to consolidate Wahhabi principles in Saudi society – from school books promoting intolerance of dissenting religious beliefs to the rollback of human rights for women and religious minorities, as in Iran. The country's authorities were interested in the Saudi ruling elite. Khomeini was a staunch critic of the Saud dynasty and called for their

overthrow. "Exporting the Islamic Revolution" became a central theme of Iranian foreign policy. Due to active efforts of Iran's new leadership, the Saudis began to promote their own version of radical Islam abroad in order not only to protect but also to increase their influence. Riyadh has spent billions of dollars building mosques and religious schools abroad and funding religious charities loyal to radical Wahhabi ideology and considering Shiites as heretics. The Iranians have done the same in countries with large Shia populations, such as Lebanon, Afghanistan and Pakistan. They have tried to portray Iran and its leaders as the true vanguard of Islam, going against all its enemies, including the Saudis.

On 25 December 1979, the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet troops took place. The three events of 1979: the revolution of Iran, the seizure of the mosque in Mecca and the entry of Soviet forces into Afghanistan had nothing to do with each other, but their occurrence led to disaster. The fall of Shah was initially supported by merchants, nationalists and the Iranian left, but supporters of Khomeini and the theocratic Shiite state quickly gained the upper hand. The attack on Mecca was carried out by extremists who saw the Saud dynasty as traitors to the rigours of Wahhabi Islam. Afghanistan became the first battlefield of international jihad in modern times. These events changed the Middle East forever and started the process of re-Islamisation of the Muslim world in the spirit of radical Islam.

The Islamic revolution in Iran and seizure of the mosque in Mecca triggered far-reaching changes in Saudi Arabia with the slow but determined expansion of Salafi puritanism. These were accelerated by the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the attack by Iraqi troops on Iran on 22 September 1980. This was the beginning of the eight-year war that both sides called Arab-Persian, referring to a division dating back to the 7th century[4]. Ghattas saw an imbalance in the way events in Iran, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia were reported at that time. While news from the former two countries made headlines around the world, events in Saudi Arabia received little media attention. However, according to the author: *There were two Islamic revolutions in 1979.* (...) *Both were misunderstood. One was a sudden, dramatic reversal of progress and rejection of centuries of history, the other was a slow but forceful expansion of Salafist puritanism. Both of them would transform their country of origin and then ripple across the Arab and*

[4] The division of the followers of Islam into Sunnis and Shiites occurred in the 7th century. After the death of the third caliph of the righteous dynasty, Uthman ibn Affan, in 656, a confrontation between the two began.

Muslim world for decades to come (p. 112). This – according to Ghattas – became the source of the black wave that swept across the Muslim world in the following years.

The author of the book interestingly describes the changes taking place in the two countries that were the cradle of the black wave, i.e. Iran and Saudi Arabia. They were becoming increasingly oppressive towards their citizens. After the declaration of the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, terror began. All universities were closed down. Their activities relaunched after three years, but with different staffing. Purges were carried out among the lecturers, but also in the student community. They were also carried out in the army and state institutions. In time, "the revolution began to devour its own children". Thousands of people died. The revolt in Iran inspired opponents of Syrian President Hafez al-Assad and in 1982 there was a rebellion organised by the Muslim Brotherhood (Arabic: Al-Ichwan al-Muslimin) in the city of Hama. Both uprisings were bloodily suppressed by government forces. The Muslim Brotherhood have never forgiven Khomeini and Iran for being abandoned by them. Said Hawwa – one of the leaders of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, who initially praised Khomeini and his revolution – began to denounce the Ayatollah as a threat to the Sunni Muslim world. The Islamic world once again entered, as in the Middle Ages, a phase of fighting between different religious trends.

