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**THESIS**

**WAHHABISM: IS IT A FACTOR IN THE SPREAD OF  
GLOBAL TERRORISM?**

by

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September 2009

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**WAHHABISM: IS IT A FACTOR IN THE SPREAD  
OF GLOBAL TERRORISM?**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

What is the role of Wahhabism in the rise of global terrorism? Is Saudi Arabia and its Wahhabi ideology a contributing factor in the spread of violent radicalization in the Muslim world? What are the possible causal mechanisms linking Wahhabism to violence? How is it possible to ascertain these mechanisms and disentangle them from other sources of radicalization in the Muslim world? Three potential hypotheses may provide answers to these questions: (1) Wahhabism provides passive ideological support for extremism, but is not a sufficient cause of violent radicalization, (2) Wahhabism provides indirect support through the establishment of networks that give material facilitation to extremist groups, and (3) Wahhabism provides direct support to extremists with the approval of the Saudi government. The major finding of this study is that the first hypothesis—Wahhabism is a facilitator but not a direct contributor to violent extremism—is best supported by the evidence. Those who claim that Wahhabism has nothing to do with terrorism underestimate the extent to which the core principles of Wahhabism overlap with the extremist ideology of takfir, and its inherent intolerance toward other creeds can create fertile minds ready to demonize foreigners and even fellow Muslims who are non-Wahhabists. The second hypothesis receives hardly any evidential support, while the third hypothesis has no support at all and amounts to guilt by association.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia and the United States (U.S.) have had a long-standing political, economic and military alliance in the Middle East since the early 1930s. The U.S. has demonstrated through various military deployments and informal agreements that it is committed to the security of Saudi Arabia. America's foreign policy, since the early 1930s, has supported and protected the Saudi ruling family and refrained from criticizing the monarchy's domestic policies and human rights record.<sup>1</sup> This is in spite of the fact that Saudi Arabia is a country that has been governed since its founding by both an Islamic fundamentalist religious ideology, Wahhabism, and a repressive authoritarian monarchy.<sup>2</sup> Many scholars have accused this ideology of "deviat[ing] from [Islam's] core notions of tolerance, pragmatism, and moderation."<sup>3</sup> This has primarily been made possible by the vast oil wealth (or Petrodollars) and purchasing power that is at Saudi Arabia's disposal, giving the monarchy the ability to form such a strong friendship with the U.S. and other liberal and conservative governments.

The events that transpired on September 11, 2001, shook the foundation of the U.S.-Saudi relationship by raising serious concerns and questions regarding the role of the Saudi government and their Wahhabi ideology played in terrorism associated with Al-Qaeda. The attacks shined a light on Saudi Arabia since 15 out of 19 hijackers as well as Osama bin Laden and many of the global "jihadists" that participated in the conflicts fought in Bosnia, Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Iraq were Saudi nationals. This naturally lead the U.S. government and its people to ask serious questions as to what is wrong with Saudi Arabia and to draw conclusions about its religious ideology and institutions. Wahhabism generates a great deal of debate among academic and policy experts. Some insist it is central to the growth of Islamist violence and jihadism; others insist it is a rigid

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<sup>1</sup> As'ad Abu Khalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2004), 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

ideology with illiberal beliefs, but not directly linked to violence and jihadism. Still others take a middle of the road position in which they say that Wahhabism is a contributing factor, but not the sole factor in violent Islamist extremism.

This thesis seeks to grapple with these issues and endeavors to answer the following questions to determine the role played by the Saudi government and the Wahhabis in the rise of global terrorism. First, is Saudi Arabia's Wahhabi ideology a contributing factor in the spread of violent radicalization in the Muslim world? Second, what are the possible causal mechanisms linking Wahhabism to violence? Finally, how is it possible to ascertain these mechanisms and disentangle them from other sources of radicalization in the Muslim world?

This topic is important to pursue because the U.S. has entered into its eighth year of fighting terrorism in the campaign formerly referred to as the "Global War on Terror" and the results thus far have not been favorable in deterring terrorist acts or the spread of its influence. Many government and academic specialists are saying that this war is not just about fighting terrorists, denying them safe haven, and bringing them to justice. It must also entail dealing with the social, political, and ideological root causes of Muslim radicalization. Some scholars assert that the radical religious ideology promoted by Saudi Arabia and its Wahhabi clerical establishment is the cause of terrorism. Yet, these assertions require serious reflections and validation. It is easy to draw a correlation between Wahhabism and violence, but correlation is not causation. This thesis seeks to think through how Wahhabism might contribute to violence and what the limits are for blaming Wahhabism for the current threat from Al-Qaeda.

## **A. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The following literature review provides a survey of the leading opinions of researchers in the field concerning Middle Eastern studies, specifically concerning Saudi Arabia and Wahhabism. This review presents the anti-Wahhabi opinions of Hamid Algar, Khaled Abou El Fadl, the International Crisis Group and Christopher Blanchard and, on the other hand, the defender's opinions of Natana J. DeLong-Bas and David Commins.

Hamid Algar, in *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay*, identifies two ways to distinguish the Salafi from the Wahhabi: “a reliance on attempts at persuasion rather than coercion in order to rally other Muslims to their cause; and an informed awareness of the political and socio-economic crisis confronting the Muslim world.”<sup>4</sup> The remainder of his comparison of the two ideologies highlights their similarities. The Salafi and the Wahhabi share a disdain for all developments subsequent to the *al-Salaf al-Salih* (the righteous ancestors), rejection of Sufism and dismissal of adherence to one of the Sunni *madhhabs* (a school of Islamic jurisprudence).<sup>5</sup> He emphasizes the strong influence of the Saudi petrodollar in the propagation of Wahhabism, but also attributes the political situation of the Arab world at the time as a contributing factor that led to the co-opting of Salafism. He asserts that the threat presented by Jamal Abd al-Nasir, required the Saudi government to develop a three-front strategy to ensure the survival of Wahhabism. The ideological front was the most important in the co-opting of the Salafis through the establishment of the Muslim World League. It was through this organization that the melding of Wahhabi and Salafi ideologies occurred.<sup>6</sup> This organization created a means for establishing “Islamic solidarity” through the spread of Wahhabism, for the Saudi government, at the “expense of local Islamic traditions.”<sup>7</sup>

Khaled Abou El Fadl, in *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, builds on the conclusions made in Algar’s work and expresses the opinion that Wahhabism would not have been able to spread in the modern Muslim world under its own banner. For this to occur, it would have to be spread under the banner of Salafism.<sup>8</sup> This attachment of Wahhabism to Salafism was needed as Salafism was a much more “credible paradigm in Islam;” making it an ideal medium for Wahhabism.<sup>9</sup> This was

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<sup>4</sup> Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (New York: Islamic Publications International, 2002), 47.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 47–48.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 49–49.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>8</sup> Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 74.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

made possible based on the assertion that “Wahhabism was not a school of thought in Islam, but Islam itself, and it is the only possible Islam.”<sup>10</sup> This rejection made many of the Wahhabi doctrines and methodologies transferable to Salafism. As a result, the methodology and substance of Salafism is nearly identical to Wahhabism, with the exception that Salafism was initially much more tolerant of diversity and differing opinions.<sup>11</sup> The co-opting of Salafism by Wahhabism was not completed until the 1970s when the Wahhabis stripped away some of their extreme intolerance and co-opted the symbolism and language of Salafism; making them practically indistinguishable.

The Wahhabi and Salafi shared three major points of ideological similarities that made this co-opting possible. First, both shared the belief in a golden age within Islam (traditionally dated from the seventh to thirteenth centuries Common Era or C.E.), which fosters the belief that this utopia envisioned by the golden age was retrievable and reproducible in contemporary Islam. Second, both dismissed critical historical inquiries and retreating to the text was their answer to the challenges presented by modernity.<sup>12</sup> Finally, both “advocated a form of egalitarianism and anti-elitism to the point that they came to consider intellectualism and rational moral insight to be inaccessible, and thus corruptions to the purity of Islam.”<sup>13</sup> This unification of Wahhabism and Salafism is the basis of the modern puritanical movement.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Saudi government began to organize a campaign of spreading Wahhabi ideology throughout both the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds. “Saudi Arabia had created a complex worldwide system of financial incentives that amply rewarded those who advocated...Wahhabism.”<sup>14</sup>

This newfound patronage with the contemporary Salafis, under Wahhabi influence, created a Bedouin Islam that had become widespread and influential in the

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<sup>10</sup> Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, 74.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

development of the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds.<sup>15</sup> With this new bankroll, it is doubtful that any attempt to stem the spread of this new movement would have been impossible.<sup>16</sup> This melding of Salafism and Wahhabism gave rise to the “vigorous, potent and at times lethal puritan movement.”<sup>17</sup>

The opposition to the arguments expressed above comes mostly from Natana J. DeLong-Bas, in *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, that the ideologies of Wahhabism, Salafism and Jihadism may appear to be manifestations of the same phenomenon. However, closer examination reveals a number of deviations in their ideological approaches.<sup>18</sup> Wahhabis reflected an ideology with the central tenant of faith focused on absolute monotheism.<sup>19</sup> Salafism reflected an ideology with the central tenant focusing on the political aspects of *tawhid* (concept of monotheism in Islam).<sup>20</sup> She argues that there is no linear trajectory between Wahhabism and Salafism based on *tawhid*. This is because Wahhabism wants to reunite Muslims under the concept of a monotheistic belief, where as Salafism exercises the political position of establishing the caliphate, without first attaining monotheism.<sup>21</sup> Salafism is further broken into three distinct groups as a result of their interpretation of the *tawhid*.

The first group focuses on education and missionary work to solidify the *tawhid* prior to any political movement, which share similarities with Wahhabism. The second group focuses on the concept of the establishment of a caliphate through the means of evolution, not revolution. This group criticizes the policies of current regimes. However, it does not advocate the use of military action to implement the caliphate and *Sharia* law.<sup>22</sup> The third group, the Jihadists, share similar political goals with the second group.

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<sup>15</sup> Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, 91.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>18</sup> Natana J. DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (London: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2004), 292.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>22</sup> DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 295.



However, unlike the second group, they advocate the use of violence to attain their goals.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, Jihadism was considered an offshoot of Salafism, not Wahhabism, with their main focus of concern on the “exercise of jihad as military engagements in the defense of Muslims worldwide.”<sup>24</sup>

David Commins, in *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, supports DeLong-Bas’s arguments that the jihadist culture is more based in Salafism than Wahhabism. He believes that “the ideology of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda is not Wahhabi. It is instead a part of contemporary jihadist tendency that evolved from the teachings of Sayyid Qutb...in other words; Al-Qaeda belongs to an offshoot of twenty-first century Muslim revivalist ideology, not Wahhabism.”<sup>25</sup> He argues that Al-Qaeda contradicts Wahhabi doctrine on two vital points. First, he claims that Al-Qaeda’s calling for the overthrow of the Saudi monarchy contradicts both the practice and doctrine of the Wahhabis. Second, he claims that the call for global jihad against the West made by Al-Qaeda is illegitimate as Wahhabi doctrine declares only a sovereign can declare jihad.<sup>26</sup> He agrees with DeLong-Bas’s conclusions that Al-Qaeda’s ideology evolved with the introduction of Salafi ideas from Sayyid Qutb and other Muslim Brotherhood members.<sup>27</sup>

Christopher Blanchard, in “The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya,” expresses the opinion that advocacy of jihad is a relatively new phenomenon and remains highly disputed by both the Wahhabi and Salafi communities. He claims that the jihadist (or militant) culture lies more in the ideology of the Salafi community despite the Wahhabi clerics and converts participation in the advocacy of jihad and their participation in the jihadist movement. However, he does recognize that some Muslims do consider Wahhabism as Saudi Arabia’s version of Salafism.<sup>28</sup> He argues that violent

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<sup>23</sup> DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 296.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>25</sup> David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2006), 185.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 185–186.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher M. Blanchard, “The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya,” *Congressional Research Service Report to Congress RS21695* (January 24, 2008): 3–4.

Salafi groups like Al-Qaeda call for the overthrow of the Saudi monarchy and the “establishment of states that will sustain puritanical Islamic doctrine enforced under strict application of Islamic law.”<sup>29</sup> He does acknowledge that the Saudis in Afghanistan established and funded the radical beliefs spread rapidly through mosques and *madrasas*. He argues that it is widely acknowledged that the Saudi government and its affluent citizens have supported the spread of Wahhabism throughout the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds and that this has been attributed by some scholars as what promoted terrorism and the spread of a violent jihadist culture. He links Saudi Arabia and Al-Qaeda through this funding of mosques, *madrasas* and charities used to modify the Wahhabi ideology to meet Al-Qaeda’s political needs and to solicit Saudi patronage.

The International Crisis Group (ICG), in the “Saudi Backgrounder: Who are the Islamists?,” presented the argument that four different groups have evolved from Saudi Islamism. The fourth group, the jihadist, developed out of this Saudi Islamism, which refutes DeLong-Bas’s argument that only the Salafi movement spawned the jihadist culture. ICG traces the roots of this jihadist culture back to the Saudi regime’s active encouragement of its citizens to participate in the Soviet-Afghan war.<sup>30</sup> The Wahhabi religious establishment also strongly supported this encouragement, which stated “it is a collective duty for Muslims to fight in Afghanistan.”<sup>31</sup> Encouragement also came from the U.S. as it supported the Cold War policies of communist containment. By the conclusion of the Soviet-Afghan war, many Saudi youths were leaving Saudi Arabia in search of military and combat experience, especially once Al-Qaeda established its training camps in Afghanistan, creating a link between Saudi Arabia and the global jihadist movement of Al-Qaeda.<sup>32</sup>

Thomas Hegghammer, in “Islamist Violence and Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia,” outlines the complexity concerning the links between Saudi Arabia and Al-

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<sup>29</sup> Blanchard, “The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya,” 4.

<sup>30</sup> International Crisis Group, “Saudi Backgrounder: Who are the Islamists?” *Middle East Report* 31 (September 21, 2004): 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Qaeda. He argues that Saudi Arabia is considered the heartland of Al-Qaeda due to the regime's contribution of money, recruits and ideology to the global jihad. However, he notes that the strength of the support given was more for the classic jihadist struggles, such as Bosnia and Chechnya, and most Saudi Islamists disapproved of Al-Qaeda's activities on the Arabian Peninsula. Based on this view, Bin Laden shifted his attention away from the Arabian Peninsula and focused on the United States. This move proved beneficial to the global jihadist movement as it resulted in Saudi Arabia becoming an important support base for Al-Qaeda in the form of financial contributions, recruits and clerical opinions.<sup>33</sup>

The arguments above both draw the conclusion that a violent jihadist movement has developed in the Muslim world; however, there are differing opinions on how that movement transpired. The anti-Wahhabi advocates, Algar and Abou El Fadl, argue that Wahhabism co-opted Salafism and that this co-opting brought the jihadist ideology into the current puritanical movement. The defenders, De-Long-Bas and Commins, argue there is no direct link to the jihadist ideology from Wahhabism as it has developed out of a stricter interpretation of Salafism. The ICG report would challenge that opinion as it links the jihadist movement as one of the four strains that developed in Wahhabism and links it with Al-Qaeda's growth in Afghanistan. Hegghammer acknowledges the influence that Saudi Arabia has played in the spread of this jihadist culture and the support given to Al-Qaeda through Saudi patronage.

The analysis of all of the arguments is sound in their individual perspectives of the development of the jihadist ideology and how that culture might have influenced Al-Qaeda's ideology and growth. This thesis attempts to evaluate the empirical basis of these claims and make a determination on which view is closer to reality, to determine which ideology had the greatest influence on Al-Qaeda's ideology and the role that the Saudi government played in the spread of the jihadist movement. This allows for the proper interpretation of implications for the Saudi government and determining future U.S.-Saudi agreements.

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<sup>33</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, "Islamist Violence and Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia," *International Affairs* 84:4 (2008): 707–709.

Three potential hypotheses can be researched to provide an answer to the major research questions.

- Hypothesis 1-Wahhabism provides Passive Support: The roots of this ideology are rigid precepts that demonize others and promote intolerance toward non-Wahhabi Muslims and non-Muslims. It also sanctions violence normally prohibited by other strands of Islam. Saudi government encourages this ideology, spreads it through the media and educational system, and does not suppress ardent promoters. This hypothesis, if valid, means that Wahhabism is not a sufficient cause of violent radicalization, but a contributing factor along with other intervening variables.
- Hypothesis 2-Wahhabism provides Indirect Support: The Saudi government and clerical establishment provide financial support to religious, charitable, and educational institutions worldwide known to have produced militants or facilitated terrorism either through ideological indoctrination, recruitment, or financial assistance.
- Hypothesis 3-Wahhabism provides Direct Support: The Saudi government and the Wahhabi clerical establishment directly support violent radicalization through facilitation of recruitment, provision of financial resources to militants, giving intelligence support, providing a safe haven, or/and providing fatwas (religious rulings) at the highest level permitting acts of violence.

