

## REFORM IN SAUDI ARABIA: THE GENDER-SEGREGATION DEBATE

*Roel Meijer*

*Dr. Meijer teaches the modern history of the Middle East at Radboud University and is a senior researcher at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, Clingendael.<sup>1</sup>*

Reform has been a buzzword in Saudi Arabia since Abdullah became king in 2005. Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, the kingdom had been accused of promoting an intolerant form of Islam and was under tremendous pressure from the United States to reform education, curtail radical preachers and implement (some) democratic reforms. Although the Saudi state at first denied a connection between 9/11 and Wahhabism, after the attacks on Saudi soil in 2003-05 by al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), it realized something had to be done. It found support among the more open-minded functionaries and intellectuals (“liberals,” the so-called *libraliyyin*), who believed reform was the only way to save the country. They felt encouraged by both the international pressures and the waning influence of the conservative Sahwa movement, responsible for the Islamic revivalism of the 1980s and 1990s. Reform of education,<sup>2</sup> improvement of the position of women,<sup>3</sup> curtailment of the more unregenerate xenophobic Wahhabi clerics, promotion of a discourse of “tolerance” and “dialogue,” and a combination of repression of jihadis and mild rehab

programs for followers<sup>4</sup> gained the kingdom wide acclaim in the foreign press.

The kingdom has scored less well with regard to the usual Western benchmarks for reform: creation of a conducive environment for the emergence of a civil society, implementation of elections for representative bodies, enhancement of the rule of law and respect for human rights.<sup>5</sup> Besides the 2005 municipal elections, very little progress has been made on these fronts; if many observers were hopeful and sympathetic to King Abdullah’s attempts to reform the country, after four years of his reign he still had few concrete results. To be sure, the more open atmosphere and restricted capacity of the religious police to interfere in personal affairs have made the country unrecognizable for those who have not visited it for 10 to 20 years. But reform is precarious at best. The personnel overhaul decreed by King Abdullah on Valentine’s Day 2009, therefore, was intended to give reform a new boost and was welcomed by the Western press.<sup>6</sup>

In this article, I will gauge the effects of reform, not by looking at progress in the development of civil society or elections, but by closely examining some aspects

of the regime that are more difficult to measure, but are perhaps as important. I will concentrate on the internal struggle between reformists and conservatives as well as the conflict between the liberal press and the conservative religious establishment. Without replacing Wahhabism's highly conservative ulama, who dominate the religious establishment, the educational system and the courts — and maintain an important hold on public opinion through sermons and the internet<sup>7</sup> — it is unlikely that reform will have any effect. Even in the unlikely event that a parliament were created, elections would be won by conservative leaders.<sup>8</sup> The state is fractured, has no clear policy and, therefore, has limited control over affairs. The result is that the battle for reform over crucial sectors of society is being fought by the liberal press, which has been strengthened since 9/11, and the conservative religious establishment, with different sectors of the state supporting one side or the other.

I have chosen the fierce debate over gender mixing (*ikhhtilat*) as an illustration of the convoluted process of reform. Gender segregation in schools, universities, charitable organizations, hospitals, restaurants, government offices and other public spaces is one of the defining features of Saudi Arabia. As several researchers have pointed out, this is not a traditional practice in Saudi society.<sup>9</sup> It was actively promoted in the 1980s and 1990s by the state, the revivalist Sahwa movement,<sup>10</sup> conservative ulama and the religious police, who enforce public moral behavior. Although the position of women has improved since 9/11, *ikhhtilat* demarcates the battle lines between reformists and conservatives. Any attempt to diminish its enforcement is regarded as a direct attack on the standing of conservatives and Islam itself.<sup>11</sup>

In the following pages, I trace the *ikhhtilat* debate from its eruption in October 2009 to the start of its fourth round in May 2010. I closely analyze the arguments and positions of the four main players around which the debate has concentrated (Sheikh Saad al-Shithri, Sheikh Ahmad al-Ghamidi, Sheikh Abd al-Rahman al-Barrak, and Sheikh Yusuf al-Ahmad), examine their backgrounds and allies, and assess the support or neglect they have garnered in higher state circles.

## THE PLAYERS

Revising strict gender segregation has been on the agenda for the past 10 years,<sup>12</sup> but what really triggered the present clash of interests was the decision on February 14, 2009, to overhaul the personnel of the highest government agencies.<sup>13</sup> The opening in September 2009 of the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST), which has become the symbol of reform and acceptable *ikhhtilat*, exacerbated the already deep apprehension of the conservatives.

King Abdullah's appointments on Valentine's Day were important because they signaled his concern about reform. Among the newly appointed were Faysal bin Abdullah as minister of education and Muhammad al-Isa as minister of justice. Equally important, well-known arch-conservative figures were replaced. They included the president of the Supreme Judicial Council, Salih bin Muhammad al-Luhaydan, who was succeeded by the king's close adviser, the president of the Majlis al-Shura, Salih bin Humayd. Likewise, the head of the Committee of Commanding Good and Forbidding Wrong (henceforth called the Hayaa), Sheikh Ibrahim al-Ghayth, was replaced by royal adviser Sheikh Abd al-Aziz bin Humayn

al-Humayn,<sup>14</sup> as was the head of the Permanent Council of Religious Research and Fatwas (Lajna al-Daima li-l-Buhuth wa-l-Fatwa).<sup>15</sup> Nor was the Council of Senior Scholars (Hayaa Kibar al-Ulama), one of the kingdom's most prestigious institutions, spared.<sup>16</sup> At least four new members of the 22-member council were appointed, among them the moderate Qays bin Muhammad bin Abd al-Latif Al Mubarak (b. 1960). Atypically, he comes from the province of Ahsa, belongs to the Maliki school of jurisprudence, and received part of his education in Tunisia. He is a specialist in *sharia* law concerning the application of modern medicine.<sup>17</sup>

The Western press has widely perceived King Abdullah's Valentine's Day reform as an important step forward.<sup>18</sup> This, however, remains to be seen. The highest dignitary of the religious establishment, the *mufti* of Saudi Arabia, Abd al-Aziz bin Abdullah Al al-Shaykh, who succeeded the arch-conservative Abd al-Aziz bin Baz 10 years ago, has sided consistently with the conservatives and has attacked the reformists on numerous occasions. Another prominent conservative of the old guard, Sheikh Salih bin Fawzan al-Fawzan, is also still active and recently issued a fatwa forbidding a French Muslim man from allowing his wife to leave the house without a *niqab*.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, most younger high ulama know their limits. Their liability is that they show themselves equivocal on many issues. The newly appointed Qays Al Mubarak, for instance, condemns *takfir*<sup>20</sup> and is known for his more liberal ideas on the Shia,<sup>21</sup> but remains skeptical of allowing women to drive.<sup>22</sup> Other higher ulama are even more critical of reform. Having been appointed only two weeks previously to the Permanent Council of Religious

Research and Fatwas,<sup>23</sup> Sheikh Abd al-Karim al-Khudayyir openly condemned measures taken by the Ministry of Education to promote sports for girls at school as "corrupting."<sup>24</sup> Like *ikhtilat*, girls' sports is an issue that divides the ulama and finds many conservatives on the same side. A conservative like Sheikh Yusuf al-Ahmad, who became famous in May 2010 for demanding *ikhtilat* in the Grand Mosque (by having it rebuilt — see below), opposed girls' sports<sup>25</sup> and called for the expansion of the Hayaa.<sup>26</sup>

An important impediment to reform is the alliance between lower and higher ulama. The International Crisis Group concluded in a 2004 report that this alliance could not be broken and that it is essential for the survival of the regime in the struggle against AQAP.<sup>27</sup> Since then, this terrorist organization has been defeated. The state no longer depends as much on the lower ulama, who are bound to lose the most from infringements on their privileges in education, jurisdiction and religious policing. In the past, the ubiquitously employed ulama in lower, secondary and higher education agitated mostly against reforms, even if only symbolically. For example, in 2005, 118 ulama signed a petition in which they agreed that, while women's driving had practical benefits (*masalih*), the danger of "legal corruption" far outweighs them. Typically they accused "Jews, Christians and hypocrites [i.e., Muslims with Western ideas]" for waging a campaign to "corrupt women and through them the Muslim nation."<sup>28</sup> The replaced Sheikh Luhaydan was prominent in this type of resistance. In 2008, for instance, he protested against the corrosive effects of the booming commercial Saudi TV stations, stating that the owners of TV stations could be sentenced to death if they

broadcast “profligate programs.” He accused them of promoting “deviation” (*inhiraf*) and sowing “doubts” about established religious values.<sup>29</sup>

Another important obstacle to reform consists of the populist ulama, who intensively use TV stations and the internet to propagate their ideas. A good example is Sheikh Sulayman bin Ahmad al-Duwish.<sup>30</sup> With obvious glee, he plays on the dilemmas the Saudi state faces by implementing reform while retaining its Wahhabi ideological basis. His most cherished term is “contradiction” (*tanaqud*). He takes Saudi reformers to task for the tendency after 9/11 to graft a religious discourse based on tolerance (*tasamuh*) and coexistence (*taayush*) with other religions onto strict and rigorous Wahhabi doctrine. Unapologetically he calls the Shia “rejectionists” (*rafida*) and “unbelievers” (*kuffar*).<sup>31</sup> Christians and Jews are, in his eyes, “overt enemies,”<sup>32</sup> and he ridicules<sup>33</sup> attempts to embellish or downplay such notorious concepts as *al-wala wa-l-bara* (loyalty and disavowal).<sup>34</sup> In August 2009, he was accused by Alarabiya.net of calling for the assassination of the makers of the soap comedy *Tash 16* for their anti-Islamic humor.<sup>35</sup> Due to his provocative pronouncements, he was briefly arrested in 2006 for incitement to terrorism.<sup>36</sup>

