

INTRODUCTION

SALAFISM TODAY – A BREAK WITH THE PAST

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In October 2017, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Muhammad bin Salman, made a call for a return to ‘moderate Islam’.¹ The statement came just a few weeks after the announcement of policy shifts in favour of social liberalisation, such as granting women the right to drive and the opening up of cinema halls.² Widely covered in the Western media, the announcement was greeted with applause as well as cynicism. Many, including those in senior ranks of the British government, interpreted it as a proof of the Crown Prince’s ideological commitment to reform the Saudi state and promote social liberalisation;³ cynics read it as a calculated move on his part to improve Saudi Arabia’s image in the West.⁴ Yet, despite attributing differing motives for this announcement, both sides shared an interpretation of the changes as the Saudi state’s acknowledgement of the failure of Salafism. Traditionally criticised for enforcing extreme social conservatism, since the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001 Salafism has been subjected to a much graver allegation – namely, that of fuelling global Islamic militancy.⁵ As we shall see in Chapter 1, for the other Sunni Muslim groups Salafism has historically been problematic due to its narrow notion of *tawḥīd* (oneness of God) which makes it easy to declare *takfīr* (excommunication; declaring fellow Muslims to be outside the fold of Islam) and impose textual rigidity, which is viewed as fuelling both sectarian violence and jihad, while simultaneously promoting a very dull and dry mode of living. It is therefore

not surprising that a call for a return to moderate Islam by the future Saudi king was thus automatically interpreted as a move away from Salafism.

Reality, however, is more complex. As we shall see in Chapter 2, for the Crown Prince the call for a return to moderate Islam was in reality a condemnation of political Islam, the *Ṣaḥwa* movement, which had established roots in Saudi Arabia from the 1970s onwards.⁶ However, even though the Crown Prince did not disavow Salafism, the conclusion drawn by Western observers was not entirely off the mark: Salafism as associated with Saudi Arabia is in retreat; the rigidity long associated with it is giving way to internal debate whereby areas of former consensus are now open to questioning. This shift is a product of the rapidly changing socio-economic realities within Saudi Arabia.⁷ Not only is the Saudi state moving towards social liberalisation, thereby reversing many of the policies that led to Salafism being branded as a particularly rigid tradition: some scholars within the tradition have started to debate core theological positions formerly viewed as part of the established consensus. Furthermore, as we will see in Part II of this volume, Salafi *da'wa* movements in other countries, long viewed as the products of Saudi patronage, have by now developed vigorous local roots. The leaders of these movements are today providing strong intellectual leadership, limiting reliance on Salafi religious material exported from the Kingdom.

The chapters in this volume present timely insights into developments within contemporary Salafism and the changing priorities of the Saudi state, long held responsible for the emergence of Salafi networks around the globe. It is argued that at the heart of Salafism rests a deeply compelling ideal for a believing Muslim: the need to follow the first three generations of pious Muslims (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*).⁸ It is this basic principle that makes it an intellectually powerful movement capable of winning adherents, with or without Saudi support. However, as history has shown, all powerful religious movements have to adapt to the changing context if they are to retain adherents, and Salafism is no exception. The changing sensibilities of the Muslim populace in response to globalisation and socio-economic modernisation are obliging Salafism as a global Islamic reform movement to engage in a visible shift towards theological, social and/or political liberalisation; this shift in popular sensibilities is also the key force propelling changes in Saudi state policies. This volume captures this opening up of space for a greater degree

of argumentation and debate than what was previously possible within the Salafi movements.

However, the volume also demonstrates that this opening up of space is not leading to a decline in jihadi mobilisation. The surge in Salafi-jihadi groups in the Middle East since the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, examined in Part III of this volume, demonstrates that, in line with earlier evidence, jihadi mobilisation is more a product of strategic interests and contemporary political opportunities, and that Salafi Wahhabi teachings *per se* cannot be held responsible for inspiring movements such as al-Qaida or ISIS, or the array of jihadi groups that have emerged in countries such as Syria and Libya since the Arab Spring. The chapters in this volume propel the debate further by moving beyond the framework of strategic interest versus ideology to analyse jihadi mobilisation and highlight the need to understand its nuances: namely, how jihadi groups apply Wahhabi Salafi reasoning in order to legitimise jihad in ways that actually contradict the core teachings of official Saudi scholars; how the actual organisational structure of a jihadi organisation has a direct bearing on its ability to survive in a challenging context; how a complex mix of religious and political variables leads to violence among jihadi groups, undermining their collective mission (as seen in the case of Syria); and how the erosion of a credible political Islam movement to challenge state oppression can create space for Salafi jihadi movements.

To appreciate the core thesis of this volume – namely, that we are witnessing a visible increase in internal debate, and adaptation to local context, within Salafism – this introduction presents a detailed analysis of its origin and subsequent emergence as the most powerful and puritanical Islamic reform movement of the twentieth century; its core principles; its association with the Saudi state and Wahhabism; and its critics' core concerns. A detailed historical analysis of this movement is essential for an appreciation of the reasons why the old assumptions about Salafism need to be revisited today.

Salafism: Origins, Methods and Association with Wahhabism

Salafism is one of the most influential and talked-about Islamic movements today, yet its origin is very recent.⁹ It was only in the 1970s that it began to become visible on the global stage. Its critics attribute its success entirely to Saudi oil wealth, which enabled the Saudi state to fund Salafi mosque and

da'wa networks around the world. Sponsoring the global Salafi networks is argued to help the Saudi royal family consolidate its soft power as the leader of the Muslim world.¹⁰ Such readings are, however, simplistic and undermine the appeal of the Salafi *da'wa*, its core theological beliefs and methodological principles.¹¹ Particularly problematic is that many of these claims assert a direct connection between Saudi Arabia, Salafi teachings and jihadi networks. Salafism, however, is a complex movement; as is the case with all influential movements, it is highly pluralistic. Salafi theology has inspired the very quietist and non-political Islamic movements involved primarily in *da'wa* and personal piety (scholastic Salafis or Madkhalis), as well as those who have engaged in politics and the capture of state power with a view to imposing *shari'a* (political Salafis such as Surooris or Sahawis in Saudi Arabia, or the al-Nour Party in Egypt). Furthermore, Salafi interpretations of the Qur'an and *hadith* have been used by groups such as al-Qaida and ISIS (a tendency known as 'jihadi Salafism').¹² The differing approaches of al-Qaida and ISIS,¹³ both espousing ideological commitment to Salafism, and the competition within Salafi jihadi groups in contexts such as Syria in themselves demonstrate the plurality within the movement. It is therefore important to examine the complex origins of Salafism, the distinctive features of its method as well as its creed in comparison with other Sunni groups, and the social, economic, and political life choices that it prescribes for its followers, in order to appreciate why this volume contends that we need to study Salafism through a new lens.