## **B. METHODS AND SOURCES**

It is necessary to engage in an historical and contemporary analysis to test each of the hypotheses that emerge from the literature on Wahhabism. The historical analysis focuses on Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab, the theology and ideology that he created and the violent influence of that ideology in the formation of the modern Saudi state. This historical analysis provides the necessary background and foundation for understanding the subsequent chapters.

The contemporary analysis focuses on three time periods and assesses each of the three hypotheses in each time period to substantiate which of the hypotheses are the most valid. The first time period is from 1979 to 1989, when the Saudi regime and its clerical establishment supported the jihad in Afghanistan. The second time period is from 1992 to 2001, when there were major conflicts and insurgencies in Bosnia, Chechnya, Algeria, Egypt and Tajikistan in which the Saudis have been involved. The final time period is from 2001 to 2007, which addresses the current insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq and

the terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia. Each time period is evaluated for evidence of passive, indirect and direct support and also attempts to assess at which level this support was coming from the Saudi government and its state institutions, Saudi sub-state actors such as the Wahhabi clerics, or Saudi citizens.

The goal of this analysis is to engage in tracing the process by which Wahhabism might have contributed, directly or indirectly, to violent extremism. Process tracing will help determine if the connection between Wahhabism and violent extremism is *ideological* (i.e., merely inspiring people to act violently with material support), *institutional* (i.e., supported by formal Wahhabi networks and the Saudi state), or *coincidental* (i.e., no evidence exists to suggest a sustained pattern of Wahhabi direct or indirect support for violent jihadism).

### **C. THESIS OVERVIEW**

The first chapter outlines the history of the origins of Wahhabism. It provides background information on Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab, the theology and ideology of his teachings and the role his ideology played in the formation of the three Saudi states.

The second chapter presents an analysis of the three major Islamic ideologies, Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism. It breakdowns each of the ideologies, addresses the internal differences that have resulted in splitting into sub-groups or sects and attempts to determine the role that Wahhabism might have played in the development of the ideology practiced by those associated with the global jihad.

The third chapter examines how the Saudi monarchy has utilized its Wahhabi ideology in the exportation of jihad, especially to places such as Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya. Second, it discusses the role Wahhabism has played in Saudi law and education. Finally, it evaluates the various opinions concerning Saudi Arabia's possible links to the terrorist group, al-Qaeda.

The major finding of this study is that the first hypothesis—Wahhabism is a facilitator but not a direct contributor to violent extremism—is best supported by the evidence. Those who claim that Wahhabism has nothing to do with terrorism

underestimate the extent to which the core principles of Wahhabism overlap with the extremist ideology of takfir, and its inherent intolerance toward other creeds can create fertile minds ready to demonize foreigners and even fellow Muslims who are non-Wahhabists. The second hypothesis receives hardly any evidential support, while the third hypothesis has no support at all and amounts to guilt by association.

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## **II. THE ORIGINS OF WAHHABISM AND THE SAUDI STATE**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Saudi Arabia has significant religious ties to Islam as it is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad and home to Islam's two holiest cities, Mecca and Medina. The significance of these ties is that they have been used, since the establishment of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (also referred to as Saudi State or Saudi-Wahhabi state) in 1932, as a means of legitimizing the Saudi monarchy's power internally and externally in Islamic terms. The intertwining of Saudi political/military power and Wahhabi religious power strengthened this legitimacy, as Wahhabism (or Wahhabiyyah) claims to represent the only orthopraxy Islam.<sup>34</sup>

Wahhabism was founded in the eighteenth century as “an Islamic puritanical doctrine of reform and renewal attributed to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who allied himself with the House of Saud in 1744.”<sup>35</sup> Wahhabism has since become the official ideology of the state or kingdom with the Qur'an serving as its constitution.<sup>36</sup> It is important to understand the origins of this ideology and its historic link with Saudi Arabia to access the events in modern times accurately. This chapter explores the origins of Wahhabism and the role it has played in the development of the Saudi state.

### **B. MUHAMMAD IBN ABD AL-WAHHAB (1703–1892)**

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was born in the region of Najd in Al-Uyaynah in 1703, which is a region not known for its religious scholarship. He was a member of the Banu Tamim tribe of that region and is said to have lived in poverty.<sup>37</sup> His father was a local judge associated with the Hanbali School of jurisprudence, which was one of the four Sunni schools of jurisprudence and known for its conservativeness and strict

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<sup>34</sup> Abu Khalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*, 50.

<sup>35</sup> Mohammed Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 193.

<sup>36</sup> Abu Khalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*, 50.

<sup>37</sup> Madawi Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge (England: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 16.



interpretations of Islam.<sup>38</sup> He is said to have travelled to places such as Hijaz, Asha' and Basrah,<sup>39</sup> where he received his training in law, theology and Sufism in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. He studied under scholars of the Hanbali School, the strictest of the Sunni schools of jurisprudence.<sup>40</sup> It was during his time in Media where he was introduced to the teachings of Ibn Taymiyyah (1263-1328), a famous scholar who fought against the crusaders and believed that the foundation of Islam were the Qur'an and the sword. These teachings would greatly influence Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's development of his ideology and it would be said that he took these teachings to their extreme.<sup>41</sup>

Ibn Taymiyyah was uncompromising of the Sufis, believing them to be pagans and infidels,<sup>42</sup> but never rejecting their beliefs entirely;<sup>43</sup> similarly, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab rejected specifically the Sufis that practiced saint veneration. Ibn Taymiyyah also did not allow for ideology, by forbidding Muslims from making requests at the tombs of holy people, which even included the Prophet's tomb, yet another trend seen in Wahhabism. The Wahhabi doctrine of anti-Shia can be linked to the influences of the Hanbali School of jurisprudence, out of which Ibn Taymiyyah is one venerated scholar. All other Sunni schools of jurisprudence, not just Wahhabism, have anti-Shia views, but Wahhabism seems to be most vocal about it.

With his Hanbali training influenced by the ideals of Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab set out to Basrah with the intention of educating the Shia in the correct path of God. He was not well received by the Shia and was forcibly expelled from Basrah. His experience in Basrah shocked him and would be the motivation behind his anti-Shia campaign he pursued for the remainder of his life. His actions in Basrah did not only alienate him from the Shia, but also from his father and brother Sulayman.<sup>44</sup> His father

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<sup>38</sup> Abu Khalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*, 52.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 118.

<sup>41</sup> Abu Khalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*, 53-54.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>43</sup> Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay*, 9-10.

<sup>44</sup> Abu Khalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*, 56.

was removed from his position as a judge in Al-Uyaynah and forced to relocate to Huraymilah as punishment for Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's actions.<sup>45</sup> This event might have been the motivation for Sulayman to become so openly critical of his brother's new ideological teachings. Sulayman called into question the legitimacy of his brother's teachings by stating, "[Ibn Abd al-Wahhab] did not concern himself with reading or understanding the works of juristic predecessors."<sup>46</sup> "Ibn Abd al-Wahhab while prohibiting *taqlid* [as far as it related to jurists to whom he did not agree], [he] ended up affirming and even maintaining it, but in a different form" creating a double standard that prohibited the *taqlid* of the other Sunni schools of jurisprudence, but allowing for his own.<sup>47</sup> Even with this rejection from his family, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was not deterred from spreading his new ideological beliefs.

After his father's death in 1740, he would return to the town of his birth where it is believed that he realized "words are not sufficient."<sup>48</sup> Ibn Abd al-Wahhab believed that Muslim society had reverted to the period of pre-Islamic Arabia, the *jahiliyya* (period of ignorance). A conclusion reached based on his time in the holy cities, and his travels to the cities of Basrah and Al-Uyaynah where he witnessed the veneration of saints and construction of tombs and shrines of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. These were acts that he considered to be "pagan superstitions and idolatry, which is the worse of sins in Islam...denouncing these beliefs and practices as unwarranted innovations"<sup>49</sup> He ordered the destruction of all tombs, mosques built over tombs that venerated anyone other than God destroyed, but this is not what would give Ibn Abd al-Wahhab his fame. That would come from the public execution by stoning of a young woman who allegedly confessed to adultery. This event gained so much attention that it almost caused revolts in Ahsa' and led the local ruler to issue an order that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab be killed.

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<sup>45</sup> Abu Khalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*, 57.

<sup>46</sup> Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, 57.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Abu Khalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*, 57.

<sup>49</sup> Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 118.

These events would force Ibn Abd al-Wahhab to flee to Dir'iyyah and place him on a collision course with his future ally, Muhammad Ibn Saud, addressed later in the chapter.<sup>50</sup>

### C. MOTIVATIONS FOR A NEW THEOLOGY

Armed with his Hanbali teachings and his experiences from his travels, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was convinced that Muslim society had reverted to the period of pre-Islamic Arabia, or the *jahiliyya* (period of ignorance). He witnessed Muslims revering saints and constructing tombs and shrines in honor of the Prophet Muhammad and the companions in the holiest of Muslim cities (Mecca and Medina). He considered these acts to be “pagan superstitions and idolatry, which is the worse of sins in Islam...denouncing these beliefs and practices as unwarranted innovations.”<sup>51</sup> These beliefs and practices, according to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, “compromised the unity of God (Islam’s radical or absolute monotheism) and the Islamic community, as [made] evident by the eruption of tribalism and tribal warfare that had returned to Arabia.”<sup>52</sup> What made this compromising of God’s unity even more reprehensible to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was that it was occurring in the “Islamic heartland and homeland of the Prophet.”<sup>53</sup> He believed that these actions weakened the *umma* (community) leading to the moral decay of Islamic society. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab believed these were deviations from the true path, which became the motivation for his theology based on *tawhid* (which is explained in the following chapter) and his mission to return all Muslims to the “true” path of Islam.

Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, with the aid of his ally Ibn Saud, set forth on a quest to “rid Islam of all of the corruptions that he believed had crept into the religion; ...mysticism, the doctrine of intercession, rationalism, and Shi’ism as well as many other practices that he considered heretical innovations.”<sup>54</sup> He believed that all Muslims needed to return to the normative period, which was the time of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions

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<sup>50</sup> Abu Khalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*, 57.

<sup>51</sup> Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 118.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, 45.

or simply the first two centuries of Islam. “The Islamic way of life was to be found in its pure, unadulterated form of seventh-century community.”<sup>55</sup> He called for *ijtihad*, which required that all post-Prophetic developments and the time-honored interpretations of both the ulama and the schools of jurisprudence be reviewed in the light of this period utilizing only the Qur’an and Sunna for guidance.<sup>56</sup> That quest would be in the form of jihad against Muslims and non-Muslims equally. He justified his war against Muslims as not only permissible, but an obligation as any Muslims not following his teachings were *mushrikin* (polytheists) and that the Qur’an was clear that such a sin against Islam was unforgivable.<sup>57</sup> Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s quest of jihad would begin with his arrival in Dir’iyyah.

#### **D. THE FIRST SAUDI STATE (1744–1818)**

With the growing level of threats against his life, including at least one failed assassination attempt, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab decided that to continue the spread of his ideology, he would need to leave the town of his birth and make his way to Dir’iyyah, a small market town in Najd ruled by Muhammad Ibn Saud. Ibn Saud expressed initial reservations about meeting with Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, but was convinced by his wife to take the risk.<sup>58</sup> She told him, “This man was led toward us by Allah, and he is a great find, so take advantage of what Allah has made exclusively yours.”<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the two men met in 1744 and struck an alliance that would shape what today is known as the Saudi Kingdom. This section shows how the alliance developed and how it benefited both parties in the accomplishment of their goals.

Dir’iyyah was a small abode of merchants, farmers, artisans, minor ulama (religious scholars) and slaves ruled by a member of the Ibn Saud family since 1727. The settlement had accepted the rule of the Saudi emirs due to their vast land and water holdings around the settlement and their ability to defend it against raids from other emirs

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<sup>55</sup> Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 119.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Abu Khalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*, 59.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

and tribal confederations. The Saudis executed a traditional form of rule in Dir'iyyah, but their power to project influence outside of the settlement was extremely limited. This inability to project power can be attributed to its shortcomings.<sup>60</sup> First, the Saudis “lacked an identifiable tribal origin that would have granted them a strong association with a tribal confederation.”<sup>61</sup> Second, the Saudis lacked a sufficient surplus of wealth because their commercial interests did not yield sufficient returns that would give them the power to project their authority beyond the settlement. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab would aid Ibn Saud in developing the necessary wealth required to expand Saudi influence through the collection of the *zakat* (Islamic tax paid to a community's ruler).<sup>62</sup> With this assurance of *zakat*, Ibn Saud agreed to the alliance with Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

The alliance would provide Ibn Saud an alternative source of legitimacy through the adoption of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's religious ideology and *zakat*, giving him the ability to overcome previous shortcoming and assume political control of the Muslim community. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab would be guaranteed control over all religious interpretations and the ability to wage his jihad against those who opposed his teachings, and the authority of Ibn Saud. This alliance provided the Saudis with the force (Wahhabism) necessary to expand their rule and promised the benefits of political and religious power that would be essential to conquering Arabian Peninsula.<sup>63</sup> It is unlikely that either man would have been successful in their ambitions without this alliance.

The Saudi-Wahhabi alliance began with a recruitment campaign endorsed by the sedentary (settlement) populations of southern Najd, as it was necessary to raise a fighting force capable of executing the jihad and spreading Wahhabism. Some of the settlements willingly accepted the rule of the new Saudi-Wahhabi emir; while others accepted out of sheer fear, and those that resisted, were subjected to raids and elimination. These newly acquired populations were required to swear an oath of allegiance to the emir, demonstrate their loyalty by fighting in the jihad and pay the required *zakat*. The

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<sup>60</sup> Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge, 16.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 18–19.

success of the expansion rested on the Saudi-Wahhabi emir's ability to subjugate the sedentary and the nomadic populations of Najd under the tenets of Wahhabism. The subjugation of the settlements proved to be relatively easy to maintain control over; however, the nomadic (tribal) populations proved to be a much more troublesome endeavor as the tribes' mobility allowed them to remain autonomous. However, once they joined the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance, they proved to be an invaluable fighting force necessary for continued expansion.<sup>64</sup> The Saudi-Wahhabi alliance was able to achieve the allegiance of these two populations through Wahhabism. "It seems that Wahhabism achieved the ultimate religious symbiosis between the nomads and the sedentary population by combining an uncompromising Unitarian and puritanical Islam with an obsession with ritual specialization and *fiqh*, those responding to the needs of both [populations]."<sup>65</sup>

With this newly acquired fighting force and under the leadership of Ibn Saud's son, Abd al-Aziz, the alliance would annex Riyadh, Kharj and Qasim by 1792. The newly conquered settlements would receive Wahhabi judges as representatives of their new rulers, but the Saudis allowed the local emirs to remain in power as long as they paid the *zakat* as a token of their submission. With both central and southern Arabia now under Saudi control, their sights turned towards Hasa, which had a large Shia population seen by Wahhabis as *ahl al-bid'a* (innovators). By 1797, Hasa, Qatif, Qatar and Bahrain had either been completely subjected or agreed to pay the *zakat* to the Saudis. The Saudis now turned their attention toward the Hijaz, which was part of the Ottoman Empire and contained the two holiest Islamic cities. The Saudi-Wahhabi forces were able to overcome the strong resistance, and by 1804, had established Saudi control over the Hijaz and Asir. Also, during the conquest of the Hijaz, the Saudis began raids into Mesopotamia (1801–1812), which included the sacking the holy city of Karbala and

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<sup>64</sup> Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge, 19–20.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

massacre of the Shia inhabitants resulting in the assassination of Abd al-Aziz in 1803, by a Shi'a as revenge for Karbala. The Saudis did attempt to expand into Yemen and Syria, but all attempts were met with heavy resistance and failure.<sup>66</sup>

Madawi al-Rasheed provides four factors that facilitated the Saudi-Wahhabi expansion. First, the fragmented society that existed in Najd allowed the Saudis only to have to contend with one enemy at a time making it easy to defeat them. Second, divisions within the various settlements ruling establishment weakened their overall resistance and provided the Saudis with allies in their enemy's camps. Third, the migration of some of the more powerful tribes to Syria and Iraq weakened the fighting capabilities of the resisters. Finally, the peaceful acceptance of Wahhabism by the sedentary populations in Najd provided support for this ideology to grow before a military campaign even began.<sup>67</sup>

The vast new Saudi state was short-lived; for the expansion created vast fluctuating bounties with nothing more than raids as a mechanism to maintain order. Raids had proven an effective technique in explaining the Saudi state, but would ultimately provoke the Ottoman Empire to dispatch forces in 1811, under the command of Muhammad Ali's son, Ibrahim Pasha. The Saudis were no match for the Ottoman forces and surrendered on September 11, 1818, after the Dir'iyah's defenses had been completely destroyed. Members of the Wahhabi ulama and the Saudi emir, Abdullah, were executed by order of the Ottoman Sultan. This marked the end of the First Saudi State and it would be six years before Saudi-Wahhabi authority would rise to power again.