Part II of the book has eight chapters. The first and seventh are devoted to events in Egypt (1977–1995), the second and fourth to events in Pakistan (1978–1988), the third to events in Lebanon (1980–1988), and the fifth and eighth to events in Saudi Arabia (1987–2001). In the sixth chapter, titled *Culture Wars*, the author described the changes that took place in the above-mentioned countries between 1988 and 1990. The transformation under the influence of radical Islam took place rapidly and covered all areas of life. Ghattas devoted a great deal of space to Egypt. In 1928, the aforementioned Society of Muslim Brotherhood (Arabic: Jamiyat al-Ichwan al-Muslimin)[5] was established in the country and successfully developed, which over the following decades spread throughout the Muslim world and became

[5] The organisation that originated in Egypt was called the Society of Muslim Brotherhood. Over the years, it became international in character and there was the disappearance of the word "society" in the name and the emergence of a shorter form – the Muslim Brotherhood.

the source of many terrorist organisations[6]. Before this, however, secular science, culture and art developed. Egyptian women were the pioneers and key figures of Arab feminism. Singer Umm Kulsum had an international career and fame, and Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser treated her like a national asset. According to Ghattas, Egypt is a prime example of the acceleration and exacerbation of radical re-Islamisation as a result of the Iranian revolution and the resurgence of Saudi Wahhabism. One manifestation of this re-Islamisation was the rise of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad organisation (Arabic: Al-Jihad al-Islami al-Misri), founded in 1978 by the group's chief ideologue and strategist Muhammad Abd as-Salam Faraj and Egyptian army officer Abbud Abd al-Latif az-Zummur. The main aim of this organisation was to overthrow the authorities in Egypt. Faraj's book entitled *Al-Farida al-Ghajba* (English: Neglected Obligation), published underground in 1980, became a new interpretation of jihad. In it, the author stated, among other things, that the means to achieve the ultimate goal of reconstituting a Muslim state was through armed struggle and the killing of those who had embezzled from the principles of Islam. Faraj's concept of holy war became an apologia for terrorism and legitimised the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, who had betrayed Islam by signing a peace agreement with Israel in March 1979. The assassination of Sadat took place on 6 October 1981 in Cairo. During a military parade, organised to mark the anniversary of the 1973 war with Israel, four members of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, under the command of Lt Khalid Ahmed Shavki al-Islambuli, armed with automatic assault rifles and grenades, broke away from the parading subdivision and attacked the stand where the president and his guests of honour were located. Apart from Sadat, eight people were killed and around 30 wounded, including US army officers[7]. Four of the direct bombers and Faraj were sentenced to death, while many others received prison terms. Among them was

[6] From the 1970s onwards, factions began to play a major role in the national structures of the Muslim Brotherhood, which decided to achieve their goals, including the overthrow of infidel rule and Islamisation, not by continuing organic work but by armed struggle. In Egypt, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood; in Lebanon – the Islamic Unification Movement; in Gaza – Hamas; in Sudan – the National Islamic Front.

[7] The author of the book erroneously attributed the attack to the Islamic Group Arabic: (Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya). It was carried out by the Islamic Jihad Arabic: (Al-Jihad al-Islami). The author of the review briefly elaborated on the course and consequences of this attack. See: K. Izak, *Leksykon organizacji i ruchów islamistycznych* (Eng. Lexicon of Islamist organisations and movements), Warszawa 2014, pp. 158–159.

doctor Ayman al-Zawahiri. He was accused of involvement in the planning of the attack and arms trafficking. He was sentenced to three years in prison. After his release in 1984, he went to Peshawar, Pakistan, where he took up a cooperation with Osama bin Laden.