The Method of Reasoning

Much has been written about the distinctions between Salafism and other mainstream Sunni schools, but most scholars point to its emphasis on creedal purity.¹⁴ However, equally important to an understanding of the distinctive aspects of Salafism compared with other Sunni groups is its method of reasoning in order to derive specific laws.¹⁵ During the first three centuries of Islam, Muslim scholars focused on developing detailed methods to translate the principles of *shari'a* into specific laws that answer everyday questions.¹⁶ By the tenth century, four Sunni *madhāhib* (schools of law) came to command an important position: *Shāfi'ī*, *Mālikī*, *Ḥanbalī* and *Ḥanafī*.¹⁷ Each school evolved around the work of its founding scholar. Successive generations of

scholars built on the work of the founding scholar to develop a distinctive methodological tradition in order to provide specific legal responses to emerging questions in the spirit of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*.¹⁸ The emergence of these four Sunni schools of law led to the practice of *taqlīd*, whereby subsequent generations of scholars of each *madhhab* placed heavy emphasis on respecting the work of the earlier scholars in that tradition. There was at the same time a strong tradition of mutual respect among scholars of different *madhāhib*.¹⁹ *Madhāhib*, as Tim Winter²⁰ notes, were developed as a science of Islamic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) to provide consistent mechanisms for resolving any conflicts in a way that ensured that the basic ethos of Islam was not violated. Arguing that the term *ta'arud al-adilla* (mutual contradiction of proof-texts) is one of the most sensitive and complex of all Muslim legal concepts, he notes: 'The *'ulamā* of *uṣūl* recognised as their starting assumption that conflicts between the revealed texts were no more than conflicts of interpretation, and could not reflect inconsistencies in the Lawgiver's message as conveyed by the Prophet (PBUH)'.²¹ Thus, the scholars within each *madhhab* focused on developing specific methods of reasoning for an interpretation of the law. He further notes how, as the *madhāhib* matured, an attitude of toleration and mutual respect among the scholars of the four schools became the norm. Along with it came an acknowledgement of the importance of respecting the role of scholarly classes who had specialised knowledge of the text and the language, as required of the *madhāhib*.

Compared to this emphasis on following the *madhāhib*, which was popular among other Sunni scholars (see the discussion concerning traditional scholars in the next chapter), the Salafi method argues for going back directly to the foundational texts, the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, instead of engaging with the dense body of literature associated with the four *madhhabs*.²² In particular, it is against the idea of *taqlīd*, on the grounds that it leads to a blind following of the scholars in a given tradition. For the Salafis, direct engagement with the foundational texts and practices and sayings of the Prophet is key to regaining the lost glory of Islam. A return to the practice of the first three generations, as well as to learning from that period and the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, is deemed critical to putting Muslim societies on the straight path. The global success of Salafi *da'wa* illustrates the appeal of such a methodological approach.

Noting that the designation 'Salafi' is prestigious among Muslims because

it claims an association with the oldest and thus most authentic version of Islam, Bernard Haykel²³ notes:

Rather, it is Salafism's claim to religious certainty that explains a good deal of its appeal, and its seemingly limitless ability to cite scripture to back these up. A typical Salafi argument is that Salafis, unlike other Muslims, rely exclusively on sound proof-texts from revelations as the basis for their views, and they add the relevant verses or traditions every time they issue a judgment or opinion'.²⁴

Its critics contend that such an approach opens the door for misinterpretation of Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīth*. This, for instance, is one of the main reasons why Salafi method is claimed to fuel jihad: it is argued that jihadi organisations take Qur'ānic verses endorsing jihad out of context to legitimise their right to declare war and use violent methods which, according to traditional legal schools, violate Islamic principles. Chapter 1 records such critiques of Salafism by other Sunni groups in detail.

Saudia Arabia and the Emergence of Salafism

Contrary to the popular assumption that Saudi Arabia exported Salafism to the rest of the Muslim world, the reality is that the Salafi method of reasoning came to Saudi Arabia from outside:²⁵ from neighbouring Middle Eastern countries and South Asia. Wahhabi scholars do, in fact, follow the *Ḥanbalī madhhab*;²⁶ the adoption of the Salafi identity by the Saudi state was thus gradual. From inside the Middle East, the Salafi methodological influence came primarily from Egypt, and ironically from the work of Islamic modernists, in particular the work of Rashid Rida (1865–1935).²⁷ Holding the traditional '*ulamā*' responsible for stagnation within Islamic thought, modernist scholars such as Rashid Rida and his teacher, the famous Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), argued for direct engagement with the Qur'ān and *Sunna* in order to find answers to the demands of the modern realities in which Muslims found themselves under colonial rule; they were against the practice of *taqlīd* and highlighted instead the importance of *ijtihād*.²⁸ In South Asia, a similar emphasis on direct engagement with foundational texts was advanced by the followers of *Ahl-i Ḥadīth*, a South Asian school of Islamic thought that places strong emphasis on the study of *ḥadīth* and is closely associated with

