

SAUDI ARABIA'S WAR ON TERRORISM

COMBATTING PASSIONS, IGNORANCE AND DEVIATION

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This chapter will analyse the history and background of the Saudi counterterrorism discourse as a religious discourse on extremism (*ghuluw*). Too often the focus on jihadi discourse has ignored its status as a counter-narrative that can only be understood against and contextualised within the framework of a dominant narrative. Looking at the official, normative narrative is important for four reasons.

First, examining the dominant discourse throws historical light on the long struggle against 'extremism' within Wahhabism (and Islam) and the arguments that have been used against not just violence but also against political demands and any opposition to the state. As Wahhabism is originally a rather strict interpretation of Islam, which regards itself as the only road to salvation and condemns other Muslims if they do not adhere to its strict rules, the distinction between radical and normative forms of Wahhabism is not always clear. Attempts to contain the radical strain within Wahhabism that challenges the current official quietist apolitical religious discourse of the Saudi state provide an insight into the nature of Wahhabism itself.

Second, an analysis of the general discourse on extremism provides a means of putting the Saudi rehabilitation programmes that have been launched since

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2003 into perspective. The confrontation with the more radical strain in Wahhabism is not 'a battle of ideas' but instead a religious reconversion programme that essentially focuses on the few items on which 'radicals' and 'moderates' differ. The historical record shows that the religious part of these rehabilitation programmes has a long history, which in itself should raise questions about the intellectual content of these programmes and their effectiveness, to say nothing of their political content. The official discourse on extremist ideas provides a counter-point to the highly positive reception of the Saudi rehabilitation programmes in the West.¹

Third, analysing the official normative discourse as it has been propagated by such newly-established Saudi counterterrorism institutions as the Advisory Committee or the campaign for 'intellectual security' (*al-aman al-fikri*) and its reception by the public in newspapers provides insights into new ways that opposition has arisen to the paternalistic attempt of the state and official clerical establishment to keep society de-politicised. Where the jihadi response tried to upstage the official moralistic, conservative, quietist Wahhabi discourse by being more activist, more uncompromising and purer in following the doctrine of *tawhid* (Oneness of God), recent public debates have stepped outside this vicious circle and displayed new ways of conceptualising citizenship and claiming political space.² At the same time they show how difficult it is to wrest away the initiative from the state.

Fourthly, an investigation of the rehabilitation discourse and other debates shows that the Saudi state is aware of the 'inner demons' of Wahhabism and is trying to find ways of containing the xenophobic and uncompromising strains

¹ The most laudatory reports were published in the media: see, for instance, Jeffrey Fleishman, 'Saudi Arabia Tries to Rehab Radical Minds', *Los Angeles Times*, 21 December 2007; David Ottaway, 'Saudi Effort Draws on Radical Clerics to Combat Lure of Al-Qaeda', *Washington Post*, 7 May 2006. For a laudatory academic article, which has no reference to the ideological content of the programmes, see Jessica Stern, 'Mind Over Matter', *Foreign Affairs* (January/February 2010), pp. 95–108. See also, Abdullah F. Ansary, 'Combating Extremism: A Brief Overview of Saudi Arabia's Approach', *Middle East Policy*, vol. 15 no. 2 (2008), pp. 111–142. For a more neutral discussion of the programmes, see Christopher Boucek, 'Extremist Re-Education and Rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia', in Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (eds.), *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 212–223.

² For more on liberal forms of opposition, see Stéphane Lacroix, 'Islam Liberal Politics in Saudi Arabia', in Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonnemam (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in the Balance: Political Economy, Society, Foreign Affairs* (London: Hurst, 2005), pp. 35–56.

in Wahhabism and include more tolerant currents in Islam, such as the 'middle way' (*al-wasatiyya*). This trend seems to be confirmed by the recent debate on gender segregation.³ Another way the monarchy tries to counter 'extremism' is to promote a discourse on proper behaviour and morals (*akhlaq*). If the first opens a broader ideological field, the second is a route to social disciplining.

This chapter is based on general books by Salafi *shaykhs* on Salafism, several official works containing the position of Saudi Arabia on extremism and other works written by Salafi *shaykhs* on this subject.⁴ Additional information on the Advisory Committee and 'intellectual security' has been collected from Saudi newspapers. There is also a considerable literature against extremism and terrorism written by Saudis translated into English.⁵

The theoretical background of the article is provided by Michael Freeden's theory of ideologies.⁶ He argues that ideologies consist of core, adjacent and peripheral concepts which together form a morphology, comparable to a map

³ See Roel Meijer, 'Reform in Saudi Arabia: The Gender Segregation Debate', *Middle East Policy*, vol.17 no.4 (Winter 2010), pp. 80–100.

⁴ The two important Saudi compilations of texts on extremism used by this author are: 'Aqil Bin 'Abd al-Rahman Bin Muhammad al-'Aqil, *Al-Irhab afat al-'asr: Madha qala 'anhu al-'ulama wa-l-mashayikh wa-l-mufakkirin wa-l-tarbiyyun wa-bi-madha wa wasafuhu* [Terrorism plague of the times: What do the ulama, shaykhs, thinkers and educators say about it and how do they describe it], 1st ed. (Riyadh: No publisher, 1425/2004); and Sulayman Bin Abdallah Bin Hamud Aba al-Khayl, *Mawqif al-Mamlaka al-'Arabiyya al-Sa'udiyya min al-irhab: Dirasa shar'iyya 'ilmiyya watha'iqiyya* [The position of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia towards terrorism: A legal scientific documentary study] (Riyadh: No publisher, 2003).

⁵ A random visit to Salafi bookshops in Great Britain will provide numerous books against extremism and terrorism. See, for instance, *The Brothers of the Devils: Islamic Condemnation of Terrorists, Hijackers & Suicide Bombers*. (Translated by SalafiPublications.com, published in Birmingham in October 2001 and 2nd edn. in May 2003) (original in Arabic, *al-Irhabiyyun ikhwan al-shayatain: Atharuhum 'ala al-afriad wa-l-umam*. No place, no date); Shaykh AbdulMuhsin Ibn Hamad al-Abbad, *According to which Intellect and Religion is Bombing and Wreaking Havoc Considered Jihaadi?* (Daarul-'Itisaam Publishing & Recording, 1425 AH/2004 AD). Some organisations specialise in deradicalisation programmes such as the Brixton SalafiManhaj, which translations many publications. See, for instance, Shaykh Saalih Bin 'Abdul 'Azeez Aali Shaykh, *A Warning Against Extremism*, transl. AbdulHaq al-Ashanti (Amman: Jamiah Media) (originally published as lecture in 1424 AH/2003 AD); Shaykh Dr Baasim Bin Faysal al-Jawaabirah, *Extremism: The Causes, Effects and the Cure* (SalafiManhaj, 2008) (originally published as *Takfir fi daw' al-Sunna al-Nabawiyya*, 1428 AH/2006 AD).

⁶ Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

on which the concepts are located in certain locations *vis-à-vis* each other. One of his important insights is that each of the concepts of an ideology can logically be contested and that ideologies by definition try to determine, fix and 'decontest' the meaning of their constituent concepts: 'ultimately ideologies are configurations of decontested meanings of politics concepts', and 'the key to' a morphology of an ideology 'lies in the relations of the units to one another, in the positioning *vis-à-vis* the centre, and the way units are made to interlock and support each other'.⁷

Michael Freeden's analysis of ideologies as flexible, multidimensional and constantly in flux around core concepts is especially illuminating for an analysis of the Saudi state's effort to amend strict Wahhabism since 9/11. It tries to redefine the state ideology by rendering the most ambiguous concepts in non-controversial ways, neutralising their implications and re-presenting them in a more benign form. It does this by interlocking their new content with the non-political and conservative *akblaq* (moralism) literature, which is further buttressed by the non-Wahhabi discourse of *wasatiyya* (median way).

Wahhabism's basic tensions

Without arguing that Wahhabism itself is responsible for terrorism⁸—which has a host of social, economic and political causes⁹—it does provide the ideological preconditions for violence on account of its intolerant and absolutist claims.¹⁰ Throughout Wahhabi history a fundamental tension and ambiguity

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁸ For this view see, for instance, Dore Gold, *Hatred's Kingdom: How Saudi Arabia Supports the New Global Terrorism* (Regnery Publishing, Washington DC, 2003). In this chapter the author has made a distinction between Wahhabism as the official Saudi state doctrine and Salafism as a more general doctrine that has more sources, although the two are closely connected. See Meijer, 'Introduction', in Roel Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (London: Hurst, 2009), pp. 1–32.

⁹ For the background of the men involved in the bomb attacks in Saudi Arabia, see Thomas Hegghammer, 'Terrorist Recruitment and Radicalization in Saudi Arabia', *Middle East Policy*, vol. 13 no. 4 (2006), pp. 39–60.

