

## 6. SAUDI ARABIA: ISLAMISTS RISING AND FALLING

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Since its inception, the Saudi state has not defined radicalism in terms of the violent, autocratic, or regressive content of an ideology. Instead, the state evaluates ideologies in terms of the challenge or support they offer to Saudi rule. In doing so, the state variously accommodates, co-opts, delegitimizes, and represses different political and religious actors at different times. These actors include a range of violent and nonviolent salafists, Islamists, and jihadists, as well as reformers who seek to moderate the role of religion in the Saudi political system.

Over the decades, religious movements within Saudi Arabia have fractured and reorganized, alternately adopting quietism (or withdrawal from politics), nonviolent political opposition, or violent action against the state. Various actors have competed for the attention of the state and control of official religious institutions. Even those who have opposed the Al Saud's political monopoly and who share basic creedal principles with one another disagree over how to engage the state politically.<sup>1</sup> Historically, the state has tolerated radical or militant groups that do not attack it directly or challenge its legitimacy, while cracking down harshly on those who do either. The archetypal crackdown occurred when King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud crushed Wahhabi

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1. For an account of those creedal principles, see Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 33–57.

Ikhwan militants—originally his own strike force—in 1929.<sup>2</sup>

Within this context, the Arab uprisings in 2011 presented two new challenges to Saudi Arabia. One stemmed from the Muslim Brotherhood's electoral successes across the region, raising the specter that political Islamists inside the Kingdom would demand reforms or even revolution. The second challenge emerged from the proliferation of militant groups operating in Syria against the Assad regime and later in Iraq. The former situation posed principally a political threat, while the latter posed principally a security threat. The Saudi state has treated them both as security threats.

So far, Saudi Arabia's counterterrorism policies—together with the distraction of Shi'a clashes in the Eastern Province—have muted domestic opposition to Saudi rule. But anger at the regime is high among those opposed to the government's stance against the Muslim Brotherhood, its suppression of private support for jihadists in Syria and Iraq, and its recent alliance with the United States to attack the Islamic State. Over 2,500 Saudi youth have gone to fight with jihadi groups in Syria, and many of them have joined the Islamic State.<sup>3</sup>

### THE SAUDI STATE

The legitimacy of the Saudi state is built on the Al Saud family's alliance with the descendants of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and adherents to the Wahhabi religious path, an ideology that other governments in the region and around the world consider radical. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was an eighteenth-century religious reformer who sought to purify Islam of the innovations in be-

2. While the Ikhwan had helped King Abdul Aziz expand and cement his territorial control, by 1929 they were continuing to fight on into Kuwait and Iraq, which angered the British and annoyed the king. He enlisted British assistance in bringing an end to their independent activities.

3. The 2,500 figure is from Richard Barrett, *Foreign Fighters in Syria*, Soufan Group, June 2014, 13, <http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/TSG-Foreign-Fighters-in-Syria.pdf>. A spokesman for the Ministry of the Interior recently stated that between 2,000 and 2,100 Saudis have gone to Syria and Iraq since 2011. Angus McDowall, "Riyadh fears Islamic State wants sectarian war in Saudi Arabia," Reuters, November 18, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/11/18/us-mideast-crisis-saudi-idUSKCN0J21CX20141118>.

lief and practice that he deemed alien to the earliest community of Muslims. He endorsed the political leadership and military campaigns of Muhammad ibn Saud in an alliance that built a large state in the Arabian Peninsula by the early nineteenth century. Ottoman military campaigns emanating from Egypt ultimately destroyed this state in 1818, but Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's influence on religious practice in the region remained. A second Saudi state rose and fell in the mid-nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, Abdul Aziz ibn Saud—an adherent of the creed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab had spread and a descendant of Muhammad ibn Saud—reestablished the Saudi state and, with the help of the Ikhwan militants, gradually gained power over most of the Arabian Peninsula. Since then, Saudi political legitimacy has rested on two foundations: political commitment to upholding Wahhabism as religious creed, and the religious establishment's endorsement of the Al Saud's rightful role as temporal leaders. Saudi foreign policy has also encouraged proselytization around the world and, at times, tolerance of militant actions by Saudis directed abroad.