Wahhabism.²⁹ Unlike the Egyptian modernists, the *Ahl-i Ḥadīth* scholars were particularly conservative and literalist in their engagement with the text.³⁰ Both sides were influenced, however, by a shared concern about the decline of Islam, the challenges of modernity and colonialism, and the need to revive the glory of foundational Muslim societies.³¹

A young nation in the 1940s, with a weak educational infrastructure, Saudi Arabia easily absorbed these intellectual influences from abroad. Saudi scholars who had studied in Cairo or India in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century brought some of these influences back to Saudi Arabia.³² Their influence was consolidated during the 1940s and 1960s when King Faisal gave refuge to many Islamic modernists and Muslim Brotherhood members fleeing from persecution at home.³³ As Saudi Arabia was at this time also starting to invest in the establishment of higher-education infrastructure, these migrating scholars secured senior positions within the newly emerging Saudi higher-education sector.³⁴ The International Islamic University in Medina, founded in 1961 and today seen as a primary base for promoting Salafi Wahhabi teachings among Muslim students from around the world, itself was shaped largely under the influence of prominent scholars from other Muslim countries.³⁵

Some of these scholars, such as the *Ahl-i Ḥadīth* ‘*ulamā*’, as mentioned earlier, had a natural affinity with the Wahhabi teachings, and thus the co-operation between them and the Wahhabi ‘*ulamā*’ was seamless. For the Islamic modernists and political Islamists, the co-operation with the Saudi royal family had more complicated foundations. Modernist scholars, such as Rashid Rida, harboured genuine respect for the Saudi royal family, because it was more independent of Western influences than were the rulers in the other Middle Eastern countries.³⁶ These scholars were, however, critical of the literalist interpretation of the Qur’ān and *ḥadīth* by the Saudi Wahhabi ‘*ulamā*’.³⁷ Their collaboration with the Saudi state was thus premised on an optimistic assumption of their ability to counter the influence of the more conservative Wahhabi scholars.³⁸ On their part, the Saudi royal family opened the doors to these scholars, partly out of a sense of Muslim brotherhood and the tribal culture of hospitality. It was, however, also conscious that involving Muslim scholars from other regions in the newly evolving Saudi educational sector would help to win broad-based legitimacy, given the concerns shared by many Sunni scholars from different traditions about the strictness and

rigidity that they all associated with the Wahhabi creedal beliefs.³⁹ Thus, what we understand today as being distinctive about the Salafi method of reasoning cannot be attributed to Saudi Arabia. In order to understand why today the terms Wahhabism and Salafism are mostly used interchangeably, and why Salafism is seen to be primarily a Saudi Arabian religious tradition, we need to understand how eventually it was the insistence of the Wahhabi *‘ulamā’* on creedal purity, rather than the Islamic modernists’ emphasis on reason-based engagement with the core texts, that came to dominate the Salafi writings and teachings. For this we first need a brief introduction to Wahhabism.

The Equating of Salafism with Wahhabism

Wahhabism refers to the eighteenth-century religious reformist movement led by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahab (1703–92), a Saudi religious scholar from the Najd region who forged a religious-political alliance with the House of Saud, one of the political clans in eighteenth-century Arabia. It was this alliance that eventually led to the establishment of modern Saudi Arabia in 1932.⁴⁰ Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab was born in Najd into a scholarly family. After receiving education in ‘Uyayna, a village near Riyadh, he began to travel to other regions, including Basra and Hijaz.⁴¹ On his return home he started preaching an austere form of Islam which challenged many of the local religious practices. Central to his teaching was a strict notion of *tawḥīd* (divine oneness, or monotheism), which is the foundation of the Islamic faith.⁴² Drawing on the work of Ahmad ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), Wahhab argued that *tawḥīd* demands that faith in the oneness of God should not be treated as merely a matter of inner belief, which was the approach of classical Islamic scholars: it must be matched by action.⁴³ Making action integral to the notion of *tawḥīd* had critical implications: it made it easy to excommunicate fellow Muslims regarded as failing to observe the required level of ritual purity. Such a notion of *tawḥīd*, whereby observable actions and not just inner belief determine one’s conviction in *tawḥīd*, in turn had other, more practical implications for the role of the state in regulating personal piety: the state acquired the authority to punish those who were seen as not observing their religious obligations, such as reciting the five daily prayers or giving *zakāt*, or those who were viewed to be indulging in practices that violate the oneness of God, such as venerating the saints.⁴⁴

In return for the state taking responsibility for creating a social milieu conducive to the observation of individual piety, the religious scholars were to pledge their complete loyalty to it. Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s austere notion of *tawhīd* thus had important implications not just for notions of individual piety, but for shaping the relationship between state and society; religion became an active part of the public sphere and also a major source of political legitimisation. It made excommunication (declaring *takfir*) of fellow Muslims easier; it reduced the individual authority of the believer by giving the state the responsibility for regulating individual piety; and it encouraged political quietism in favour of authoritarian states as long as they provided the right societal framework for religious values to be upheld.

The teachings of ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab initially met with stiff resistance from the local Saudi scholars of the time, including his own brother as well as the local political authorities.⁴⁵ However, they found support within the House of Saud.⁴⁶ The resulting alliance proved mutually beneficial, as the Wahhabi use of *takfir* enabled the Wahhabi scholars to endorse the wars that the House of Saud waged against other tribes and clans over two centuries, ultimately leading to the establishment of present-day Saudi Arabia in 1932. Madawi al-Rasheed maintains that Wahhabi ‘*ulamā*’ used *takfir* as a social-political tool in order to control social and political deviance, and to expand ‘the political realm under the pretext of correcting the blasphemy of others’.⁴⁷ Drawing on the works of early Wahhabi scholars, including ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’s statements, she contends that these scholars viewed Muslims of their time as polytheists and thus in need of reform.⁴⁸ She also maintains that this process of *takfir* was often driven by specific historical and political interests, rather than by theological concerns. While scholars agree that after the establishment of Saudi Arabia in 1932 the Saudi state, as well as the Wahhabi ‘*ulamā*’, became very cautious about the use of *takfir* to legitimise war in order to gain authority in the eyes of Muslims from different Islamic traditions, the reason why modern jihadism is attributed to Salafism lies in that it is argued to draw on the very same Wahhabi teachings of *tawhīd* and *takfir* as were deployed by Wahhabi ‘*ulamā*’ in the early period. As Maher notes, . . .