One reason the higher official ulama are unable to respond to this challenge is their lack of authority. After the death in 1999 of the last mufti, Abd al-Aziz bin Baz, few outstanding and generally accepted sources of religious authority remained. The plethora of fatwas since then reflects this. On April 10, 2010, the Council of Senior Ulama held an extraordinary meeting to discuss the “chaos of fatwas,” especially the use of takfir.<sup>37</sup> A day later, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs

issued a warning to imams about using the mosques for their campaigns against liberals,<sup>38</sup> in line with King Abdullah’s warning a month earlier that “words should not be an instrument to settle accounts.”<sup>39</sup> So far, all attempts to limit fatwas to the “people of rooted knowledge,” represented by the religious establishment, have failed;<sup>40</sup> and popular sheikhs who, in their view, issue “irresponsible” fatwas remain unchecked.<sup>41</sup> The lack of religious authority has become apparent especially in the ikhtilat debate.<sup>42</sup> Few members of the Council of Higher Ulama, however, seem to be perturbed. The newly appointed Qays Al Mubarak stated that there was no need for drawing up a blacklist of ulama who have issued “deviationist” (*shadhdha*) fatwas.<sup>43</sup>

The reason the conservative alliance is so strong is that many of the higher and lower ulama share the same apocalyptic discourse. Due to the increasing power of the liberal press and the reformists, they feel threatened by “the secularists and the liberals,” who wage “horrendous campaigns” against the real protectors of Islam and the interests of the king and Saudi Arabia.<sup>44</sup> For them, liberals and “hypocrites” (*munafigun*) are synonymous. They openly asked the state to curtail the power of the liberals and put their newspapers under supervision.<sup>45</sup> The populist sheikh Sulayman al-Duwish has become notorious for his personal attacks on the editors-in-chief of the foremost liberal newspapers, *al-Watan* and *al-Riyad*, and on the head of the journalists’ organization, Turki al-Sudayri, as well as the former minister of culture, Iyad Madani, and media czar Prince Alwaleed bin Talal.<sup>46</sup>

Liberals, in the eyes of conservatives, are presumed to be bent on “westernizing Islam” and replacing it with a “modern, moderate” version, which they call

“American Islam.”<sup>747</sup> The mere raising in the Majlis al-Shura of the issue of women driving is condemned as “intellectual terrorism” (*al-irhab al-fikri*).<sup>48</sup> Conservatives try to delegitimize the liberal discourse of reform by equating “progress” (*taqaddum*) with terms such as “decay” (*inhilal*). They regard liberals as “corrupters on earth,” who believe that “decay of religion and behavior is the basis for progress” and that we “cannot adopt Western industry and knowledge without accepting its ideas and its values.”<sup>49</sup> Only the sharia can, in their view, constitute “a blockade against pretexts and means to promote corruption and the forbidden.”<sup>50</sup> With relief, therefore, conservatives welcomed the decision by Minister of Interior Nayif to continue the ban on cinemas in Saudi Arabia.<sup>51</sup>

Remarkably, the conservative discourse against the liberals and reformists is very much the same as the Wahhabi counterterrorism discourse against “extremism.”<sup>52</sup> Liberalism is accused of spreading “corruption” and “abomination.” Good Muslims must be “educated” and “inoculated” against its “deadly poison,” which is encapsulated in such devious terms as “reform,” “advice” and “nationalism.” Like terrorists, liberals use “spurious arguments” and are slaves of their passions. Basically, liberals are apostates, although few will say so openly. In the hysteria of the moment, the conservatives regard KAUST as the first step to “dissolve religion, its values and its morals.”<sup>53</sup> Their views were confirmed when footage was posted on YouTube showing men and women students at the new university dancing.<sup>54</sup>

It is important to note that the so-called liberals can be divided into different categories, and that cultural liberals are involved in this debate.<sup>55</sup> In this clash of world views, the liberals are no less

outspoken than the conservative clerics. This has developed to the point that one wonders whether Saudi Arabia might not be one of the few countries in the Middle East to develop an anti-clerical movement comparable to that in Iran. The liberals portray the conservatives as “reactionaries” who oppose reform, progress, science, modernity and the development of knowledge “that should be enjoyed by both sexes.”<sup>56</sup> They accuse their opponents of misusing their power by manipulating the media — especially the internet, where they are far stronger than the liberals — for their own purposes instead of adhering to the custom of giving discreet advice to the ruler.<sup>57</sup> Their weapon of issuing fatwas and ostracizing liberals and other opponents is particularly condemned. Moreover, the liberals accuse the conservatives of derailing the debate over the future of the country by referring to non-issues such as *ikhtilat*, the prohibition against women driving cars and the introduction of cinemas. Compared to “real problems” like poverty, drug abuse, unemployment and the nuclear threat, these are non-issues.<sup>58</sup> The conservatives, they believe, are damaging the image of Saudi Arabia and isolating it from the rest of the world. KAUST, for the liberals, is the symbol of allowing women to “participate fully in the family, society and labor market,” and carry out “their normal duties in society.”<sup>59</sup> While the conservatives try to portray the liberals as the most important threat to Islam and the source of terrorism, the liberals try to connect the religious “extremists” and their opposition to pluralism and freedom of expression with terrorism.<sup>60</sup> However, liberals are also not averse to using religious terms against their opponents, accusing them of promoting dissension and “innovation.”

One of the fascinating aspects of the debate and power struggle is that both sides invoke the name of the ruler (*wali al-amr*). In a political environment that allows little critique of the ruler, and where he is decisive in all political matters, both sides are careful to underline the theory of complete obedience. But, of course, both have their own interpretation of this concept. For the first time since the rise of the *Sahwa*, the liberals feel that they are on the right side of history. They portray the king as the promoter of modernization, “who believes in the future and gives the next generation opportunities [for development].”<sup>61</sup> KAUST conveniently links those elements that are crucial for their program of modernization. It enjoys the patronage of the ruler and promotes science, progress and women’s emancipation. It incorporates nationalism, but it has also begun to dismantle the walls of isolation and connect Saudi Arabia with the rest of the world. In a complete mirror image of the Wahhabi clergy, the liberals maintain a utilitarian view of religion. As one liberal writer put it: “We cannot believe that when the state sets the highest goals for the benefit of the citizen that it can contradict the principles of religion or break the locks of the forbidden and rejected.”<sup>62</sup>

No less vehement is the conservatives’ defense of the ruler. They criticize KAUST and liberal reforms in the name of the *wali al-amr*. Had he not earlier criticized the press for printing pictures of women? Does he not promote the “good” and defend the general interest?<sup>63</sup> They, not the liberals, have the best interests of the ruler at heart, and only they can prevent the liberals from promoting their hidden agenda of Westernization.<sup>64</sup>

## THE IKHTILAT DEBATE

### The Saad al-Shithri Case

The ikhtilat debate has been around for some time, but it emerged in full force after the reforms of February 2009. Saad bin Nasir bin Abd al-Aziz al-Shithri was the first to trigger the strong emotions involved in the case. Remarkably, he had been appointed to the Council of Senior Ulama during the February 2009 personnel overhaul as part of its rejuvenation; born in 1964/65,<sup>65</sup> he was regarded as a member of “the king’s party.” Even if he was not recognized as a reformer, he was a member of a well-known family of ulama who had been in the service of the royal family for some time and was assumed to be loyal.<sup>66</sup>

The remarks he made after he was appointed show him to be level-headed and conventional. He was correct to point out that the Council of Senior Ulama had never been confined to the Hanbalis, but had always been open to the other three schools of jurisprudence.<sup>67</sup> One of his fatwas was to forbid jihad “unless it is permitted by the ruler.”<sup>68</sup> Likewise, he dutifully warned against using the holy texts for apostasy and terrorism and “the development of extremist thought.”<sup>69</sup> On another occasion, he made the standard Sunni warning — much repeated in the ikhtilat debate — against internal divisions, for “the sharia forbids parties and factions because Islam demands that the *umma* be united.”<sup>70</sup>

Shaykh Saad al-Shithri’s promising career took a sudden turn for the worse when he was interviewed by the private TV station al-Majd on September 28, 2009, on the opening of KAUST. He started out by carefully praising King Abdullah for founding such an excellent university and “restoring the *umma* to its previous posi-

tion of being the world leader in science”; in short, he considered it a “blessed step.” However, he believed there were some aspects of the university “of which the king will not approve.” In keeping with the king’s condemnation of publishing pictures of women in the press, he recommended that special ulama committees be established to ensure that the university acts in accordance with the king’s wishes and “removed that which contradicts the sharia” and “differs from the truth.” As an example, he cited the theory of evolution. Typically, he claimed to speak in the name of the “general interest,” for the sharia promotes the good and rejects the bad and the corrupt. Only at the very end of the interview did he mention the I-word: “One of the reasons people might oppose the good” is that it might promote ikhtilat, which is regarded as a “massive evil.” To make sure that his message came across, he stated that “in mixed-gender universities we see lots of evil/corruption.” In those places, “men can look at women and women can look at men, and their hearts might catch flame.”<sup>71</sup>

The liberal press reacted as if stung by a bee. No less than 18 articles were published during the next few days in the national liberal newspapers, especially *al-Riyad* and *Okaz*, attacking the unfortunate sheikh. The assault began with an article by the editor-in-chief of *al-Watan*, Jamal al-Khashoggi. He attacked al-Shithri for opposing “progress,” but — more ominously — for attacking the king. By openly casting doubt on the legality of the university on a TV station, he had promoted *fitna* (dissension) and had “accused the rulers of this country of betraying its security and of being the stooges of unbelieving foreigners.”<sup>72</sup> Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Isa stated in *al-Watan* that ikhtilat was

just a pretext. The ulama want to retrieve their previous power over education by using ikhtilat, which is a threat to academic freedom. He concluded that “we do not want an intellectual police.”<sup>73</sup>

