How Saudi wealth fueled holy war

Photo from "Conquest and Defeat"

Adel Batterjee (center, shown in Afghanistan in an image from his book) has financed Muslim fighters in several nations.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

Saudi Arabia is the heart and soul of Islam. Muslims face the sacred city of Mecca in the desert kingdom when they pray. But the nation plays another role in the Islamic world. It is a powerful financial engine that has generated billions of dollars that flow into mosques and Islamic communities from Cairo to Chicago.

Much of the money funneled through charities and foundations finances health care, food for the needy, mosque construction and many good deeds that can help win converts to Islam.

But some of this cash also finances wars and a militant strain of Islam, one that advocates rigid adherence to a conservative brand of the religion and that often scorns the West and moderate Muslims. Sometimes, the dividends of this investment can be violent and divisive.

In this second part of a continuing series, Tribune reporters show how a Saudi businessman who set up a major charitable operation in suburban Chicago has helped finance one side in the struggle for the soul of Islam.

Charity leader funded fighters to spread and defend Islam

Chicago Tribune

By Tribune staff reporters
Sam Roe, Laurie Cohen
and Stephen Franklin

JIDDAH, Saudi Arabia — Muslim forces were gathering near a small town in Bosnia, and commanders were moving fighters to the front. The man in charge wanted the very best soldiers available, so he handpicked six of his favorites and ordered them to the area immediately.

The mission was indisputably military, but the man calling the shots was not a captain with the army or a general back in command headquarters. He was the person helping finance the battle: Adel Batterjee, a wealthy Saudi businessman aiding the operation 2,000 miles away from his home in Saudi Arabia.

This was not the only battleground in which Batterjee played a major role. During the past two decades, he has financed Muslim fighters in some of the world's most volatile areas, including Afghanistan, Chechnya and Sudan. And he has done so with the help of U.S. citizens, establishing a major charitable operation in suburban Chicago to collect donations to fulfill his dream of creating Islamic states and spreading Islam around the globe.

Batterjee stands at the forefront of one of the great religious movements of our time. Since Saudi Arabia's oil boom in the 1970s, wealthy Saudis have poured billions of dollars into Islamic causes worldwide. They have constructed hundreds of mosques, funded thousands of Islamic schools and distributed millions of Korans.

Much of what the Saudi money has done in the name of the world's fastest-growing religion is admirable and within the bounds of mainstream philanthropy.

But in the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001, with 15 of the 19 hijackers proving to be Saudi citizens, questionable practices by Saudi charities have come to light—practices such as Batterjee's use of charitable dollars to fund Islamic military operations.

Also of concern, and not only to Westerners, is the ultraconservative brand of Islam that the Saudis embrace and often seek to export. Some Muslim organizations have gone so far as to refuse Saudi money, on the grounds that they do not

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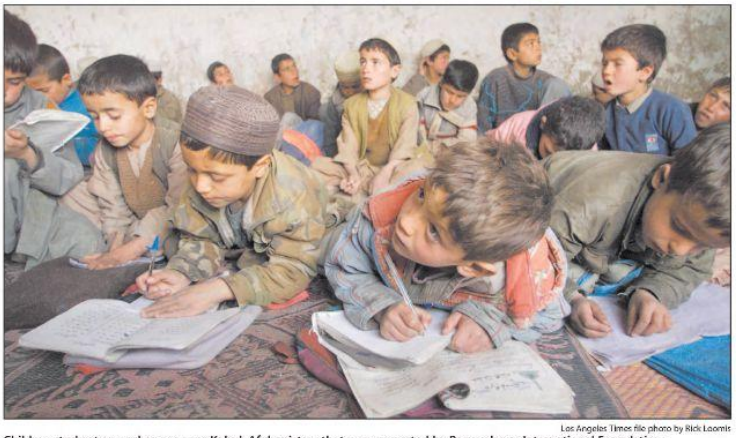


Los Angeles Times file photo by Rick Loomis

Children study at an orphanage near Kabul, Afghanistan, that was supported by Benevolence International Foundation.

Saudi philanthropist's aid to Muslim fighters

Adel Batterjee, a wealthy businessman in Saudi Arabia, founded a charity in the mid-1980s that became Benevolence International Foundation. The charity has provided food, shelter and medicine for needy Muslims around the world. It also has supported Muslim fighters in several nations, according to documents and interviews.

