SAUDI SOCIETY AND THE STATE: IDEATIONAL AND MATERIAL BASIS

Muharrem Hilmi Özev

Abstract: This article considers religious, social, political, and economic dimensions of the Saudi-Wahhabi state imagination. Since the inception, the Saudi state has relied on two main pillars: the monarchy and Wahhabism, which have been in a symbiotic relationship. In time, the state imagination in Saudi Arabia has been determined and reconstructed by factors like Wahhabism, monarchism, rentierism, internal and international political and economic obligations, and modernization efforts imposed by being a "nation state." Those factors made Saudi Arabia a sui generis state. The legitimacy of the monarchy has been ensured through tribalism and, on a larger scale, religion. Foreign aid, booties, oil revenues, and, on a rather insignificant scale, tax revenues have created a material infrastructure to build citizenship.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, state/nation building, monarchism, Wahhabism, tribalism, oil money, rentier state

Introduction: Historical and Ideational Background

The fact that religion consists of rhetoric and actions that are believed to be of divine origin, it is natural that an affiliate of any faith is on the move to protect unique peculiarities of the original message. In this context, the concept of Salaf Al Saleheen is of a great significance in the eyes of almost all Muslims.

Lexically, Salaf means origin and antecedents. It is the name of the first three Islamic generations, Al-Sahabah, Al Tabi'in, and Taba Al Tabi'in. The term Salafism (or Salafiyya), on the other hand, was not constructed as a concept or slogan, which is believed to have stood for a broad movement of Islamic modernism and ambiguously used to refer Wahhabism, until the early twentieth century.[1] Nevertheless, it is possible to define a Salafist trend through some features and to trace its historical roots.

As Koca[2] points out, the Salafis argued that belief and action are parts of an indivisible whole; the revelation is superior to the reasoning, theological, philosophical, and mystical thought and Al Ra'y (expression of autonomous thought

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and opinion in religious matters) must be prohibited; the Quran and the Sunnah (the way the Prophet conducted himself) are religious evidences of equal status; views and practices of the first generations of Islam (Salaf) constitute binding religious evidences; and the Caliphate exclusively belongs to Quraysh till doomsday. Salafists regard those who do not accept these principles as heretics, and, therefore, their lives and property are halal (sanctioned to be taken).

The Salafi movements have gained strength at times of increasing external political or cultural challenges, such as Greek philosophy, Mongolian invasions, and modern Western culture. Salafism became an active movement under the leadership of scholars like Ahmad b. Hanbal and Ibn Hazm, and it has developed a theoretical framework through the thoughts of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim al Jazviyya. In addition to these scholars, Muhammad Bin Abd al-Wahhab was affected by the Kadızadeliler movement, which was influential in Istanbul, Damascus, and Cairo.[3] In time, according to Yörükan, Wahhabis put forward their own principles and tenets, which were far away from ibn Taymiyyah especially in their puritanical tenets and their complete denial of the other Sunni schools.[4] In the final analysis, Wahhabism is the name given to the religious current that emerged in the Arabian Peninsula, which has been influential in the entire Islamic world through the systematic use of oil revenues since the second half of the twentieth century.[5]

The concept of Wahhabi and Wahhabism has negative connotations among a certain group of believers. Those who embrace Wahhabism define themselves as those who declare the oneness of God ("Ahl al-Tawhid" or "Muwahhidun"). This definition, however, was put forward to blame all the other Muslims with being polytheists (mushrikun).[6] Indeed, Muhammad Bin Abd al-Wahhab regarded most of the Muslim sects not only as heretics but also outside the Islamic circle.[7] He interprets the hadith "Islam began as a something *strange* (gharib) and it *will return* to being *strange*, so blessed are the strangers"[8] as to explain the loneliness of his bounds within the Islamic society.[9] Commins argues that the distinction between Wahhabism and the other Muslims is too deep to be compared with the Catholic-Protestant dissociation.[10] Therefore, it is problematic to evaluate Salafism and Wahhabism under the Sunni umbrella. However, to my mind, there are serious differences between the religious texts of Islam and Christianity. The peculiarities of the Islamic texts have prevented the divisions between Wahhabism and other Sunni denominations from being so deep as in the case of Christian denominations.

It is known that Saudi Arabia has taken a number of measures to protect and improve Wahhabism within the country and over the Islamic world and to use it as a tool of soft power. The Saudi-based organizations, such as Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami,[11] have engaged in activities throughout the Islamic world. In 1971, the

Permanent Committee for Islamic Research and Issuing Fatwas was created against established fatwa authorities in the Islamic world like al-Azhar.[12] Saudi Arabia gained a non-negligible soft power capacity in the entire Islamic world through synthesizing the expressive power of the Arabic language, the symbolic power of the sacred spaces (Mecca and Medina), the economic power of oil revenues and the influence of Wahhabi activism while remaining comfortably in harmony with the Western world.

One of the issues distinguishing Wahhabism from general Sunni understanding is its specific "ijtihad" approach. To deny centuries-old acquisitions of Islamic history, Wahhabis negate the tradition (taqlid), reproducing or reusing the ideas and the deeds of pioneer Islamic scholars like Abu Hanifah, Shafi'i, etc.