¹⁰ For an analysis of these concepts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2006). For an analysis of the contemporary situation, see Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices From Within* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 22–54; and Guido Steinberg, *Religion und Staat in Saudi Arabien: Die wahhabitischen Gelehrten, 1902–1953* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2002), pp. 92–102.

has existed between its core concept of the Oneness of God (*tawhid al-rubu-biyya*), expressed as total submission to god, on the one hand, and its other core concept of the oneness of worship (*tawhid al-uluhiyya*), which is its political expression, on the other. While the first is the theological assertion of monotheism and implicitly upholds the idea that one should not bow to political authority, the second is the political foundation of autocracy because it commands the unity of the community (*jama'a*) and therefore interlocks with the rejection of dissension (*fitna*), political competition (*hizbiyya/tafarruq*) and differences of religious opinions (*ikhhtilaf*). The connection between the two and the basic ideological morphology of Wahhabism is laid down in the Wahhabi political dictum: 'There is no religion without a *jama'a*, and no *jama'a* without an imam [a ruler], and no imam without obedience'.¹¹ This negation of the contestation of political authority—in a broader sense, the liquidation of politics as an independent field of activity—is further enhanced by the doctrine of total obedience to the ruler (*wali al-amr*). According to this classical theory, Muslims are not allowed to revolt against the ruler no matter how iniquitous or debauched he is, as long as he does not oppose the *shari'a*.¹²

This tension between the core concepts of Wahhabism between the total submission to God and total submission to the state is historically reflected in a constant oscillation between two extremes. On the one hand the tension finds expression in a zealous, missionary activism that is led by religious goals of spreading its doctrine of *tawhid* based on such potentially radical concepts as *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* (loyalty to Muslims and disavowal of non-believers),¹³

¹¹ Khalid S. Dakhil, 'Wahhabism as an Ideology of State Formation', in Mohammed Ayoub and Hasan Kosebalaban (eds.), *Wahhabism and the State: Religion and Politics in Saudi Arabia* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2009), p. 28.

¹² The apolitical aspect of Salafism is based on, among other sources, the hadith of Muslim [Eng. Transl. 3/1029/ no. 4554] "There will come leaders who will not follow my guidance and not follow my Sunnah. There will be among them men who will have hearts of devils in the bodies of humans'. He (the Companion of the Prophet) asked 'What shall I do, O Messenger of Allah, if I reach that?' He replied, 'You should hear and obey the ruler even if he flogs your back and takes your wealth, then still hear and obey'" (quoted in *The Brothers of the Devils*, p. 22). Perhaps a better statement of these concepts is formulated by Imam al-Barbahaaree, who said: 'If you find a man making supplication against the ruler, know that he is a person of innovation. If you find a person making supplication for the ruler to be upright, know that he is a person of the Sunnah, if Allaah wills'. *Ibid*.

¹³ 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 Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism*, pp. 81–106.

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combating innovation (*bid'a*), *takfir* (excommunication of Muslims if they do not adhere to Wahhabi doctrine) and the waging of *jihad* against these so-called non-believers, regarding themselves as the 'victorious sect' (*al-firqa al-mansura*).¹⁴ On the other, it is contained by an apolitical, quietist obedience to the ruler whose interests are determined by pragmatic reasons. This contradiction is reflected in the ambiguity of the *'ulama*, who often support zealots in their heart but ultimately submit to the ruler's power in practice.

This tension remained below the surface as long as the political and religious powers worked together and the ruler could harness the zeal of new, Bedouin converts to the expansionist drive and political goals of the state. Such was the case during the alliance between Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab (1703–92) and Muhammad Ibn Sa'ud (d. 1765), established between 1744 and 1808 when the Arabian Peninsula was conquered, and again from 1902 to 1930, when 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn Sa'ud founded the modern Saudi state. In times of crisis the conservative apolitical inclination of the *'ulama* was even enhanced, as for instance during the chaotic years between the second and the third Wahhabi states (1865–1902), when the Wahhabi mission was threatened by a civil war. This threat to unity was condemned and eventually neutralised by the rejection of internal dissension (*fitna*), the condemnation of splitting into groups (*tafarruq*) and a rejection of differences of opinion (*ikhtilaf*).¹⁵ However, on rare occasions the pendulum swung to the other, activist extreme, such as during the Ikhwan rebellion of 1929–30, when religious zealots were adamant to fight innovation and continue their jihad to expand Wahhabism across the agreed borders with Iraq and Jordan. The same type of religious upsurge occurred during the occupation of the Grand Mosque in Mecca in 1979, which was inspired in part by a struggle to purify Saudi society.¹⁶ Although in both

¹⁴ See David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission*; and Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*.

¹⁵ Guido Steinberg, 'The Wahhabi Ulema and the Saudi State' in Paul Aarts and Gerd Nonneman (eds.), *Saudi Arabia in the Balance*, p. 19; and Steinberg, *Religion und Staat in Saudi Arabien*, pp. 427–31. Many researchers have pointed out that the difference between 'extremist' and 'moderate' Wahhabis lies in moderates' rejection of the extremists' ideas, the major difference being in attitudes toward submission to the ruler: see Yahya Bin Muhammad al-Amir, *Ayyam al-irhab fi al-Sau'udiyya: Ukhruju 'al-watan' min Jazira al-'Arab* [Days of Terrorism in Saudi Arabia: Banish 'Nationalism' From the Arabian Peninsula] (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqafi al-'Arabi, 2007), p. 61.

¹⁶ Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix, 'Rejectionist Islam in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman al-Utaybi Revisited', *International Journal of Middle East*

cases the *'ulama's* ambiguous stance was apparent in their simultaneous admiration for the rebels and idealistic assertion of the supremacy of *tawhid al-ulubiyya* over the pragmatics of politics,¹⁷ ultimately they reverted to their apolitical position of curtailing the 'chaos' and acknowledging the authority of the state.

Their loyalty was repaid by allowing them to assert a monopoly over interpretation of religious texts and sanctioning their claim to being 'the *'ulama* rooted in knowledge' (*al-'ulama al-rasikhin bi-l-'ilm*).¹⁸ The same trade-off occurred more generally in the wake of the oil boom and the resulting partial delegitimisation of the official ideology of Saudi Arabia as the 'state of monotheism', as the state became more corrupt and it became clear that its foreign and economic policy were outside the purview of the *shari'a*. In exchange for legitimising the Al Sa'uds' power, the *'ulama* acquired a monopoly over the regulation of the social behaviour down to the most minute details.¹⁹ Another means used to co-opt the *'ulama* was to grant them the role of vanguard in the ideological struggle against pan-Arabism and secularism abroad in the 1960s, while at home their task was to turn the expanding modern educational system into 'the most important means of spreading the correct version of religion and creed among the people' (incidentally making the humanities and natural sciences subservient to religious indoctrination).²⁰ The curriculum that was implemented would assure that the future 'Wahhabi generation' would not be influenced by *fitna* or the spirit of opposition (*tamarrud*) and revolution (*thawra*) that were prevalent in the hectic 1960s and 1970s.²¹ The bureau-

Studies, vol. 39 no. 1 (2007), pp. 97–116. Yahya Bin Muhammad al-Amir, *Ayyam al-irhab fi al-Sau'udiyya*, pp. 58–67.

¹⁷ Ahmad al-Katib, *al-Fikr al-siyasi al-Wahhabiyya: Qira'at tabliliyya* [Wahhabi Political Thought: A Critical Reading] (Cairo: Madbuli, 2008), p. 131.

¹⁸ Steinberg, *Religion und Staat in Saudi Arabien*, p. 432.

¹⁹ This has been regarded as the basic contradiction of Saudi Arabia. See Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi state*; As'ad Abukhalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), p. 144.

²⁰ Ahmad al-'Isa, *Islah al-ta'lim fi al-Sa'udiyya bayna ghiyab al-ru'y'a al-siyasiyya wa-tawajjuz al-thaqafa al-diniyya wa-'ajiz al-idara al-tarbawiyya* [Reform of Education in Saudi Arabia Between the Lack of a Political Opinion and the Apprehension of a Religious Culture Incapable of Running the Educational System] (London: Dar al-Saqi, 2009), p. 75.

²¹ Anwar 'Abdalla, *al-'Ulama' wa-l-'arsh: Thaniyya al-sulta fi-l-Sa'udiyya* [The Ulama and the Throne: The Dual Power in Saudi Arabia] (Paris: Maktaba al-Sharq, 2004), pp. 279–80.