The second half of the 1980s saw a number of attacks on Egyptian politicians and intellectuals. In 1987, former Minister of the Interior Hassan Abu Basha was severely injured and Makram Mohamed Ahmed, editor-in-chief of the weekly Al-Musawar (English: The Shaper), was assassinated. In 1989, former Interior Minister Zaki Badr was the victim of an assassination attempt, and in 1990 – Rifat Mahjub, Speaker of Parliament. In 1992, Farag Foda, a well-known intellectual and opponent of Islamic radicalism, was killed. During the trial of Foda's killers, Mohammad al-Ghazali, a leading Muslim scholar and charismatic preacher, who was called as a defence witness, stated that when a person born a Muslim fights against Sharia, as Foda did, he or she commits an act of apostasy punishable by death. Ghattas writes: (...) *it was up to the state to carry out the sentence of death against apostates after a trial, but since the state had failed to curb Foda, the sentence could be carried out by righteous Muslims. Chillingly, Ghazali declared there was no punishment for a Muslim stepping in to carry out this deadly duty* (p. 270). In 1993, extremists attempted to assassinate Prime Minister Atef Sidki, Interior Minister Hassan Muhammad al-Alfi and Information Minister Safwat al-Sharif. They also attacked Nobel Prize for Literature laureate Naguib Mahfouz. In 1994, he was stabbed in the neck. He survived, but his hand was severely damaged. University lecturer Nasr Abu Zeid became another target. Inappropriate content was found in his works and he was labelled an apostate. The court divorced him from his wife against his will, as according to Islamic principles a Muslim woman cannot be married to a dissenter (Abu Zeid became one as an apostate). His wife disobeyed the verdict and in 1995 they both left for Europe. They settled in Leiden, in the western Netherlands, where Abu Zeid was offered a job at the local university. These events made it clear that radical Islam was influential in Egyptian legal circles, and not only among advocates, whose union the Muslim Brotherhood had already taken control of in 1992, but also among judges. It turned out that moderate and radical Islamists began to act together – the latter murdering victims identified by the former. Targeting secular intellectuals served to deepen religious fanaticism.

The black wave also reached Pakistan. The author begins her narrative on the country with the story of Mehtab Channa (after her

husband: Mehtab Akbar Rashdi), a well-known TV and radio presenter and lecturer at the University of Sindh, who went to the United States to study international relations. She returned to Pakistan in 1978, a year after the dictatorship was introduced there. In July 1977, the charismatic and popular Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, a follower of Shiite Islam in its moderate version, was arrested. He was deposed by the commander of the armed forces, General Mohammad Zia ul-Haq, who promised that the situation created after the coup would be temporary. He declared: *My sole aim is to organize free and fair elections which would be held in October this year* (...)*Soon after the polls, power will be transferred to the elected representatives of the people. I give a solemn assurance that I will not deviate from the schedule* (p. 162). However, elections never took place and in September 1977 the general declared himself president. In April 1979, despite worldwide protests, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was executed. Ghattas devotes considerable attention to the events unfolding in Pakistan. He recalls that Islamist groups have been active there for decades. The largest and best known, the Muslim Association (a.k.a. Jama'at-e Islami), was established as early as 1941, six years before the creation of Pakistan. It was founded in the city of Lahaur by the well-known radical Muslim scholar Abu Al al-Mawdudi. However, changes in the country leading to its Islamisation were slow. They accelerated after the seizure of power by Zia ul-Haq, who called himself a soldier of Islam. He was a deeply believing, orthodox Muslim, usurping the moral right to undertake a broad policy of Islamising the state. His ambition was to make every Pakistani a devout and God-fearing Muslim. On 10 February 1979, the day before the declaration of the victory of Islamic Revolution in Iran, Zia ul-Haq introduced strict Shariah laws. Mehtab Channa watched these changes with horror. She was fired from television because she disagreed with an order to cover her hair on camera. This order soon began to apply to women in public spaces. At the same time, Saudi Arabia's religious influence in Pakistan had been growing since the early 1980s. Aid, mainly American and Saudi, flowed through the country for the Afghan mujahideen fighting the Russians. Saudi financial support for Quranic schools educating children and young people who had fled Afghanistan was also growing. The young generation gave birth to the Taliban.