#### **E. THE SECOND SAUDI STATE (1824–1891)**

The removal of Ottoman forces in 1824 from Najd marked the opportunity the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance needed to reassert its control over the region. Turki Ibn Abdullah, the son of former Saudi ruler, Abdullah, would accomplish this task. He would capture Riyadh, Arid, Kharj, Mahmal, Sudayr and Aflaj with forces he was able to muster in the areas surrounding Riyadh. By 1830, he was able to assert authority over

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<sup>66</sup> Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge, 21–22.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

Hasa, but had minimal control over Ha'il and Qasim. He did restrict his campaigns, even though he was a strict Wahhabi imam, to avoid poking the Ottoman forces that remained in the Hijaz. However, the Ottoman forces would prove to be the least of Turki's problems, because by 1831, internal divisions within his own family began to challenge his authority. Turki was assassinated in 1834, by his cousin, Mishari, who was subsequently killed by Turki's son, Faysal, who assumed the position of imam.<sup>68</sup>

Faysal's first reign would be short lived. By 1837, his refusal to pay tribute to the Ottoman forces in Hijaz provoked them to march on Riyadh. Faysal was captured and imprisoned in Cairo. Khalid, a member of the Saudi family, was appointed to rule southern Najd by the Ottomans, but another member of the Saudi family, Abdullah Ibn Thunayan, overthrew him. The political instability continued when Faysal escaped from Cairo in 1843, and killed Ibn Thunayan to begin his second reign over the Saudi state. Upon Faysal's death in 1865, his son, Abdullah, would become ruler. However, Abdullah would also be challenged by his two brothers, which would result in various confederations taking advantage of the division within the Saudi family to regain their independence. This struggle between brothers would not be resolved allowing the ruler of Ha'il the opportunity to seize Riyadh and assume control over the Saudi state. The Saudis attempted to regain control, but failed to achieve victory over the Rashidi emirate and were exiled to Kuwait in 1893.<sup>69</sup> Unlike the First Saudi State that fell due to the defeat at the hands of the Ottoman forces, the Second Saudi State's collapse can be attributed to the internal fragmentation caused by the political struggle. This internal conflict weakened the power of the Saudis allowing the state to be conquered by a rival Najd emirate bringing an end to the Second Saudi State and the presence of Saudi authority on the Arabian Peninsula for nine years.

#### **F. THE RISE OF THE THIRD SAUDI STATE (1902–1932)**

Abd al-Aziz Ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Saud (known as Ibn Saud) executed military campaigns with the assistance of the *mutawwa'a* (religious specialists) and the *Ikhwan*

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<sup>68</sup> Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge, 23–24.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 24–25.



(tribal military force) to restore Saudi authority to the Arabian Peninsula and laying the foundation for the creation of the Third (or modern) Saudi State. It began in Kuwait in 1902, when Ibn Saud recruited only sixty men and launched a surprise attack on Riyadh. The surprise raid was successful and Ibn Saud was appointed ruler of Riyadh. From Riyadh, Ibn Saud began a series of campaigns to regain former Saudi territories in southern Najd pushing the Rashidis forces into Qasim. The battle between the Saudis and Rashidis would be fought in Qasim for four years (1902–1906). The Ottoman Empire provided the Rashidis with arms and supplies to oppose Ibn Saud; however, the Ottoman's involvement allowed Ibn Saud to secure an alliance with Kuwait, and ultimately, the British. By 1906, Ibn Saud had successfully defeated the Rashidis and the Ottoman conferred upon him the de facto title of ruler of Qasim and Najd.<sup>70</sup> With Qasim and Najd firmly under Saudi control, Ibn Saud turned his attention to the conquest of Hasa. The Ottomans had approximately 1,200 troops stationed in Hafuf, but Ibn Saud still attacked and successfully defeated the Ottoman troops. As a result, Ibn Saud signed the Ottoman-Saudi treaty in May 1913, in which the Ottoman confirmed him by Imperial Firman' the governor of Najd.

The conquest of Hasa resulted in two issues for Ibn Saud. First, the dominated Shia region of Hasa was reincorporated into the Saudi state. Ibn Saud entered into an agreement with the Shi'a ulama that would allow the Shia in Hasa to maintain their religious freedom as long as they pledged allegiance to Ibn Saud. This agreement would never fully be honored by the Wahhabis as they view the Shia as *rafida* (those that reject faith) and would have serious consequences later during the Ikhwan rebellion that cited Ibn Saud's accommodation of the Shia violating Wahhabi doctrine. Second, with Ibn Saud's appointment as governor of Najd, he was viewed by the British as an Ottoman vassal and withdrew from treaty negotiations to confer protection status upon the Saudi state.<sup>71</sup>

The onset of the First World War would, once again, change the dynamic of relationships on the Arabian Peninsula. The Ottomans were the first to attempt to resolve

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<sup>70</sup> Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge, 39–40.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

their differences with the rulers of the Arabian Peninsula. Ibn Saud signed the Ottoman-Saudi Convention in 1914, which granted Ibn Saud a family line of succession as rulers of Najd in exchange for Ibn Saud's promise of military support to the Ottomans and restraining from engaging into treaties with foreign governments or ceding lands to them. With Britain now at war with the Ottomans, the previous agreement between the two powers, excluding British intervention into Ottoman territories, were now void; the British began searching for allies on the Arabian Peninsula. In December 1915, Ibn Saud violated his treaty with the Ottomans and signed the Anglo-Saudi Treaty. This treaty granted Ibn Saud and his claimed territories the military protection of the British government. In exchange for British protection, Ibn Saud was provided with arms and money to continue to fight the Rashidis, as long as he did not enter into treaties with other governments or commit any acts of aggression towards any of Britain's other protected Gulf States. Ibn Saud was unable to take Ha'il and it remained part of the Ottoman Empire for the course of the war; however, he used this conflict with the Rashidis to obtain additional British aid, arms and supplies.<sup>72</sup>

The end of the First World War did not end the battle for the Arabian Peninsula, as both Ibn Saud and Ibn Rashid solidified control over their territories with plans to expand in the wake of the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Ibn Rashid, without the assistance of his former Ottoman allies, was unable to repeal Ibn Saud's attacks on Ha'il, and by 1921, Ha'il fell under Saudi control. The fall of Ha'il marked the end of the Rashidis emirate, leaving the Saudis in a good position to be the dominating power on the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>73</sup>

With his long-term rival, Ibn Rashid, defeated, Ibn Saud turned his attention to the Hijaz and his other rival, King Husayan. This rivalry stemmed from a territorial dispute over the town of Khurma, which according to St. John Philby, began when Khurma switched its allegiance to Ibn Saud leading to a military clash between the Saudis and Hashemites. The Hashemites' army would be defeated in Khurma and retreated to Turaba where the Saudis completely destroyed them. This Hashemite defeat led to an

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<sup>72</sup> Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge, 41–43.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

armistice agreement between the two rulers that suspended hostilities for four years and granted control of Khurma and Turaba to Ibn Saud. As a possible response to Britain support for Hashemite kingdoms in Iraq and Trans-Jordan, and with the armistice agreement expired, Ibn Saud decided to go on the offensive to expand his territory into southern Hijaz, specifically Asir ruled by the Idrisis emirate. The emir of Adha, the capital of Asir, swore allegiance to Ibn Saud in 1922 and was subsequently occupied by Saudi forces.<sup>74</sup>

Ibn Saud's aggressive assault that followed the occupation of Adha is most likely because of the British discontinuing his monthly stipend and King Husayan assuming the caliphate in 1924. Ibn Saud ransacked Ta'if for three days, which forced King Husayan, under pressure from his subjects, to abdicate in favor of his son, Ali. The abdication was Ibn Saud's green light to invade the holy city of Mecca. On December 5, 1925, Saudi forces entered and took control of Mecca and forced Ali to flee to Jeddah. Ibn Saud followed Ali to Jeddah, and again forcing him to surrender the city and with Medina already under Saudi control, Ibn Saud declared himself King of the Hijaz. By January 1926, the notables of the Hijaz proclaimed him King of the Hijaz and Sultan of Najd. For the first time since the fall of the First Saudi State, the territories of Najd, Hijaz, Hasa and Asir were under the control of the Saudi-Wahhabi emirate and set the foundation for the establishment of the modern Saudi Kingdom.<sup>75</sup>

The British, in an attempt to maintain border stability between Ibn Saud and the newly create Hashemite Kingdoms of Iraq and Trans-Jordan, mediated the signing of two treaties, Bahra and Hadda agreements that closed the borders between the states to the migrations of any tribes, which was used by the *Ikhwan* as another reason to challenge Ibn Saud authority. Ibn Saud entered into the Treaty of Mecca to solidify his control of Asir, in which Hassan Ibn Ali al-Idrisi swore allegiance to Ibn Saud, recognized his titles, and would refrain from engaging into agreements with any foreign governments without the permission of Ibn Saud. In return, the Asir emirate was given semi-autonomous

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<sup>74</sup> Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge, 44–45.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

status (only until 1930) to coexist with the Saudi-Wahhabi emirate.<sup>76</sup> The British, feeling their 1915 treaty with Ibn Saud was not longer valid, reengaged Ibn Saud in treaty negotiations and signed the Treaty of Jeddah in 1927. This treaty had the British recognize the complete independence of the Saudi-Wahhabi emirate and Ibn Saud's right to choose his successor in return for assurance Ibn Sauds maintains friendly relations with all British-protected Gulf emirates. The relationship that Ibn Saud shared with the British would remain forever ambiguous.<sup>77</sup> Ibn Saud, with the assistance of the British Royal Air Force, did finally put down, or massacre, the *Ikhwan* by 1929.<sup>78</sup> This act solidified Ibn Saud's power on the Arabian Peninsula and on September 22, 1932, he proclaimed his realm to be the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.<sup>79</sup>

## G. CONCLUSION

The origins of Wahhabism have provided insight into the life and motivations of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founder of Wahhabism, in an effort to understand and interpret better the tenets of his ideology examined in the next chapter. The analysis of the origins of the Saudi states have provided insight into how the relationship between the political ruling Saudis and the religious Wahhabis evolved and was critical in the development of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The next chapter analyzes the Wahhabi ideology in greater detail, compares it with the other competing Islamic ideologies of Salafism and Islamism and attempts to conclude what Wahhabism's role might have been in the spread of global terrorism.

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<sup>76</sup> Al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia*. Cambridge, 46–47

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 48–49.

<sup>78</sup> Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, 65.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

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### **III. UNDERSTANDING WAHHABISM, SALAFISM AND ISLAMISM**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

In an effort to address the concerns raised in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and to determine if Wahhabism had any role in the spread of the global jihad responsible for this attack, this chapter attempts to evaluate the major ideologies that exist in the modern Islamic world to clear the blurred lines between Wahhabism, neo-Wahhabism, Salafism, neo-Salafism, moderate and radical Islamists commonly lumped together under the common title of “Islamism.” This common mistake made by world leaders, policymakers, academics, journalists and the average citizen are due to the fact that all of these groups share “similar literal doctrines and concepts of jihad, Islamic state, *shari’a* or prophetic traditions.”<sup>80</sup> Even though these ideologies share such similarities, their connotations and discourses differ according to each of them; resulting in the importance for understanding and studying these ideologies to determine which of these ideologies are truly a threat and those that may be allies in the growing global war on terrorism. This chapter discusses each of these major ideologies separately, compare and contrast them and attempt to offer a conclusion that suggests that Wahhabism, although not directly responsible for the ideology associated with the spread of the global jihad, did have a passive influence on associated ideologies.

#### **B. WAHHABISM / NEO-WAHHABISM**

The first concept that must be understood when studying Wahhabism is that it considers itself as the only true Salafist movement and by others as the Salafism of Saudi Arabia.<sup>81</sup> This characterization is supported by the fact that Wahhabism “is the extreme interpretation of puritanical Islam which has been the basis of legitimacy of the Saudi royal family and there are many similarities between Wahhabi Islam and the doctrines of

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<sup>80</sup> Ahmad Moussalli, “Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism: Who is the Enemy?” *A Conflict Forum Monograph* (January 2009): 3.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

the Muslim Brotherhood.”<sup>82</sup> Wahhabism arose in Najd in Saudi Arabia in the eighteenth century as a religious revivalist movement led by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1892) as he believed that over the centuries, since the beginning of Islam Muslim societies had reverted into a *jahiliyya* (era of ignorance) through the prevention of Islam.<sup>83</sup> The goals of the movement were to restore the true meaning of *tawhid* (oneness with God or monotheism) by the people, to disregard traditional disciplines and practices that had evolved over the centuries, such as theology and jurisprudence, and to eliminate the worshipping of venerated individuals other than God.<sup>84</sup> Wahhabism accepts *tawhid* as a core concept of Islam; however, it claims that correct belief is insufficient without a joining with pure Islamic behavior. This claim is interpreted to mean that, in the view of Wahhabism, belief in God is not enough without the discontinuing of acts and customs that promote idolatry and *kufir* (disbelief). Therefore, Wahhabism bans the practices of listening to certain types of music, drawing any living thing with a soul, praying at tombs and shrines (including the Prophet’s tomb) and following any of the *madhhabs* (schools of Islamic jurisprudence) that deviate from the original sources (as blind imitation of past scholars is discouraged, but to the extent these scholars base their judgments on the *Qur’an*, *Sunna*, and *Salaf al-Salih* then it is permissible to accept their rulings), all of which constitute Sunni orthodoxy and are practiced by all Sunni Muslims outside of Saudi Arabia.<sup>85</sup>

The Wahhabis separate themselves from the Sunni orthodox by claiming to follow the example outlined by al-salaf al-salih (the pious ancestors) calling themselves salafists, and claiming that the pious ancestors are the model that all Muslims should emulate. This belief led them to accuse the majority of Sunni Muslims living under the Ottoman caliphate (including the caliphate itself) of committing *bid’a* (innovation) and *kufir* (unbelief) as the political system was unknown to the pious ancestors.<sup>86</sup> They also

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<sup>82</sup> Oxford Analytica, “Dialogue with Islam,” *Oxford Analytica Ltd.* (2004): 3.

<sup>83</sup> International Crisis Group, “Saudi Backgrounder: Who are the Islamists?” 1.

<sup>84</sup> Moussalli, “Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism: Who is the Enemy?” 4.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

differentiate themselves from other Muslims (including other salafists) through their literal unorthodox understanding of God's attributes by associating human attributes to God, a point reinforced when Ibn Baz, the late Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, stated "the Prophet's Companions and their followers believe in a direction for Allah, and that is the direction of elevation, for the exalted is above the throne without giving an example and without entering into modality."<sup>87</sup> Orthodox Sunni Muslims do not share this opinion.

The Wahhabis also declared that all Shi'a and Sunni Muslim (non-Wahhabi) that do not follow in the path of the pious ancestors are subject to *takfir* (excommunication), essentially stating that all Muslims that did not follow Wahhabism were guilty of *shirk* (sin of polytheism).<sup>88</sup> This accusation had major implications as it allowed for "jihad against one's own people,"<sup>89</sup> which gave the Wahhabis the justification to kill other Muslims and to establish their own independent Islamic state resulting in a number of murderous campaigns that culminated in the establishment of the modern Saudi State (or Kingdom). With the creation of the modern state by Abd al-Aziz, "Wahhabism was then forcefully changed from a movement of a revolutionary jihad and theological *takfiri* purification to a movement of a conservative social, political, theological, and religious *da'wa* (call) and to justifying the institution that upholds loyalty to the royal Saudi family and the King's absolute power."<sup>90</sup> With the Wahhabi ulama (religious scholars) being effectively a state institution, they gave rise to the opinions of non-state Wahhabis that disagreed with the ulama on every issue and re-asserting the neo-Wahhabi perspective.