Other liberals used the case to attack the prohibition of ikhtilat in general. They regarded the obsession with preventing ikhtilat as insane, arguing that it already exists in hospitals, marketplaces, airplanes and even during the circumambulation of the Kaaba in Mecca. Moreover, as some pointed out, ikhtilat is a new phenomenon that did not exist before the conservative reformist Sahwa movement imposed it on Saudi Arabia in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>74</sup> In an argument that would later become magnified, most liberals pointed out that prohibition of ikhtilat is not Islamic; in fact, it did not exist during the time of the Prophet and is “tarnished by our local culture.”<sup>75</sup> Turki Abdallah al-Sudayri, editor-in-chief of *al-Riyad*, asked whether the rest of the Islamic world — which does not practice the total separation of men and women — is, in the view of al-Shithri, deviant. He also asked whether the portrayal of women as “temptations” and sources of sin and deviation is not an insult to human values and rationality. He argued that these extremist ideas will isolate Saudi Arabia, not just from other religions, but also from the majority of Muslims.<sup>76</sup>

Sheikh Saad al-Shithri tried to defend his position in a letter to *al-Watan* praising KAUST. He protested that the content of his interview with the TV station had been mangled by the editor-in-chief of *al-Watan* and praised the “excellent role of KAUST and the glorious goals it pursues.” He was especially adamant in correcting the idea that he had criticized the ruler. To no avail. In less than a week, on October 4, a royal decree relieved him

of his position as a member of the Council of Senior Ulama. He also lost his other positions, among them membership on the Permanent Council of Religious Studies and Fatwas.<sup>77</sup> It was the second time that someone on the Council of Senior Ulama had been dismissed.<sup>78</sup>

One of the questions that has been asked about resistance to reform is to what extent did al-Shithri speak for the Council of Senior Ulama? Was it a planned strategy? Was he nudged forward by his colleagues because he was newly appointed and well-connected, and therefore able to voice their concerns and those of the whole religious establishment without severe consequences? Or was it simply a blunder?

That it was not simply a blunder is clear from al-Shithri's commentary on KAUST during the TV interview. It was well-reasoned and lengthy and gave the impression of expressing a more general opinion. This is supported by the massive protest from the religious establishment against his dismissal. The mufti publicly stated that, when al-Shithri had earlier offered to step down, his "resignation was unacceptable."<sup>79</sup> For fiery preachers like Sheikh Sulayman al-Duwish, the al-Shithri case was another example of the mortal threat Saudi Arabia faced from the "deviationist liberals." He clearly voiced the opinion of many conservatives that al-Shithri had become the victim of a well-orchestrated campaign of the liberals led by *al-Watan*.<sup>80</sup> In anger, Sheikh al-Duwish "disavowed" KAUST and stated that members of its educational board were "corrupters."<sup>81</sup> Members of the religious establishment, however, remained neutral. In his Friday sermon, the imam of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Sheikh Abd al-Rahman al-Sudays, called upon everyone to remain calm and prevent fitna from spreading. He praised KAUST and pressed

upon leaders, ulama, intellectuals and "those interested in the general [welfare...] to uphold the consensus and agreement on this important endeavor."<sup>82</sup>

The al-Shithri case seemed to confirm the ascent of the reformist trend. That someone just appointed by the king and as well-connected as al-Shithri could not impede it was encouraging to the liberals.

### The Sheikh al-Ghamidi Affair

Two months after the dismissal of al-Shithri, the ikhtilat debate flared up again. On December 9, 2009, Sheikh Ahmad bin Qasim al-Ghamidi, head of the Committee for Commanding Right and Preventing Wrong in Mecca, wrote an article in *Okaz* arguing that ikhtilat was permitted and that its prohibition had no basis in sharia.<sup>83</sup> Like al-Shithri, al-Ghamidi was, at 46, relatively young. He based his views on an extensive study he had done during the previous two years.

The al-Ghamidi affair confuses the reformist case. While Sheikh al-Shithri was supposed to toe the reformist line and support the policy of King Abdullah, al-Ghamidi was a civil servant. He was required to implement the policy of the state to the letter and see to the prevention of breaches of doctrine, not voice opinions on controversial matters. However, he retained his position, indicating that he had support from higher up.

In fact, nothing seemed to stop him from promoting a more comprehensive reform program during the following months, although he was abused, ostracized and even physically intimidated. Five young men tried to enter his house, demanding to have ikhtilat with his wife and daughters, as he did not object to the mingling of genders.<sup>84</sup> He expanded his campaign to subjects other than ikhtilat

when, in an interview with *al-Madina* on April 8, he stated that any cleric who considered the duty of common prayer in the mosque unnecessary could not be punished, because it is an issue of personal interpretation (*ijtihad*).<sup>85</sup> Related to this issue is that of the closing of shops during prayers, which he also did not regard as mandatory. On April 18, 19 and 20, *al-Madina* published three extensive excerpts from his 190-page book on the subject, further kindling the fires of fitna.<sup>86</sup> In the latter half of his campaign, he even criticized institutions such as the Hayaa itself, of which he was an important functionary.

Al-Ghamidi would not have been able to wage his campaign for reform if the liberal press and related spheres of influence (like cultural clubs) had not given him the space to express his views. For instance, he launched the second part of his campaign during a lecture he gave in a cultural club in Taif on April 4, 2010.<sup>87</sup> His most important interviews were with the liberal media, which also published excerpts from his books (two to Alarabiya.net,<sup>88</sup> one to *al-Watan*,<sup>89</sup> two to *Okaz*,<sup>90</sup> and one to Elaph).<sup>91</sup> But al-Ghamidi did not limit his attacks on “extremist thought” to the liberal press, which gladly gave him space. He also engaged in fierce debates and even became the butt of vicious attacks on religious TV shows like *al-Bayyana* on Iqra TV.<sup>92</sup> All of these debates have been put on YouTube, where they are widely viewed and referred to on websites. The fact that his campaign is comprehensive and was sanctioned by important circles calls for a closer look at his ideas and background.

### Al-Ghamidi's Background and Ideas

Ahmad bin Qasim al-Ghamidi was born in 1965 in al-Baha, a village in the south of Saudi Arabia. Apparently he had

missed the Sahwa movement because he describes himself as belonging to the *Wasatiyya* (the middle way) and the rationalists. Although he has contacts with liberals and obviously has obtained some ideas from them, he regards himself as a Salafi. At the same time, he claims to have been a student of the mufti, Abd al-Aziz bin Baz (d. 1999), and conservative scholars such as Muhammad bin Salih al-Uthaymin (d. 2000) and Abdallah bin Jibrin. However, since 1998, he claims to have been a *talib* (student). Strangely enough, he received his B.A. and M.A. in public administration from an American university. When the affair erupted, he had been an employee of the Hayaa for 20 years, but he only became its head in Mecca three years before the controversy started (thus two years before the 2009 Valentine Day appointments).<sup>93</sup>

Since his appointment as head of the Hayaa in Mecca, he has been in the news for his role in supervising the Hajj.<sup>94</sup> He showed himself to be open-minded on the rare occasions when he was interviewed. He once mentioned the issue of women in the workplace, stating that the issue was not whether they could work but under what conditions. Naturally, during the whole controversy, he supported the power of the ruler, who he claimed could put an end to *ijtihad* if state security were endangered.<sup>95</sup>

What are the reformist ideas that have provoked such sharp response? First, al-Ghamidi challenges the religious competence of the ulama, stating that *ikhtilat* “is natural in the life of the umma, and forbidding it does not rest on clear religious evidence.” He asserts that “the term *ikhtilat* is a recent phenomenon, which the first people of knowledge, the *Sahaba* [companions of the Prophet], did not know.” “In fact,” he asserts, “*ikhtilat* was a natural disposition in the life of the umma and

its societies.”<sup>96</sup> His argument that forbidding ikhtilat is based on “custom” and “tradition” is remarkable. It constitutes a direct assault on the main tenets of official Wahhabism and its claim to represent pure doctrine, combating customs such as the veneration of local holy men and Sufism as “innovation.”<sup>97</sup> This is also why he defends KAUST. As a modernizing force, it is not just a project that restores the Arab role in science. It is also opposed to un-Islamic traditions and customs that in his liberalist terminology are the “worst enemies of development and change.”<sup>98</sup>

His second challenge concerns the authority of the ulama. By pointing out that ikhtilat and mandatory common prayers and the closing of shops are issues of ijtiḥad, he undermines their claim that they have decided the issue. His answer is that rulings on these issues must be “resolved by impartial investigation of the evidence.” Merely accepting the opinions of senior ulama in the past is un-Islamic, which in Salafism is forbidden.<sup>99</sup> By opening the door of ijtiḥad, al-Ghamidi lifts the lid on Pandora’s box.<sup>100</sup> Remarkably, he assigns to the king the power to terminate ijtiḥad as soon as it threatens the unity of the umma and leads to dissension.<sup>101</sup>

Al-Ghamidi’s third line of attack is more rational, based on a trend supported by liberals within Wahhabism: the middle way, or *al-Wasatiyya*. The trend has gained greater influence since the criticism of Wahhabism after 9/11. He points out that ikhtilat is an outgrowth of extremism that has become ingrained in Saudi Arabia during the past 30 years. He believes the sharia demands that people live their lives normally without “exaggeration” or “neglect.” This is an interesting view; it basically attacks the official counterterrorist discourse that calls the jihadis extremists.

