

Jihad in Saudi Arabia

Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979

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Introduction

It was a quiet Monday evening in Riyadh when car bombs ripped through the housing compounds. The triple suicide attack on 12 May 2003 killed thirty-five people and marked the beginning of a protracted wave of violence in Saudi Arabia. Over the next few years, the campaign waged by 'al-Qaida on the Arabian Peninsula' (QAP) would take the lives of around 300 people and maim thousands. Never before in its modern history had Saudi Arabia experienced internal violence of this scale and duration.

The 2003 violence is intriguing because it put an end to the paradox which marked Saudi Islamism in the 1980s and 1990s, namely the curious discrepancy between the large number of Saudis involved in militancy abroad and the near-absence of Islamist violence at home. Apart from a few isolated incidents, the kingdom had largely been spared the unrest which haunted Egypt and Algeria in previous decades. Why, then, did the QAP campaign break out in 2003 and not before?

The reason, this book argues, is that the jihadist movement in Saudi Arabia differs from its counterparts in the Arab republics in being driven primarily by extreme pan-Islamism and not socio-revolutionary ideology. The outward-oriented character of Saudi Islamism is due to the relative lack of socio-economic grievances and to the development of a peculiar political culture in which support for suffering Muslims abroad became a major source of political legitimacy and social status. The 2003 violence was a historical anomaly, undertaken by an extreme offshoot of the Saudi jihadist movement which had radicalised in Afghan training camps. Unlike the Egyptian and Algerian insurgencies which lasted for years, the QAP campaign lost momentum after only eighteen months, because the militants represented an alien element on the Islamist scene and had almost no popular support.

Saudi Arabia occupies a central place in the modern history of militant Islamism. Since the oil boom in the 1970s, the kingdom has promoted its ultra-conservative Wahhabi interpretation of Islam across the

world. Since the 1980s, Saudi Arabia has been a prominent supplier of fighters and funds to Muslim guerrillas in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya and elsewhere. More recently, it gained infamy as the homeland of al-Qaida leader Usama bin Ladin as well as fifteen of the nineteen hijackers on 9/11. To many in the West, Saudi Arabia is synonymous with, and partly responsible for, the rise of Muslim extremism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Yet the inner workings of Saudi Islamism remain notoriously under-explored. In much of the literature, Saudi Arabia features as a black box from which radicalism is steadily pumped into the international system. Until recently, very few studies treated Saudi Islamism as having internal dynamics and a variety of politically minded actors. The opaqueness of Saudi Islamism has been illustrated several times in recent decades by spectacular but isolated violent incidents, such as the 1979 Mecca mosque takeover, the 1995 Riyadh bombing or the 1996 Khobar bombing. Each event took observers by complete surprise, only to fade rapidly into a mist of secrecy and speculation. This book will use new primary sources to shed light on the history and dynamics of violent Islamism in the kingdom.

In a comparative political perspective, Saudi Islamism is highly interesting because of the many apparent idiosyncracies of Saudi politics and society. Most obvious is the central role and conservative interpretation of religion in the kingdom. The kingdom cultivates its identity as the heartland of Islam by conceding considerable power and funds to the Wahhabi religious establishment and making religion a central part of its own discourse. The political system is also uncommon: Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy ruled by an extensive royal family (the Al Sa'ud) in alliance with a family of clerics (the Al al-Shaykh). Moreover, the kingdom has one of the region's longest-ruling families and is one of few Middle Eastern countries untouched by Western colonialism or military coups. Economically, oil has made Saudi Arabia considerably wealthier than most of the other countries that have produced large jihadist communities, such as Egypt or Yemen. Socially, the kingdom is characterised by, among other things, the prominence of traditional social structures such as tribes and noble families. Perhaps even more striking is the speed and scale of socio-economic change in late twentieth-century Saudi Arabia. These and other factors raise intriguing questions whose significance extends beyond the narrow fields of Saudi studies or jihadist studies. For example, how can militant Islamism emerge in an Islamic state? How do the specificities of Saudi politics

and society affect dynamics of contestation? How does individual radicalisation occur in ultra-conservative, tribal and wealthy societies?¹

