

## The Jihadi Factor in Wahhabi Islam

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Since there is a lot of talk about jihad in the air these days, let me begin with some categorical distinctions. One kind of jihad movement seeks national liberation from non-Muslim rule or oppression, as in Palestine, Kashmir, Chechnya and Bosnia. A second kind of jihad movement seeks to overthrow Muslim governments on the grounds that they are actually apostate regimes, as in Algeria and Egypt during the 1990s. A third kind of jihad movement is directed against the United States and its allies, the so-called far enemy, as in the case of Al Qaeda. Curiously, none of these varieties matches jihad waged under the Wahhabi-Saudi banner in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: warfare designed to conquer neighboring territories deemed idolatrous in order to expand the realm of monotheism. In Saudi Arabia today, controversy over jihad stems from tensions within Wahhabi doctrine between a propensity to obey Saudi authority in the political realm and the imperative to at least bear enmity toward infidels if not wage jihad against them. I begin with a review of jihad in Wahhabi doctrine and practice, then analyze some aspects of ideological affinity between jihadi discourses and Wahhabi doctrine, and consider how dissident Saudis have turned Wahhabism into a rebel cry.

**Da'wa and Dawla.** Strictly speaking, Wahhabi doctrine does not privilege Saudi rule. Wahhabi doctrine is a set of positions rooted in a particular reading of the Quran and the Sunna. In theory, it could be invoked for various, even contrary political purposes, for endowing legitimacy on Al Saud, or for stripping it away. The marriage between doctrine and a particular political power was one of convenience. Before arriving at al-

Dir`iyya in 1744, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab had preached his message in two nearby towns. Had his previous host withstood pressures to expel him, we might today be speaking about the Kingdom of “Muammari” Arabia.<sup>1</sup>

Saudi rule possesses legitimacy on condition it implements and rules according to Wahhabi doctrine. There has never been clarification as to how far Saudi rulers can bend Wahhabi doctrine and retain legitimacy. During the period of dynastic strife in the 1870s, one Saudi amir appealed for Ottoman assistance and thereby forfeited Wahhabi allegiance for violating the prohibition against alliance with infidels. In the late 1920s, some Wahhabi preachers backed the Ikhwan’s revolt against Abdulaziz ibn Saud for his decision to bar jihad against infidels in Transjordan and Iraq. The August 1990 decision to invite non-Muslim military forces for protection provoked religious dissent. In each case, a purist reading of Wahhabi doctrine could conclude that Al Saud had violated their duties, and in each instance, a section of Wahhabi ulama objected.<sup>2</sup>

The willingness of the Wahhabi leadership to countenance such violations reveals a calculation that ensuring their da’wa’s survival required compromise on core principles. In other words, the tendency to accommodation is based on the notion that without Al Saud, the da’wa may not survive. But that is a political judgment, not a doctrinal principle. The closest one comes to Wahhabi doctrinal justification for yielding to the ruler are the positions that preserving the community’s solidarity is necessary and that

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<sup>1</sup> For the historical background and development of the Wahhabi movement, see David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> For analysis of these episodes, see Abdulaziz H. al-Fahad, “Commentary: From Exclusivism to Accommodation: Doctrinal and Legal Evolution of Wahhabism,” *New York University Law Review*, 79:2 (2004), 485-519. For an extensive account of how Wahhabi ulama responded to political complications during the Saudi dynastic struggle of the 1870s, see Michael Crawford, “Civil War, Foreign Intervention, and the Question of Political Legitimacy: A Nineteenth Century Saudi Qadi’s Dilemma,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 14:2 (1982), 227-248.

subjects owe the ruler obedience unless he commands them to violate a basic principle of Islamic law.<sup>3</sup>

**Jihad in Wahhabi Doctrine** Once Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab gained the support of Muhammad ibn Saud, they both saw profit in expansionist war. Doctrine served power and power served doctrine. What had been endemic raiding among oasis chieftaincies was elevated to jihad. How could Arabian skirmishing among petty Muslim rulers turn into religious warfare? The answer lies in Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings.