At the time, the city of Peshawar, known as "mini Arabistan" and a kind of melting pot of international jihad, played an important role. Volunteers coming from all over the world to fight the Red Army in

neighbouring Afghanistan gathered there. Al-Qaeda founders Abdallah Azzam, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri also stayed there. In turn, Jamal Khashoggi, to whom Ghattas devoted the last chapter of the book, was a correspondent in Peshawar, sending admiring dispatches to Saudi newspapers. He was fascinated by the jihadist international in which he saw the unity of the ummah, i.e. the worldwide Muslim community. In his eyes, the Afghan mujahideen were waging a just and glorious war against the infidels, i.e. the Soviet invaders. Armed groups and militias were being formed with the approval of the Pakistani special services to attack the Shia minority. In 1987, Afghan and Pakistani militants attacked villages belonging to the Shiite Turi tribe in the Kurram region, on the border with Afghanistan. The Shiites repelled the attack. In the fighting, which lasted two weeks, 52 Shiites and 120 Sunnis were killed and 14 villages were partially or completely destroyed. According to Ghattas: *Here then was the epicentre of modern-day sectarian bloodletting, the first of its kind in modern times. Sectarianism had been weaponized. Targeted assassinations came next* (p. 230). The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran spilled over into Pakistan, where Sunnis and Shiites began to systematically murder each other. This hatred was skilfully fuelled by the Saudi Arabian authorities, who persecuted Shiites in their country and detained their religious leaders. The Saudis have poured many millions of dollars into rebuilding the temple complex in Mecca, destroyed in the 1979 events, and erecting hotels for pilgrims around it. This task was outsourced to the Saudi Binladin Group, a construction holding company founded in 1931 by Muhammad Bin Laden, Osama's father. In the process, many monuments remembering the time of the first Muslims were demolished. The Wahabbi religious establishment, fighting against any commemoration of ancestors, was most pleased with these measures. At the same time, religious rigour was intensifying. In order to bring about reform in Saudi Arabia, to divert attention from their own Western lifestyle and to secure the legitimacy of their exercise of power with Muslim scholars, the Saudis gradually increased their privileges and their ability to control social life. In 1984, King Fahd opened the Holy Quran Printing Complex named after him (Arabic: Majma al-Malik Fahd al-Itibit al-Mushaf al-Sharifi), one of the largest printing houses in the world, capable of producing 8 million copies of the Quran per year. It printed a new, supposedly perfect, version of the holy book, complete with annotations and commentaries, and its English translation. Plenty of copies of this version of Quran (and its

subsequent reprints), containing, among other things, violent content against Jews and Christians, were distributed to pilgrims and abroad through Saudi embassies.

In 1986 – as Ghattas writes – (...) *King Fahd announced he was officially replacing the title of His Majesty the King with that of Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. First introduced by Saladin during the Crusades, the title had never been officially used, until King Fahd* (p. 241). Throughout the Iraq-Iran war (1980–1988), Fahd supported Baghdad with billions of dollars. Wahhabi ideology, which inspired Saudis and other Muslims to fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, became a tool for spreading ideas of intolerance, radicalisation and terrorism in the Islamic world. The government in Riyadh viewed Saudi jihadi fighters differently at home and abroad. It fought the former and treated the latter as Wahhabi martyrs. The detachment of the Saudis from Wahhabism was what the Americans wanted. However this was not possible. This ideology had brought them to power and they derived their legitimacy from it. The country's religious elite enjoyed the patronage of many princes and a conflict with the Wahhabis could have deprived the Saudis of power.

After the US attack on Afghanistan in October 2001 and Iraq in 2003, a new wave of radicalisation emerged in Saudi Arabia, similar to that which followed the 1991 Iraq war. However, the allegations against the royal family were different. In the 1990s, members of the fundamentalist revival known as the Awakening (Arabic: *sahwa*) accused King Fahd of summoning infidels to liberate Kuwait. In the early 2000s, al-Qaeda jihadist sympathisers accused the Saudis of providing assistance to infidels from the West in their war against Iraq and Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, which gave refuge to Bin Laden and his followers. The illegitimacy of the Saud dynasty's rule and the need to drive the Americans out of the country were highlighted. Despite much effort and deference to the religious authorities, propagating Wahhabi ideology in the Muslim world, the Saudis thus had a hostile, radical opposition outside their state.