ADEL BATTERJEE

Age: 58

Profession: Businessman, author and philanthropist

Home: Jiddah, Saudi Arabia

- He has been an outspoken supporter of creating Islamic states—by force, if necessary.
- Batterjee incorporated Benevolence International Foundation in Illinois in 1992 and opened a fundraising office in Palos Hills the next year.
- The U.S. froze the charity's assets in December 2001, citing suspected links to terrorism, and Benevolence closed its doors several months later. The charity has denied any links to terrorism.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Early 1990s: During the Bosnian war, Batterjee's charity gives military supplies to the Black Swans, an elite Islamic unit of the Bosnian army. The charity also helps transport Muslim fighters from Afghanistan to Bosnia and flies injured soldiers to Saudi Arabia to be treated at a Batterjee family-owned hospital.

1992: Batterjee handpicks several soldiers for battle.

CHECHNYA

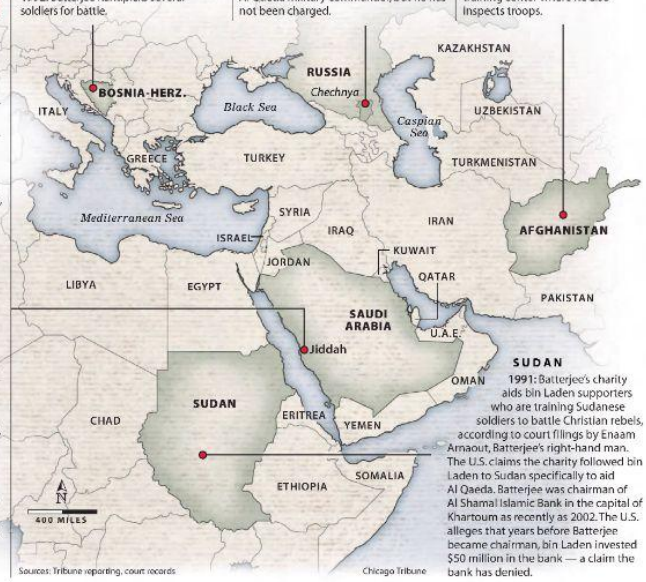
Mid-1990s: The charity establishes operations with the help of Batterjee's contacts with a top Islamic leader. The charity provides uniforms and anti-mine boots to Chechen rebels fighting the Russians.

1998: The charity hires Saif ul Islam to run its Chechnya operations. He is described by the U.S. government as a high-ranking Al Qaeda military commander, but he has not been charged.

AFGHANISTAN

1980s: During the Afghan-Soviet war, Batterjee and Osama bin Laden are among the top fundraisers for Muslim fighters, documents indicate.

Early 1990s: During the Afghan civil war, Batterjee helps finance the Mountain Camp, an Islamic military training center where he also inspects troops.



1991: Batterjee's charity aids bin Laden supporters who are training Sudanese soldiers to battle Christian rebels, according to court filings by Enaam Arnaout, Batterjee's right-hand man. The U.S. claims the charity followed bin Laden to Sudan specifically to aid Al Qaeda. Batterjee was chairman of Al Shamal Islamic Bank in the capital of Khartoum as recently as 2002. The U.S. alleges that years before Batterjee became chairman, bin Laden invested $50 million in the bank — a claim the bank has denied.

Sources: Tribune reporting, court records

Chicago Tribune

cially strapped mosque in Gary, Ind., the group appealed to the Saudi king and secured the necessary aid.

The Saudis would eventually help establish at least 1,500 mosques abroad. They would also aid 2,000 Islamic schools, sponsor summer camps for children, supplement the salaries of many prayer leaders and spend millions of dollars on Muslim research centers and endowed teaching positions at some of the world's top universities, including Harvard and Oxford.

So much money went out, from so many Saudi sources, that even Saudi leaders did not know how much was spent and exactly who was on the receiving end. Estimates on the total would be put in the tens of billions.

And while the Saudis would insist that strings were not attached to their giving, some Muslim groups would think otherwise.

Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina would become upset when the Saudis tried to impose dress codes. The mosque in Northbrook, the Islamic Cultural Center of Greater Chicago, would reluctantly halt coed folk dancing in the basement, partly because of Saudi complaints. And the American Society of Muslims, the 1.5 million-member African-American group based in Chicago, would quit taking Saudi money because of unacceptable demands.

"They wanted to tell me what to teach in the schools and what to use as curriculum," recalled W. Deen Mohammed, the former head of the association. "Our leaders won't accept that."

Others would assail the Saudis for publishing hate-filled books. One religious encyclopedia, published by a Saudi charity, called Jews "humanity's enemies; they foment immorality in this world."

Over time, the Saudis' free-wheeling spending and strident beliefs made the kingdom vulnerable to criticism that it was systematically encouraging Islamic extremism.

And that made someone like Batterjee an increasingly logical target.

Ominous problems

When a despondent Batterjee left Afghanistan, it was by no means the end of his support for jihad. From 1992 to 2000, his charity collected twice as much in donations, opened offices in 10 nations and moved into several regions where Muslims were at war.

Bosnia-Herzegovina was the focus of this rapid growth, with Batterjee taking on a clear military role.

Beginning in 1992, after Bosnia declared independence from Yugoslavia, Serb nationalists started expelling and killing Bosnian Muslims and Croats in what became known as ethnic cleansing. Newspaper photographs of starving Muslims in concentration camps evoked images of the Holocaust and sparked worldwide outrage.

Like other Islamic charities, Batterjee's group helped Muslim refugees and orphans. But it also provided boots, uniforms and walkie-talkies to units of the Bosnian army, including the Black Swans, an elite Islamic fighting force that prayed daily and barred alcohol and swearing.

On one occasion, U.S. government filings state, Batterjee handpicked six fighters and ordered them transported from Croatia into neighboring Bosnia.

Overseeing the charity's operations in Bosnia was a familiar figure: Enaam Arnaout, Batterjee's right-hand man. He helped transport many Arab men pouring into the Balkans to join the fight. Some injured fighters were flown all the way to Jiddah to be treated at Saudi German Hospitals, run by the Batterjee family.

With Batterjee's charity growing, he increasingly looked to America for money. In 1992, he decided to open a fundraising office in the Chicago area, home to several hundred thousand Muslims. He filed state incorporation papers and changed the name of his charity to Benevolence International Foundation.

But with rapid growth came problems, some of them ominous.

In the spring of 1993, as part of a wider crackdown on extremists, Saudi authorities brought Batterjee in for questioning and closed his charity's headquarters in Jiddah.

Exactly why the Saudis were concerned about Batterjee remains unclear, but Sudan appeared to play a role. The African nation had become a haven for Osama bin Laden, by now one of the biggest critics of the Saudi royal family. And Batterjee had opened an office in Sudan shortly after bin Laden had moved there.

About the same time he was questioned in Saudi Arabia, Batterjee removed his name from the charity's U.S. paperwork. Arnaout went to Chicago to manage the entire charity from there, working out of a rented office in Palos Hills.

With Arnaout now officially in charge, Batterjee was forced to oversee operations from behind the scenes, U.S. government documents and interviews show. Arnaout kept him abreast of developments, faxed him important documents and instructed employees not to offer outsiders information about the Saudi financier.

Charity officials also became uneasy about the increasing gap between their stated mission and their actual activities.

While the charity's public literature implied that it was strictly a relief group, one internal record said that "from its first day, [the charity] aimed to support jihad and mujahedeen." Another said the mission was "to make Islam supreme on this Earth."

One top charity official, Suleman Ahmer, feared that the organization was misleading donors. In a 1999 e-mail message to director Arnaout, he complained that the group was claiming that 100 percent of a special fund was going to orphans when the figure was actually much lower.

The statement was dishonest, he said, and he did not agree with what Batterjee had "taught" Arnaout about such practices. "May Allah forgive him," he wrote.

Despite the concerns, Batterjee's charity continued to prosper, collecting $3.3 million in donations in 2000—more than ever before.

Then came 9/11.

Mounting pressure

Patrick Fitzgerald had just arrived on a flight from New York to Chicago when the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were struck. He hurried to his hotel room, turned on the television and watched the second tower fall.

