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# THE KINGDOM AND THE CALIPHATE

## Duel of the Islamic States

Cole Bunzel



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## About the Author

**Cole Bunzel** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University, where his research focuses on the history of the Wahhabi movement in Saudi Arabia. An expert on jihadi thought and ideology, he is the author of *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State* (Brookings Institution, March 2015). He has previously held government and think tank positions related to Syria and Iraq in Washington, DC, and has lived in Syria and Saudi Arabia. He holds an MA in international relations from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and an AB in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton University.

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# **Summary**

Since late 2014 the Islamic State has declared war on Saudi Arabia and launched a series of terrorist attacks on Saudi soil intended to start an uprising. In a further attack on the Saudi kingdom, the self-declared caliphate has claimed to be the true representative of the severe form of Islam indigenous to Saudi Arabia, Wahhabism. These two very different versions of an Islamic state are at war over a shared religious heritage and territory.

## **Heritage and Homeland Under Siege**

- The Islamic State, which draws on the teachings of the Wahhabi school of Islam, finds inspiration in the example of the first Saudi-Wahhabi state (1744–1818), which engaged in expansionary jihad and cultivated a sectarian animus toward the Shia.
- The Islamic State has declared three so-called provinces in Saudi Arabia and carried out some fifteen attacks there since November 2014.
- The Islamic State's rise has reignited a debate in Saudi Arabia over the intolerant and aggressive nature of Wahhabism. Liberals have called for a revisionist movement, as they describe it, to expunge certain doctrines from Wahhabism.

## **Conclusions**

- In some ways the Islamic State's claim to the Wahhabi heritage is not unfounded. The early Wahhabis advanced an exclusivist version of Sunni Islam that was universally seen as a heresy, founded a state that waged expansionary jihad against fellow Sunni Muslims, and killed Shia Muslims because they were seen as hopeless idolaters. The Islamic State has done the same on all three counts.
- Other features of the Islamic State's ideology—from the declaration of a caliphate to the use of extraordinary violence to the group's apocalyptic fervor—do not find a mainstream Wahhabi precedent.
- The Islamic State's campaign in Saudi Arabia has slowed considerably since October 2015. Despite concerted propaganda efforts, the group appears to be making little headway against a state outfitted with one of the most advanced counterterrorism infrastructures in the world. But given the substantial Islamic State following in Saudi Arabia, more attacks, however occasional, can be expected.

- Saudi Arabia is a long way from pursuing meaningful reforms of Wahhabi doctrine. Saudi liberals' criticism of Wahhabism is tolerated as of early 2016 more than ever before, despite the kingdom's religious scholars who would prefer the government silence them. But the new political leadership is busy consolidating power, while the religious leadership is defensive and mired in conspiracy theories.

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## Introduction

For Osama bin Laden, the United States was the “head of the snake”—the primary target of al-Qaeda’s jihad. “Its many tails,” the authoritarian regimes of the Middle East, were deemed of secondary importance.<sup>1</sup>

For Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, however, it is the regime in Saudi Arabia that is the “head of the snake,” as he has said in a metaphorical revision worthy of note.<sup>2</sup> This revision by the leader of the Islamic State marks a significant change in the priorities of the global jihadi movement now spearheaded by that group. Notwithstanding the deadly terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015, this group’s focus is on the Middle East before the West. Its slogan, “remaining and expanding,” is indicative of its foremost aims: entrenching itself in its Syrian and Iraqi territories and conquering new ones. One of those territories increasingly in its sights is Saudi Arabia, home to Islam’s holiest places and one-quarter of the world’s known oil reserves.

The competition between the jihadi statelet and the Gulf monarchy is playing out on two levels, one ideological and one material.

Ideologically, the Islamic State presents itself as the true guardian of the particular version of Islam native to Saudi Arabia—that is, Wahhabism, a variant of Salafism.<sup>3</sup> Over the past two decades the jihadi-Salafi movement, which encompasses both al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, has become more Wahhabi in orientation, its leaders and thinkers rooting their radical ideas in the Wahhabi tradition.<sup>4</sup> Wahhabism has thus emerged as the most prominent feature of the Islamic State’s ideology. It follows that the conflict between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic State can be understood as one between competing models of the same idea, namely, an Islamic state. Both are self-professed Islamic polities claiming to represent Wahhabi Islam.

Materially, the Islamic State has launched a string of attacks on Saudi soil, targeting Shia civilians and Saudi security forces, and has made its presence official with the establishment of three declared provinces. The latter are, of course, provinces in name only. The Islamic State does not administer or oversee territory in Saudi Arabia; it carries out terrorist attacks in the name of an administrative fiction that it hopes one day to make reality. While for the foreseeable future the provinces will remain fictional, the terrorism intended to realize them is likely to continue.

Throughout 2015, several authors offered rather unfavorable comparisons of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic State, some drawing a direct line from one to

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the other. They pointed out the similar educational curricula used by the two and the shared practice of beheading, among other things.<sup>5</sup> Kamel Daoud, in a November 2015 *New York Times* op-ed, argued that “Saudi Arabia is a Daesh that has made it,” referring to the group by the Arabic acronym for its former name—a “dressed up” form of the same thing.<sup>6</sup> But for the most part these comparisons are wide of the mark, as Saudi Arabia seeks partnership with the West and does not aspire to global conquest.

The comparison worth noting is the one in the minds of the Islamic State’s jihadi thinkers, the idea that Saudi Arabia is a failed version of the Islamic State. As they see it, Saudi Arabia started out, way back in the mid-eighteenth century, as something much like the Islamic State but gradually lost its way, abandoning its expansionist tendencies and sacrificing the aggressive spirit of early Wahhabism at the altar of modernity. This worldview is the starting point for understanding the contest between the kingdom and the caliphate, two very different versions of Islamic states competing over a shared religious heritage and territory.

## The Islamic State and Wahhabism

“Wahhabism” is historically a pejorative term, so its adherents generally do not identify as such. But certain words and phrases serve to indicate affiliation. Thus the Islamic State addresses its supporters in Saudi Arabia, the historical heartland of Wahhabism, as “the people of *tawhid*” (God’s unity) and “the people of *al-wala wal-bara*” (association and dissociation), appealing to them via the most prominent Wahhabi theological concepts. In doing so, it emphasizes the historical position of the Saudi people as the keepers of the Wahhabi creed. The Al Saud, the royal family, in the Islamic State’s telling, has failed to live up to expectations, selling out the creed. In the group’s imagery, the royal family has become the Al Salul, a designation referring to Abdallah ibn Ubayy ibn Salul, a leader of the so-called “hypocrites” of early Islam who are repeatedly denounced in the Quran.

### Competing Models

Historically, Saudi Arabia has pinned its legitimacy on the support it gives to Wahhabism, a theologically exclusivist form of Sunni Islam that arose in central Arabia in the mid-eighteenth century. The government has conferred on the Wahhabi religious establishment the privilege of regulating social order, granting the religious scholars a large degree of control over the judicial and educational systems and allowing them to run a religious police force. In return, the rulers earn the approval of a deeply conservative Wahhabi populace.

By these means, the kingdom’s rulers have long portrayed theirs as an Islamic state, and King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who acceded to the throne in

January 2015, is no different. The new king has described Saudi Arabia as the purest model of an Islamic state, saying it is modeled on the example of the Prophet Muhammad's state in seventh-century Arabia. "The first Islamic state rose upon the Quran, the prophetic *sunna* [that is, the Prophet's normative practice], and Islamic principles of justice, security, and equality," he stated in a lecture in 2011. "The Saudi state was established on the very same principles, following the model of that first Islamic state." What is more, the Saudi state is faithful to the *dawa* (mission) of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, meaning Wahhabism, upholding the "banner of *tawhid*" and "calling to the pure faith—pure of innovation and practices having no basis in the Quran, *sunna*, and statements of the Pious Forbears."<sup>7</sup>

The Islamic State makes the same claims for itself. It, too, models itself on the first Islamic state, as its early leadership stated upon its founding in October 2006: "We announce the establishment of this state, relying on the example of the Prophet when he left Mecca for Medina and established the Islamic state there, notwithstanding the alliance of the idolaters and the People of the Book against him."<sup>8</sup> Another early statement appealed to the Wahhabi mission, claiming that the Islamic State would "restore the excellence of *tawhid* to the land" and "purify the land of idolatry [*shirk*]."<sup>9</sup>

The Islamic State, like jihadi groups before it, declares the kingdom's rulers apostates, unbelievers who have abandoned the religion and must be killed. The judgment derives from their perceived failure to rule in accordance with God's law, their alliance with the West, and their tolerance of Saudi Arabia's Shia minority, among other things. The Islamic State presents itself not only as the one true Islamic polity on earth but also as the only one faithful to the Wahhabi mission. As early as 2007, the Islamic State claimed to have assumed the role of the "political authority that protects and spreads *tawhid*."<sup>10</sup> In contrast to modern Saudi Arabia, it seeks to do so via military expansion, as "Islam recognizes no borders."<sup>11</sup>

Which state, it might be asked, has the better claim to this heritage? A review of the relevant history suggests a rather mixed answer.

### **The First Saudi-Wahhabi State**

The history of Saudi Arabia is widely understood as the history of three successive Saudi-Wahhabi states: the first (1744–1818), the second (1824–1891), and the third (1902–present). Unbeknownst to most observers, the Islamic State holds up the first of these as a model to be emulated: an example of an Islamic state that spread *tawhid* via military conquest, killed the heretics standing in its way, and posited no boundaries to its expansion. The Islamic State is not wrong to see much of itself in the historical first Saudi-Wahhabi state, a radical, expansionary state whose interpretation of Islam was condemned as a fanatical

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heresy by nearly the entire Muslim world.<sup>12</sup> Here, for example, is a typical description of the founder of Wahhabism by an anonymous contemporary: “He has appointed himself leader and requires that the Muslim community obey him and adhere to his sect. And he compels them to do this by the force of the sword, believing that those who oppose him are unbelievers and deeming it licit to take their blood and property even if they demonstrate the pillars of Islam.”<sup>13</sup>

This first Saudi-Wahhabi state was the product of an agreement reached between the chieftain Muhammad ibn Saud and the preacher Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the small desert oasis of Diriyah in central Arabia. The two leaders agreed to support each other, the Al Saud supporting the Wahhabi mission and the Wahhabi missionaries supporting Saudi political authority.

