Center for Open Access in Science ▪ Belgrade - SERBIA
*11th International e-Conference on Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*
http://centerprode.com/conferences/11IeCSHSS.html ▪ 2025: 59-66

# Saudi Wahhabism After 9/11 – Ideology Versus Pragmatism. Modern Wahhabism: The "Shaping" of Ideology

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Received: 3 November 2025 ▪ Revised: 15 December 2025 ▪ Accepted: 22 December 2025

*Abstract*

In recent years there has been voices against the Wahhabis as someone who "exports Islamic fundamentalism." Indeed, radicalism and the father can still be found inside and outside Saudi Arabia in the form of organizations such as Ahl al-Sunna and al-Tawhid in Sudan, elements and foes of the al-Qaeda organization headed by Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan and Yemen and other neo-Wahhabi organizations throughout the Muslim world. However, these organizations should not be regarded as representing the Wahhabist ideology, so that their law is no different from other marginal radical movements, such as Al-Takfir and Al-Hijra, who were educated on the knees of the Muslim Brotherhood.

*Keywords*: Wahhabism, Saudi-Arabia, Muslim Brotherhood.

## 1. Introduction

A day after 9/11, the Saudi government issued an official statement in the Al-Riyadh newspaper on religious rulings and media. According to the announcement, which is a reminder of an existing 1980 order, the publication of religious rulings is permitted only to the official religious establishment of the state or a person authorized by it. The announcement also mentioned the names of the authorized religious authorities (muftis), their telephone numbers (Goldberg, 1981).

The argument was to prevent contradictions between religious rulings of the establishment and those of private religious authorities. It is reasonable to assume that this announcement was part of an immediate Saudi reaction to the events of September 11, in order to prevent potential responses by private religious authorities that do not conform to the official policy of the government. More importantly, however, this is another expression of the long tradition of trying to preserve the monopoly on the interpretation of religion by the government as a mechanism for adapting classical ideals and cubes to the conditions of a modern state and a constantly evolving cosmopolitan space.

That the construction and stabilization of a modern state is incompatible with the traditional puritanical Wahhabist concept. Fanaticism that stemmed mainly from a conservative interpretation of the sources and the demand to adhere to the tradition of al-Salaf al-Salih or the ancestors of the first three centuries of Islam. According to this traditional view, Muslims must


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follow the path of the ancient patriarchs by adhering to their heritage while avoiding innovations in religion that are incompatible with the same heritage as interpreted by the Wahhabis. (Lish, 1996).

Moreover, Salafiyya is the only guarantee for those who wish to belong to the survivor group (al-Farqah al-Najiya), who is a servant of the path, which is mentioned in tradition, which says: "This nation (Islam) will be divided into seventy-three groups, One group." Hence, the Wahhabis were not only impatient to non-Muslims, but also to other Islamic movements. For example, the Wahhabi doctrine rejects Greek philosophy and the kalam or theological discussion, including the formulas of al-Ash'ari, claiming that they are foreign to the Koran. A similar attitude was felt toward the Scouts or the mystics and the Shiites on the grounds that they caused a forbidden opinion or innovation in religion (Bligh, 1985: 37-50).

In relation to non-Muslims, the classical Wahhabi doctrine adopted the legal approach especially Ibn Taymiyyah, which is familiar with both types of jihad, initiated by Talab, (Daf), dividing the world into two main parts: the land of Islam (Dar al-Islam), the land of war (Dar al-Harb). It is important to note that according to this view, the imam or the leader is obliged to expand the land of Islam at the expense of the land of war. As much as they enjoyed militant circles and foes, and based on this political philosophy, they demanded that King Abd al-'Aziz ibn Saud (the father and founder of present-day Saudi Arabia, 1953) declare jihad even on neighboring Islamic countries such as Iraq and Jordan in order to spread the Wahhabism among the urban population Al-Khadr.) (Layish, 1984: 29-63).

This approach was not accepted by Ibn Saud, who took operative steps to suppress the militant Ikhwan movement in the late 1920s, and sent the clerics to the Bedouin neighborhoods to instruct them on matters of religion, and especially to preach to them against radical religious positions .

This approach of the Wahhabi recession was preserved by Ibn Saud's heirs, so that a significant attempt was made under Feisal (1964-1975). Feisal, who was perceived in the historiography of Saudi Arabia as a modernist, sought to see a modern Saudi state developing as part of the advanced global world.

