32

Islam, politics, and legitimacy

The role of Saudi Arabia in the rise of Salafism and Jihadism

Mohamed-Ali Adraoui

Introduction

If several centuries of historical changes have made Islam a worldwide religion that is present, albeit in varied ways, on all continents, one of the novelties of the 20th century is undeniably the emergence and re-emergence of fundamentalist conceptions within Islam that have benefited from the action of certain states in order to reach a prime place within many contemporary Muslim societies. Whether it is a question of communities claiming orthodoxy (without concretely becoming overt political projects), or of organized parties (with the clear ambition of rising to power), or local and transnational projects (with an insurrectional and revolutionary plan inspired by a violent and military understanding of Jihad), it must be acknowledged that ‘Salafism’ owes its rise to the key role played by Saudi Arabia for over a century. Having built its political legitimacy on the claimed defense of the Salaf Salih heritage (Meijer 2009), this state has had since its origin a specific place within the international arena, claiming not only to defend monarchical power but also, and perhaps especially, to speak out for and support Islam and Muslims wherever necessary. The promotion of Westphalian and Pan-Islamic interests has thus been confounded in the Saudi state’s domestic and international actions for many decades, the emphasis on the Pan-Islamic narrative and mission being the means of preserving and legitimizing the Westphalian interests as part of a fundamental dialectic between religious identity and political legitimacy.

The aim of this chapter is to shed light on the motivations and challenges related to the construction of a form of ‘Islamic manifest destiny’ that characterizes the way Saudi Arabia sees and presents itself to the world since the first decades of the 20th century. More specifically, by drawing on substantial economic resources and the symbolic capital of ‘authentic’ Islam, meaning Salafism, according to the discourse of princes and clerics established at the head of the state, this country has mobilized the religion in order to bolster both its inner stability and its international position. By instituting Salafism as the only version of Islam to be considered authentic, while claiming the exclusive power to define it, Saudi religious authorities have also made Salafist preaching a major dimension which structures the international action of the kingdom.
Studying the proclaimed homology between ‘true’ Islam and the Saudi identity has led me to study, first of all, the religious foundations on which the Saudi state is based, whose birth and history are unquestionably motivated by the ambition to defend an ‘authentic’ Islam. Secondly, I will analyze how social and political configurations (whether domestic or international) have not only generated re-compositions within the contemporary Salafist matrix, but especially ideological, political, and geo-strategic divisions which explain a large part of the crises and conflicts of the past several years in which reference to Islam is used at once to overthrow, challenge, or reinforce established regimes (Cavatorta and Merone 2017). Saudi Arabia, by establishing the preaching-state in the 20th century, whose mission goes beyond simply serving national interests, has thus directly or indirectly contributed to fashioning political and religious dynamics in Muslim territory and beyond, as this country is also both the subject and the object of continuities and divisions which have defined Salafist movements for several decades.

The role of Salafism in Saudi identity and politics

In the Muslim religion, Muhammad revealed a belief system to the world, delivered a message, and, by doing so, sealed the Prophecy (which had begun with the first man and messenger, Adam). If authenticity is represented in the man (in his person, character, and behavior which form the Sunna), it did not dissolve after the disappearance of Muhammad, since his contemporaries as well as successive generations remain steeped in his paragon. While a number of ways of apprehending and understanding Islam have emerged since its beginnings, only one is supposed to remain faithful to his call. Claiming in both the proper and figurative sense of the word an ethics of rectitude, Salafists, meaning those who seek to follow in the footsteps of the Salaf Salih, see themselves as remaining scrupulously on the path that leads from the present to the origins. Among other possible ways, its existence and morality are founded on a specific and exclusive Minhaj (‘path’), that of the Ancient Sages (or Pious Predecessors). Each word in Arabic comes from a root (contributing to the meaning of the term) onto which is added a schema (which determines the grammatical nature of the word used). Salaf thus comes from the root s-l-f, which echoes back to anteriority and precedence. Unlike kh-l-f, which refers to succession and consequitiveness, this root has the main function of illustrating a search for the origin, the only true condition of authenticity in that time which passes is supposed to have brought deviationism in opposition to the straight path that Salafists intend to revive. Salih comes from the root s-l-h, which refers to value and virtue. Giving rise, for instance, to the first name Salah, it describes piousness in the religious sphere. Thus, referring to the first Muslims as the paradigmatic models of faith and practice, Salafists have erected the early times of Islam as the Golden Age whose characteristics must be reproduced. Representing in a substantial way a paradigm (which the followers present as scientific since it is based on a rigorous academic approach), preaching (since it is a call to return to the ‘right path’), and a state of authenticity (in that it provides an exclusive moral, religious, and social content), Salafism is thus the form of Islam that is supposed to contain the highest level of authenticity. Thus it sees itself as a movement of revival and restoration.