> Ibn Abd al-Wahhab questioned the dependence of ordinary Muslims on the Ulama in understanding the primary sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the hadith. Every Muslim male and female should have read the Qur'an and the hadith on his/her own. This call in fact questioned the whole reason behind the existence of the Ulama in Muslim societies.[13]

On the other hand, according to Wahhabism, the Quran and the Sunnah should be understood and interpreted strictly in accordance with the verbal meaning of the texts. Strictly attached to this framework, everyone can make ijtihad, but as Yörükan[14] asserts, their concept of ijtihad is very narrow, limited to ideas based only on the verbal (zahir) meaning of the Quranic verses and the Hadiths (the sayings of the Prophet). The comparison (qiyas) is not one of the foundations of the religion. The faith is composed of affirmation by heart, verification by word, and good deeds. For this reason, those who do not fulfill the tasks foreseen by Islam cannot be considered believers.[15] As Commins points out, this approach strengthens the autonomy of the clerics vis-à-vis the administrations.[16] However, in practice, Wahhabism has just been an instrument for the rulers. Since its inception, "a Wahhabi monolithic religious order has been imposed on Saudi society from above."[17] This, in my opinion, creates a Shiite or Catholicism-like clergy, which confines the religion within the state's domain and destroys civil society.

The particular emphasis on Wahhabi understanding in Saudi Arabia has deepened the distinction between the Arabian Peninsula and the Islamic world as a whole. This distinction was used as a very effective tool, especially in the process of separating Arabian lands from the Ottoman Empire, and subsequently as an instrument to explain why Saudi Arabia is different from the other Islamic states or societies, in order to provide legitimacy both in domestic and international politics.

During the 1910s and 1920s, the Ikhwan movement forced Ibn Saud to fight against the British protectorates in the Gulf and opposed the developing of

relations with non-Muslims. Eventually, Ibn Saud waged a war against them with an army of loyal tribes and urbanites in 1929.[18] The Ikhwan liquidation constituted the first step to ensure the political superiority of the Saudi dynasty over the religious institutions. In the 1950s and 1960s, more people from non-clerical sections of the society have been appointed to the state ranks and the religious institutions were put clearly under the control of the political leadership, but, concurrently, they were empowered to conduct morality policing and media supervision. In this frame, there has even been not a single event that the Wahhabi scholars have opposed to the basic elements of the regime[19] because they know that they may lose their existing position forever in case of any regime or systemic change.

Since the 1960s, efforts to spread the Wahhabi creed among other Muslims have intensified, which was probably supported by the United States, as these overlapped with the US's global policies.[20] Since then, Wahhabi scholars have tried to use a more nuanced language to ensure that Wahhabism can be more easily accepted by other Muslims. In the 1970s, "conservative" and "innovative" wings among Wahhabi scholars emerged.[21] After 1991, as a result of deepening reliance on Western protection and socioeconomic problems, the tension between Wahhabi purists and the dynasty escalated.[22] As a result, the influence of Wahhabism on the structure of Saudi politics and society was determined not only by internal conditions such as the principle that the monopoly of using legitimate violence belongs to the state, but also by international systemic conditions.

Social Structure and Political Legitimacy

Historically, according to Bodur, some factors have made it easier for Wahhabism to spread in a certain area. First, Salafi movements began to spread in the region by acquiring new aspects with the leadership of Ibn Taymiyyah. Second, increased activities of Western merchants and British foreign aid made it possible to collect Bedouins in villages and towns. Third, religion had a decisive influence not only on peripheral opposition movements but also on all areas of life.[23] Once established, the state had sustainable financial resources thanks to the incomes generated from the influx in neighboring tribes and countries and conquests. Since the late 1930s, revenues from trade, booties, and foreign aid during the foundational period have been overtaken by oil revenues.

In time, Wahhabi ideology had an unquestionable role in constructing Saudi society, establishing political unity and a strong army, and determining Saudi Arabia's political boundaries and its international relations. In that vein, Wahhabi clerics became effective in the administrative stages of law making, judiciary, law enforcing, creating public opinion, public diplomacy, culture, tourism, finance, media control, etc.[24]

Thanks to the oil revenues, Saudi Arabia has been able to put the clergy as well as the other sections of the society on salaries. This has affected the vast majority of clerics to have a conformist mind and to influence the qualities of political opposition movements in the successive periods. As a striking example, Abdul-Aziz bin Baz, who gave a fatwa (a religious dispensation), which permits the entrance of foreign soldiers into the Saudi territories during the Gulf War, was appointed to the office of Chief Mufti in 1993, which had been empty since 1969. Moreover, the high-level religious bureaucracy in Saudi Arabia endorsed and supported the decisions taken by the government on important political issues, such as women's education, use of technical devices (radio, TV, etc.), monarchical succession (for example, king Faysal after king Saud in 1964), eliminating the fanatics occupying the Kaaba, and cooperation with Western countries during the 1991 Gulf War.[25]

During the establishment stages of the state, financial assistance by the United Kingdom and, subsequently, by the US alleviated the need for collecting taxes from the tribes, which made the latter grateful to the dynasty. Sometimes the British army intervened against tribes who opposed the central authority, refrained from paying taxes and did not recognize the police and judicial authorities.[26] Sometimes British officials were assigned to important offices such as police and finance, and some other times civil servants who were overly independent or inadequate were dismissed by British authorities.[27] These efforts did not completely end tribal and religious ties but changed the balance between tribes and religious groups, and the central authority in favor of the latter. In the following periods, tribal leaders and clergy were appointed to state posts and became part of the central government.