There are, of course, other important dimensions to the Saudi state and its political power. These include traditions of loyalty and patronage that predate the discovery of oil, historical relationships among Arab tribes, and the massive expansion of a central administrative state—upon which the people of Saudi Arabia depend for their livelihoods and which the Al Saud family controls—that the discovery of oil enabled. The Saudi state today draws on a combination of religious, administrative, economic, and military power to maintain its stability and advance its aims.

### **SAUDI SALAFISM**

The alliance between Ibn Saud and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab in the eighteenth century, revived by their descendants in the twentieth century, bound the legitimacy of the Saudi state to the version of salafism Ibn Abd al-Wahhab propagated. He vehemently opposed the expression of cultural practices not sanctioned by

Islam and anything he perceived to contradict the unity of God (*tawhid*—Wahhabis would refer to themselves not as Wahhabis but as Muwahhidun, or those who adhere to *tawhid*). While in theory Ibn Abd al-Wahhab criticized strict adherence to any of the four schools of traditional Sunni Islamic law, in practice one of the schools, the Hanbali, informs many Wahhabi interpretations and judgments.<sup>4</sup>

The descendants of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, known as the Al al-Shaykh (or the family of the sheikh, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab himself) control the religious establishment in Saudi Arabia, which ensures that religious policy and practice adhere to Wahhabi orthodoxy. Religious scholars run Saudi Arabia's legal system based on their Wahhabi interpretations of the Qur'an, Hadith, and other legal traditions. They control religious education and practice throughout the Kingdom and play a significant role in the education system more broadly. They issue a formal religious judgment (*fatwa*) to stamp various behaviors as permissible, impermissible, or necessary. Through the institution of committees to "command virtue and forbid vice," the Mutawwa' (religious police) monitor public behavior and enforce strict Wahhabi norms.

Yet officially sanctioned Islam in Saudi Arabia is no monolith. The political and social space in Saudi Arabia has produced loyal salafists and Wahhabis who support the Saudi state and argue for political obedience to the Al Saud; "Islamoliberals" critical of state Wahhabism but supportive of a continued role for religion in Saudi public life;<sup>5</sup> the Muslim Brothers who participated in the organized Sahwa (or "Awakening") movement to curtail the state's powers; hard-line Wahhabis critical of social, economic, and political reform that in their view undermines Saudi Arabia's authentically Islamic character; and jihadi-salafists who join or support transnational jihadi organizations, in-

4. David E. Long and Sebastian Maisel, *The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, 2nd ed. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 26.

5. The term "Islamoliberal" was coined by Stéphane Lacroix, "Between Islamists and Liberals: Saudi Arabia's New 'Islamoliberal' Reformists," *Middle East Journal* 58, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 345–65.

cluding al Qaeda (which rejects the legitimacy of the Saudi state) or, more recently, rebel jihadi groups fighting in Syria and Iraq, including the self-declared Islamic State. The state's relationship with each of these currents has ebbed and flowed over time in line with perceived challenges to the state's power and legitimacy.

## DIRECTIONS WITHIN SAUDI ARABIA

### *The Quietists and Islamo-Liberals*

Most religious scholars in Saudi Arabia preach obedience to the state run by the Al Saud. The most supportive religious figures confirm the Saudi claim to be ruling justly over the home of the two holy cities in Islam, Mecca and Medina, by ensuring Islamic governance of the Arabian Peninsula. Others, even if they privately harbor disloyal thoughts, still do not preach disobedience. Like other salafists across the region who preach an apolitical approach to religion, they cite religious texts and traditions that forbid rebellion against a ruler who is even nominally Muslim, because to rebel is to cause *fitna*, or chaos and disunity, within the Muslim community. Many also view politics as a distraction from religious practice in both thought and behavior.