It also reinforces the image the liberals have of the conservatives.<sup>102</sup>

The fourth argument is pragmatic, based on his own experience as head of the Hayaa, enforcers of the prohibition of gender mixing. He points out that ikhtilat is outdated and can no longer be practically implemented. Ikhtilat takes place through the internet, which has become so realistic that it is as if men and women, through webcams, actually meet. He accuses people who condemn ikhtilat of hypocrisy: “Those who forbid it actually experience it in their daily lives.”<sup>103</sup>

Undoubtedly, it was not just his ideas that provoked vehement responses. He also attacked institutions and personnel directly. His speech to the Cultural Club in Taif was a riposte to his detractors calling for a major overhaul of the Hayaa. Echoing the critique of the liberals, he advocated an open debate on the mistakes of the Hayaa.<sup>104</sup> He said the Hayaa should be purged of “extremists,” who should be replaced by “moderates” and adherents of *al-Wasatiyya*.<sup>105</sup> The Hayaa, according to him, had usurped power. Its members “have exceeded the [original] limits and instructions to the extent that they have taken away the freedom that Islam allows to people.”<sup>106</sup> He argued for the “correction” of “flaws” in the Hayaa and for the appointment of “moderate-minded ulama in leading places in Mecca and replacing those who are irresponsible and overwhelmed with rashness and who are unwilling to work with that spirit [of moderateness] or are ignorant of jurisprudence on the different forms of allegiance to the ruler.”<sup>107</sup> In his latest utterances, he promoted a culture of “dialogue,” stating that “the general public is dominated by fanaticism and traditions of one point of view,”<sup>108</sup> echoing the belief of the liberals that terrorism has its source in Wahhabism itself.<sup>109</sup>

### Responses to the Affair

Although al-Ghamidi was, to everybody's surprise, not fired for his ideas, very few really defended him. His direct boss, Sheikh Abd al-Aziz bin Humayn al-Humayn, who was appointed in February 2009, did not speak up in his favor.<sup>110</sup> Another so-called reformer, Sheikh Qays Al Mubarak, who was named by al-Ghamidi as an ally, quickly denied any association with him.<sup>111</sup> Salman al-Awda, the leader of the Sahwa movement in the 1990s, who since has moderated his speech,<sup>112</sup> refused to become involved in the debate but denounced the "extremist" ulama for "pronouncing something forbidden." He acknowledged that there was room for debate on the issue of ikhtilat.<sup>113</sup>

This weak-to-noncommittal attitude of the reformers, moderate officials and clergy opened the door for the conservatives to express their views. On April 23, 2010, the mufti repeated his earlier critique and called al-Ghamidi's ideas concerning the non-mandatory nature of common prayer "misguided opinions" that aim "to mislead Islam and Muslims."<sup>114</sup> At this point, it became known that al-Ghamidi had sent him his study on common prayer, and that the mufti had advised him "on a personal basis" not to publish it.<sup>115</sup> Also, major figures in the Council of Senior Ulama and the Fatwa Council were opposed.<sup>116</sup> Not surprisingly, the Hayaa was outraged that such a high member of the institution would come out as a detractor. A meeting of the Hayaa in Burayda condemned al-Ghamidi, particularly for venting his ideas through the liberal press.<sup>117</sup> An official declaration, signed by, among others, the mufti and Sheikh Salih bin Fawzan al-Fawzan, condemned allowing shops to be open as contrary to the Sunna and the *dalil* that the Sahaba have laid down.<sup>118</sup> Other higher

ulama, such as Shaykh Abd al-Rahman al-Atram, a member of the Majlis al-Shura, condemned al-Ghamidi as well.<sup>119</sup> The Permanent Council of Research of Religious Knowledge and Fatwas indirectly accused him of "making it easy" to evade the common prayer.<sup>120</sup> An excursion through conservative Saudi religious websites shows endless postings refuting al-Ghamidi's statements, often reiterating the same "authoritative" sources. His book on shops and prayers is especially condemned.<sup>121</sup> As the bulk of official Wahhabi fatwas issued during the past 50 years are against reform, these are often referred to.<sup>122</sup>

The opposition to al-Ghamidi was, however, not just based on arguments. Much of it was pure slander. As noted, the mufti himself called him "one of the preachers of misguidance" and devoted a whole Friday sermon to the issue of not praying in the mosque.<sup>123</sup> Others called his arguments "passions for making it easier" or just "madness."<sup>124</sup> Sheikh Sulayman al-Duwish, who debated with al-Ghamidi on the TV show *al-Bayyana*, on the issue of ikhtilat, tried to discredit him by stating that his standing as a scholar is "weak." He claimed al-Ghamidi was a "nonentity," his views "contradictory." Moreover, he had been "carried away by personal passions" and was willing to "sell his religion for publicity."<sup>125</sup> Ostracism extended even to his own tribe: its ulama, in a joint proclamation, denounced al-Ghamidi as having brought shame to the tribe's name.<sup>126</sup> Even students came out against al-Ghamidi.<sup>127</sup>

The massive negative response to al-Ghamidi's ideas provides reason to ponder the effectiveness of the half-hearted support al-Ghamidi received from higher up and the reason for his stubbornness. The expansion of al-Ghamidi's reformist campaign clearly alarmed not just conser-

vatives but also the more thoughtful ulama, who feared that al-Ghamidi's promotion of *ijtihad* might encourage the common people to start doubting the authority of the ulama. The influential administrative judge in Mecca, Sultan bin Uthman al-Busayri, argued that this could lead to dissension and deception.<sup>128</sup> Even some of the liberal newspapers that published al-Ghamidi's articles felt compelled to allow ripostes to be printed as a way of dissociating themselves from the runaway reformer.<sup>129</sup> Few moderates held al-Ghamidi in esteem. Most regarded him as both ignorant of religious knowledge and bent on deception. By stating that one has direct access to the Quran and the *hadith* (sayings of the prophet), he lacked knowledge of the principles of the sharia and was deficient in his knowledge of the *hadith*.<sup>130</sup> Neither his association with the liberals nor his degrees from an American university helped him in that respect.<sup>131</sup> Some websites even accused him of plagiarizing two articles from liberal newspapers and websites.<sup>132</sup>

Strangely enough, the liberal response to al-Ghamidi was divided. Prince Khalid bin Talal bin Abd al-Aziz asked al-Ghamidi to resign.<sup>133</sup> The journalist Faris bin Hizam had mixed feelings about al-Ghamidi, whom he regards not as a liberal but as a Salafi.<sup>134</sup> On the other hand, the columnist Abdallah bin Bakhit supported al-Ghamidi "100 percent" and called *ikhtilat* — in one of those half-ironic, half-serious religious counterarguments — an "innovation." He agreed with al-Ghamidi that *ikhtilat* contradicts the spirit of Islam and hampers women from acquiring economic independence.<sup>135</sup> Other liberals, even within *al-Watan*, pointed out the dangers of assuming the authority of the mufti and raising such controversial issues as *ikhtilat*, as these are the prerogative not of the head of the

Hayaa in Mecca but of the Permanent Council of Religious Research and Fatwas and the Council of Senior Ulama.<sup>136</sup>

The most generous support that al-Ghamidi has received is from more moderate ulama outside Saudi Arabia. The famous Iraqi sheikh, Ahmad al-Kubaysi, living in Qatar, agreed with al-Ghamidi that forbidding *ikhtilat* has its origins in the Abbasid dynasty and that Arabs during the time of the Prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs did not forbid men and women from mingling at the Kaabah, in market-places, in education, in prayer and even in battle.<sup>137</sup> Likewise, al-Azhar was embarrassed by the fatwa of al-Barrak, which it condemned for giving Islam a bad name.<sup>138</sup>

What helped al-Ghamidi the most were the vicious attacks he had to endure.<sup>139</sup>

Most neutral commentators were amazed and shocked by the vehement campaign that has been waged against him. The fact that the highest ulama of the country participated in the slander campaign, along with the populist sheikhs, revealed to them the lack of tolerance in the society as a whole.<sup>140</sup>

### The al-Barrak Case

The *ikhtilat* debate reached a new level of notoriety when, on February 22, 2010, the 77-year-old Sheikh Abd al-Rahman al-Barrak<sup>141</sup> warned against promoting *ikhtilat*: "Ikhtilat between men and women in work and education — which is wished for by the modernists — is forbidden (*haram*).” He continued, "It will lead to words that are haram, gazes that are haram, and *khalwa* [when a man meets a woman alone] that is haram." But his most damaging remark was this: "Those who permit *ikhtilat* are unbelievers; this means they become apostates," and they can be killed if they do not repent.<sup>142</sup> Earlier, Sheikh al-Barrak had been involved in the case of al-Shithri,

whom he had defended in a declaration on his website entitled "Justice and the Case of Ikhtilat."<sup>143</sup> His page on the website of Sheikh Habdan hosted most of the posts in support of al-Shithri.<sup>144</sup> The tremendous acclaim he received for the organization of this support must have encouraged him to come out with his fatwa in February.<sup>145</sup>

If his public pronouncements on the ikhtilat issue are rare, his arguments are not. In his condemnation of gender mixing, he repeated the by-now-familiar diatribes against the modernists, who are inclined to a "Western unbelieving lifestyle" and who intend to "Westernise the umma."<sup>146</sup> Confirming his Wahhabi background, he termed fighting this evil a "jihad against the people of falsehood" and the "people of innovation."<sup>147</sup>

Although Sheikh al-Barrak appears to be a maverick, he has had a typical, if not illustrious, career. He was appointed a member of the al-Mahad al-Ilmi in Riyadh when it was opened in 1951 and became a lecturer there in 1959. He has had an impressive career as a teacher but was refused membership in the Dar al-Ifta. Unofficially, he is considered to have a major theological following since the death of the previous mufti, Bin Baz, in 1999. He is known for his modesty and piety.<sup>148</sup> Moreover, his ideas are typical of the conservative ulama who oppose all reforms and divide the world into good and evil, truth and falsehood, believers and nonbelievers, the party of God and the party of the devil.<sup>149</sup> His notoriety goes back to March 2008, when he issued a fatwa condemning as apostates two Saudi writers who had penned articles critical of Wahhabi Islam in *al-Riyad*.<sup>150</sup> Typically, he had been supported by Salih Fawzan al-Fawzan, a member of the Council of Senior Ulama, who called upon the writers to admit

their mistakes,<sup>151</sup> and by Sheikh Salih bin Muhammad al-Luhaydan.<sup>152</sup> He reiterated that classical Wahhabi doctrine forbids travel to the land of the nonbelievers for tourism.<sup>153</sup> During the civil strife in Iraq, he denounced the Shia as "unbelievers."<sup>154</sup> Ismailis are, in his eyes, "rejectionists" because they belong to the school of hidden knowledge.<sup>155</sup> Not surprisingly, Jews constitute "the worst of all nations."<sup>156</sup> He argued that making permanent peace with Israel is contrary to the sharia as long as it occupies Muslim land.<sup>157</sup>