He reiterated the standard view that believers are to wage jihad against idolaters, but he parted with consensus in his definition of idolatry. In *The Book of God's Unity* he argued that proclaiming belief in one God and in Muhammad as His messenger does not make one a Muslim. One might sincerely affirm that belief, but if one also practiced customs that indicated devotion to one of God's creatures, then one was in fact a polytheist, not a Muslim. The justification for jihad is a hadith: "Whoever affirms that there is no god but God and denies all other objects of worship, safeguards his blood, property, and fate with God." Ibn Abd al-Wahhab interpreted that to mean that merely declaring belief in one God does not make one's blood and property safe from attack. One must also deny any other object of worship, and if that denial is ever compromised, then the safeguard against attack is lifted. The Muslims of his era rained criticism on him for declaring other believers to be infidels, pronouncing takfir, but he held fast to that position.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Al-Fahad, "From Exclusivism to Accommodation," 513-514; Crawford, "Civil War," 231, 233.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, *Kitab al-tawhid*, in Muhammad Rashid Rida (ed), *Majmu'at al-tawhid al-najdiyya*, Reprint edition (Riyadh, 1999), 29-30; Husayn ibn Ghannam, *Tarikh najd* (Cairo, 1961), 467-471.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab augmented the basis for jihad by adding the criterion of allegiance to the monotheist cause. It was possible to affirm belief yet fall into the ranks of the unbelievers if one's actions in a political contest between believers and infidels did not conform to belief. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab declared that his folk were fighting for a cause on which all the ulama agree, namely, the profession of faith. That is a point on which Muslims would indeed agree, but he made allegiance to his doctrine and its Al Saud patrons the criterion for dividing the world between believers and unbelievers. If you did not join the Saudi-Wahhabi enterprise, you were relegated to the ranks of unbelievers even if you were in complete accord with true belief and worship of one God.<sup>5</sup>

One final point in Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's jihad doctrine is essential to note. He reserved to the sovereign ruler the decision to wage jihad. Ordinary believers do not determine when to wage jihad. The doctrine assumes that the sovereign is legitimate leader of the believers. For Wahhabi ulama under the first Saudi state, there was no doubt that Al Saud possessed legitimate authority.

**Jihad in practice** The expansion of the first Saudi amirate during the 1700s and early 1800s took place in accord with Wahhabi doctrine, which divided Arabia between domains of belief---territory ruled by Al Saud with subjects following the religious guidance of Wahhabi ulama---and unbelief. Saudi rulers commanded the jihad to expand the realm of belief and eliminate polytheism. Thus Saudi chroniclers and Wahhabi authors render that chapter of history as a triumphant jihad in the path of God. The tide turned shortly after the Saudis seized Mecca and Medina from the Ottoman Empire. In

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<sup>5</sup> Ibn Ghannam, *Tarikh najd*, 405-407.

1811, the pasha of Egypt, Mehmet Ali, launched a war to recover the holy cities and extinguish the upstart Arabian power. In autumn 1818, the Saudi amirate was crushed, its capital razed, the religious and political leaders exiled and dispersed. A few years later, the Saudis regained power in Central Arabia and restored Wahhabi doctrine, which initially showed no sign of readiness to dilute the commitment to jihad.