Gradually, the Saudi-Wahhabi state came to encompass most of the Arabian Peninsula, including by 1805 the holy sites of Mecca and Medina. Its expansion was predicated on jihad understood as offensive religious war against all manifestations of *shirk*. As the Wahhabis saw it, most of the world’s Muslims had fallen into *shirk*, and the Wahhabis’ duty was to eliminate and replace it with true Islam.

In numerous letters, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab explained the basis of his expansionary jihad, arguing that he and his followers were calling people to turn away from idolatry. “For this we are fighting them,” he wrote. “As God Almighty said, ‘And fight them till there is no persecution,’ that is, *shirk*, ‘and the religion is God’s entirely’ [Quran 8:39].”<sup>14</sup> A son of his explained the Wahhabis’ right and duty to conquer all who had learned of the mission and rejected it. “Whoever has received our mission,” he said, “and refused it, remaining upon *shirk* . . . him we excommunicate and fight. . . . Everyone we have fought has been made aware of our mission. . . . The people of Yemen, Tihama, the Hijaz, greater Syria, and Iraq have been made aware of our mission.”<sup>15</sup>

Wahhabis mostly fought fellow Sunni Muslims, but the Shia also came under attack. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had written that the Shia—“the accursed Rejectionists [*al-Rafida*]—were the first to bring *shirk* into this Muslim community.”<sup>16</sup> In 1791, the Wahhabis attacked the Shia areas of eastern Arabia, pillaging towns and killing some 1,500. The court historian of the first Saudi-Wahhabi state justified the attack as a proper response to the Shia heresy—“they had raised a lighthouse for Rejectionism”—and lauded the destruction of Shia mosques—“temples of Rejectionism” (*kanais al-rafd*).<sup>17</sup>

Another massacre of the Shia came in 1802 when the Wahhabis invaded the Shia shrine city of Karbala in Iraq. The Wahhabi armies, according to the court historian of the second Saudi-Wahhabi state, “entered [the city] forcibly, killing most of its people in the markets and in [their] homes. . . . Nearly 2,000 of its men were killed.”<sup>18</sup> The city was pillaged and objects of Shia devotion were destroyed. The commander of the expedition, a grandson of Muhammad ibn Saud, wrote to the Ottoman governor in Iraq to explain his actions: “As for your statement that we seized Karbala, slaughtered its people, and took their possessions—praise

belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds! We make no apology for that, and we say: ‘And like catastrophes await the unbelievers’ [Quran 47:10].”<sup>19</sup>

In 1818, the first Saudi-Wahhabi state finally met its demise when the Egyptian army of Muhammad Ali, at the direction of the Ottomans in Istanbul, overran Diriyah after a seven-year campaign. The Saudi capital was razed and its political and religious leaders were exiled or executed. The fanatical heresy of Wahhabism seemed to meet its end.

### **The Second and Third Saudi-Wahhabi States**

Soon after, however, the Saudi-Wahhabi alliance resurfaced in a second state formed in 1824. Growing in fits and starts, the second Saudi-Wahhabi state never attained the power and size of the first, and its political leaders were less ideologically charged. It collapsed in 1891 during a long civil war.

The third and final Saudi-Wahhabi state emerged in 1902 when Abdulaziz ibn Saud, a member of the Saudi family living in Kuwait, took Riyadh and conquered the rest of Arabia in about two decades. In 1932, Abdulaziz renamed his state the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

At first, the third Saudi-Wahhabi state looked much like the first. The basis of its expansion, as before, was jihad to spread *tawhid* and eliminate *shirk*. It took up arms against fellow Sunni Muslims on the grounds that they had apostatized from Islam. As one of the leading Wahhabi scholars in Riyadh, Sulayman ibn Sihman, wrote in a poem to Abdulaziz in 1921 about the opposition in Hail in northern Arabia: “Fight them for God’s sake, for they are an army of disbelief.”<sup>20</sup>

Ibn Sihman and his colleagues also urged the king to purge the Arabian Peninsula of the Shia. In 1927, they called on him to convert or expel the Shia of the Eastern Province.<sup>21</sup> Much to the scholars’ chagrin, however, the king allowed the Shia to remain. As the kingdom ceased waging expansionary jihad and began tolerating the Shia, it resembled less and less the first Saudi-Wahhabi state. They may not have liked it, but the official Wahhabi scholars of the kingdom acknowledged that the king was acting in accordance with his prerogative as ruler in calling off armed jihad.

Yet despite this acknowledgment, the Wahhabi scholars of the third Saudi-Wahhabi state held to the radical mold of their forebears for decades to come. They continued to fashion an intolerant and sectarian version of their faith. Thus the jihadis of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, though viewing King Abdulaziz as having betrayed Islam, often quote the scholars who served him, and even those who came after. For example, Turki al-Binali, the thirty-one-year-old Bahraini presumed to be the mufti of the Islamic State, begins one of his books with a poem by Ibn Sihman.<sup>22</sup>

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Generally, the last scholarly authority from the Wahhabi religious establishment accepted by jihadis is Muhammad ibn Ibrahim, Saudi Arabia's former grand mufti who died in 1969. Yet some jihadi scholars have viewed certain hardline members of the present Saudi religious establishment with favor, even studying with them. Binali, for example, is proud to have studied with the hardliner Abdallah ibn Jibreen. They spent much time together in what Binali called Riyadh's "Tora Bora quarter," the al-Suwaidi District, in the mid-2000s.<sup>23</sup> In 2004, Ibn Jibreen wrote Binali a recommendation for the Islamic University of Medina, praising the future mufti's "commitment to learning."<sup>24</sup>

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**As a general principle, jihadis view the first Saudi-Wahhabi state as a political experiment worth emulating and the third Saudi-Wahhabi state as a betrayal.**

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Yet as a general principle, jihadis view the first Saudi-Wahhabi state as a political experiment worth emulating and the third Saudi-Wahhabi state as a betrayal. In a 2013 lecture, Binali reminded his audience that one must differentiate among the Saudi states. "The first is not like the second, and the second is not like the third. The third is the last in sequence and the last in worth."<sup>25</sup>

### The Fourth Wahhabi State

Indeed, the Islamic State is a kind of fourth Wahhabi state, given its clear adoption and promotion of Wahhabi teachings. In an essay in early 2014, Binali highlighted the resemblance between the first Saudi-Wahhabi state and the Islamic State.<sup>26</sup> After "implementing Islamic sharia in Diriyah," he said, the first Saudi-Wahhabi state "expanded to numerous cities and villages . . . fought people identifying with Islam . . . and was stormed by a mass of accusations and confronted with a flood of lies." With the Islamic State, he continued, "history is repeating itself in identical fashion."

Many of the Islamic State's official publications are classic works of the Wahhabi canon, including some by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself. One of these is a lengthy treatise on the requirement of excommunicating fellow Muslims deemed somehow wayward. In the preface, the editor praises Ibn Abd al-Wahhab for "waging war against *shirk* . . . in all its forms, inside Arabia and beyond, and waging jihad against all those standing in the way of the mission of *tawhid*." He boasts that the Islamic State promotes the very same *aqida* (creed) that "Sheikh Ibn Abd al-Wahhab adopted, called to, and fought for."<sup>27</sup>

Two more official publications of Wahhabi texts include *The Four Principles* and *The Nullifiers of Islam*, both also by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. The first of these teaches that "the idolaters of our time" (that is, the opponents of the Wahhabis) are "more severe in idolatry" than the idolaters whom the Prophet Muhammad fought in the seventh century.<sup>28</sup> The second is a list of ten things that can nullify one's Islam, in effect rendering one an unbeliever.<sup>29</sup> Particularly significant is nullifier number eight, "supporting the idolaters against the believers"—a violation of *al-wala wal-bar'a* (association and dissociation). In mid-2015, a

video from Deir Ezzor Province in eastern Syria showed a classroom of supposedly penitent Syrians studying the nullifiers with a Saudi teacher and admitting guilt in the matter of nullifier number eight, since they had supported the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.<sup>30</sup> Beyond these original texts,<sup>31</sup> the Islamic State promotes Wahhabism in many other publications. For example, the most important text at Islamic State training camps is a lengthy explication of Wahhabi creed, apparently written by Binali.<sup>32</sup>

Online supporters of the Islamic State, who universally embrace Wahhabi theology, have similarly likened the group to the first Saudi-Wahhabi state. The most representative publication in this regard, from mid-2014, is titled “Sheikh Baghda in the Footsteps of Imam Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab: The Resemblance Between the Wahhabi and Baghda States.” Distributed online by pro-Islamic State media outlets, this highly detailed comparison of the two state-building projects concludes that “the Islamic State is an extension of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s mission [*dawa*] and state [*dawla*]—the first Saudi state.” The mainstay of the resemblance, according to the pseudonymous author, is both states’ determination “to fight *shirk* in all its forms” and to “implement Islamic law immediately upon seizing territory.”<sup>33</sup>

A similar article, distributed by the Islamic State’s semiofficial al-Battar Media Agency, described the Islamic State’s mission as “an extension of Sheikh [Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s] mission.” The author, who goes by Abu Hamid al-Barqawi, drew attention to the similar accusations made against the two states by their respective enemies, namely accusations of excess in the *takfir* (excommunication) and killing of fellow Muslims. He noted that both states were denounced as Kharijites, an early radical Muslim sect.<sup>34</sup>

These online supporters of the Islamic State also find in the example of the first Saudi-Wahhabi state a model for the group’s current campaign of violence in Saudi Arabia, particularly its atrocities against the Shia. One of the most prominent online jihadi writers, who goes by the pseudonym Gharib al-Sururiyya, cited the first Saudi-Wahhabi state’s raids on the Eastern Province and Karbala to illustrate the continuity between those attacks and the current campaign. Quoting at length the works of the court historians mentioned above, he concluded that the Islamic State’s actions are an extension of the first state’s. “The men of *tawhid* were attacking and destroying the temples of the idolatrous Rejectionists, unhindered by borders,” he wrote. “And now the Islamic State, may God support it, has broken down borders and attacked the temples of the Rejectionists in the Gulf and elsewhere.” He went on to quote several Wahhabi scholars’ condemnations of the Shia.<sup>35</sup>

## **Departures From Wahhabism**

The religious character of the Islamic State is, without doubt, overwhelmingly Wahhabi, but the group does depart from Wahhabi tradition in four critical respects: dynastic alliance, the caliphate, violence, and apocalyptic fervor.