Quietists do not always refrain from criticizing Saudi policy. In the 1980s and 1990s, for example, the Ahl al-Hadith (scholars who base religious practice on the Sunna, or traditions of the Prophet and his companions)<sup>6</sup> rejected official calls for Saudis to

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6. Ahl al-Hadith ("the people of Hadith") is a medieval school of thought that emphasized the role of Sunna in determining religious rulings for which the Qur'an provided no explicit direction. The movement was revived in the nineteenth century by the Syrian-born Mohammed Nasir al-Din al-Albani. Al-Albani rejected the practice of imitation (*taqlid*) that was characteristic of the four canonical schools of Islamic law. Instead, al-Albani advocated the use of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*) based on the Qur'an and Sunna. Although the Saudi jurisprudential tradition claims no explicit link to any of the four schools, in practice it follows the Hanbali line. While al-Albani's outspoken criticism of *taqlid* earned him many foes within the Saudi religious establishment, he was also able to amass a number of "self-proclaimed disciples" who in turn adopted the name Ahl al-Hadith. "By relying on al-Albani's positions for legitimacy, they broke both with the traditional Wahhabi religious establishment and with the Sahwa." Stéphane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia*, trans. George Holoch (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 85. For more on the Ahl al-Hadith see *ibid.*, 81–89.

join the jihad in Afghanistan, insisting that the Afghans, who belonged to the Maturidi school of Islamic thought, needed proper creedal guidance more than military support.<sup>7</sup> In terms of their creedal approach, the Ahl al-Hadith do not differ significantly from other groups that have embraced a turn toward militancy—in fact, the leader of the 1979 Grand Mosque attack drew heavily on their teachings.<sup>8</sup> Yet in the early 1990s, the Saudi state carefully co-opted offshoots of this movement to protect itself from political threats: followers of two loyalist sheikhs, Muhammad Aman al-Jami and Rabi' al-Madkhali, gained notoriety for their critical stance toward the Muslim Brotherhood and the Sahwa, and the state was quick to enlist their support. The government facilitated the rise of prominent individuals from the Jami and Madkhali movements in Islamic universities, from which they could launch a counteroffensive against the Sahwa.<sup>9</sup>

The Saudi state has also shown it can accommodate those whose ideologies may deviate from the Saudi Wahhabi orthodoxy. In the 1990s, a group of activists became intellectually and politically critical of the dominant Wahhabi orthodoxy. While these “Islamoliberals” advocated religious reform, they did not reject salafism as such.<sup>10</sup> They have advanced two interrelated positions. Intellectually, Islamoliberals take a steadfastly anti-Wahhabi position. Politically, they argue for the adoption of democratic practices, viewing democracy almost exclusively as a procedural scheme rather than a value-laden ideology.<sup>11</sup>

7. *Ibid.*, 116. Lacroix notes, however, that the Saudi state also appreciated the Ahl al-Hadith's stance against the jihad in Afghanistan as they grew more concerned about potential blowback against Middle Eastern regimes from jihadists fighting there.

8. Stéphane Lacroix, “Between Revolution and Apoliticism: Nasir al-Din al-Albani and His Impact on the Shaping of Contemporary Salafism,” in *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 74.

9. *Ibid.*, 77.

10. Rather, they maintain that in order to arrive at a state of “real” salafism, the latter must be divorced from its Wahhabi and Ibn Taymiyyan intermediaries. In other words, Islamoliberals argue for an innovative and dynamic form of salafism—one that agitates for a “return to the methodology of the pious ancestors and not simply to their productions, with a clear vision of what the *maqasid* (objectives) of the *shari'a* ought to be.” Interview with Abdullah al-Hamid; quoted in Lacroix, “Between Islamists and Liberals,” 349–50.

11. *Ibid.*, 347.

The Islamo-liberal reformist movement began to consolidate and formalize its demands in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks. In their 2003 charter, "Vision for the Present and the Future of the Homeland," a group of Islamo-liberal intellectuals, including both Sunnis and Shi'a, demanded "the separation of powers; the implementation of the rule of law; equal rights for all citizens regardless of regional, tribal, and confessional background; the creation of elected national and regional parliaments (*majlis al-shura*); and complete freedom of speech, assembly and organization to allow the emergence of a true civil society."<sup>12</sup> Then-Crown Prince Abdullah was at first receptive to these demands: he invited 40 of the signatories to his palace and offered his support for their cause, created a national dialogue conference to facilitate debate about and refinement of the charter, and in October 2003 announced the introduction of partial municipal elections to be held in 2004.<sup>13</sup>

#### *The Muslim Brotherhood and the Sahwa*

The Saudi government has had an ambiguous yet interdependent relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood since the movement unofficially established a branch in the Kingdom in 1937.<sup>14</sup> The annual pilgrimage traffic to Mecca and Medina made Saudi Arabia an inviting target for the Brotherhood's expansion because it offered easy access to potential recruits from around the world.<sup>15</sup>

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12. *Ibid.*, 360–61.