Fitzgerald was only one week into his job as the U.S. attorney for the Northern District of Illinois. He had earned a reputation in New York as an aggressive federal prosecutor with a superb memory and a fierce work ethic. After helping win convictions in the 1993 World Trade Center attack and the 1998 African embassy bombings, he was viewed by many as the nation's top expert on Islamic terrorism.

As much as Sept. 11 horrified him, he said he would not personally try a case in Chicago for a year so he could focus on his administrative duties. But in the ensuing weeks, with the nation's attention increasingly focused on terrorism, he decided to take on Batterjee's organization.

The charity was not unknown to U.S. authorities. The FBI had picked through its garbage as early as 1999, and a 1996 CIA report said Batterjee's group and 14 other Islamic relief organizations "employ members or otherwise facilitate the activities of terrorist groups operating in Bosnia."

U.S. authorities also had been concerned about Saudi charities in general, traveling to the kingdom in 1999 and 2000 to urge the Saudi government to curb the groups. But the Saudis did little, and the United States did not push the matter because of a long political understanding: America would defend the kingdom militarily and not meddle in its internal affairs if the Saudis remained a loyal oil supplier and Middle East ally.

When Fitzgerald began poring over documents in the Batterjee case, he recognized some of the same names from his previous terrorism investigations: Salim Bayazid. Khalifa. "Those names jumped off the page," he recalled.

With the heat on Muslim militants, managers at Batterjee's charity started scrambling.

One e-mailed Arnaout in November 2001 to say that about half of the charity's expenditures in Bosnia were not on the books and that he feared authorities would find out.

Arnaout decided to handle the problem in person, but shortly after he left for Bosnia, federal agents raided his home in suburban Justice and the charity office in Palos Hills.

He flew back to the United States, and soon after, Bosnian agents raided his apartment and several other homes there.

Arnaout phoned his top aide in Bosnia to assess the extent of the latest raids. "Have they come to your house?" Arnaout asked, according to U.S. transcripts of secretly recorded conversations.

The aide answered yes.

"And your father's house?"

"Yes."

"And your mother's house?"

"Yes."

"And your in-laws' house?"

"Everyone."

In a call to his brother, Arnaout said he feared U.S. officials were trying to determine whether the charity was linked to anyone in Saudi Arabia. And much to Arnaout's consternation, Batterjee persisted in wiring money from the kingdom.

"By God, he does not understand me," Arnaout told his brother. "It appears he is becoming senile a little bit sometimes."

Weary and frightened, Arnaout was not sure what to do. In a phone conversation, Batterjee suggested that Arnaout and his family move to Saudi Arabia.

But it was too late. On April 30, 2002, Arnaout was arrested.

Connecting the dots

That fall, U.S. Atty Gen. John Ashcroft flew to Chicago to announce terrorism charges against Arnaout—the first time in a decade that an attorney general had come to the city to announce an indictment.

Before a packed news conference at the Dirksen Federal Building, Ashcroft and Fitzgerald said Arnaout had spent at least 10 years funneling charity money to bin Laden's terrorist network, Al Qaeda, and to other armed groups.

Ashcroft pointed to "an archive of incriminating documents," including a purported list of donors and fundraisers for Afghan fighters. The name appearing most on the list of fundraisers was bin Laden. Next was Batterjee.

But for now, authorities named Batterjee only as an unindicted co-conspirator.

When Fitzgerald began piecing together the evidence, he saw a charity that had many contacts with alleged members of Al Qaeda's network. One alleged member once headed the charity's office in Chechnya; another traveled to Bosnia under the guise of being a charity director.

But as the court case progressed, it became increasingly clear that Fitzgerald was having trouble connecting the dots.

One link Fitzgerald cited involved Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, the friend of Batterjee's who participated in the Afghan-Soviet war. In a news release, Fitzgerald pointed to an FBI affidavit that linked Khalifa to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and other terrorist plots.

The main evidence the prosecutor offered tying Khalifa to Batterjee's charity was that several years before, someone in the charity's Palos Hills office called a telephone number that was, according to the affidavit and news release, "associated" with Khalifa.

While Fitzgerald viewed this example and others as solid evidence, the judge handling the case did not. She made several rulings that indicated the case was not going in the prosecutor's favor.