However, he was aware of the difficulties on the way and stemmed mainly from the opposition of clerics and conservative circles and fathers, who viewed openness as a threat to traditional Wahhabi values. It is not surprising, therefore, that King Faisal was conspicuously interested in exerting his influence on the clerics, and especially the religious authorities, as the commentators and official sheikhs of the shari'a by institutionalizing them and integrating them as part of the ruling elite (Rentz, 1982).

The first expression of the establishment of the masterpieces was on August 29, 1971, when King Feisal ordered the establishment of two official institutions of religious rulings:

> (1) The Supreme Council of the World (Hayat Kabar al-Ulma). This council, which was composed of senior Wahhabi clerics in the country, was under the direct authority of the king. Thus, for example, Article C of the Royal Order, which deals with the main purpose of the Council's existence, determines that this Council will issue a religious ruling in accordance with the King's request, and will advise him on matters of religion related to public legislation.
>
> (2) The committee for scientific research, religious rulings, and the spread of Islam "(al-Lajnah al-Daamah, al-Bakhut, al-'Alami, al-Afta, and al-Dawa and al-Arshad). This committee was composed of four halachic authorities, including the chairman, who were elected from among the members of the Supreme Council of the World. Its function is to answer public inquiries in the field of transactions, rituals and personal affairs, conduct research on religious questions, and provide logistical and administrative assistance to the Supreme Council of the World.

These two institutions were under his direct authority of the king, so that he determines not only their composition but also the validity of their halachic ruling by enforcing it by royal decree based on the doctrine of Siasa Sharaya. The fact that halachic rulings are not binding according to Muslim law enables the king to use the halachic ruling of these institutions as a mechanism for shaping legal and social norms. In any event, the establishment of these two institutions under the direct authority of the king, with a clear definition of the powers of the Ulema, undoubtedly marked an important turning point in world-ruling relations that expressed a new order of forces within the famous formula of Ula-Umra in the Saudi-Wahhabi state (Al-Sadhan, 1980).

On the face of it, the new division of powers weakened the status of the Ulema as one of the country's traditional centers of power, and as a result increased the power of the royal family (Umra). Moreover, the fact that most of the ummah members of the two religious authorities (Afta) are not members of the Aal al-Sheikh family is not coincidental and comes as part of the trend of increasing the power of the Umra at the expense of the Ulema.25 It is reasonable to assume that the royal family preferred to cultivate loyalty to their rule Olma outside the Aal Sheikh family who will have influence. A prominent example of this was Sheikh Abd al-'Aziz ibn Baz, who as head of the halachic ruling establishment over two decades (1975-1999) enjoyed a privileged position within the religious establishment during this period. Ibn Baz is considered a member of the royal family and works to preserve their rule by legitimizing their policies, although this often contradicts the religious ruling. This criticism was voiced mainly by the Saudi opposition following a number of rulings on political matters that, in the opinion of the critics, aimed at legitimizing the King's policy.

One of the most famous rulings in this context was, for example, the one that allowed the entry of American soldiers into Saudi Arabia following the first Gulf War and the ruling on peace with Israel. In any event, the official religious establishment was "accused" of having "renounced" the classical Wahhabi tradition in favor of processes of change and modernization of the state. And the question, then, is what is the world of contemporary Wahhabis different from the world of their forefathers?

## 2. The Wahhabi ideology between past and present

The worldview of religious and modernist men was referred to by Frank Vogel in his book on the modern legal system in Saudi Arabia. Vogel referred to the legal views of judges (qadis) and modern fathers in relation to issues that reach sharia courts in a comparative historical perspective. His conclusion was that the world of modern Wahhabis was different from that of their ancestors. "It is clear that the modern Saudis who seek to adopt traditional ideals and fathers are very different from their fathers in terms of the openness and loyalty they profess. In any case, the world of modern Saudi Ulema is drastically different from that of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab [...] The Saudi Ulema are no longer leaders of a militant sect that seeks to create a new Muslim world, but they have become part of the international community of Ulema [...]] The Wahhabi worldview has become more accepted in the world [...] (Vogel, 1996).