13. *Ibid.*, 363. The municipal elections were delayed and eventually took place in 2005.

14. The relationship between Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Brotherhood began in 1936 when Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, went to the Kingdom to solicit the new ruler's permission to establish a local chapter of the Islamic fraternal order. Banna had called Abdul Aziz "one of the hopes of the Islamic world for restoration of its grandeur and a recreation of its unity." *Five Tracts of Hasan Al-Banna (1906–1949)*, trans. Charles Wendell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

15. King Abdul Aziz did not permit the Muslim Brotherhood to recruit openly, but did not prohibit recruitment altogether. The king also bought numerous volumes of the Brotherhood's edition of a classical Islamic text, which helped finance the publishing endeavor. Banna, in turn, wrote editorials urging the Saudi king to lead Muslim public opinion. But as the Brotherhood's fortunes rose in the late 1930s, the Brotherhood's newspaper became more critical of the king for his allegedly un-Islamic behavior while abroad. See William McCants, "Derivatives of the Mus-

For the next several decades, relations between Saudi Arabia and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood waxed and waned depending on whether the Brotherhood was being persecuted by Arab nationalists at home. In 1954, after Gamal Abdel Nasser's crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Saudis welcomed the Brothers and offered citizenship to many of their prominent members. The Saudis badly needed the many professionals among the Brotherhood members to build and maintain the Kingdom's educational and financial infrastructure, which oil revenues were rapidly expanding.<sup>16</sup> The Saudis also viewed Nasser's socialism and Arab nationalism as a threat to the legitimacy of the Kingdom's identity and system of governance, and so considered his enemies as their allies.<sup>17</sup>

The Muslim Brotherhood's hold on the Saudi education system afforded the movement its greatest and most lasting im-

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lim Brotherhood: Saudi Arabia," Center for International Issues Research, January 2, 2007; Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt: The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement 1928–1994* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1998), 140–43, 219; Umar al-'Izzi, "Al-Ikhwan al-Sa'udiyyun. . . Al-Tayyar al-ladhi lam yaqul kalimatahu ba'd!" ["The Saudi Brotherhood': The trend which has not said its piece yet], *Al-Asr*, July 25, 2004, <http://alasar.ws/articles/view/5547>; Husam Tammam, "Al-Ikhwan fi al-Sa'udiyya: Hal daqqat al-sa'a" [The Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia: Has the time of separation arrived?], *Islamismscope*, December 3, 2002, [http://www.islamismscope.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=119:2010-02-09-13-12-44&catid=37:articles&Itemid=67](http://www.islamismscope.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=119:2010-02-09-13-12-44&catid=37:articles&Itemid=67).

16. One of the first Muslim Brothers to arrive in Saudi Arabia was Manna al-Qattan, an Egyptian scholar who came to the Kingdom in 1953 and served on various committees directing religious schools and educational policy. Qattan was the head of the Saudi Brotherhood until his death in 1999 and the intermediary between the Saudi government and the Brotherhood in Egypt. In that capacity, he frequently met with the interior minister, Prince Naif, and his deputy Prince Ahmad bin Abdul Aziz, in addition to Crown Prince Salman bin Abdul Aziz, then the governor of Riyadh. See McCants, "Derivatives of the Muslim Brotherhood: Saudi Arabia"; Muhammad al-Majdhub, "Sheikh Manna' al-Qattan," *Odabasham*, undated, December 18, 2007 <http://www.odabasham.net/show.php?sid=8353>; Yusuf al-Qaradawi, "al-Halaka al-Thalitha: al-Ikhwan fi Kharij Masr," [Section Three: The Brotherhood outside Egypt], *Islamonline*, October 2003; Ali Ashmawi, *Al-Tarikh al-sirri li-jama'at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin* [The secret history of the society of Muslim Brothers] (Cairo: Dar Al-Hilal, 1993), 62.