Takfir can seem like an archaic concept because it draws a line against those deemed to have left the Islamic faith, either voluntarily or through an act.

For the global jihad movement it has become a valuable tool for the protection of Islam, a means of expelling those from the faith who are thought to be subverting it from within. As such, in its current constructions, the concept is used to license intra-Muslim violence – particularly in high sectarian environments.⁴⁹

A related idea also attributed to Wahhabism that is deployed actively by jihadis to legitimise jihad against Muslims and non-Muslim targets alike is that of *al-walā' wa-l-barā'*. Put simply, this concept argues that one is a friend of those who are pious Muslims and against all those who are non-Muslims or Muslims who do not follow the strict ideal of *tawḥīd* as operationalised by ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. Maher explains:

In its political and military contexts, the concept of *al-walā' wa-al-barā'* operates in a similar fashion to *takfīr*, as a tool of 'in-group' control which draws a line against those deemed to be outsiders. It forms a distinct delineation between the Salafi-Jihadi constructions of Islam and everything else, forming a protective carapace around the faith which guards against impurity and inauthenticity. Put this way, *al-walā' wa-al-barā'* is integral to the protection of Islam itself, just as *takfīr* is also used as a protective tool.⁵⁰

As to why these core tenets of Wahhabi creed eventually became synonymous with Salafism instead of with the works of the Islamic modernist scholars, the answer rests in the unexpected outcomes of the Saudi state's decision to give refuge to Islamic modernist scholars and members of the Muslim Brotherhood from the 1960s onwards. The initial visits by Islamic modernists, such as Rashid Rida, to Saudi Arabia were followed by an influx of many Muslim Brotherhood members from the Middle East who were being persecuted by regimes in their home countries. Their political orientation led them to initiate political activism within Saudi Arabia, which particularly influenced the university-educated Saudi youth. This led to the birth of political Islam in Saudi Arabia (*al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya*, Islamic Awakening), which, as explained later in this introduction, in the eyes of the Saudi royal family constitutes the real cause of religious radicalisation. An entirely unexpected outcome of the Saudi royal family's accommodation of the modernists and political Islamists, the *Ṣaḥwa* movement became a threat to the Saudi

royal family as well as to the authority of the Wahhabi scholars. In order to de-legitimise the political Islamists, the Wahhabi scholars and the Saudi state actively tried to project themselves as the true guardians of the tradition of the *Salaf*.

This was particularly so as the label given by other Sunni groups to Saudi Islam was that of ‘Wahhabi’, which implied that Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab had introduced a new school of Islamic law and, thus, is a *mubtadi* (innovator). To the Wahhabi scholars, ‘Wahhabism’ was thus a derogatory term. Salafism, on the other hand, helped to assert a broad-based legitimacy, due to its claim to be emulating the first three pious generations of Muslims. Thus, in an attempt to reassert their religious authority, starting from the 1970s, the Wahhabi scholars and the Saudi state actively worked to claim the label ‘Salafi’. They did so successfully by publishing writings that presented Wahhabi beliefs and practices as being according to the Salaf; Wahhabi ‘*ulamā*’ were included among the biographies of the Salafs; primary religious texts were re-edited to highlight a historical link between the Salafi tradition and Wahhabism;⁵¹ and foreign authors who wrote Salafi works with a pro-Wahhabi perspective were patronised.⁵² It is due to this success that today Salafism is synonymous with Wahhabism and not with the work of the Islamic modernists or political Islamists who in the middle of the twentieth century actively self-appropriated the term.

Salafism and the Legitimisation of Jihad: The Saudi Perspective

As outlined in the preceding section, the Wahhabi conception of *tawhīd* that makes it easy to ex-communicate Muslims or to declare war on non-believers, combined with the Salafi method of reasoning, is credited with helping jihadi groups to legitimise their actions.⁵³ Within Saudi Arabia, this attribution of Islamic militancy to the Wahhabi/Salafi way of thinking is, however, contested. The blame for promoting Islamic militancy is instead placed on the Muslim Brotherhood and the writings of its key ideologue, Syed Qutb. As argued in detail by al-Saud in Chapter 7, this position highlights the need for understanding how, among the Wahhabi followers, the teachings of the movement are divided between *taʿzīlī* (foundational) and *tawāṣulī* (communicative) teachings: the former consists of statements and declarations of creed, jurisprudence and rituals, through either authorship or

annotations, and the latter comprises the many replies, epistles and discussions that engaged numerous past scholars of the movement. It is argued that the Wahhabi *manhaj* (path or approach) is captured in the former, and the study of these teachings shows that organisations such as ISIS do not fit within it. Among the differences highlighted are the fact that, unlike ISIS, Saudi Wahhabis have never aspired to, or advocated, the establishment of a caliphate; nor have the Wahhabis used the level of brutality displayed by Islamic State. In this view, it is not the Wahhabi writings but those of Syed Qutb⁵⁴ that help the current jihadis to legitimise their violence. In particular, reference is made to these organisations' practice of attacking leaders of Muslim states by drawing on the concept of *takfīr* in ways that run entirely contrary to the teachings of the Wahhabi scholars.