The Islamic State did not follow the pattern of the first three Saudi-Wahhabi states in allying the religious mission of Wahhabism with the family dynasty of the Al Saud. It is the fourth in this succession of states only in its Wahhabi component, viewing alliance with the current members of the Al Saud as impossible on account of their impiety. The official poetess of the Islamic State, Ahlam al-Nasr (*Dreams of Victory*), summed up the group's position on the matter in a January 2016 essay: "The Al Salul today sanctify themselves by appeal to the mission of the Sheikh [Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab]," but in fact "the sheikh and his mission have nothing to do with these apostates [that is, the Al Saud]."<sup>36</sup>

The aspiration to the caliphate is another departure from Wahhabism. The caliphate, understood in Islamic law as the ideal Islamic polity uniting all Muslim territories, does not figure much in traditional Wahhabi writings. The Wahhabis could have held up their state as a countercaliphate to the Ottoman caliphate, which they declared a state of *kufr* (unbelief) until its demise in 1924. But they never did. And in fact it is somewhat ironic that Wahhabism, which began as an anticaliphate movement, should become the instrument of a procaliphate movement.

Violence was by no means absent from the first Saudi-Wahhabi state, as has been seen. But the Islamic State's gut-wrenching displays of beheading, immolation, and other forms of extreme violence aimed at inspiring fear are no throwback to Wahhabi practices. They were introduced by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the now-deceased former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, who had been introduced to them by a certain Egyptian scholar in Afghanistan named Abu Abdallah al-Muhajir. It is the latter's legal manual on violence, popularly known as *Fiqh al-dima* (*The Jurisprudence of Blood*), that is the Islamic State's standard reference for justifying its extraordinary acts of violence.<sup>37</sup>

The Islamic State's apocalyptic dimension also lacks a mainstream Wahhabi precedent.<sup>38</sup> As William McCants, a scholar of jihadism at the Brookings Institution, has set out in detail in a book on the subject, the group views itself as fulfilling a prophecy in which the caliphate will be restored shortly before the end of the world.<sup>39</sup> While the Saudi Wahhabis and the Islamic State Wahhabis share an understanding of end times, only the latter view themselves as living in them.

The Islamic State is, therefore, by no means the inevitable expression of historical Wahhabism. It does bear greater resemblance to the first Saudi-Wahhabi state in its commitment to fighting jihad against perceived heretics, particularly the Shia, than does the modern Saudi kingdom. Indeed, the Islamic State has wantonly killed Shia in the same places in Saudi Arabia where its Wahhabi forebears wantonly killed Shia. But in spurning the traditional alliance with the Al Saud, it has adopted certain ideas about politics, violence, and the apocalypse that the three Saudi-Wahhabi states never did. Nonetheless, those nostalgic for the more aggressive Wahhabism of old could be forgiven for seeing more of this in the Islamic State than in modern Saudi Arabia.

## The Islamic State in Saudi Arabia

The Islamic State is divided into different *wilayat* (provinces), some more real than others. In November 2014, after receiving pledges of *bayat*, singular *baya* (fealty), from individuals in Algeria, Libya, Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi heralded these territories as new "provinces." Baghdadi was laying claim to Saudi territory and was encouraging his supporters there to join together. Whereas Baghdadi had previously ordered all the world's Muslims to make *hijra* (emigrate) to Iraq and Syria, Saudis were now no longer obliged to join the thousands of their brethren who had gone there to fight. They could fulfill their duty of *hijra* by building up the Islamic State at home.

### First the Shia

Since the November announcement, the Islamic State has indeed been active in Saudi Arabia. Administratively, the group has carved the country into three provinces: Najd Province in central Arabia, Hijaz Province in western Arabia, and Bahrain Province in eastern Arabia ("Bahrain" being an old term for eastern Arabia excluding the modern country of that name). On a popular website run by Islamic State supporters, the three are grouped together as "the Provinces of the Land of the Two Holy Places."<sup>240</sup> The provinces have taken responsibility for a variety of attacks in pursuit of a strategy focused on the kingdom's minority Shia population and Saudi security forces. Seventeen separate security incidents related to the Islamic State were reported between November 2014 and November 2015, including one carried out in Kuwait (see table 1).

Table 1. Islamic State-Related Security Incidents in Saudi Arabia

<b>November 3, 2014</b>	Shooting at a Shia mosque in al-Dalwa near Hofuf in the Eastern Province kills seven, injures seven
<b>November 22, 2014</b>	Shooting of a Danish citizen by Islamic State supporters in Riyadh
<b>January 5, 2015</b>	Attack on Judaydat Arar border post near Iraq kills three, including a Saudi general; four militants also killed
<b>March 29, 2015</b>	Attack on security patrol in western Riyadh injures two
<b>April 8, 2015</b>	Attack on security patrol in eastern Riyadh kills two
<b>May 8, 2015</b>	Attack on security patrol south of Riyadh kills one
<b>May 22, 2015</b>	Suicide bombing at a Shia mosque in al-Qudayh in the Eastern Province kills 21, injures more than 100
<b>May 29, 2015</b>	Suicide bombing at a Shia mosque in al-Dammam in the Eastern Province kills three, injures four
<b>June 26, 2015</b>	Suicide bombing at a Shia mosque in Kuwait City, Kuwait, kills 27, injures more than 200
<b>July 4, 2015</b>	Shootout during a raid in Taif kills one officer and one militant; three others arrested
<b>July 14, 2015</b>	Shootout during a raid in Khamis Mushayt near Abha kills one militant and his father, injures two
<b>July 16, 2015</b>	Militant murders a relative in the security forces, then detonates suicide bomb at checkpoint at al-Hair Prison in Riyadh, injuring two
<b>August 6, 2015</b>	Suicide bombing at a mosque of the Saudi Emergency Force in Asir kills 15, injures 33
<b>September 23, 2015</b>	Two militants kill a relative in the security forces in filmed shooting, also kill two civilians and one police officer outside police stations near Hail
<b>October 15, 2015</b>	Shooting attack at a Shia mosque in Sayhat in the Eastern Province kills five, injures nine
<b>October 26, 2015</b>	Suicide bombing at a Shia (Ismaili) mosque in Dahda, Najran Region, kills one, injures 19

Sources: *Al-Arabiya*, *Al-Hayat*, *Al-Riyad*, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, the *National* (UAE)

The strategy in place was outlined by Baghdadi in his November 2014 announcement (see appendix). Addressing the Saudi people, he said: “Unsheathe your swords! First, go after the Rejectionists [*al-Rafida*, that is, the Shia] wherever you find them, then the Al Salul [that is, the Al Saud family] and their soldiers, before the Crusaders and their bases.” In Saudi Arabia, the Islamic State has acted accordingly, with suicide bombers targeting Shia mosques yielding the most casualties. While there have been more security incidents involving Saudi security forces (nine) than Shia (six), the group has managed to kill more Shia (64) than security forces (25). One attack has been reported against a Western target, a Danish citizen.

The last time jihadis registered this much activity in Saudi Arabia was in 2003–2006, when al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) waged a low-scale insurgency that killed some 300 people. Over several years, the Al Saud family managed to destroy AQAP, which then reconstituted itself in Yemen.

It is interesting to observe that the Islamic State’s strategic priorities in Saudi Arabia contrast sharply with those of AQAP. AQAP’s priorities in Saudi Arabia were, first, Westerners and Western interests and, second, the Saudi security forces and the regime.<sup>41</sup> It did not go after the Shia at all. With its anti-Shia strategy, the Islamic State is trying something quite different. Playing to the inherent anti-Shiism of Wahhabi religious doctrine, and to the widespread fears of creeping Shia domination of the region, it is presenting itself as the champion of Sunni Islam at a time when the Shia are seen to be taking over the Middle East.

The leaders of Najd Province, in two audio statements released in May and October 2015, have described and justified this anti-Shia strategy at length.<sup>42</sup> Both statements are diatribes against Shiism. The first (translated in full in the appendix) accuses the Saudis of failing to carry out their Islamic duty of expelling the Shia from the Arabian Peninsula and by contrast cites Baghdadi’s order to “kill the Rejectionists wherever they are found.” “The Al Salul,” it says, “will never protect you from the Rejectionists. Indeed, they have been unable to protect their artificial borders from the Houthi scum, so how will they protect you from the Rejectionists if they join together against you?”

The second statement presents an overview of the Shia threat, which can be summarized as follows: The Sunnis are under a regionwide attack by an Iranian-led Shia conspiracy (witness Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, where the Shia are taking power with Iranian support). The Shia aspire to a massive state in the shape of a crescent, stretching from Syria through Iraq, down through eastern Arabia to Oman and Yemen, ultimately encompassing Islam’s holy places in the Hijaz. The Shia of the Eastern Province are secretly loyal to Tehran and are readying to free themselves of the Sunni yoke when the time is right. Meanwhile, members of the Al Saud family are complicit in this plot to the extent that they care only about their power, wealth, and survival.

The two statements emanating from Najd Province appeal to Wahhabi theology to demonstrate the Shia's abiding enmity for the true Muslims. For example, the first statement describes the Shia as a group of idolaters and applies to them the alleged statement of the Prophet Muhammad, "Expel the idolaters from the Arabian Peninsula." Dipping into the Wahhabi heritage, it quotes Sulayman ibn Sihman—one of the scholars who urged King Abdulaziz to expel the Shia back in 1927—to the effect that civil war is preferable to a ruler who fails to rule in accordance with God's law.

### Hypocrisy Allegations

Indeed, it is common practice for the Islamic State and its supporters to assert that their actions against the Shia are in accord with Wahhabi theology. They even maintain that their actions find sanction in the official teachings of the Saudi religious establishment. Thus the second statement from the leaders of Najd Province argues that "the mujahideen in the Arabian Peninsula . . . have killed only those against whom the clerics of the Al Salul theorized a judgment of excommunication and death." Abu Musab al-Zarqawi may have been the first to argue along these lines when, in a lecture on Shiism in 2006, he quoted a fatwa from Saudi Arabia's Permanent Committee for Islamic Research and Fatwa Issuing that clearly excommunicated the Shia.<sup>43</sup>

Islamic State supporters online frequently quote official Saudi scholars to justify anti-Shia attacks. For instance, after a shooting at a Shia mosque in the Eastern Province in mid-October 2015, a supporter tweeted the following quote from Ibn Jibreel, the scholar with whom Turki al-Binali studied: "The Rejectionists are in the main idolaters . . . theirs being greater idolatry [*shirk akbar*] and apostasy from Islam, for which they are deserving of death."<sup>44</sup>

The intrinsic anti-Shiism of Wahhabism poses a problem for Saudi religious scholars when it comes to condemning the Islamic State's attacks in the kingdom. The group and its online supporters accuse these Saudi scholars, sometimes rightly, of backsliding and hypocrisy.