17. McCants, "Derivatives of the Muslim Brotherhood"; Tammam, "Al-Ikhwan fi al-Sa'udiyya"; Thomas Hegghammer and Stéphane Lacroix, "Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia: The Story of Juhayman al-'Utaybi Revisited," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 39, no. 1 (2007): 103–22.

pact on political Islam in Saudi Arabia.<sup>18</sup> This is nowhere more evident than in the rise of the so-called Sahwa or Awakening movement in the 1980s and 1990s. In essence this movement represented a marriage between the doctrinal conservatism of Wahhabism and the “political consciousness” of the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>19</sup> Influenced by the political vocabulary of the Muslim Brotherhood, this movement over time assumed its own unique identity.<sup>20</sup> The ideology of the Sahwa as such did not perturb Saudi authorities, but when the Sahwa movement openly critiqued Saudi policy in the early 1990s, the Saudi government’s attitude toward it shifted accordingly.

In 1991, when the Muslim Brotherhood in Saudi Arabia opposed the stationing of U.S. troops on Saudi soil in the wake of Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, the Sahwa launched a national campaign demanding political reforms through a series of open letters to the king.<sup>21</sup> In response, the Saudi government cracked

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18. Muslim Brothers also established charitable and missionary institutions that extended Saudi influence around the world, such as the Islamic Bank for Development, the Muslim World League (a Wahhabi missionary organization), and the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (a youth mission organization headquartered in Saudi Arabia). On the Islamic Bank for Development see Qaradawi, “Brotherhood outside Egypt”; ‘Ala’ Matar, “Asrar ‘audat madaris al-Ikhwan,” [Secrets of the return of Brotherhood schools], *Katibatibia*, December 18, 2007; Sulayman bin Salih al-Kharashi, “Arba’ ‘ibar... min mudhakarāt ahad rumuz jama’at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin,” [Four lessons from the memoirs of one of the prominent members of the Muslim Brotherhood], *Sayd al-Fuad*, undated, <http://saaid.net/Warathah/Alkharashi/27.htm>. For details on the Muslim World League, see J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins, *Alms for Jihad: Charity and Terrorism in the Islamic World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 19, 33, 34–35. See also Thomas Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia: Violence and Pan-Islamism since 1979* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 38–58.

19. See Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action,” 50.

20. Stéphane Lacroix, “Saudi Arabia’s Muslim Brotherhood predicament,” *Washington Post*, March 20, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/03/20/saudi-arabias-muslim-brotherhood-predicament/>. For example, even though one of the Sahwa groups referred to itself as “the Saudi Muslim Brotherhood,” organizational links between this group and the mother organization were weak and informal. More importantly “its members did not pledge allegiance to the general guide in Cairo”—because they had already pledged allegiance (*bay’a*) to the Saudi King.

21. For example, in the famous *Letter of Demands* presented by the Sahwa leaders in 1991, out of the 12 points outlined, only one makes implicit reference to the stationing of U.S. troops in Saudi: “Build a foreign policy that preserves the interests

down, and it largely succeeded in silencing the movement. In an attempt to frame the episode as an intrusion of foreign origin, the Saudi government exaggerated the link between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Sahwa, and in the process exiled Egyptian members of the former while imprisoning those of the latter.<sup>22</sup>

In the late 1990s the Sahwa movement reemerged weakened and fractured. A significant number of its former leaders and scholars had broken off and espoused alternate political and ideological positions, ranging from the extreme to the “liberal” and from the active to the quietist. Salman al-‘Awda, one of the movement’s most prominent and prolific scholars, toned down his opposition to Saudi rule and policy in exchange for official tolerance for his views. Mitigating circumstances—the deaths of two of the most respected figures in the state religious establishment—facilitated the rapprochement.<sup>23</sup> In this “theological power vacuum” the government co-opted members of the Sahwa movement to serve as an alternative source of legitimacy.<sup>24</sup>

### *The Grand Mosque Attack, Anti-Saudi Wahhabism, and Jihadism*

The co-optation of different components of the Muslim Brotherhood and Sahwa movements at various points in Saudi Ara-

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of the *umma*, far removed from the alliances contrary to God’s law, and that joins in Muslim causes.” The rest of the document demands the creation of an independent advisory council, rulers’ accountability, the fair distribution of wealth, etc. Quoted in Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 180.