For the Wahhabi scholars, the notions of *ḥākimiyya* and what constitutes *kufṛ* (disbelief) have remained largely unchanged: in terms of *ḥākimiyya*, the scholars have maintained that the state can put in place new regulatory laws to meet the needs of the time, provided that they do not violate the *sharī'a*; and as for *takfīr* on those who do not rule according to God's revelation and thus commit *kufṛ*, they argue for acknowledging *i'tiqād* or *istiḥlāl* (the belief or conviction on the part of the ruler or legislator that a man-made law, while seemingly contradicting *sharī'a*, may actually be a better choice and is in fact permissible in Islam) or *kufṛ aṣghar* (minor unbelief), neither of which should justify expelling the ruler from the realm of Islam. Al-Saud's chapter also emphasises the importance of appreciating the difference between two different types of *takfīr*: *takfīr bi-l-naw'* (declaration of *kufṛ* on specific words or deeds) and *takfīr al-mu'ayyan* (declaration of a certain individual as *kāfir*, an apostate or unbeliever). While the former is argued to be largely uncontroversial among past and present Wahhabi scholars, the latter's application is seen to be very complicated among Wahhabi scholars, who argue that one cannot practise *takfīr al-mu'ayyan* until all conditions (such as intent and free choice) are present and all barriers (such as ignorance or error) are absent, given that it can lead to a death sentence. They thus maintain that it is not an individual who can declare *takfīr*, but the ruler or the judiciary. If someone believes that a certain individual has committed an act of *kufṛ*, or apostasy, the only thing they should, or can, do is to disavow the deed in their heart or, if it is possible to do so without causing further harm, by their words; it

is never the responsibility of the individuals to go beyond that and apply the rulings of *takfir*.

In Part III of this volume, we will see how there is some truth to both sides of the story. We will, however, also see how understanding the role of textual justifications only partly illuminates the process of jihadi mobilisation. While jihadi movements might invoke religious texts to win legitimacy in the eyes of their followers, their existence is equally due to explicit strategic interests or political grievances.

Salafism Today

Against this historical evolution and understanding of Salafism, the chapters in this volume highlight the need to appreciate that Salafism as a movement is undergoing a critical transformation. This is a result of the changing socio-economic dynamics within Saudi Arabia but equally a product of societal shifts within other Muslim countries and the growing independence of Salafi movements therein. While in some countries, self-identified Salafi movements might still adhere to the work of the Saudi scholars and the patronage of the Saudi state, in other countries, both in the Muslim-majority context and among Muslims in the West, Salafi movements and individual scholars are becoming quite independent of these influences, producing a rich literature of their own. The chapters in this volume are divided into three parts, in order to consider how the Salafi Wahhabi way of thinking and the rigidity associated with it is today under pressure at home and abroad. Together they show the malleability of Salafism. Salafis claim to represent timeless truth, but they have to operate in the specific socio-political contexts they inhabit. Top-down social opening in Saudi Arabia, bottom-up mobilisation in the Arab uprising, mobilisation for jihad in countries like Syria and a growing influence of globalisation on the attitudes of the Muslim youth is making Salafism open up to competing discourses.

Part I of this volume captures the shifts in Salafi thought as visible in the work of some reformist Salafi scholars who are arguing for social liberalisation, or greater political freedoms, and/or who are raising questions about foundational theological debates, including the very concept of *tawhīd*, which is the bedrock of Wahhabi theology. The section also maps the socio-economic changes within Saudi Arabia that have made the ongoing social

liberalisation an inevitable outcome, while also presenting a more detailed analysis of the challenges that other Sunni groups present to Salafism. Part II presents examples of Salafi *da'wa* movements in different country contexts to show how in a few places there is continued reliance on Saudi Arabia to provide intellectual leadership and finances, while in other contexts the Salafi movements are well-positioned to actually export Salafi ideals, due to a strong indigenous Salafi intellectual leadership and writings. Thus, irrespective of changes within Saudi Arabia, these movements can be self-sustaining. The chapters in this section also show how the traditional division between Salafi *da'wa* and political Salafism have become blurred in the Middle East since the Arab Spring. Part III in turn considers the connections between Salafism and jihad, to highlight how the links have always been tenuous, and how we need to appreciate that the political context and organisational structure, combined with a twisted application of religious reasoning, facilitate recruitment for jihadi organisations. Attributing jihadism to Salafi modes of thinking or Saudi funding is thus counter-productive. Such an approach avoids focusing on the real political, organisational and strategic factors that shape the working of jihadi groups.

Part I: Changes in Salafi Thought

The three chapters in Part I map the new debates emerging within the Salafi scholarly sphere that are critically examining issues which until recently were regarded as settled: social conservativeness; a narrow definition of *tawhīd*; and loyalty to the ruler. While the work of Salafi scholars, such as Salman al-Awda, who led the *Ṣaḥwa* movement starting from the 1970s, is already familiar to many, the recent questioning by a prominent Salafi scholar of the Salafi conception of *tawhīd*, the foundation of its theology and the Saudi state's own push towards social liberalism are marking a major shift from the past. The chapters thus demonstrate how the pressure for reform is coming from within the state as well as from within the ranks of the respected Salafi scholars. To fully understand the implications of the ongoing shifts within Salafism, it is useful to understand first why Salafism has been challenged across time by Sunni groups and continues to be challenged even today. Thus, in the first chapter in this section, Hazim Fouad captures the critiques of Salafism as voiced by various Sunni groups. Based on interviews and writings

of scholars viewed as representative of traditional Sunni *madhāhib*, as well as of Sufi *ṭarīqahs* and Islamic modernists, this chapter recaptures why the Salafi Wahhabi way of thinking is to date viewed as an aberration by other Sunni groups, and why these groups insist on labelling Saudi Salafism as a modern phenomenon not representative of the authentic Islamic scholarly tradition. Developing understanding of these traditional critiques of Salafism is key to appreciating why the ongoing shifts recorded in this volume are important.

In Chapter 2, I build on the analysis that I presented in *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change*, to map the changing societal dynamics within Saudi Arabia that are prompting the Saudi state to promote greater social freedoms. Drawing on fieldwork in Saudi Arabia, this chapter shows how a complex set of socio-economic changes are triggering the ongoing shifts. In particular, this chapter considers the views of the educated urban youth (men as well as women), who are seen to constitute the primary support base for the ongoing social-reform agenda of Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman. The chapter also focuses on the work of two contemporary Salafi scholars, one operating within Saudi Arabia, Hatim al-Awni, and the other based in the USA, Yasir Qadhi, who each have a strong individual following among Salafi Muslims and who are arguing for greater individual autonomy in the area of theology as well as everyday life choices for Muslims. This chapter considers the arguments advanced by these scholars in favour of greater social freedoms or greater individual autonomy in interpreting religious obligations than what has historically been the norm within the Saudi Salafi tradition.