In July 2010, Sheikh al-Barrak again made the headlines when he cursed journalists as "armies of the devil" on his website. He was criticized by judge Isa al-Ghayth for not "respecting the good intentions of the other," "plural views" and "difference of opinion." The judge noted that it was deplorable that clerics could use the internet for slander and incitement, saying that those responsible should be held accountable for their "dangerous and forbidden acts." However, the Ministry of Media and Culture made it clear that they were unable to pursue Sheikh al-Barrak because the internet did not fall within their jurisdiction.<sup>158</sup>

### **The Yusuf al-Ahmad Case**

The case of Sheikh Yusuf bin Abdallah al-Ahmad is the latest chapter in the ikhtilat debate. He called for the Grand Mosque in Mecca to be greatly enlarged and, as part of the project, to ensure that the mixing of the sexes would be prevented. Perhaps more than in the other three cases, his position is puzzling. He is a prominent government official who has voiced an even more severe critique of KAUST than Sheikh al-Shithri and yet remains in his post. Sheikh al-Ahmad is a professor in the Department of Sharia at

the Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University in Riyadh. He had taken part in the ikhtilat debate at an earlier stage, attacking the minister of justice, Muhammad al-Isa, in regard to KAUST. In this article, entitled “Twenty Questions ... Your Excellency, Minister of Justice,” he states that KAUST is a source of unbelief in Saudi Arabia. It is not based on Islamic principles; its president as well as its teachers are nonbelievers; its finances are based on interest, yet derive from public finances; Saudis constitute only 15 percent of the teaching personnel; no courses on the Quran are offered. Worst of all, it “totally lacks religious surveillance.”<sup>159</sup>

But, as in the other cases, this is part of a long guerrilla war. The opposition against Sheikh Yusuf al-Ahmad apparently flared up in March 2010, when he intended to gatecrash the Riyadh book fair, where ikhtilat was permitted. He is convinced that the affair is a premeditated attempt to discredit him by linking his call for expanding the Grand Mosque to ikhtilat. He believes that his liberal opponents spun the case to make it appear that he was willing to tear down the Grand Mosque for the sole purpose of preventing ikhtilat — while in fact he was primarily interested in expanding it.<sup>160</sup> He did state, “Nobody would allow his wife or next of kin to touch men during the *tawwaf*.”<sup>161</sup> His opponents apparently looked for writings to attack and found an article he had written in *al-Jazirah* on December 30, 2008, “Expanding the Haram Mosque.”<sup>162</sup> In an interview, moreover, he explains that he had written a study three years before calling for expanding the capacity of the Haram al-Sharif from 900,000 to 10 million persons.

As in the al-Shithri case, conservatives immediately rallied to the cause of Sheikh Yusuf al-Ahmad. Fifty-five supporters

issued a declaration protesting the liberal attempt to undermine the sheikh’s position.<sup>163</sup> Even his family, claiming superior lineage, rallied to his side. Other sites supported him, stating that it would be rational to expand the Haram mosque to accommodate millions and at the same time make it safe for women.<sup>164</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

As the four cases above demonstrate, it is extremely difficult to determine whether reforms are successful and whether the liberals or conservatives are making gains. Although the general trend is in favor of the reformists, reform is piecemeal, hesitant, equivocal and strongly resisted.

Several issues are worthy of attention. First, it appears that the state itself is divided between reformists and conservatives, with not just King Abdullah on the one side and Prince Nayif on the other, which is the usual cliché. In fact, all the religious institutions are divided. As there is no constitution and no clearly defined policy for reform — and the state is still officially based on Wahhabism, despite the insertion of nationalism and an ideology of “dialogue” and “tolerance” based on *Wasatiyya* — the conservatives can resist attempts at reform and call the government’s bluff. There seems to be an ideological power vacuum in which the state allows liberals and conservatives to slug it out. Naïve loyalists like Sheikh al-Shithri find themselves caught up in the struggle and the butt of liberal wrath for a slight remark that is commonly supported in conservative circles. On the other hand, reformists who stick their necks out, like Sheikh al-Ghamidi, are left exposed to a massive and vicious conservative campaign to discredit them. The ideological vacuum allows popular sheikhs like al-Duwish, pensioned

mavericks like al-Barrak and provocative officials like al-Ahmad enough room to propagate their conservative ideas and strike alliances with more prominent ulama in official institutions.

Second, one wonders what the effect is of the appointment of new personnel in the top ranks of religious institutions, as happened in February 2009. It seems that the replacement of the heads of the religious institutions has not always had beneficial results, as the al-Shithri case demonstrates. He was young but obviously not a reformer. On the other hand, Qays Al Mubarak is young but an equivocal reformer. During the power struggle, neither he nor the minister of education nor the newly appointed head of the Hayaa, Sheikh al-Humayn, made clear pronouncements in the ikhtilat debate. The personnel policy during the debate was also confusing. While Sheikh al-Shithri was fired for voicing a cautious critique, which the whole religious establishment probably shared, a teacher at an official university, such as Yusuf al-Ahmad, can quite easily voice a much more severe critique of KAUST and retain his post, while the mufti can easily use his function to oppose reform.

Third, in this regard, the lack of religious authority and the ensuing "fatwa chaos" are signs of the tremendous changes

taking place in Saudi Arabia. Religious authority has moved to informal popular preachers such as Sulayman al-Duwish, while maverick old-guard preachers like Sheikh al-Barrak can still create turmoil, and civil servants like Yusuf al-Ahmad can mobilize protests against reform. Meanwhile, the liberal press can launch a massive and outspoken campaign against Wahhabism and control of society by official clergy. Although it is too early to tell, it is quite possible the Saudi state is managing this behind the scenes, drawing out its opponents.

Fourth, the debate and the vehement response make one wonder about the dangers of reform and chances of success in the future. Real reform can only take place with broad public support; therefore, it needs an overhaul of ideas, not just of personnel. Although the state is promoting a more open and tolerant Islam in the form of Wasatiyya, it is obvious from the ikhtilat debate that the battle has not been won. Many Saudis are fed up with the inordinate interference of religious authorities in their lives, and one can even speak of an anti-clerical movement. The liberals, however, speak a language that is alien to the world of official Wahhabism and the majority of Saudis and is therefore hardly likely to influence them.

<sup>1</sup> He is the editor of *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (Hurst/Columbia University Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Michaela Prokop, "The War of Ideas: Education in Saudi Arabia," in Paul Aarts & Gerd Nonneman, eds., *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs* (Hurst & Co, 2005), pp. 57-81.

<sup>3</sup> Eleanor Abdella Doumato, Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin, eds., "Saudi Arabia," in *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa*, (Freedom House, Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), pp. 1-33.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Boucek, "Extremist Re-Education and Rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia," in Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan, eds, *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (Routledge, 2009), pp. 212-223; and Jessica Stern, "Mind over Matter," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2010, pp. 95-108.

<sup>5</sup> Amr Hamzawy, *The Saudi Labyrinth: Evaluating the Current Political Opening* (Carnegie Papers, April

2006, No. 68).

<sup>6</sup> See Christopher Dickey, "The Monarch Who Declared His Own Revolution," *Newsweek*, March 21, 2009, <http://www.newsweek.com/2009/03/20/the-monarch-who-declared-his-own-revolution.html>; Karen Elliott House, "The Saudi Shake-up Portends Real Reform," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 23, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123535163037745007.html>; and the editorial "A Promise of Reform in Saudi Arabia," *The New York Times*, February 26, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/26/opinion/26thu2.html>?

<sup>7</sup> See Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Interviews with several liberals in Saudi Arabia in January/February 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Amélie Le Renard, "'Only for Women': Women, the State and Reform in Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 62, No. 4, Autumn 2008, pp. 610-629.

<sup>10</sup> For a brilliant account of the Sahwa, see Stéphane Lacroix, *Les islamistes Saoudiens: une insurrection manquée* (Paris: Puf, 2010). For a different and more critical view, see Abd al-Aziz al-Khidr, *al-Sa'udiyya, sirat al-dawla wa-mujtama'.* *Qira'a fi tajriba thalath qarn min al-tahawwalat al-fikriyya wa-l-siyasiyya wa-l-tanmiya* [Saudi Arabia, the development of the state and society: An interpretation of the experiment of the past three decades of the ideological, political and developmental changes] (Al-Shabaka al-'Arabiyya li-l-Abhath wa-l-Nashr Beirut, 2010), pp. 87-117.

<sup>11</sup> For excellent if brief articles on the ikhtilat controversy, see F. Gregory Gause III, "The Second Sex and the Third Rail," *Foreign Policy*, April 19, 2010; and Caryle Murphy, "Clerics Support for Men and Women Mingling in Public Sparks Furor in Saudi Arabia," *Christian Science Monitor*, April 13, 2010. For a longer discussion of ikhtilat, see Abd al-Aziz al-Khidr, op. cit., pp. 328-341.

<sup>12</sup> Abd al-Aziz al-Khidr, op. cit., pp. 87-117.

<sup>13</sup> "al-'Ahil al-Sa'udi yaquda 'al-thawra samita' didd rijal al-din al-mutashaddidin wa-tahrir biladihi," *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, October 7, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> For more on the appointments, see Lars Døssing Rosenmeier and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, "Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?" April 8, 2009, <http://cuminet.blogs.ku.dk/2009/04/08/can-saudi-arabia-reform-itself/>.

<sup>15</sup> 'Isa al-Suwadi, "Ibn Muni': al-Malik yatmahu al-islah al-salabiyyat al-hay'at."

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Article on Qays Al Mubarak in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 15, 2009, <http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&article=507133&issueno=11037>.