In time, from a sociological standpoint, Wahhabism transformed and united the Bedouin tribes, and it functioned as the basic glue in the formation of the "Saudi society." By virtue of Wahhabi ideology, Bedouins were settled in villages and towns and transformed into "Saudi citizens" and a society that obeyed the central authority. The Saudis regard themselves as the saviors of the Tawhid doctrine and perceived themselves as members of a society different from and superior to the other Muslims in general and the Arab world in particular. It is unconvincingly argued that the Arabs had a tradition of accusing others, even if they were Muslims, of blasphemy (Takfeer) and that the tradition originated in the tribal tradition.[28] In fact, the Wahhabi principles and attitudes paved the way for the takfeer issue and made it easy for them to accuse other Muslims of blasphemy.

Encouraging asceticism and austerity, Wahhabism might have served to prevent public accusations regarding regime legitimacy during the settlement processes of the Bedouins in towns. Puritanism has led the Saudis to become a formal, strictly normative and intolerant society. As İşcan says, "Thanks to this kind of

creed, it was possible for the Ikhwan movement to help the Saud family to fight for independence against the outsiders, and to have the required legitimacy for the unity of the Saudi nation."[29]

The Saudi monarchy has come a long way, initially through foreign aid, trade revenues, booties, and, later on, oil revenues, in centralizing power, monopolizing the use of violence and creating a citizen mass composed of homogeneous individuals. Furthermore, it managed to attach a unique "citizen" identity to the members of the tribes and religious groups. Still, when compared with Western countries, it has been problematic for Saudi Arabia to develop a full-fledged citizenship identity because, as Hinnebusch states, regional ideologies as nationalism and Islamism relate far beyond the borders of these countries.[30] Apart from the Shiite-Sunni split, it is not possible to speak about sectarian divisions to help Middle Eastern countries create a unique citizenship identity. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia has gone a long way in building citizenship and used Wahhabism and oil revenues effectively to this end.

During the Cold War, the interplay between the two blocs and regional developments in the Middle East have strongly affected the domestic political and sociological structures in Saudi Arabia. For example, Muslim Brotherhood (MB) presence was felt in Saudi Arabia in the 1950s and 1960s, when Egyptian president Nasser exiled a great number of its members. However, as Heikal[31] states, the Saudi authorities were extremely cautious and did not allow them to penetrate into the core of the Saudi society. Nevertheless, according to Kepel,[32] Saudi administrators attached great importance to and took benefit of the MB members during the heyday of the Cold War. Meanwhile, Nasser was trying to promote al-Azhar as an international university to narrate Islam as a religion compatible with socialism. In reaction, Saudi Arabia established the Rabitat organization in 1962, and MB members in Saudi Arabia, assigned to the Rabitat, uttered in every turn that Communism and Socialism were contrary to Islam. Moreover, they became the main instrumental group in supporting the jihad in Afghanistan and developed strong arguments against Khomeini.[33]

With the end of the Cold War, all the Arab and Western countries began to see the MB organization as a threat, as it had been influential beyond expectation. In the aftermath of the jihad in Afghanistan, the MB, accused of involvement in politics, was isolated from the Saudi society and politics. In time, Saudi Arabia has faced such allegations as supporting terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda and ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) because the vast majority of those who committed the September Eleventh attacks were Saudi citizens. The Saudi regime argued that those movements were "Qutbis."[34]

In 1990, the Saudi administration was stunned by the reactions raised in all parts of the Islamic world, which accused Saudi Arabia of inviting foreign troops to the

Gulf region. Thus, it decided to cut its support to such organizations as the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front. During the Gulf War, the Gulf States were in favor of countries like Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria, who saw Islamic movements as a regional threat. Meanwhile, in a petition submitted to the Saudi King by some sectors of the society, the Saudi administration was severely criticized due to cutting support to some Islamic groups abroad.[35] In this context, some commentators argue that the "Islamic" language in the Gulf states have created legitimacy crises for these countries in the face of ideologies advocating the unity of the Islamic Ummah.[36]

Wahhabism has played an important role in constructing the Saudi state and shaping its social structure. It had also begun to influence the entire Islamic world since the 1960s claiming that it was the sole "righteous" sect that the whole Islamic world had to accept. In this regard, it can be argued that Wahhabism depended on the existence of Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia to tell Muslims that it carried the right understanding of Islam, which had originated in the land of Mecca and Medina. Oil revenues constituted the main material basis to put that kind of thought into practice. However, becoming so effective in the global arena, Wahhabism has lost quality in many ways. Above all, the doctrine, which had been relatively autonomous until then, has become more dependent on the Saudi government. As political dissatisfaction within the kingdom increased, Wahhabism's credibility in the public eye eroded as an institution supporting the regime. Besides, as Vatikiotis[37] points out, as foreign policy pursued by Riyadh necessitates, Wahhabis' allegiance to other Islamists, who defend very different tenets from Wahhabism, in the global arena led the Saudis to minimize the emphasis on Wahhabism. However, the fact that Wahhabism is presented as the only legitimate sect in Islam even though it cannot be defended on the intellectual and universal level seems to constitute a serious ground for a crisis in the future of the Wahhabi ideology. Moreover, the Arab identity of Saudi Arabia constitutes a weakness in the face of Arab nationalism, which envisages that all Arabs should act together under a single political roof. In this regard, the tensions, if not crises, caused by identity issues become permanent.

Regarding the interaction between the Wahhabi identity and the construction of the Saudi borders, any change at the existing borders in the region can trigger many problems and it can affect the regional, if not the entire, international system. It can, therefore, be assumed that Wahhabi (or Salafi in general) ideology is facing great challenges and that serious breaks have already been waiting at the door. Aside from probable changes in the concerns of global powers about their interests in the Middle East, it is very difficult to resolve the disputes between Saudi Arabia's internal identities such as tribalism, monarchism, and Wahhabism, and outward looking identities such as modernism, being a member of the "free market" economies, a Western-world or Arab-world ally.