Over the centuries, and notably through the intervention of clerics who wanted to call their co-religionists to order, puritan reforms focusing on the need to return to the teachings of the Salaf have emerged. One of the most famous was initiated in the Arabic peninsula in the 18th century. If today the term ‘Wahhabism’ is often lumped together with that of Salafism, it is essentially because in the Arabic peninsula at the time, Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahab (1703–1792) was seeking, in a context that he thought had become
religiously heterodox, to re-establish the rights of a dogma (*al-Aqida*) that he considered had been trampled upon (Al-Rasheed 2010; Commins 2006). He thus rejected and fought the practices that had become usual at the time. One example is the worship at tombs because neither intercession (asking another to pray to God for oneself) nor veneration of another besides Him is supposed to be part of the Ancients’ faith and can in certain cases lead to anathema. However, his main success is undoubtedly to have turned his puritan preaching in a more political direction by forming an alliance throughout his life with Muhammad Ibn Saud, a tribal leader from Najd who wanted to spread his power by giving him a religious anointing from the cleric hoping to give more strength to his fundamentalist reform. This alliance, which took the form of a pact dating from 1744 in the name of which Ibn Saud supported the preaching of what would become the religious reference of the young state, lies at the origin of the first Saudi kingdom. This served as a model for other alliances based on a complicit transaction (Mouline 2014) between tribal leaders and clerics. These transactions reveal not only the difference of roles and authorities but also the collusion between scholars and rulers who decide to collaborate on a project combining puritan reform and territorial conquest. Although defeated by its neighbors in the end, this first Saudi state came back to life on several occasions, particularly between the two world wars with the new conquest of Hijaz after 1926 and the unification of the kingdom in 1932. This took place at the instigation of a descendant of the Saud (Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud, 1876–1953), once again supported by the descendants of Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahab. This turn of events formed the Al-Shaykh family which still represents today the religious backbone of the Saudi state, which has exported Salafism on a global scale in the 20th century.

The Saudization of Salafism in the 20th century

In the 20th century, Saudi Arabia built itself as a state with a specific destiny, echoing the need to bring greatness back to the Muslim religion after centuries of decline, which is explained in Salafism in terms of a distancing from ‘orthodox’ Islam. Establishing a missionary state for co-religionists who need support and ‘the right word,’ Saudi Arabia uses discourse and action defined by the belief that the country (starting with its political and religious elites) and Islam are enmeshed in their values and interests. Saudi Arabia established its legitimacy for nearly a century in the service of ‘authentic’ Islam. It has maintained its preaching and missionary role. Over the past several decades, this role has taken the form of funding for the foundation of religious sites across the world, the organization of an educational and university system based on the promotion of Salafist norms, an institutional network with a transnational dimension in view of bringing together all Muslim states, and even support for ideological movements and armed groups also claiming to be Salafists engaged in domestic or international struggles in defense of Muslims. In effect, Saudi Arabia has tried to mold the global Islamic field in its image, thus risking alliances to its religious legitimacy.

The emergence of a globalized Salafist field under Saudi authority: the consensual decades (1950–1990)