<sup>18</sup> See Christopher Dickey, "The Monarch Who Declared His Own Revolution," *Newsweek*, March 21, 2009, <http://www.newsweek.com/2009/03/20/the-monarch-who-declared-his-own-revolution.html>, and the above-mentioned Arabic articles on the personnel change.

<sup>19</sup> Jamil al-Dhayabi, "Fatawa tazaja," *al-Hayat*, May 31, 2010, <http://www.daralhayat.com/portalariclen-dah/147003>.

<sup>20</sup> "Tawasul al-rafd li-l-takfir mustabih al-ikhtilat," *al-Watan*, February 26, 2010, <http://www.alwatan.com.sa/NEWS/newsdetail.asp?issueno=3437&id=137989>.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Qays Al Mubarak in *al-Hayat*, February 5, 2010, <http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/105338>.

<sup>22</sup> See Jamil al-Dhayabi, "Fatawa tazaja," *al-Hayat*, May 31, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> "Al-tay'in al-Wiqdani qa'id li-Bahariyya wa-l-Khudayyir fi Lajna al-Aff," *al-Hayat*, May 10, 2010, <http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/139816>.

<sup>24</sup> See Jamil al-Dhayabi, "Fatawa tazaja," *al-Hayat*, May 31, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Hasan bin Salim, "Ibn Baz wa-l-riyada al-banat," *al-Hayat*, June 1, 2010, <http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/147516>.

<sup>26</sup> Ahmad al-Farraj, "'al-Hay'a, Da'im al-'amal ghayr al-rasmi," *al-Hayat*, April 6, 2010, <http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/127259>.

<sup>27</sup> International Crisis Group, *Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?* Middle East Report, No. 28, July 14, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> See the article on Alarabiya.net, July 16, 2005, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2005/07/16/14981.html>.

<sup>29</sup> See interview with Salih al-Luhaydan, <http://www.aluae.net/vb/showthread.php?t=69925>.

<sup>30</sup> See for an analysis of the background of the resignation of Sheikh Sa'd al-Shithri: October 7, 2010, <http://www.israj.net/vb/t4411/> (accessed May 21, 2010).

<sup>31</sup> al-Duwish made these statements in a talk show on al-Arabiyya TV on December 17, 2005, with Mansur

al-Nuqyadan, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Qasim and others, Alarabiya.net, December 19, 2005, <http://www.alarabiya.net/programs/2005/12/19/19619.html>.

<sup>32</sup> "Da'iyā al-Sa'udi: abghadu al-shi'a wa-astikhiamuhum, wa amna'u abna'i min al-dirasa," April 19, 2009, Alarabiya.net, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/04/19/71029.html>.

<sup>33</sup> See May 14, 2010, <http://www.saudiyoona.com/news-action-show-id-5779.htm> (accessed June 1, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> For more on the concept of 'al-wala' wa-l-bara', see Joas Wagemakers, "The Transformation of a Radical Concept: al-wala' wa-l-bara' in the Ideology of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi," in Roel Meijer, ed., *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (Hurst/Columbia University Publishing, 2009), pp. 81-106.

<sup>35</sup> "Da'iyā al-Sa'udiyya yuharridu 'ala qatl al-katib al-halqa al-thalitha min 'tash 16'," Alarabiya.net, August 28, 2009, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/08/28/83164.html>.

<sup>36</sup> See his statement after his release on April 29, 2006: <http://www.muslim.net/vb/archive/index.php/t-159529.html> (accessed 2 June 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Mustafa al-Ansari, "Kibar 'Ulama' yu'qidun jalsa 'istithna'i li-munaqisha 'tajrim al-takfir,'" *al-Hayat*, April 10, 2010, <http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/128965>.

<sup>38</sup> See the warning of the undersecretary of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, *al-Hayat*, April 11, 2010, <http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/129322>.

<sup>39</sup> Jamil al-Dhayabi, "'Hamaqat' bi-ism al-fatwa," *al-Hayat*, March 22, 2010, <http://www.daralhayat.com/internationalarticle/121731>.

<sup>40</sup> 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Qara'awi, "Nadwa al-aman al-dini wa-l-fikri tutalibu al-khutaba' bi-l-turayyith fi ifta' al-musalin," *al-Hayat*, May 14, 2010, <http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/140846>.

<sup>41</sup> Hasan bin Salim, "Tasa'ul ma bu'd al-fatwa?," *al-Hayat*, March 16, 2010, <http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/119701>; and Faysal al-Makhlafi, "Intiqadat li- 'Ahmad' ba'd fatwahu bi-hadam al-haram," *al-Hayat*, March 20, 2010, <http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/121331>.

<sup>42</sup> Hasan bin Salim, "Tasa'ul ma bu'd al-fatwa?," *al-Hayat*, March 16, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> "Hadha al-hall anfa' min 'jald' ashab al-fatawa al-shadhdhda," *al-Hayat*, January 30, 2010, <http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/103078>.

<sup>44</sup> See interview with Salih bin al-Luhaydan, <http://www.aluae.net/vb/showthread.php?t=69925>.

<sup>45</sup> "Bayan 'ulama' Mekka fi-l-difa' 'an al-duktur Sa'd al-Shithri," October 2009, <http://www.almhml.com/c/-63835> (accessed April 26, 2010).

<sup>46</sup> 'Adwan al-Ahmari, "Bi-madha yasannifu al-Duwish nafsahu al-yawm: al-da'iyā al-Islami aw khuffash iliktruni?" *al-Watan*, April 19, 2009, <http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/newsdetail.asp?issueno=3122&id=98185&groupID=0>.

<sup>47</sup> See the interview of Sheikh Yusuf al-Ahmad with *al-Shams*, posted on his website: <http://www.dr-alahmad.com/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=17965> (accessed March 20, 2010).

<sup>48</sup> "118 al-shakhsiyya al-Sa'udiyya yarfidun fi bayyan jadid qiyada al-mara'a li-l-sayyara," July 16, 2005, Alarabiya.net, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2005/07/16/14981.html> (accessed March 30, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> Ibrahim bin Muhammad al-Haqil, "Hal taghrib sabab al-taqaddum? Al-Jama'a al-Malik 'Abdallah namujan," October 8, 2009, <http://www.islamlight.net/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=15422&Itemid=25> (accessed June 2, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> "118 al-shakhsiyya al-Sa'udiyya yarfidun fi bayyan jadid qiyada al-mara'a li-l-sayyara," July 16, 2005, op. cit.

<sup>51</sup> See for instance, this document on <http://www.almhml.com/c/-63778>, no date (accessed May 29, 2010).

<sup>52</sup> See Roel Meijer, "Saudi Arabia's War on Terrorism: Combating Passions, Ignorance and Deviation," Jeevan Deol and Zahir Kazmi, eds. *Contextualizing Jihadi Thought* (Hurst & Company, forthcoming).

<sup>53</sup> One remark in a compendium of negative responses to KAUST, <http://www.islamlight.net/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=15402&Itemid=25>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> The liberals can be divided into different categories: political liberals who demand political reforms and who ultimately advocate a constitutional monarchy; liberals who demand freedom of speech; and cultural liberals who promote the expansion of personal rights, among them women's rights. What unites them is their disgust with clerical power in Saudi Arabia. The political liberals were largely defeated after their demands for reform were rejected in 2004. For more on their ideas, see the fascinating book which represents their ideas and programs, *Rabi al-Saudiyya wa-makhrajāt al-qama: Duah al-islah al-siyasi* [The Saudi spring and the extracts of repression: Reasons for political reform] (Beirut, Dar al-Kunuz, 2004), and the ICG report,

*Can Saudi Arabia Reform Itself?* op. cit.

<sup>56</sup> Jamal al-Kashoggi, "al-Shaykh al-Shithri wa-l-qanat al-Majd...li-ma tashwish wa nahnu fi khayr min dinina wa dunyana?" *al-Watan*, September 29, 2010, <http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/writerdetail.asp?issue=3287&id=14724&Rname=51>.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> 'Abdallah bin Bakhit, "Hal qiyadat al-mara'a li-l-siyara hiyya akbar hummuna?," *al-Riyad*, January 13, 2010, <http://www.alriyadh.com/2010/01/13/article489309.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Yusuf al-Kwaylit, "al-Mara'a bayn al-hajis al-shakk wa yaqin," *al-Riyad*, September 30, 2009, <http://www.alriyadh.com/2009/09/30/article462881.html>.

<sup>60</sup> "Da'iya al-Sa'udiyya yuharridu 'ala qatl al-katib al-halqa al-thalitha min 'tash 16'," [www.Alarabiya.net](http://www.Alarabiya.net), August 28, 2009.

<sup>61</sup> Jamal al-Kashoggi, "al-Shaykh al-Shithri wa-l-qanat al-Majd...li-ma tashwish wa nahnu fi khayr min dinina wa dunyana?" *al-Watan*, September 29, 2009.

<sup>62</sup> Yusuf al-Kwaylit, "al-Mara'a bayn al-hajis al-shakk wa yaqin," *al-Riyad*, September 30, 2009.

<sup>63</sup> These remarks were made by Sheikh al-Shithri when he criticized KAUST, see below.

<sup>64</sup> See the attack of Sulayman al-Duwish on the editor-in-chief of *al-Watan* newspaper, Jamal al-Kashoggi, made on 12-10-1430 (October 2, 2009), <http://www.islamfeqh.com/News/NewsItem.aspx?NewsItemID=2201> (accessed April 20, 2010).

<sup>65</sup> See the article on al-Shithri on [www.israj.net](http://www.israj.net), <http://www.israj.net/vb/t4411/>, October 7, 2009 (accessed April 21, 2010).

<sup>66</sup> 'Abduh Khal, "Nazra al-Shithri wa-l-nazra al-waqi'a," *Okaz*, September 30, 2009, <http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/Issues/20090930/Con20090930306933.htm>.

<sup>67</sup> Na'im Tamim al-Hakim, "al-Shithri: Hay'a Kibar al-'Ulama' mundhu takwinha la tat'assabu li-madhab al-mu'ayyan," *Okaz*, February 19, 2009, <http://www.okaz.com.sa/okaz/osf/20090219/Con20090219259602.htm>.