A change in the ideology of modern Wahhabis is also expressed in their political worldview. In fact, they define their attitude to the outside world differently than that of their ancestors. This is expressed in a different approach to doctrinal issues, such as jihad, the attitude towards members of the monotheistic religions or The people of the book (Ohel al-Dhimma) and the contract between them and the Muslims ('Aqd al-Dhimma), you asked (Wala'a and Bara), and even on subjects related to ritual and world order.

For example, Abd al-'Aziz Aal Shaykh (the current Saudi Mufti) states that hijacking planes is prohibited from the religious point of view because passengers may belong to one of three

main categories, the fighting against which is prohibited: Ba'ath (Maadh), members of monotheistic religions such as Jews, Christians (Ahl al-Dhimah), or a protege (Mastaman). In the first category, the prohibition applies due to the honoring of a contract between the Muslim state and other countries, so that harm to the nationality of a state with which a treaty is in breach of that covenant is contrary to the religious principle of honoring promises (Al-Ifaa in al-'Ahud). As for Ahl al-Dhimma, Aal al-Sheikh states that they enjoy immunity according to the principle of 'Aqd al-Dhimma. According to the classic definition, 'Aqd al-Da'ma is a contract between the Muslims and the people of the Book, who are sponsored by the Muslim state, such as the Jews, the Christians, and the Zoroastrians, so that fighting against them is prohibited as long as these conditions are met. Din is equal in relation to a non-Muslim whose permanent residence is in the territory of Dar al-Harb and enjoys temporary protection of the Muslim state within the framework of the Maskman category. He enjoys security (Aman) for his safety and property, but for a limited period of one year.

However, extending the stay beyond a year entails a transition to the status of Ohel al-Dhimma and the payment of a poll tax (Jizya)

In fact, this is the use of classic basic terms of defining Muslims' relationship with non-Muslims, although they do not correspond to the current context of the nation-state in the Middle East. For example, there is no al-dhimma under the protection of the Muslim state, so the payment of a poll tax (jizya) is irrelevant.

In any case, the Saudi mufti's halachic interpretation is interesting and undoubtedly teaches a pragmatic approach, while reading the sources differently, and thus on dialogue and the father is uncompromising in relation to non-Muslims (Al-Yassini, 1985: 37-50).

This approach is expressed in a long line of coherent halachic rulings, from the one that confirms the coalition against Iraq, to the halachic ruling of peace with Israel, to the halachic rulings of September 11 and the Palestinian suicide bombers. For example, Ibn Baz states that a peace treaty can be made with enemies, whether temporary or permanent, to the degree that the leader sees fit.

He bases his arguments mainly on religious principles, such as the general good (Masalha), and a vital need (Drora), but mainly on the textual sources (the Koran and the Sunnah). As far as he is concerned, the peace treaty with the Jews can be expressed in diplomatic relations and commerce, although this treaty does not require a vaunted (Jewish) loyalty to the Jews, which is indeed a contradiction in theory. This ruling provoked a wave of negative reactions by religious scholars in the Muslim world. For example, Sheikh Yussuf al-Qaradhawi argued that peace with Israel is not possible because it occupies Muslim territory, so that a peace treaty with it is not halachically valid.

For him, it is the Muslims' duty to go to jihad as a defense of Muslim land (jihad daf), so that a permanent peace agreement, as proposed by Ibn Baz, is irrelevant. For example, on December 29, 1994, Osama bin Laden sent an open letter to Sheikh Ibn Baz in response to this ruling. In his letter, Ibn Laden tried to challenge the halachic competence of the fatwa and severely criticized the functioning of the religious establishment headed by Ibn Baz, as a "betrayal" on his Wahhabi mission. nother example was the fatwa through which Ibn Aaz confirmed the aid Saudi Arabia received from the Allies during the Gulf War and the US military presence in its territory.

The analysis of the fatwa once again demonstrates Ibn Abbas's massive use of the principle of the common good (success) (Fandy, 1999: 1-20).

He stressed the authority and even the religious obligation of the ruler (king) to take actions in order to safeguard the common good. In his opinion, due to the existence of a danger to the security of the state, it is the duty of the king to take every possible step to remove this danger, even if it involves seeking assistance from strangers. 129

Ibn Baz finds references to this ruling in the narratives of the prophet's biography. According to him, the Prophet Muhammad was assisted by the son of Adi when he returned to Mecca from the city of Taif, as well as in 'Abd al-Hala ibn Arit, despite being non-Muslims. He notes the migration of the Muslims to the land of the Abyssinians according to the Prophet's instruction, despite being a Christian land, in order to preserve their safety by keeping them away from their enemies in Mecca, as well as the help that the Prophet sought on the day of the Khenin system, in the form of an armor garment "He was not a Muslim."