This nationalization of Salafism (connected with the Saudi preaching-state) is first based on a doctrinal clarification articulated by the clerics. As an intransigent conception of Islam, whose aim is the revival of a dogma, a religion, and social relations which would have been supposedly observed in the early times of Islam, the Salafism affirmed by the Saudi state is organized around the need to swear allegiance (*al-Wala*) to regimes claiming Islam, no
matter how imperfect, or run the risk of triggering sedition (al-Fitna) without which no orthodoxy can exist. The discipline of the state alone can, in this perspective, guarantee the stability and security that are seen as the sine qua non conditions of acceptable religious practice. Disavowal (al-Bara) of a religiously imperfect regime can only be done if the clerics decide, which means that they are in theory the true holders of authority in that they grant kings, presidents, or governments Islamic legitimacy, or take it away. In the tradition of this dual authority, theoretically subject to the primacy of clerics (al-Ulama), if a political power is considered to seriously refute their religious duties (e.g., bad international alliances, tolerance of laws deemed incompatible with Islam, or moral debauchery), and if the ‘good advice’ (al-Nasiba) of clerics does not bear fruit, permission can be granted to revolt against this ‘corrupt’ regime. By means of a vehement and dissenting understanding of Jihad (an effort to become compliant with the principles of Islam), certain believers can claim to return to ‘original’ Islam through an undertaking that is not only politicized but also revolutionary in that the violent insurrection becomes legitimate against the religiously inept authority\(^7\) (that some go as far as excommunicating (al-Takfir)).

In the Saudi case, the definition of true politics (namely that which is in line with divine law (al-Sharia) and the interest of Muslims, whether Saudi or not) is done by official institutions that organize what is possible to see as a form of state Salafism, by virtue of which a body of clerics was established and then were co-opted, guide the Saudi government policy and state system (most often formed by members of the al-Saud monarchy). On the one hand, Council of Senior Scholars (founded in 1971), directed by the Grand Mufti Abdul-Aziz al-Shaykh (a descendant of Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahab), the main religious body that is dedicated to the Islamic approval of political decisions as well as providing religious council, above all to the king, embodies the secular arm of power. On the other hand, the permanent delegation for Islamic research and the issuing of fatwas is also directed by the Grand Mufti and dedicated to giving religious consultations. These consultations are not only for such questions as religious practice, private legal affairs (e.g., marriage, divorce, and inheritance) or the kingdom’s foreign policy, but also research and education via the management of institutions attached to the Delegation. These various bodies are characterized by their solidarity with the monarchy, particularly when the latter is attacked by other states or other Islamic movements that consider that the politics led by Saudi Arabia contradict these fundamental values. Two famous examples illustrate the solidarity linking the royal family and the body of official ulamas at the summit of the oil monarch. First is the campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War, which resulted in the kingdom asking for US protection against Iraq. The Islamist branch targeted the Saudi policy of cooperating with the West to the detriment of their ‘natural’ duty of distrust towards countries that are ‘enemies of Islam.’ A fatwa issued by the Grand Mufti at the time thus clearly took a stance against the Muslim Brotherhood, which he criticized for their inclination for sedition and the weakening of established regimes, particularly the Saudi regime, his opinion being that social order must absolutely be preserved and thus subject to religious criticism, the state having done what it had to do. Then, still following the crisis triggered by the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein’s Baath regime, there is a hostility, still alive and well today, directed towards the Saudi regime on the part of official religious institutions with Jihadist influences. Their opposition has taken the form of an anathema directed on the royal family for its ‘hypocrisy,’ symbolized by its acts of ‘betrayal’ such as the alliance with the United States and the presence of its troops on two holy sites (Bilad al-Hanamayn). A number of fatwas, issued in particular by the Grand Mufti at the time, Abdul-Aziz Ibn Baz (1910–1999), one of whose unique traits is the (exceptional) fact that he is not a member of the al-Shaykh family, clearly aiming to disqualify these movements claiming a violent vision of Jihad, countered the discourse
of the al-Qaeda organization. Moreover, this campaign still continues today in that the Islamic State Organization is still condemned in the same way, with Jihadist branches being accused of pointless bloodshed and spreading anarchy worldwide.

**Saudi Arabia as a central link in a transnational institutional network devoted to its interests**

The globalization of Salafism in the second half of the 20th century and the growing political and religious supremacy gained by the kingdom are all grounded in the economic centrality resulting from having the world’s main oil reserves, lending an impressive financial force to the service of the Saudi missionary plan.

