
Wahhabism, the Brotherhood of those who obeyed Allah and ISIS: Has history repeated itself?

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Cover: "Al-Ikhwan on the move"; 1911

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Note: The organisation Al-Ikhwan (Brotherhood) referred to in this report is an ideological army of settled Bedouins that became known as Al-Ikhwan (Brotherhood). They contributed to the unifying the Arabian Peninsula under the reign of King Abdulaziz Al Saud. It has no relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood founded by Hassan Al Banna in Egypt in 1928.

As a result of sluggishness and weakness it was subjected to in the wake of the downfall of the second Saudi Emirate and Al-Rashid's domination over the Najd region, the historical allies of the Ottoman state, the Wahhabi movement lost the political authority that supported it and helped it and that enabled it to maintain influence and hegemony and to impose its school of thought on the general public.

However, the hopes of the movement's preachers was revived when, one of the grandsons of Prince Faisal Bin Turki, King Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman embarked on the project of rebuilding the ruling family's authority at the turn of the 20th Century.

Realising the ideological significance of the Wahhabi-Hanbali school, King Abdulaziz quickly moved to renew the historic alliance that linked his ancestors with the movement's scholars and followers. The association was expressed in terms of reviving the historic compromise deal between the political authority and the religious authority. Indeed, King Abdulaziz married the daughter of Sheikh Abdullah bin Abd Al-Latif Al Ash-Sheikh, the chief scholar of the Wahhabi school at the time.¹

King Abdulaziz famously described this alliance saying: "Then, Muslims disagreed repeatedly over who rules them. But, whenever such disagreement erupts and reaches a level that threatens the religion of Allah and threatens to extinguish His Light, Allah refuses to allow this to happen and delivers from among the two families [Al-Saud and Al Ash-Sheikh] someone to take charge."²

Wahhabism scholars mobilised all their symbolic and spiritual resources in order to bless and support the political route of King Abdulaziz. They stood by him fully dedicated to building the state; employing for this purpose the religious preparation of the public and inciting people to fight under his command. The king agreed in exchange for dedicating all his power resources for the sake of empowering his loyal partners by means of imposing their religious discourse and disseminating among the masses.

One of Wahhabism's most prominent scholars of the time³, Shaikh and Judge Abdullah Al-Anqari, wrote: "Allah has bestowed upon the Muslims a just religious reign, and that is the reign of the leaders of the Muslims Abdulaziz bin Abdul Rahman Al-Faisal. His banner will remain victorious and the soldiers of falsehood, by virtue of his onslaught, will be broken and defeated. Through him, Allah has established the pillars of Sharia, and through him He has uprooted sinful and ugly deeds."⁴

Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdel Latif Al-Sheikh wrote an admonition in which he said: "My brothers, recall the bounty of Islam and what Allah has bestowed upon you of taking you away from the habits and legacies of the fathers and grandfathers in much of which they contravened what came to be in the book and the Sunnah. Thank Him too for what He has bestowed during this time, namely the reign of this Imam King Abdulaziz."

"It was by virtue of his means that Allah bestowed upon you great bounties and it was through him that He protected you from plenty of wrath. He who seeks perfection and expects to see the model of the Caliphs, is asking for the impossible. So, listen and obey, observe his right and his reign upon you. By Allah, and by Allah once again, we have no knowledge of the existence on the face of the earth, east or west, north or south, of a person who is more worthy of Imamate [leadership] than him. We truly believe his Imamate to be sound and right and [will be religiously] proven. His Imamate is leadership of the Muslims and his reign is one of religion."⁵

Matters did not stop at enforcing the principle of obedience to the king, they went beyond that to inciting people to perform jihad and urging them to offer themselves in martyrdom to achieve the aspired objective. Sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Latif Al-Sheikh said: "I urge you in the name of Allah to take the initiative and rise promptly. Allah loves to see His servants rise promptly and implement what he commands them to do. Once the Imam (leader) mobilises his subjects, jihad becomes obligatory upon every single one of them that is enabled by Allah to perform it."