In Chapter 3, Usaama al-Azami considers the work of Salman al-Awda (b. 1956) and Muhammad al-Hasan Wuld al-Dadaw (b. 1963) to illustrate how these prominent Salafi scholars legitimised the notion of political rebellion from within a Salafi framework in the context of the Arab Spring. The chapter shows how these scholars counter the traditional position of the official Saudi Salafi establishment, which argues for obedience to the ruler at all costs, in order to avoid the risk of *fitna* (civil strife). Al-Azami shows how these scholars use the same Islamic sources as those used by the official Saudi Salafi establishment – but in defence of the public's right to engage in political protests against unrepresentative regimes. Not surprisingly, the Saudi state has shown less tolerance for these scholars than for those arguing in defence of greater theological freedom or social liberalisation, the latter of which is

in fact in line with the Saudi state's own agenda. Thus, while the ongoing changes are partly triggered by the Saudi state, there are also new discourses and debates emerging due to self-reflection by prominent Salafi scholars.

Part II: Salafi Movements on the Ground

The chapters in Part II present case-studies of Salafi *da'wa* movements in three Muslim-majority countries. These chapters cover contexts where Salafi groups are still reliant on Saudi support, as well as contexts where they are quite independent. By presenting detailed studies of Salafi movements in these Muslim-majority countries, the volume shows how the leaders of some of these movements are producing publications and religious material that have a wide readership in Salafi circles, not only in their own countries, but also among Saudis. The removal of Saudi support might weaken the Salafi groups that are reliant on it, but Salafism as a movement has developed strong indigenous roots in most countries. Further, we see also a great deal of pragmatism on the part of the leaders to expand the scope of their activities when opportunities become available: thus, in the post-Arab Spring context Salafi *da'wa* movements turned to politics in ways not traditionally associated with them. We also see that even in other contexts, just like the Saudi state, Salafi movements are becoming conscious of the need to move away from the textual rigidity that historically marked Saudi Salafi reasoning.

In Chapter 4, Guy Eyre explores how, even in the case of Morocco, quietist Salafi groups attempted to take advantage of the space that emerged in the political arena, even if it proved to be only a momentary phenomenon. The chapter shows how, in response to the nationwide protests in Morocco on 20 February 2011, in order to avert further mass protests the state tried to release some of the quietist Salafis from prison and invited others back from exile. Using year-long ethnographic fieldwork in Marrakech and lectures available on social media, Eyre considers the case of two Salafi quietist scholars who came out in support of political protests and endorsed Islamic parties, contrary to their pre-2011 positions, thereby demonstrating tactical acumen on their part to expand the scope of their activities. However, the chapter also shows that they reverted to their former positions when the grip of the state and their patrons, especially the Saudi state, tightened.

In Chapter 5, Neil Russell traces the responses of Salafi networks in

Egypt since the Arab Spring, to examine why al-Sisi's government persecuted Ansar al-Sunna, a quietist Salafi *da'wa* network, while it did not target political Salafi movements such as the al-Nour Party and Dawa Salafiyya. Noting that the latter two movements avoid persecution because of their support for the *coup d'état* of 3 July 2013, Russell argues that Ansar al-Sunna became a target of state oppression because, while staying out of electoral politics, it did support Islamic political activism, irrespective of party orientations. Ansar al-Sunna sought to promote the 'collective identity' of the Islamic movement above individual factional interests, to further the electoral prospects of both the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafi alliance. By supporting this broad-based Islamic activism, it posed a threat to the al-Sisi regime in a way that the al-Nour Party and Dawa Salafiyya did not. Ansar al-Sunna effectively became a political interest group representing Egypt's Islamic movement in the electoral sphere. This does demonstrate that, while we have seen increasing polarisation among Salafi groups since the Arab Spring, there are some who have had the vision to look beyond narrow group interests and forge an alliance for strengthening the defence of Islam against the secular forces in society. These groups have also shown the pragmatism necessary to change their quietist orientation and engage in politics when opportunities have become available.

In Chapter 6, Kristin Diwan considers the Hizb al-Umma Party in Kuwait and situates it within the current regional politics of the Middle East. The analysis in this chapter draws on the writings and activities of Hakim al-Mutairi, the leader of the Umma Party. It elaborates on the expansion of his ideas and the Umma network into Saudi Arabia. It also maps the role of the Umma Party in other regional political tensions, especially Syria. Among other things, the chapter illustrates how Salafi writers and figures outside Saudi Arabia have influenced Salafi networks within Saudi Arabia and beyond. The flow of Salafi discourse has never been uni-directional: Saudi Arabia has imported Salafi discourses evolving in other Muslim countries as much as it has exported them.

Part III: Salafi Jihadism

The chapters in this section show how Salafi jihadism has proliferated across the Middle East since the Arab Spring, as many quietist Salafi movements

have moved into politics or even espoused jihad, troubled by state oppression in contexts such as Syria. The chapters in this section, however, record a great deal of inter-group competition within Salafi jihadi groups, whereby strategic interests, as opposed to ideology alone, shape their operational strategies. As a result, in contexts such as Syria, Salafi jihadi groups are competing with each other rather than joining hands, thereby undermining their ability to focus on the actual enemy. Further, the volume shows that the weakening of the Muslim Brotherhood has also contributed to the rise of Salafi jihadism, which has often moved in to fill the gap.