With these broader questions on the horizon, this book focuses on the evolution of jihadism in Saudi Arabia after 1980. Jihadism is used here as a synonym for ‘militant Sunni Islamism’, while Islamism is defined broadly as ‘Islamic activism’. Non-violent Islamist actors will be considered where relevant, but this is neither a book about Saudi Islamism as such, nor about the Saudi political system as a whole. Shiite Islamist militancy, such as the 1979 riots in the Eastern Province, the 1987 Hajj riots and the 1996 Khobar bombing, will also be left out because it represents a largely separate political phenomenon. Earlier Sunni violence such as the 1920s Ikhwan revolt is not included either, because it has been treated by other scholars and has few direct implications for militancy after 1980.²

The analysis downplays two of the most well-known parts of Saudi Islamist history for reasons that are less intuitive. The first is the famous Mecca mosque siege in November 1979. This spectacular event, which caused the death of hundreds of people, was the work of an apocalyptic sect led by the charismatic Juhayman al-Utaybi. The rebels, who called themselves the *Ikhwan*, represented a radicalised clique of an extreme pietist organisation known as *al-Jama'a al-Salafiyya al-Muhtasiba* (JSM) that had been established in Medina in the late 1960s. The clique, radicalised by arguments with scholars in Medina, the fiery personality of Juhayman and finally by a two-year desert existence, had come to believe that the end of the world was nigh. They believed that the Mahdi, an Islamic messianic figure, had manifested himself in one of the group's members, and that the latter needed to be consecrated in the Great Mosque at the end of the fourteenth century of the Islamic calendar. The Juhayman group is not treated in detail here because as an organisation it died out in 1979 and because it represented a pietist current of Saudi Islamism that is distinct from the pan-Islamist

¹ For general works on Saudi Arabia, see Alexei Vassiliev, *The History of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi Books, 2000); Madawi al-Rasheed, *A History of Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Robert Lacey, *The Kingdom: Arabia and the House of Saud* (New York: Avon, 1981).

² For more on Shiite militancy, see Fouad Ibrahim, *The Shi'is of Saudi Arabia* (London: Saqi, 2007); Toby Jones, ‘Rebellion on the Saudi Periphery: Modernity, Marginalization, and the Shi'a Uprising of 1979’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38, no. 2 (2006); and Thomas Hegghammer, ‘Deconstructing the Myth about al-Qa'ida and Khobar’, *The Sentinel* 1, no. 3 (2008). For more on the 1920s Ikhwan, see John Habib, *Ibn Saud's Warriors of Islam: The Ikhwan of Najd and Their Role in the Creation of the Sa'udi Kingdom, 1910–1930* (Leiden: Brill, 1978); and Joseph Kostiner, *The Making of Saudi Arabia: From Chieftaincy to Monarchical State* (Oxford University Press, 1993).

movement that produced the QAP. The Mecca event had an important indirect effect on Saudi Islamism by prompting the regime to give the ulama more power and Islamic activists more political space in the early 1980s. However, there are practically no substantial links, neither organisational nor ideological, between Juhayman and al-Qaida.³

Similarly, the rise of the so-called Sahwa (Awakening) movement in the 1980s and early 1990s is treated only peripherally in this book, because the Sahwa was a non-violent reformist movement whose aims, means and social base were different from that of the extreme pan-Islamists on the foreign jihad fronts. The Sahwa, whose ideology represented an amalgam of Wahhabi conservatism and Muslim Brotherhood pragmatism, grew on Saudi University campuses from the early 1970s onward under the influence of exiled teachers from the Egyptian and Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Sahwists began engaging in open polemics in the mid-1980s against the modernist literary current known as the *hadatha*. After the Gulf crisis and the deployment of US troops to Saudi Arabia, the Sahwa, led by the charismatic preachers Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Awda, presented formal political demands to the Saudi government, most famously through the petitions known as the *Letter of Demands* in 1991 and the *Memorandum of Advice* in 1992. At this point part of the Sahwa movement also produced a formal organisation, the ‘Committee for the Defence of Legitimate Rights’, the founders of which were soon forced into exile in London. After a crackdown in September 1994, the movement was silenced until it re-emerged severely weakened in the late 1990s. The Sahwa will necessarily feature in our analysis, because it was such an important part of the political landscape in which the jihadist movement operated, but the Sahwa’s history and internal dynamics will not be a major line of inquiry.⁴