Moussalli dates the rise of this neo-Wahhabism to the aftermath of the Gulf War where a great deal of dissatisfaction existed with the Saudi monarchy and the ulama for their decision to request U.S. assistance in removing Iraq from Kuwait and for allowing these non-Muslim (or infidel) forces into Saudi Arabia. While the Neo-Wahhabism did wish to overthrow the Saudi monarchy and the Wahhabi ulama; it did, however, still share the fundamental doctrines and objectives of Wahhabism. A demand for reform of

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<sup>87</sup> Moussalli, "Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism: Who is the Enemy?" 6.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 7-8.



the system came from the religious scholars of Najd, who called for “the formation of a shura council, the review of the laws' compatibility with Islamic *shari'a*, the just distribution of public funds and the restructuring of media and of foreign policy, away from alliances (with non-Muslim) not sanctioned by *shari'a*.”<sup>91</sup> The neo-Wahhabi movement exercised both violent and non-violent means and evolved into sub-movements with different goals and stands on the various issues facing Islam in the modern world.<sup>92</sup> One such example is the group led by Muhammad al-Mas'ari, who fled to London to establish the “Salafists' first public tribune.”<sup>93</sup> This group would later be divided into three separate wings: “1) the Sa'd al-Faqih wing, representing the Brotherhood's line, 2) the Muhammad al-Mas'ari wing, forming the Legal Rights Committee in London, 3) the Osama Bin Laden wing, calling for revolutionary opposition.”<sup>94</sup> The last group, which found its origins in Afghanistan, was appalled to find that U.S. forces were occupying their holy land of Islam. This violation committed by the Saudi monarchy and the Wahhabi ulama would prompt Bin Laden to submit a letter protesting U.S. presence in Saudi Arabia. This letter, according to Moussalli, would be the foundation for which the neo-Wahhabi/neo-Salafist organization of al-Qaeda was formed.<sup>95</sup>

Although Moussalli seems to date the origins of the neo-Wahhabi movement to the post-Gulf war period, the author believes that evidence exists that shows the movement began even earlier and has just recently acquired global interests. He also believes the evidence can be found in The International Crisis Group (ICG) article, “Saudi Arabia Backgrounder: Who are the Islamists?,” which concludes that the multiple origins of Saudi Islamism can be divided into three sub-groups/strains: the Reformists,

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<sup>91</sup> Moussalli, “Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism: Who is the Enemy?” 9.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 10.

the Rejectionists and the Jihadists. These sub-groups/strains quite possibly may have been the foundation for the development of the Neo-Wahhabism movement, as described by Moussalli.

The reformist strain (al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya or Islamic Awakening) arose in the turmoil of religious activism of the 1970s and 1980s influenced by the influx of the exiled members of the Muslim Brotherhood. The reformist combined the traditional Wahhabism in matters of social issues and the contemporary Muslim Brotherhood (or Salafist) approach towards political issues.<sup>96</sup> “They distinguished themselves from the Wahhabi establishment by their willingness to discuss issues of contemporary significance rather than concentrate on abstract theological debates.”<sup>97</sup> The reformists, although not responsible for the seizing of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, consider it a turning point for the reformist movement. The Saudi government’s crackdown in the wake of this incident, unintentionally allowed the reformists to gain access to funds through their involvement in the educational system, which allowed for increased reformist participation in public debates. However, the reformists lacked a true united front, and as a result, fragmented into sub-strains assimilating back into Wahhabism and others into the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>98</sup>

The rejectionist’s strain is sometimes referred to as neo-Salafist, and at other times, confused with the reformers. The rejectionist’s central concern is not with the broader social, cultural or political issues, which were the reformer’s central concern, but more with the questions of individual faith, morals and ritual practices. The rejectionists are also opposed to the concept of a nation-state; however, their goal is not to destroy or oppose nation-states, but to break withdrawal from them, and at times, revolt against them. Like the reformists, the rejectionists were also fragmented and did not share a unified front or central organizational structure.<sup>99</sup> The rejectionists tended to operate in fringe communities withdrawn from society practicing “a very conservative, puritan

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<sup>96</sup> International Crisis Group, “Saudi Backgrounder: Who are the Islamists?” 2.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

lifestyle; and informal religious study circles, which rejected both the mosque-based Wahhabi and the school and university-centered Sahwa teachings.”<sup>100</sup> The most notable rejectionists were those of the al-Jamaa al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba (JSM), who was responsible for the seizing of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. In the aftermath of this event, what was left of the JSM took exile in other Muslim countries and some Islamist groups claim to be their heirs.

The jihadist’s strain is a result of Saudi Arabia’s active support of the Afghans in their war against the Soviet Union with the commitment of thousands of Saudis to fight in addition to the financial and logistic support provided. Those that participated were transformed into believing that they were part of culture of violent resistance. The Saudis would return from this conflict with a militaristic and violent worldview and greater understanding of politics outside of Saudi Arabia.<sup>101</sup> These Saudis also had the ability to travel in and out of Saudi Arabia freely, which gave them extensive access to Saudi youths to influence and recruit them to the jihadist cause. Many of these influenced youths would seek to obtain military training and combat experience, which led them to al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. The jihadist believed that the only way to enact political or social change was with violence, which was not shared by the reformists and rejectionists as a whole, but some of the rejectionists did drift towards more violent means of activism.<sup>102</sup>

Whether the neo-Wahhabi movement began in the 1970s or 1990s, two distinct facts remain clear when comparing neo-Wahhabism and Wahhabism. First, neo-Wahhabism and Wahhabism share the same fundamental beliefs, doctrines, practices and objectives. Second, the differences between the two groups were the methods or means that they employed to meet those objectives. The next section outlines the ideologies of Salafism and neo-Salafism, which have glaring similarities to Wahhabism and neo-Wahhabism and strengthens the case that these ideologies are interchangeable.

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<sup>100</sup> International Crisis Group, “Saudi Backgrounder: Who are the Islamists?” 3.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 3–4.

### C. SALAFISM/NEO-SALAFISM

Salafism is a modern movement that emerged in late 19th century under such key figures as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Abdu, and Rashid Rida, which were referred to as Islamic modernists. Their form of Salafism was fundamentally different from contemporary Salafism. These Salafists wanted to return to the *Qur'an* and *Sunna* as original sources to free them to innovate and incorporate Western ideals. Their logic was based on the belief that the *Qur'an* and *Sunna* are open to many interpretations, whereas the rulings by jurists from the *madhhabs*, were more constraining. They rejected *taqlid* (blind imitation) and called for opening the gates of *ijtihad* (new interpretations). The Salafism discussed in this section is contemporary Salafism practiced by Qutb and others, and not the original Salafism of al-Afghani, Abdu and Rida.

Salafism is an ideological religious movement united under a common belief system that provides principles and methods for addressing modern day issues and concerns confronting the Islamic world. Like Wahhabism, Salafism belief system finds its foundation in a strict adherence of the *tawhid*.<sup>103</sup> “Salafis believe that by strictly following the rules and guidance in the *Qur'an* and *Sunna* (path or example of the Prophet Muhammad) they eliminate the biases of human subjectivity and self-interest, thereby allowing them to identify the singular truth of God’s commands.”<sup>104</sup> They conclude from this belief that there is only one true interpretation of God’s message, their own, and that Islamic pluralism is non-existent. Again, like Wahhabism, Salafism shares a common religious belief and approach to jurisprudence, but divides into sub-groups based on how that belief and jurisprudence should be applied to modern issues and concerns.<sup>105</sup>

Three such sub-groups have emerged within the Salafi movement based on this differing opinion on applying their faith to modern issues and concerns. The first sub-group is the purists, who focus on the “nonviolent means of propagation, purification and

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<sup>103</sup> Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” *Taylor & Francis Group: Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29 (2006): 207.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 207–208.

education [of Islam] and view politics as a diversion that encourages deviancy.”<sup>106</sup> The second sub-group is the politicians, who advocate the melding of Salafi beliefs with politics. The final sub group is the jihadis, who assume the militant position of using violence to attain the goals set forth by their Salafi belief system. Before discussing these sub-groups further, it is important to understand the command belief system that they share first.<sup>107</sup>

All Salafis are united under a common belief system that acts as the core of their religious understanding and interoperations of Islam. This belief system is based heavily on the concept of *tawhid* that includes three components, which all Salafis believe must be met for one to be considered a true Muslim. First, Muslims must accept that there is only one true God and He is the creator and sovereign of the universe. Second, Muslims must accept that God is supreme and unique sharing no characteristics or traits with those that He has created. This means that all must adhere to the entire *shari’a*, which rejects human-made laws and secularism as it is a challenge to God’s authority. Finally, Muslims must accepted that God is the only one worthy of worship and that to worship others, even the Prophet, would be considered *shirk*.<sup>108</sup> All Muslims already share these doctrines and there is no unique contribution by the group in advancing these conditions.

In addition to the *tawhid*, Salafis believe that all aspects of human behavior and beliefs are to be governed by the *Qur’an* and *Sunna*, and to protect the *tawhid*, Muslims must maintain strict adherence to these doctrines. Salafis believe that any action or belief that violates these doctrines is a form of *bid’a* (innovation), which would threaten *tawhid*. For example, the use of or consulting any other doctrines results in a divergence from the straight path resulting in deviancy and sectarianism. The Salafis believe that they are the saved sect (*al-firqa al-najiyya*), and by holding true to these doctrines, they are granted

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<sup>106</sup> Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” 208.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 208–209.

salvation on the Day of Judgment.<sup>109</sup> As such, like the Wahhabis, the Salafis also “reject the imitation of earlier scholars (taqlid), following schools of jurisprudence, and other widely accepted instruments for rendering religious legal opinions.”<sup>110</sup>

Salafis believe that there are two dangerous challenges facing pure Islam in modern times. The first is human desires (or innovation) that threatens the purity of Islam’s message by the blending of local customs with Islamic traditions in an effort to aid with conversions when Islam spreads to new regions. Salafis mark culture as an enemy of pure Islam and make it part of their mission to eliminate the innovations created by culture. The second is the application of human intellect and logic (or interpretation) to the *Qur’an* and *Sunna* as these doctrines, in the eyes of the Salafis, are self-explanatory resulting in a rejection of religious pluralism. This rejection comes from the belief that interpretation strips God of his attributes and literal understanding would imply anthropomorphism. Therefore, the Salafism subscribe to a school of thought that understanding is to be achieved without understanding the how as God’s attributes are beyond human comprehension.<sup>111</sup>

As a result of these challenges, Salafis consider themselves in constant battle with rationalists (i.e., human intellect and logic) and human desires. This battle has placed a great emphasis on the studying of Islam and scholars, which some characterize the movement as a vast educational network. “Without scholars, religious knowledge and education wither, as does the Salafi mission to promote *tawhid*.”<sup>112</sup> Therefore, all the sub-groups recognize the importance of the centrality of the scholars, which results in their common belief system.<sup>113</sup>

The first sub-group is the purists (or the reformers) primarily concerned with maintaining the purity of Islam conveyed by the *Qur’an*, *Sunna* and the consensus of the Prophet’s companions. They believe that the goals of the Salafi movement should be to

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<sup>109</sup> Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” 209.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 210–211.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

promote their belief system and combating the deviating forces that threaten it by following the example set by the Prophet when he founded Islam. They consider that the introduction of politics or taking political actions before Islam is purified can only result in corruption and injustice, because society would be ignorant to understanding the tents of faith. Therefore, they follow a three-step method of implementation: 1) *da'wa* (propagation), 2) *tazkiyya* (purification) and 3) *tarbiya* (religious education or cultivation).<sup>114</sup>

The purists believe themselves to be the vanguards protecting the purity of Islam and *tawhid* with no political connotations attached. For this reason, some purists even reject the idea of Salafism as a movement. The purists believe that the West intends to destroy Islam and they responded to this by creating a nonviolent ideological campaign that eliminates Western logic from religious discussions. This nonviolent campaign has at times led to isolationism to remove the chance for non-believers and purists to interact, and thus, eliminating any chance of corruption or deviant influences to challenge the purity of Islam.<sup>115</sup> This isolationist attitude is justified by their belief that “if all knowledge and guidance are in the sources of Islam, nonbelievers offer nothing.”<sup>116</sup>

The purists also believe in distinguishing between the Salafi belief system and the method in which it is implemented. Purists believe that Islam should be implemented in the prophetic model, and to be a Muslim, it is necessary to execute both belief and method properly. It is from this point that their disapproval of the other two sub-groups stems, as their use of politics, political parties and democracy are considered to be a Western innovation, and therefore, a threat to true Salafism.<sup>117</sup> This critical view of the other sub-groups taken by the purists is based on their non-Islamic methods and results in two significant charges rendered against them by the purists. First, though they may understand and believe in the Salafi belief system, they fail to implement it utilizing the prophetic model. Second, they are viewed to be rationalists driven by human desire and

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<sup>114</sup> Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” 217.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 218–219.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 219–220.

implementing strategies without Islamic sources. This has resulted in the purists boycotting (*hajr*) their fellow Salafis and banning all forms of publications from either sub-group. The purists use this boycott as part of their strategy to purify Islam using the prophetic model.<sup>118</sup> The most prominent example of the purists in Islam today is the Wahhabi ulama of Saudi Arabia that ascribe to the purists' model of Salafism. This leads the author to conclude that the purists are representative of Salafism and the politicos and jihadis are most representative of neo-Salafism, which is identical to the divisions within Wahhabism.

The second sub-group, the politicos (or the rejectionist), claimed a greater understanding of modern issues and concerns in comparison to the purists, and are therefore, better suited to implement and apply the Salafi belief system in modern context. As Saudi Arabia avoided colonization, the priority for the purists (i.e., the Wahhabi ulama) was the purity of Islam and the politics were simply left to the rulers. It was not until the introduction of the Muslim Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia that the politicos were able to gain any influence or power. The brotherhood introduced a politically driven agenda into the purists' Saudi community, which encouraged the youth of the county to being inquiring about modern world events. The politicos believed it was their duty to engage in political discussions and to be critical of un-Islamic rulers and policies to expand their realm of influence and pass strictly religious matters while still holding true to their Salafi belief system. The politicos believed that truly to protect the purity of Islam, it was necessary to address political issues; otherwise, their rulers could destroy Islam.<sup>119</sup>

The *fatwa* issued by the purists (i.e., the Wahhabi ulama) during the Gulf War that allowed U.S. forces to enter and be based in Saudi Arabia is considered the point at which the politicos, for the first time, openly opposed the Saudi government and the ulama. The politicos claimed that U.S. presence on the Arabian Peninsula was an invitation for colonization. The politicos made it clear that they were not questioning the purists' beliefs, but rather, whether they truly understood the context for applying their

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<sup>118</sup> Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 220–221.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.



beliefs. The politicians charged the purists on this point as being isolated from world politics and lacked the knowledge or skills to issue *fatwas* on matters concerning politics.<sup>120</sup>

The politicians charged the purists with supporting rulers destroying Islam, which sparked a debate between the two sub-groups. The purists assumed the position that focusing on current affairs generated emotional responses, which in turn, would lead to deviance that would destroy *tawhid* and the purity of Islam. The politicians argued that purists lacked an understanding of the modern issues facing Islam, and therefore, lacked the context to implement Salafi beliefs properly to address current issues of jurisprudence.<sup>121</sup> This debate strengthens the division between the politicians and the purists and the politicians claims of being more knowledgeable with regard to current issues facing Muslims, and therefore, more qualified to implement the Salafi belief system better in the proper context.<sup>122</sup> The jihadis sub-group took on this debate as well, but they introduced violent militant action as a method for attaining results.

The final sub-group, the jihadis, gained their experience and power in exactly the same manner as the jihadis in the Wahhabism section above. The jihadis earned their experience and knowledge of jihad on the battlefields of Afghanistan, unlike their politico counterparts, who learned of jihad in discussions of the Ikhwan at their universities. The jihadis gained particular momentum and power after the Saudi crackdown on politicians in the post-Gulf war period. This allowed the jihadis the opportunity to fill the vacancy left by the politicians and openly oppose the purists for their allowance of U.S. forces into Saudi Arabia. The jihadis charged the purists with ignorance of the current state of affairs, and most of all, for misleading the people by being puppets of the regime, not protectors of the Salafi belief system. The jihadis conveyed this by referring to the ulama as the scholars of rulers (*al-ulama al-sulta*), effectively stating that the ulama were incapable of issuing *fatwas* without the approval

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<sup>120</sup> Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," 222–223.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

of the rulers, as they were part of the Ministry of Interior.<sup>123</sup> Jihadis claimed that these scholars “speak in their masters’ languages and in the concepts of the enemy of the umma (community).”<sup>124</sup> This constitutes the crux of the jihadis’ criticisms of the purists and the bases for which they made their judgments. The jihadis, like the politicians, were not challenging the purists on their Salafi beliefs, but more on their failure to address the injustices persecuted by the regimes that they supported and effectively failing to protect *tawhid* and Islam.