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cratisation of the *'ulama* as salaried civil servants and the establishment of the Higher Council of *'Ulama* and the Ministry of Justice in the 1970s buttressed their stake in the status quo. It is therefore no accident that—despite their ambivalent attitude towards the state, their adherence to zealous interpretations of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* and their support of an external jihad—towering figures of Wahhabism/Salafism in the 1980s and 1990s like 'Abd al-'Aziz Bin Baz (d. 1999), Salih Bin Fawzan al-Fawzan,²² Muhammad al-Uthaymin (d. 2001) and Nasir al-Din al-Albani (d. 1999)²³ basically propagated an apolitical form of Wahhabism. They focussed completely on the purification of Salafi doctrine and practice.

The end result of this symbiotic, if sometimes strained, relationship between the state and the *'ulama* was a further deepening of the religiosity of society and a deeper control of the religious establishment over society.²⁴ All forms of independent organisations and the relative liberalisation that had been allowed between 1965 and 1979 were terminated.²⁵ The abhorrence of politics is apparent in comments such as those made by Mufti Bin Baz and the Council of Senior *'Ulama* when they castigated the Memorandum of Advice issued by the

²² See one of his major works in translation, *Guide to the Sound Creed: A Book on Muslim Creed and Faith* (Riyadh: al-Maiman Publishing House, 2005).

²³ Stéphane Lacroix, 'Between Revolution and Apoliticism: Nasir al-Din al-Albani, and his Impact on the Shaping of Contemporary Salafism', in Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism*, pp. 58–80.

²⁴ It is beyond the scope of this chapter to analyse the complex relationship between the Wahhabi establishment and the state in detail. For more on this issue, see, for example, Abdulaziz Sager, 'Political Opposition in Saudi Arabia', in *Saudi Arabia in the Balance*, pp. 234–270. Many also stress the conflicts within the Saudi royal family. However, the basic dependence of the state and the *'ulama* on each other, politically and ideologically, is clear. For instance, the Basic Law of Governance promulgated in March 1992 states that the Qur'an and the sunna are the constitution of Saudi Arabia; Article 6 stipulates that 'citizens are to pay allegiance to the King in accordance with the Holy Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet, in submission and obedience, in times of ease and difficulty, fortune and adversity' (quoted in As'ad Abukhalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia*, p. 126). For more on the lack of political theorising by the *'ulama*, see Madawi Al-Rasheed, 'State and society', pp. 192–99.

²⁵ A fascinating inside account of the stultifying effects of the increasing religiosity is given in '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).

Saudi opposition in 1992 as *fitna* because it breached the 'the deep tradition of the Wahhabi *'ulama* to give advice (*nasihah*) to the ruler only in a discreet manner. In the theological discourse of virtue, 'mobilisation' against the authorities is condemned as a 'general *fitna*' and 'demonstrations' are regarded as a 'civil atheism'.²⁶ In the highly apolitical religious discourse of official Wahhabism, reform is regarded as a personal matter. The Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs at the time (now *mufti*), Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz Al al-Shaykh, stated that reform basically amounts to a 'deepening of [one's] religion'.²⁷ This attitude is also reflected in Saudi books condemning terrorism translated into English, which emphasise a political orientation, obedience to the authorities and individual piety. Meanwhile, all the potentially radical concepts in Wahhabism were marginalised: *jihād*²⁸ was diverted outside the Kingdom to Afghanistan, Chechnya or Yugoslavia and put under the strict control of the *imam* (the ruler);²⁹ *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*³⁰ was domesticated, tamed and shorn of violence; and *takfir*³¹ was highly restricted and only allowed in accordance with strict rules applied by 'the *'ulama* rooted in knowledge'. The slightest incursion into politics was condemned as partyism (*hizbiyya*), leading to divisions (*tafar-ruq*) and dissension (*fitna*). Some clerics such as Rabi' Hadi al-Madkhali have even made a career out of attacking the Muslim Brotherhood by accusing them of spreading the heresy of mixing politics with religion.³²

²⁶ Anwar 'Abdalla, *Khasa'is wa-safat al-mujtama' al-Wahhabi-al-Sa'udi: Babth susy-ululji, antrupuluji* [The Specifics of Wahhabi Saudi Society: A Sociological and Anthropological Study] (Paris: Maktaba al-Sharq, 2004), pp. 77–8.

²⁷ Interview with Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz Bin 'Abdalla al-Shaykh in Aba al-Khayl, *Mawqif al-Mamlaka*, p. 460.

²⁸ Thomas Hegghammer, 'Violent Islamism in Saudi Arabia, 1979–2006: The Power and Perils of Pan Islamic Nationalism' (PhD, 2007), pp. 175–202. Madawi al-Rasheed, 'The Minaret and the Palace: Obedience at Home and Rebellion Abroad', in Madawi al-Rasheed (ed.), *Kingdom Without Borders: Saudi Arabia's Political, Religious and Media Frontiers* (London: Hurst, 2008), pp. 199–220.

²⁹ Aba al-Khayl, *Mawqif al-Mamlaka*, pp. 573–5.

³⁰ See in this volume Joas Wagemakers, 'Of "Seceders" and "Postponers"? An Analysis of the 'Khawarij' and 'Murji'a' Labels in Polemical Debates between quietist and Jihadi-Salafis'.

³¹ See, for instance, the book by 'Abd al-Salam Bin 'Abdalla al-Sulayman, *Sillat al-ghuluw fi-l-takfir bi-l-jarima* [The Relation Between Extremism in Takfir and Crime] [No place: no publisher], 2005.

³² For more on al-Madkhali, see Roel Meijer, 'Politicising *al-Jarh wa-l-Ta'dil*: Rabi' b. Hadi al-Madkhali and the Transnational Battle for Religious Authority' in Kees Ver-

One can therefore safely conclude that the whole discourse of countering Wahhabism's radical tendencies was well-established in Saudi Arabia before 9/11 and could be repackaged after the internal attacks in the country in 2003. Basing himself on this discourse, Minister of Interior Prince Nayef tried to deflect the American critique of Wahhabism by accusing the preponderant political Islamic organisation, the Muslim Brotherhood, of being the 'source of terrorism' in Saudi Arabia.³³ However, at the same time his support of more moderate forms of Islam seems to show an implicit awareness of the problematic nature of Wahhabism.

Extremism and passions

The most important technique for containing Wahhabism's inner tensions has been to associate all political claims and demands with religious extremism (*ghuluw/tatarruf*) and deviation (*inhiraf*).³⁴ The core concept of extremism is defined or decontested by closely interlocking it with terms such as exaggeration, excess and vehemence (*mujawaza, mubalagha, ifrat, irtifa', ziyad, tashaddud*).³⁵ Religious extremism is regarded as the 'root cause' of terrorism and engaging in politics and joining 'groups' or 'parties' is a step towards that goal.

The first source of extremism is the act of challenging religious authority and the monopoly of the 'ulama over religious knowledge (*'ilm*). Those who have the audacity to think for themselves suffer from ignorance (*jahl*): 'igno-

steegh, Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort and Joas Wagemakers (eds.), *Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: A Collection of Essays Presented to Harald Motzki on the Occasion of his 62nd Birthday* (Leiden: Brill, [forthcoming] pp. 368–91). For more on the conflation of religion and politics in Saudi Arabia, see As'ad Abukhalil, *The Battle for Saudi Arabia*, pp. 132–3.

³³ See interview with the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Siyasa*, 'al-Ikhwan al-asas al-bala' wal-qa'ida al-'umala', 25 November 2003, available at [http://www.paldf.net/forum/showthread.php?t=6193] [Last accessed 9 November 2009], and also a more recent interview in *al-Jazira Newspaper*, 1 June 2009, available at [http://www.al-jazirah.com/2487744/ar8d.htm] [Last accessed 9 November 2009].

³⁴ *Ghuluw* is a term that occurs repeatedly in the Qur'an. One of the most quoted *ayas* is: 'Ghuluw in religion, an increase (exaggeration) in religion is perhaps worse than too little', *Sura* 4:171; also *Sura* 5:77 and 20:81.