Another example brought by Ibn Baz was the assistance that the Prophet received from the Jews of Khaybar in agriculture and in the treatment of palm groves while the members of the Prophet (Tshuva) were busy with jihad. In his view, receiving non-Muslim welfare does not necessarily mean loyalty to the aid recipients, which is indeed forbidden by Islamic law. From here he states that there is nothing wrong with the entry of American soldiers into the land of Saudi Arabia (Armstrong, 1988).

There is no doubt that in this matter at least (assistance to non-Muslims against Muslims) is their halachic position of modern Wahhabis is drastically different from that of their forefathers, such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and Ulamah, and the later fathers. Ibn Taymiyyah, for example, states that the aid of non-Muslims against Muslims is contrary to the religious principle of al-Wala'a and al-Baa, which is considered an outing against Islam.

An example of this was found by Ibn Taymiyyah in the Muslims who helped the Tatars in their war against the Muslims and who were defined by them as apostates from Islam (Martadon). Ibn Abd al-Wahhab states that helping non-Muslims against Muslims is considered one of the most contradictory acts in Islam (Nuked al-Islam).

A similar approach was presented by his grandson, Sheikh Abd al-Rahman Ibn Hassan (1868), a senior al-Qaeda scholar of Najd and the chief mufti of the second Saudi state, who ruled that any assistance to non-Muslims, whether moral or logistical, was in complete contradiction to belief.

Abd Allah Ibn Abd al-Latif Aal al-Sheikh (the leading Wahhabi scholar in the first half of the twentieth century, died, 1932) states, like Ibn Taymiyyah, that this is indeed a departure from Islam (al-Haruj al-Mala) (Donner, 1999).

## 3. The Wahhabis and the September 11 events

The dramatic regional and global geopolitical events of the past two years, centered on the Palestinian intifada and the September 11 attacks, posed many challenges not only to politicians but also to clerics and halachists throughout the Arab and Muslim world (Khadduri, 1955: 63). The involvement of Islamic organizations such as Al-Qaeda, Hamas, the Islamic Jihad, and others in these events once again raised religious-political issues of Islamic radicalism, Islamic movements, and political Islam in general (Schwartz & Galily, 2021). However, the issue of jihad as a holy war and its contemporary conceptual significance was particularly prominent in light of events such as the massive attack on the Twin Towers, described by Bernard Lewis as "an unprecedented act of terror even in human history" (Lewis, 2001).

The phenomenon of suicide bombers; these actions, which were carried out in the name of jihad, at least for the perpetrators, raised many questions that were placed at the door of religious men throughout the Muslim world, including the Wahhabis. For example, is the military activity of Al-Qaeda, including the attacks on the United States, considered jihad? How does this organization differ from the military activities of Palestinian organizations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad against Israeli targets? What is the religious law of the suicide bombers in the September 11 attacks against the Palestinian suicide bombers?

The Wahhabi response to these questions was coherent and largely preserved their approach to the events of the Gulf War. This can be seen from the religious definitions of the attacks on the United States, the coalition of Muslims and non-Muslims in the war on terror, and also with regard to the issue of Palestinian suicide bombers. The Wahhabis condemned the attacks on the United States and defined them as contradicting all the rules of jihad and the most basic principles of Islam in general, which prohibit attacks on innocents and destruction of property.

For example, Sheikh Salih Al-Lahidan, head of the Supreme Judicial Council (Ra'is Majlis al-Qada'a al-'Ala), condemned the attacks and referred to an existing religious ruling on the matter issued by the Supreme Council of Ulama in 1988. Al- States that hijacking planes is prohibited whether the passengers are Muslim or not, because it contradicts the clear halachic injunctions of harming innocent people.

For him, such acts are prohibited even during war, because harming the weak, children, women, adults, and property destruction is a very serious contradiction of Muslim law (sharia). Moreover, Al-Lahidan stresses that Muslims aspire to live on the basis of mutual respect with other peoples because Islam does not distinguish between mortals: "Muslims want to live in peace with all human societies, because Islam does not distinguish between people - after all, they are all brothers."