“So, listen and obey the one whom Allah has entrusted with your affairs. Respond to him as he summons you for jihad. Work hard and in earnest and assist the Imam (leader) of the Muslims in righting the enemies of the religion and the faith.”⁶

“I am talking about the valiant hero and the daring brave man, the commander of the masses in the lands of Islam, the Imam: Abdulaziz bin Imam Abdel Rahman Al-Faisal, may Allah protect him and prolong his life. Should he summon you, O Muslims, to jihad and battle, listen and obey, and be warned not to be like those who said we hear but we disobey. Rising to his obedience and supporting him is one of the religious obligations... obedience is a must and under whose command jihad is a duty.”⁷

“And [let it be known that] deserting jihad is an act of self-destruction. The Almighty says: ‘And do not throw yourselves with your [own] hands into destruction’ (Chapter 2, verse 195).⁸ Only a hypocrite, whose hypocrisy is confirmed, would stay back from performing jihad when summoned to it. So, beware and beware not to listen or pay attention to those who pull you back and dissuade you. Be careful not to be duped by the suspicion they raise or the doubts they cast. Do not think ill of the folks of the Islamic mission.”⁹

Shaikh and Judge Abdullah Al-Anqari wrote: “In total, his [King Abdulaziz] virtues are numerous and are more than can be counted. The amount of what Allah has bestowed through him upon the people of Najd is more abundant than can be accounted for. It is obligatory upon Muslims to perform jihad under his command. The Prophet (peace be upon him) is quoted as saying: ‘Rush to battle when you are summoned’. This means that when the Imam orders his subjects to go to battle, it is obligatory upon them to rush to jihad under his command and offer their wealth and souls, that is because he is performing jihad against the aggressing infidels for the sake of protecting the faith and saving the Muslims and protecting them from all the ills that may befall them.”¹⁰

These religious discourses that so persistently incite the public to obey and perform jihad concealed a political/military problem

perceived by King Abdulaziz and the scholars of Wahhabism behind him. The residents of the Najd metropolis, by virtue of their social and economic stability, grew more loathing of the invasion and fighting that constantly erupted among Bedouin tribes who were looting to earn a living. City dwellers, who engaged in agriculture, commerce and industry, had no pressing need for fighting and invading. They would resort to fighting only should a necessity rise such as in the case of having to defend one's self or one's property.

Indeed, there were ferocious fighters who would join the ruler in invading should the need arise or should that be necessary. However, this would usually only be temporary and for a specific purpose. Then, they would just return to their urban dwellings where they would settle down. They did, in fact, take part in the early battles waged by King Abdulaziz against the Turks to drive them out of the Najd metropolises. After the Turks were driven out and after they conceded defeat, the residents became content with expressing loyalty to Abdulaziz and with being prepared to defend themselves in the form of a local military battalion.¹¹ They had no firm intention of expanding, extending and going far beyond the territories of their own metropolises.

Yet, as Abdulaziz's theatre of operations expanded and extended to regions far away from Riyadh and other towns loyal to him, it became apparent that the military might he had used to impose his hegemony on Najd was no longer suitable for the battles and military operations he was preparing for and planning to execute in the distant parts of the Arabian Peninsula.

Despite the sincerity of the urban dwellers and their loyalty to Abdulaziz they were not fully prepared to relinquish their fields, trade and factories in order to fight in those far away parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Indeed, some of them expressed readiness and joined the King's troops and sided with him in his bid to accomplish his project. Yet, these were not a striking force sufficient for the fulfilment of the King's ambitions.¹²

The King was in need of a military power characterised by the ease of mobility, valiant bravery, simplicity and profound belief in

the project itself. The Bedouins were the sole human resource available to him. However, the experience of his predecessors the Saudi princes with the Bedouins was not good. The Bedouins did not spare a single Saudi emirate from their rebellion and they joined ranks with their foes for the sole purpose of maximising their gains.¹³ Add to this the position of the Wahhabi institution since the 19th Century which emanated from the vision that Bedouins were nothing but aliens to Islam and rebellious against its teachings and should therefore be rescued from perdition in this life and in the Hereafter.¹⁴

Hence emerged the idea of settling Bedouin tribes and rehabilitating them religiously, politically and militarily as well as integrating them into urban life and into the state's project. As of 1912, the authorities set up several settlements, whose houses were made of clay, around water springs and called them Hajars (migrations). Deriving the name of these Bedouin settlements from the verb to migrate is significant because the idea was to move away from the life of infidelity towards a place where the religion of truth is implemented.¹⁵