The choice of terms and concepts used in this book to differentiate between various actors and ideological currents is based on two fundamental assumptions. The first is that Islamism is politically heterogeneous. Islamists work towards different short- and mid-term aims and

³ Yaroslav Trofimov pushes the Juhayman–al-Qaida link a little too far in his otherwise brilliant account of the Mecca siege; Yaroslav Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca: The Forgotten Uprising in Islam’s Holiest Shrine and the Birth of al-Qaeda* (New York: Doubleday, 2007); for more on the origin of Juhayman’s group, see Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix, ‘Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman al-Utaybi Revisited’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 39, no. 1 (2007).

⁴ For more on the Sahwa, see Mamoun Fandy, *Saudi Arabia and the Politics of Dissent* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); and Stéphane Lacroix, ‘Les champs de la discorde: Une sociologie politique de l’islamisme en Arabie Saoudite (1954–2005)’ (Ph.D. thesis, Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris, 2007).

display systematic differences in political behaviour. The second is that many of the theological descriptors commonly used in the literature on Islamism, such as *salafi*, *wahhabi*, *jihadi salafi* and *takfiri*, do not correspond to discrete and observable patterns of political behaviour among Islamists. I therefore rely instead on terms that signal the political content of the ideology at hand or the immediate political priorities of a given actor, such as ‘revolutionary’ or ‘pietist’. This approach, I argue, is a prerequisite for analysing social movements, because a social movement is by definition united by a shared set of political preferences. It makes no sense to speak of a ‘salafi social movement’, for the simple reason that actors labelled salafi have wildly different, often diametrically opposing, political agendas. This is not to say that the terms Salafism or Wahhabism should be discarded, only that they are more useful for analysing theological discourse than political behaviour.⁵

For the same reason, it is not fruitful to look at the relationship between Wahhabism and contemporary militancy as a causal one. Wahhabism, although named after a historical figure, the eighteenth-century scholar Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, is not a political doctrine, but a living theological tradition, interpreted and contested by successive generations of scholars. In the modern era, both the regime and its violent opponents anchor their discourse in the Wahhabi tradition, but they draw vastly different conclusions about politics, as Madawi al-Rasheed has shown in *Contesting the Saudi State*. Wahhabism shapes the way in which activists and their opponents articulate and legitimise their agenda; it does not, however, dictate the core content of their activism.⁶

The actor labels used in this book derive from a broader conceptual framework for distinguishing between ideal types of Islamist activism (see Table 1). The framework is based on the idea that five main rationales for action underlie most forms of Islamist activism. Under the term rationale, I subsume observed mid-term political aims and strategy. These rationales, which may have both a violent and a non-violent manifestation, represent the five principal purposes for which

⁵ John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, ‘Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory’, *American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (1977): 1218; Thomas Hegghammer, ‘Jihadi Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Theology and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism’, in *Global Salafism*, ed. Roel Meijer (London and New York: Hurst and Columbia University Press, 2009).

⁶ For more on Wahhabism, see David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006); Guido Steinberg, *Religion und Staat in Saudi-Arabien* (Würzburg: Egon, 2002); Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Mohammed Ayoub and Hasan Kosebalaban, eds., *Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia: Wahhabism and the State* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2008).