Fitzgerald decided to cut a deal. Arnaout agreed to plead guilty to a racketeering charge, admitting he had defrauded donors by diverting almost $316,000 to fighters in Bosnia and Chechnya. In return, prosecutors dropped the terrorism count—ending the only U.S. terrorism charge brought against a top official of a Saudi charity.

Arnaout was sentenced to 11 years in prison. At a news conference afterward, Fitzgerald did not mention the man who was truly in charge of the charity: Batterjee.

'A touchy subject'

Forty-five minutes north of Jiddah, just off a long desert highway, is Sultana's, a large outdoor fish restaurant with neon signs, small fountains and kiddie rides. It is run by Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, whom Fitzgerald characterized as a prominent terrorist operative linked to Batterjee's charity.

On this night, Khalifa greets diners, monitors the kitchen and sits down to the house specialty: barbecued parrotfish. He mocks U.S. authorities for their unproven accusations against Batterjee and himself.

"They don't like to admit they are mistaken," he says. "They don't like to accept all the evidence in the world."

Since Sept. 11, the United States has frozen the assets of 30 Islamic charities worldwide, but only one other Saudi charity besides Batterjee's has been affected: Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation, one of the larger relief organizations in the kingdom. The assets of eight of its offices have been frozen.

The Saudis say they have audited all of their charities, banned them from sending money abroad and closed more offices of Al-Haramain.

One person who has faced increased scrutiny since Sept. 11 is Batterjee. At the request of the United States, Saudi officials interviewed him several times and checked his bank accounts and wire transfers, according to Adel Al-Jubeir, spokesman for Crown Prince Abdullah, Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler.

Nothing improper was found, the Saudi spokesman said. "Why do you want us to convict someone who you ... don't have evidence on?"

Today, Batterjee lives in Jiddah in a large white house surrounded by palm trees, flowering bushes and a 6-foot-high wall. A gold plaque next to the iron gates says: "The home of Adel Al-Jalil Batterjee."

His charity activities have been curtailed, with Arnaout in prison and the U.S. Treasury holding the group's assets. Batterjee, 58, spoke only briefly to the Tribune, saying, "This is a touchy subject, and there are a lot of things you don't know about."

In his book, Batterjee writes that the West is morally corrupt and that its war on terrorism is just an excuse to try to stop Muslims from spreading Islam. He says Muslims have tried to peacefully expand Islam throughout the world, but those attempts have always met armed opposition. So Muslims have a right to fight back.

More and more clashes with the West are inevitable, he writes, predicting that they will culminate in a final military encounter. "Does any doubt remain that the great confrontation ... is certainly coming?"

Charities reined in, Saudis say

ISLAM

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accept the Saudi version of Islam.

The United States has frozen the U.S. assets of two Saudi relief organizations, including Batterjee's, because of suspected links to terrorism.

Even Saudi Arabia itself, a highly insular society, has publicly cracked down on its 240 charities. For decades, the Saudis sent money abroad with little oversight, but after Sept. 11 and subsequent terrorist attacks on its own soil, the kingdom has taken unprecedented steps to rein in charitable donations and other activities that might be linked to terrorism.

The Saudis have arrested 600 terrorism suspects, removed dozens of preachers for extremism, restricted the flow of donations overseas and even banned a tradition central to Saudi identity: the collection of alms in mosques.

Today, the practices of the charities remain largely mired in ambiguity, with extensive investigations by U.S. authorities finding only sketchy evidence of wrongdoing and no proof that Saudi money financed the Sept. 11 hijackings. For many Muslims, the inquiries are just further indication that America's war on terrorism is unfairly targeting Islamic groups.

Drawing on court, charity and intelligence documents, the Tribune has detailed the rise and fall of Batterjee's charity, Benevolence International Foundation, providing insight into how Saudi charities work, the power they wield in spreading Islam and how one used its assets to wage war.

The tale of Batterjee's organization, which closed in 2002, spans 20 years, four continents and many battlefields.

At Batterjee's side was Enaam Arnaout, a passionate and shrewd man whose job was to run the day-to-day operations of the charity without tipping off authorities. In pursuit was star federal prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald, who had vowed not to personally try a case for a year but changed his mind and went after Batterjee's charity.

Batterjee, who declined to be interviewed for this report, advocates armed confrontation in the name of Islam—not just to defend the religion but to spread it as well.