<sup>68</sup> Sheikh al-Shithri, "al-Jihad bi-dun wilaya al-shari'a wa idhn al-imam," July 6, 2009, <http://www.assakina.com/fatwa/3419.html> (accessed May 4, 2010).

<sup>69</sup> See the article taken from the newspaper *al-Madina* and posted on September 6, 2009, <http://www.sahab.net/forums/showthread.php?t=370881>, September 6, 2009, (accessed May 3, 2010).

<sup>70</sup> Abd al-Muhsin al-Harithi, "al-Shithri yad'u talabat al-'ilm li-badhala al-jahd fi muhariba, al-fikr al-dall," *Okaz*, January 3, 2008, <http://www.okaz.com.sa/okaz/osf/20080103/Con20080103163285.htm>.

<sup>71</sup> The full text of the interview was published a day later in *al-Watan* newspaper with a letter by Sa'd al-Shithri, "Ma nusba li ghayr daqiq wa ad'amu KAUST," September 30, 2010, <http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/newsdetail.asp?issue=3288&id=119507&groupID=0>.

<sup>72</sup> Jamal al-Kashoggi, "al-Shaykh al-Shithri wa-l-qanat al-Majd...li-ma tashwish wa nahnu fi khayr min dinina wa dunyana?" *al-Watan*, September 29, 2010.

<sup>73</sup> Ahmad bin Muhammad al-'Isa, "Hunaka ma huwwa akhtar fi kalam Shaykh al-Shithri," *al-Watan*, October 2, 2009, <http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/writerdetail.asp?issue=3290&id=14802&Rname=391>.

<sup>74</sup> Qaynan 'Abdallah al-Ghamidi, "Fiza'a al-ikhtilat al-mutajaddada: al-Shithri lam yasma' infjar al-lughm," *al-Watan*, October 1, 2010, <http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/writerdetail.asp?issue=3289&id=14773&Rname=319>.

<sup>75</sup> Abduh Khal, "Nazra al-Shithri wa-l-nazra al-waqi'a," *Okaz*, September 30, 2009.

<sup>76</sup> Turki 'Abdallah al-Sudayri, "Min mantiq al-shaykh al-Shithri...Li-madha nukhtalifu 'an al-majmu' al-islami?," *al-Riyad*, September 30, 2009, <http://www.alriyadh.com/2009/09/30/article462891.html>.

<sup>77</sup> For the full text of al-Shithri's dismissal, see <http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/newsdetail.asp?issue=3293&id=120058>.

<sup>78</sup> See for analysis of the affair, <http://www.mqataa.com/vb/showthread.php?p=165682>, October 4, 2009, (accessed April 21, 2010).

<sup>79</sup> See the article on al-Shithri on [www.israj.net](http://www.israj.net), <http://www.israj.net/vb/t4411/>, October 7, 2009 (accessed April 21, 2010).

<sup>80</sup> See, <http://www.qassimedu.gov.sa/edu/showthread.php?p=181699>.

<sup>81</sup> See, <http://www.islamlight.net/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=15314&Itemid=48>.

<sup>82</sup> Posted on October 11, 2009, on the website, <http://aintedles.yoo7.com/montada-f48/topic-t13547.htm>.

<sup>83</sup> "al-Ikhtilat mustalat jadid wa adilla al-shari'a taraddu bi-quwwa 'ala min yahrimu," December 9, 2010,

<http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/Issues/20091209/Con20091209319589.htm>.

<sup>84</sup> Hatim al-‘Amiri, “Shurta Makka tatahafaza ‘ala 5 shabab hawilu dukhul manzil al-shaykh al-Ghamidi,” April 30, 2010, *al-Madina*, <http://www.al-madina.com/node/244237>.

<sup>85</sup> “Mudir ‘amm al- Hay’at Makka Dr. Ahmad Qasim al-Ghamidi fi risalatihī ‘al-Qawafil al-Ta’a fi Hukm al-Salat al-Jum’a” [The caravans of obedience on the issue of the communal prayer], *Okaz*, April 8, 2010. There is a link to the book in this article: <http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/Issues/20100418/Con20100418345202.htm>, and a link to the full interview: <http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/Issues/20100417/Con20100417344908.htm>. The full document can be found on <http://www.benaa.com/Read.asp?PID=1758757&cnt=-2&Sec=0>.

<sup>86</sup> Excerpts from *al-Qawafil al-ta’a fi hukm al-salat al-jum’a* were published in *al-Madina*, the first on April 18, 2010, <http://www.al-madina.com/node/240958>; the second on April 19, 2010, <http://www.al-madina.com/node/241206> and the third on April 20, 2010, <http://www.al-madina.com/node/241451>.

<sup>87</sup> *al-Jazeera*, April 18, 2010, <http://search.suhuf.net.sa/2010jaz/apr/18/ar2.htm>.

<sup>88</sup> “Al-Saudiyyun yatadhakkirun madihim bad hadith al-Ghamidi an al-ikhtilat,” December 12, 2009, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/12/12/93988.html>; and “Nusus al-ikhtilat sahiha wa min khalifuni yuridu tadril al-nas,” *www.al-Arabiya.net*, January 3, 2010, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/01/03/96207.html>.

<sup>89</sup> Jamal al-Kashoggi, “Min ajli al-Hay’a: li-nufiqu bayn al-shaykh al-Ghamidi wa-l-ikhwanuhu,” *al-Watan*, April 22, 2010, <http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/writerdetail.asp?issueno=3492&id=18968&Rname=51>.

<sup>90</sup> *Okaz*, April 6, 2010, <http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/Issues/20100406/Con20100406342746.htm>; and “Khilasa al-Kalam...La yasihhu al-inkar ‘ala min yunadi bi-‘adam ighlaq al-mahal al-tijara awqat, al-sallat,” *Okaz*, April 17, 2010, <http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/Issues/20100417/Con20100417344908.htm>.

<sup>91</sup> Published on May 1, 2010, <http://www.elaph.com/Web/news/2010/5/557334.htm>.

<sup>92</sup> *Iqra’*, April 15, 2010. For an analysis of the debate, see <http://www.barakish.net/news.aspx?cat=12&sub=13&id=6284>; and *Okaz*, April 22, 2010, <http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/Issues/20100422/PrinCon20100422345923.htm>.

<sup>93</sup> See for his biography, *Okaz*, April 17, 2010, <http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/Issues/20100417/Con20100417344909.htm> and other sources.

<sup>94</sup> See *al-Riyad*, May 14, 2009, <http://www.alriyadh.com/2009/05/14/article429404.html>.

<sup>95</sup> “Khilasa al-Kalam...La yasihhu al-inkar ‘ala min yunadi bi-‘adam ighlaq al-mahal al-tijara awqat, al-sallat,” *Okaz*, April 17, 2010, <http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/Issues/20100417/Con20100417344908.htm>.

<sup>96</sup> “Ikhtilat mustalah jadid wa-adilla al-shar’iyya turaddu bi-quwa ‘ala min yaharramuhu,” *Okaz*, December 9, 2009, <http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/Issues/20091209/Con20091209319589.htm>.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. For more on the doctrine of Salafism, see Bernard Haykal, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,” Roel Meijer, ed. *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement* (Hurst & Co, 2009), pp. 33-50.

<sup>98</sup> Muhammad Sa’id al-Zahrani, “Na’m...hunak muhtasibun yashawwahun sam’a al-Hay’a wa sa-nuqzadikum,” *Okaz*, April 6, 2010, <http://www.okaz.com.sa/new/Issues/20100406/Con20100406342746.htm>.

<sup>99</sup> “Nusus al-ikhtilat sahiha wa min khalifuni yuridu tadril al-nas,” *www.Alarabiya.net*, January 3, 2010.

<sup>100</sup> “Khilasa al-Kalam...La yasihhu al-inkar ‘ala min yunadi bi-‘adam ighlaq al-mahal al-tijara awqat, al-sallat,” *Okaz*, April 17, 2010.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> “Ikhtilat mustalah jadid wa-adilla al-shar’iyya turaddu bi-quwa ‘ala min yaharramuhu,” *Okaz*, December 9, 2009.

<sup>103</sup> Muhammad Sa’id al-Zahrani, “Na’m...hunak muhtasibun yashawwahun sama al-Hay’a wa sa-nuqzadikum,” *Okaz*, April 6, 2010.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> “Khilasa al-Kalam...La yasihhu al-inkar ala min yunadi bi-adam ighlaq al-mahal al-tijara awqat, al-sallat,” *Okaz* April 17, 2010.

<sup>106</sup> Muhammad Said al-Zahrani, “Nam...hunak muhtasibun yashawwahun sama al-Haya wa sa-nuqzadikum,” *Okaz*, April 6, 2010.

<sup>107</sup> “Khilasa al-Kalam...La yasihhu al-inkar ala min yunadi bi-adam ighlaq al-mahal al-tijara awqat, al-sallat,” *Okaz*, April 17, 2010.

<sup>108</sup> “Ahmad al-Ghamidi, ‘Fard al-ray’ al-wahid huwa ma yuhdith al-dajj,” *al-Hayat*, May 14, 2010, <http://>

international.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/141198.

<sup>109</sup> Ahmad al-Ghamidi, "Wisaya al-fikriyya muqaddima li-l-irhab al-jisdi," *al-Hayat*, May 19, 2010, <http://international.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/143050>.

<sup>110</sup> See for his response, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/04/25/106830.html>.

<sup>111</sup> "Shaykh Al Mubarak: ma li-nisba li-duktur Ahmad bin Qasim al-Ghamidi bi-muwafiqihi al-ray fi masala ikhtilat 'kadhb wa kalam khatir'," May 7, 2010, <http://www.kabar.ws/news-action-show-id-14199.htm> (accessed June 2, 2010).