The modern Wahhabi position was also interesting in the Palestinian question. In fact, the recent events of the intifada and the issue of suicide bombers were a delicate and sensitive issue in the Arab and Muslim world. The suicide bombings, which received widespread support in the Arab street, received the halachic seal of approval by many in the Muslim world (Vogel, 2000).

The Wahhabis were part of the minority in this case, which rejected their halachic legality as they deviated from the definition of jihad as perceived by them. As stated, Abd al-'Aziz al-Sheikh (the current mufti) states that these acts are contrary to the principle of basic justice among the people enshrined in the Koran, as well as the religious principle of forbidding the intimidation of peaceful citizens (Tar'iy al-Aamnin) Harming innocent people such as women, adults and children who are not combatants (Harbion).

The approach of Muhammad ibn 'Abdallah al-Sabil, the chief preacher of the two great mosques in Mecca and Medina, was similar. He stated that the suicide attacks are prohibited from the halachic point of view, since the victims are not considered part of the campaign, except that they belong to the monotheistic religions (Ahl al-Dhimma), who are accorded special treatment in Islam.

According to their rulings, the harm to innocent people and the destruction of property is forbidden from a religious point of view. Islam gives special attention to members of the monotheistic religions (Ohel al-Dhimma) and instructs them to respect the contracts that are made with them. Even if these contracts are violated by them, they should not be harmed until after the announcement of the termination of the contract and the notification thereof to them (Schleifer, 1991).

The "compromise" approach of the official religious establishment is clearly expressed in the Saudi letter mentioned above. The authors, who, as noted, represent broad cross-sections of the Saudi intellectuals, tried to present their world of values and their worldview with regard to cultural and political issues, especially those that were controversial in Western-Islamic discourse. Below we shall attempt to understand the significance of this letter by analyzing its content and methodology (Lewis, 2001).

## 4. Conclusion

The events of September 11 brought the Wahhabis to face serious challenges due to the prominent role of circles identified with them in these events. They were forced to defend their ideology to the outside world by presenting their world view on a long list of universal values.

However, one of the most important changes in the post-September 11 Wahhabi discourse, as expressed in the response of the official religious establishment, but mainly in the letter, was their presentation of their world normative values as part of a universal world and treating others on an egalitarian basis.

For example, the authors focus on world peace and treat Islam as an equal among equals while ignoring the principle of supremacy as a universal religion, which characterizes the Muslim discourse in general and the Wahhabi discourse in particular. This approach undoubtedly represents a worldview and the abyss is different from the past. Although in the evening Saudi Arabia of today can still be seen in religious and abhoristic rhetoric, which professes allegiance to the classical Wahhabi teachings of Ibn Taymiyyah and Muhammad ibn ʻAbd al-Wahhab. However, the contemporary religious-political worldview of contemporary Wahhabis differs greatly from that of their forefathers.

In practice, modern Wahhabism has come a long way towards the center of the modern Muslim political map. The establishment of the Ulema in the early 1970s and their transformation into a governmental establishment contributed significantly to the "soft" process of Wahhabism as a religious-ideological movement, and especially to the political worldview and the attitude toward the outside world. It was possible to learn from the modern Wahhabi definitions of political-legal doctrines, such as jihad, loyalty (Wala'a and Bara), dhimmis, the attitude towards the monotheistic religions (Ahl al-Da'ma), and expressed in their "compromising" reactions to geopolitical events The Gulf War, the issue of peace with Israel, and the attitude toward Palestinian suicide bombers.

In other words, modern Wahhabism is no longer considered militant which seeks to declare jihad on all who are not and who are fathers. This conclusion contradicts the claims which has even recently been voiced against the Wahhabis as someone who "exports Islamic fundamentalism." Indeed, radicalism and the father can still be found inside and outside Saudi Arabia in the form of organizations such as Ahl al-Sunna and al-Tawhid in Sudan, elements and foes of the al-Qaeda organization headed by Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan and Yemen and other neo-Wahhabi organizations throughout the Muslim world.

However, these organizations should not be regarded as representing the Wahhabist ideology, so that their law is no different from other marginal radical movements, such as Al-Takfir and Al-Hijra, who were educated on the knees of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Acknowledgements

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The author declares no competing interests.

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