This is the case of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) (which became the Cooperation in 2011), founded in 1969 and located in Jeddah, as an inter-governmental entity with the aim of defending the holy sites of Islam, establishing economic and diplomatic cooperation between Muslim countries, and coming to the aid of co-religionists. Starting with Palestine, the OIC (today bringing together 57 states) was created particularly after a fundamentalist Australian Christian set the al-Aqsa Mosque on fire in Jerusalem. If the political context that presides over Saudi Arabia seeking transnational Muslim unity has a lot to do with the desire to counter Arab and third-world nationalism, heralded by the Egyptian president Nasser (Kerr 1972), the OIC counts among its aims the defense of the Islamic vision of ethical, legal, and international political challenges (e.g., human rights). A few years earlier, in 1962, another entity, a non-governmental organization the World Islamic League, was born with the aim of spreading pan-Islamic theses (already in opposition with the Nasserian pan-Arabism) and to promote the Muslim religion in all its dimensions (e.g., construction of religious sites, funding of humanitarian projects, working to unite the Muslim people, and building schools and religious institutes). Located in Mecca, under the aegis of a general secretary (often Saudi), the League is nonetheless not restricted to majority Muslim countries, as illustrated by its participation in the construction of religious sites in societies that are Muslim, Western, African, or Asian.

Beyond the strategy of institutional networking at the global level, the university system also represents an important vector for exporting the Salafist imaginary to the rest of the world. Since the 1960s, Islamic universities of the Mecca, Medina, and even Riyadh have thus trained several generations of students who are aware of the orthodoxy favored in Saudi Arabia. While these institutions cannot be reduced to their proselytizing function, they nevertheless have largely contributed to training thousands of students funded by the Saudi state. The return of these students to their countries of origin has helped consolidate the dynamic of globalized Salafism during the 20th century. The same observation can be made about migratory waves to the Gulf that connect several generations of workers coming to these growing countries since the 1970s (in the wake of the explosion of oil prices), living in the proximity of Saudi state Salafism.

**The fragmentation and explosion of global Salafism**

A number of historical events pushed Saudi Arabia to revise the ideological content which nonetheless has defined its doctrinal offer for decades, during which the kingdom had a near monopoly of Salafism. Even though it is a missionary state, Saudi Arabia had to switch to a form of Salafism that can be characterized as ‘defensive,’ due to evolutions and changes that have marked the Muslim policy of the Saudi kingdom after 1945. If, from a domestic point of view, the doctrine has been expressed since the birth of the third Saudi kingdom by
a strong conservatism in terms of morals and legislation, the Saudi international policy has demonstrated real dynamism, especially if we keep in mind the historic alliance of 1945. The main oil-producing country and the US superpower, soon to be victorious over Nazi Germany, represented by King Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud and President Roosevelt, signed on February 14, 1945 on the Quincy warship an alliance that is today the basis of the Saudi monarchy’s foreign policy. Taking advantage of the religious legitimacy granted by the body of the ulama, whose principles emphasize the abomination of disputing a political order claiming Islam, as well as the US protection granted against a supply of oil in the best possible conditions, the country was able to promote an effective policy. Religious proselytism, creating a true Saudi soft power, supportive of the incumbent power and conservative at the domestic level, dynamic and serving the image of the country at the international level, and supported by economic force bolstered by the rise in the price of oil during the 1970s, is at the heart of the political-religious contract that ensured the country a privileged position on the world stage. This double movement of economic and religious development enables the puritan religiosity identified with the form of Islam practiced in Saudi society to gain true prestige across the Muslim world. The two-pronged Saudi regime moreover never hesitated to wield the most ‘authentic’ religious rhetoric in order to disqualify its political and ideological adversaries within and outside the state. Its preaching role served each time to bolster the credibility of Saudi positions.

This ‘blessed period’ coincided with a religious view that can be seen as both dynamic and extensive. While the Islamic principles defended were Salafist, the leaders attached to the religious authority were not included in the logic of blame that has characterized the official clerics since the Gulf War of 1991 in particular. The Saudi strategy is more similar in this era to a quest to expand the country’s audience. As such, these elements of similarity and of political-religious synergy has prevailed, as illustrated by Fayçal’s decision to reach out to the Muslim Brotherhood (Lia 1999), persecuted by the Nasserian power starting in 1954, or the funding of movements drawing on Salafist rhetoric in order to use violence to defend certain ‘Muslim causes.’ The Saudi state doctrine is satisfied by the emulation that is observed as part of a true ‘compromise’ Salafism accepting, despite strictly religious disputes, the political intersections between the Saudi power and other movements of re-Islamization, provided that the Saud leadership is not disputed. Placing, in a way, the Saudi national political interest before a strict observance of dogmatic prescriptions, these years are among the greatest trans-Islamic legitimacy of the Saudi Kingdom within the religious field.