Just as Peshawar was a "mini-Arabistan" in the 1980s, Lebanon's Baalbek and Beqaa Valley became an outpost of Tehran. It was in this region that Hezbollah (Arabic: Hizb Allah – Party of God) was founded. The direct influence of the formation of this organisation came from the entry of Israeli troops into Lebanon on 6 June 1982 and the actions of the Iranian ambassador in Beirut – Ayatollah Ali Akbar Mohtashamipur. At his request, some 1500 soldiers of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard

Corps (Persian: Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami) were flown from Tehran to the Beqaa Valley with the task of training Lebanese Shia fighters. The main figures associated with the implementation of this venture were the well-known Shiite cleric Raghib Harb and the first Hezbollah leader Sobhi Tufayli. His deputy was Naim Qassem, who had previously been active in the Lebanese Resistance Troops (Arabic: Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniyya, Amal). In addition to them, the core of Hezbollah consisted of a group of Shiite clerics, led by Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. Hezbollah's armed wings were the Islamic Resistance (Arabic: Al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya) and the Islamic Jihad (Arabic: Al-Jihad al-Islami), which organised suicide attacks on Israeli, US and French military headquarters. These were the first such attacks in the Middle East. People living under Hezbollah's control were forced to endure social and legal restrictions and were subjected to ideological indoctrination, something hitherto alien to Lebanon. The author of the book captures the reader's attention with a description of the first eight years of Hezbollah's terrorist activities and the fate of its leaders.

Ghattas also interestingly describes the case of Salman Rushdie's book *The Satanic Verses*, which was much talked about at the time of the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in early 1989[8]. When the novel was published in September 1988, Ayatollah Khomeini raised no objection. Instead, it provoked heated protests in Britain. They were supported by Saudi Arabia and various Muslim organisations. Nevertheless, the book was translated into Persian and sold in Tehran. The situation changed when Saudi Arabia, as the guardian of Islam, directly joined the campaign against *The Satanic Verses*. With the help of its embassy in London, it organised a campaign to ban the dissemination of this novel and bring its author to justice. Khomeini could not remain passive in the face of the Kingdom's actions. He called not only for a ban on the sale of the book, but also for the killing of its author and any person involved in the publication of this work. He has set a 3 million US dollars reward for Rushdie's head. Saudi religious authorities, "defeated" by the Iranian

[8] The title of the book refers to the words encouraging the worship of the pagan goddesses Al-Lat, Manat and Al-Uzza, which Satan allegedly whispered to the Prophet Muhammad. The prophet was said to have stated that the place of these goddesses was with Allah. With this statement, Muhammad gained allies in the hostile tribe of the Quraysh, but he denied this narration a few days later. Its contents, however, were to be found in the original version of the 53rd surah of the Quran entitled *The Star* (Arabic: An-Najm).

fatwa, announced that the courts there should try Rushdie to convict in absentia for blasphemy. However, the author of *The Satanic Verses* did not stand trial and avoided death[9]. However, the translators of his novels into Japanese and Turkish and the publisher of the Norwegian translation were murdered. The race to religious intolerance between Saudi Arabia and Iran is just one of the themes of Ghattas book. She writes: *Death by blasphemy had now been introduced to the Muslim world by a strange twist in the competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia to position themselves as the standard-bearer of global Islam* (p. 256). Since then, people accused of blasphemy began to be killed in many Muslim countries. Muslim radicals usually carried out executions in the streets.

Part III of the book consists of seven chapters and covers the period 2003–2019, and is devoted to events and the fate of the people in the countries that were the subject of the previous chapters, and additionally Syria and Turkey. In the last part of the publication, the author has interestingly portrayed the subsequent course of the Saudi-Iranian ideological-religious rivalry and struggle for power in the Middle East as well as the seizure of control by Muslim extremists in Syria and Yemen. This struggle has largely evolved into proxy wars between Riyadh and Tehran.