The divisions between Salafism and neo-Salafism, like the divisions between Wahhabism and neo-Wahhabism, are not based on differing opinions concerning the belief system, the doctrines used to justify that belief or the objectives and practices of those beliefs. The difference lies in the methods in which the belief system applies to the current issues facing the Muslim world. Vast similarities exist between the Wahhabi and Salafi belief systems; however, those similarities do not transfer to the methods in which they are implemented or executed by their respective sub-groups. Thus, the author is led to the conclusion, as supported by the opinions of the various Middle East experts presented in the introduction that these two ideologies are similar; however, they are not interchangeable. The next section evaluates the final ideology present in the Muslim world, Islamism.

#### **D. ISLAMISM**

Islamism focuses primarily on the political aspect assisted by Islam as a means of promoting a modern Islamic resistance. It centers on the Muslim Brotherhood’s goal of establishing an Islamic state as the first step in implementing the *shari’a*. The Islamists remain committed to their goals of returning to the fundamentals of Islam; however, they have selectively integrated aspects of Western political systems, such as constitutional

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<sup>123</sup> Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” 225–227.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

rule and democracy into their modern Islamic thought. This approach has been taken, as it is the belief of the Islamist that it is necessary to modernize their concept of an Islamic state.<sup>125</sup>

Islamism, like Wahhabism and Salafism, has splintered into distinct groups that share similar beliefs and objectives, but disagree on how to attain those objectives. These two groups are the moderates and the radical Islamists. The divide between these two groups developed under the leadership of Sayyid Qutb, as he rejected all dealings and intellectual openness with the West in the fulfillment of establishing an Islamic state.<sup>126</sup> He believed the Islamic state was not a tool, but a fundamental principle of belief as it signified “the community’s submission to God on the basis of *shari’a* and represents political and ideological obedience to God.”<sup>127</sup> He believed without this submission and obedience to God that any forms of Western political tools (constitutions, laws, etc.) were illegitimate and would result in a state that would decay into a *jahiliyya*. This opinion was further narrowed by the Ayatollah al-Khumayni, who claimed, “while *shari’a* theoretically legitimizes a government, only the rule of the jurist actualizes its legitimacy.”<sup>128</sup> The opinions expressed by Qutb and al-Khumayni constitute the ideological foundation of the radical Islamist movements, where as the moderate Islamist movements broke from Qutb and followed the beliefs presented by al-Banna’s concept of the Islamic state, constitutional rule and multi-party politics.<sup>129</sup>

As stated above, the major point of contention between the moderates and the radicals results from the “conditions and principles of transforming a religiously motivated political agenda into daily life.”<sup>130</sup> The radicals do not view the *shura* as a mere religious concept for promoting democratic ideals, such as individual freedom and social agreements, but it represents the public will in combination with the divine will.

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<sup>125</sup> Moussalli, “Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism: Who is the Enemy?” 23.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 23–24.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 27.

Radicals believe that any deviation from the divine will is a religious violation and that individual freedom is dependent on it. This interoperation does not allow for political contracts with rulers or governments, like the moderates, as it results in pluralism, which leads to disunity. Radicals believe that the fulfillment of this divine will, subordinating individuals and groups to the state, is the only means of establishing an Islamic state. The radicals' belief in the divine will implies that the state defines the public will as giving the state the authority to make the normative decisions in people's lives through the institutionalization of the *shura* and *ijma*. This concept also implies that the state is not answerable to its people, but only answerable to God or the *shari'a*, therefore making legitimacy an internal state function not open to public debate. This implies that as long as the state adheres to the *shari'a*, there is no legitimate justification for challenging or overthrowing the government of that state. The radicals in doing so have transformed individual religiosity into a moral and political state controlled common public will.<sup>131</sup>

The moderate Islamist ideology postulates that democracy and pluralism are religious rights and views their normative character as absolute. Their understanding of these Western political concepts is dependent on the modern interpretation of the sources of religion and the means of some basic doctrines, such as “*shura* (consultation), *ijma'* (consensus), *ikhtilaf* (difference), *ahl al-dhimma* ([non-Muslim] minorities), *hisba* (enjoining the good and forbidding evil), and similar doctrines;”<sup>132</sup> doctrines the radicals claim to be incompatible with such Western political concepts.

The moderates believe that political rule is a religious matter, because of the agreement and consent of the people, which is contrary to the Wahhabi and Salafi interpretations. The moderates also believe that arbitration was a choice of the people used to settle many significant events in Islamic history and like government; arbitration rests with “the people's contractual authority to shape and reshape its life.”<sup>133</sup> This belief in communal arbitration, although incontestable, was set aside in the pursuit of increasing

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<sup>131</sup> Moussalli, “Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism: Who is the Enemy?” 28.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

states power. The moderates believe that a possible return to this concept of communal arbitration might be a means to address the issues facing the Muslim world concerning the exercising of political power and the political legitimacy of rulers and states.<sup>134</sup>

The moderates believe that the doctrines of shura and ijma are the keys to religiously developing democratic notions (government and politics) in addition to human rights, because they remove the divine perception of political government by reducing its legitimacy to the consent of the people. The moderates believe that shura, like democracy, provides the religious legitimacy to maintain a government since its acceptance is drawn from the approval of the majority. They believe the implementation of ikhtilaf allows for the acceptance of pluralistic understanding of the diversity of religion and philosophy, but also the political aspects as well. The moderates believe that implementation of these doctrines could release the majorities from the thumbs of the minorities' currently in power and remove the tyranny that currently exists in the Muslim world. They believe these doctrines have been manipulated and corrupted by the current tyrannical/authoritarian government's political and religious elites as a means of securing their own political, social, religious and economic interests at the expense of the majority of the people, as in the case of Wahhabism and Salafism.

The moderates believe that the blending of Western political ideals and Islam is currently ongoing as it is a primary concern of modern Islamic political thought and the justifications for the current tyrannical/authoritarian are disappearing as they are obstacles in the effort to establishing free Muslim societies capable of leading good religious lives.<sup>135</sup> The moderates perceive this blending of religion and democracy in the form of the shura as a "quest for popular empowerment vis-à-vis the oppressive state."<sup>136</sup> This empowerment is solidified by the *Qur'anic* doctrines, as it is authenticated in the *Qur'an* and *Sunna*, and supersedes the coercive power utilized for legitimacy by modern tyrannical/authoritarian Muslim states. States that fail to seek the consent of the majority

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<sup>134</sup> Moussalli, "Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism: Who is the Enemy?" 28.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 25–26.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 27.

and oppose this empowerment are considered illegitimate.<sup>137</sup> The moderates believe that the causes of violence in these illegitimate states are due to the absence of a pluralistic society and democratic institutions within Islamic states removing the non-violent mechanisms that the people could employ to settle grievances.<sup>138</sup> Violence has been far replaced as a mechanism for the political participation and instead the moderates have transformed “modern jurisprudence into an ideologically derived political discourse.”<sup>139</sup> Individuals cannot achieve this discourse, only attainable through the mechanism of the state, and therefore, the only credible understanding is derived through shura in the form of politics, which is a concept dissimilar from those found in Wahhabism and Salafism.<sup>140</sup>

Although the arguments made above by Moussalli are sound in their own right, the ICG in *Understanding Islamism*, concludes that simply dividing Islamism into two groups, the moderates and the radicals, fails to address the diversity of outlook, methods and purposes that can actually be seen in Islamism.<sup>141</sup> The ICG first distinguishes between Shiite and Sunni Islamism. Shiite Islamism was founded during the 1979 Iranian Revolution, but since Shiites are normally a minority in most Muslim states, their movements have been communal in nature focusing on the needs of their specific community in relation to others and the state. This has resulted in Shiite Islamism remaining localized and small, which has allowed it to remain united, unlike their Sunni brothers. Sunni Islamism, the one most commonly associated with the term Islamism by the West, is characterized as conveying radical and fundamental rhetoric that threatens Western interests. However, this characterization is very monolithic in nature, as Sunni Islamism can be divided into three separate movements/groups: Political, Missionary and Jihadi.<sup>142</sup> Islamists share a common belief that “they found their activism on traditions

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<sup>137</sup> Moussalli, “Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism: Who is the Enemy?” 27.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> International Crisis Group, “Understanding Islamism,” *Middle East Report* 37 (March 2, 2005): 2.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, i.

and teachings of Islam as contained in scripture and authoritative commentaries.”<sup>143</sup> With this shared belief, all of the movements/groups share the common objectives of attempting to “reconcile tradition and modernity, to preserve those aspects of tradition considered to be essential by adapting in various ways to modern conditions; all select from tradition, borrow selectively from the West and adopt aspects of modernity.”<sup>144</sup> The divergence arises from how each movement/group envisions the primary issue facing the Muslim world and what they each believe is the necessary, possible and advisable method or means of achieving their collective objectives.<sup>145</sup>

The political Islamists are most represented by the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood and other similar political groups within the Muslim world. The political Islamists take issue with the mismanagement, injustice and poor governance of many of the Muslim states throughout the world calling for political reforms to be accomplished through the exercise of political activism.<sup>146</sup> Their purpose is to attain political power at a national level by accepting the concept of the modern nation-state, operating within the current political systems, avoiding violence (unless opposing foreign occupiers), conveying reformist vice revolutionary attitudes through the employment of democratic norms.<sup>147</sup> They give priority to political action vice religious proselytism and organize themselves into political parties rather than resorting to violence to attain their political power, as demonstrated by the Muslim Brotherhood, *Jamaat-i Islami* and the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP).<sup>148</sup> The political Islamists, through their various movements, have also proven that they are capable and inclined to accept modernist and democratic ideals.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> International Crisis Group, “Understanding Islamism,” 1.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., i.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., i–ii.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., ii.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., i.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 7.

The missionary Islamists are represented by two main variants: the Tablighi and Salafiyya movements. Both groups share the purpose of “preservation of the Muslim identity and the Islamic faith and moral order against the forces of unbelief, and the characteristic actors are missionaries (du'ah), and the ulama.”<sup>150</sup> The missionary Islamists take issue with the corrupting of Islamic values and the weakening of faith. They “give priority to a form of moral and spiritual rearmament that champions individual virtue as the condition of good government as well as of collective salvation.”<sup>151</sup> They avoid engaging in political activism and associating with political parties, as they do not seek any form of political power. They instead focus on preaching to restore or revive the faith and use this to preserve the unity of the community through upholding the moral order expressed in Islam.<sup>152</sup>

The jihadi Islamists, the group with which most Westerners associate all Islamism, are the militia or violent arm of Islamism that can be divided into three separate variants in how they execute the armed struggle. The first variant is the internals, who execute the jihad against corrupt or impious Muslim states or the “near enemy.” This variant of jihad has yet to produce any successful outcomes, which is important in understanding the final group. The second variant is the irredentists, who are determined to reclaim former Muslim lands either being ruled or occupied by non-Muslims. The final variant is the globalists, who are conducting a jihad against the West (specifically the U.S. and its allies) or the “far enemy.” The failure of the internals to claim any victory is considered a contributing factor in the rise of this last variant, which is being carried out by al-Qaeda and networks supported by them.<sup>153</sup> The jihadi Islamist, all variants, take issue with the political and military influences non-Muslims have over Muslim governments; therefore, placing their priority on armed resistance as the only means of removing such influence and protecting Islam from corruption.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> International Crisis Group, “Understanding Islamism,” i.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., ii.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., ii.



This section presented two differing opinions or representations of how Islamism can be interpreted. Regardless of expressing Islamism in terms of moderates and radicals or political, missionary or jihadi, it is possible to draw some conclusions. First, the moderates (or political) seem to be adaptable and inclined to work within current systems, accept democratic ideals and avoid the use of violence to attain these goals. Second, the radicals (or jihadis) seem to be the movement/group that poses the threat to the interests of current Muslim regimes and the West. Finally, based on these conclusions and conclusions made in previous sections, the enemy seems to stem from either neo-Wahhabism/neo-Salafism or radical Islamism. The next section compares these two ideologies in an attempt to determine which ideology had the strongest influence in the spread of the global jihad.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The war in Afghanistan against the Soviets (1979-1989) was the melting pot that brought the three major ideologies (Abdallah Azzam's Salafism, Osama Bin Laden's Wahhabism and Ayman al-Zawahiri's radical Islamism) together in one area for the first time. Radical Islamist, Wahhabi and Salafi militias from all over the Muslim world converged in a common goal of repealing the Soviet invaders from Muslim lands.<sup>155</sup> "The most notorious manifestation of that deadly combination is al-Qaeda along with its ideological and military affiliates that have spread throughout the Muslim world."<sup>156</sup> The neo-Wahhabis, neo-Salafis and radical Islamist ideologies that emerged from this melting can be classified under one name: *takfiri* jihadist. This new group has managed to imbed themselves in different parties becoming indirectly involved in different contexts representing a transformation of conflicting Islamic ideologies into one form of radical jihadism.<sup>157</sup> This chapter analyzed the three major ideologies (Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism) that exist in the Muslim world in an attempt to determine if Wahhabism was a

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<sup>155</sup> Moussalli, "Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism: Who is the Enemy?" 31.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

factor in the spread of the global jihad. Through the analysis of these three major ideologies, a number of conclusions can be made in an attempt to answer this question.

First, Wahhabism and Salafism are not interchangeable ideologies although they share a similar belief system that at times leads people to believe or support such expressions that “All Wahhabis are Salafis” and “Wahhabism is the Salafism of Saudi Arabia” are incorrect as the methods that each ideology implemented and executed are completely different.

Second, in general, Wahhabism has not spawned violent extremism, but a particular brand of Wahhabism known as neo-Wahhabism. Therefore, the spread of violent extremism can be linked more closely to neo-Wahhabism and neo-Salafism, because of the methods they employ to obtain their stated objectives and their ideological association with Osama bin Laden’s terrorist organization: Al-Qaeda. Radical Islamism, although theologically and politically very different from neo-Wahhabism and neo-Salafism, shares the same objectives and executes the same methods to achieve those objectives and they have merged together creating the *takfiri* jihadist. Wahhabism alone has not lead to the spread of the global terrorism. It has contributed through its splintered sub-groups of neo-Wahhabism/neo-Salafism that melded with radical Islamist’s ideologies creating global terrorism (i.e., *takfiri* jihadist).

