

# BUYING INFLUENCE?

## BRIEFING NOTE: SAUDI ARABIA AND THE SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES



*A message from Robert Halfon MP*

"I am deeply concerned at the findings of this report by Student Rights, following the recent Freedom of Information Request that I made to SOAS. I will be raising this further in Parliament at the next opportunity, and will be writing to the Vice-Chancellor of SOAS asking for an explanation."



### FOREWORD

*by Raheem Kassam, director of Student Rights*

In response to a Freedom of Information campaign Robert Halfon's office and Student Rights, an organisation tasked with tackling extremism on campuses, a number of UK universities have been forced to disclose their close financial relationships to oppressive regimes and dictatorships in the Middle East and North Africa. Continuing our investigation of this regretful state of affairs, we have compiled this briefing on the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) and its official ties to the Royal Family of Saudi Arabia.

Recently, the director of the London School of Economics resigned over growing concerns and revelations regarding the university's links with Muammar Gaddafi's brutal regime in Libya. In this report, we also show the links between SOAS and the Al-Fateh University, where Saif Gaddafi attended in the 1990s.

Shockingly, on the Editorial Board of the SOAS Journal of Qur'anic Studies is Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a man who is banned from the UK and USA for inciting suicide bombings and issuing a fatwa advocating the murder of pregnant women and their babies. SOAS now has a lot to answer for.

Considering the atrocious human rights record of the Saudi regime, it is unclear as to how authorities at SOAS saw fit to establish official ties with a regime that is helping to oppress protests in Bahrain and Oman, and buying off its own population with an injection of over \$130bn. We must not forget, Saudi Arabia is a country in which corporal and capital punishment are still widely prevalent, where women cannot vote or even drive and where there is no religious freedom and apostasy is punishable by penalty of death. To understand the true extent of the situation, it is worth considering this paragraph on Saudi Arabia, by the human rights organisation 'Freedom House':

In Saudi Arabia, homosexuality is a crime under the threat of 'public execution' and there are no political freedoms. These standpoints are completely contrary to SOAS' own statements on human rights and the freedom of speech, as displayed on page 2 of this report.

We urge the university management at SOAS to take this opportunity to reconsider their dealings with the Saudi Royal Family and diversify their funding stream so as not to seem liable to influence or propaganda from an oppressive dictatorship. If universities are to remain bastions of free speech and progressive attitudes, they must not engage with regimes that have no concern for basic human rights.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Following a Freedom of Information request dated 26<sup>th</sup> April 2011, the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) revealed information regarding monetary donations received from the Saudi Arabian Royal Family, amounting to a grand total of **£755,000** between 2006-2010.
- International human rights organisations including Amnesty International and Freedom House list a broad range of **human rights abuses** by the regime. In 2011, the Saudi regime helped to squash protests in Bahrain and Oman as well as pumping money into its own economy to dissuade protesters in Saudi Arabia.
- The donations were made to fund the Islamic Studies Centre and Journal of Qur'anic Studies. On the latter's advisory board is **Yusuf al-Qaradawi**, a man banned from the UK and USA for **endorsing suicide bombings and the murder of pregnant women**. He has been condemned by over 2,500 Muslim scholars worldwide.
- The donations were made for the Islamic Studies Centre, led by Professor Mohammad Abdel Haleem, a trustee at the King Fahad Academy, London – a school in East Acton which has used textbooks describing **Christians as 'pigs' and Jews as 'apes'** (Source: London Evening Standard, 2007)
- Since 2007, the Saudi Royal Family's invested in SOAS has increased from **£100,000** to **£230,000**, a **130% increase**. The donation accounted for 10.3% of SOAS' income from 'Scholarships, donations and other funded activities' in 2007 to 12.3% of the same category in 2010. Including donations from state-owned Saudi Arabian Oil and the King Saud Foundation, the 2010 figure is £253,945, or 13.6% of donations.
- SOAS accepted an **£8.8m donation** from the Sultan of Brunei, the leader of the Shariah country of Brunei which has recently been ranked by Freedom House as 'not free' and where women are at a significant disadvantage in the fields of divorce and in the workplace.
- In 2006, SOAS Interface co-ordinated one-to-one English training for **Mutassim Gaddafi**, the now National Security Advisor to the murderous Gaddafi regime in Libya. The programme was organised through a London-based company and teaching fees of £5,500 were paid.
- In 2010, SOAS signed an agreement with the **Al-Fateh University, in Tripoli, Libya** – just months before the 'Arab spring' swept through the region. SOAS has had an established 'academic collaboration' with Al-Fateh since 2002. Al-Fateh is the Alma mater of **Saif al-Islam Gaddafi**, the founder and President of the Gaddafi Foundation which the London School of Economics recently was disgraced over. He is the second son of Muammar Gaddafi.
- SOAS also received **£1 million** from King Fahd of Saudi Arabia in 1995 to establish a Chair in Islamic Studies at the university
- The Director or Pro-Directors of SOAS have received a gift of a set of cufflinks made of Quarter silver Riyals from **Arts of Heritage, Saudi Arabia (2011)**. SOAS announced in May 2011 a new 'Research Fellowship' with the Art of Heritage.