<sup>112</sup> For more on the accommodation of the Sahwa movement, see Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a New Generation* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>113</sup> See for his pronouncements: February 28, 2010, <http://islamtoday.net/salman/artshow-78-128533.htm> (accessed June 2, 2010).

<sup>114</sup> "Mufti yasifu Ahmad al-Ghamidi bi-annahu min du'a al-dalal," April 23, 2010, <http://www.ejaz.ws/news.php?op=viewNews&id=2740&catID=9>; and "Al-sheikh tells Haia official to stay out of Shariah issues," [www.arabnews.com](http://www.arabnews.com), April 23, 2010.

<sup>115</sup> Badr al-Sultan, "Ahmad al-Ghamidi: sa-abqi adafi an mawqifi," May 2, 2010, <http://www.alhiad.com/news-action-show-id-4463.htm>.

<sup>116</sup> See April 29, 2010, <http://www.sabq.org/sabq/user/news?section=5&id=9036>.

<sup>117</sup> See for its condemnation of al-Ghamidi, <http://www.buraydahcity.net/vb/showthread.php?t=204450>.

<sup>118</sup> The declaration was issued on April 29, 2010, and posted on <http://www.sabq.org/sabq/user/news?section=5&id=9036> (accessed May 20, 2010).

<sup>119</sup> "al-Shurta al-diniyya bi-l-Saudiyya tataraja an iqala mudirih bi-Makka bi-mansabihi," *al-Quds al-Arabi*, April 26, 2010, <http://www.alquds.co.uk/index.asp?fname=data\2010\04\04-26\25z44.htm&storytitle=>.

<sup>120</sup> April 28, 2010, <http://www.sabq.org/sabq/user/news?section=5&id=9036> (accessed May 20, 2010).

<sup>121</sup> See the refutation on the Salafi site by Abu al-Jabr Abdallah Muhammad al-Ansari, May 14, 2010, <http://www.sahab.net/forums/showthread.php?p=773024>; and Abd al-Muhsin Abd al-Hamd al-Ibad al-Badr, "al-Tahthir ahl al-ta'a min al-hathayan," May 7, 2010, <http://www.saaaid.net/bahoth/123.htm>. Both these articles have been reproduced endlessly on Salafi websites, as, for instance, [www.alhudaweb.com](http://www.alhudaweb.com) and [www.alazd.net](http://www.alazd.net) (accessed May 20, 2010).

<sup>122</sup> See, for instance, <http://www.azuad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=7040>, April 25, 2010 (accessed May 22, 2010).

<sup>123</sup> See <http://www.islamlight.net/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=18501&Itemid=0>, April 24, 2010.

<sup>124</sup> 'Abd al-Muhsin 'Abd al-Hamd al-'Ibad al-Badr, "al-Tahthir ahl al-ta'a min al-hathayan," May 7, 2010, <http://www.saaaid.net/bahoth/123.htm> (accessed May 22, 2010).

<sup>125</sup> See <http://www.sabq.org/sabq/user/news?section=5&id=8634>, April 20, 2010 (accessed May 23, 2010).

<sup>126</sup> See <http://www.alazd.net/news-action-show-id-4250.htm> (accessed June 20, 2010) and also posted on April 26, 2010, <http://www.otaibah.net/m/showthread.php?p=1034031>.

<sup>127</sup> Posted in January 2010, <http://www.almhml.com/c/-63916>.

<sup>128</sup> See the publication written by Sultan bin 'Uthman al-Busayri, *Mazahir al-jahl wa-l-talbis 'and Ahmad bin Qasim al-Ghamidi*, <http://www.saaaid.net/Doat/busairi/34.htm> (no date, but probably April 2010).

<sup>129</sup> See the critical article in the newspaper *al-Medina*, April 19, 2010, <http://www.al-madina.com/node/241206>.

<sup>130</sup> Sultan bin 'Uthman al-Busayri, *Mazahir al-jahl wa-l-talbis 'and Ahmad bin Qasim al-Ghamidi*.

<sup>131</sup> See, April 25, 2010, <http://www.darmm.com/vb/showthread.php?t=11036> (accessed June 5, 2010).

<sup>132</sup> See, April 28, 2010, <http://www.harfnews.org/news.php?action=show&id=1004> (accessed June 6, 2010).

<sup>133</sup> See, April 19, 2010, <http://muntada.islammessages.com/showthread.php?p=92891> (accessed June 6, 2010).

<sup>134</sup> Faris bin Hazim, "Quwa wa da'f al-shaykh Ahmad al-Ghamidi," *al-Riyad*, May 4, 2010, <http://www.alriyadh.com/2010/05/04/article522467.html>.

<sup>135</sup> 'Abdallah bin Bakhit, "Tahrim ikhtilat ibtida' fi-l-din," <http://www.alriyadh.com/2009/12/14/article481235.html>.

<sup>136</sup> Khalid 'Abdallah al-Mashawwih, no title, <http://www.anbacom.com/articles.php?action=show&id=2128> (accessed May 20, 2010).

<sup>137</sup> "al-Shaykh al-Kubaysi yu'ayyidu shaykh Ahmad bin Qasim al-Ghamidi fi-l-mas'alat al-ikhtilat," <http://>

[www.humanf.org:8686/vb/showthread.php?t=2521](http://www.humanf.org:8686/vb/showthread.php?t=2521), April 28, 2010 (accessed May 20, 2010).

<sup>138</sup> See statements by Al Azhar, February 25, 2010, [http://www.leblover.com/variater/barak\\_43857567546456.html](http://www.leblover.com/variater/barak_43857567546456.html) (accessed May 21, 2010).

<sup>139</sup> Badriyya al-Bishr, "al-khutba al-jum'a," *al-Hayat*, May 5, 2010, <http://international.daralhayat.com/internationalarticle/137750>.

<sup>140</sup> Hasan bin Salim, "al-Shaykh al-muthir," *al-Hayat*, May 4, 2010, <http://international.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/137451>.

<sup>141</sup> For his works, see: <http://www.saaaid.net/Warathah/AlBarak/index.htm>.

<sup>142</sup> Tahthir min fitna al-da'wa ila al-ikhtilat," February 22, 2010, <http://albarak.islamlight.net/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=17426>.

<sup>143</sup> 'Abd al-Rahman al-Barrak, "Insaf wa-l-qadiya al-ikhtilat," <http://albrak.net/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=15420&Itemid=25> (accessed on June 2, 2010).

<sup>144</sup> See <http://www.islamlight.net/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=15259&Itemid=0> (accessed June 2, 2010).

<sup>145</sup> al-Barrak's declaration was posted on numerous websites of the religious followers. See, for instance, <http://www.alwadi.com.sa/vb/showthread.php?p=677278> (accessed on June 2, 2010).

<sup>146</sup> "Tahthir min fitna al-da'wa ila al-ikhtilat," February 22, 2010. For his official biography, see <http://albarak.islamlight.net/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=1364&Itemid=45>.

<sup>147</sup> See his fatwa issued on May 2, 2010, [http://www.islamlight.net/index.php?option=com\\_ftawa&task=view&Itemid=0&catid=1007&id=36746](http://www.islamlight.net/index.php?option=com_ftawa&task=view&Itemid=0&catid=1007&id=36746).

<sup>148</sup> Biography of Sheikh al-Barrak, <http://www.israj.net/vb/t6015/> (accessed June 1, 2010).

<sup>149</sup> Sheikh Abd al-Rahman al-Barrak, *Mawqif al-muslim min al-khilaf*, originally published in 1993, <http://saaaid.net/book/open.php?cat=85&book=2267> (accessed on June 1, 2010).

<sup>150</sup> See article, April 1, 2008, <http://middle-east-online.com/?id=60291>.

<sup>151</sup> See, <http://alfetn.net/vb3/showthread.php?p=101783> (accessed June 1, 2010).

<sup>152</sup> See, <http://alfetn.net/vb3/showthread.php?p=101783> (accessed June 1, 2010).

<sup>153</sup> See his collection of fatwas: [http://www.islamlight.net/index.php?option=com\\_ftawa&task=view&Itemid=0&catid=981&id=36829](http://www.islamlight.net/index.php?option=com_ftawa&task=view&Itemid=0&catid=981&id=36829).

<sup>154</sup> See February 24, 2010, <http://www.israj.net/vb/t6015/>.

<sup>155</sup> See his collected fatwas: <http://www.alksa2.com/vb/t1501.html> and specifically the fatwa on "Su'al 'an al-sunna wa-l-shi'a," <http://saaaid.net/Warathah/AlBarak/19.htm>.

<sup>156</sup> "Hiwar ma'a al-'alama al-fadila al-shaykh 'Abd al-Rahman bin Nasir al-Barrak," *Majallat al-Bayan*, March 28, 2009, <http://www.factway.net/discuss.php?id=28>.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Iman al-Qahtani, "al-Barrak yutalibu bi-taghtiya wihj al-mara'a," *al-Hayat*, July 11, 2010, <http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/161849>.

<sup>159</sup> Yusuf al-Ahmad, *'Ishrun su'alan...ya ma'ali wazir al-'adl*, <http://www.almhml.com/c/-63853>, October 29, 2009. It was written as a response to an article the minister had written in the newspaper *al-Riyad*.

<sup>160</sup> For the interview with the al-Shams on Yusuf al-Ahmad's website, see: <http://www.dr-alahmad.com/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=17965>.

<sup>161</sup> "'Ulama' al-Misriyyun....," <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/03/19/103464.html>

<sup>162</sup> For the *bayan* on Yusuf al-Ahmad's website, see: <http://www.dr-alahmad.com/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=18293>.

<sup>163</sup> Alarabiya.net, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/04/25/106769.html>, April 25, 2010. For the full text; see "Bayan fi munasira al-shaykh Yusuf al-Ahmad," <http://www.saaaid.net/Doat/yusuf/38.htm>, no date.

<sup>164</sup> Article by Abd al-Rahman bin Muhammad al-Ansari, March 25, 2010, <http://www.almisq.net/articles-action-show-id-475.htm>.