22. This theme would reemerge in 2002 when Prince Naif bin Abdul Aziz lamented: “The Brotherhood has done great damage to Saudi Arabia . . . All of our problems come from the Muslim Brotherhood . . . The Muslim Brotherhood has destroyed the Arab World.” Quoted in “Naif says Muslim Brotherhood Cause of Most Arab Problems,” *Arab News*, November 28, 2002, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/226291>. It would emerge yet again in 2014 when, for example, Khalid al-Faisal, the Saudi Minister of Education, said of the Brotherhood: “We offered them our children, and they took them hostage . . . The society left the stage open for them, including schools.” See “Saudis Arrest Professors Linked to Brotherhood: ‘We Offered Them Our Children . . .’” *World Tribune*, May 27, 2014, <http://www.worldtribune.com/2014/05/27/saudi-arrests-university-professors-linked-muslim-brotherhood/>.

23. The two were Abd al-Aziz bin Baz (died May 13, 1999) and Muhammad bin ‘Uthaymin (died January 10, 2001).

24. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, 83; Lacroix, “Saudi Arabia’s Muslim Brotherhood Predicament.”

bia's recent history served the overarching goal of countering accusations from within Saudi Arabia that the Al Saud's political rule failed to uphold a sufficiently Islamic form of governance or failed to protect the holiest sites in Islam.

The Saudi government faced such accusations on the morning of November 20, 1979, when a group of several hundred apocalyptic militants led by Juhayman al-Utaybi laid siege to Mecca's Grand Mosque and Islam's holiest site, the Ka'ba. The attack initially provoked confusion and questioning among many Saudis, both as to whether the Mahdi (or savior) had actually arrived, and as to whether fighting in Mecca, expressly forbidden in a reliable prophetic tradition, was permissible to dislodge the rebels (some Saudi soldiers refused to attack).<sup>25</sup> In response, the regime was quick to enlist the support of the Council of Ulema, which, on November 24, 1979, issued a fatwa permitting the use of force within the mosque.<sup>26</sup> The Saudi authorities launched a two-week offensive against the insurgents, and by December 4, they had reclaimed control of the mosque and its surroundings. Al-Utaybi was captured and the alleged Mahdi, his brother-in-law Muhammad Abdullah al-Qahtani, was killed. Although the exact number of casualties is not known, estimates place the death toll in the hundreds, if not as high as a thousand. On January 9, 1980, the Saudi state executed 63 people across eight different cities in connection with the siege.<sup>27</sup> Following that incident, the government began to exercise tighter control over religious institutions within Saudi Arabia and pursued a policy of "re-Islamizing" society by clamping down on unreligious behaviors and expressions such as music and song on television

25. Yaroslav Trofimov, *The Siege of Mecca* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 85–86.

26. See Joseph A. Kechichian, "The Role of the Ulama in the Politics of an Islamic State: The Case of Saudi Arabia," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 18, no. 1 (February 1986): 53–71.

27. In the wake of the incident, government officials were quick to blame foreign ideological influences for Utaybi's actions. Specifically, the government singled out Egyptian groups such as Jama'at al-Muslimin (the Society of Muslims), also known as al-Takfir wa-l-Hijra (Excommunication and Emigration). See Hegghammer and Lacroix, "Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia," 113.

and immodest dress by women. In addition, beginning in 1982, the state required every mosque orator to receive official authorization from the Ministry of Hajj and Waqf,<sup>28</sup> and a number of informal religious groups were banned. One immediate consequence was to strengthen the position of the Sahwa movement, which at that time was more “institutionally integrated” than other Islamist movements.<sup>29</sup>