Saudi troops roll into Bahrain to crush protests

## SOAS AND SAUDI ARABIA

'There are no elections or political parties in Saudi Arabia, and there are no constitutionally guaranteed rights to free speech, press, or assembly. Neither Saudi nationals nor non-nationals have the right to vote or participate in any political activity. Forming trade unions, striking, and engaging in collective bargaining are forbidden.'

### FREEDOM HOUSE, SAUDI ARABIA<sup>1</sup>

SOAS' work resulting from the donations from the Saudi Arabian Royal Family includes the running of the Islamic Studies Centre and the Journal of Qur'anic Studies. Student Rights and Robert Halfon MP raise various concerns over work with the Saudi Arabian Royal Family, including but not limited to the brief points set out below.

The following examples of Saudi oppression are in direct contravention with SOAS' principles with regards to the freedom of expression, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and racial, religious or gender discrimination

### TERROR PREACHER

One member of the Editorial board of the Journal is Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a Sunni cleric who is banned from the United Kingdom. He has said on al-Jazeera TV, that he was "not alone in believing that suicide bombings" were a legitimate form of self defence.<sup>2</sup> Qaradawi has also issued a fatwa allowing for the killing of pregnant Israeli women and their unborn children.<sup>3</sup>

In 2004, over 2,500 Muslim intellectuals from 23 countries signed a petition to the United Nations calling for a ban on the use of religion to incite violence. "There are individuals in the Muslim world who pose as clerics and issue death sentences against those they disagree with," says Shakir Al-Nablusi, a Jordanian academic and one of the signatories. "These individuals give Islam a bad name and foster hatred among civilizations."<sup>4</sup>

### SOAS PRINCIPLES BROKEN BY SAUDI TIES

"We acknowledge the paramount importance of freedom of expression."

"[the] School endorses the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international covenants"

"Furthermore, the School of Oriental and African Studies does not tolerate any form of discrimination or intimidation based upon race, religion, gender."

"...the School reserves the right to take action against individuals or groups who violate these principles."

"It is essential that equality of opportunity and the absence of unfair discrimination be at the core of all the School's activities"

Source:

<http://www.soas.ac.uk/admin/governance/policies/file37349.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=182>

<sup>2</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3874893.stm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://archive.arabnews.com/?page=4&section=0&article=53683&d=30&m=10&y=2004>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

“Freedom of religion is neither recognized nor protected under the law and is severely restricted in practice.”<sup>5</sup>

The freedom of religion in Saudi Arabia is non-existent. The public practice of non-Muslim religions is prohibited under the penalty of death and the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) and security forces of the Ministry of Interior continued to raid private non-Muslim religious gatherings.<sup>6</sup>

## USE OF CORPORAL AND CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN SAUDI ARABIA

In 2008, 102 people were executed in Saudi Arabia and in 2009 the figure was 69.<sup>7 8</sup>

Ali Hussain Sibat, a Lebanese national, and ‘Abdul Hamid bin Hussain bin Moustafa al-Fakki, a Sudanese national, were under sentence of death having been convicted in separate trials of committing sorcery. In both cases, their trials were unfair; they were tried in secret and without access to defence lawyers.<sup>9</sup>

Individuals can be sentenced to capital punishment for crimes including: witchcraft, apostasy and sorcery.