In 1837, Mehmet Ali's forces invaded Arabia for the second time. According to the leading Wahhabi sheikh of the time, Abd al-Rahman ibn Hasan, the Saudi ruler, Amir Faysal, wavered on mobilizing for jihad against Egyptian forces when they occupied Medina. Abd al-Rahman wrote that he urged Faysal to call upon "the resources of the bedouin, the crops of Sudayr and Washm, the dates of al-Hasa and Qatif, and the fighters of al-Qasim" to wage jihad against the invaders. Before Faysal could take action, the people of Riyadh betrayed him and expelled him. In this account, the doctrinal conditions for waging jihad remained constant.<sup>6</sup>

Abd al-Rahman's adherence to a purist view of the enemy is also on display in an epistle he composed during the Egyptian occupation. Wahhabi ulama divided between those who withdrew from lands that came under Egyptian rule and those who chose to remain. Abd al-Rahman condemned the latter, who were arguing that it was permissible for Muslims to live under infidel rule and not an obligation to perform hijra (emigration) as long as they could practice their religion. They also argued that since the Saudi amir was in Egyptian captivity, his followers had no legitimate leader to wage jihad in resistance to infidel occupation. That point accorded with Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's position on delegating to the sovereign the authority to declare and lead jihad. But Abd al-Rahman ibn Hasan argued that if there is no imam, then one would emerge as leader of

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<sup>6</sup> Abd al-Rahman ibn Hasan Al al-Shaykh, *al-Maqamat* (Riyadh, n.d.) 28.

jihad against infidel rule. He reversed the position that there is no jihad without an imam and held there is no imam without jihad.<sup>7</sup>

**Compromising the da'wa for raison de dawla** The first notable compromise on jihad doctrine occurred after Mehmet Ali withdrew his forces from Arabia in 1840. Amir Faysal regained power and never again challenged Ottoman authority. Crushing defeats in 1818 and 1838 taught Saudi rulers the wisdom of following a pragmatic line rather than pursuing a course that would prove suicidal for both da'wa and dawla. It is not clear how Sheikh Abd al-Rahman and other Wahhabi ulama regarded peaceful coexistence with the Ottomans, but there is abundant evidence that they continued to view the Ottomans as polytheists whose company Muslims must avoid. The issue of jihad resurfaced briefly in the 1870s with calls for war against Ottoman forces occupying al-Hasa.<sup>8</sup> Otherwise, it lay dormant until Abdulaziz ibn Saud reactivated jihad in 1902 to recover his patrimony, tapping the fighting abilities of nomadic tribesmen recruited to the Ikhwan.

The rise and fall of the Ikhwan between 1912 and 1929 was a critical episode in Ibn Saud's rise to power. Besides their significance as fighters, they represented the domestication of tribal nomads through settlement in agricultural communities and indoctrination in Wahhabi principles. Conversion to Wahhabism endowed their participation in military operations with religious legitimacy: ghazawat became jihad. Ordinarily, their military activities served Ibn Saud's purposes, but the Ikhwan sometimes committed atrocities and carried out raids without his consent. A confrontation became inevitable when the Ikhwan attacked tribes across recently

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<sup>7</sup> Al-Fahad, "From Exclusivism to Accommodation," 498-500; Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Qasim (ed), *Al-Durar al-saniya fi al-ajwiba al-najdiyya* 12 vols. (Riyadh, 1995), 8:167-168.

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Qasim, *al-Durar al-saniya*, 8:385. Crawford, "Civil War," 238-239.

demarcated international frontiers between Ibn Saud's domain and the British mandates of Transjordan and Iraq. From the Ikhwan's perspective, there was no reason to recognize the frontiers any more than they did the former boundaries between Hashemite Hijaz and Najd. But Ibn Saud could not afford to provoke a military conflict with Great Britain any more than Faysal could risk war against Mehmet Ali, and he ordered the Ikhwan to cease their jihad.

While the conditions for jihad based on Wahhabi doctrine seemed to be the same as those in the eighteenth century, indeed during the first twenty-five years of Ibn Saud's military campaigns, the issue came down to deciding who had the authority to declare jihad. From the Ikhwan perspective, it was natural to continue waging jihad against neighboring polytheists. From Ibn Saud's perspective, whether or not to wage jihad was his prerogative. Leading Wahhabi ulama ruled that Muslims owed obedience to the ruler and that the ruler could punish subjects for waging jihad without his permission.<sup>9</sup> The emphasis on obedience to the ruler and authorizing the ruler to suppress raids in the name of jihad did not contradict Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings, but it did mark a shift in emphasis away from expansionist jihad against the enemies of monotheism. Wahhabi ulama figured that preserving the da'wa required compromise for the sake of the sheltering dawla.