These accusations can be rhetorically powerful. For example, a lengthy Islamic State video from July 2015 features Saudi fighters in Aleppo pointing out contradictions in the scholars' statements. "A short time ago," one of the Saudis in the video says, "the scholars of the Al Salul were excommunicating the Rejectionists, indeed excommunicating the generality of them. . . . They excommunicated them, but when the caliphate fought them . . . they issued condemnations."<sup>45</sup> The video then shows statements (mostly tweets) by Saudi scholars before and after the Islamic State attacks in the Eastern Province. In one sequence, Muhammad al-Arifi, the most popular Saudi preacher in the country with more than 14 million followers, is shown in a scene before the Islamic State attacks scolding "the Rejectionists" for transgressing the

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**Islamic State supporters online frequently quote official Saudi scholars to justify anti-Shia attacks.**

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bounds of Islam and making war against “the Muslims.” In a scene following the attacks, he is shown expressing profound sympathy for the people of the Eastern Province, who are mostly Shia.

The same video further accuses these scholars of holding the Islamic State to a double standard, since these men, while criticizing the Islamic State’s targeting of the Shia in Saudi Arabia, still condemn the Shia in Yemen and urge the Saudi government to wage jihad against them as “idolaters.” Numerous tweets to this effect are presented. A Saudi then remarks to the camera: “They excommunicate the Rejectionists in Yemen and proclaim them Muslims in the Eastern Province!”

## Scholarly Outreach

In late 2014, rumors began circulating that the Islamic State was trying to recruit more of the world’s jihadi scholars to its cause, as most of them had sided with al-Qaeda’s Ayman al-Zawahiri over Baghdadi.<sup>46</sup> The recruitment effort, spearheaded by Binali, fared rather poorly, with the biggest names doubling down on their opposition to Baghdadi and reiterating their support for al-Qaeda. But in Saudi Arabia it seemed to yield a measure of success.

In the early 2000s, Saudis were some of the chief ideologues of the jihadi-Salafi movement, contributing large numbers of fatwas, essays, and books to a growing corpus of online literature. Unlike most jihadi thinkers, these men were trained Muslim scholars with advanced degrees and, in some cases, university positions. They gave the movement greater legitimacy and theological depth. A cohort of these men was known as the Shuaybi school, named for the late Saudi Humud al-Uqla al-Shuaybi, a former university professor in Riyadh and al-Qasim. Its other leaders were Nasir al-Fahd, a professor of theology at Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh, and Ali al-Khudayr, a mosque leader who taught theology and law in al-Qasim.<sup>47</sup> In 2003, they were arrested for supporting AQAP. This was a major blow that, according to Thomas Hegghammer, an academic specializing in jihadism and the author of a book on AQAP, deprived the organization of “a crucial legitimising resource.”<sup>48</sup> Since 2003, little has been heard of these jihadi scholars, whom the Saudis have kept under lock and key.

Fahd and Khudayr are among more than 4,000 Saudis being held in Saudi Arabia as “security prisoners,” which is Saudi parlance for supporters of jihadism as advocated by al-Qaeda and the Islamic State.<sup>49</sup> According to a senior prison official quoted in the Saudi press, there has been a major ideological split among the prisoners, who have smuggled out messages in support of either the Islamic State or al-Qaeda.<sup>50</sup> One of these messages from early 2014, recorded by the jihadi scholar Sulayman al-Ulwan, decried Baghdadi and his claim to statehood.<sup>51</sup> However, most of what has been leaked is supportive of the Islamic State, suggesting that Saudi Arabia’s jihadi prison population has gravitated in its direction.<sup>52</sup> One former AQAP ideologue, Hamad al-Humaydi,

authored several pro-Islamic State works from his cell that were published online between 2014 and 2015, and another, Faris al-Zahrani (also known as Abu Jandal al-Azdi), allegedly gave *baya* to Baghdadi from prison.<sup>53</sup> Both were executed by Saudi authorities on January 2, 2016, in a group of more than 40 condemned for what the state deemed terrorism.<sup>54</sup>

In a mid-May 2015 audio address, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi appealed directly to Saudi Arabia's imprisoned jihadi religious scholars (*talabat al-ilm*) for their support, saying "we have not forgotten you, nor will we ever forget you," and promising to fight for their freedom.<sup>55</sup> Three months later, in August 2015, the Islamic State won its biggest prison victory when a handwritten letter of *baya* from Nasir al-Fahd was leaked from al-Hair Prison; it called on all mujahideen to join the Islamic State. The Islamic State's semiofficial media agencies online proclaimed and circulated Fahd's statement, which did not address Saudis in

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**Over the long term, Saudi Arabia has to worry about the contagion effects of having thousands of citizens behind bars who are loyal to the caliph in Raqqa.**

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particular but did express the hope that the Islamic State would eliminate all the illegitimate regimes ruling the region. Significantly, he attempted to preempt criticism by noting that while the Islamic State had caused excessive shedding of blood, this was an excusable error in light of trying circumstances.<sup>56</sup>

With Fahd on board, the Islamic State clearly is hoping for Khudayr's endorsement as well. The video featuring Saudis in Aleppo, discussed above, shows some of the Saudis seated before a well-placed copy of one of Khudayr's books.<sup>57</sup>

Just how influential the *baya* from Fahd—and a potential one from Khudayr—will be on the Saudi scene is hard to say. In October, a prominent jihadi writer online who uses the pseudonym Abu l-Maali Aqil al-Ahmad trumpeted "Fahd's call" as a major victory.<sup>58</sup> But thus far, the *baya* has not energized the Islamic State's campaign in Saudi Arabia, perhaps because Fahd did not specifically encourage the Islamic State's attacks in Saudi Arabia. He may have been unaware of them. The greatest effect of the *baya* has probably been in persuading those already harboring jihadi sympathies to support the Islamic State over al-Qaeda. For the moment, that is an invisible victory. But over the long term, Saudi Arabia has to worry about the contagion effects of having thousands of citizens behind bars who are loyal to the caliph in Raqqa.

### A Range of Supporters

As of March 2015, more than 2,000 Saudis had gone to join jihadi groups in Syria and Iraq, according to the Saudi Interior Ministry. But far more remained back home. Between November 2013 and July 2015, the number of Saudi security prisoners had nearly doubled as Saudi security forces arrested those attempting to leave for Syria and Iraq and disrupted the Islamic State's networks in Arabia.<sup>59</sup>

Saudi supporters of the Islamic State do not fit a single profile but are a mixed bag ranging in age from teenagers to septuagenarians. Scattered, anecdotal information in the media suggests that the majority of this group consists of young men, most of them hailing from central Saudi Arabia in the Riyadh area or the conservative al-Qasim area some 200 miles to the northwest. The six Saudis who carried out suicide bombings in the name of the Islamic State's Arabian provinces in 2015 seem to have been mostly from central Arabia, ranging in age from fifteen to thirty-five. The largest networks that Saudi security forces claim to have broken up were in Riyadh and al-Qasim. None of this is surprising given past experience, but more data would be required for a more significant demographic comparison between Islamic State supporters and earlier groups of Saudi jihadis.

The support network's upper ranks also encompass a range of people. The reputed religious leader of the al-Qasim network, for example, was the blind, septuagenarian scholar Hamad al-Rayyis, who has links to the Shuaybi school and is now in prison.<sup>60</sup> Other minor religious scholars of different ages have emerged as Islamic State supporters as well. Faris al-Zahrani was in his mid-forties and Hamad al-Humaydi was in his late fifties when they were executed in January 2016. Nasir al-Fahd is in his late forties.

Then there are the Islamic State's generally younger Saudi logisticians, themselves a diverse group. They include Abd al-Rahman al-Mujil, a former employee of the Ministry of Health, and Abdallah al-Fayiz, who previously fought with al-Qaeda in Iraq. Both are believed to have coordinated extensively with Islamic State leaders in Syria and Iraq.<sup>61</sup>

### **Be Patient, Do Not Rush**

The Islamic State's military campaign in Saudi Arabia has failed to gain traction in the year since its launch.

Several reasons seem to account for the slow pace of the Islamic State's campaign in the country. The first is the regime's effective counterterrorism infrastructure, which was put in place as a result of the AQAP insurgency in the mid-2000s. It combines elite policing with advanced surveillance, intelligence, and special forces training, and a certain restraint in repression, offering rehabilitation and mediation programs and eschewing torture.<sup>62</sup> The government announced in July 2015 that multiple raids over the preceding year had prevented attacks and led to the arrest of more than 400.<sup>63</sup> The crackdown seems to have severely damaged the network of Islamic State militants and sympathizers, particularly in the al-Qasim region, which was home to the largest and best-organized network in the country.<sup>64</sup>

Another reason is the apparent lack of charismatic leadership, apart from those in prison, supporting the Islamic State in Saudi Arabia. In its campaign, AQAP encountered a significant setback with the loss of its leader Yusuf al-Uyayri, who had been a key recruiter and fundraiser and was the link between

the militants and the Shuaybi school; he was killed by Saudi security forces during a shoot-out in 2003. The Islamic State has no comparable figure in what it considers its Arabian provinces, and it is uncertain whether it has many competent people at all. The first statement from Najd Province has several errors, suggesting a mediocre standard of learning and poor execution on the part of its leadership.

Yet another reason for the campaign's slow pace is the historical tendency of Saudi jihadis to prefer jihad abroad to jihad at home. Saudi Arabia has been a major contributor of fighters to foreign jihad theaters, from Afghanistan in the 1980s to Iraq in the mid-2000s, and to Syria and Iraq today.<sup>65</sup> But stirring unrest at home has proven difficult, probably for reasons to do with the religious character of the state and the wealth of average Saudis relative to their neighbors. Altering this tendency will be a challenge for the Islamic State. Because the Saudi regime is playing only a minor role in the fight against the group in Iraq and Syria, it has inspired little resentment. Meanwhile, the Saudi people, surveying the regional upheaval, are keenly aware of the destructive consequences of a rebellion at home.

Nonetheless, the Islamic State's attacks in the kingdom are likely to continue for some time for two reasons. The first is that with its attacks on the Shia in outlying areas, the group is not disrupting the lives of most Saudis, some of whom sympathize with attacks on the Shia as idolaters. This is in contrast to the reaction to AQAP's attacks on Western civilians in downtown areas. The second reason is that the campaign's external stimulus, namely the Islamic State's inspiring presence in Iraq and Syria, is by no means on the verge of receding. The AQAP campaign failed in part because it got going only with a massive influx of veteran jihadis, whose depletion spelled its ruin. With a more enduring external stimulus, the Islamic State's campaign in Saudi Arabia is likely to hold up longer than AQAP's.