Hundreds of Hajars were built between 1912 and 1926 housing 150,000 Bedouins.¹⁶ Such settlement efforts were accompanied by another serious and intensive endeavour, unconditionally supported by King Abdulaziz himself, undertaken by the scholars of Wahhabism to teach religious ideas. Religious preachers called Mataw'ah were dispatched with the commission to teach the tribal children the rules of the true religion and to incite them into adopting the Wahhabi-Hanbali school and its world view. The scholars made numerous visits to various settlements so as to supervise and check the process of religious education and rehabilitation.

For the purposes of the process of mobilisation for jihad and fighting, Wahhabi concepts, which were born out of the political challenges that accompanied the founding of the first Saudi dynasty, were invoked. These included: takfir (excommunication), jihad, wala' (allegiance) and bara' (dissociation). The purpose was to make a clear distinction, both culturally and geographically, between the communities of the religion of truth on the one hand

and the communities of the religion of falsehood on the other.

Scholar Hasan bin Hussein Al Ash-Sheikh, who actively contributed to the migration of Al-Artawiyah, one of the biggest and most significant hajar settlements in the country, wrote a message in which he re-introduced some of the ideas adopted by Wahhabism in the 19th Century. He prohibited any peaceful communication with the authorities or inhabitants of the lands of the infidels, referring specifically to south Iraq and Kuwait. He decided that the only permissible communication with them will be in the battlefield within the context of jihad.¹⁷

Sheikh Abdullah bin Abdullatif Al Ash-Sheikh designated Al-Rashid and their supporters as infidel apostates because they sought military and financial assistance from the pagan Ottoman. It was not sufficient to declare them to be infidels; they needed to be fought too within the context of jihad in the cause of Allah. "He who knows the infidelity of the [Ottoman] state but does not distinguish between them and Muslim insurgents must lack knowledge of the meaning of 'There is no god but Allah'. If he further thinks that the [Ottoman] state are Muslims, then is even worse and graver. This is what amounts to suspecting the infidelity of he who disbelieves in Allah or assigns partners with Him. Whoever facilitates them or supports them against the Muslims in any way this would amount to clear apostasy."¹⁸

He also stressed: "Those who stood in extreme hostility to the adherents of monotheism and their folks – that is Al-Rashid and whoever joined them of their supporters – are without doubt infidels. Fighting them is incumbent upon the Muslims save for those who have never been acquainted with religion or those who are hypocrites or those who are sceptical about the Islamic mission."¹⁹

A group of Wahhabism scholars also issued fatawa (religious edicts) designating as infidels those who call for recognising the authority of Al-Sharif over Hijaz. One fatwa stated: "Such people, their apostasy is not to be doubted so long as they are in such a position because they are calling for homage under the authority of the pagans. It is incumbent upon all Muslims to fight them.

The same would apply to whoever provides them with shelter or supports them.”²⁰

Sheikh Suleiman bin Shuayman, one of the most senior scholars of the time, issued a verdict declaring those who are under the authority of King Abdulaziz to be Muslims in essence unlike those who are not under his authority who are assumed in essence not to be following the way of Islam.

He said: “Those who are in the Arabian Peninsula, we have no knowledge of their status. Apparently, most of them are not in the way of Islam! We do not judge them all to be infidels because it is possible that there are Muslims in their midst.”

“Yet, those who are under the authority of the leader of the Muslims [within Najd and its precincts], most of them are assumed to be in the way of Islam because they implement Islam’s established laws. But those who have not entered under the authority of the leader of the Muslims, we are not aware of all their conditions. However, their majority, as we mentioned, most probably is not Muslim.”²¹

Such dogmatic literature, and before it the literature bequeathed by the mission’s scholars during the era of the first Saudi state, were what fed the mind-set of the combatants (Brotherhood). As a result of this cultural preparation and jihadist ideological mobilisation, Bedouin tribes were converted, within a few years, to Wahhabi-Salafism after decades of hostility, mistrust and discomfort.