³⁵ The *ghuluw* literature is vast and is a genre in itself. I have used Khalid Bin Hamad al-Kharif, *Al-Ghuluw fi-l-din wa atharuhu fi-l-umma* [Extremism in Religion and Its Influence on the Umma] (Riyadh: Maktaba al-Rushd, 2005); and sections in Aba al-Khayl, *Mawqif al-Mamlaka*, and al-'Aqil, *al-Irhab afat al-asr*.

rance is one of the most important reasons to deviate from truth, reject it and distance oneself from it [leading to], ideological divergence (*ikhhtilaf*) and political divisions (*tafarruq*). As such it is at the origins of misguidance (*dalala*) and innovation (*bid'a*).³⁶ What is regarded as especially dangerous is that seekers of knowledge believe that they have religious knowledge (*ilm*) after only reading a few books and that they have the right to proclaim someone an infidel (*takfir*). A whole library has been written on the topic of ignorance and extremism leading to *takfir*.³⁷

The second source of deviation from the straight path is applying unguided reason (*aq'l*) to texts. If reason alone becomes the source of interpretation of the Qur'an it can lead to 'going astray', 'confusion' and 'doubt'.³⁸ The third source of deviation is fanaticism (*ta'assub*) related to *taqlid*, for example clinging to personal, un-Qur'anic opinions. In contrast, it is claimed, the Salafi follows the truth and gives proof (*dalil*): 'Therefore fanaticism in following people and opposition to proof is a source of improper guidance (*dalal*) for many people'.³⁹

But it is not just having the wrong ideas or being ideologically misguided that can lead to extremism and escaping from the guidance of the 'ulama. The core concept of extremism is given further content and value by associating it with uncontrolled emotions. Imposing correct behaviour and strict morals is therefore imperative as a means to survey and control disruptive emotions.⁴⁰ An important element in the discourse of extremism is the theory of inclinations and passions (*hawa/ahwa*). These emotions, in turn, are related to other sources of deviations, such as desires (*shahwa/shahawat*), corrupted reasoning

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 28–30.

⁴⁰ Others have pointed out the extreme social moralism and surveillance in Saudi Arabia as a deflection from real political claims. See especially Madawi al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State*, pp. 24–5, and the remark by Gwenn Okruhlik, '[...] the problem is not with conservative morality but that the very idea of morality has been trivialized. It is conflated with the codification of social absurdities, demonstrated by religious rulings that regulate the plucking of an eyebrow, the use of nail polish, and the length of gowns, rather than grapple with explicitly political issues that revolve around distributive fairness, governmental accountability, and social justice'. Gwenn Okruhlik, 'State Power, Religious Privilege and Myths About Political Reform', in Mohammed Ayooob and Hasan Kosebalaban (eds.), *Wahhabism and the State*, p. 95.

and sophistry (*shubha/shubabat*). With the theory of passions, Salafism comes closest to propounding a religious psychology of terrorism. There are several steps that have to be made in this process. Thus, according to the Minister of Interior Prince Nayef, 'terrorism does not issue from a people or a creed, it originates in an individual person'.⁴¹ He suggests that the most potent means of countering it is to 'create a psychological barrier around Muslims and their creed (*aqida*)'.⁴² Likewise, one of the most prominent contemporary clerics, Shaykh Salih Bin Fawzan al-Fawzan, argues that terrorists are 'those individuals who ride their passions/inclinations and have chosen the road to error out of stubbornness and haughtiness'. He concludes with the remark that 'they seek a means to fulfil their ambitions hastily', suggesting that religious guidance and the virtue of patience can only be acquired from the '*ulama*'.⁴³

A host of negative passions has the ability to mislead the believer. They manifest themselves particularly in such emotions as envy (*hasad*) and hatred (*hiqd*). In a typical characterisation of extremism—which brings together the negative connotations of uncontrolled emotions, wilful bad intentions and one of the main sins of Wahhabism, religious innovation (*bid'a*)—Sulayman Aba al-Khayl, dean of the Islamic University of Muhammad Ibn Saud and teacher of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) in the Higher Institute for Judges, states that extremist groups 'try to prove their passions with the *shari'a* and deform the texts and proofs to agree with their innovations'. In this manner, he argues, 'their opinions and their minds have become the primary sources [of finding the truth] and the *shari'a* has become subordinated to it'. He concludes with the remark that 'innovation through passions is the worst form of innovation and a sin against God and the worst crime against the Truth'.⁴⁴ This association is summed up by Salafis in the general definition of deviationists and sectarians who do not share the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam as the 'people of passions and innovation (*ahl-al-ahwa wa-l-bid'a*)'.⁴⁵ From this term it is clear that passions, innovation and deviation are closely linked; the one follows from the other and provides the core concept of extremism (*ghuluw*) with its specific connotation of being opposed to the truth. The only remedy,

⁴¹ Interview with Prince Nayef, published in *Majalla al-Da'wa*, 4 October 2001, cited in Aba al-Khayl, *Mawqif al-Mamlaka*, p. 321.

⁴² Interview with Prince Nayef, probably after 9/11, cited in Aba al-Khayl, *ibid*, p. 316.

⁴³ Lecture published in *Majalla al-Da'wa*, 24 October 2002, cited in *ibid*, p. 498.

⁴⁴ Introduction in *ibid*, p. 123.

⁴⁵ al-Kharif, *al-Ghuluw fi-l-din*, p. 23.

according to Sulayman Aba al-Khayl, is 'to rein in one's emotions, control them, distance oneself from them, and look at the truth (*haqq*) and keep a balance'.⁴⁶

This disciplining discourse of passions can be used against all kinds of deviants. The first to be identified is the historical example of the *khawarij* who used excommunication (*takfir*) against Muslims and assassinated the fourth rightly-guided Caliph 'Ali (661). This example is often linked to the more contemporary history of the violence of the Algerian civil war of the 1990s, which Shaykh Rabi' al-Madkhali condemns as having had its origins in such general concepts as 'enmity, hatred, and power of the resentment and passions, desirous of degradation [of the other] and spilling of blood'.⁴⁷

But not only Muslims can be misled by passions: the West is also accused of being led by passions and inclinations (*ahwa*) when it regards Islam as the source of terrorism.⁴⁸ However, the frequent references to unguided youth as a source of danger and disorder indicate that they are undoubtedly the main culprits of self-indulgence, disobedience and revolt against the order of things: they are liable to go astray because they are ignorant, gullible and stubborn. They are the main political, religious and cultural threat to stability and correct morals because 'new generations reject completely the existing *turath*'.⁴⁹ The final group that is regarded as a threat because of its connection to passions are intellectuals (*muthaqqafun*), meaning Westernised independent thinkers rather than the *'ulama*. They resemble terrorists because they 'spread banalities and superficialities and are holders of passions (*ashab al-shahawat*)'. Not surprisingly, intellectuals are also proclaimed to be unbelievers by more radical shaykhs in the heat of debates on issues such as gender segregation.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Interview with Sulayman Aba al-Khayl on passions and their influence and dangers, printed in al-'Aqil, *al-Irhab afat al-'asr*, pp. 212–3.

⁴⁷ *Nasiha ila al-umma al-Jaza'iriyya sha'ban wa-hukuma* [Advice to the Algerian People and Government] (14/1/1422 AH [2001]), p. 1.

⁴⁸ For instance, the West's attempt to connect Islam to terrorism is rejected by the *mufiti* as a form of being led by passions and inclinations, Aba al-Khayl, *Mawqif al-Mamlaka*, p. 522.

⁴⁹ For the new ways of Saudi youth, see Mai Yamani, *Changed Identities: The Challenge of the New Generation in Saudi Arabia* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000). See, for instance, programmes directed at combating extremism among youth, available at [<http://www.hrmla.com/forums/showthread.php?t=60915>].

⁵⁰ Introduction by Sulayman Aba al-Khayl for *Mawqif al-Mamlaka*, pp. 58–9. See also my 'Reform in Saudi Arabia: The Gender Segregation Debate'.

Terrorism

A definition of terrorism as violence against innocent bystanders, however, does exist in Wahhabism. The characterisation of terrorism as the wanton destruction of houses, schools, oil pipelines, bridges or the life of believers finds ample support in the Qur'anic term 'corruption on earth' (*ifsad fi-l-ard*).⁵¹ Corruption on earth is explained as violence directed against the five essential human conditions for life, or sacrosanct principles, which are protected in Islamic law: religion (*din*), soul (*nafs*), intelligence (*'aql*), honour (*'ird*) and possessions/wealth (*mal*).⁵² Minister of Defence Prince Sultan defined terrorism as 'every action which has the aim to instil fear in innocents, to bring corruption on earth, or is organized to achieve these ends'.⁵³ The term was used in 1989 by the Council of Senior Ulama⁵⁴ after the attacks in Riyadh on 13 November 1995⁵⁵ and again in August 2003 after the first attacks in Riyadh by al-Qaeda on the Arabian Peninsula. Typically for Wahhabism, the term is often linked with innovation,⁵⁶ and, as part of the discourse of individual irrationality and emotions, wilful destruction is ascribed to a psychology of a 'weakly developed character'.⁵⁷ Despite the existence of this definition of terrorism as corruption on earth, it took the Council of Senior Ulama seven years to come up with a real condemnation of the 2003 attacks, but the declaration had no impact and was not debated in mosques or schools.⁵⁸ Not until 12 April

⁵¹ See, for instance, *suras* 2:204–5, 5:64, 10:81 and 5:33.