Table 1. *A rationale-based typology of Islamist activism with examples from Saudi Arabia*

RATIONALE	NON-VIOLENT FORM		VIOLENT FORM	
	<i>Manifestation</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Manifestation</i>	<i>Examples</i>
State-oriented	Reformism	Sahwa	Socio-revolutionary Islamism	n/a
Nation-oriented	Irredentism	n/a	Violent irredentism	n/a
Umma-oriented	Soft pan-Islamism	World Muslim League	Violent pan-Islamism Classical jihadism Global jihadism	Saudis in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Bosnia, Iraq Qaida, QAP
Morality-oriented	Pietism	JSM	Vigilantism	Juhayman's Ikhwan, Unorganised <i>hisba</i>
Sectarian	Sectarianism	n/a	Violent sectarianism	n/a

Islamists act. For violent groups, they represent the most important mid-term objectives for the armed struggle:

- *Socio-revolutionaries* fight for state power against a Muslim regime perceived as illegitimate.
- *Violent irredentists* struggle for a specific territory against a local non-Muslim occupier.
- *Violent pan-Islamists* fight to defend the entire Muslim nation and its territories from non-Muslim aggression. Among these, classical jihadists will fight conventionally in local conflict zones, while global jihadists fight the West with all means in all places.
- *Vigilantists* use violence to correct the moral behaviour of fellow Muslims.
- *Violent sectarians* kill to intimidate and marginalise the competing sect (Sunni or Shiite).

These are not mutually exclusive categories, but ideal-type motivations that partially overlap. Most Islamists act to promote several or even all of these objectives, but all actors will, at any given time, have one dominant rationale which determines the principal modalities of the actor's violent behaviour.

Three terms feature prominently in the following analysis and require further elaboration, namely ‘socio-revolutionary Islamism’, ‘classical jihadism’ and ‘global jihadism’. The first term is associated with the ideas of Sayyid Qutb and refers to activism intended to topple a Muslim government through a military coup. This was the principal form of militant Islamist activism in 1970s Egypt and Syria, as well as in 1990s Algeria. The violence of these groups struck primarily targets associated with the government, and the dominant discursive theme or frame in their texts was the corruption, repression and malgovernance of the Muslim ruler.

The two latter terms refer to extreme forms of pan-Islamist activism. Classical jihadism is so termed by this author because the underlying doctrine is closer than other militant ideologies to orthodox conceptions of jihad, though not identical to them. The classical jihadist doctrine is a modern invention, first articulated by Abdallah Azzam in the context of the 1980s jihad in Afghanistan. Azzam argued that non-Muslim infringement of Muslim territory demanded the immediate military involvement of all able Muslim men in defence of the said territory, wherever its location. He thus redefined the political content of contemporary jihad from a struggle against Muslim regimes over state power to a defensive struggle against non-Muslims over territory. This conception of jihad was closer to orthodox views on legitimate jihad – hence its popularity – but Azzam differed from mainstream ulama in arguing that all Muslims, not just the population immediately concerned, had a duty to fight.⁷

Classical jihadism has long been confused with its more radical ideological sibling, the doctrine of global jihadism, which was developed by Usama bin Ladin in the mid-1990s. Both considered the fight against non-Muslim powers involved in the oppression of Muslims as more important than the fight against corrupt Muslim governments. Both framed their struggle similarly, using a rhetoric whose discursive theme was the humiliation of Muslims at the hands of non-Muslims, usually illustrated by long lists of symbols of Muslim suffering. However, while Azzam advocated guerrilla warfare within defined conflict zones against enemies in uniform, Bin Ladin called for indiscriminate mass-casualty out-of-area attacks. This is why Arabs in 1980s Afghanistan or 1990s Bosnia and Chechnya, all of whom were classical jihadists, practically never undertook international terrorist operations, while

⁷ For overviews of the concept of jihad in the classical tradition, see David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and Michael Bonner, *Jihad in Islamic History: Doctrines and Practice* (Princeton University Press, 2006).

al-Qaida militants have attacked a broad range of Western targets in a variety of locations. The difference between classical and global jihadists is important because in late 1990s and early 2000s Saudi Arabia, the two communities opposed each other, notably on the issue of whether to fight in Saudi Arabia or abroad.