One of the most significant signs of the success of this endeavour was the creation of an ideological army of settled Bedouins that became known as Al-Ikhwan (Brotherhood), they would later contribute effectively to the process of unifying the Arabian Peninsula under the reign of King Abdulaziz.²²

Abdulaziz benefited from his imagination and courage. He radically transformed the Bedouins, turning them into a force able to roam the Arabian Peninsula across its entire length and breadth. He also made a stable force that could be stationed wherever he wanted

it. Abdulaziz managed to achieve this without clamour or uproar until this force emerged and appeared in the Arab scene for the first time ready and eager to fight under the name of the Ikhwan movement.²³

The international scene at the time, represented by the British and Ottoman governments, noticed the threat this secret movement, which was founded by King Abdulaziz, was posing. Sharif Hussein wrote in 1918 to the acting British envoy in Jeddah: "What concerns me above all this is that His Majesty the [British] King should compel the Prince [Abdulaziz] to annul and disband the organisation known as Al-Ikhwan."²⁴

The British Public Records Office kept a report written by Dickson on the September 2, 1929, while he served as a High Commissioner in Kuwait. In it he wrote: "On the other hand, the Al-Ikhwan was founded by Ibn Saud so as to fight his battles for him and achieve victory in the name of religion. By virtue of their Brotherhood and the fact that they are inspired by religion, they have become a formidable and invincible. They may be compared to Cromwell's tanks or the German hurricane forces."²⁵

The British Public Records Office also kept a lengthy report authored by the late traveller John Philby about Al-Ikhwan. At the time, he was in charge of the political bureau in Baghdad. He said in his report: "The conclusion is that Ibn Saud's objective of reinforcing and founding the Al-Ikhwan movement is to enhance his own military power using the largest number of his subjects to compensate for the weakness inherent in a Bedouin state and in a Bedouin army and to economise his resources by means of instilling the promise of a Hereafter reward to replace the concerns for earning a living."²⁶

The British High Commissioner in Egypt Reginald Wingate concluded, in a report he wrote in 1918, that the Bedouin Al-Ikhwan movement was a closed secret society of an ideological and combat nature.

He wrote: "I do not have sufficient information about the strength and objectives of the Al-Ikhwan so as to assess the credibility of

King Hussein's concerns about their influence. However, I did learn from my experience in Sudan the extent of the danger posed by a secret organisation disguised in the cloak of religion in the midst of uncivilised residents. Such a Muslim individual would, in times of hardship, flock to religion in as much as some individuals in the Christian countries flock to alcoholic drinks. That Muslim would usually be more vulnerable to the first spark of radicalism that soon turns into a fire if fuelled by an unwise leader or a misguided one beyond control no matter what."²⁷

During the same year, a civil servant in the Foreign Office in London made the following observations: "King Hussein's appraisal of the Al-Ikhwan movement is accurate. This society will be hostile to civilisation in the region falling between the two rivers and Syria."²⁸

In addition to this, on May 12, 1918, the British political officer in Baghdad described Al-Ikhwan as "a socialist movement in the sense that the rich have an obligation to share their goods and commodities with the people."²⁹ In late 1924, a European newspaper described Al-Ikhwan as "nearly a communist brotherhood".³⁰

King Abdulaziz once told British traveller John Philby: "I need only issue a call for thousands to rise and fight under my flag from Bishah to Najran and from Ranya to Tathlith. There is not a single one of them who does not love to die for the sake of the faith and they all believe that fleeing from the battlefield will lead them to the Hellfire."³¹

This is an ideological military army that resembles, to a large extent, what was known in European medieval times as the Temple Knights - the ideological individuals who were dedicated to fighting in a holy war and who shunned all the pleasures of life. Harsh living conditions permitted Bedouins little if any pleasures or luxuries. "Therefore, it was not surprising that Bedouins would seek martyrdom in the battlefield so as to guarantee themselves a place in paradise."³²

Since Al-Ikhwan were compelled to sell their camels and

sheep, their main source of economic revenue, they ended up relying, to a large extent, on the assistance they received from the treasury. Such government assistance was not paid to them as unemployment benefits but rather as a salary in exchange for fulfilling an important state requirement, namely to be militarily prepared and ready for immediate mobilisation. This assistance was known as grants that were paid to tribal chiefs, princes, knights and residents of the hajar settlements in general. The names of beneficiaries were recorded in the king's court. The king would personally decide how much everyone was paid.