**Loosening ties between da'wa and dawla** In 1932, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was officially proclaimed with internationally recognized borders (more or less: boundary disputes with Yemen, Oman, and the Trucial States took decades to resolve). Ibn Saud and his successors developed normal relations with other Muslim governments, dropping the traditional Wahhabi view of other Muslims as unbelievers and hence the

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<sup>9</sup> Al-Fahad, "From Exclusivism to Accommodation," 514.

rationale for waging jihad against them. Ibn Saud and his successors consolidated their kingdom by opening it to outside forces that in Wahhabi doctrine would be deemed infidel. Both non-Wahhabi Muslims and even non-Muslims advised Ibn Saud and developed his realm's resources. The consolidation and growth of state institutions embedded the Wahhabi estate in the dynasty's political projects, particularly through the creation of institutions and offices dedicated to implementing and preserving the da'wa.

Two developments arising from the kingdom's incorporation into the international system diminished discursive uniformity in the Wahhabi estate. First, the kingdom admitted religious activists, namely Muslim Brothers, fleeing persecution in Arab nationalist countries, and the ideas of these activists began to circulate alongside Wahhabi doctrine in schools and universities. Second, Wahhabis cooperated with religious activists in numerous Muslim countries through international religious organizations. The combined effect of these two developments, intended to buttress the position of the dawla in the Arab and wider Muslim worlds, was to introduce Saudis to Muslim Brother authors and writings, and to introduce Muslims outside Saudi Arabia to Wahhabi authors and writings. Both developments had the potential to loosen the da'wa's connection to the Saudi dawla. Inside the kingdom, Muslim Brother ideology was attractive for its attention to political, social, and economic issues on which Wahhabism had little to say. Outside the kingdom, Muslims encountered Wahhabi doctrine in spaces beyond the reach of Saudi government control. The logic of these developments unfolded in the 1980s, when the dawla reactivated jihad to bolster its religious credentials. By that time, Arab religious intellectuals outside the kingdom had elaborated new frameworks for conceiving the conditions for waging jihad.

**Affinities between Discourses of Exclusion** In the 1970s and 1980s, jihad became a conspicuous part of Muslim political discourse, both as a rallying cry for nationalist causes against foreign occupation and as part of revolutionary political thought targeting Muslim regimes deemed apostate. It is common to trace the contemporary jihadist stream to the later writings of Sayyid Qutb. That is not entirely accurate, but it is still useful to compare aspects of his thought to Wahhabi doctrine.

One point of similarity between Qutb's thought and Wahhabism relates to the grounds for exclusion by takfir. Qutb upheld the notion of God's sole right to sovereignty and the corollary that submission to human authority is a form of *shirk* (idolatry). This has a similar ring to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's pronouncement that worship belongs to God alone and that worshipping a created being is *shirk*. Similar, but not identical: Qutb was writing about political sovereignty and the right to legislate while Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was writing about forms of worship. Qutb's gloss on the testimony of faith, "There is no god but God," holds that God is the only ruler and source of law, whereas Ibn Abd al-Wahhab interpreted the phrase to mean that all worship is due to God. The differences arise from the political meaning that Qutb assigned to *tawhid*---the unity of Muslims under the Quran---as opposed to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's theological analysis of *tawhid*'s three senses pertaining to God's lordship over creation, sole object of worship, and transcendent attributes.<sup>10</sup>

On the issue of jihad, Wahhabi doctrine coincides with Sayyid Qutb's position in a general sense: both view jihad as a means to eliminate worship and obedience to any

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<sup>10</sup> Ahmed S. Moussalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism: The Ideological and Political Discourse of Sayyid Qutb* (Syracuse, 1993), 150-151.

created being but God.<sup>11</sup> But they differ on more specific criteria for defining the enemy. In Wahhabi doctrine, the enemy is the unbeliever located outside the territory under Muslim ruler; jihad is necessary to extend monotheism's realm. In Qutb's thought, the enemy is the apostate ruler oppressing believers and failing to adhere to sharia; jihad is a means to rid believers of such rulers, it is a doctrine for rebellion.