Probable problems arising from this inconsistency have thus far been assuaged by the rentier state practices. Rentierism "is […] an economy where the creation of wealth is centered [on external rent, received mostly by the government and] around a small fraction of the society; the rest of the society is only engaged in the distribution and utilization of this wealth."[38] Saudi Arabia has used foreign aid and, especially after the 1970s, oil revenues to legitimize the regime, through having a balanced government budget, providing free public services like education and health care and incorporating diverse sections of the society into the political system, which complicates the nation building endeavors and creates dependency in international/global relations.[39] It is conceivable, therefore, that there can be serious and political and social breakdowns and crises in Saudi Arabia in the near future due to reasons such as a population increase and falling oil prices.

If citizens pay low tax or no tax at all, military service cannot be mobilized by nationalist or patriotic sentiments. Saudi Arabia, governed by an Islamic monarchy and being the only country that the state and the citizens have named after the ruling family (the House of Saud), cannot use modern discourses such as patriotism and nationalism to form national troops. On the other hand, the Saudi government is afraid of the recurrence of the Ikhwan experience due to the Wahhabi jihadist discourse because national conscription could lead Wahhabi-minded citizens single-handedly to decide who the enemy of the army is and participate in foreign policy making. For these reasons, Saudi Arabia does not have the opportunity to fully mobilize its own citizens for its own defense. Its relatively small population further complicates the situation, making Saudi Arabia more vulnerable to outside intervention.

The Saudi regime has resorted to using the tribal card to stand against the demands of Islamic groups and Wahhabism to fuse tribes into a single Saudi citizenship and against socialist and nationalist movements. In the 1980s, the Iranian Revolution stimulated radical Islamism and Shiites in Saudi Arabia. The Iranian revolutionary discourse was against the presence of both the USSR and the US in Afghanistan and in the Gulf States, which constitutes complex challenges for the Gulf countries.

In the 1980s, Iraq tried to use Arab nationalism as a tool in its struggle with Iran. Although Saudi Arabia is a major center for the symbols of the Arab world, its legitimacy is based on religion and tribalism, not Arab nationalism. The Gulf States have sought to build a regional "Gulf" identity, which was one of the most important reasons for the establishment of the GCC, in order to reverse possible adverse effects of radical Islamist movements revived mostly by Iran or Arab nationalism revived by Iraq. In that regard, too, oil revenues are the source of prosperity and a material source of political legitimacy. Therefore, the social and political legitimacy perception would deteriorate if these incomes decrease.

Indeed, there was a considerable decrease in the oil revenues in the second half of the 1980s and the inconveniences became obvious with the submission of a number of petitions to the Saudi dynasty in the 1990s.

All of the efforts, like increasing state control on the media instruments, fusing tribal militia forces into a central army, state monopoly on education, etc., have been possible by oil revenues. As a consequence of collocating an abstract intellectual element, Wahhabi ideology, with a concrete material element, oil incomes, Saudi Arabia has not only succeeded in "nation" building efforts, but has also strengthened its grip on foreign policy by using the Salafi currents outside the country as a kind of diaspora. However, one should not assume that the capacity of the country has not been exploited, in one way or another, by major powers, for the country was under the US influence on a large scale, especially in terms of commercial, financial, military and foreign relations, and bureaucratic capacity.

The Saudi rulers often utter that the state is an "Islamic State" and the Constitution is the Quran,[40] reminding that the legitimacy basis of the state is religion.[41] The fact that two sacred places, Mecca and Medina, are located within the borders of Saudi Arabia is a functional symbol and a source of legitimacy, as well. Since the 1980s, the Saudi kings have been using the title of *the Custodian of the Two Sacred Spaces* (Khadim al-Harameyn al-Sharifain), which had been used by the Ottoman sultans since Yavuz (the Stern) Sultan Selim, against the Iranian accusations of the Kingdom not being an Islamic state.

As a base of legitimacy, Saudi Arabia uses complex and precarious discourses, which are too difficult to be aligned and, in the near future, may drive Saudi Arabia into an absolute isolation, within the Islamic sphere and against the non-Muslims. While Wahhabism problematizes relations with other Muslims, it suggests that relations with the People of the Book (Ahl Al-Kitab) can be established in a certain frame. This legitimized and paved the way for easy relations with Western countries, at least during initial phases of the Kingdom and the Cold War. As Evkuran states, deeming historical acquisitions of Islam as bid'ah provides Saudi Arabia with a more comfortable relationship with Western countries in political, economic, and military fields.[42] In the course of time, however, the Wahhabi claim of being the only faithful denomination of Islam has produced a discourse that requires jihad against all non-Muslims, which is currently being used by Al Qaida and ISIL. According to Hegghammer:

> … it has been much easier to mobilize Saudis for extreme pan-Islamist activism than revolutionary activism [against the Saudi regime] … because socio-cultural isolation make Saudi Islamists particularly hostile to non-Muslims[43] and the Saudi regime has pan-Islamism to divert challenges to its own [internal] legitimacy.[44]

In the Arab countries, political regimes are legitimized through one of two basic ideational sources: Islam or Arab nationalism. While the influence of Arab nationalism is more dominant in the republics like Egypt and Tunisia, the influence of religion is more forceful in the monarchical regimes. None of them, however, is completely immune from legitimizing the power of the religion or nationalism. Here, we ought to be reminded of pressures coming from modernization processes, based mainly on technological breakthroughs,[45] which create drastic legitimacy problems in both secular republics and religious monarchies.