The emergence of Jihadism-Salafism and the crisis of Saudi religious and political legitimacy

This ‘syncretic moment’ (Adraoui 2019) within Sunni Islam, oriented towards the consolidation of an Islamic field under Saudi leadership, results, due to political changes putting it at risk, in a return to an ultra-legitimatist discourse (Piscator 1991). This is why the religious authority increasingly integrated, more than in the past, the constraints weighing on Saudi power due to the splitting of the Salafist field under the influence of bin Laden in particular. In this respect, an event marks a decisive turn in the official Saudi position materialized by a severe split within the Salafist field between ‘revolutionaries’ and ‘legitimitists.’ This basic tension starting with the crisis of the Gulf represents another illustration of the organic link between political power and religious authority by the head of the Saudi state. The even larger solidarity between the two pillars of the state produced a radical switch in discourse compared notably to the ‘fake Salafists,’ which committed the
‘abomination’ of turning against the directors seen as the legitimate governors of the country. The ‘Islamic consensus’ (Piscatori 1991) that was the source of the centrality granted to Saudi Arabia found itself undermined by the action of de-legitimation undertaken by the ‘revolutionary’ Salafists (Salafists-Jihadists), who were moreover also presenting themselves as the defenders of ‘authentic’ Islam. Seen by protesting Salafists as blind to the need to fight, if need be through armed conflict, for Muslim people throughout the world, the ‘clerics of the Palace’ (al-Ulama al-Balat) have since been vilified for abandoning what represents for Jihadists the heart of the preaching, namely the Islamization of power and legislation. The same clerics, on the other hand, came to the aid of Saudi power by virtue of their anti-anarchist understanding of the dogma. The presence of foreign troops, particularly Americans, in the country housing the sacred sites of Islam constitutes the reason for which the ‘winners of Afghanistan’ (i.e., the first generation of Salafist-Jihadists) went after the monarchy, updating in their perspective the duplicity and hypocrisy of the latter (Gerges 2011). The defense of Islam needing from then on to return to this ‘avant-garde,’ having better understood the widespread hate against Islam than the establishment clerics, it is now a matter of disqualifying the Saudi two-thronged power.

It is thus in this logic of mutual discredit, reaching a level of anathema particularly on the Jihadist side, which spoke of ‘apostate regimes’ (Hegghammer 2010), that the fragmentation must be understood which had become central in the Saudi political and religious landscape as well as in a number of Muslim countries. If one of the main consequences of this crisis of legitimacy is the stronger rigor with which the legitimist and anti-revolutionary canons were spread to the whole Islamic field (Bradley 2005), it is clear that these two facets of contemporary Salafism were split.

In the midst of important uprisings and at times deep political transitions in the Arab world since 2011, Salafists have maintained indisputable faithfulness to Saudi power, which went as far as approving the reinforcement of the US alliance, and even with Israel, on the basis of a shared fear of the Iranian expansion and the growing influence of Jihadist movements within some Arab countries. This involved creating a new state with the ambition of re-establishing the original Caliphate in Syria and Iraq under the impulsion of the Islamic State (Gerges 2017). The latter targeted more than ever the Saudi kingdom, which it accused of betraying the role of missionary and defender of co-religionists.

Since the Arab revolutions

The above-mentioned phenomena are verified by the revolts in the Arab world which started in the winter of 2010 and which led notably to the fall of Presidents Ben Ali in Tunisia and Moubarak in Egypt before generating several conflicts elsewhere and authoritarian revivals. Once again serving as vehicles of conservatism, legitimacy, and ‘dismantling’ in the name of religion in a situation of dispute, the official Saudi clerics united with the other side of the Saudi two-thronged power, removing any Islamic aspect from the ‘Arab Spring.’ This is evident in the order given during the events that affected Saudi Arabia in March 2011, which resulted not only in a return to the religious order but especially a defense of the regime as an organic supporter of Islam.