But as of January 2016, the Islamic State had gone three months without pulling off a major attack in the kingdom. Whether the current dry spell marks the decline of the Islamic State in Saudi Arabia or is merely the eye of the campaign's storm is too early to tell. But the group's leaders in Syria and Iraq seem to be running out of patience.

In November 2014, Baghdadi had counseled his supporters in Saudi Arabia, "Be patient, do not rush."<sup>66</sup> But in mid-December 2015, the group launched a full-scale propaganda campaign calling for attacks in Arabia. In the space of just a few days, the Islamic State put out fifteen official videos from its provinces, from Syria and Iraq to Yemen and the Sinai, all concerning Saudi Arabia, many of them calling on the group's supporters there to step up their efforts. At the same time, the Islamic State's unofficial media agencies released 26 essays in the same vein.<sup>67</sup> The Islamic State, as Baghdadi's earlier statement would suggest, seems to be playing the long game in Arabia. But it is also clearly disappointed in its progress there.

## Saudi Scholars and the Islamic State

With jihadis openly laying claim to the Saudi religious heritage, the Saudi religious establishment might be expected to engage this threat in serious intellectual combat. Yet nothing of the sort has taken place. Instead, the kingdom's scholars have reluctantly addressed the issue of the Islamic State by issuing only blanket condemnations. There is little sense of urgency in their words and actions, and absolutely no recognition of the Islamic State's Wahhabi character. Meanwhile, Saudi liberals who are clear-eyed about the Islamic State's Wahhabi character, along with at least one dissident religious scholar, have reignited a debate over Wahhabism in the kingdom. They want the religious establishment to lead an effort to reform Wahhabist doctrine, but many of them view the institution as too weak to handle the task.

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### The Scholars Reprimanded

In mid-2014, the late King Abdullah castigated the Saudi religious establishment for its silence in the face of the jihadi threat. In August 2014, a month after the Islamic State declared itself the caliphate, Abdullah fumed at the establishment scholars during a public gathering at his palace in Jeddah. Earlier that day he had given a speech warning about the dangers of Islamic extremism and calling on “the scholars of the Islamic community to carry out their duty before God and confront those trying to hijack Islam and present it to the world as the religion of extremism, hate, and terror.” Muslim scholars, he suggested, needed to do more. Those who “have hesitated or are hesitating to carry out their historical responsibilities against terrorism for the sake of worldly benefits or hidden objectives, tomorrow they shall be its first victims,” he said.<sup>68</sup> At the reception at his palace, the king made clear that those he had in mind were his own court scholars.

Discussing the “deviants” of the Islamic State, the king decried “how a person could take hold of another person and slaughter him like a sheep.” Then, raising his voice, he motioned reproachfully at the scholars seated beside him. “Your scholars, all of them are listening. I am asking them to expel the laziness that is around them,” he said, turning to face the men concerned. “They see laziness in you, and silence in you. And you have a duty. You have a duty [to defend] your world and your religion, your religion, your religion!” The several dozen scholars sat stone-faced during the king’s condemnation.<sup>69</sup>

The reluctance of the scholars to address the Islamic State was partly because of their support for the revolution in Syria, which they have cast as a legitimate jihad. Though adapting their views to suit government policy, the scholars have remained unwavering supporters of the Syrian jihad.<sup>70</sup> In 2012, the Council of Senior Religious Scholars, which was created by royal decree in 1971 and is the country’s highest religious authority, issued a fatwa prohibiting nonofficial

donations pursuant to a government order. But in line with their innate sectarianism, the scholars have been much more vocal in denouncing the crimes of the Assad regime and Iran than in condemning the Islamic State or al-Qaeda.

King Abdullah's 2014 outburst directed at the religious scholars was not his first. Known as a moderate reformer, he had had prior public disputes with the religious establishment when he was the crown prince. In November 2001, after the terrorist attacks on September 11 brought Wahhabism to the world's attention, Abdullah addressed the scholars in a public statement, warning against indulging "extremism" (*al-ghuluww fi l-din*) at this "critical" phase, suggesting that some official scholars were given to extremist opinions.<sup>71</sup> The Saudi intelligentsia saw in this a clear message to the scholars to revise the religious discourse of the country in a more tolerant direction.<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, the educational curricula, for example, began putting more stress on the concepts of moderation and justice in Islam and less on exclusivist notions like *al-wala wal-bara*.<sup>73</sup> But these were minor changes.

### **Questioning Wahhabism During the AQAP Campaign**

Calls for revising the religious discourse of the country would continue after 2003 when al-Qaeda, in May of that year, began a bombing campaign in Saudi Arabia targeting Western expatriates and Saudi security forces that lasted several years. The attacks prompted some Saudis publicly to question the bases of Wahhabism in unprecedented fashion. But the state only let them go so far.

Two of the most prominent critics were Saudi liberals Jamal Khashoggi and Mansour al-Nogaidan. Khashoggi, a U.S.-educated journalist, was removed from his post as editor of the semiofficial Saudi newspaper *al-Watan* for publishing articles critical of Wahhabism. In one article, Khashoggi blamed the May 2003 bombings on the broader religious culture in the kingdom. In response, a group of official scholars met with Crown Prince Abdullah to complain, leading to Khashoggi's firing. Though reinstated in 2007, Khashoggi was again forced to step down in 2010 for publishing yet more articles hostile to Wahhabism.<sup>74</sup>

In similar fashion, Nogaidan, a Saudi Islamist-turned-liberal commentator, launched an assault on Wahhabism in newspaper op-eds in the wake of the 2003 bombings. Sentenced to 75 lashings for his outspokenness, he took his story to the *New York Times* where he declared that "many [Saudi] religious leaders sympathize with the criminals" of al-Qaeda. He accused Saudi Arabia's "educational and religious institutions" of being "breeding grounds for terrorists" and called for reforms to "our extremist religious culture."<sup>75</sup> After Nogaidan's article appeared in the *New York Times*, he was imprisoned for five days.<sup>76</sup>

Among the religious class, however, few dissenters emerged in the post-2003 period. Several members of the Sahwa, the country's broad-based Islamist movement, called for reexamining the more exclusivist and violent parts of the Wahhabi religious heritage, but they soon ceased to speak up.<sup>77</sup> Only one man with scholarly pretensions, Hasan bin Farhan al-Maliki, a historian holding

rather eccentric views by Saudi standards, wrote critically of the Saudi religious tradition.<sup>78</sup> In *Preacher, Not a Prophet*, published in 2004 in Jordan, Maliki called Saudi Arabia's official religious class extremists (*ghulat*) and blamed them for fostering a religious culture conducive to jihadi violence. It was futile for the religious establishment to counter al-Qaeda's jihadi ideology, he wrote, for the jihadis were merely doing what the religious establishment had taught them.<sup>79</sup> Maliki's views were naturally not well-received in Riyadh, where scholars rushed to dismiss his work. He lost his job at the Ministry of Education.

The limited revision of Wahhabism that took place in the wake of the AQAP campaign of 2003 to 2007 was largely superficial. National Dialogue conferences were held to discuss Islamic extremism, and the religious curriculum of primary education was updated to accommodate a "tone of tolerance," as David Commins, a scholar of Saudi and Wahhabi history, characterized it. In one textbook, for example, according to Commins, "sections about bearing enmity to infidels were removed altogether."<sup>80</sup> Yet there was no serious reevaluation of basic Wahhabi principles.

### **Questioning Wahhabism During the Islamic State Campaign**

The rise of the Islamic State beginning in 2013 has revived the internal Saudi debate over Wahhabism, and once again Saudi liberals are at its forefront. The opening shot in this period was fired by Saudi economist Hamza ibn Muhammad al-Salim in a very provocative newspaper article, "Salafism on Its Deathbed," in September 2013. Salim declared that Wahhabism was now "only a burden on the Saudi state," with international charges against it accumulating daily. Many Saudis, he said, just wanted "to dispense with it" altogether.<sup>81</sup>

The king's 2014 reprimanding of the scholars brought yet more anti-Wahhabi voices to the surface. In marked contrast with the preceding period of debate, the most prominent voice has been that of a dissident religious scholar, Hatim al-Awni, a professor of *hadith*, the statements attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, at Umm al-Qura University in Mecca. Awni is a marginal figure in the Saudi religious landscape because of his background. Born in Taif in the western Hijaz Province of Saudi Arabia, Awni is related to the Sharif family that ruled the Hijaz prior to the Saudi conquest of the region in the 1920s. Be that as it may, his positions are worth relating as representative of liberal Saudi criticism of Wahhabism and the increased openness of the debate.

On August 3, 2014, just two days after King Abdullah's public rebuke of the scholars, Awni published a fiery essay on his website entitled "The Lazy Scholars," a clear reference to the king's remarks. Taking aim at the very scholars who were the target of the king's wrath, Awni claimed that they had criticized the Islamic State "only lazily" because they do so "without conviction." In reality, "the bases of their thought and their *takfir* [excommunication of other Muslims] are in agreement with those of [the Islamic State]," he wrote. Their difference with the Islamic State is only a matter of "political loyalty."

They and the Islamic State shared the “same principles of *takfir*,” namely *takfir* of “those providing assistance to unbelievers against Muslims,” of those who rule “by other than what God has revealed,” of those who engage in impermissible acts when visiting graves, of those who adhere to rival theological schools of Sunni Islam, of those who are simply ignorant of the fundamentals of the religion, of the Shia, and so on.<sup>82</sup>

At the end of the month, Awni brought his critique to the pages of one of the country’s leading semiofficial newspapers, *al-Hayat*, calling for a campaign to correct the extremist views in the standard compendium of Wahhabi writings, *al-Durar al-saniyya fi l-ajwiba al-Najdiyya* (The Glistening Pearls of Najdi Responsa). According to Awni, this book—sixteen volumes of Wahhabi essays, fatwas, and correspondence from the time of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab to the mid-twentieth century—was the fount of extremism. (Indeed, Turki al-Binali, the Islamic State’s mufti, has frequent recourse to the book, even quoting it without notes by volume and page number in his lectures.)<sup>83</sup> But Saudi Arabia’s religious scholars refused to acknowledge the relationship between the ideas on display in *al-Durar al-saniyya* and the ideas of jihadi-Salafism as represented by the Islamic State. Their denial, in Awni’s words, amounted to a “betrayal of the Islamic community and the country.” There were three kinds of Saudi religious scholars, according to Awni: the ignorant who simply do not understand what is in the book; the opportunists who defend it to advance their own careers; and the crypto-jihadis, the largest group of all, who wish Saudi Arabia would be more like the Islamic State.<sup>84</sup>

In May 2015, in response to the Islamic State’s attacks on Shia mosques, Awni again accused the religious establishment of ideological complicity. The official scholars’ condemnations of the attacks, he argued, were insufficient. They needed to “clarify their position with respect to the Shia: Are they Muslims? And if so, how do we reconcile classifying them as Muslims with the statements in *al-Durar al-saniyya* that clearly affirm their unbelief?”<sup>85</sup>

Significantly, Awni has called not for ditching Wahhabism altogether but for reforming it. In a televised interview, he described an envisioned “correctionist movement” (*harakat al-tashih*), to be led by the Al al-Sheikh (the descendants of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab) and the Council of Senior Religious Scholars. It would be, in his view, a continuation of certain revisions made by Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz, the former grand mufti who famously gave opinions on *takfir* at odds with the bulk of the Wahhabi tradition.<sup>86</sup>

Like Awni, the Saudi liberals critical of Wahhabism generally argue for reforming, not dumping, Wahhabism. Some of them have praised Awni for his outspokenness and hailed him as their leader.<sup>87</sup> But Saudi Arabia’s scholars have not been interested in participating in this debate.