⁵² Aba al-Khayl, *Mawqif al-Mamlaka*, p. 139. Also mentioned by Shaykh 'Abdalla Bin Muhammad Bin Ibrahim al-Shaykh [no date] in *ibid.*, p. 521.

⁵³ Cited in *ibid.*, pp. 298 and 428.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 426–7; and al-'Aqil, *al-Irhab afat al-'asr*, p. 17. The Suras quoted on the principle of corruption on earth (*ifsad fi-l-ard*) are *suras* 5:32–33, 2:204–205, 6:151, 13:25, 27:48–9 and 28:77.

⁵⁵ al-'Aqil, *al-Irhab afat al-'asr*, p. 19.

⁵⁶ *Saudi Arabia's Permanent Council of Senior Scholars on Terrorist Cells* [transl. from Arabic *al-Fatawa al-shar'iyya fi al-qadaya al-'asriyya*] made on 6/11/1424 or 10 August 2004, p. 4, Available at [<http://www.answering-extremism.com>] [Last accessed 12 March 2009].

⁵⁷ Lecture given by Shaykh 'Abdalla Bin Muhammad al-Mutlaq on 16 *dhul-Qi'da* 1422HA/30 January 2002, cited in Aba al-Khayl, *Mawqif al-Mamlaka*, p. 566.

⁵⁸ Sa'ud al-Rayyis, '*Hin afaqna fi muwajaha al-tatarruf*' [When we failed to counter terrorism], *al-Hayat*, 5 June 2010 [<http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/148975>] [Last accessed 10 March 2009].

2010 did the Council of Senior Ulama issue declaration no. 239 making financing of terrorism a crime.⁵⁹

The Western concept of terrorism (*irhab*) is not well-liked in official Saudi discourse and is secondary to core concepts like *ghuluw*. This is probably because the Western definition regards violence against innocent citizens as the end of a line of development defined by concepts such as intolerance and rejection of the humanity of others, holding equality (regardless of race, religion or gender), pluralism, democracy and the practice of negotiation as the only means of eliminating its causes—all of which are anathema to Wahhabism. In the Saudi discourse, the causes of violence are sought in a different logical sequence of steps beginning with ignorance, irrationality (passions), extremism and deviation, all of which leads to political involvement. In this discourse the believer is the central figure and the concept of the 'victorious sect' (*al-ta'ifa al-mansura*), to which all Salafis/Wahhabis belong, is by definition without equal. It also assumes *a priori* that Islam (here, Wahhabism) and terrorism are mutually exclusive.⁶⁰ Thus, 'terrorism', according to Minister of Interior Prince Nayef, 'is the work of the devil; it is not anchored in religion, is not supported by knowledge of people and human values, and harms others in the service of personal reasons and closed ignorant concepts.'⁶¹

⁵⁹ 'Taqdir wa-l-irṭiyah rusi li-fatwa' 'ulama' al-Sa'ūdiyya bil-tajrim tamwīl al-irḥab' [Russian appreciation and satisfaction for the *fatwa* of the Saudi 'ulama condemning the financing of terrorism], *al-Hayat*, 22 May 2010 [<http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/144156>]; and Nawwal al-'Id, 'Ḥazm al-'ilmi ma' al-irḥab' [Religious determination against terrorism], *al-Hayat*, 21 May 2010 [<http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/143730>] [Last accessed 10 June 2010]; Sami al-Majid 'Fatawa al-qatl wa madhhab aydan' [Fatawa and schools of death], *al-Hayat*, 14 May 2010 [<http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/141197>]. For the full text, see *al-Hayat*, 8 May 2010 [<http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/139081>] [Last accessed 10 June 2010]. Dawud al-Shiryan, 'Ad'afiman—'ulama' al-Sa'ūdiyya hasamu al-jadl' [Strengthening belief...Saudi 'ulama have made the decision], *al-Hayat*, 14 April 2010 [<http://www.daralhayat.com/internationalarticle/130204>] [Last accessed 11 June 2010].

⁶⁰ This has been the official Saudi counter to the accusation after 9/11 that Wahhabism is at the root of terrorism. See, for instance, the response to the critic of Congress, *Khatab ila al-Gharb: Ru'ya min al-Sa'ūdiyya* [Response to the West: A Saudi point of view] (Riyadh: Dar al-Ghayna' li-l-Nashr, 2003).

⁶¹ Cited in *Aba Al-Khayl*, pp. 311–2. Prince Nayef consistently uses a religious counterterrorism discourse: for instance, he makes clear 'that the nation as a whole is based on this creed (*aqida*) and that it cannot exist without it', in Muhammad 'Ali al-Harafi, *al-Amir Nayif wa qadaya 'al-mujtama'* [Prince Nayef and the Issues of Society], *al-Watan*, 21 April 2008.

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Thus the Western definition of terrorism and its adjacent counter-concepts pose a threat to official Wahhabism, its total rejection of politics as a separate autonomous field to solve basic conflicts of interest, and its support of such potentially ambiguous or threatening concepts as *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*, jihad and *takfir* (even in their moderate, decontested forms). The Western explanation also condemns the national-liberation struggles that Saudi Arabia supports in Palestine, Chechnya and Afghanistan.⁶²

The ethics of normalcy

Another means of containing Wahhabism's radical strains has been to introduce new definitions of Islam as moderateness (*i'tidal*), the middle of the road or median way (*wasatiyya*),⁶³ or balance (*ittizan*). In this way common Islamic terms such as justice (*adl*), easiness (*yusr*) or facilitation of belief (*taysir*) can be used to counter extremism. *Wasatiyya* and easiness (*yusr*) in particular are terms that are constantly repeated in the discourse of behavioural normalcy versus extremism. This discourse is not part of Wahhabism's ideological morphology but derives instead from Yusuf al-Qaradawi; since 9/11 it has been transported to the core of Wahhabism to buttress the decontested, peaceful nature of the four concepts explained above and enhance the credibility of its struggle against extremism.⁶⁴ Like the concept of passions (*ahwa*), the concept of *wasatiyya* gives specific flavour and colour to the Saudi counterterrorist discourse by means of the richness of adjacent terms that resonate with the values of a conservative society.

The core of this discourse of normalcy is constituted by the discourse of correct manners, attitudes and ethics (*akhlaq*), based on the *sunna* (way) of the Prophet.⁶⁵ This concept of *akhlaq* is core to Islam as a whole, but it is given a Wahhabi twist by relating it to notion of 'the right creed'. If the right creed

⁶² Lecture of Salih Bin Fawzan al-Fawzan in Aba al-Khayl, *Mawqif al-Mamlaka*, pp. 492–4.

⁶³ Prince Sultan in *ibid.*, pp. 291–2.

⁶⁴ Bettina Gräf, 'The Concept of *Wasatiyya* in the Work of Yusuf al-Qaradawi', in Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen and Bettina Gräf (eds.), *Gobal Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yusuf al-Qaradawi* (London: Hurst, 2009), pp. 213–38.

⁶⁵ For a comprehensive explanation of this widespread discourse, see Aba al-Khayl, *Mawqif al-Mamlaka*, pp. 173–181. See also, Rabi' Hadi al-Madkhali, *Mudhakkira al-hadith al-nabawi fi-l-'aqida wa-l-ittiba'i* (Cairo: Dar al-Manhaj, 1424/2004. Originally published in 1406/1985), p. 37. The discourse is based also on *suras* 28:50 and 45:23.

(*'aqida*) represents the truth in doctrine and terms such as 'balance' and 'facilitation' are meant to convey moderateness, having the correct moral behaviour (*hasan al-khulq*) is their reflection in practice (*manhaj*) in daily life and refers to more precisely-defined values and attitudes that oppose extremism and restrain passions. Thus religion and behaviour are entwined, for 'religion is ethics (*khulq*)', and it is believed that 'whatever increases your morals will increase your religiosity'. A person who has these positive qualities is a '*sahib al-khulq al-wasat*', literally having the behaviour of the median way, who combines piety and apolitical moralism. The ethics of *akhlaq* is based on four pillars: endurance/hardiness/patience (*sabr*), virtue/chastity (*iffa*), courage (*saja'a*) and justice (*adl*). The first concept, endurance, has the normal meaning of capacity to stand suffering, but it also has the connotation of suppressing anger, being inoffensive, showing forbearance/clemency, patience and friendliness. The second element in *akhlaq* literature, virtue, forbids committing vices, using disgraceful language and performing vile deeds; while the third element, courage, is identified with the dignity of the soul, self-discipline and clemency.