The Council of Senior Scholars beseeches Allah to grant all Muslims aid, stability and the unification of governors and the governed around the Truth. The Council praises Allah for having granted the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia the favor of reuniting his word
and uniting his ranks around the Book of Allah and the Tradition of the Prophet in the shadow of a wise governance, legitimized by a legal allegiance, that Allah grants him strength and longevity and that Allah completes for us this good deed and makes it last.

( ... )

Allah grants the people of this country to come together, with their governors, around the guidance of the Book and Tradition, without making them diverge or to spread their word according to other branches coming from elsewhere, or parties with antagonist principles

( ... )

The Kingdom has succeeded in conserving this Islam identity. Thus, despite the progress and development that the Kingdom has experienced, and the recourse to legal terrestrial ways, it does not permit nor will it ever permit – by the Force of Allah and His Power – branches with ideas coming from the West or East to undermine this identity or disperse the Group.

This excerpt cannot be understood without putting it in perspective with Jihadist-Salafist texts for whom this country is today an enemy of Islam. One text is interesting from this point of view for illustrating the ‘ambiguous’ or ‘dual’ dimension that was the Salafist norm in the 20th century and which explains why this religious field exploded after the 1990s. It is an article from a Takfiri site (follower of excommunication) which cites ‘the sins’ committed by leaders of this country:

The impiousness of Saudi Arabia takes on several forms, such as the seat at the UN General Assembly, the organization of municipal elections, the authorization of interests in international transactions: the amendment of martial law concerning military flight which is subject to months in prison, member state of UNESCO (acceptance of the charter, etc.), the bearing of the cross of King Fahd; the alliance with American infidels, their fight against Muwahidin

[reference to Jihadists]

The alliance with the infidels: the abandonment of Jihad and the alliance with infidels against the Taliban and the Iraqis, the presence of U.S. bases in Arabia, their fighter planes bomb Muslims, as well as giving gifts and food to soldiers, without mentioning the oil that they sell to these infidels.  

This excerpt supports the essential idea that Saudi Arabia is at the heart of tensions that have marked the Salafist field after the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq at the turn of the 1990s. Split in two, each side orientated towards Saudi, whether congratulating or blaming it for defending or betraying the true version of Salafism.

The Salafist matrix continues today to provide the ideological shield thanks to which the Saudi state has neutralized the effects of the policy of defending Islam. The collision of these two worlds (legitimist-Salafist and Jihadist-Salafist) since the Gulf crisis continues. Thus, it is clear that a crucial difference distinguishes the political and religious fields characterizing contemporary Muslim societies. This situation must be contrasted to that which prevailed in the 1960s, namely that by stopping the sponsoring of Islamic movements to supporting counter-movements in the
name of a veritable state Salafism, Saudi Arabia was at once one of the chief actors legitimizing militant, radical Islam and one of its most serious opponents since the early 1990s (Al-Rasheed 2007; Lacroix 2011). The dual character of Saudi Arabia, pushing it to be a Westphalian state creating alliances and counter-alliances according to its interests, as well as a preaching actor having led for decades an identity reaffirmation seeking to reintroduce the symbolic aspect of Islam in world political struggles, thus seems to have become an additional target for Jihadist movements by choosing to remain faithful to that which is seen as the US *imperium*. By brandishing its state Salafism to de-legitimize Jihadist activism, the Saudi monarchy has thus largely contributed to the fragmentation of Islamic radicalism in the contemporary era (Aarts and Roelants 2015), thereby illustrating that some of these prior instigators could, in the very name of fundamentalism, join the opposition using religion as language of protest.

**Notes**

1. The path of Mohammad, source of truth and exemplariness after the Koran which features the word of God uncreated in Sunni Islam. Shia Islam adopts another understanding which is centered on the belief that the Truth is transmitted first within the family of Mohammed, and specifically among his descendants, making up the Imams that will transmit this privileged relationship with the Truth from one generation to another.

2. In Salafist reasoning, there is reference to a speech of Muhammad addressing the relative value of different eras of history, which sheds light on the exemplary piousness of the first three generations of Muslims: ‘The best people are my contemporaries, and then those who will follow them, then those who will follow them’ (Collection of authentic prophetic words, Imam Boutkhiari, hadith number 6248).