Throughout history, Muslim masses have developed a frosty attitude toward politics because of traumatic consequences of the early battles such as Siffin, Jamal, and Karbala, which constitute the historical background for the Shiite political opposition and the Sunni focus on political stability. Hence, Sunni scholars have assumed only a secondary role in politics and fallen under the shadow of the rulers. We can add that the Khawariji[46] slogan "sovereignty belongs to no one but Allah" (40:12) has kept Salafi/Wahhabi currents away from the politics. Since the very beginning, however, the Wahhabi Ulama have attached great importance to be accepted as representatives of the state and carried out such tasks as collecting taxes and distributing justice. Still, Wahhabis, like the other Sunni denominations, have put considerable distance between themselves and politics.

In Wahhabism, political obedience belongs to God and, then, to his caliph on earth, or the head of the state. Saudi rulers formalize this principle with bay'a rituals.[47] At first glance, it can be argued that this principle is not much different from the general understanding of obedience in Sunnism. However, the Wahhabi concept of unity (Tawhid) and the monolithic interpretation of Shari'a principles mean that the obedience can only be directed to the Imam, head of the state, separating the Saudi society politically from other Muslim societies by certain lines. To my mind, such principles as the denial of intercession (shafa'ah) and nullity of Islamic foundations (Awqaf) have led "civil society" to die, which means that sub-dedications and dependencies within society have disappeared and the Saudi regime have remained as the sole last resort, making the regime one step closer to absolutism.[48] Still, the Saudi regime is limited by the Wahhabi Ulama, power struggles among the dynasty members and partly by tribalism. However, religion can easily be interpreted according to the regime's demands, as it was the case with Bin Baz's aforementioned fatwa. Sometimes, when religion-based imperatives fall against the interests of the state, the basic elements of the religious institution can be excluded from the political sphere, as it was the case with the Ikhwan movement in 1930.

Compared with the Baathist regimes and Yemen, Saudi Arabia has successfully used tribalism and religion, with the help of oil revenues, as means of legitimacy so that crisis like the Iranian Revolution, invasion of Kuwait, the Gulf War, and the "Arab Spring" have been overcome with relatively less damage. Indeed, as Rieger[49]

states, an additional source of hundreds of billions of dollars has been transferred to the public so that the "Arab Spring" would not affect the Saudi regime.

Wahhabism has three main functions in the political sphere. First, it ensured Saudi Arabia to be a prominent "nation"-state. While defending solidarity inside, excluding the other Muslims by accusing them with bid'ah, at least, is, in fact, a requirement of the "Al Walaa wa Al Baraa" principle of Salafism. Second, Saudi Arabia has widened and deepened its influence over, first, the Arabian Peninsula[50] and, secondly, the Islamic world[51] through Wahhabism. Third, outsider Wahhabi affiliates worked for Saudi interests and, in the final analysis, for US foreign policy interests, at least in combating communism.[52] The modernization efforts of the other Islamic countries like Turkey have led the conservative religious Muslims to focus on Saudi Arabia, which claims to be the cradle of Islam and the sole proper Islamic state.

Political Participation and Political Opposition

Saudi Arabia sees religion as a source of legitimacy but oppositional views, too, are mainly based on religious arguments, based on Shiism or Wahhabism. The Shiite opposition has ever been a serious threat to Saudi Arabia because of concerns that Iran can support Shiite groups. So, the anti-Shia discourse has been used in schools and ceremonies, Shiites have been banned from building their own mosques (Huseyniyyah) and practicing their rituals, and they have been excluded from government, causing the Shiite opposition to remain alive and become a serious threat to domestic security, if not the regime.[53]

After the mid-1970s, as Shavit and Abir point out, the frustration experienced by conservative groups created a new-fundamentalist movement. Many of the Wahhabi scholars and some sections of the society began to criticize Western influence and innovations (bid'ah).[54] For example, in 1979, the men of Juheyman El-Utaybi invaded the Kaaba on the grounds that the Saudis had moved away from the Wahhabi principles and lost the right to rule the sacred places.[55] In later periods, the most serious opposition came from religious circles,[56] which, at times, turned into religious violence. According to Hegghammer, religious violence in Saudi Arabia is based mainly on rejectionism or extreme pietism (represented by Juheyman al Utaybi) and pan-Islamist jihadism, which focus on the defense of the umma. Saudi Islamism has not a strong socio-revolutionary domestic Islamist current but a stronger pan-Islamist orientation than its counterparts in many other countries.[57]

The reaction of the regime to the religious opposition has been twofold. First, the regime emphasized the close relationship between government and religious institutions and the state's commitment to religious rules. Second, it resorted to a violent punishment of representatives of the religious opposition to show that the ultimate leadership of religious institutions is in the hands of the government.[58]

Although governments in the Gulf countries are deriving their legitimacy from the religion, it is in the hands of the administration, in the last instance, to hire the clergy to and fire them from the religious offices. As Shavit and Abir[59] state, when the clergy disobey the rulers, the last word always belongs to the latter. Wahhabi scholars can discuss political decisions, but the authority to make any changes is in the hands of the governments.