Walking the straight path or median way (*wasatiyya*), means that the believer must not deviate toward either extreme, both of which are described in Wahhabi discourse. For instance, justice in this context does not mean equality before the law or getting a rightful share but is instead expressed as avoiding spendthriftiness/exaggeration (*ifrat*) on the one hand and negligence (*tafrit*) on the other. It is furthermore related to such virtues as open-handedness and generosity and munificence.⁶⁶ Other virtues mentioned are wisdom (*hikma*), friendliness (*rifq*) and flexibility (*lin*).

These qualities are, not accidentally, also considered necessary qualities for *da'wa*.⁶⁷ Furthermore, forgiveness (*safh*), truthfulness (*sidq*) and gentleness/understanding (*hilm*) are considered to belong to both *akhlaq* and respect for contracts.⁶⁸ Having the right *akhlaq* and the right moral qualities is regarded in this moderate form of Wahhabism as a sign of belonging to the chosen sect (*al-ta'ifa al-mansura*).⁶⁹

⁶⁶ 'Introduction', in Aba al-Khayl, *Mawqif al-Mamlaka*, p. 176.

⁶⁷ Rabi' Hadi al-Madkhali, *Al-Bahth 'ala al-muwadda wa-l-i'tilaf wa-l-tahdbir min al-firqa wa-l-ikhtilaf*, 12/21/1429 (12/12/2009), p. 4, Available at [http://www.rabec.net/show_des.aspx?pid=3&d=263] [Last accessed 22 January 2009].

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5 and Muhammad Ibn Salih al-'Uthaymin, quoted in *Is the Salafi Manhaj an Indicator of Terrorism, Political Violence and Radicalisation?* (SalafManhaj, 2007), p. 22.

⁶⁹ al-'Aqil, *Al-Irhab afat al-'asr*, pp. 9–10.

Putting ideology into practice

The Advisory Committee and repentance

Saudi counterterrorist discourse is not just an ideology but it is also translated into policy and practice. The close cooperation of religious and political authorities is apparent from the Advisory Committees (al-Lijan al-Munasiha) that were established after the first attacks occurred in Saudi Arabia in May 2003. They were established—like all the other counterterrorist initiatives—by Muhammad Ibn Nayef, Deputy Minister of Interior and son of Nayef Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, the Minister of Interior.⁷⁰

The organisation reportedly consists of four sections: religious knowledge (*‘ilm*), security (*aman*), social work and media. However, it appears that the balance of resources is in favour of the religious section, which consists of one hundred and sixty *‘ulama* and only forty psychologists and social workers.⁷¹ It is manned by *‘ulama* and religious experts and is directed at ‘correcting their thought’ by combating specious arguments (*shubahat*), ‘wrong convictions’ and the ‘wrong understanding’ of religious texts by prisoners.⁷² In essence refutation (*tafnid*) of deviation has been its main task, and it is exactly this aspect of the programme that has been regarded as highly successful.⁷³ We are furthermore told that whereas at first the prisoners were reluctant to talk to the ‘*‘ulama* rooted in knowledge’, once their trust was won they competed to join

⁷⁰ Khalid al-Ghanami, ‘*Najaha rijal al-aman wa fashalat lijan al-munasiha*’ [Success of the security police and failure of the Advisory Committee], *al-Watan*, 30 April 2007, available at [<http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/writerdetail.asp?issueno=2404&cid=238&Rname=53>] [Last accessed 10 January 2010].

⁷¹ Turki al-Suhayl, ‘*Dahaya da’awi al-jihad fi-l-Iraq*’ (part 4) [Victims of propaganda of jihad in Iraq], *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 21 July 2007, available at [<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?issueno=10462&article=428975>].

⁷² Turki al-Suhayl, ‘*al-Sa’udiyya: jawla hasima ma’a al-takfiriyyin min khilal al-munasiha wa-l-ifraj ‘an al-mawqufin amaniyyan*’ [Final round of the *takfiris* through the Advice Council and the release of those imprisoned], *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 5 November 2005, available at [<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=43&article=331928&issueno=9839>] [9 September 2009]. See also Walid Mahmud, ‘*al-Munasiha*’ *al-Sa’udiyya bi-sujun al-Iraqiyya*’ [Saudi advice for Iraqi prisons], *Islamonline*, 16 February 2008, available at [http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_A_C&cid=1201957953553&pagename=Zone-Arabic-News%2FNewsLayout] [Last accessed 20 February 2009].

⁷³ Khalid al-Ghanami, ‘*Najaha rijal al-aman wa fashalat lijan al-munasiha*’, *al-Watan*, 30 April 2007.

the course because they understood that 'the only goal of the correct explanation of the *shari'a* was to reach the truth'. Wholly in line with the official discourse, the head of the project 'Ali Shai'a al-Nafisa'⁷⁴ stated that the prisoners realised that their deviation derived from 'wrong explanations and provocative *fatwas* (*al-fatawa al-tahridiyya*) of 'ulama of aggressive organisations who led them to adopt wrong ethics/habits based on 'excitement', 'delusions', 'utopian thought' and 'restrictive thinking'—in short, passions (*ahwa*). The psychological dimension is reflected in the sentence 'who becomes mixed up in his heart by spurious reasoning (*shubahat*) and whims/greed (*shahawat*) can use them for evil ends'. In order to counter 'enthusiastic' videos on the internet and provocative lectures these sources must be 'closely controlled by the rules of the *shari'a* [otherwise they] can develop into a violent storm'.⁷⁵

It is no accident that as part of the deradicalisation programme prisoners were offered special religious sessions (*dawrat*) on the crucial and contested topics of *takfir*, *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*, jihad, the spilling of innocent blood, the ruler and the community (*al-imama wa-l-jama'a*), and allegiance (*bay'a*) and obedience (*ta'a*) to the (wrong) leaders. The whole course covered twenty sessions and lasted seven weeks.⁷⁶ Total ideological deprogramming, called revision (*muraja'a*) of radical ideas, is regarded as a precondition for taking part in the subsequent social-reintegration stages of the programme,⁷⁷ which includes courses on subjects such as law, culture, psychology, sport and medicine.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Shaykh Ali Bin Shai'a al-Nafisa combines a religious education with training in security and law. He graduated from the Faculty of Shari'a in 1974, was appointed a member of the rehab programme of the Ministry of Interior and obtained a MA in security and law ten years later. See interview with Shaykh 'Ali Bin Sha'i al-Nafisa in al-'Aqil, *Al-Irhab afat al-'asr*, pp. 301–2.

⁷⁵ For a revealing interview with Ali Shai'a al-Nafisa in *al-Riyadh*, 9 December 2005, available at [<http://www.alriyadh.com/2005/12/09/article113922.html>] [Last accessed 30 August 2009].

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Asma' Al-Muhammad, '*Fi-Khidam al-intiqadat 'ilamiyya li-l-lijan al-munasiba: al-takfiriyyun fi sujun al-Sa'udiyya yabda'una fi-tadwin muraja'atibim*' [In the sea of media critique of the Committees of Advice: Takfiris in prison are starting to write down their revisions], al-Arabiyya.net, 20 June 2007, available at [<http://www.alarabiyya.net/articles/2007/06/20/35699.html>] [Last accessed 12 September 2009]; and Turki al-Suhayl, '*Dahaya da'awi al-jihad fi-l-'Iraq*' (part 4), *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 21 July 2007, available at [<http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?issueno=10462&article=428975>] [Last accessed 18 September 2009].

⁷⁸ al-Suhayl, '*Dahaya da'awi al-jihad fi-l-'Iraq*'.

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The ultimate goal of the programme, according to Shaykh 'Ali al-Nafisa, is reconversion and 'repentance and a return to God'. Once the prisoners have understood that they had been led astray, he explained that 'some youth wept tears of remorse [...], describing themselves as if they were half drunk or fools who had missed the manifest truth that the counselling *shaykhs* had given to them'. The expression 'breaking down in sobs', seems to suggest that '*ulama* and psychologists work together to bring about a catharsis of the prisoner through a combination of religious doctrine and psychological techniques'.⁷⁹

How successful this programme has been is disputed. By February 2008, we are told, some 3200 prisoners in total had gone through the programme, and 5000 sessions had been held.⁸⁰ In 2007 'Ali al-Nafisa stated that 80–90 per cent of the prisoners had repented.⁸¹ However, although the percentages might differ, everyone agrees that the hard-core members of radical groups are beyond the reach of the programme. The reasons are not hard to discern. Ideologues like Yusuf al-'Uyayri, the first leader of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, would not be impressed by this approach. To him, the rulers are corrupt and unable to defend Islam, like the '*ulama*, who have betrayed the pure forms of *tawhid* by toning down jihad and *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* and propagating an effeminate *akhlaq* of defeatism. He believes that the urgency of the moment calls for self-sacrifice and total war. In place of their '*aqida* and *manhaj* of moderation and the median way, he poses to follow a praxis in which the harsh reality of a transnational jihad determines whether one is a Muslim or not. Eventually, this leads to a completely different definition of the 'victorious sect'.⁸²

Scepticism of the effectiveness of the programme has been voiced by different sources. For instance, the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Siyasi* argued, after the escape of two prisoners, that the rehabilitation programme is worthless because the members of the Advisory Committee basically share the same ideas as the extremists; they differ only in the timing and circumstances of action and are therefore

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Uthman Bin Salih al-'Amir, '*al-Hibr al-akhbar*' [Green ink], 13 April 2008, available at [<http://www.hyil.com/vb/archiev/index.php/t-123668.html>] [Last accessed 14 September, no longer available].