One piece missing from Qutb's writings is a clear discussion of who has the authority to declare jihad. In the view of Egyptian militants inspired by Qutb's writings, there is no need for a legitimate ruler to command jihad. Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj, author of *The Neglected Duty*, argued that in the absence of an imam, Muslims could choose a military commander from among themselves. So there is no excuse to neglect jihad; it is necessary to mobilize for jihad to establish the Islamic state.<sup>12</sup>

The common points are broad, though different, definitions of *shirk* and correspondingly frequent resort to *takfir*. There is the crucial difference that Qutb's defined the enemy as the apostate regime while Wahhabi doctrine defined the enemy as neighboring lands. Nevertheless, the rebellious impulse in Qutb's thought is embedded in religious categories and offers a doctrinal foothold for Saudi religious dissent.

**Re-Activating Jihad, Unhinging Da'wa from Dawla** Al Saud revived jihad in response to two events in 1979. First, Iran's revolutionary regime condemned Al Saud for their alliance with the United States. Second, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan stirred apprehensions of communist threats to the kingdom. Support for Afghan mujahidin would display Al Saud's religious credentials to their subjects and to the Muslim world in general in order to counter hostile Iranian propaganda. For Wahhabi

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<sup>11</sup> Moussalli, *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism*, 205-206.

<sup>12</sup> Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The Neglected Duty: The Creed of Sadat's Assassins and Islamic Resurgence in the Middle East* (New York, 1986), 202-203.

ulama, the call to jihad provided the occasion to recover legitimacy diluted by their association with the pro-American Al Saud.<sup>13</sup> Neither Al Saud nor Wahhabi ulama anticipated that exploiting the rhetoric of jihad might backfire. While Al Saud backed the Afghan jihad to pose as champions of Muslim causes, Saudi volunteers for jihad came into contact with Muslims from other countries who viewed Al Saud with contempt for their alliance with the United States. Some Muslim volunteers came from movements that fought their governments on the ground that they were apostate regimes. Hence, two visions of jihad mixed together in the Afghan-Pakistan arena, one directed against non-Muslim enemies like the Soviet Union and its Afghan communist allies, and another directed at apostate regimes.<sup>14</sup>

Abdallah Azzam, a Palestinian Muslim Brother and admirer of Sayyid Qutb, is reported to have enjoyed influence on volunteers arriving in Pakistan. His militant theology of national liberation addressed infidel oppression in Afghanistan, Palestine, Kashmir, and elsewhere. Azzam's focus on jihad to expel the unbelievers from Muslim lands coincided with the sermons of mainstream Wahhabi ulama, but he did not accept their position that jihad required the authorization of the imam. He maintained that the absence of a sovereign ruler does not nullify the believer's duty to wage jihad because fighters may choose a leader from among themselves.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, Azzam refused to compromise ideal interests in jihad for the sake of Al Saud's dynastic interest. The difference between the two comes out in descriptions of

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<sup>13</sup> Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge, 2006), 107.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, 111-112; Bernard Rougier and Pascale Ghazaleh, *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam among Palestinians in Lebanon* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 91.