In Saudi Arabia, political activity has largely been confined to tribal and religious institutions, and this paves the way for the political opposition to sprout around a tribe, a mosque or a madrasah. The most important criticisms and threats to the regime came not from social classes or underground organizations, but from institutions supported by regimes themselves. However, the perception of inequity about the distribution of oil revenues constitutes a material basis for the oppositional discourse. As Claus[60] points out, such a discourse has given the religious opposition a social-democratic character in the Gulf countries. Contrary to religion, the tribal opposition is paler because of social and cultural homogeneity.

For Saudi Arabia, it is not possible to speak about political representation and participation in the Western sense of the terms. Activities of the workers and nationalist movements, which turned into strikes and labor movements in the 1950s and 1960s, disappeared almost completely after the 1973 oil shock, due to the absence of directly elected representatives until early 1990s.[61] However, though not in the Western sense, relatively modern institutions, such as clubs and organizations established by trade chambers, trade unions, or intellectuals, have emerged in Saudi Arabia and a group of businessmen, intellectuals, and administrators have regularly come together to discuss the establishment, enlargement, and deepening of the Gulf Cooperation Council at the events called Development Forum (Muntada al-Tanmiya).[62]

During the 1970s and 1980s, traditional and "modern" representatives had largely and effectively used family ties to have their voices reach the decision makers. Toward the end of this period, social and political groups increased their demands for a greater representation and participation, and governments responded to these demands with a promise of reform.[63] Then, the masses realized how potent the state was and patronage relations began to change,[64] and the masses who could not reach the administrators became more and more politicized. In the 1980s, activities to provide financial assistance and personnel provision to Afghan mujahedin politicized the public, as well.

In Saudi Arabia, the distribution of oil revenues, namely rentier state, has been more effectively determining representation and participation patterns since oil shock in 1973. After the 1973 and 1979 oil shocks, the citizens paid very low- or zero-level taxes but began to have better public services thanks to oil revenues. However, oil prices, peaking at $41/b in 1982, began to decline in 1983, and in

1986 fell to $9/b,[65] which has resulted in a serious decline in services. This was one of the main reasons for the political mobility that emerged at the end of the 1980s.

The occupation of Kuwait in 1990, too, deeply affected the Saudi citizens. Problems such as not being able to defend themselves against a regional country like Iraq without US help despite enormous defense expenditures and deployment of non-Muslim soldiers in "holy" lands have politicized Saudi citizens. In this period, for the first time in the Kingdom, there were petitions including reform requests signed by hundreds of people, from liberals, radical clerics, and representatives of the Shiites to the King. Among these requests were the issues such as the establishment of an Assembly Council (Majlis Al-Shura), to put an end to arbitrary interventions by the executive into the legal processes, the equal treatment of all layers and sections of the society, and freedom of the press.[66] In the petitions submitted by the Clergy were such demands as the abolition of state-sponsored monopolies, favoritism, taxes, interests, and interest-like applications, and readjustment of individual and social rights as required by "human reputation." Shia petitioners, as well, demanded the removal of discriminatory practices in such issues as worshipping, Shia sanctuaries, employment, and education.[67]

The Saudi dynasty has always acted to meet the demands of the radical religious men to ensure the survival of the monarchy because the latter have a considerable support from the social fabric and are more ambitious and brave to maintain, or move further, its current position. Liberal groups, however, are hesitant to express their views clearly in fear of isolation and expect foreigners in the region to do something on their behalf. In this case, the political debate remains in the hands of religious radicals, and there is no other option for the dynasty other than seeming to be on the side of the radicals and supporting them.

We should note that none of these dissident movements took an approach that questioned the foundations of the regime, as did the nationalist movements of the 1950s and 1960s, or the Kuwaiti and Bahraini Shias after the Iranian Revolution,[68] despite the contrary claims suggested by some scholars.[69] The administrations, on the other hand, were not unresponsive to the requests in this direction. Advisory councils were established and appointed by the King and semi-constitutional documents emphasizing individual rights were declared by the administrations. Saudi people take part in the governmental issues to the extent permitted by the regime and express themselves in "traditional" patterns of tribalism or religion. However, commercial and professional chambers, newspapers, and "modern" organizations, operating within ideological frameworks, but banned officially, are increasing day by day.[70]

In Saudi Arabia, state interests and regime security are largely defined by concerns about the future of the dynasty. Although many talented diplomats work in the foreign ministry, decisions are made as a result of unofficial interventions of

dynasty members who do not want to be bound by formal agreements. Even if unofficial promises are upheld, this increases the concerns of the regional and global actors and makes them hesitant in their relations with the country. As dynasty members monopolize foreign policy,[71] it naturally concentrates on their very interests.

Another interest group is the new bourgeoisie, which has flourished after considerable oil revenues flowed in the region. Some scholars deal with the bourgeoisie in the Middle Eastern countries in three categories: commercial, financial, and industrial. The commercial and financial bourgeoisie have been allowed to grow because their control is very easy, while the growth of the industrial bourgeoisie, which could be the main trigger of political and social transformation, has been restrained.[72] On the other hand, while the bourgeoisie in the Gulf countries was initially in need of Western companies to operate and sustain, over time they have gotten stronger. In time, the rivalry between the parties has turned into a hidden conflict, and some of the indigenous bourgeoisie groups—like the Ladin family—have begun to instigate radicalism and suggest that infidel companies should abandon the holy lands.