A few years later, Al-Ikhwan - a distinguished class within the new state - considered themselves guardians of state security and morality. Their growing political and military power generated within their ranks some sort of arrogance and class superiority at times entering into competition with other classes and groups such as those of the scholars and dignitaries of towns and villages.³³

Additionally, Al-Ikhwan were known for their extremism and for their tendency to be too literal in their implementation of the principles of Wahhabism. Their mind-set had no place for a middle ground. This was evident from the harsh penalties they applied to whoever failed or neglected when it came to what they believed was straight and pure religious conduct.³⁴ Examples of this included being late for congregational prayers or the practice of what Wahhabism considered to be prohibited conduct such as smoking, singing, beard shaving, wearing long gowns and lack of modesty in clothes for women etc. Such deviations used to be dealt with through beatings, lashings or imprisonment.

Penalties may at times include death, especially if the person concerned is suspected of what Al-Ikhwan consider to be an act of apostasy or infidelity. The properties and possessions of those deemed to be infidels - non-Muslim - are seized as booties.

It would seem that the extremism of Al-Ikhwan and their onslaught on the inhabitants expanded and became a noticeable phenomenon to the extent that the British government began monitoring what they termed in their reports as "enforced guidance" practiced by Al-Ikhwan against the general Muslim population.

The British High Commissioner in Kuwait, Harold Dickson, submitted a memorandum in which he described the situation: “Enforced guidance has, until recently, been one of the tools of faith among the Ikhwan. It is certain that their tools have dismayed the inhabitants of Al-Hijaz and adjacent regions.”³⁵

Sergeant Garland wrote that there was stronger objection “to the brutal methods the Ikhwan resorted to in order to implement enforced guidance and punish sinners than to the principles of the sect itself. Undoubtedly, the Bedouins themselves, who joined the Ikhwan, used to be systematically terrorised through the process of enforced guidance. The practice of enforced guidance and penalising the sinners may have ended up with death.”³⁶

“It became obvious to Abdulaziz that the Ikhwan were getting out of control and were becoming arrogant.”³⁷ They used the authority in order to impose Sharia by force without seeking permission from him, especially in the wake of their impressive military successes that led to the downfall of Al-Sharif Emirate in Al-Hijaz and Al-Rashid Emirate in Hail and to the suppression of mutinies and rebellions in the south and west of the Peninsula. They always attributed these victories to their strength, sacrifices and their valiant conduct in combat.

In such a situation, it was only natural that things would head in the direction of difference, tension and dissension between Al-Ikhwan and the central authorities in the Emirate. Al-Ikhwan began to express dismay at the king himself and to denounce his modern policies as necessitated by unfolding reality such as the question of geopolitical borders of the state.

The king was keen to finalise this matter through his communications and agreements with the British government which, at the time, reigned over neighbouring regions. Al-Ikhwan believed that the “True Religion” should not be limited to a certain geographical area called “the state”. They believed that the authority of the religion and perfect faith should extend and expand geographically to wherever could be reached through fighting. That is why they continued in the jihad against neighbouring areas in southern Iraq, Kuwait and Jordan, imposing

a jizyah (poll tax) on those they conquered and looting them without permission from the king.

They objected to the government's use of modern inventions such as the telegraph, telephones, cars, bicycles and clocks, believing them to be some sort of forbidden magic.³⁸

They also engaged in the forcible application of Sharia in some regions so strictly and harshly and in a manner that involved abusing the inhabitants. They went as far as declaring as apostates and infidels many of the king's subjects who paid homage to him despite their own origins stemming from the fatawa of past and present Wahhabi scholars.

Then, the senior Wahhabi scholars had to intervene. They had already declared their allegiance and absolute solidarity with the king and had given their blessings for his modern state, which they saw as a natural extension of the contractual condition between the Emir and the Sheikh. Their intervention was swift and decisive so as matters did not get out of hand more than was necessary.