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## IV. EXPORTING WAHHABISM

### A. INTRODUCTION

Initially, to maintain good relations with other Muslims states, the Saudi government would offer concessions or apologizes for the practices of Wahhabism, thereby alleviating their concerns in regard to the disposition of the two holy cities of Islam: Mecca and Medina. By the 1950s, this policy of apologizing to maintain Muslim alliance had ended, due mostly to Saudi Arabia's alliances with the British and later, the U.S. that rid them of their need to maintain their Muslim alliances. Combined with their new Western alliances, and the influx of the petrodollars from the oil discovered in the early twentieth century, gave the Saudis the power to withstand the criticisms emanating from moderate Muslim countries. This gave the Saudis complete control of the two holy cities, dominance over the brand of Islam practiced in the holy land and the power to exercise Wahhabism without modifying or moderating it. By the 1970s, a turning point occurred concerning Wahhabism that was currently only an internal affair for the Saudis. The Saudis, with their increased strength of the petrodollar, embarked on an aggressive campaign to export Wahhabism to the rest of the Muslim world. The assistance began initially as monetary support to various organizations and groups, classified by some to be fanatical, in various Muslim countries. By the 1980s, that backing had evolved into a much more sophisticated and comprehensive campaign. The Saudis established numerous proxy organizations that would distribute Wahhabi literature and Qur'ans translated into local dialects, created a vast network of financial support dedicated to publishers, *madrasas*, mosques, organizations and individuals that not only accepted Wahhabism, but also became its advocate. The result was a large number of Islamic movements, groups and organizations that would alter their messages to align themselves with Wahhabism to gain Saudi patronage.<sup>158</sup>

Kahled Abou El Fadl, in his book *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, outlines four major reasons why Wahhabism was able to survive and expand

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<sup>158</sup> Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, 69–70.

into contemporary Islam. First, Wahhabi rebellion against Ottoman rule set a powerful precedent for notions of Arab self-determination and autonomy that appealed to some of the Muslims that ascribed to the emerging ideologies of Arab nationalism. Second, Wahhabism avocation of returning to the early period of the “Rightly Guided” (al-salaf al-salih) was liberating to many Muslim reformers as it meant a rebirth of ijihad (process of making a legal decision by independent interpretation of the legal sources, the Qur'an and the Sunnah), which would remove all pervious interpretations, allowing for a fresh look at the original sources. Third, by controlling the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina, the Saudis acquired the ability to influence the scores of pilgrims participating in the hajj giving them the ability to influence and quite possibly control Islam’s belief system. Finally, the introduction of vast wealth of petrodollars afforded the Saudis the necessary funds to export Wahhabism aggressively and gain influence in the Muslim world in return for their patronage.<sup>159</sup>

It is not surprising that in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks that the Saudis would come under considerable scrutiny from the U.S. and other Western powers because of their aggressive campaign of exporting Wahhabism. The world was aware of the Saudi’s actions in the three decades prior, but now believed that their actions had spawned a radical and extremist ideology and apparatus of support that provided the terrorist the means in which to execute such attacks. This chapter examines the mechanisms (supporting jihadi movements, education, monopoly of media sources, financial support and terrorist associations) used in the exportation of Wahhabism and the accusations associated with each in an effort to determine the Saudi Arabian government’s involvement in the spread of global terrorism.

## **B. SUPPORTING JIHADI MOVEMENTS**

The Saudi’s support for the various jihadi movements or campaigns that have occurred throughout the Muslim world have to be separated into two categories: pre-11 September and post-11 September. The pre-11 September period encompasses Saudi support for the jihadi movements in Afghanistan (1979-1989) in the struggle against the

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<sup>159</sup> Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, 71–72.

Soviet invaders, support for the Taliban (1996–2001) and the other jihadi movements that occurred in other Muslim countries. The post-11 September period shows a decline of Saudi support, which some experts would call a complete 180-degree change in policy, for jihadi movements especially in Afghanistan (2001–present) and Iraq (2003–present).

First, it is important to understand how Wahhabis define jihad. Natana DeLong-Bas, in her book *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, provides the definition of jihad as understood by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. “Jihad is a *fard kifayah*, or collective duty, required by those who fulfill the requirements established by God: submission to Islam, maturity, financial ability, free (as opposed to slave) status, the intent to remember and serve God in this endeavor, and good moral character”<sup>160</sup> to be executed annually. A Muslim is obligated to participate in jihad except for periods of *hajj* (pilgrimage) or of peace and truce. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab continues to define the purpose of jihad as, “the protection and aggrandizement of the Muslim community as a whole, not personnel gain or glory.”<sup>161</sup> She claims that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab never defined jihad as an individual undertaking, as this is an adaption created by modern extremists and that his interpretation only required individuals to answer the call for jihad to fulfill duties.<sup>162</sup> An interpretation disputed by other experts as being an extremely blurred interpretation and contradicted by Wahhabis themselves. The first major call to jihad in the twentieth century would occur because of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

### **1. The Soviet-Afghan War (1979–1989)**

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the conflict that occurred as a result is viewed by many experts as the birthplace of Islamic extremism and the global terrorism. David Commins, in his book, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, also classifies this period as the “peak of Wahhabi-revivalist collaboration and triumph.”<sup>163</sup> It is important

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<sup>160</sup> DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 201.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 4.

to understand that this conflict was important to the Western world as it was part of the greater U.S.-Soviet Cold War. Cummins claims that because of this Western view of the conflict, what was overlooked or missed completely was “its function as a crucible for the synthesis of desperate Islamic revivalist organizations into loose coalition of likeminded jihadist groups that viewed the war as a struggle between Islam and unbelief,”<sup>164</sup> which took the relatively insignificant jihadist (prior to Afghanistan) and converted them into a major force in the Muslim world.

The jihadists were based out of Peshawar, Pakistan and were commonly known as the Peshawar Alliance. They received intelligence support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, recruiting assistance from Pakistani intelligence and weapons and money from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The Saudis benefited in two significant ways from involvement in this jihad. First, they gained favorable standing in Washington, D.C. for their involvement in the U.S. anti-communist campaign. Secondly, they were able to export their young militants to Afghanistan in the name of jihad. All told, approximately 35,000<sup>165</sup> Muslim participated in the conflict or were trained at one of the many established frontier schools and would later participate in future jihads. The exact number of Saudi volunteers is not known; however, estimates place the range at 12,000–25,000.<sup>166</sup> The leading Muslim in this conflict was Abdullah Azzam, who would be an important figure in influencing Osama bin Laden. Azzam, through the publication of *al-Jihad*, was able to spread the news of the conflict and the jihadi ideology to the rest of the Muslim world.<sup>167</sup> “Azzam considered the Afghan jihad a religious duty binding on all Muslims, not just those of Afghanistan,” which was in terms of Islamic law as a radical argument. Azzam takes the traditional definition of jihad, which is the definition expressed by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and modifies it. He asserts “jihad becomes the duty of each individual in that land and then in other lands if the Muslims enduring aggression

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<sup>164</sup> Cummins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 174.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 174–175.

prove unable to repel it alone.”<sup>168</sup> The philosophy was adopted by Bin Baaz, the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, as justification for Saudi involvement in other jihads throughout the Muslim world.

With the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the jihadists “interpret[ed] their victory as a sign of God’s favor and the righteousness of their struggle.”<sup>169</sup> A struggle that for ten years consumed the youth and energy of idealistic Muslims, some of which would return to their homes to join local Islamist groups in the struggles against their “apostate” governments and others, would continue the struggle in places such as Bosnia, Chechnya and Kashmir.<sup>170</sup> The Saudis would fill the ranks of both of these groups as they were transformed during the conflict, becoming part of the romanticized culture of violent resistance.<sup>171</sup>

The Saudi jihadist that traveled to Afghanistan had limited political exposure with no domestic agenda hostile towards the Saudi government. However, they would be exposed to a militaristic worldview while in Afghanistan; they would use this newly acquired worldview to influence the youth of Saudi Arabia fostering future participation of Saudis in jihadi movements. Saudi youths began seeking combat experience in the various jihadi movements and with Al-Qaeda once they had established themselves in Afghanistan under the protection of the Taliban. The experience gained by Saudi volunteers in Afghanistan created a Saudi culture of support for the various jihadi movements and government, such as the Taliban, in the post-Afghan war period.

## **2. The Taliban and Afghanistan (1996–present)**

The Taliban movement arose in 1993–1994 because of the power vacuum created by the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan.

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<sup>168</sup> Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 175.

<sup>169</sup> DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 267.

<sup>170</sup> Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 175-176.

<sup>171</sup> International Crisis Group, “Saudi Backgrounder: Who are the Islamists?” 3.



Many were former mujahedin who had become disillusioned with conflict among mujahedin parties and had moved into Pakistan to study in Islamic seminaries (“*madradas*”) mainly of the “Deobandi” school of Islam. Some say this Islam is similar to the “Wahhabism” that is practiced in Saudi Arabia. Taliban practices were also consistent with conservative Pashtun tribal traditions.<sup>172</sup>

The Taliban ruled through a harsh interpretation of Islamic law commonly associated with Wahhabism. David Commins claims that even though the Taliban received assistance from both the Saudi government and Wahhabi ulama, their movement emerged more from the Deobandi School and not Wahhabism.<sup>173</sup> Official Saudi involvement with the Taliban began in 1995, in which the Taliban regime lobbied a group of Saudi princes to extend assistance to them.<sup>174</sup> Saudi Arabia was one of only three countries (Pakistan and United Arab Emirates being the others) officially to recognize the Taliban as the official government of Afghanistan and was seen as a partner in Saudi Arabia’s anti-Iranian campaign. Saudi intelligence also worked with Taliban leaders to suppress anti-Saudi rhetoric being promulgated by Al-Qaeda. There was even discussion of a Saudi-Afghani panel to discuss the disposition of Osama bin Laden that never came to fruition.<sup>175</sup> During a visit by the Taliban’s leadership to Saudi Arabia in 1997, King Fahd “expressed happiness at the good measures taken by the Taliban and over the imposition of *shari’a* in our country.”<sup>176</sup> However, the Al-Qaeda’s attacks of September 11, 2001, led the Saudi government to break all ties with the Taliban and a reversal of Saudi policy towards support jihadi movements, although seen more in Iraq than in Afghanistan.

U.S. officials noted that the Saudi government cooperated fully, although not publically, with U.S. operations in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom) by allowing U.S. forces to use Saudi air bases to control U.S. aircraft (not U.S. air strikes) in

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<sup>172</sup> Kenneth Katzam, “Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy,” *Congressional Research Service Report to Congress RS21695* (June 18, 2009): 5.

<sup>173</sup> Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 191.

<sup>174</sup> Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay*, 56.

<sup>175</sup> Katzam, “Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy,” 52.

<sup>176</sup> Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay*, 57.

Afghanistan. Beginning in 2008, the Saudi government has engaged in the negotiations process between the Afghani government (lead by Hamid Karzai) and moderate Taliban leaders as a mediator in which they have strongly urged the Taliban leadership to seek reconciliation.<sup>177</sup>

### 3. Iraq (2003–present)

The role of Saudi jihadist (or militants) in Iraq is significantly different and more complex than previous involvements in jihadi movements of the past. Abd al-Muhsin al-Ubaykan, a government-affiliated member of the Wahhabi ulama, issued a fatwa (religious opinion) “declaring that the insurgency in Iraq amounts to fitna (sedition) and is illegitimate.”<sup>178</sup> This is most likely a reaction to the 2003 violence conducted by Al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (QAP). The Saudi government realized the security risk that jihadi war veterans posed to its government. The issue of Saudi participation was further complicated by the issuing of another fatwa in 2004, which stated that resisting U.S. occupation in Iraq was legitimate for the Iraq people. This fatwa made the insurgency lawful in the understanding it was a collective duty; however, it was not necessary for Saudis to participate. These conflicting and confusing *fatwas* issued by the government-affiliated ulama, not only confused the U.S. (a Saudi ally), but also Saudis themselves.<sup>179</sup>

Despite these *fatwas*, Saudis began entering Iraq in March 2003, with record arrests and martyrs reported in the summer of 2003. There was an influx that occurred in 2004. With the QAP losing its battle in Saudi Arabia, many of the jihadist opted to go to Iraq instead. However, their numbers would be slowed that same year with the Saudis increasing their border security to prevent the traffic in both directions. The actual number of Saudi participants, like in other jihadi conflicts, is highly disputed. Thomas Hegghammer has noted the number to be around 421 individuals. Although he claims

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<sup>177</sup> Katzam, “Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy,” 33 & 52.

<sup>178</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, “Saudi militants in Iraq: Backgrounds and Recruitment Patterns,” *Norwegian Defense Research Establishment* (February 5, 2007): 9.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

that his numbers are most likely incomplete, he does not assume there are more than 1,500 Saudis participating in the Iraqi insurgency. This is significantly less participation than has been seen by Saudis in other jihadi movements.<sup>180</sup>

In terms of the Saudis that have participated, their motives can be divided, according to Hegghammer, into two groups: altruistic and personal. Those altruistically motivated aligned with previous Saudi support for jihadi movements in that they are participating to liberate their fellow Muslims from U.S. occupation. Those personally motivated align more with the radical and extremist ideologies in that they wish to reach heaven through martyrdom. The majority of the Saudi participants seem less motivated by the idea of martyrdom.<sup>181</sup> It is also difficult, like determining their motives, to determine the actual role the Saudi jihadists have actually played in the insurgency. The Saudis have participated in the lower echelons of the insurgency and have been involved in a large number of the suicide attacks that have occurred through the insurgency.

The size and importance of the Saudi involvement in Iraq has been most likely overestimated, and with the exception of some of the suicide attacks, have had little to do with the overall strategy of the insurgence.<sup>182</sup> The change in the Saudi government's policy towards jihadi movements seems to be more of a reaction to the QAP's attacks (2003-2006) inside Saudi Arabia that threatened their domestic security than a proactive attempt to stem the tide of jihadi movements in the Muslim world.

### **C. EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Since the mid 1970s, the Saudis have executed, with the assistance of the petrodollar, a campaign of spreading Wahhabism in the form of educational religious study in both *madrasas* (schools) and mosques throughout the Muslim world. This campaign has drawn a great deal of scrutiny in the post-11 September world. The majority of the assumptions and accusations stem from the idea that the Saudi suicide terrorist (hijackers) who participated in the September 11, 2001 attacks were

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<sup>180</sup> Hegghammer, "Saudi Militants in Iraq: Backgrounds and Recruitment Patterns," 10–11.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

representatives of the Saudi educational system that promulgates messages of hatred towards non-Muslims and links to Al-Qaeda.<sup>183</sup> It has been suggested in some studies that Wahhabi (or Saudi) domestic and abroad *madradas* promote a religiously based curriculum intolerant of other religions and cultures.<sup>184</sup> Other accusations have declared that the curriculum taught in *madradas* and mosques has fostered extremist and radical thinking adopted by various terrorist groups. In 2002, a Center for Strategy and International Studies (CSIS) report indicated that “some Saudi textbooks taught Islamic tolerance while others viciously condemned Jews and Christians...[and] use rhetoric that was little more than hate literature.”<sup>185</sup> In 2005, Freedom House’s Center for Religious Freedom referred to the literature being distributed from Saudi *madradas* and mosques amount to nothing less than “hate ideology.”<sup>186</sup> “The system and its underlying ideology have been accused of contributing to anti-western sentiments and of providing fertile ground for Islamic extremism.”<sup>187</sup> The Wahhabi educational system was designed to create a sense of loyalty, obedience and the duty of spreading and defending the Wahhabi message.<sup>188</sup>

Education should 'promote a spirit of loyalty to Islamic law by denouncing any system or theory that conflicts with it and by behaving with honesty and in conformity with Islamic tenets'; it should 'awaken the spirit of Islamic struggle, fight our enemies, restore our rights, resume our glory and fulfill the mission of Islam' and 'project the unity of the Muslim nation.'<sup>189</sup>

## 1. Evolution of Wahhabi Education

Traditional Wahhabi education evolved from the model of learning that occurred in medieval Muslim societies with the purpose of “transmitting the eternal truths about

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<sup>183</sup> Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 122.

<sup>184</sup> Blanchard, “The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya,” 4.

<sup>185</sup> “Saudi Arabia: Opposition, Islamic Extremism, and Terrorism,” *Report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies* (November 27, 2002): 18.

<sup>186</sup> Blanchard, “The Islamic Traditions of Wahhabism and Salafiyya,” 5.

<sup>187</sup> Michaela Prokop, “Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Education,” *International Affairs* 79, no. 1 (January 2003): 77.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

God, His creation, man's place in creation and so forth."<sup>190</sup> This was achieved through a deep familiarity with the Qur'an and Sunna as the primary sources of belief and conduct. A study of various languages was offered to ensure students would have a proper understanding of the primary sources and arithmetic was included to ensure students could calculate inheritances and *zakat* (alms) payments in accordance with *shari'a* (Islamic religious law). The instruction of students initially took place in mosques, teacher's homes or workshops. In the twelfth century, *madrasas* were formed as institutions dedicated to study; however, it was not until after the eighteenth century that the majority of students would be trained in *madrasas*. Students would be issued *ijaza* (permission) that qualified them to teach others what they had learned.<sup>191</sup>

This was the educational system where Ibn Abd al-Wahhab received his instruction and the method that he employed to spread his teachings.<sup>192</sup> The Wahhabis utilized the same standard sources with regard to teaching the subject of Arabic, sciences, arithmetic and Hanbali law, but when it came to theology, they used Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's Book of God and other sources that refuted the challenges made against Wahhabi teachings. The Wahhabi ulama would maintain this method of teaching and content well into the twentieth century. Modernization of the educational system did not occur until around 1920, when Ibn Saud decided it was necessary for Saudis to be educated in subjects that addressed other cultures, languages and modern sciences. Hafiz Wahbah, head of the Directorate of Education, was able to overcome the Wahhabi ulama's opposition, with the king's support, allowing him to introduce these modern subjects into the current Wahhabi curriculum.<sup>193</sup> The push for modernization would intensify with the discovery of oil and the formation of the state institutions in the modern era.