One of the most important reasons for politicization is education. Thanks to oil revenues in Saudi Arabia, education services have been extended to all levels of society. Despite the lack of instruction about political participation in schools, the ability of the literate masses to acquire knowledge improved and educated people developed political views across peer groups throughout the country. Free education has created an educated, but under- or unemployed masses, pressuring to change the political system and facilitating economic differentiation. This requires autonomous private sector-led economic development, distribution of power to a relatively wider circle and to reverse top-down governing processes into ascending participatory governance.

Educational Policies

Education in Saudi Arabia has been designed to serve the purposes of promoting Wahhabi belief and securing the monarch's survival. According to the Freedom House reports,[73] this approach encourages violence against the "Other" and misleads the students into repressing the "Other" by violence or even physically eliminating it. However, the religious curriculum is pedagogically higher than the pupils' intellectual capabilities so that they learn to be quiet and obey the state in advance.[74]

The Saudi elites are opposed to Western lifestyles. However, Saudi Arabia has had to maintain political and economic relations with Western countries, especially with the US. The Saudi people behave in accordance with modern

consumption patterns, but the influence of conservative tribal cultures on civil law, women's rights, minority rights, etc., continues. These contradictions have led some social groups to develop reactions against the regime and the clergy.

In the early days, education in Saudi Arabia consisted only of the lessons given by the Wahhabi scholars. Initial citizenship consciousness was shaped during these lessons. At the beginning of the 1960s, new ministries were established in the fields of communication, agriculture, education, and finance, and a large number of new bureaucrats were employed in the state ranks so that the development of the petroleum industry and the export operations could be more efficiently carried out.[75] Important reforms were made in the educational and judicial institutions, which had been under the monopoly of the Wahhabi Ulama until that time. In addition, new courts and schools, which the clerics did not control, were opened. More importantly, from that time on, the Gulf States have increased their oil revenues and, thus, have formed official religious institutions. This has made religious affairs more open to state intervention, and the state has diminished the relative autonomy of the Wahhabi Ulama.

These changes had become possible thanks to abundant oil revenues. The budget allocated for education from 1970 to 1975 rose to $2.5 billion and increased to $28 billion between 1975 and 1980.[76] Moreover, due to the recruitment of persons who had studied abroad and have a relatively more universal worldview, religious institutions lost more degrees of autonomy against the regime.[77] However, two important events in 1979 reversed this loss, namely, the Iranian Islamic Revolution and the occupation of the Kaaba by a group of Saudi radicals. To overcome the trauma and to prevent recurrence of this kind of events, the Saudi administration preferred to re-increase Wahhabi weight in the educational system.

The Saudi regime had exerted efforts to have new generations of Saudis adopt the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam to secure and improve its legitimacy. However, this kind of formation is inspiring hatred against non-Muslims, and Muslims who do not adopt the Wahhabi creed, the Shia in the first instance. Since the 1979 Iranian revolution, the struggle with Shiism has gained new aspects[78] because this revolution brought the Saudi leadership in the Islamic world into question, introduced new dimensions about the regional hegemonic rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and deepened the problems of the Shia citizens in Saudi Arabia.

Saudi educational policies are against ideologies like Arab nationalism or socialism. In reaction to al-Azhar's efforts to promote these ideologies, the education curriculum in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s and 1970s was set out to modernize the country and keep away the ideologies of socialism and nationalism, without undermining the basic principles of Wahhabism. Meanwhile, the Islamic University of Mecca, the Islamic University of Medina, and the Riyadh Imam Muhammed University have attempted to spread the idea that those ideologies are

not compatible with Islam and have provided a wide range of scholarship opportunities to foreign students for this purpose. These universities have been the main institutions to consolidate Wahhabi belief inside the country and to disseminate it globally. In this context, Rabitat al-Alam al-Islami has been active worldwide to combat Arab nationalism and communist ideology.

The general conviction about the ideologies of al-Qaeda and similar terrorist organizations is that they are fueled from Wahhabi/Salafi veins. The September Eleventh terrorist attacks have strengthened this conviction. Saudi Arabia argues that the terrorists are under the influence of Sayyid Qutb. However, when we look at the curriculum of the Saudi Ministry of Education, the similarities between Qutb's understanding of jihad and Wahhabism are remarkable.[79] It appears that the language used in this curriculum promotes jihad and conflict with the non-Muslims or many non-Wahhabi Muslim groups and it aims at establishing a universal theocratic caliphate system based on Wahhabism. Since 2000, even if there seems to be a serious disagreement between Saudi Ulama and al-Qaeda, especially about the fact that it would be unfair for al-Qaeda to kill Muslims, the similarities and interactions between the two groups regarding basic principles and approaches remain.

The Status of Women

The image of women's place in Islam in the global public opinion is mainly based on Saudi Arabia. Women's possibilities or difficulties in Islamic countries like Turkey, Iran, and Malaysia are not considered very much. In Saudi Arabia, the official Islamic interpretation of the women issue is handled according to Wahhabism and tribal (mainly the founding tribe Najd) culture. In this framework, the prevailing conviction is that Islam and universal women's rights are not compatible with each other. However, according to some scholars, the women issue in Saudi Arabia is a result of the traditions and patriarchy,[80] or rentier state practices,[81] in addition to the religious or tribal traditions. The Wahhabi understanding of Islam, however, is used as an intellectual infrastructure that legitimizes and sustains existing socioeconomic, political, and diplomatic formation.

Rentier state practices supported by oil revenues reduces the demand for female workforce because increasing oil exports fuels imports and undermines domestic production. Therefore, when women are not autonomous in economic terms, it makes patriarchal practices structurally sustainable and limits women's participation in politics.[82] However, it is much easier for individuals who cannot express themselves in the political scene to support radicalism. According to Ross,[83] the women who are weak in terms of economic opportunities are more supportive of fundamentalism than their male counterparts.