In a book he published in 2002, portions of which were translated by the Tribune, he writes that "the pinnacle of Islam" is jihad, which he defines as use of force for religious purposes. Muslims, he states, are in a "vicious confrontation" with their "enemies, including the Jews, the Christians, the Hindus and idol worshipers from the East and West."

Such views are controversial among Muslims, reflecting the growing debate over Islam's place in the modern world and the role of militants in shaping the religion.

New power brokers

On a Wednesday night in Jiddah, a bustling port along the Red Sea, thousands of customers filled the Herra mall, one of the city's modern shopping centers. Teenage girls chatted on cell phones, families crowded into the food court and young Saudis, Egyptians and Jordanians lined up at Starbucks.

Also present were the *mutawaein*, or the religious police. Five of them—three in long white robes and two in brown police uniforms—slowly patrolled the mall corridors, looking for unmarried couples talking, women not properly covered by the traditional black gown and stores not shutting promptly at prayer time.

When a middle-age woman walked out of a jewelry store with her hair partially uncovered, the police quickly encircled her. Looking annoyed, the woman adjusted her black scarf and moved on.

Such contradictions abound in Jiddah—Adel Batterjee's hometown—and in Saudi Arabia as a whole. The nation offers all the comforts and conveniences of modern life but with the strict religious rules and tribal traditions of centuries past.

Women are not allowed to drive, but they can become doctors. Record stores sell American rap music, but authorities use felt-tip pens to black out women's shoulders, legs and cleavage on each CD cover.

Though many Saudis are fabulously wealthy, many others are poor and live in drab apartment buildings. A volatile oil market and a population boom have dropped the per capita income to only $7,000.

Religion, more than anything, defines Saudi life. The country is home to Islam's two holiest sites, Mecca and Medina, where Islam's prophet, Muhammad, lived in the 7th Century. Muslims face Mecca when they pray, and a basic tenet of Islam is that all Muslims should try to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once.

Islam is not just the dominant religion in Saudi Arabia; all others are banned. Most Saudis follow the orthodox teachings of Muhammad ibn Abdel-Wahhab, an 18th Century religious reformer who wanted to cleanse Islam of impurities and return to the "true" teachings of the prophet. This called for no drinking, dancing or music.

For much of the past 100 years, the people of Saudi Arabia and their religious practices attracted little notice in the world. The nation was a vast desert, with few paved roads, or homes with electricity or goods to trade, except for camels and dates.

Then, in 1938, oil was discovered—the largest known reserves in the world.

The Saudis launched a major modernization effort, constructing schools, highways, apartments and hotels. Entire towns rose from the desert, and by 1973, Saudi Arabia was synonymous with wealth. That year, it and other Arab nations imposed an oil embargo that doubled oil prices and plunged the West into an energy crisis.

But even as the Saudis were being recognized—and reviled—in the West as the world's new power brokers, they were quietly pursuing another path to influence: They were using their newfound wealth to spread Islam around the world.

In the Chicago area alone, the Saudis were helping build mosques in Northbrook and Bridgeview and helping establish the American Islamic College on the North Side and the East-West University on South Michigan Avenue.

But it was in Afghanistan where Saudi money had a profound global impact. When Soviet tanks rolled into the Muslim nation in the winter of 1979, the Saudi government began funneling billions of dollars to the front to repel the communist invaders.

A wealthy Saudi businessman named Osama bin Laden also aided the Muslim fighters, as did the U.S. government, which contributed several billion dollars in weapons. President Ronald Reagan called the Muslim soldiers "freedom fighters."

Among the first journalists to report on the fighters was Jamal Khashoggi, a young Saudi working at a daily newspaper in Jiddah. One day, a dignified looking man came to the reporter's office and said he enjoyed his stories. He wondered whether the reporter would like an inside tour of the Afghan war zone.

"Come with me, and you'll get some scoops," he said.

The man was philanthropist Adel Batterjee.

Joining the fight

The Batterjee name was well-known in Jiddah, as the family owned a wide variety of businesses: health-care companies, a computer firm, an ice cream factory. One business, Saudi German Hospitals, was on a long boulevard called Batterjee Street. The family was also politically connected. Adel Batterjee's uncle was Hisham Nazer, the Saudi planning minister who would go on to become the country's influential oil minister.