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<sup>190</sup> Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 123.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

The oil industry, ARAMCO, and the state's newly established governmental institutions, demanded that Saudis receive a broader and higher quality of education that would provide them the skills necessary to perform jobs in modern industry and government. To obtain support from the Wahhabi ulama, which was necessary to fund the needed improvements, required that the new curriculum (examined in greater detail later in this section) still be dominated by religious study. The purpose of the modern education system was to "achieve mass literacy, to create a uniform national system of schools, exams and textbooks and to incorporate science, foreign languages and social studies into the curriculum."<sup>194</sup>

In 1953, King Saud Ibn Abd al-Aziz ordered the education systems within the kingdom merged together under the central control of the Ministry of Education as a first step in meeting the goals of modernization set forth by his predecessor, King Saud.<sup>195</sup> By 1958, substantial allocations of the national budget were dedicated to the improvement of education and the spread of elementary education to the smaller provincial towns. In 1957, higher education would be introduced into the educational system with the establishment of King Saud University (originally Riyadh University). The Wahhabi ulama established the Islamic University in Mecca in 1961, as an alternative to King Saud's and other Arab universities secular curriculums. The 1970s, with the introduction of the petrodollars from the oil boom, allowed for the building of hundreds of *madrasas* and the hiring of thousands of teachers, which resulted in over half the Saudi population becoming literate.<sup>196</sup>

## **2. The Curriculum, Textbooks and Teaching Methods**

The content of the curriculum at all levels of the education system is dominated by religious study. The main focus of this religious study is on the *Qur'an*, *tawhid* (declaration of oneness of God), *tajwid* (recitation), *tafsir* (interpretation of the *Qur'an*), hadith (record of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet) and *fiqh* (jurisprudence). The

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<sup>194</sup> Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 122.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

amount of time dedicate to the study of these religious subject varies depending on the level of education required to dedicate a percentage of their weekly school hours to the study of religion such as elementary school (30 percent), intermediate school (24 percent), secondary school (14–35 percent), secular universities (10–15 percent) and religious universities (40–45 percent). Three of seven of the Saudi’s main universities are dedicated to religious studies. All students are required in their first year of school to take an Islamic ideology course designed to fortify their beliefs in the Wahhabi belief system and renouncing of all other “godless ideologies.”<sup>197</sup>

The goal of teaching history as part of the curriculum is to unify the population under a common Saudi identity. The history taught ignores the histories of non-Najd, to include the histories of the Hijaz and the Shi’a. It glorifies the exploits of Ibd Saud in unifying the tribes and country and returning all Muslim of the Arabian Peninsula to the orthopraxy of Islam, but eliminates any mention of the battles, massacres and bloodshed that accompanied this unification. The history taught also glorifies the early Islamic Empires, but fails to address contemporary issues and events such as Nasserism, pan-Arabism, revolutions in neighboring Muslim countries or even the Gulf War.<sup>198</sup>

Wahhabism greatly influences the textbooks’ content and is strictly regulated by the Wahhabi ulama. The sections dedicated to the teaching of other cultures, ideologies and religious is divided into two groups: believers (those that follow Wahhabism) and *kuffar* (unbelievers or those who do not follow Wahhabism). The references to the “People of the Book” (i.e., Christian and Jews) is full of contradictions with one side claiming that peace and friendship should be extend, and on the other hand, declaring that jihad should be waged against them. Further, there are contradictions concerning the practice of jihad and the concept of Islam as a religion of peace. The belief systems of the Shi’a and Sufi were, until 1993, openly denounced in all textbooks as *bid’a* (innovation). Textbooks also blame countries of unbelievers for encouraging *bid’a* and tarnishing religion; especially, accusing the Iranians for inciting unrest or rebellious attitudes in Saudi Shi’a. This rhetoric against the Shi’a has been removed from official

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<sup>197</sup> Prokop, “Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Education,” 79.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

textbooks, but is still present in books distributed by Saudi sponsored mosques both at home and aboard.<sup>199</sup> The content of textbooks also teaches of Jewish and American conspiracies that claim they are attacking Islam.<sup>200</sup>

The content and curriculum conveyed in the textbooks is reinforced by the methods use to teach it. The rote learning method (a technique that avoids understanding of a subject and instead focuses on memorization) is employed in teaching religious subjects.<sup>201</sup> “This philosophy of teaching inculcates passivity, dependence, an a priori respect for authority and an unquestioning attitude.”<sup>202</sup> This system limits student/teacher interactions, discourages the debating of curriculum subjects or current issues and limits creative or analytical thought as a means of learning.<sup>203</sup> However, students are not just limited to the public schools as mediums for learning. Students also are educated in their mosques, homes and by the media almost to an equal degree and referred to at times as the hidden curriculum. This creates a divide between the education received by students in the public schools and those that receive this private education, which at times, can be more conservative.<sup>204</sup>

### **3. Exporting the Curriculum**

Saudi Arabia is involved with the exportation of Wahhabism in the sphere of education in a number of ways, which includes “building and funding new mosques, Islamic cultural centers, schools and universities, as well as providing generous scholarships and assistance to perform the hajj.”<sup>205</sup> There is also a great deal of influence spread through the distribution of Wahhabi versions of the Qur’an and other religious texts. There are two main reasons related to power considerations for exporting Wahhabi teachings: political and religious rivalry with Iran or other challenging Muslim countries

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<sup>199</sup> Prokop, “Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Education,” 80–81.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 83.



and to placate internal religious dissent. This allowed the Saudi government to contain and control any domestic opposition by diverting their attentions to educating the unbelievers in other Muslim countries.<sup>206</sup>

This policy of exportation did come with domestic and international consequences. On the domestic front, the returning Arab Afghans, educated in the Wahhabi system and sent to fight in the jihad in Afghanistan, began to return and view the Saudi government's alliances with Western powers, particularly allowing U.S. troops to be stationed in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War, as a reason to declare a jihad against the Saudi government.<sup>207</sup> On the international front, the influx of Wahhabism into other countries often created friction and conflict with local officials and particular aspects of Wahhabism, in the form of neo-Wahhabism, have been adopted by extremist and radical groups that have engaged in local, regional and international terrorism.<sup>208</sup>

#### **4. Reforming the Curriculum**

The education system has been plagued with numerous problems such as “poorly trained teachers, low retention, lack of rigorous standards, weak scientific and technical instruction and excessive attention to religious subjects,”<sup>209</sup> which has amplified admissions to religious universities resulting in Saudi graduates that do not have the complete skills to compete in either the domestic or international job markets.<sup>210</sup> Although most Saudis recognize the need for education reform to improve their economic opportunities, they have chosen to defend their system of education against external criticism of the system supporting extremism.<sup>211</sup> Reforms to the educational system are most likely to be met by strong opposition from the ulama and be extremely slow to be

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<sup>206</sup> Prokop, “Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Education,” 83.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>209</sup> Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 128.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Prokop, “Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Education,” 77.

enacted, if at all. The ulama views changes to the curriculum as a sign of weakness by the Saudi government and their willingness to placate U.S. desires and would weaken Wahhabi influence abroad.<sup>212</sup>

The resistance to change does have a positive aspect associated with it as “it may provide a starting point for a dialogue among various stakeholders that will be important not only in respect of curriculum development but also for the emergence and involvement of a more active civil society.”<sup>213</sup> Then Crown Prince, now King Abdullah, has called the “events of 11 September as an opportunity for self-scrutiny.”<sup>214</sup>

#### **D. EXPORTING FINANCES**

In conjunction with support of jihadi movements and the exportation of Wahhabi education, the Saudis distributed funds throughout the Muslim world to support these efforts. The majority of financial support was dispersed through two sources: Islamic charities (Saudi sponsored and private) and private Saudi donors. The intended usage of these funds was to support the building of mosques and *madrasas*, Islamic centers and support humanitarian efforts; however, allegations of funds being diverted to extremist and radical terrorist groups arose in the wake of the 11 September attacks. The 9/11 Commission report released in July 2004 concluded the following:

[N]o evidence that the Saudi government as an institution or senior Saudi officials individually funded [Al-Qaeda]...[however, that Saudi Arabia] was a place where Al-Qaeda raised money directly from individuals and through charities,” and indicates that “charities with significant Saudi government sponsorship.”<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Prokop, “Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Education,” 89.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Christopher M. Blanchard, “Saudi Arabia: Terrorist Financing Issues,” *Congressional Research Service Report to Congress RL32499* (September 14, 2004), 2; “National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States,” *The 9/11 Commission Report* (July 22, 2004).

There have also been allegations originating from the U.S. Department of Treasury in July 2005, accusing the private Saudi donors of being a significant source of financial support for the Sunni insurgency in Iraq.<sup>216</sup>

### **1. Islamic Charities and Charity Oversight**

Charitable (alms) giving is one of the five pillars of Islam and an obligation for all Muslims. Contributions amongst Muslims may vary, but on average, Muslims donate 2.5 percent of their annual income to mosques, charities, relief organizations to support various projects throughout the Muslim world. The Saudi government estimated (in 2004) that approximately 100 million dollars of charitable donations were directed to causes abroad.<sup>217</sup> The exact amount of these funds diverted to terrorist groups is currently in dispute. However, an Indonesian Intelligence official has estimated that 15-20 percent of the charitable donations have been diverted.<sup>218</sup>

Zachary Abuza suggests, in *Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Financial Network of Al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah*, that groups like Al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), were able to divert these funds because they had placed operatives within the leadership of various Islamic charities in the late 1990s.<sup>219</sup> He estimates that Saudi-based charities have actually distributed over 10 billion dollars worldwide in support of their “Wahhabi-Islamist agenda” and that the Saudi government is either complicit or negligent.<sup>220</sup>

Approximately over 300 private Islamic charities have established their base of operations in Saudi Arabia. A Canadian intelligence report estimated that 1-2 million dollars were diverted to Al-Qaeda, whereas the U.S. National Security Council holds that 300-500 million dollars have been diverted to Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups from

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<sup>216</sup> Blanchard, “Saudi Arabia: Terrorist Financing Issues,” 8.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>218</sup> Zachary Abuza, “Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Financial Network of Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah,” *The National Bureau of Asian Research* 14, no. 5 (December 2003): 22.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

Saudi charities. Four major Saudi charities (Islamic International Relief Organization (IIRO), the Al Haramain Foundation, the Medical Emergency Relief Charity (MERC), and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY)) have been suspected of diverting their funds to extremist or radical terrorist groups.<sup>221</sup>

It is doubtful that the central leadership of many of these charities has set out to assist terrorists, but there is a surprising lack of knowledge of what their branch offices are doing on the ground, and paltry oversight of how their funds are actually being used and allocated.<sup>222</sup>

The Saudi government, in response to considerable U.S. pressure, disbanded the Al Haramain Foundation after evidence of their association with Al-Qaeda, specifically one of their employees, of the attacks on the U.S. embassies in Africa in 1998.<sup>223</sup>

In 2002, the Saudi government announced it was establishing a government body, High Commission for Oversight of Charities, which would assume responsibility for reforming all Saudi-based Islamic charities. In 2003, the Saudi government enacted new banking regulations that prohibited private charities and relief groups from distributing funds overseas; however, these regulations did not address multilateral Saudi-based charities such as the Muslim World League (MWL), the IIRO, or the WAMY. In 2004, King Fadh established the Nongovernmental Commission on Relief and Charity Work Aboard, which would regulate all private charitable contributions earmarked for distribution to overseas locations.<sup>224</sup> As of 2007, none of the above-mentioned commissions had been established and the Saudi government claimed it was working through the remaining legal and financial obstacles standing in the way of the commissions being made operational.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Abuza, "Funding Terrorism in Southeast Asia: The Financial Network of Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah," 23–24.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>223</sup> Blanchard, "Saudi Arabia: Terrorist Financing Issues," 19.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

## **2. Unresolved Issues**

In addition to concerns related to funds being diverted from Islamic charities, there is also concern for donations made by private donors and currency controls. Daniel Glaser, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes, stated before the U.S. Senate committee on the Judiciary “while current regulations take account of the financial activities of charitable concerns, they do not apply to direct donations made by private donors.”<sup>226</sup> No high profile or elite donors have been charged or prosecuted by Saudi Arabia, the U.S. or any other international judicial authority. Therefore, this source of potential funds to be diverted still remains unregulated.

Even though new banking regulations have been enacted, loopholes still remain concerning currency conversions and cash couriers. Saudi officials have been urged to require more information for all international currency transactions and to regulate currency being transported across their borders. However, Saudi customs officials still do not use declaration forms, and therefore, have no mechanism of enforcement. This lack of regulation of these private funds is a concern for the U.S. as reports have suggested that much of the funding for the Iraqi insurgency comes via these sources.<sup>227</sup>

## **3. U.S. Assessment of Saudi Counterterrorist Financing Efforts**

In April 2008, Stuart Levey, Undersecretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, made the following statements concerning Saudi Arabia’s effort towards combating terrorist financing.

Saudi Arabia is serious about fighting Al-Qaeda in the kingdom, and they do, but that the seriousness of purpose with respect to the money going out of the kingdom is not as high...Saudi Arabia today remains the location from which more money is going to terror groups and the Taliban—Sunni terror groups and the Taliban—than from any other place in the world.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> Blanchard, “Saudi Arabia: Terrorist Financing Issues,” 26.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>228</sup> Christopher M. Blanchard, “Saudi Arabia: Backgrounder and U.S. Relations,” *Congressional Research Service Report to Congress RL33533* (April 30, 2009): 9.

However, there has been a general concession among many U.S. agencies that the Saudis are taking the necessary steps to combat terrorist financing, but the process is moving slowly and there is still a considerable amount of work remains to be accomplished to make their system of regulation effective. The U.S. State Department noted in the 2009 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report that Saudi Arabia still “continues to be a significant jurisdictional source for terrorist financing worldwide” and that they needed to do more to stem the flow of unregulated funds coming out of Saudi Arabia.<sup>229</sup> The Saudis to date still have not made operational any of the commission mentioned above and their level of commitment to combating the flow of terrorist funds coming from Saudi sources still remains to be seen.

#### **E. MONOPOLY OF MEDIA SOURCES**

A major part of the Saudis campaign of exporting Wahhabism was the effort they extended to control all media sources and scholarship in the Muslim world. Saudi Arabia established a complex worldwide system of financial incentives with the purpose of promoting governments and Muslim leaders to advocate Wahhabism or simply to refrain from any criticism of it. The system also was in place to control the vast media sources such as television radio news and published religious *fatwas*, newspapers, academic papers and books.<sup>230</sup> Saudi influence, both direct and indirect, was exerted through the largely Saudi-owned Arab media and publishing companies such as *Al-Sharq*, *Al-Awsat*, *Al-Hayat*, *Al-Muslimun*, *Al-Majalla*, the Middle East Boardcast Company and Orbit Satellite Television.<sup>231</sup> Individuals also targeted were “writers and imams espousing pro-Wahhabi positions would qualify for very lucrative contracts, grants and awards.”<sup>232</sup> The Saudis would also promise authors that they would make considerable larger purchases of

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<sup>229</sup> Blanchard, “Saudi Arabia: Backgrounder and U.S. Relations,” 8-9.

<sup>230</sup> Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, 87–88.

<sup>231</sup> Prokop, “Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Education,” 84.

<sup>232</sup> Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, 88.

their book to ensure them a profit and entice them to take a pro-Wahhabi position. This was most apparent in the 1980s and 1990s when known liberalist and rationalist authors published books praising and defending Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.<sup>233</sup>

This control over the various sources of media in the Muslim world was made possible for two main reasons: 1) Gamal Abdel Nasser's death also ended his effective anti-Saudi propaganda and 2) the influx of petrodollars in the late 1970s gave the Saudis the necessary capital to execute this campaign of media control. This reason also contributed to the Saudis gaining political control of the Leagues of Arab states as well, opening up avenues into the various Arab countries media market with promises of financial aid.<sup>234</sup>

The dominating control that the Saudis have had over Muslim media sources since the late 1970s may be ending. The introduction of mass global communications, the Internet, independent news outlets (i.e., *Al-Jazeera*) and other mediums for disseminating massive amounts of information have opened the flood gates for uncensored and diverse information, opinions and debates to enter the Muslim world.<sup>235</sup> This has weakened the Saudi's ability to suppress criticism of Wahhabism and the Saudi state and to influence the rest of the Muslim world. The true impact of this communications revolution still remains to be seen and its impact on the Saudi people is still undetermined as the Saudi government still maintains control of the media, through censorship, inside Saudi Arabia.