Al-Utaybi’s movement, a singular blend of radical Wahhabism and messianism, had few adherents, and therefore represented a short-term security threat more than an existential challenge to the Saudi state. Nevertheless the government did see a need in the aftermath of the attack to bolster its Islamic credentials. The shock of the attack, combined with concerns about an oversupply of trained clerics in the country, the recent Islamic Revolution in Iran, and growing criticism from the religious establishment—including leading cleric Abd al-Aziz bin Baz—of the Kingdom’s rapid modernization,<sup>30</sup> contributed to the Saudi government’s decision to support Arab jihadists in the fight against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. Working with Pakistani and U.S. intelligence agencies, Saudi Arabia provided institutional support (including recruitment and funding) as well as religious sanction for what became the jihad in Afghanistan.<sup>31</sup> In addition to the Afghan jihad, the Saudis also supported jihadi activity in Chechnya. Saudi sheikhs legitimized the Chechen resistance, and private donors and Islamic charities in Saudi Arabia offered financial support to the cause.<sup>32</sup> The state neither intervened in nor curtailed these ef-

28. Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 103.

29. Hegghammer and Lacroix, “Rejectionist Islamism in Saudi Arabia,” 113.

30. Trofimov, *Siege of Mecca*, 27.

31. For example, the grand mufti, Sheikh Bin Baz, issued a fatwa sanctioning the jihad against communism and referring to it, in religious terms, as a *farid kifaya* (incumbent on the Muslim community as a whole). The state, for its part, provided logistical and financial support to the effort. The Saudis also afforded a space for private, unofficial contributions in the form of Islamic charities, mosque collections, and private donations. Madawi Al-Rasheed, *Contesting the Saudi State: Islamic Voices from a new Generation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 107.

32. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, 56.

forts. Many of the fighters wounded in Chechnya received medical treatment in Saudi Arabia.<sup>33</sup>

Osama bin Laden emerged from the fight in Afghanistan at the head of a network of jihadists looking for a new fight. While bin Laden's ambitions were global, he held a particular antipathy toward the Al Saud, especially after their collaboration with the United States during the first Gulf War. Bin Laden's diatribes against the Al Saud found a receptive audience within Saudi Arabia. Many fighters returned from Afghanistan feeling empowered and enthusiastic to fight on behalf of Islam. From the early 1990s through the 2000s, Saudi Arabia confronted rising numbers of domestic *takfiris*, Muslims who rejected the Saudi leadership as un-Islamic. Rejection of the state was based both on opposition to domestic policy reforms seen as Westernizing or un-Islamic, and on foreign policy decisions—including alliance with the United States and the decision to allow U.S. troops to be stationed within Saudi Arabia—seen as antithetical to the state's claim to be protecting Islamic holy sites and Muslims. A new movement known as the Shu'aybi school, whose leadership was made up almost entirely of former Sahwa leaders, provided significant intellectual support for the domestic jihadi movement that began to gather momentum in the 2000s in the wake of the U.S.-led military campaign in Afghanistan.<sup>34</sup> According to Thomas Hegghammer, the movement was fueled by the so-called Jenin Battle in the spring of 2002, the build-up to the Iraq War in late 2002, the Saudi regime's crackdown on possible militant action during the Iraq War, and the circulation of images from Guantánamo Bay.<sup>35</sup>

Sometime in 2002, bin Laden ordered al Qaeda networks in Saudi Arabia to prepare for attacks within the country.<sup>36</sup> At the time, the Saudi security apparatus was underprepared and

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33. *Ibid.*

34. Among the leaders of the movement were Hamud al-Shu'aybi and Ali al-Khudayr. According to Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, 148, there is little evidence indicating that the Shu'aybis were aware of the jihadists' operational schemes.

35. *Ibid.*, 143–47.