For the first time, they found themselves facing a religious rebellion from within the mission's community, from amongst the disciples who grew up learning their teachings and fighting the infidels and the pagans and who contributed to the establishment of the State of Monotheism. Establishing a central authority in managing religious meanings and interpreting Wahhabi teachings was inevitable.

This was also necessary in order to prevent a free for all interpretation. The senior scholars, the devoted descendants of Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Wahhab, are exclusively authorised to issue teachings and fatawa. There is no deliverance in this life or the Hereafter without following their teachings and implementing their instructions. "He who refrains from receiving their instructions or refuses to accept what they have narrated ends up shunning the legacy of the Master of Apostles and relinquishing it in favour of the sayings of the ignorant and the confused who have no knowledge of Sharia rules."³⁹

Hence, "Not everyone who claims knowledge and seeks to decorate himself with it is qualified to be asked or is in a position to issue a fatwa or can be trusted in the matters of your religion."⁴⁰

They also denounced them for disrespectfully addressing the king in their communications as well as for intending to depose him and revolt against him. They said: "We absolve ourselves before God from this and from whoever perpetrates it or causes it or assists others to engage in it because we have not seen or experienced from Imam Abdulaziz what justifies revolting against him and withdrawing the homage of obedience given to him. Should he ever perpetrate any prohibited action that is not condoned by Sharia, it would suffice for he who seeks the truth to pray for him to be guided and to give advice to him in the proper legitimate manner."⁴¹

The senior scholars also noted the abuse Al-Ikhwan engaged in against them, ridiculing them and casting doubt on their honesty, accusing them of bootlicking. Thus, they swiftly launched a counter attack and issued statements in which they replied to the accusations levelled at them.

In one such statement they wrote: "Of what should be cautioned against are some of the actions many ignorant have been embroiled in. These include levelling accusations against the learned and the religious of bootlicking and shortcomings, of failing to carry out what Allah mandated them to do, of withholding their knowledge of the truth and failing to explain it to the public."

"These ignorant people have not been aware that backbiting against the learned and the religious and amusement over exposing the weakness of the believer is a deadly poison and a hidden sickness as well as a clear sin."⁴²

"You were originally immersed in ignorance and darkness and in a state of alienation from the truth. Your leaders were mostly arch tyrants and your commoners were mostly harsh and evil. You had no knowledge of the truths of the religion of Islam. You knew nothing of the truth apart from what you desired to grasp. Your conduct amongst yourselves was marked by bloodshed, looting,

severing family ties, over stepping the boundaries set by Allah and perpetrating other prohibitions and big sins.”

“Then Allah guided you to the knowledge of His religion, to enacting His monotheism and to conducting yourselves in accordance with the conduct of the people of Islam and monotheism. The books of tradition and history became widespread amongst you and so too became the writings of Islamic scholars in various disciplines. And now, you have changed to the extent that you are attempting to rebel against the Imam, oppose the people of Islam and dissent against your own community.”⁴³

There were so many other statements and fatawa issued on this matter by the scholars of Wahhabism, particularly from 1919 to 1920.⁴⁴ They issued collective fatawa in which they elucidated the new Wahhabi discourse that is commensurate with the new conditions and nature of the modern Saudi State.

However, Al-Ikhwan did not succumb or submit to these new fatawa, in which they saw a reversal of what Wahhabism was about from their point of view. They started arguing with the scholars referring to the writings and the teachings produced by the movement’s scholars during the two earlier periods: the first and second eras of the Saudi Emirate.

Then, the scholars were compelled to declare Al-Ikhwan as infidels and to excommunicate them from Islam declaring that fighting them and performing jihad against them was a must. To this end, they issued the following fatwa: “As to he who asks regarding the Ikhwan, who view all Muslims and their leader as not being on the truth, this opinion is the product of their misguidance and one of the reasons that renders it incumbent to declare them infidels and to excommunicate them from Islam.”