## **F. OSAMA BIN LADEN AND AL-QAEDA**

The events of September 11, 2001 was the culmination or grand finale for a string of Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks that began with the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, which was followed by the 2000 attack on the USS Cole (DDG 67) in Aden Harbor in 2000.<sup>236</sup> What made the attacks on September 11 different, other

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<sup>233</sup> Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists*, 88.

<sup>234</sup> Abu Khalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia: Royalty, Fundamentalism, and Global Power*, 33–34.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>236</sup> Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 185.

than the severe loss of life and property, was that of the 19 suicide terrorists, 15 and the leader of Al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, who had claimed responsibility for the attacks, were all Saudi nationals. These facts and questionable Saudi practices with regard to Islamic charities, support for jihadi movements and exportation of Wahhabism, lead U.S. politicians, citizens, academics, as well as others outside the U.S., to make the assumptions that Saudi Arabia must have been in some way involved in the attacks and with Al-Qaeda. These assumptions have damaged the long-standing relationship that the U.S. has had with Saudi Arabia since the early 1930s. Some experts even believe that bin Laden specifically chose Saudis to be the suicide terrorist to create such a divide between the two countries.<sup>237</sup> “Osama bin Laden’s Saudi ties and support for Al-Qaeda among religious circles in the Kingdom created the impression that Wahhabism is a major factor in fomenting religious violence in many parts of the world.”<sup>238</sup>

In 1980, the mujahidin forces fighting in the war opposing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, supported primarily by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the U.S., pressured the Saudi royal family to send a leader for the contingent of Saudi fighters, mostly consisting of lower-class Saudis, political dissidents and militants. Osama bin Laden would be selected as the commander of this contingent for three reasons: 1) No member of the royal family volunteered for the task, 2) Bin Laden at the time of his selection had close relationship with the royal family, and 3) Bin Laden’s making his considerable assets available ensured the Saudis would be well represented in the campaign.<sup>239</sup> Bin Laden’s reputation amongst the Afghans, Arabs and fellow Muslims grew as he engaged in direct combat with the Soviets, demonstrating his commitment to the cause despite the fact that he was a member of the Saudi elite. He also contributed to the campaign through building roads, medical centers, training camps and ammo depots. With the Soviet defeat in 1989, Bin Laden and his fellow mujahidin fighters believe their victory was a sign from Allah (God) that their course was just and righteous.<sup>240</sup> The victory left Bin Laden

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<sup>237</sup> Blanchard, “Saudi Arabia: Backgrounder and U.S. Relations,” 6.

<sup>238</sup> Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 185.

<sup>239</sup> DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 201.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.



with a sense of vindication and a belief that the struggle against similar enemies worldwide would be necessary “in order to establish a truly global community of the faithful.”<sup>241</sup> In 1989, he would form Al-Qaeda as a means of continuing the jihad against the infidels outside of Afghanistan.<sup>242</sup> Bin Laden decided to return to Saudi Arabia when Afghanistan began to fall into a state of civil war. It is in Saudi Arabia where he would begin to speak publically of the exploits of the Afghan jihad and encourage the boycotting of U.S. products.

In 1990, when Saddam Husain’s forces invaded Kuwait, Bin Laden offered his services and his force of Afghan fighters to defend Saudi Arabia from possible invasion from Iraq. The King, of course, refused such a request and instead invited the U.S. and its coalition partners into Saudi Arabia to defend its borders and conduct operations to remove Iraqi forces from Kuwait. This decision by the King would enrage Bin Laden and he would align himself with other dissidents such as Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Awda. His chief complaint was with the King’s decision to allow infidels into the Muslim holy land and with the Wahhabi ulama for supporting the King’s decisions. He would declare the King apostate and call for his abdication. He would challenge Abd al-Aziz Ibn Baz, Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia (1993-1999), directly for supporting the King’s decision concerning the U.S. and negotiating for possible peace with Israel.<sup>243</sup> “He accused Ibn Baz of straying from Islam in order to please his masters, Al Saud.”<sup>244</sup>

Bin Laden’s open dissent led him to relocate to Sudan in 1992, under the protection of the Islamic regime that came to power in 1989. From his base in Sudan, he would continue his campaign of challenging Saudi Arabia and also of supporting the various jihadi movements occurring in Chechnya, Tajikistan, Bosnia and the Philippines.<sup>245</sup> His continued criticism of Saudi Arabia resulted in the revocation of his

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<sup>241</sup> DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 267.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 267–268.

<sup>243</sup> Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 187.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

Saudi citizenship in 1994.<sup>246</sup> In 1996, the Sudanese government, under pressure from the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, would expel him for his suspected involvement in the bombing of the National Guard barracks in Riyadh. He would settle in Afghanistan, under the protection of the Taliban, and would issue is “Declaration of War against the Americans occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places.” In 1998, he issued a fatwa against the U.S., declaring that all Americans were complicit in the U.S. plans to destroy Islam, which would be followed by the string of attacks on U.S. targets culminating in the attacks of September 11, 2001.<sup>247</sup>

### 1. Is Wahhabism the Ideology of Al-Qaeda?

David Cummins believes that “the ideology of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda is not Wahhabi.”<sup>248</sup>

It is instead a part of contemporary jihadist tendency that evolved from the teachings of Sayyid Qutb and took shape in the Egyptian militant groups that appeared in the 1970s and spread in the 1980s, thanks in large measure to the Afghan jihad. In other words, al-Qaeda belongs to an offshoot of twentieth century Muslim revivalist ideology, not Wahhabism.<sup>249</sup>

DeLong-Bas agrees with Cummins’s assessment. She would classify Al-Qaeda as a member of the Jihadist group; therefore, concluding that their ideology is an offshoot of Salafism, not Wahhabism, with their main focus of concern on the “exercise of jihad as military engagements in the defense of Muslims worldwide.”<sup>250</sup> Muhammad Ayoob, on the other hand, concludes, “[it] is a marriage between Qutbist political ideas and the innate Puritanism and conservatism of the Wahhabi doctrine.”<sup>251</sup> Ahmad Moussalli, supports the Ayoob definition with his conclusion that Al-Qaeda’s ideology is neo-

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<sup>246</sup> Blanchard, “Saudi Arabia: Backgrounder and U.S. Relations,” 6.

<sup>247</sup> Cummins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 188–189.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 293.

<sup>251</sup> Ayoob, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World*, 58.

Wahhabi/neo-Salafist.<sup>252</sup> This argument concerning the origins of Al-Qaeda's ideology continues to have opposing expert opinions from both sides. Although the evidence does not definitively point to either side as being correct, the author believes that Wahhabism, through neo-Wahhabism, somewhat influence how it was developed. Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda ideology would evolve more from his experiences in the Afghan jihad and his reaction to the Gulf War.

## **G. CONCLUSION**

The Saudis embarked, with the aid of petrodollars, on a campaign in the late 1970s to export Wahhabism as a means of establishing themselves a hegemonic force in the Muslim world mainly to compete with Iran and to fulfill the objective of defeating the Soviets in Afghanistan. They created vast financial networks that supported various jihad movements throughout the Muslim world, built mosques, community centers and *madradas* in other Muslim lands to spread their Wahhabi ideology through education and influenced Muslim governments and media sources through patronage to support their Wahhabi message. Although it is impossible to conclude definitively based on the current information available of the extent of Saudi or Wahhabi involvement in the rise and spread of global terrorism, it can be concluded that whether intentional or unintentional, their campaign of exportation had one grave consequence. Their campaign of spreading Wahhabism, more about promoting Saudi influence in the Muslim world than spreading Wahhabi ideology, created an environment that for approximately 30 years, whether directly or indirectly, supported the spread of extremist ideologies and provided Bin Laden with the necessary resources and atmosphere to establish Al-Qaeda as the threat it has become today to the U.S. and Saudi Arabia alike. Therefore, it was not Wahhabism that created this environment; it was Saudi government's desire to spread their influence throughout the Muslim world in the form of financial, infrastructure and social incentives.

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<sup>252</sup> Moussalli, "Wahhabism, Salafism and Islamism: Who is the Enemy?" 10.

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. CONCLUSION

The tragic events of Al-Qaeda's attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon led to a critical review by U.S. government policy makers, military leaders and academics of the part that Saudi Arabia might have played in the planning and execution of the attacks. This thesis attempted to answer the question of whether or not Saudi Arabia's religious ideology, Wahhabism, contributed to the rise and spread of global terrorism. Through analysis conducted in this thesis, the overall conclusion is that Wahhabism was a contributing factor; however, it is not the only or main factor that contributed to the rise and spread of global terrorism.

The Saudis can be held accountable for creating a permissive environment through their campaign of spreading Wahhabism that provided, whether intentional or not, groups like Al-Qaeda the opportunities to spread. The Saudi campaign of financing charities, mosques, *madrasas* and Islamic centers throughout the world with no government regulation of the funds being contributed nor the manner in which they were distributed provided Al-Qaeda with a means of raising, laundering and distributing funds worldwide to support attacks against U.S., Saudi and other Western targets. It is important to understand that the evidence concerning this theory is still more circumstantial than conclusive. To date no members of any of the suspected charities leadership or any of the charities as a whole organization have been indicted on any charges related to terrorism in any court of the U.S., Saudi Arabia or International community. Only one charity, the Al Haramain Foundation, was disbanded by the Saudi government with considerable pressure from the U.S. government.

The evidence that the curriculum taught in the Saudi educational system within Saudi Arabia and exported to the mosques and *madrasas* worldwide promotes radicalism and extremism is also circumstantial and can be more conclusively proven to be intolerant. Evidence can be presented that radical and extremist groups, specifically Al-

Qaeda, use these Wahhabi mosques and *madrasas* as places of recruitment; however, it is not clear if the curriculum taught alone or its combination with a multitude of other factors is what motivates the students to join these groups.

It is true that Wahhabism is an ideology viewed by many as being intolerant of other religions and other Muslims' interpretations of Islam, as backward or anti-progressive with its stance against innovation and overly conservative or being literal in its interpretations of the Qur'an, Sunna and other religious texts. However, intolerance does not always mean radical or extremist thinking. The ideology practiced by Al-Qaeda is not strictly limited to Wahhabism.

The ideology of al-Qaeda is not a simple affair, and it is a serious mistake to reduce it to Wahhabism. To do so is to ignore the extent to which al-Qaeda broke with the traditional geo-political outlook of Wahhabism, which had never entered into politico-military opposition to the West and was indeed in alliance with the U.S. from 1945 onwards.<sup>253</sup>

Al-Qaeda's ideology is a mixture of neo-Wahhabi/neo-Salafi and radical Islamist ideologies influenced by the politics, economics and jihadi movements of the late 1970s and onward. The melding of different ideologies, cultures and political views in the battlefields of Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, Iraq and other locations throughout the Muslim world, in conjunction with the failure of Muslim governments and Arab nationalists to deliver on promises made and the involvement of Western nations in the affairs of the Muslim world, have all contributed to the rise and spread of global terrorism. "Hypothesis two" underestimates to what extent the tenets of Wahhabism overlap with the extremist ideology of *takfir*, how intolerance can create fertile soil for which to demonize foreigners. Little evidence was found to support "hypothesis three" and that individuals making those claims often base their arguments on the fallacy of guilt by association and no evidence despite their serious charges. Therefore, the analysis of the evidence and the conclusions derived in this thesis best support "hypothesis one" that Wahhabism has provided passive support to the spread of global terrorism.

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<sup>253</sup> International Crisis Group, "Understanding Islamism," 2.

The Saudis have initiated programs with the intentions of reforming their educational curriculum and for regulating funds exported out of Saudi Arabia by both public and private charities and individual donors. However, these programs or measures have either not yet been implemented or are slow to be implemented with little success in correcting the problems discovered. The measure of Saudi commitment to combating global terrorism outside their own borders is still yet to be determined and is something that should be closely monitored and fostered by U.S. leaders, policy makers and diplomats in the near future.

## **B. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The U.S. approach to combating global terrorism, specifically Al-Qaeda, and U.S. foreign policy toward the Muslim world, should take a two-pronged approach to addressing what cause radicalism that leads to terrorism. The first approach should utilize elements of soft power: diplomatic, political and culture. The second approach should utilize elements of hard power: military and economic intervention. The utilization of soft power elements should be utilized prior to engaging any hard power elements to avoid creating additional issues and alienating possible allies by deploying military forces or crippling a state's economy.<sup>254</sup>

Both approaches should avoid essentialism, reductionism and generalizations. The Muslim world is a complex environment comprised of various countries and regions that employ different forms of government governing populations of diverse religious, ethnic and cultural identities. The leaders and members of Al-Qaeda and other radical and extremist groups come from diverse and complex environments. These strategies should be developed and employed to combat each group individually, as a policy designed to combat global terrorism as a whole, may prove to be effective against Al-Qaeda, but at the same time, prove to be ineffective or detrimental to efforts to combat local or regional radical and extremist groups.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Mohammed Hafez, "Lecture on the "Sources of Islamic Radicalism in the Arab World," *Naval Postgraduate School* (February 5, 2009).

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

These two strategies should address two main areas that have contributed to the radicalization of Muslims who then engage in terrorism. The first area that should be addressed is the historic persistent political grievances that have developed in the Muslim world. The failure of Arab nationalism and the authoritarian regimes to deliver on their promises has resulted in poor governance, repression and dishonor through military defeats. Western support for these failed governments has also resulted in the rise of anti-Western and anti-American sentiments. These failed governments also allow little to no legal participation in the government for the citizenry, and thus, leaving only radical activism or terrorism as a means of enacting political changes. Through the use of soft power elements, the U.S. should attempt to influence these governments to implement democratic reforms that provide the citizenry with a legitimate means of expressing and correcting their grievances without resorting to violence. The policy and strategy implemented should be careful not to utilize military or economic force against the citizenry to implement democratic changes. These changes must develop over time and at a pace manageable by the country in which the changes are occurring.

This leads directly into the second area that should be addressed, which are permissive environments. These environments can be created by the states sponsoring or acquiescing to terrorist groups. These types of permissive environments can be a result of the states not having the capacity to combat the rising radicalism within their own borders, which can be a direct result of their failure to implement a system of government that could properly address the citizenry's grievances. These environments can also be a result of the instability caused by rapid political change (i.e., regime changes).<sup>256</sup>

The forcing of democratic changes can backfire, as it did in Iraq, causing the people to rise up not only against their government, but also against U.S. and Western forces that attempt to enforce the change. A delicate balance of soft power elements and patience by the U.S. and Western powers dedicated to supporting those elements of the government and citizenry dedicated to democratic reforms could reduce the numbers of Muslims that resort to terrorism as a means of political change.

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<sup>256</sup> Hafez, "Lecture on the "Sources of Islamic Radicalism in the Arab World."

The use of hard power elements to protect U.S. national interests can at times do more harm than good demonstrated by the increased anti-Western and anti-American sentiments in the Muslim world in response to the U.S. led invasions and subsequent occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. The implementation of hard power elements should be considered as a last resort option as they have historically done more to harm the citizenry than the oppressive governments themselves. However, hard power elements may be required to remove an oppressive regime or as a last means to force an oppressive regime to enact reforms. The U.S. should avoid acting unilaterally when implementing hard power elements by working more within the constructs of coalitions, multinational and United Nations forces that include Muslim allies and encourage those Muslim allies to participate in leading roles. The use of other Muslim military forces to combat terrorism or enforce reform changes in other Muslim states might lessen the backlash against U.S. and Western states. The limiting of the deployments or the permanent stationing of U.S. and Western forces in Muslim countries to the minimum allowable safe levels to accomplish missions by avoiding large scale deployments as a last resort, could also aid in reducing the spread of radicalism that leads to terrorism.

These are not recommendations to remove U.S. or Western forces from Muslim countries to which they have been invited, nor for the U.S. or the West to employ military force when warranted. It is more of a recommendation to use greater caution in the deployment of U.S. and Western military forces by employing a cost benefit analysis of the consequences of using hard power versus soft power elements. The overall recommendations to U.S. policy makers, military leaders and academics is first to incorporate the lessons learned from past experiences in the Muslim world to determining whether a policy utilizing soft power or hard power elements can generate the least amount of consequences with the best possible results for both the Western and Muslim worlds. Second, the task of reforming Wahhabism must be left up to Muslims, because the U.S. is in no position to affect these internal debates and intervention by the U.S. on religious doctrine can be construed as ‘U.S. efforts to falsify Islam’ and ‘turn Muslims from the true religion’.



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