In Chapter 7, Abdullah al-Saud presents a detailed critique of the idea that Wahhabi-Salafi teachings are responsible for modern global jihadi networks. Comparing the position of ISIS with the Wahhabi *manhaj*, al-Saud demonstrates major contradictions between the two. The chapter presents a detailed analysis of the traditional Saudi position that attributes the birth of modern Islamic militancy to the Muslim Brotherhood, rather than to the Wahhabi creed. Focusing on the political quietism associated with Wahhabi scholars, the chapter illustrates how the principles of *takfir* have been misappropriated by the jihadi groups to legitimise jihad against Muslim rulers. The chapter thus presents the counter-narrative to the popular perception that links Wahhabi creed and Saudi funding to the spread of jihadi networks. It is important to note that to some the analysis presented in this chapter could appear like an apology piece for the Saudi regime. The reason for its inclusion is that most researchers and students do not understand the difference between Salafi jihadi thought as advanced by the Salafi Wahhabi scholars and how it is operationalised by the numerous jihadi groups. This volume is thus distinct in attempting to present both sides of the debate.

In Chapter 8, Tore Hamming complicates the role of religious conviction in mobilisation for jihad, by asking why Salafi jihadis kill each other. Despite being inspired by the same ideology, they end up engaging in internal fights that weaken them. Existing literature indicates that extreme ideologies or strategic differences are responsible for generating inter-group conflict. Hamming, however, notes that since 2013 inter-group conflicts are evident even among jihadi groups that share the same theological outlook and strategic goals. The chapter contends that the jihadi in-fighting in Syria in the period between 2013 and 2018 offers a microcosm of examples illustrating

how different issues can lead to conflict between groups. He presents a four-fold typology of protagonists of this in-fighting: hegemony seekers, unitarians, opportunists and isolationists.

In Chapter 9, Jérôme Devon also examines the proliferation of Salafi armed groups since the Arab Spring uprising in 2011. Considering the case of Ahrar al-Sham, which was the main alternative to the al-Qaida-oriented Jabhat al-Nusra, this chapter analyses how these jihadi groups strategise to cooperate or compete with other Islamist groups. The author identifies three factors as influencing these strategies: a group's level of political institutionalisation from the perspective of having a clear strategy; its ability to work with other Islamist militant groups and states; and the nature of its relationships with the population. The analysis is based on extensive interviews with members of Ahrar al-Sham and other jihadist groups operating out of Turkey. The chapter shows how a narrow focus on the ideology of these groups ignores the fact that in contexts of civil war their adaptation to structural factors becomes more important in shaping their strategies.

In the final chapter of the volume, Belal Shobaki examines changes within the political outlook of Hamas, whereby it has moved away from a religious and non-reconciliatory discourse to the adoption of a more democratic outlook, a discourse that is open to forming political partnerships with secular and Marxist parties, and a political settlement with the Israeli occupation. Shobaki shows how the softening of Hamas's political outlook has disappointed some of its followers, making them drift towards the combative stance urged by Salafi jihadism. The other factors leading to the emergence of Salafi jihadism in Palestine include the decline of the Muslim Brotherhood in the entire region after the Arab Spring, as well as the absence of more moderate Salafi political movements in Palestine. Developments in the region since the Arab Spring have thus also led to an increasing polarisation within the Islamic groups in Palestine, while creating increased space for jihadi networks.

These ten empirically rich chapters, which draw on fresh fieldwork at a number of different sites, help to illustrate how Salafism today needs to be studied through a new lens. Capturing the core contentious of these chapters, in the volume's conclusion Itzhak Weismann thus notes a visible weakening of the more rigid forms of Salafism associated with Wahhabi creed and

a revival of its earlier version, which was open to accommodating pluralistic interpretations.

Notes

1. 'Crown Prince says Saudis want return to moderate Islam', *BBC News*, 25 October 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-41747476> (accessed 23 October 2019).
2. Martin Chulov, 'Saudi Arabia to allow women to obtain driving licenses', *The Guardian*, 26 September 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/26/saudi-arabias-king-issues-order-allowing-women-to-drive> (accessed 23 October 2019). Since then, the state has made further concessions which in the past would have been highly contentious: the relaxation of rules concerning male guardianship of women (Bethan McKernan, 'Saudi Arabia "planning to relax male guardianship laws"', *The Guardian*, 11 July 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/11/saudi-arabia-planning-to-relax-male-guardianship-laws> [accessed 23 October 2019]); and allowing unmarried foreign couples to share a hotel room (in a bid to promote tourism): Julia Buckley, 'Saudi Arabia Allows Unmarried Couples to Share Hotel Rooms', *CNN*, 17 October 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/saudi-arabia-unmarried-couples-female-travelers/index.html> (accessed 23 October 2019).
3. Since then, the Crown Prince's suspected involvement in the murder of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi Embassy in Istanbul has greatly compromised his international standing.
4. Saudi Arabia and Salafism are routinely blamed for promoting jihadi networks, not only by Western observers, but by many Muslim scholars and members of the lay public.
5. As Roel Meijer notes in the influential volume that he edited on *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), before the September 11 attacks in 2001 there was limited interest in Salafism among scholars overseas. Since then, however, there have been published a number of monographs and collected works that provide in-depth analysis of Salafi movements in various country contexts.
6. *Al-Ṣaḥwa al-Islāmiyya* (Islamic Awakening) is an indigenous political movement that began in Saudi Arabia under the influence of scholars and activists from the rest of the Middle East and combined political activism with local religious discourse.
7. Masooda Bano, 'Saudi Salafism amid Rapid Social Change', in *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change, Volume 1: Evolving Debates in Muslim-Majority*