In the first chapter, on Iraq, Ghattas went back to the 1990s, in which Saddam Hussein's regime bloodily cracked down on Shiites and exterminated their religious leaders. The entry of US troops into the country in 2003 raised hopes of positive social change. However, the opposite happened. Iraqi soldiers discharged from the army by the Americans, as well as officials of the former regime, formed the secret grouping The Return (Arabic: Al-Awda). The majority of Sunnis felt that the banning of the Iraqi Baath (English: renaissance or resurrection)[10] party and the demobilisation and dismissal of its members from public institutions were unjust. Moreover, these actions were perceived as a blow to all Sunni adherents, not just those who belonged to Baath. Excluded from public life, unemployed party members began to organise themselves into insurgent groups, fighting the Americans and acting against Iraqi Shiites. During Saddam Hussein's rule they were persecuted, but after his overthrow they

[9] In August 2022, a Muslim radical attacked Salman Rushdie with a knife. The incident occurred during an author meeting in the town of Chautauqua near Buffalo, New York. As a result of his injuries, the writer lost sight in one eye and power in his left hand.

[10] The party's name is an acronym for Hizb al-Baas al-Arabi al-Ishtiraki (Arab Socialist Baath Party).

began to dominate political life, as they outnumbered the population (they made up 60%). The disillusioned, especially the former military men, quickly joined the anti-American resistance movement. The mistakes that were made[11] at the time triggered a wave of violence and led to a Sunni uprising and bloody fighting between the Shiite Mahdi Army (Arabic: Jaysh al-Mahdi) and the Sunnis, led by members of the organisation Supporters of Islam (Arabic: Ansar al-Islam). In the first few years after the invasion, Saudis accounted for almost half of the foreign fighters taking part in the insurgency, and Saudi jihadists carried out more suicide attacks than Islamic volunteers from any other country. Ghattas writes: *The Saudis had warned the Americans not to invade, telling them it served no one's interests and would cause a resurgence of fundamentalism that would reach the United States and Europe. They warned about the destruction of Iraq, but what they really worried about was a Shia-ruled Iraq where Iran called the shots. A Sunni insurgency was the deadly antidote* (p. 326–327).

The Islamic State, which turned out to be the largest, richest and most murderous terrorist organisation in the world, emerged from organisations then linked to al-Qaeda. It gained followers and created affiliates in many Muslim countries. Even then, Saudi Arabia did not stop supporting the spread of Wahhabi extremism. Its victim in Pakistan was Salmaan Taseer, governor of Punjab province, who was assassinated by his own bodyguard in January 2011. The killer could not accept that the politician defied the blasphemy law and stood up for the Christian woman Asia Bibi accused of the offence. The murderer was sentenced to death and hanged in 2016. He was declared a martyr and a mosque built in his honour in a suburb of Islamabad gathers thousands of worshippers. Ghattas states: *Since the end of the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, Saudi influence in Pakistan had become less obvious but perhaps more insidious. Saudi intelligence officials didn't need to fly to Peshawar twice a month anymore with bags of cash, as they had done in the 1980s. Their network of influence was well established, with both formal and informal networks* (p. 357).

The author of the book took too cursory an approach to the situation in Syria. She blamed Iran for its problems, just as she blamed Saudi Arabia for the rise of the Islamic State. Meanwhile, the causes

[11] Paul Bremer, the US civilian administrator of Iraq, concentrated all power in the country and disbanded the Iraqi army, leaving a multitude of men unemployed. This was one of the sources of the insurgency. By delaying the Iraqis taking charge of the country, Bremer contributed to the recognition of the Americans as occupiers rather than liberators.