## The Scholars Respond

As King Abdullah suggested, the official Wahhabi scholars had said little about the Islamic State prior to August 2014.<sup>88</sup> After the king's reprimand, they had no choice but to speak up. Since then, their condemnations have appeared in the semiofficial Saudi press almost weekly.

Three themes recur in these routine statements: name-calling and conspiracy-mongering, exonerating the Wahhabi tradition, and announcing plans to combat terrorist ideology. On August 19, 2014, Abd al-Aziz Al al-Sheikh, the grand mufti of the kingdom and head of the Council of Senior Religious Scholars, introduced these themes in the establishment's first statement on the Islamic State.<sup>89</sup>

Al al-Sheikh characterized the Islamic State, along with al-Qaeda, as "an extension of the Kharijites, who were the first group to leave the religion." The association of jihadis with the Kharijites, an early Islamic sect known for its violence and eagerness in *takfir*, is of course not new. Mainstream Muslims have branded extremist rivals as Kharijites for decades. For Saudi scholars, it is the term of abuse of first resort.

It is important to note that in Islamic theology, the designation "Kharijite" does not necessarily amount to a charge of unbelief and apostasy. Perhaps only one establishment scholar, Sa'd al-Shathri, a professor and former member of the Council of Senior Religious Scholars, has gone that extra step to declare the Islamic State to be not only Kharijites but "unbelievers"—"more disbelieving," indeed, "than Jews and Christians and idol-worshippers."<sup>90</sup> But this position is rare.

The corollary of such name-calling is conspiracy-mongering. The two often appear together, as when the Council of Senior Religious Scholars described the Islamic State's "client, Kharijite thought," alleging that the group had been fashioned by "hidden hands" with the aim of "sowing division" and "sullying the pure Islamic religion."<sup>91</sup> Shathri described the Islamic State as "an extension of the former Baath Party,"<sup>92</sup> while another establishment scholar, Abd al-Latif Al al-Sheikh, said it "was conceived and developed in the womb of the Muslim Brotherhood," its actions showing evidence of a "foreign agenda."<sup>93</sup> Yet another, Salih ibn Humayd, said it is "the creation of international intelligence agencies."<sup>94</sup> The list of conspirators is long. In December 2015, the kingdom's mufti described the Islamic State as "soldiers for Israel," but also added that they are Kharijites.<sup>95</sup>

Indeed, the scholars seem willing to attribute any source to the Islamic State but Wahhabism and hope to stifle any discussion of the Wahhabi connection. This was the message of Abd al-Aziz Al al-Sheikh's early statement calling for "elevated discussion that does not call people traitors and does not accuse." Soon after, the Council of Senior Religious Scholars stated that it "rejects what some writers have said in connecting terrorist ideas to educational methods or to the esteemed writings of the scholars."<sup>96</sup> This was intended to dismiss all that

Hatim al-Awni had said. Shathri said of the Islamic State: “The truth of this organization is that it has no connection to the mission of Sheikh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab.”<sup>97</sup>

Yet the religious establishment has not denied that the Islamic State exerts a certain attraction on Saudi youth. “The Council of Senior Religious Scholars is following with great concern the development of Daeshi thought” in the kingdom, the *al-Watan* newspaper reported in October 2015.<sup>98</sup> In his August 2015 statement, Abd al-Aziz Al al-Sheikh announced that he would put forward “a comprehensive plan” to strengthen the moderation (*al-wasatiyya wal-itidal*) of true Islam and deter Saudis from joining the “Kharijite groups.” “The overarching objective of Islamic sharia,” he said, “was protecting the order of coexistence.” In October the scholars unveiled their eight-point plan, which focused on holding conferences, reaching out to vulnerable youth to refute their errors, and increasing the public presence of the establishment scholars, including on social media. The implementation of this plan, if forthcoming at all, is certainly lethargic.

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**The religious establishment has not denied that the Islamic State exerts a certain attraction on Saudi youth.**

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### **The Persistence of Unreconstructed Wahhabism**

In short, official Saudi scholars are not interested in countering the Islamic State by reforming Wahhabi doctrine. Their plan, as Saudi liberals have pointed out, does not differ from previous efforts of cosmetic reform. There is no bold reexamination of the Wahhabi heritage, only self-vindication.<sup>99</sup> As Saudi liberals, including Hatim al-Awni, see it, the scholars are simply unwilling to look in the mirror. The scholars believe the liberals are taking advantage of the present situation to bring down Wahhabism.

But even if the religious establishment wanted to embark on bold religious reform, some of the leading liberal voices have questioned whether it is capable of doing so. A weakness, they have observed, has set in since the death of the establishment’s two most revered scholars in 1999 and 2000, and the establishment is no longer a strong historical force and trendsetter.<sup>100</sup> The nonofficial scholars, who may have more clout in society, seem for their part just as hesitant to discuss reform as their official peers.

The climate is one that ensures the persistence of what Awni called “al-Durar al-saniyya Salafism,” meaning unreconstructed Wahhabism that enshrines a hostile and confrontational approach to non-Wahhabi Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Beyond the religious establishment’s nice talk of coexistence and moderation, the core Wahhabi teachings and the textual heritage of Wahhabi militancy remain. The teachings do not inevitably lead to something like the Islamic State but are certainly compatible with it, and the heritage is no doubt one that the Islamic State looks to for inspiration.

What is positive about the present climate in Saudi Arabia is that critical voices are no longer being smothered. In addition to social media, the official press has become an approved outlet for Awni and liberal critics of Wahhabism since the rise of the Islamic State. The religious establishment would like the government to intervene and put an end to this conversation, as the government did in 2003 and after, but so far this has not happened. Awni has not lost his university position, nor have journalists been fired. This time around, it has become publicly acceptable to speak ill of Wahhabism, a dramatic change from a decade ago and an astounding change from a century before, when in the early 1920s King Abdulaziz assured the scholars that anyone criticizing Wahhabism would be “exposed to danger.”<sup>101</sup>

The problem is that the religious scholars have not been pressured to engage the criticism. With the ascension of King Salman, busy consolidating his rule and winning allies among the scholars, they are unlikely to be prodded in a reformist direction.<sup>102</sup>

## Conclusion

The contest between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic State is not a close one. There is no sense of alarm in Saudi Arabia itself, where the Islamic State’s violent campaign focusing on Shia and government targets has gained only limited ground. The ruling Saudi family seems to regard the Islamic State as only a nuisance, not a fundamental threat. Only in a future where the Islamic State has gained enormous new resources and territorial holdings would the threat be considered more severe.

But the struggle between Saudi Arabia and the Islamic State is also a contest for the soul of Wahhabism, and on this front the jihadis have made strides. Over the past few decades, the jihadi-Salafi movement has increasingly billed itself as the rightful heir to the Wahhabi tradition and has appropriated its textual resources. The Islamic State in some sense represents the culmination of this effort—a Wahhabi state as radical and sectarian as the original Saudi-Wahhabi state, though departing from it in certain ways. It is thus truer today than ever, as Western analysts have argued for years, that the Wahhabi form of Islam is a crucial component of jihadism.

Yet, though Wahhabism and jihadism are intimately linked, it is not necessarily prudent to think in terms of fighting jihadism by fighting Wahhabism. Indeed, Wahhabism (or Salafism, as most Wahhabis would prefer it be called) has become a global movement not dependent on the support of one state, no matter how great its oil reserves. Saudi backing is not the only or even the main cause of the movement’s spread throughout the Islamic world.<sup>103</sup> And the vast majority of Wahhabis, or Salafis, reject the violence and the political project of the Islamic State.

It is also worth considering that the Al Saud's support for Wahhabism is what gives the kingdom's rulers their legitimacy. Should the royal family's ties to the movement be sundered, chaos in the Arabian Peninsula would almost certainly result. This is not to mention that a Saudi divorce from Wahhabism would automatically confer on the jihadis the status of protectors of the Wahhabi mission.

But a less hostile, if not less intolerant, form of Wahhabism is a possibility. Dissidents such as Hatim al-Awni want the official religious scholars to tone down the *takfir* and disavow the more aggressive episodes of Wahhabi history. That is probably the most that can reasonably be hoped for. But such reform, if it is happening at all, is coming very, very slowly.

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## Appendix

The following are original translations of official Islamic State statements concerning Saudi Arabia. The first is an excerpt from Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's November 2014 address, in which he declared the establishment of an official presence on the Arabian Peninsula and outlined a strategy there. The second is the first audio statement from Najd Province, one of the Islamic State's three declared provinces in Saudi Arabia, released at the end of May 2015. It is both a statement of the Islamic State's intentions and motives in Saudi Arabia and a tribute to the suicide bomber who killed 21 Shia civilians at a mosque in the Eastern Province on May 22, 2015.

### **Excerpt From "Though the Unbelievers Be Averse," Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, November 13, 2014<sup>104</sup>**

O sons of the Lands of the Two Holy Places, O people of God's unity [*tawhid*], O people of association and dissociation [*al-wala wal-barā*]. Among you is the head of the snake, the stronghold of the disease. So unsheathe your swords, break your scabbards into pieces, forsake this lower world! There shall be no safety for the House of Salul, no relief from this day forward. There is no place for the idolaters on the Peninsula of Muhammad—may God bless and preserve him. Unsheathe your swords! First, go after the Rejectionists [*al-Rafida*, that is, the Shia] wherever you find them, then the Al Salul [that is, the Al Saud family] and their soldiers, before the Crusaders and their bases. Go after the Rejectionists and the Al Salul and their soldiers! Tear them to pieces! Seize them as groups and as individuals! Make life loathsome for them. Keep them busy with themselves, not us. And be patient, do not rush. Before long, God willing, you will see portents of the Islamic State.