This culture, which aims to protect traditional family values and to prevent social interactions of men and women who are not from the family, is much different from other Islamic countries in terms of veiling conception, prohibition of driving, discrimination in higher education, right to vote and stand for elections, etc. In Saudi Arabia, the veil of women is strictly supervised by volunteer police called al-Muttawwi'. In 2002, during a fire in a girl's boarding school, students were not allowed to be rescued by the fire brigades under the rationale that their veils were not suitable and, as a result, 15 female students burned to death. The ban was lifted in 2010 due to this incident, which caused great controversies.[84] The attitude against the coexistence of women and men in the public sphere is exaggerated to the extent that some Wahhabi scholars suggested to change 1400 years of practices of Hajj and Umrah and to identify separate tawaf (circumambulation of the Kaaba) sites for men and women.[85]

Women in Saudi Arabia had been able to travel riding on their horses or camels anywhere they wish until 1957 when they were banned from driving cars. This ban is still valid. Those who opposed the ban and organized the demonstrations were sentenced to imprisonment and lost their jobs at the state levels. The employment of eighty thousand or so foreigners as chauffeurs of wealthy Saudi women in Saudi Arabia,[86] however, constitutes a grave contradiction. Saudi women can travel on public transport only in the sections reserved for them, using the special gates of those sections. Women who travel from one city to another or out of the country can travel only with a written permission from their close male relatives or guards.

Involvement of women in the workforce is limited to the jobs that are restricted only to women or can be considered as housework, such as treatment of women, tailoring, teaching girls, and child care.[87] Legal regulations in Saudi Arabia strictly limit women's participation in the labor market and economic activities. It is possible for the female students to have jobs in such areas as dentistry, medicine, nursing, and teaching, while they are blocked from engineering, architecture, pharmacy, and journalism. Formerly, trade licenses granted to women in the condition that they employ a male manager but now these licenses are completely abolished if the work involved requires contact with foreign workers or government officials.

In Saudi Arabia, the people went to the polls only three times, in 1965, 2005, and 2015. Until the municipal council elections held in December 2015, Saudi women were not eligible to vote or to be elected. In the last elections, in accordance with the regulations made during the reign of deceased King Abdullah, 130 thousand women were registered to vote and 978 women as candidates for city councils.[88]

The Saudi family is deeply influenced by tribal traditions and women's chastity is directly related to the honor of the Saudi family. The woman's impurity is regarded as an attack on the honor of the man, and the girls begin to be followed

before they enter puberty. In this culture, the kinship ties are so strong that the dishonorable behavior of any member of the family or tribe deeply affects all members of the tribe, and misogyny develops. Hence, women are not permitted to be left alone or make their own decisions. Therefore, the source of policies developed against women is not Islam, but tribalism and Wahhabism. As Alawi[89] says, a significant number of Wahhabi Ulama and members of the dynasty consider the suppression of women as the last point of reference to maintain their religious and dynastic authority. Consequently, observing the rules and traditions of Saudi morality and opposing the abolition of prohibitions are critical for them. But such a position paves the way for a totalitarian regime. It is not possible to come across this kind of so sharply a social perception against women anywhere in the Islamic world other than Taliban's Afghanistan.

Conclusion

The state imagination in Saudi Arabia has been determined by factors like Wahhabism, rentier state conception, necessities of being a "nation state," and the way of integration with international political and economic structures. Initially, external aid and booties and, in the preceding periods, oil revenues have constituted the material basis for the rentier state practices in Saudi Arabia. Intangible intellectual elements such as tribalism, monarchism, and Wahhabism have thus far protected Saudi Arabia's traditionally patriarchal society and state structures.

Wahhabism has had a two-way effect on domestic and foreign politics. In domestic politics, it has functioned as the basic glue in "nation" building efforts and provided political legitimacy for the regime. Externally, the capacity built out of the Salafi/Wahhabi elements abroad through oil revenues has transformed Saudi Arabia into an effective international actor not only in the Islamic world but also at the global level. Saudi Arabia used this capacity to be influential in a number of issues, such as fighting communism and Arab nationalism and inducing Islamic societies according to its own and its allies' interests.

The most significant dynamic of the Saudi/Wahhabi state imagination is the employment of Saudi/Wahhabi identity to create and maintain a Saudi "nation"-state and the necessity to integrate this "nation"-state into the international system. In the forthcoming periods, the most vital challenges for the survival of the Saudi state will be related to whether these dynamics can be managed well or not. In the near future, Saudi Arabia's complex and precarious legitimacy discourses may drive Saudi Arabia into an absolute isolation within the Islamic world and against the non-Muslims.

As a result, we may assert that, in the near future, some improvements may be influential not only in changing society and state imagination in Saudi Arabia but

also in redrawing the political map of the Middle East. Some of these improvements can be listed as follows: major fluctuations in oil prices due to upcoming developments in the energy sector, radical transformations in the social fabric because of further educational and technological improvements, especially in the communication and transportation sectors, increase in secular demands against the clergy's pressures, increasing disagreements among the affiliates of the Wahhabi creed when trying to adapt Wahhabism to new situations, issues about monarchical succession, changing perspectives against terrorism and Islamic radicalism, changes in the geopolitical value of the Gulf region in the eyes of the global and regional actors, and so on.

Notes

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