⁸¹ al-Muhammad, '*Fi-Khadm al-intiqadat 'ilamiyya li-l-Lijan al-Munasiha al-takfiriyyun fi sujun al-Sa'udiyya yabda'una fi-tadwin muraja 'atihim*', al-Arabiyya.net 20 June 2007.

⁸² See, for instance, Roel Meijer, 'Yusuf al-Uyairi and the Making of a Revolutionary Salafi Praxis', *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 47 nos. 3–4 (2007), pp. 422–459.

unable to present an 'enlightened alternative'.⁸³ Shi'as I met in Qatif in February 2010 inferred from the VIP-treatment prisoners received in the half-way houses that the authorities basically regarded them as brothers rather than enemies.⁸⁴

Intellectual Security

The Intellectual Security (*al-Aman al-Fikri*) programme, as the word indicates, derives from the same discourse of the Committee of Advice. It also adopts the terminology of the religious psychology of waging war against 'malicious' and 'envious' people. In contrast to the Advisory Committee, however, it is a preventive programme for the general public. It aims to 'raise consciousness' (*taw'iyya*) and present 'correct arguments' to counter extremism.⁸⁵ It is also more direct in that it combines Islam and security explicitly. A prominent cleric, Shaykh Salih Bin Fawzan al-Fawzan, takes this argument one step further by stating that Islam is not only stability (*istiqrar*) but it is also 'the religion of belief and security (*aman*)'.⁸⁶

The Intellectual Security campaign started most probably in 2007. It is part of a religious campaign to protect culture and society from threats.⁸⁷ Some even speak of 'creating a blockade' against deviant thought.⁸⁸ The Intellectual

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⁸³ Bandar Sulayman, '*Lajna al-Munasiba al-irhabiyyin fi-l-Sa'udiyya bi-haja al-munasihaba'd ittiham adha' bi-him bi nasr al-tatarruf*' [The Committee of Advice of the terrorists in Saudi Arabia needs advice itself after the accusation of its members spreading extremism], *al-Siyasi*, 31 January 2009, available at [<http://www.alssi-yasi.com/?browser=view&EgyxpID=16758>] [Last accessed 12 January 2010].

⁸⁴ Interviews with several anonymous Shi'i representatives in February 2010.

⁸⁵ 'Amir al-Nayif, '*Yad'u al-a'ima wa-l-khutaba' ila al-taw'iyya bi-l-Aman al-Fikri*' [Prince Nayef calls the imams and preachers to raise awareness [of the dangers of terrorism] by means of intellectual security], *al-Watan*, 10 May 2010, available at [http://www.alwatan.com.sa/Local/News_Detail.aspx?ArticleID=1586&CategoryID=5].

⁸⁶ Cited in al-'Aqil, *al-Irhab afat al-'asr*, p. 76. The *mufti* made the same remark, stating that Islam cannot support terrorism because it 'protects security (*aman*) of society, defends the rights of individuals and has all kinds of laws regarding security (*aman*), justice (*adl*) and stability (*istiqrar*)', cited in Aba al-Khayl, *Mawqif al-mamlaka*, p. 525. At the same time jihadis such as Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abu Baseer al-Tartusi often quote *suras* discussing the evil intentions of Christians and Jews such as Sura 2:120 and 127, 4:89 and 3:119.

⁸⁷ 'Ali al-Khashiban, '*al-Thaqafa al-hakima wa-marhala al-'inaya al-fikriyya*' [The ruling culture and the stage of interest in thought], *al-Watan*, 13 April 2007, available at [<http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/writerdetail.asp?issueno=2387&id=79&Rname=34>].

⁸⁸ Qaynayn Abdallah al-Ghamidi, '*al-Aman al-fikri wa-tullab wa-talabat*' [Intellectual

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Security campaign is focussed especially on those sites in society where the main threat, youth, can radicalise (families, schools, universities) and is intended to educate parents, teachers, university professors, *imams* of mosques, policemen and the military to detect the first symptoms of radicalisation. The purpose is a return of obedience to the ruler according to the principles of *wali al-amr*, since youth are regarded the first in line for 'immunization (*tahsin*) of people against deviant thoughts'.⁸⁹

For instance, on 15 May 2007 Ministry of Education organised a week-long session of lectures on the subject of 'security and the nation' for 166 secondary schools around Riyadh and schools belonging to the teachers' training institute, as well as meetings with one hundred of the schools. The dean of the Teachers' College, Dr 'Ali al-'Afnan, organised a fifth session on *al-Aman al-Fikri* with teachers.⁹⁰ In August of that year a seminar was organised by the Committee Commanding Good and Preventing Wrong (religious police) of al-'Asir on the role of the '*ulama* and *du'a* in strengthening the roots of intellectual security and the role of apprentices in countering ideas 'which weaken the role of the family, undermine the parents, and spread forbidden deeds (*mankurat*) and ideas of *takfir* and revolt against the ruler'.⁹¹ The programme also seeks to limit the chaos caused by the proliferation of *fatwas*: in May 2010, a conference was held for 700 mosque preachers who were asked to limit their *fatwas* and refer those who seek guidance to the 'people of knowledge'. The Friday preachers were told that they have an important role in implanting the notion of *wasatiyya* and pointing out the dangers of *takfir*.⁹² 'Abd al-Rahman al-Hadlaq stated that attention to intellectual security was important for teachers and supervisors in the massive Qur'an memorisation sessions so that they

Security and Male and Female Students], *al-Watan*, 20 May 2009, available at [<http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/writerdetail.asp?issueno=3155&id=11494&Rname=319>] [Last accessed 9 September 2009].

⁸⁹ *al-Jazira* 16–8–2009 No. 13471 available at [<http://www.al-jazirah.com/156795/ln4d.htm>] [no longer accessible].

⁹⁰ *al-Watan*, 15 May 2007.

⁹¹ Hamza Qablan al-Mazini, 'Abhath "an 'al-Shamagh"', *al-Watan*, 9 August 2007, available at [<http://www.alwatan.com.sa/new/writerdetail.asp?issueno=2505&id=1674>] [no longer accessible].

⁹² 'Nadwa al-aman al-dini wa-l-fikri tutalibu al-khutaba' bi-l-turayyith fi 'ifta' al-musalin' [Seminar of religious and intellectual security asks preachers to act prudently in giving *fatwas*], *al-Hayat*, 14 May 2010, available at [<http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/140846>].

could detect early signs of extremism.⁹³ That the programme is also directed against radical *imams* is clear from the warning of the undersecretary of Islamic Affairs, who stated that *imams* who did not moderate their campaigns against journalists could be fired.⁹⁴

Another difference is that the Intellectual Security campaign also has a stronger 'scientific' component. Although the *'ulama* still play a crucial role in the campaign and Prince Nayef constantly refers to them as 'the vanguard in the anti-terrorist struggle',⁹⁵ a third party is involved in this phase of the war against deviation, namely the universities who try to reinvigorate the campaign and give it international respectability. The close involvement of the state is apparent from the endowment of the Prince Nayef Chair of Intellectual Security Studies in May 2008 at the al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University with the aim of supervising this project.⁹⁶ Since its foundation, the institute has organised a host of seminars on intellectual security,⁹⁷ and as a highpoint it organised a three-day national conference on intellectual security in May 2009. In an interview, the chair, Dr Khalid Bin Mansur al-Daris, reiterated the common themes of the doctrine of *ghuluw*. The scientific content however does not consist in analysing violence in an objective detached manner but instead in applying a security plan to all sections of life, especially schooling, in order that the student eventually walks 'the straight path'.⁹⁸ A glance at the three-day programme of the conference in May shows that papers with religious topics

⁹³ See *al-Hayat*, 26 April 2010, available at [<http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/134553>].

⁹⁴ See the warning of the undersecretary of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, *al-Hayat*, 11 April 2010, available at [<http://www.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/129322>].

⁹⁵ 'A person whose *'aqida* has been shocked, like in a earthquake, and his thought deviated can be exposed to currents with false thoughts that will lead him to destruction and loss, and expose his life and that of his society to danger'. See [<http://www.sahab.net/forums/showthread.php?t=363276>].