### **"Expel the Rejectionist Idolaters From the Peninsula of Muhammad," Najd Province, May 29, 2015<sup>105</sup>**

Praise belongs to God, Empowerer of Islam by His support, Humbler of idolatry [*shirk*] by His power. And prayers and peace be upon the Chosen Prophet, and upon his family and his companions altogether.

God the Exalted said: “And when the sacred months are past, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush” [Quran 9:5].<sup>106</sup>

And God the Exalted said: “And fight the unbelievers totally as they fight you totally” [Quran 9:36].

And on the authority of Ibn Abbas,<sup>107</sup> may God have mercy on him, who said: The Messenger of God, may God bless and preserve him, said: “Whoso changes his religion, kill him.”

Now, these Rejectionists [*al-Rawafid*, a variant of *al-Rafida*] are apostates from Islam, belligerent enemies of the Religion of God. The scholars [*ulama*] have agreed upon their unbelief, as Ibn al-Samani,<sup>108</sup> may God have mercy on him, stated. He said: “The Muslim community has agreed on the excommunication [*takfir*] of the Shia [*al-Imamiyya*.]” The imams Abu Zura and Abu Hayyan,<sup>109</sup> both from Rayy, said: “We have met scholars in Iraq and Sham and the Hijaz, and all of them say that the Rejectionists have rejected Islam.” The author of the book *al-Mughni*,<sup>110</sup> may God have mercy on him, recorded the scholars’ consensus that whoever accuses Aisha,<sup>111</sup> may God have mercy on her, of a sin, he is an unbelieving apostate—and this is the religion of the Rejectionists.

And the scholars have agreed that whoever rejects the *sunna* [that is, the traditions of the Prophet] is an unbeliever—and this is the religion of the Rejectionists.

And the scholars have agreed that whoever claims that the Quran is faulty is an unbeliever, for he repudiates the statement of God the Exalted: “We have surely sent down the Quran; and We will certainly preserve the same from corruption” [Quran 15:9].

And the scholars have agreed that whoever takes with God another god is an unbeliever—and this is the religion of the Rejectionists.

And the scholars have been in consensus that whoever seeks the aid of the dead for the fulfillment of needs and the relief of troubles is an apostate unbeliever—and this is the religion of the Rejectionists.

And whoever excommunicates the Companions [of the Prophet] has committed unbelief, for he repudiates the statement of God the Exalted: “God was well pleased with the believers when they were swearing fealty [*baya*] to thee under the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down tranquility upon them, and rewarded them with a nigh victory” [Quran 48:18]. And he repudiates the statement of the Prophet, may God bless and preserve him: “The

Prophet is in Heaven, and Abu Bakr is in Heaven, and Umar is in Heaven, and Uthman is in Heaven, and Ali is in Heaven.”

This is the religion of the Rejectionists. They are apostate unbelievers, whose blood and property it is licit to take. And it is obligatory for us to kill them, to fight them, and to drive them away, nay but to cleanse the land of their filth.

It is well-known to the observer of Rejectionist beliefs that the Rejectionists are of three kinds, Usulis [*Ilmiyya*], Akhbaris [*Khabariyya*], and Shaykhis [*Shaykhiyya*], and the most severe of these in unbelief are the Shaykhis, the followers of Ahmad al-Ahsai,<sup>112</sup> who are the Rejectionists of the Gulf. They view Ali, may God have mercy on him, as a lord who creates and sustains—far is God above that they say!—and they claim that the Power is Ali’s, that he directs matters and relieves troubles—far is God above that they say! They are the most severe of the factions of the Rejectionists in unbelief and apostasy, and thus killing them and fighting them wherever we find them are a duty incumbent on us.

Indeed, our state [that is, the Islamic State], may God strengthen it and grant it victory, has answered the command of God, who said: “Fight them till there is no persecution and the religion is God’s entirely” [Quran 8:39]. It ordered its soldiers in all places to kill the enemies of the religion, and especially the Rejectionists, on account of the severity of their unbelief and their remoteness [from Islam]. Then what if, in addition to their unbelief, they are living in the Peninsula of Muhammad, may God bless and preserve him?

The Prophet, may God bless and preserve him, said: “Two religions shall not dwell together on the Arabian Peninsula.”

And he, may God bless and preserve him, said: “Expel the idolaters from the Arabian Peninsula.”

And what idolatry is worse than the idolatry of the Rejectionists? And what is more dangerous to Islam than the danger of the Rejectionists?

Did not the Sheikh of Islam Ibn Taymiyya al-Harrani say, “The Rejectionists are worse for the Muslims than the Jews and the Christians”?<sup>113</sup>

And so, answering the command of God the Exalted, then the command of the caliph of the Muslims, to kill the Rejectionists wherever they are found, one of the lions of the Islamic State, the worthy man—worthy we deem him and we vouch none above God—Abu Amir al-Najdi, the lion’s claw, set out, carrying on his pure body instant death and terrible poison, to explode the belt of death among the masses of the idolaters in the temple of pagan idolatry, the

place that God the Exalted detests. The flesh of the idolaters scattered, and the lives of the idolaters slipped away, by the act of this righteous monotheist—as we deem him, and may God deem him so. Their lives descended to hell, an evil homecoming. And although the Muslim community has lost this courageous lion, God has by him indeed purified the land of the filth of the idolaters. We deem him a martyr, and may God deem him so. And we hope for him the highest station among the martyrs, for verily he has delighted the hearts of the believers and enraged the hearts of the idolaters and hypocrites. So blessed be he whose departure from this lower world brings strength to this religion and degradation to unbelief and the unbelievers, delight to the believers and rage to the unbelievers, idolaters, apostates, and hypocrites.

To God belongs your achievement, O mighty state of mine. The unbelievers have joined together against you, and yet you still await the purification of the Land of the Two Holy Places from the filth of the idolaters and the apostates.

I say to our people in the Land of the Two Holy Places: by God, the Al Salul will not benefit you, and they will never protect you from the Rejectionists. Indeed, they have been unable to protect their artificial borders from the Houthi scum, so how will they protect you from the Rejectionists if they join together against you?

O people of ours. Do you not remember in 1411 [1990/1991], when the Iraqi army penetrated the borders of the Al Salul, how they had more than 40 civilian aircraft at the airport ready to bring the whole family of the Al Salul to the lands of unbelief, leaving the Sunnis unarmed to meet their fate?

O people of ours in the Land of the Two Holy Places. By God apart from Whom there is no god, only the Islamic State will protect you after God the Exalted. So come to your state. Come to the place of strength and power. Come to the Land of Islam, O young men of the Land of the Two Holy Places. O young men of the Land of the Two Holy Places, the spark has been lit. So come light a fire to burn the faces of the Rejectionists and the apostates. Come set fire to the thrones of the idolatrous rulers.

Come! For [the Prophet,] may God bless and preserve him, said, according to Tirmidhi in the *hadith* of Abu Hurayra:<sup>114</sup> “The martyr will not feel the pain of death but as one of you feels the pain of a pinch.” Indeed, the martyrdom-seeker, though his parts become pieces and his limbs are torn apart, finds no pain in death. And when he is called forth on the Day of Resurrection, his wound will flow with blood, all of him being a wound. He will flow with blood from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. The martyrdom-seeker supports the religion with his blood, flesh, bones, veins, and arteries. So good for him! Good for him, since when he meets God the Exalted, God will say to him: “My servant, what

carried you to do what you have done?" He will say: "I did this on your behalf, O Lord." God will say to him: "Right you are."

Come, O young men of the Land of the Two Holy Places. Come purify the captive land of the peninsula of the filth of the idolatrous rulers and the Rejectionists. Come, O you who seek the freedom of your prisoners. Heal your breasts! How often do they fill with rage and oppression, on account of the oppression of the idolatrous rulers and their followers? Come, O you who seek the application of God's law in the Land of the Two Holy Places. The law will not be applied but by jihad in the path of God. The law will not be applied but by jihad and martyrdom, but by blood and limbs—"until . . . the religion is God's entirely" [Quran 8:39]. Come, O people of *al-wala wal-bara*. There is only one death, so let it be in the path of God.

Sheikh Sulayman ibn Sihman,<sup>115</sup> may God have mercy on him, said: "If the people of the city and the desert fought each other until all of them perished, it would be better than if they erected an idol being worshiped apart from God."<sup>116</sup>

And what idol? The idol [*taghut*] of the peninsula, the best of lands and the cradle of revelation. It is ruled by an idol who is a vile servant of the Jews and the Christians. There the believer is degraded and humiliated, while the apostates, hypocrites, and secularists are strong and in charge. There God is blasphemed. There the Messenger of God, may God bless and preserve him, is blasphemed. The blasphemer is elevated in status, while the devoted [to God] who defends the honor of Muhammad, may God bless and preserve him, is imprisoned. Indeed, the peninsula has been worn thin to the point that its wear has been made manifest, to the point that women dare to blaspheme against and abuse the laws of the religion, blaspheme against God the Exalted, and blaspheme against the Prophet, may God bless and preserve him. You will not see a man zealous about God's religion rousing the inactive, following the practice of Islam, and killing him who blasphemes against the Prophet, may God bless and preserve him, and ridicules the religion of God. And "surely we belong to God, and to Him we return" [Quran 2:156]. "And may the eyes of the cowards never sleep."<sup>117</sup>

O Lord, if the time of my death has come, let it not be upon a bier overlaid with green garments. Rather make my day as a martyr in a band, under assault and fearing in a broad valley path.<sup>118</sup> For truly we are a people admitting of no mediation; we are out front, above the worlds or below the grave.<sup>119</sup>

And you, O prisoners of the Land of the Two Holy Places. O men of audacity and honor. O you who have supported the religion of God. By God, we have not forgotten you and will not forget you. For the Messenger of God, may God bless and preserve him, said: "Set free the captive." We ask God the Exalted

that He achieve your freedom by our hands—by God, even if our blood must flow and our limbs be torn apart at the gates of your prisons. God's setting you free by our hands is more desirable than this lower world and what is in it. So await relief from God by our hands, God willing.