In 2009, Ahmed bin 'Adhaib bin 'Askar al-shamlani al-'Anzi was beheaded and his body crucified in a public place in Riyadh.<sup>10</sup>

In January, a court in Jubail sentenced a 13-year-old school girl to 90 lashes, to be carried out in front of her classmates, after it convicted her of assaulting a teacher. She was also sentenced to two months’ imprisonment.<sup>11</sup>

## BAN ON PROTESTS

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 2011 the Saudi government banned all demonstrations because they contradict Islamic laws and social values.<sup>12</sup>

Saudi television said the authorities would “use all measures” to prevent any attempt to disrupt public order.<sup>13</sup>

Some 10,000 Saudi troops would be deployed to crack down on any protests.<sup>14</sup>

In Qatif, a town in Eastern Saudi Arabian, protesters from the Shia minority were put down after police opened fire upon them.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148843.htm>

<sup>6</sup> US Department of State, Nov 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148843.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International, 2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/saudi-arabia/report-2011#section-121-11>

<sup>8</sup> Amnesty International, 2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/saudi-arabia/report-2011#section-121-11>

<sup>9</sup> Amnesty International, 2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/saudi-arabia/report-2011#section-121-11>

<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International, 2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/saudi-arabia/report-2011#section-121-11>

<sup>11</sup> Amnesty International, 2011, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/saudi-arabia/report-2011#section-121-11>

<sup>12</sup> The Independent, March 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-bans-all-marches-as-mass-protest-is-planned-for-friday-2233666.html>

<sup>13</sup> The Independent, March 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/saudi-arabia-bans-all-marches-as-mass-protest-is-planned-for-friday-2233666.html>

<sup>14</sup> Amnesty International, March 2011, [http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news\\_details.asp?NewsID=19319](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=19319)

## BAHRAIN INTERVENTION

Saudi Arabia sent 1,000 soldiers to Bahrain in an attempt to quell protest there. There have been reports of violence on behalf of the Saudi Arabian army, with harrowing scenes emerging from the Pearl Roundabout.

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Saudi Arabia does not give women equal status with men and rules on male guardianship subordinate women to men in relation to marriage, divorce, child custody and freedom of movement”<sup>15</sup>

Of late women in Saudi Arabia have attempted to obtain the right to drive. Manal Al Sharif was detained for posting a video of herself driving on YouTube and now faces charges of "besmirching the kingdom's reputation abroad and stirring up public opinion.”<sup>16</sup>

They were not permitted to vote in the 2005 municipal elections.<sup>17</sup>

Their use of public facilities is restricted in some cases when men are present.<sup>18</sup>

By law and custom, Saudi women cannot travel within or outside of the country without a male relative.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike Saudi men, Saudi women cannot pass their citizenship to their children or foreign-born husbands.<sup>20</sup>

According to interpretations of Sharia in Saudi Arabia, daughters generally receive half the inheritance awarded to their brothers, and the testimony of one man is equal to that of two women.

<sup>21</sup>

## MEDIA FREEDOM

Saudi Arabia has previously taken action against media freedom by “blocking access to over 400,000 websites that are considered immoral or politically sensitive.”<sup>22</sup>

In May 2010, Jamal Khashoggi “resigned as editor of the daily Al-Watan after coming under pressure for publishing an opinion piece critical of conservative Islam. Khashoggi had previously been fired from the same position at Al-Watan in 2003 after criticizing the country’s religious police and engaging in a dispute with the interior minister.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Amnesty International, March 2011, [http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news\\_details.asp?NewsID=19319](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=19319)

<sup>16</sup> Reuters, Jun 2011, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/06/09/us-saudi-women-driving-idUSTRE7581EF20110609>

<sup>17</sup> Freedom House, 2011, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2011>

<sup>18</sup> Freedom House, 2011, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2011>

<sup>19</sup> Freedom House, 2011, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2011>

<sup>20</sup> Freedom House, 2011, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2011>

<sup>21</sup> Freedom House, 2011, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2011>

Freedom House, 2011, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2011>

<sup>23</sup> Freedom House, 2011, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2011>

## ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Academic freedom is heavily restricted in Saudi Arabia. “Informers monitor classrooms for compliance with curriculum rules, such as a ban on teaching secular philosophy and religions other than Islam.”<sup>24</sup>

In March 2010, authorities seized books published by the prominent Saudi political reform activist and critic of the government, Abdullah al-Hamed, at the Riyadh International Book Fair.<sup>25</sup>