<sup>15</sup> Rougier, *Everyday Jihad*, 78-84.

guest houses that hosted foreign volunteers in Peshawar. One Saudi-sponsored guest house run by Jamil al-Rahman was known for its rigid positions on doctrine and wielding takfir against rivals. Its publication echoed the official line in Riyadh, lauding Al Saud as defenders of Islam. Azzam's guest house initially enjoyed Saudi support, but he rankled authorities in Riyadh because he refused to censor anti-American rhetoric in his publication. By contrast, Jamil did not attack the United States in his publication. Even worse from Riyadh's perspective, Azzam allowed Saudi volunteers in his ranks to air criticisms of Al Saud. Given the fluid conditions in Peshawar, the most the Saudi government could do was control guest houses it sponsored. It could not prevent Saudi volunteers from mixing with Muslims from other countries and the cross-fertilization of ideas.

**Indigenizing rebellious jihad** Whatever religious credibility accrued to Riyadh for supporting the Afghan jihad quickly dissipated when Al Saud decided to seek American military aid to deflect the threat posed by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Even with the endorsement of senior ulama, violating the prohibition on seeking assistance from infidels triggered an avalanche of protest. While the Wahhabi leadership tacked further in the direction of accommodating doctrine to dynastic interest, dissidents among lower ranking clergy strained in the opposite direction. The schism opened up by the introduction of American forces turned into a running debate between dissident *sahwa* sheikhs and loyalist sheikhs. Al Saud broke a second taboo in 2001 when they sided with the United States against the Taliban. This time, they were not seeking the assistance of infidels but lending assistance to infidels against fellow Muslims.

A powerful critique of Al Saud for their close alliance with the United States was composed by Nasir al-Fahd, relying on traditional Wahhabi categories and citing historic Wahhabi authorities. He reminded readers that to assist infidels in war against believers makes one an infidel and a legitimate target for jihad. Al Saud were guilty of subservience to the infidels by assisting the American invasion of Afghanistan. Fahd also produced a recasting of Saudi-Wahhabi history that depicts Usama bin Laden as a heroic figure resembling Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab: both men resorted to jihad to spread monotheism and both men suffered condemnation from the scholars of their day. Fahd asserted that history was now repeating itself. Just as the first Saudi state fell to infidel forces, so did the Taliban government; Afghan towns were destroyed just as the first Saudi capital and other Arabian towns were destroyed; infidel forces sent Muslim prisoners to Guantanamo just as Saudi and Wahhabi leaders had been exiled to Egypt and Istanbul; Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden were forced to hide in Afghanistan's caves just as Saudi Amir Turki ibn Abdallah hid in caves south of Riyadh. In the end, the Ottoman Empire and Mehmet Ali's Egypt were destroyed whereas the Wahhabi mission spread and the Saudi state recovered, even though the state would eventually abandon the mission. Only when Muhammad ibn Saud backed Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab's effort to spread monotheism through jihad and rebellion against the Ottomans did his power expand. But now, the Saudi rulers call the warriors of jihad terrorists and they accuse the sincere believers of practicing excommunication. Even worse, they allow infidels to use their territory as a launching pad for invading Muslim lands.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, 141-148; "A Letter from the Imprisoned Shaykh Nasir al-Fahd," At-Tibyan Publications, 1425, posted at <http://marisaargo.com/MSJ/Scholarship.html> accessed 20 November 2007.

The implications of Fahd's insistence on Wahhabi purity were developed by Yusuf al-Ayiri, the chief ideologue for Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. The gist of his argument is that Al Saud had forfeited legitimacy, and therefore the same conditions that make jihad a duty abroad were present in Saudi Arabia. If jihad against infidel power is a religious duty, then the Muslims of Arabia are obliged to rise up against Al Saud.<sup>17</sup> The extension of Qutb's template against apostate regimes on the basis of binary classification of the political arena as Muslim or infidel was not an illogical step. It seems that in the Saudi political arena a doctrine of religious rebellion could not get traction by merely reproducing the arguments developed by Qutb or Faraj. One could cite early Wahhabi authorities to devise a political litmus test to determine whether Al Saud's policies severed the ties binding them to the call for religious purification.