⁹⁶ The discourse of Nayef also remains largely religious. In a speech on 30 March 2009 he called upon *'ulama*, *shaykhs* and *ahl al-fikr wa-l-ra'y* (people of thought and opinions) to participate in the opposition against [extremism].

⁹⁷ That the chair is not based on secular research on terrorism is clear from the speech that Dr Salih Hamid, member of the Majlis al-Shura, gave, entitled, '*al-Aman al-Fikri fi dbu' maqasid al-shari'a*' [Intellectual Security in the light of the goals of the *Shari'a*]. The *mufti* Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abdalla al-Shaykh, also participated in the seminars.

⁹⁸ Lengthy interview with professor Khalid Bin Mansur al-Daris, available at [http://www.ksu.edu.sa/sites/KSUArabic/UMessage/Archive/960/dialogue/Pages/Main_T3.aspx] [no date].

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dominated most sessions, which were chaired by the highest religious dignitaries of the Kingdom. The panels had titles like 'Tactics in Persuasion', 'The Qur'an and Intellectual Security', 'Finding Signs of Extremism Among Sons' and 'The Role of the Family in Supporting Security Thinking of Sons'.

The debate on Intellectual Security

The response to the campaigns in local newspapers shows the widespread scepticism about their effectiveness. These responses are important for they show that there are other alternatives available in Saudi Arabia than the vicious circle of competition for religious 'purity'. The more liberal discourse of the Saudi newspapers, almost all of them owned by liberal princes, is critical of the religious content of the rehabilitation programmes. They are the only rational sources of resistance against the discourse of mental and social control which the 'intellectual security' programme implies. The debate in newspapers touches on such crucial issues as the role of religion in society, state policy or, even bolder, freedom of thought.

Some authors criticise the basic weakness of the programmes by pointing out that their religious approach to terrorism and violence prevents institutions from making a more objective analysis of the background of the problem. The Advisory Committees, according to some authors, do not have a clear idea of the root causes, ideology and motives, or social background of the extremists and simply assume that they are religious deviationists. For instance, they exaggerate the role of the internet and therefore the importance of ideas.⁹⁹ Liberal authors question the role that religion can play in combating terrorism.¹⁰⁰

A few present alternatives. One author suggested that a more open culture should be promoted instead of enhancing the hold of religion over people's lives. Another believed that the lack of freedom rather than the lack of control of thought is the source of terrorism.¹⁰¹ Likewise, a commonly-held cri-

⁹⁹ 'Abdalla Nasir al-Fawzan, 'Istintaj Lajna al-Munasihah ghayr daqiq' [The results of the Committee of Advice are unclear], *al-Watan*, 5 December 2007.

¹⁰⁰ Muhammad Ahmad al-Rashid, 'al-Tatarruf...mulahazat...iqtirabat' (Extremism, remarks, proposals), *al-Watan*, 23 August 2009, available at [<http://www.alwatan.com.sa/NEWS/writerdetail.asp?issueno=3250&id=13836&Rname=139>] [Last accessed 10 January 2010]; see also Muhammad 'Awda Al-'Anzi, 'Munasihat laysat intisaran li-dhat bi-qadr ma hiyya qadiya wujud wa-kiyan wa-watan' [Advices are not in themselves the solution], *al-Watan*, 7 July 2007, available at [<http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/ad2.asp?issueno=2472&id=531>].

¹⁰¹ Khalid al-Ghanami, 'Hurriyya al-ta'bir ka-l-shart li-l-aman al-fikri' [Freedom of expression as condition for intellectual security], *al-Watan*, 21 May 2009, available

tique is directed not to the common religious fear of diversity (*ikhtilaf*) but instead to the uniformity of thought (*ahadiyya al-ray'*) that prevails in Saudi Arabia. This argument holds that the exclusion (*al-iqsa'*) of divergent opinions is the root cause of extremism and terrorism. Turning the earlier concept of the five basic principles of life around, this particular author stated that 'whatever the definition of intellectual security—and nobody is going to find it—it will hamper the right of persons to express their opinion and thoughts without fear while this belongs to one of the five basic conditions (*darurat*) of human life, protection of reason (*hafz al-'aql*)'. Defending the basic liberal principle of liberty, according to this writer, intellectual security can only derive from 'the absolute freedom of expression of ideas'.¹⁰² Another commonly held liberal critique is that extremism is ingrained in Saudi society and that it has taken over the educational system, penetrated the domestic environment and entered even the bedroom.¹⁰³ Unless the educational system is changed and greater leeway is given to discussion, tolerance, freedom, humanism and openness towards the rest of the world, the term *al-aman al-fikri* will not help, one writer argued.¹⁰⁴ Another important critique is reserved for the total lack of attention to the problems of the young. According to this author, contemporary Saudi society must respond in a totally new way to the problems of youth if it wants to prevent extremism and not just point out how they deviate from the straight path.¹⁰⁵ Some, mostly non-Saudis like the Egyptian commentator Fahmi Huwaidi, mock the whole notion of intellectual security because they believe that terrorism has its roots in social problems.¹⁰⁶

at available at [<http://www.alwatan.com.sa/NEWS/writerdetail.asp?issueno=3156&id=11526&Rname=53>].

¹⁰² Muhammad al-Sahimi, '*Ma huwa al-aman al-fikri?*' [What is intellectual security?], *al-Watan*, 20 May 2009, available at [<http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/writerdetail.asp?issueno=3155&id=11505&Rname=134>].

¹⁰³ Shtewi al-Ghaythi, '*al-Aman al-fikri: Mas'ala al-usul al-thaqafa'* [Intellectual security: an issue of cultural principles], *al-Watan*, 6 February 2009, available at [<http://www.alwatan.com.sa/NEWS/WriterPrinting.asp?issueno=3052&id=9386>].

¹⁰⁴ Shtawi al-Ghaithi, '*al-Aman al-fikri wa-tajdid al-khatab al-dini*' [Intellectual security and the renewal of religious discourse], *al-Watan*, 20 May 2009, available at [<http://www.alwatan.com.sa/news/writerdetail.asp?issueno=3157&id=11545&Rname=33>].

¹⁰⁵ Shtawi al-Ghaythi, '*al-Ajyal al-jadida wa-l-qiyam al-mutahawwala*' [New generations and changing values], *al-Watan*, 24 July 2009, available at [<http://www.alwatan.com.sa/NEWS/writerdetail.asp?issueno=3220&id=13126&Rname=33>].

¹⁰⁶ Fahmi Huwaidi, '*Bid'a wa-l-aman al-fikri*' [Innovation and intellectual security],

Conclusion

This chapter has focussed on the religious dimension of the deradicalisation process to the exclusion of the social reintegration part of the programme, which probably accounts for its partial success. From the above it is apparent that the Saudi rehabilitation programme is not just a battle of ideas but is also, primarily, part of a long battle to contain the 'extremist' side of the Wahhabi mission and as such is a religious battle. The problematic part of this discourse is that however much the authorities prefer to label it as passions, ignorance and deviation, its extremist forms derive in large measure from Wahhabism itself. The establishment and the radicals share the majority of their ideas and only differ on such awkward concepts and practices as *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*, *takfir* and *jihad*, although radicals can swerve in a completely new direction once they have taken the 'road of deviation'. It seems that the authorities are also aware of this fact. Their attempts to introduce new terms associated with the median way (*wasatiyya*) are a means of creating a softer, more tolerant form of official Islam. Recent new appointments in the religious hierarchy demonstrate that the state is aware that the old guard and unregenerated Wahhabism do little to enhance Saudi standing abroad and in fact form a danger to security.¹⁰⁷ Another indication that the state is trying to reform religious discourse is its attempts to 'immunise' the passions (*ahwa*) that it claims to be at the heart of extremist thought and behaviour through a focus on correct attitudes and morals (*akhlaq*). At the same time, it is clear that the all-important Minister of the Interior Prince Nayef still upholds the former alliance between the family of the Sauds and the *'ulama* and believes in the latter's task of defending Saudi society and state against threats labelled as 'deviation'. Official discourse therefore remains ambiguous and not convincingly decontested in any way. The Saudi anti-terrorism discourse is therefore not a very convincing one. While official discourse cannot reach the ideologically motivated jihadis who already have their own answer to a discredited discourse of passions, ignorance and deviation, the Saudi liberal discourse of the freedom of speech and tolerance is barely able to make inroads into a society that has so long been dominated by a conservative, and in many ways deeply irrational, form of Wahhabism.

31 May 2009, available at [http://www.fahmyhoweidy.blogspot.com/2009/05/blog-post_31.html].

¹⁰⁷ See Meijer, 'Reform in Saudi Arabia'.