“As to he who responds to their call, and those of the inhabitants of Najd who assist them, the same verdict applies to them. All Muslims have a duty to fight them and perform jihad against them. He who declines to perform jihad against them and claims that they are his brothers and that they are on the truth, then the same

verdict that applies to them applies to him. “⁴⁵

It would seem that Al-Ikhwan felt bitter about this coup against them by their senior scholars. At the time when the scholars and their followers deafened listeners, in accordance with the principle of wala’ (allegiance) and bara’ (dissociation), forbidding all forms of official communication with the pagans, and even going as far as excommunicating whoever was politically content with an alliance with the Ottoman State or with joining it, we could see by now that the king and his advisors were, with the blessings of the new Wahhabi scholars, establishing diplomatic relations with these foreign infidel powers. This is how Al-Ikhwan viewed matters. This was part of their world view that had been fed by old Wahhabi teachings, or this was at least what they understood from those teachings.⁴⁶

While the scholars deafened the ears with their talk about bara’ and hostility toward all the sects or schools of thought that, according to them, practiced infidelity and innovations, or that compromised in their favour, we could by then see the scholars of Wahhabism give licence to the king to tolerate such sects and schools and to embrace them within the state, leaving them alone without compulsion and being content with just inviting them through wisdom and compassion, step-by-step. However, Al-Ikhwan rejected this bootlicking, slackness and softness when it came to truth as they perceived it and as they had learnt during their formative years in Wahhabi hajars. When Al-Ikhwan tried to impose the correct faith and the proper conduct on people by force in some regions, especially in Hijaz, the scholars of Wahhabism objected and called on them to adopt more lenient and wiser methods after obtaining permission of the authorities.

Irrespective of how this religious dispute and conflict proceeded and how it ended politically and militarily, we could see in it the first clearly overt rebellion and dissension within Wahhabi-Salafism. More accurately, we ended up before two versions of Wahhabism: the old era Wahhabism and the new era Wahhabism, a Wahhabism that is observant of the literal interpretation of the founding fathers’ writings and a Wahhabism that interprets these texts more realistically and more pragmatically.

Such division and split did not end upon the use of military action against the dissenting groups. The ideas of old Wahhabism continued to be transferred from one generation to the next generation until this very day of ours. Jihadist groups, for instance, which adopt the methodology of violence, takfir (excommunication) and fighting, derive their ideological discourse from the teachings of old era Wahhabism.

We have, in fact, seen most Al-Qaeda ideologues emanate in their discourses and writings from those that originated in that era. When the followers of Wahhabism, or what is known as dynamic Salafism, stand up to these groups today or enter into conflict with them, they do little apart from repeating the same encounters that occurred between the Wahhabism that was reconciled and allied with the state and the rigid, rebellious and militant Wahhabism.

It is the conflict of interpretations, a conflict over interpreting the texts of the old Wahhabi era. It is an ongoing conflict between two Wahhabisms: a Wahhabism that is realistic and pragmatist and a Wahhabism that is loyal to the teachings of the old era. Both Wahhabisms claim to be the legitimate representative of the true religion.

At the time when Al-Ikhwan declared the state to be sacrilegious because of its communications and dealings with the British government, in implementation of the teachings of the old era Wahhabism regarding the excommunication of whoever joins or assists the Turkish troops, we find that these same Ikhwan gave licence to their leaders afterwards to communicate with the British government and to seek the conclusion of deals with it, resorting to it and seeking its assistance when things turned against them as a result of the massive losses and repeated defeats they suffered at the hands of the troops of King Abdulaziz.⁴⁷

In an attempt to avert seeming self-contradictory before the eyes of their followers, they justified their political conducts in terms of following the example of the Prophet's companions who migrated to Christian Abyssinia and deserted the infidels in their tribe.

This prompted the senior scholars of new era Wahhabism to issue a fatwa declaring Al-Ikhwan to be infidels (excommunicating them) because of their contacts with the sacrilegious British government and because they resorting to it and sought its assistance. Thus, “those whom the questioner referred to, namely Al-Ajman and Al-Duwaish and whoever followed them, are undoubtedly infidels and apostates because they sided by the enemies of Allah and His Apostle and asked to join their authority and sought their assistance. Such are those who combined deserting the abode of Muslims and joining the enemies of the faith and religion, while excommunicating the folks of Islam and licensing the shedding of their blood and the looting of their wealth.”⁴⁸

This fatwa was issued at the same time when these scholars were providing licence for the king to communicate with the British government “because he is the leader of the Muslims who is responsible for guarding over their interests and therefore it is inevitable for him to seek to protect his subjects and his authority from foreign states.”⁴⁹

Both Wahhabisms are reflections of the same pattern. This is the pattern that claims to possess, absolutely and exclusively, the religious truth and claims to be the sole legitimate representative of the correct faith and to be the sole reference for understanding the straight path toward salvation in the Hereafter and therefore has the right to generate, implement and impose on others the religious meaning.