And there is no might nor power save in God, the High, the Mighty. “And God prevails in His purpose, but most men know not” [Quran 12:21]. And peace and prayers be upon our Prophet Muhammad, and upon his family and his companions altogether.

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## Notes

- 1 Peter L. Bergen, *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al Qaeda's Leader* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 116.
- 2 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, "Wa-law kariha l-kafirun" [Though the unbelievers be averse], Muassasat al-Furqan, November 13, 2014, <https://archive.org/details/wlwCareha21>.
- 3 Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (London: Hurst, 2009), 33–57.
- 4 Cole Bunzel, *From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, March 2015), 10–11, <http://www.brookings.edu/-/media/research/files/papers/2015/03/ideology-of-islamic-state-bunzel/the-ideology-of-the-islamic-state.pdf>.
- 5 See, for example, Brahma Chellaney, "Saudi Arabia's Phony War on Terror," *Project Syndicate*, December 21, 2015, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/saudi-arabia-war-on-terrorism-by-brahma-chellaney-2015-12>; and Maajid Nawaz, "Saudi Arabia's ISIS-Like Justice," *Daily Beast*, January 2, 2016, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/01/02/saudi-arabia-s-isis-like-justice.html>.
- 6 Kamel Daoud, "Saudi Arabia, an ISIS That Has Made It," *New York Times*, November 20, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/21/opinion/saudi-arabia-an-isis-that-has-made-it.html>.
- 7 Salman ibn Abd al-Aziz Al Saud, *al-Usus al-tarikhyya wal-fikriyya lil-Dawla al-Saudiyya* [The historical and intellectual bases of the Saudi state] (Riyadh: Darat al-Malik Abd al-Aziz, 2011/2012), 26, 35. While Wahhabis generally do not call themselves "Wahhabis," the main tenets of their version of Islam are apparent. These include, among other things, the affirmation of *tawhid* (God's unity), the eschewal of *shirk* (idolatry, or association of something with God), the practice of *al-wala wal-bara* (associating exclusively with Wahhabi Muslims and dissociating from non-Wahhabi Muslims), and identification with the mission begun by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab.
- 8 Muharib al-Juburi, "al-Ilan an qiyam Dawlat al-Iraq al-Islamiyya" [The announcement of the Islamic State of Iraq], October 15, 2006, in *al-Majmu li-qadat Dawlat al-Iraq al-Islamiyya* [The anthology [of statements] of the leaders of the Islamic State of Iraq], Nukhbat al-Ilam al-Jihadi, 2010, [https://archive.org/download/Dwla\\_Nokhba.mjdwatl.doc](https://archive.org/download/Dwla_Nokhba.mjdwatl.doc), 222.
- 9 Uthman ibn Abd al-Rahman al-Tamimi, *Ilam al-anam bi-milad Dawlat al-Islam* [Informing mankind of the birth of the Islamic State], Muassasat al-Furqan, 2007, 41, [https://ia801901.us.archive.org/31/items/OZ00067/DAWLA\\_ISLAMIA.pdf](https://ia801901.us.archive.org/31/items/OZ00067/DAWLA_ISLAMIA.pdf).
- 10 Ibid, 7.
- 11 Ibid, 74.
- 12 Hamadi Redissi, "The Refutation of Wahhabism in Arabic Sources, 1745–1932," in *Kingdom Without Borders: Saudi Arabia's Political, Religious and Media Frontiers*, ed. Madawi Al-Rasheed (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 157.

- 13 Quoted in Alawi ibn Ahmad al-Haddad, *Misbah al-anam wa-jala al-zalam fi radd shubah al-bidi al-Najdi allati adalla biha l-awwam* [Enlightening mankind and illuminating darkness in refutation of the errors of the Najdi heretic by which he misled the multitude], (Cairo: al-Matbaa al-Amira al-Sharafiyya, 1907/08), 82.
- 14 *Al-Durar al-saniyya fi l-ajwiba al-Najdiyya* [The glistening pearls of Najdi responsa], ed. Abd al-Rahman ibn Qasim (n.p.: Warathat al-Shaykh Abd al-Rahman ibn Qasim, 2012), 8th ed., 1:95–96.
- 15 Ibid, 9:253.
- 16 Husayn ibn Ghannam, *Tarikh Ibn Ghannam* [Ibn Ghannam's history], ed. Sulayman al-Kharashi (Riyadh: Dar al-Thuluthiyya, 2010), 1:412. The Rejectionists (*al-Rafida* or *al-Rawafid*) is a derogatory term for the Shia used by Sunnis since early Islam. It refers either to the Shia's rejection of Islam or to their rejection of the first two Rightly Guided Caliphs, Abu Bakr and Umar.
- 17 Ibid, 2:899–900.
- 18 Uthman ibn Bishr, *Unwan al-majd fi tarikh Najd* [The mark of glory in the history of Najd], ed. Abd al-Rahman ibn Abd al-Latif Al al-Shaykh (Riyadh: Darat al-Malik Abd al-Aziz, 1982), 1:257–258.
- 19 *Al-Durar al-saniyya* [The glistening pearls], 9:284.
- 20 Sulayman ibn Sihman [Poem inciting to jihad against Ha'il], ms. Riyadh, King Salman Library, 3422, 95.
- 21 Guido Steinberg, “The Wahhabiyya and Shi'ism, from 1744/45 to 2008,” in *The Sunna and Shi'a in History: Division and Ecumenism in the Muslim Middle East*, ed. Ofra Bengio and Meir Litvak (New York: Palgrave, 2011), 172–73.
- 22 Turki al-Binali, *al-Salsabil fi qillat saliki l-sabil* [The fountain of the few following the path] (2012), Minbar al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, 4–5, [https://archive.org/details/Salsabil\\_201309](https://archive.org/details/Salsabil_201309). On Binali, see Cole Bunzel, “The Caliphate’s Scholar-in-Arms,” *Jihadica*, July 9, 2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20151213140850/http://www.jihadica.com/the-caliphate%E2%80%99s-scholar-in-arms/>; and Cole Bunzel, “Binali Leaks: Revelations of the Silent Mufti,” *Jihadica*, June 15, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20151217164430/http://www.jihadica.com/binali-leaks/>.
- 23 Turki al-Binali, “al-Tarjama al-ilmiyya lil-shaykh al-mujahid Turki ibn Mubarak al-Binali” [The intellectual biography of the mujahid Shaykh Turki ibn Mubarak al-Binali], Muassasat al-Battar, March 4, 2014, 3, [http://ia700708.us.archive.org/16/items/s\\_shaykh\\_bin3li/Llbj1.pdf](http://ia700708.us.archive.org/16/items/s_shaykh_bin3li/Llbj1.pdf); Binali, “Jabr al-rayn fi ritha al-Jibrin” [The force of death in the elegy of al-Jibrin], Minbar al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, June/July 2009, 1–2, <https://archive.org/download/abu-hamam-alathary/38.pdf>.
- 24 An image of the recommendation is available in Abu Usama al-Gharib, *Minnat al-Ali bi-thabat shaykhina Turki al-Binali* [The Most High's bestowal of steadfastness on our Sheikh Turki al-Binali] (2013), 58, <https://archive.org/download/minato.alali001/minato.alali001.pdf>.
- 25 Turki al-Binali, “Sharh Nawaqid al-Islam” [Commentary on the nullifiers of Islam], part one, al-Ribat Mosque, Sirte, Libya, April 6, 2013, [http://archive.org/download/Islamic\\_enty/01.mp3](http://archive.org/download/Islamic_enty/01.mp3), 42:30–42:50.
- 26 Turki Binali, *Tabsir al-mahajij bil-farq bayn rijal al-Dawla al-Islamiyya wal-Khawarij* [Showing the divergent paths of the men of the Islamic State and the Kharijites], Muassasat al-Ghuraba, January 19, 2014, 5–6, <https://archive.org/download/tabsir.almahajij.l/tabsir.almahajij.l.pdf>.
- 27 Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Mufid al-mustafid fi kufr tarik al-tawhid* [Informing the inquirer about the unbelief of the abandoner of God's unity] (Maktabat al-Himma, July/August 2015), 3–4, <http://justpaste.it/MoFeDTwheeD>.
- 28 “Arba qawa'id muhimma” [Four important principles], Maktabat al-Himma, April/May 2015, [https://ia601300.us.archive.org/35/items/Qwaed-4/Qwaed4\\_0.pdf](https://ia601300.us.archive.org/35/items/Qwaed-4/Qwaed4_0.pdf). On this text see Michael Cook, “Written and Oral Aspects of an Early Wahhabi Epistle,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 78, No. 1, February 2015.

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- 103 Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,” 36–37.
- 104 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, “Wa-law kariha l-kafirun” [Though the unbelievers be averse].
- 105 “Akhriju l-Rafida al-mushrikin min Jazirat Muhammad” [Expel the rejectionist idolaters from the peninsula of Muhammad].
- 106 Translations from the Quran are adapted from the translation by A. J. Arberry.
- 107 Companion of the Prophet, who died in 687–8.
- 108 More properly al-Samani, historian and hadith scholar from Merv in present-day Turkmenistan, who died in 1166.
- 109 Abu Zura was a hadith scholar from Rayy in Iran who died in 877. Abu Hatim—not Abu Hayyan, as the speaker mistakenly has it—was a hadith scholar from Rayy in Iran who died in 890.
- 110 Hanbali jurist from Jerusalem, who died in 1233.
- 111 Aisha was a wife of the Prophet and died in 678. In a well-known story, Aisha was accused of adultery. In Sunni tradition, a revelation from God exonerates her, but not so in Shia tradition. She is traditionally seen by the Shia as a subversive enemy of the Prophet’s family.
- 112 On Ahmad al-Ahsai and the Shaykhiyya, see Toby Matthiesen, *The Other Saudis: Shiism, Dissent and Sectarianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 41–44.
- 113 Hanbali jurist and theologian from Damascus, who died in 1328.

- 114 Tirmidhi was a hadith scholar, who died in 892. Abu Hurayra was a companion of the Prophet and died in 678–80.
- 115 Saudi-Wahhabi scholar who died in 1930.
- 116 The speaker gets a few words wrong in this famous quote from Ibn Sihman (*al-Durar al-saniyya* [The glistening pearls], 10:510).
- 117 Quote attributed to Khalid ibn al-Walid, an early Muslim general and companion of the Prophet.
- 118 Lines by the Kharijite Arabic poet al-Tarhmah ibn al-Hakim, who died in 742–43.
- 119 Line by the Shia Arabic poet Abu Firas al-Hamdani, who died in 968.

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