3. The term Caliph refers to the title used by Mohammed’s successors. The Caliph is the successor of the Messenger of God.

4. The sultan and the conqueror of Jerusalem (*al-Quds*), Salah-dine al-Ayyoubi (Saladin, 1138–1193), winner of the Battle of Hattin in 1187, is an example of this.

5. Often under the effect of opponents of Saudi Arabia to whom they wish to remove any roots in the early times of Islam to the benefit of a name that is supposed to ‘sectarize’ the country by conflating the Islam practiced there with the work of a single man deprived of the prestigious genealogy linked to identification with the Ancients.

6. The cleric condemning, for instance, the veneration of Arabs that was popular during his time under the pretext that certain companions or even the Prophet himself drew on them. It is thus told that Abdul-Wahab tore down one of the most worshiped trees with his own hands and requested the destruction of the tomb of a famous companion and brother of the second Caliph of Islam, Zayd Ibn al-Khattab, his contemporaries considering it an object of worship. prohibition des manifestations’s sing instead on topics they consider marginal, as illustrated here by the reference to womenmajo.

7. Jihad is not only here a call to reason and morality but also a fight led with the sword (*Jihad bil-Sayf*) to re-establish the rights of the dogma.

8. This is the case during the overtaking of the Mecca, which was finally aborted but attempted by a commando led by Juhayman Al-Uthaybi. On November 20, 1979 they tried to overthrow the monarchy accused of already being ‘falsely’ interested in authentic Islam, as shown by the problematic mores of certain princes in private, the US alliance on the international level, and the socio-cultural modernization that the country was undergoing.

9. For instance, the Nasserian competition asserting Arabness in which the Saudi kingdom insisted on religious belonging as the cement joining the people of the Muslim world. After 1979, another competitor emerged, Khomeinist Iran, which would try to represent this religion by disqualifying Saudi Arabia, the ‘slave’ of the ‘American Satan’ and thus ‘traitor to Islam.’ It is moreover the revolutionary Shia and Iranian pressure which explains in large part Saudi Arabia’s investment in the Afghan conflict after 1979, with the Mufi of the kingdom, Shaykh Ibn Baz, decreeing the country ‘land of armed Jihad’ for all believers. The Saudi state, beyond the religious dimension thus added to the conflict, took back a part of the Iranian rise obtained in the name of a revolution, one of the slogans of which was *Death to America!* On another level, to signify the religious predominance of the Saudi monarch, in 1986, the latter added the ‘Guardian of the Holy Places’ of Islam (*Khadim al-Haramayn al-Sharifayn*)
to his sovereign title, with Iran sending each year ‘pilgrim-activists’ responsible for undermining the symbolic authority of the monarchy in the most sacred sites of Islam.

10 We know, for instance, that even before the beginning of the war in Afghanistan, the Saudi state helped the Pakistani military regime in its historical rivalry with India, thereby enabling the very birth of the Taliban movement. These ‘students of religion,’ adopting an ultra-puritan view whose doctrine is drawn from the Wahhabist rigorism and the preaching of Deobandi groups, themselves fundamentalist as they sought the revival of the Muslim faith in a ‘purified’ way, played the role we know about in the 1990s in their support of Al-Qaeda.

11 King Faysal chose, for instance, after the 1960s to facilitate access to religious teaching for Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood activists which, later on, in doctrinal terms, resulted in the emergence (or re-emergence) of an ultra-rigorist, potentially revolutionary political-religious view. This view involved the Saudi regime, which had been considered up until then as the main supporter of Islamic movements worldwide. Al-Qaeda and Bin Laden and bin Laden are certainly the most well-known examples of this hybridization of ‘Salafist-Wahhabist’ convictions.

12 This expression designates the political and religious configuration, which had ensured a central place in Saudi Arabia for several decades up until the crisis opened by the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein’s armies on August 2, 1990. The Islamist consensus refers to the Saudi hegemony, which is accepted as beneficial by a majority of Muslims within the global Islamic field.

13 It is for this reason the revolutionaries pejoratively call the legitimist clerics, ‘clerics of the menses’ ('Ulama al-Haid), to imply that the object of their teaching neglects the essential, namely Islamic morality regarding the exercise political power, focusing instead on topics they consider marginal, as illustrated here by the reference to women.

References