- Countries*, ed. Masooda Bano (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 127–49.
8. The first three generations of Muslims making up the Salaf consisted of the following: the Prophet's companions (*ṣaḥābas*), the last one of whom died in 690; the *tabi'īn*, the last one of whom died in 750; and the *tabi' tabi'īn*, the last one of whom died in 810. Shiraz Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism: The History of an Idea* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2016).
 9. See the chapters in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, for a good introduction to the core tenets and historical evolution of Salafism. See Chapters 5–7 in Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change, Volume 1*, for an in-depth historical analysis of Wahhabism and Salafism, the relationship between the state-society and the scholars in Saudi Arabia, and the position of reformist Salafi scholars on contemporary issues. On the latter, see also Pooya Razavian, 'Yasir Qadhi and the Development of Reasonable Salafism', in *Modern Islamic Authority and Social Change, Volume 2: Evolving Debates in the West*, ed. Masooda Bano (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 155–79.
 10. As the guardian of the two holy mosques, the Saudi state is in a privileged position to claim traditional Islamic authority.
 11. See Meijer's edited volume *Global Salafism* for a good summary of the Salafi creedal beliefs and methodological principles, as well as their appeal.
 12. Joas Wagemakers, 'The Transformation of a Radical Concept', in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, 81–106.
 13. ISIS has adopted much more violent tactics and established a state.
 14. Bernard Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action', in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, 33–57.
 15. Scholars often assert that an emphasis on creed, rather than method, is the most distinctive element of Salafism. See Haykel, *ibid.* But starting with creed associates Salafism too closely with Wahhabism. As will be argued below, Salafism has a more complex origin.
 16. Wael B. Hallaq, *Shari'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For a simpler introduction to the evolution of the *shari'a* and the main *madhāhib*, see Raficq S. Abdulla and Mohamed M. Kesharjee, *Understanding Sharia: Islamic Law in a Globalised World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018).
 17. There existed many competing approaches in the initial period; see Abdulla and Kesharjee, *Understanding Sharia*. Of these, four survived and became formally recognised schools of law across the Sunni Muslim world.

18. For the derivation of specific law from the principles of *shari'a*, see Hallaq, *Shari'a*, and Abdulla and Kesharjee, *Understanding Sharia*.
19. Hallaq, *Shari'a*; Abdulla and Kesharjee, *Understanding Sharia*.
20. Abdal Hakim Murad, *Understanding the Four Madhabs* ([n. p.]: Muslim Academic Trust, 1999).
21. Ibid.
22. Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought'.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid, 36.
25. For a detailed analysis of this argument, see Nathan Spannaus, 'Evolution of Saudi Salafism', in Bano, *Modern Islamic Authority, Volume 1*, 150–71.
26. David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012).
27. 'Rashid Rida, Muhammad', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito; *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1979> (accessed 23 October 2019).
28. Islamic modernism is an approach associated most noticeably with the work of scholars such as Muhammad Abduh, Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Rashid Rida, who tried to reconcile Islam and modern values associated with Western civilisation. Operating against the tension of the colonial period, these scholars differed from the traditional '*ulamā*' as well as from secular groups. They argued for adopting Islam as the guiding framework, while simultaneously defending the adoption of Western institutions and values in areas where they were optimal. This adaptation was argued to be essential for ensuring that Islam remained relevant for all times. For a detailed analysis of the modernists' influence on Salafism and the eventual shift to more puritanical Salafism, see Itzhak Weismann, 'A Perverted Balance: Modern Salafism between Reform and Jihād', *Die Welt des Islams* 57 (2017), 33–66; Itzhak Weismann, 'New and Old Perspectives in the Study of Salafism', *Bustan: The Middle East Book Review* 8/1 (2017), 22–37.
29. Mariam Abou Zahab, 'Salafism in Pakistan', in Meijer, *Global Salafism*, 126–42; Spannaus, 'Evolution'.
30. Abou Zahab, 'Salafism in Pakistan'.
31. Spannaus, 'Evolution'.
32. When studying at al-Azhar, the Saudi scholars tried to search for more direct connections between Hanbalism and Wahhabism. In India, they had a natural alliance with *Ahl-i Ḥadīth* due to their similarly literalist approaches to the text and also their shared concerns about Sufism. Nabil Mouline, *The Clerics of*

Islam: Religious Authority and Political Power in Saudi Arabia (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Spannaus, 'Evolution'.

33. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Islamists were persecuted by the secular and socialist regimes that came to power in many Middle Eastern countries upon the withdrawal of the colonial powers. For details of how Saudi Arabia acted as a refuge for Islamists from all over the Middle East during this period, see Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, trans. George Holoch (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).
34. Ibid.
35. Michael Farquhar, *Circuits of Faith: Migration, Education, and the Wahhabi Mission* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2016).
36. Spannaus, 'Evolution'.
37. Henri Lauziere, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); cf. Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity (Cultural Memory in the Present)* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2011), esp. 67–108; Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Malcolm Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966).
38. In 1927, Rida defended the modernist interpretations of Qur'ānic text, which were challenged by a leading Wahhabi scholar, on the grounds of securing social benefit for contemporary Muslims. He provided the Wahhabi scholars with copies of his own exegesis of the Qur'ān, *Tafsīr al-Manār*.
39. Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission*; Spannaus, 'Evolution'.
40. For details on the alliance between the House of Saud and the House of Wahhab, see Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission*.
41. Ibid.
42. Conversion to Islam requires committing to worship of one God and acknowledging Muhammad as his last prophet.
43. Haykel, 'On the Nature of Salafi Thought'.
44. Mouline, *The Clerics of Islam*.
45. Spannaus, 'Evolution'.
46. The House of Saud was one of the rival tribal factions always competing for control over the region of Najd. For details, see Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission*.

47. Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 37.
48. Ibid, 267.
49. Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*, 71.
50. Ibid, 111.
51. Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission*; Spannaus, 'Evolution'.
52. Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: HarperCollins 2005), 72–74; Spannaus, 'Evolution'.
53. Maher, *Salafi-Jihadism*.
54. In this line of reasoning, it is maintained that Qutb's focus on *jāhiliīs* was developed by Muhammad Abdul Salam Faraj, the main ideologue of the Egyptian extremist group *Tanzim al-Jihad* and the author of the 1980 tract, *Jihad: The Absent Obligation*, to argue for the excommunication of all Muslim rulers, thus paving the way for armed rebellion. Faraj maintained that such a rebellion has become a personal duty for every Muslim, in order to establish the caliphate and institute God's *ḥākimiyya*. He stressed that the priority is to fight the enemy at hand (the apostate rulers), rather than the distant enemy (Israel).