Interestingly, extreme pan-Islamism shares a number of structural similarities with nationalist-type ideologies, notably the focus on the liberation of territory, the primacy placed on the fight against the external enemy and the emphasis on internal unity in the face of outside threats. It is indeed possible to view pan-Islamism as a macro-nationalism centred on the imagined community of the umma, which is defined by religion and to some extent by language (Arabic having a special status in Islam). Although the Muslim nation is by definition aterritorial – the umma is wherever Muslims are – pan-Islamists have a clear sense of what constitutes Muslim territory, namely all lands once ruled by Muslims, from Andalucia in the West to Indonesia in the East. Some scholars may object to the view of pan-Islamism as a macro-nationalism. However, the perspective makes better sense when linked to the ideal-type distinction between revolutionary-utopian and ethno-nationalist ideologies, which has proved heuristically very fruitful in the analysis of militancy outside the Middle East. Peter Waldmann documented generic differences in behaviour and recruitment patterns between ethno-nationalist and leftist extremist groups in 1970s and 1980s Europe. As we shall see later in the book, some of these same differences characterise the relationship between socio-revolutionary and pan-Islamist activists.⁸

If we examine the history of Sunni Islamist violence in the kingdom with the above-mentioned concepts in mind, a clear and interesting pattern emerges, namely that most of the violence has been of the extreme pan-Islamist kind. There has been some moral vigilantism, while socio-revolutionary violence is very rare. Seven episodes of Sunni Islamist violence have marked the kingdom's recent history. First was the 1979 Mecca incident, which was a sui generis phenomenon, although closest to vigilantist violence because it was intended as an act of collective moral purification. Second was a series of three small attacks on US targets during the 1991 Gulf war. Third was a little-known series of around ten non-lethal attacks on symbols of moral corruption (video shops, women's centres, etc.) in the Qasim

⁸ Peter Waldmann, 'Ethnic and Sociorevolutionary Terrorism: A Comparison of Structures', in *Social Movements and Violence: Participation in Underground Organisations*, ed. Donatella Della Porta (Greenwich: JAI, 1992).

province and in Riyadh around 1991. The attacks were carried out by a small group of extreme pietists who viewed their deeds as *hisba*, or moral policing. Fourth was the 1995 Riyadh bombing, which targeted a US military facility. The fifth wave took place between 2000 and early 2003 in the form of a series of small-scale attacks (booby traps on cars, drive-by shootings, letter bombs etc.) on Western expatriates. Although none of the perpetrators were ever found, the violence was most likely the work of amateur militants driven by anti-Westernism. The sixth wave was a series of five assassination attempts on judges and policemen in the northern city of Sakaka in the Jawf province in late 2002 and early 2003. The Sakaka events represent arguably the only cases of violence against civilian representatives of the government in modern Saudi history.⁹

The seventh and by far the most important wave of violence was the QAP campaign. Through both acts and discourse, the QAP exhibited a primarily pan-Islamist agenda. Most premeditated attacks were on Western targets, and there was never a single successful attack on a Cabinet member, royal palace or civilian government building outside the security apparatus. There were attacks on security forces and the Interior Ministry, but only relatively late in the campaign when vengeance had become a factor. In its publications, the QAP consistently justified its violence as a defensive reaction to US aggression in the Muslim world. The top al-Qaida leadership may well have wanted regime change, but it is clear from the QAP literature, in particular the many interviews with and biographies of militants published in the magazine *Sawt al-Jihad* (Voice of Jihad), that most mid- and low-level operatives saw themselves as waging primarily a pan-Islamist struggle.

Extreme pan-Islamism thus seems to have been the dominant, though not the only, rationale behind Islamist militancy in the kingdom in recent decades. The history of Saudi jihadism is therefore largely the history of the extreme pan-Islamist subcurrent of Saudi Islamism. How, then, can we best go about explaining the rise of this current and the outbreak of the QAP campaign?