of the outbreak of civil war in Syria in 2011 were more complex, with the regime in Damascus playing a major role. The United States, which sent large quantities of arms there and supported the rebels, had a significant impact on the course of the war in Syria, which the author failed to mention. Turkey's involvement in the Syrian conflict was also passed over in silence. Moreover, the book lacked commentary on Libya. Ghattas mentions the country only marginally, in relation to the various figures she describes who spent some time there. However, during the Arab Spring in 2011, there was an anti-government rebellion in Libya. It was supported by NATO aviation, contrary to the UN Security Council's decision to allow only air zones, not aerial bombing and support for the rebels. Furthermore, the author did not write about the attack on the US consulate in Benghazi carried out on 11 September 2012 by Islamist extremists linked to al-Qaeda. The American ambassador Chris Stevens and four other people were killed at the time. The Arab Spring in Egypt, on the other hand, was interestingly described. It led to the fall of President Hosni Mubarak and the election of Mohammad Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood figure, to the post in 2012. Mohammad Morsi, who came from the Muslim Brotherhood, was elected to office in 2012. The changes in Egypt were watched with great concern by the Saudis, as the political success of the Muslim Brotherhood in that country could have inspired a coup in Saudi Arabia. However, after a year in office, the "troublesome" president was overthrown by the military.

Sofana Dahlan, a Saudi lawyer and one of the author's interviewees, said she wanted to believe (...) *that Mohammad bin Salman was the hero that her generation had long been waiting for* (p. 434). Young Salman, also known as MbS[12], became defence minister after his father, King Salman, took the throne in 2015, and soon afterwards also the heir to the throne exercising real power in the country. He lifted the ban on women driving and freed up many professions for them. He ordered the reopening of cinemas and concert halls and launched a propaganda attack on the Kingdom's religious conservatism, which won him the applause of young Saudis. His statements and actions attracted worldwide media attention. Ghattas writes: *When he declared that the 1979 era was over, he was right in one respect: religion was no longer enough to motivate society and mobilise the masses* (p. 440). Behind this

[12] MbS i san acronym created from the name of the prince, in which the word "ibn" has been replaced by "bin". Both words mean "son" in Arabic.

pose of reformer, however, was a cruel tyrant, intolerant of opposition and criticism. Hence the kidnappings and arrests of opponents of the Saudi regime, including the high-profile death of the aforementioned journalist Jamal Khashoggi. The author devoted the final chapter, entitled *Murder on the Bosporus*, to him. Khashoggi was murdered on 2 October 2018 at his country's consulate in Istambul, and his corpse was quartered. The journalist's life and death may provide an epilogue to the book in relation to Saudi Arabia and the assassin's perception of it – from his early support for the Afghan Mujahideen to his later, fateful realisation that the successor to the throne's reforms were designed to keep the Saud dynasty in power. In 2019, five of Khashoggi's killers were sentenced to death by a Riyadh court. However, their principals and those who oversaw the journalist's murder were never brought to justice. Among them was Prince Salman and his right-hand man for menial jobs – Saud al-Qahtani. After a period of diplomatic isolation for the Kingdom, and even after the publication of a report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights acknowledging Saudi Arabia's responsibility for the "extrajudicial premeditated execution" of Khashoggi, things returned to normal, and the West was ready to join in the implementation of the "Vision 2030" project announced by MbS in April 2016.

In summary, Iran and Saudi Arabia have for 40 years used religion as a weapon to consolidate the state, exercise internal control over society and discredit the opposition. At the same time, they have provided support to the authorities of other countries and NGOs to promote a militant religious ideology. One would have to wonder, however, whether the Black Wave could have been created without the opportunistic exploitation of the Arab-Israeli conflict by the Ayatollah Khomeini or Osama bin Laden. However, the author did not pay much attention to Israel.

The book by Kim Ghattas can be a fascinating read both for academics and professionals who devote their time to analysing the situation in the Middle East, as well as for those who are simply interested in the region and want to understand the complexity of the issues that affect it. In her conclusion, the author states: *I wrote it for those who believe the Arab and Muslim worlds are more than the unceasing headlines about terrorism, ISIS, or the IRGC. Perhaps above all I wrote it for those of my generation and younger in the region who are still asking, "What happened to us?" and who wonder why their parents didn't, or couldn't, do anything to stop the unraveling.* As well as seeking answer to this question, readers of *Black wave*... will find in

the book of Ghattas explanations of the origins of many conflicts in that part of the world and poignant descriptions of the hopes and desires of the people who live there. It reads like a good novel. I strongly encourage to read it.

Krzysztof Izak

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