Like many wealthy Saudis, Adel Batterjee left home as a teenager to study in America. He enrolled at the University of Kansas and graduated in 1968 with a math degree and a C average. He then returned to Saudi Arabia, where he worked in the burgeoning oil industry before branching out to other fields, including banking and technology.

He also became interested in one of the great Muslim causes of his day: the Afghan-Soviet war. For generations, Muslims had suffered devastating military defeats, but the war offered an opportunity to recapture past glories by waging jihad, or the armed struggle against Muslim oppressors.

Thousands of Arab men were descending on Afghanistan to help their outmatched Muslim brothers. "Just to come and get the dust of the ground on your boots was a very great thing," recalled Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, a Saudi who joined the fight and a friend of Adel Batterjee's.

At first, Batterjee only listened to news reports and donated some money. But after hearing a moving speech by a prominent Muslim fighter in nearby Mecca, Batterjee decided to become personally involved. And by the time he walked into Khashoggi's newspaper office in the mid 1980s, he had become an important figure in the jihad movement.

The reporter accepted Batterjee's offer of a tour of Afghanistan, and within a month the two were in Peshawar, Pakistan, a dusty border town that served as a staging ground for fighters moving to the Afghan front. Several Saudi relief groups had set up shop there, including Batterjee's, which at the time was called the Islamic Benevolence Committee.

The charities were busy aiding the thousands of war refugees streaming into the city, but they were also helping train, house and transport the Muslim fighters, or mujahedeen. Batterjee's charity, which had dozens of employees, was no different. In fact, Abdullah Azzam, the inspirational leader of the Afghan jihad, hailed Batterjee's organization as being "at the forefront" of the jihad movement, according to a report Azzam wrote for an aid group he operated.

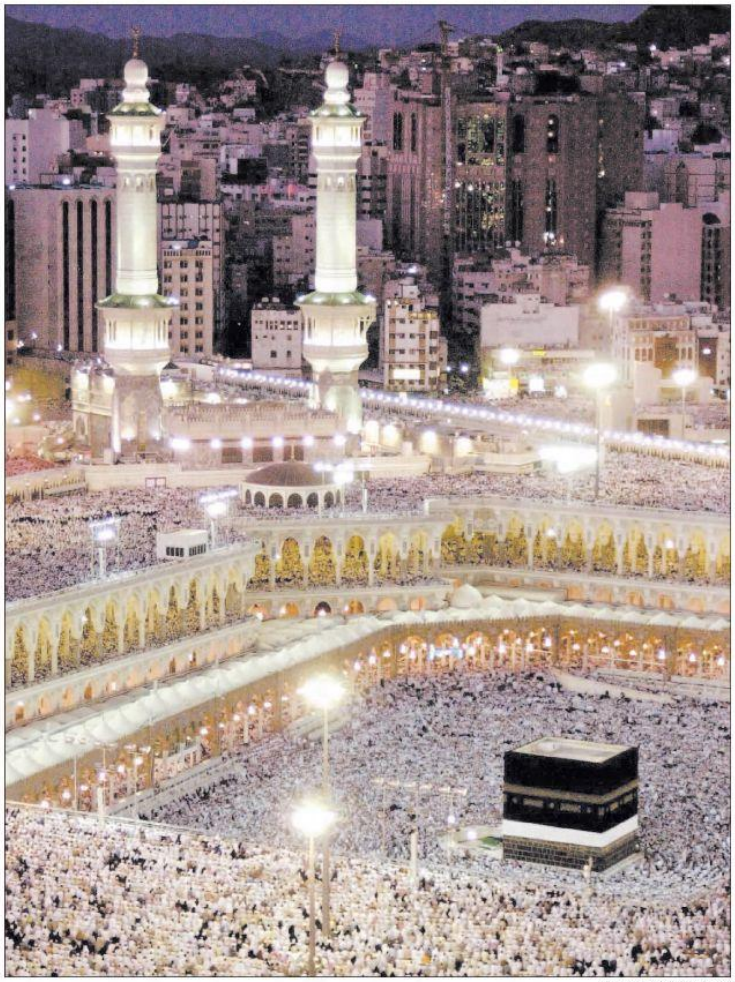
Batterjee showed Khashoggi around his charity, telling the reporter that he frequently flew in from Saudi Arabia to oversee operations. "He was completely consumed by the Afghan jihad," Khashoggi recalled.