However, despite all of this, and for the sake of objectivity and fairness, it is no longer possible to equate modern day Wahhabism, which has become part and parcel of the modern state project and its prerequisites and has become pliable to concessions dictated by the pressures of modernity, with traditional Wahhabism, which continues to abide, in a literal fashion, by the teachings of the old era.

End Notes:

All 49 footnotes refer to Arabic references.

1. The Scholars of Islam, the History and Structure of the Saudi Religious Institution, Muhammad Nabil, Arab Research and Publishing Network; p. 153.
2. For the Night Travellers the Morning has Called, Abd Al-Aziz Al-Tuwajiri, p. 520.
3. The most prominent Wahhabism scholars who played an active role during the founding of the Third Saudi State are: Abdullah bin Abd Al-Latif Al Ash-Sheikh, Muhammad ibn Abd Al-Latif Al Ash-Sheikh, Saad bin Atiq, Abdullah Al-Anqari, Suleiman bin Sahman and Abdullah bin Salim.
4. Al-Durar Al-Saniyyah, 8/47
5. Ibid. 9/105
6. Ibid. 9/105
7. Ibid. 8/29
8. Ibid. 8/30
9. Ibid. 8/28
10. Ibid 8/47
11. See: Saudi Al-Ikhwan in Two Decades, John Habib, translated by Sabri Muhammad Hassan, Dar Al-Marrikh, Riyadh, p. 46-47
12. Ibid, p. 46-47
13. Some historical references say that the tribes of Najd and Al-Hijaz, who were originally loyal to the First Saudi State, renounced Wahhabism and entered into an alliance with Ibrahim Pasha, commander of the Ottoman expedition. These tribes provided direction for the expedition and assisted it until it reached the walls of Dariyah. See: Saudi Arabia by John Philby; p. 140.

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14. This was mentioned in the third essay and see also Al-Durar Al-Saniyyah; 9/238
 15. Scholars of Islam; p. 159
 16. Ibid. p. 159
 17. A manuscript in the possession of researcher Dr Muhammad Malin. See Scholars of Islam; p. 160.
 18. Al-Durar Al-Saniyyah; 10/429
 19. Ibid. 9/83
 20. Ibid. 9/211
 21. Minhaj Ahl Al-Haq, Suleiman bin Suhayman, Al-Furqan Bookshop, Ajman; p. 79.
 22. Scholars of Islam; p. 160
 23. Saudi Al-Ikhwan in Two Decades; p. 47
 24. Ibid. p. 53
 25. Ibid. p. 57
 26. Ibid. p. 60
 27. Ibid. p. 63
 28. Ibid. p. 63
 29. Ibid. p. 63
 30. Ibid. p. 66
 31. Saudis and the Islamic Solution, Muhammad Jalal Kishk. p. 395
 32. The Saudi Ikhwan in Two Decades; p. 93
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33. Ibid. p. 90

34. Al-Durar Al-Saniyyah; 8/82; 9/144, 173

35. The Saudi Ikhwan in Two Decades; p. 82

36. Ibid. p. 83

37. Ibid. p. 80

38. Saudis and the Islamic Solution; p. 535 and For Night Travellers; p. 205.

39. Al-Durar Al-Saniyyah; 9/133

40. Ibid. 8/84

41. Ibid. 9/183

42. Ibid. 9/113

43. Ibid. 9/185

44. See volume eight of Al-Durar Al-Saniyyah; pp. 83, 84, 422 & 480, and volume nine; pp. 44, 105, 108 & 142.

45. (See Al-Durar Al-Saniyyah: 9/210)

46. See the rebuttal of the Scholars of Wahhabism to Al-Ikhwan on this issue; 9/157

47. Al-Durar Al-Saniyyah; 9/209

49. Ibid. 9/158.

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