Broadly speaking, the existing literature offers three main paradigms for explaining the evolution of Saudi jihadism. First are

⁹ For the 1991 attacks, see Elizabeth Rubin, 'The Jihadi Who Kept Asking Why', *New York Times*, 7 March 2004; author's interviews with Mansur al-Nuqaydan, Riyadh, April 2004 and Nasir al-Barrak, Dammam, December 2005. For the 1995 Riyadh bombing, see Joshua Teitelbaum, *Holier than Thou: Saudi Arabia's Islamic Opposition*, vol. LII (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000). For the 2000–3 attacks and the Sakaka assassinations, see J. E. Peterson, 'Saudi Arabia: Internal Security Incidents Since 1979', *Arabian Peninsula Background Note*, no. 3 (2005).

organisational-level analyses which attribute the QAP campaign to a decision by Usama bin Ladin and al-Qaida to open a battlefield in Saudi Arabia. Anthony Cordesman, Nawaf Obaid, Dominique Thomas and Bruce Riedel have each provided very valuable insights into al-Qaida's strategic thinking and the early history of the QAP organisation. However, these analyses do not adequately explain why Bin Ladin suddenly decided to launch the campaign in 2003 and not before. Moreover, organisational-level analyses tend to skirt the deeper causes of the violence.¹⁰

Some scholars have therefore presented structuralist explanations which see the violence as the natural result of deep socio-economic problems or fundamental dysfunctions in the Saudi state system. Some have emphasised the economic dimension and argued that Saudi Arabia experiences violence because it is in a terrorism-prone stage of economic development. Others, such as Joshua Teitelbaum, have acknowledged the importance of socio-economic factors, but suggested that the real problem is the 'ideology of religious extremism' which underlies the legitimacy of the Saudi state. A related, but more sophisticated analysis is that presented by Madawi al-Rasheed in her landmark work on Saudi Islamism, *Contesting the Saudi State*. Al-Rasheed explains Saudi jihadism as one of several permutations of Wahhabism after the authoritarian Saudi state lost the monopoly over Wahhabi discourse under the pressures of globalisation. Al-Rasheed does not articulate a clear explanation for the outbreak of the 2003 violence, presumably because this is not the focus of her book, but she does allude to the authoritarian nature of the state and its instrumentalisation of Wahhabism as root causes of Saudi jihadism. The key problem with these explanations, however, is that they rarely account for chronological variation in levels of violence, and they are particularly badly suited to explain small-scale violence of the kind that has taken place in the kingdom. Political violence is rarely the linear expression of structural strain, because violent contestation requires actors who can mobilise followers and operationalise intentions.¹¹

¹⁰ Nawaf Obaid and Anthony Cordesman, *Al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia: Asymmetric Threats and Islamic Extremists* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2005); Dominique Thomas, *Les hommes d'Al-Qaïda: Discours et stratégie* (Paris: Michalon, 2005), 39–58; and Bruce Riedel and Bilal Y. Saab, 'Al Qaeda's Third Front: Saudi Arabia', *The Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2008).

¹¹ Robert Looney, 'Combating Terrorism Through Reforms: Implications of the Bremer-Kasarda Model for Saudi Arabia', *Strategic Insights* 3, no. 4 (2004); Joshua Teitelbaum, 'Terrorist Challenges to Saudi Arabian Internal Security', *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 9, no. 3 (2005); al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, 134–74.

A third and related type of explanation has therefore drawn on social movement theory and presented the QAP campaign as the violent phase in a ‘cycle of contention’ of the Saudi Islamist movement. This is the approach used by Roel Meijer to argue that the violent phase was brought about by the 1995 repression of the non-violent Islamist opposition. However, this approach assumes the existence of a coherent Saudi Islamist movement, while there are important ideological differences and few organisational links between the QAP and the opposition of the early 1990s. Moreover, this approach does not adequately explain the specific timing of the QAP campaign.¹²

To overcome this triple methodological challenge – namely that organisational analyses omit root causes, that structural explanations cannot explain timing and that social movement theory does not work well on the Saudi Islamist movement as a whole – I propose to apply a multi-level social movement framework to the more narrowly defined Saudi jihadist movement. I draw here on the work of Donatella Della Porta, who studied leftist extremism in Italy and Germany by distinguishing between macro-level variables such as styles of protest policing, meso-level variables such as underground organisational dynamics, and micro-level variables such as recruitment and radicalisation processes. This powerful framework makes it easier to capture both root causes and tactical variations, and to assess the effect of synchronic changes at different levels of analysis.¹³

The following analysis will therefore identify the most crucial chronological periods and study each of them on the macro, meso and micro levels. At the macro level I will look primarily at international political developments, the domestic political space for jihadist activism and ideological developments in the wider Islamist community. At the meso level the focus will be on ‘first movers’ and entrepreneurs, and on the strategies they employed to mobilise followers. At the micro level, I will look at the socio-economic profiles, declared motivations and patterns of joining of individual recruits. All chapters at a given level of analysis are not entirely symmetrical, partly because they cover time periods of very different length. However, they do answer the same broad questions about context, agency and individual radicalisation respectively.