The screenshot shows the Edinburgh University Press website for the Journal of Qur'anic Studies. The page includes a navigation menu with 'Home', 'Books', 'Journals', 'Search', and 'Information Zone'. Below the navigation, there is a search bar and a 'Go' button. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column features a 'Latest Issue: 13.1' section with a thumbnail of the journal cover and a description: 'About this Journal: The Journal of Qur'anic Studies is a biannual, bilingual, peer-reviewed journal that aims to encourage and promote the study of the Qur'an from a wide range of scholarly perspectives.' It also lists publication details: 'Published: Biannual', 'ISSN: 1465-3591', and 'E-ISSN: 1755-1730'. Below this is an 'E-Alerts' button and links for 'Advertising', 'Reprints', and 'Recommend'. The right column is titled 'Editorial Board' and lists 20 members with their names and affiliations, including Professor M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (Chairman), SOAS, University of London; Professor Zafar Ishaq Ansari, International Islamic University, Islamabad; Dr Salwa El-Awa, University of Birmingham; Professor Elsaid M. Badawi, American University in Cairo; Professor Sebastian Günther, University of Göttingen; Dr Helen Blatherwick, SOAS, University of London; Professor Carole Hillenbrand, University of Edinburgh; Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu, IRCICA, Istanbul; Dr Ahmad Ali al-Imam, Qur'an University, Khartoum; Professor A.H. Johns, Australian National University; Dr Baha al-Din Khurramshahi, Academy of the Persian Language, Tehran; Dr M.O. Klar, SOAS, University of London; Professor Oliver Leaman, University of Kentucky; Professor W. Madelung, University of Oxford; Professor Abdul Hakim al-Matroudi, SOAS, University of London; Dr Abd al-Rahman al-Matroudi, Imam Muhammad ibn Saud University, Riyadh; Professor Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington D.C.; Professor Ali Merad, University of Sorbonne, Paris; Professor Mustansir Mir, Youngstown State University, Ohio; Professor Ian Richard Netton, University of Leeds; Professor Angelika Neuwirth, University of Berlin; Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawi, University of Qatar; Professor Neal Robinson, Sogang University, Seoul; Professor H. Shafie, Cairo University; Dr Mustafa Shah, SOAS, University of London; Dr Ayman Shihadeh, SOAS, University of London; Dr S. Sperl, SOAS, University of London; Professor Shawkat Toorawa, Cornell University; Professor Josef van Ess, University of Tübingen; Mr T. Winter, University of Cambridge; Professor J.C. Wright, SOAS, University of London; Dr Badri Najib Zubir, Islamic International University, Malaysia; and Professor Muhammad Sani Zahraadeen, Bayero University, Nigeria. At the bottom of the screenshot, there is a black box with white text that reads: 'Above: screenshot of the Journal of Qur'anic Studies Editorial Board'.

## SOAS AND AL-FATEH UNIVERSITY

Months before the revolution in Libya and the wider Arab Spring, SOAS signed an agreement with the Gaddafi-run Al-Fateh University. The programme was to include distance learning in MSC Finance and SOAS received £147,864 for course materials and for delivering teaching.

Al-Fateh University has been regarded as a 'Gaddafi-sympathetic' institution, due to the state-controlled nature of the education system. Gaddafi's own son, Saif-al-Islam Gaddafi attended in 1994.

Saif Gaddafi is now recognised as a key member of Gaddafi's inner circle and is the founder/President of the Gaddafi Foundation which was recently used to channel over £1.5m to the London School of Economics. The director of the London School of Economics resigned over the issue.

<sup>24</sup> Freedom House, 2011, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2011>

<sup>25</sup> Freedom House, 2011, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=22&year=2011>

## FIGURES

Organisation	Details	Amount	% of overall donations
Saudi Arabian Royal Family	2006-7 - Contribution to operating expenses of the Islamic Studies Centre, including publication of its biennial scholarly journal The Journal of Qur'anic Studies	£100,000	10.3%
Saudi Arabian Royal Family	2007-8 As above	£200,000	11.1%
Saudi Arabian Royal Family	2008-9 As above	£225,000	11.6%
Saudi Arabian Oil	2009-10 Two scholarships for MA Islamic Art and Architecture	£8945.19	N/A
King Saud Foundation	2009-10 King Saud Foundation scholarships – contribution towards fees for two research degrees in sustainable development with reference to Saudi Arabia	£15,000	N/A
Saudi Arabian Royal Family	2009-10 - Contribution to operating expenses of the Islamic Studies Centre, including publication of its biennial scholarly journal The Journal of Qur'anic Studies	£230,000	12.3% (or 13.6% including the two figures from Saudi Arabian Oil and King Saud Foundation)