As a charity leader, Batterjee, then in his early 40s, commanded respect. Many employees called him "sheik," a term of honor, while some of his workers ironed his clothes and addressed him only when spoken to first.

One young mujahed who admired Batterjee was Enaam Arnaout, a Syrian who was drawn to Muslim causes ever since his older brother, a noted Islamic militant, was gunned down by Syrian police in 1980.

The young fighter met Batterjee one day when Arnaout picked him up at the Islamabad airport and drove him to Peshawar. Batterjee liked the way Arnaout drove, so he offered him a job at his charity.

It was the start of a long relationship.



AP photo by Hasar Sarbakhshian

Muslims pray in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, during hajj. One of the basic tenets of Islam is that worshipers should try to make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lifetimes.

The Mountain Camp

For Batterjee, waging jihad involved more than taking on superpowers. It also entailed mundane tasks and headaches: Did the fighters have coats? Was a new car needed?

These were the day-to-day details the Saudi financier often confronted, particularly at a remote training center he financed in Afghanistan called the Mountain Camp, according to records provided to the Tribune by French terrorism researcher Jean-Charles Brisard.

Batterjee's camp opened about 1990, shortly after Muslim forces drove the Soviets out of Afghanistan. But then the Muslims began fighting each other for control of the country, splitting into seven guerrilla factions.

Batterjee sided with the most anti-Western faction, the Party of Islam, headed by fundamentalist warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. The U.S. government also aided Hekmatyar, hoping he could help rid the country of the remnants of Soviet influence.

With the help of Batterjee's charity, Hekmatyar's guerrillas established the camp to train their special forces. It consisted of tents for about 150 fighters, an infirmary, a mosque and a bakery.

Chosen to oversee all this was Enaam Arnaout—the young Syrian driver Batterjee liked so well. When the camp needed money for supplies, Arnaout or other leaders would phone or write Batterjee in Saudi Arabia.

In one letter, Arnaout asked Batterjee to send $20,000 and to talk with the new recruits coming from Saudi Arabia. "Please remind the brothers to purchase shoes and jackets from your location," he told Batterjee, "because they will be going to very cold regions."

During a particularly troublesome week in which fighters quarreled with the cooks and three soldiers deserted, Batterjee came to inspect the troops, stayed a few hours, then left.

Over time, Batterjee became disheartened with the Afghan civil war, which pitted Muslim against Muslim, Khashoggi recalled. "He didn't want to be part of that butchering," he said.

Fed up, the Saudi financier decided to quit Afghanistan.

Billions of dollars

The financial system that allowed Saudi philanthropists such as Batterjee to do their work was vast, complex and extremely well-funded.

Billions of Saudi charitable dollars changed hands, with the money originating from a variety of sources, including the king himself, thousands of members of the royal family, numerous millionaires and millions of average Saudis. Most of these people donated for religious reasons, fulfilling the Islamic requirement that Muslims give 2.5 percent of their annual net worth to charity.

But for the oil-rich Saudi royal family, the motives for giving were also political. Donating generously to Islamic causes abroad not only increased the kingdom's stature in the world but also helped win allies against periodic threats to the Saudi crown.

The Saudis feared that the Soviets would encroach on Middle East oil fields; that the push for a secular, pan-Arab nation in the 1960s would spell the end of monarchies; that the revolution sweeping Iran in the 1970s would hurt Saudi Arabia's bid to become Islam's worldwide voice; and that religious zealots within the kingdom would try to overthrow the Saudi government.

To gain control over the mounting charitable donations, Saudi government officials became heads of some of the charities. Other groups, such as Batterjee's, remained private ventures.

When the money was distributed abroad, it often went to needy Muslims in nations at war. But some funds went to those who simply asked. When a Muslim student organization in America wanted to save a finan-

Tribune file photo by Zbigniew Bzdak

Atty. Gen. John Ashcroft and U.S. Atty. Patrick Fitzgerald (right) announce charges against Enaam Arnaout in 2002 in Chicago.

Enaam Arnaout admitted he defrauded donors by diverting almost $316,000 to fighters in Bosnia and Chechnya. He received 11 years in prison.