¹² Roel Meijer, ‘The “Cycle of Contention” and the Limits of Terrorism in Saudi Arabia’, in *Saudi Arabia in the Balance*, ed. Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman (London: Hurst, 2005).

¹³ Donatella Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9–14.

The central concern throughout the analysis is to understand and explain *mobilisation*, that is, why and how human, material and immaterial resources were marshalled and organised for political action. I will also pay some attention to the way in which actors frame their struggle to attract followers, and to the dynamics that affect the mobilising power of their frame. The broader notion of 'ideology' thus comes in at all three levels of analysis: as part of the environment in which agents operate, as part of their strategy to mobilise followers and as part of the individual recruitment process.¹⁴

The problem, of course, is that this type of analysis requires a considerable amount of detailed information about the actors, whereas the groups we are dealing with here are small, violent and secretive. Indeed, ten years ago it probably would not have been possible to write this book. However, three recent developments have made Saudi jihadism considerably more transparent. First and most important is the Internet, which has revolutionised the academic study of militant Islamism. Since the late 1990s, jihadists have used the Internet as a distribution platform, library and information exchange for texts, recordings and videos. The QAP in particular published an astonishing amount of documentation about itself in 2003 and 2004, making it arguably one of the best-documented terrorist groups in history. Documentation from jihadist websites must obviously be used with caution, but authenticity is less of an issue than sceptics think. Forgery is difficult because individual documents can always be checked against other sources for consistency of style and content. Inaccuracies, on the other hand, are a more serious concern, but this problem can be addressed by relying on accumulated evidence. This study is based on thousands of texts, recordings and videos systematically collected from the Internet over a period of six years.¹⁵

Another change which made this study possible was Saudi Arabia's opening up to Western social scientists from around 2002 onward.

¹⁴ David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, 'Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization', in *International Social Movement Research: From Structure to Action*, ed. Bert Klendermans, Hans Peter Kriesi and Sidney Tarrow (Greenwich: JAI Press, 1988).

¹⁵ The remarkable textual production of the QAP included five different publication series: *Sawt al-Jihad* (Voice of Jihad), published in thirty issues (30–50 pages each); *Mu'askar al-Battar* (Camp of the Sabre), twenty-two issues (30–50 pages); *al-Khansa'* (named after a seventh-century female poet), one issue; *al-Taqrir al-Ikhbari* (News Report), twenty-three issues; and *al-Bayan* (Statement), at least three issues. The QAP also produced several 40–90-minute films documenting their operations in remarkable detail, such as *Wills of the Martyrs*, *Martyrs of the Confrontations*, *Badr of Riyadh*, *The Quds Squadron* and *The Falluja Raid*.

This author was able to conduct extensive fieldwork in Saudi Arabia on five trips between 2004 and 2008. Although I was never able to access active QAP members, I interviewed their friends and families, veterans of foreign jihad fronts, former radicals, moderate Islamists, journalists and expert commentators across the country. Some of the informants have been anonymised in this book for obvious reasons.

The third development was the change of attitude among Saudi authorities towards information-sharing after the outbreak of the QAP violence. From May 2003 onward, the Interior Ministry was considerably more forthcoming with information about security incidents than it had been in the past. The change likely reflected a realisation that the Internet and satellite TV had broken the state's monopoly on information, and that the government needed to present its own version of events as an alternative to that of the militants. Local Saudi media, while state controlled, were also allowed to undertake a certain amount of investigative reporting.