But Wahhabi doctrine never offered a platform for rebellion. Enmity toward the external Other marched with loyalty to Al Saud political power on the inside, and during spells of infidel occupation, either acquiescence or emigration, but not jihad. We do not find epistles from Wahhabi scholars calling on Najdis to rebel against the Egyptians in 1838-1840 or against Al Rashid in the 1890s. The habits of history are hard to shake: even now only a handful of ulama have endorsed takfir against Al Saud. Ulama loyalty has interlocking strands. First there is the customary calculation that Al Saud rule has benefited the da'wa and their removal could lead to chaos or a new, less favorable regime. Second, Wahhabi doctrine calls for obedience to the ruler unless the ruler commands believers to violate sharia: a sinning ruler is still to be obeyed. Third, Wahhabi doctrine warns against rebellion as a threat to communal solidarity, rendering believers vulnerable to domestic strife or infidel invasion.

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<sup>17</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, 150.

The militants coined an original doctrine of rebellion with a blend of Wahhabi and jihadist themes. In doing so, they raised the question of who has the authority to speak on behalf of Wahhabism, in their terms, the true monotheism. Wahhabism's doctrinal repertoire is proved malleable enough to serve as a rallying cry for rebellion against the dynasty. The catalyst was the absorption of jihadist discourse to frame a grammar for rebellion in Wahhabi terminology. The scope of *kufir* (unbelief) extended to encompass violations of *tawhid hakimiyya* (the unity of divine sovereignty), and hence applied to Al Saud for not ruling according to God's law. Instead of targeting Egyptian-Ottoman forces, al-Ayiri targeted Al Saud as adversaries against whom believers should wage jihad. The discourse of allegiance to *tawhid*, wielded so effectively against Al Saud's foes, is now turned against them.

Wahhabism and contemporary jihadist discourse may be analytically distinct, but the distinction blurs practice when it comes to mobilizing jihad against foreign occupation, apostate regimes, or the far enemy. From the vantage of al-Dir'iyya's Wahhabi leaders in the 1700s, the outside world assumed the form of idol-worshippers. It did not matter if the outsiders were denizens of oases in Najd or Ottoman townsmen in Medina. Difference in the exterior is effaced by the common trait of idolatry.<sup>18</sup> Between eighteenth century Wahhabis and twenty-first century jihadists, the ground for takfir differs, but the trigger happy impulse toward any who do not completely embrace their religious vision has a similar practical effect. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab made fighting on the side of the monotheists a condition for belonging to their cause. Rebellious jihadis apply the same logic in their definition of allies and enemies. Pragmatic considerations

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<sup>18</sup> Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, 187.

governing Al Saud's handling of the jihad on/off switch are symptoms of feeble conviction. It does not matter whether the enemy is an apostate regime or an infidel aggressor: both are reduced to the archetypical adversary of monotheism, taghut.

**Coda:** For the sake of perhaps stimulating discussion regarding a facet that I could not develop in a short presentation, it appears that outside Saudi Arabia the Wahhabi da'wa may be losing its Najdi accent. Proselytizing since the 1960s has brought thousands of Muslims to Saudi Arabia for indoctrination and sent them home to spread the da'wa, where it assumed a life of its own. Once transplanted abroad, the da'wa benefits from Saudi funds, but its proponents are not beholden to Al Saud. Given the da'wa's xenophobic thrust, its converts usually find themselves in the company of other anti-Western groups. Moreover, by managing to assume the mantle of Salafi Islam, the da'wa's agents have turned a neat rhetorical trick, diminishing the credibility of their critics' propensity to charge them with peddling a rustic Najdi heresy. The incorporation of Wahhabi texts into jihadi discourse outside Saudi Arabia by writers like Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi indicates the portability of the Najdi tradition. The confluence of Wahhabi and contemporary jihadi discourses in the context of regional states' legitimacy deficits on matters of defending Muslims against external domination has created new discursive formulations that resonate with Muslim audiences in Diasporic settings and majority Muslim societies.