For the micro-level analysis the book relies on a collection of 539 biographies of Saudi militants whose activities span a range of arenas from the 1980s Afghan jihad to the QAP campaign (but excluding Iraq). The biographies were collated from open sources by this author alone over a period of over four years. More detailed information about the sources and the socio-economic data is included in Appendix 1. The ambition of the micro-level analysis is not primarily comparative, so it does not engage systematically with the vast and growing corpus of profile-based studies of individual radicalisation. It does, however, provide a relatively detailed look at how some Saudis became militants.¹⁶

This book will inevitably contain factual errors and omissions, as do all empirically rich studies of clandestine phenomena. Nevertheless, I believe the data is sufficiently extensive and varied to provide relatively well-founded answers to some of the above-mentioned questions.

¹⁶ For studies of individual radicalisation in other contexts, see e.g. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, 'Anatomy of Egypt's Militant Islamic Groups: Methodological Notes and Preliminary Findings', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12, no. 4 (1981); Ayla Hammond Schbley, 'Torn Between God, Family and Money: The Changing Profile of Lebanon's Religious Terrorists', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 23 (2000); Ami Pedahzur, Leonard Weinberg and Arie Perliger, 'Altruism and Fatalism: The Characteristics of Palestinian Suicide Terrorists', *Deviant Behaviour* 24 (2003); Alan B. Krueger and Jitka Malečková, 'Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is there a Causal Connection?', *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (2003); Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Edwin Bakker, 'Jihadi Terrorists in Europe', in *Clingendael Security Paper no. 2* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2006).

The central argument, put very simply, is that Saudi jihadism has been more pan-Islamist than revolutionary, in contrast to the Arab republics where the reverse has been true. I further argue that the QAP campaign represented the homecoming of a Saudi jihadist movement which had developed in three stages. The first stage lasted from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s and saw the formation of a classical jihadist movement which engaged in local struggles of national liberation in places such as Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya in the name of pan-Islamism. The classical jihadist movement emerged at this time for three reasons. First, the increase in the number and visibility of conflicts pitting Muslims versus non-Muslims made pan-Islamist rhetoric more empirically credible. Second, domestic political factors produced a beneficial political opportunity structure for extreme pan-Islamist activism. Third, Abdallah Azzam and his associates exercised excellent social movement entrepreneurship.

The second phase, from the mid-1990s to 2001, witnessed the emergence of the more radical 'global jihadist' branch of the Saudi jihadist movement. The global jihadists were also extreme pan-Islamists, but differed from the classical jihadists by their anti-Americanism and their willingness to use international terrorist tactics. The global jihadists, represented by the al-Qaida organisation, attracted many Saudis in the late 1990s because Bin Ladin succeeded in establishing a local recruitment infrastructure, winning the support of radical clerics and exploiting popular sympathy for the Chechen and Palestinian causes.

In the third phase, from 2002 to 2006, the global jihadist branch produced an organisation, the QAP, which waged war on the Western presence in Saudi Arabia. The immediate cause of the QAP campaign was a strategic decision by Usama bin Ladin, taken after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan, to open a battlefield in the kingdom. In the spring of 2002, several hundred Saudi fighters returned from Afghanistan to Saudi Arabia and began making military preparations under the supervision of Yusuf al-Uyayri. The mobilisation was facilitated by inconsistent policing, a polarisation of the Islamist field and new symbols of Muslim suffering.

The book is structured over a basic 3x3 grid with three chronological periods and three levels of analysis. The first part explains the rise of classical jihadism in Saudi Arabia between 1979 and 1995. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 analyse the emergence of a classical jihadist movement at the macro, meso and micro level respectively. The second part moves forward in time, narrows the focus to the global jihadists and examines the mobilisation of Saudis to al-Qaida between 1996 and 2001. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are thus devoted to the context, the agents and

the subjects of recruitment to al-Qaida in Afghanistan. The third and final part examines the formation of the QAP in 2002 and 2003, with chapters 7, 8 and 9 devoted to the macro-, meso- and micro-level aspects of the group's formation. Chapter 10 serves as an epilogue that explains how the campaign evolved and why it failed.