36. Thomas Hegghammer, "Islamist Violence and Regime Stability in Saudi Arabia," *International Affairs* 84, no. 4 (2008): 709.

weak relative to the operational capability of the local al Qaeda network.<sup>37</sup> Bin Laden also had Yusuf al-Uyayri in his arsenal of Saudi-based personnel. Unlike other jihadi leaders before him, Uyayri was from the conservative stronghold of Burayda in Najd, and he was able to significantly broaden the scope of al Qaeda recruitment and fundraising within Saudi Arabia. His family ties to Najd linked him—and by extension al Qaeda—to the most conservative and well-respected religious scholars in the country, among whom were the members of the Shu‘aybi movement.<sup>38</sup> Around this time, Nasir al-Fahd, a leading scholar of the Shu‘aybi school, issued a fatwa declaring that visas could no longer guarantee the safety of Western visitors, and he published documents that sanctioned the targeting of Westerners as well as Saudi security forces in violent attacks.<sup>39</sup>

Saudi officials’ overt concern about terrorist activity grew not after the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States, but after May 12, 2003, when multiple suicide car bombs were detonated in Riyadh at several residential compounds housing non-Saudi contractors and their families. In total, 34 people were killed and another 200 were injured. The declared and immediate aim of the attacks was to rid the Arabian Peninsula of the U.S. presence there.<sup>40</sup> Over the next several years, an unprecedented and sustained wave of attacks was carried out across the country; by mid-2005, over 91 civilians and 118 militants had been killed and nearly 800 others injured.<sup>41</sup> In response, the regime first launched a nationwide crackdown on suspected militants, questioning thousands and arresting at least 800 on suspicion of terrorist activity,<sup>42</sup> and then instituted a rehabili-

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37. *Ibid.*, 703.

38. Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*, 121, 148–55.

39. *Ibid.*, 153.

40. *Ibid.*, 105. There are also statements from bin Laden and Uyayri (al Qaeda’s leader in Saudi Arabia) to this effect.

41. John Bradley, “Kingdom of Peace Transformed into al-Qa’eda’s Latest War Zone,” *Telegraph*, August 1, 2005, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/saudiArabia/1495290/Kingdom-of-peace-transformed-into-al-Qaedas-latest-war-zone.html>.

42. “Initiatives and Actions Taken by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Combat Terrorism,” Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington, DC, December 2006, [http://www.saudiembassy.net/files/PDF/KSA\\_WOT\\_Report\\_Deco6.pdf](http://www.saudiembassy.net/files/PDF/KSA_WOT_Report_Deco6.pdf).

tation and reeducation program. The program sought not only to address the behavior of suspected terrorists directly but also to portray the latter as “errant” and religiously misguided, suffering from a sort of “illness.” By defining the attackers as misguided and terrorism as a “fatal disease,” the authorities attempted to deny the attacks’ political relevance and frame them as a social challenge.

#### **AFTER THE UPRISINGS**

The Arab uprisings confronted Saudi Arabia with two principal challenges related to religious ideology and militancy: First, the success of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia emboldened political Islamists across the region—including a variety of salafi and Islamist Saudis critical of the state and the Al Saud. Second, the civil war in Syria fostered the emergence of a radical Islamic group, the Islamic State, which is not just a military concern but an ideological one—specifically, the Islamic State’s claims to authentic religious authority over all Muslims threaten the Saudi state’s legitimacy. Saudi Arabia has responded to the first challenge by framing the political opposition of the Muslim Brotherhood (and others) as a terrorism threat that must be addressed through police and counterterrorism efforts. As for the second threat, the Saudis have countered the dual challenge posed by the Islamic State with combat operations and with religious scholarship that seeks to delegitimize the Islamic State’s religious and ideological claims. While in the past, the Saudi government dealt with various oppositional movements as they emerged periodically, the Arab uprisings presented the Saudis with the threat of a resurgence of oppositional sentiments en masse. This was a novel situation, but the techniques used by the Saudis to address it were old ones: the conflation of political threats with security threats, and the framing of all political opposition as foreign intrusion in domestic affairs.

The most credible threat came from the Saudi Muslim Brotherhood and Sahwa, which continue to be the only organized and

popular activist groups. Notable Sahwa figures, such as Salman al-'Awda and Nasir al-Umar, expressed their support for the revolutions taking place across the region, despite the Kingdom's official position.<sup>43</sup> Activists and intellectuals closely associated with the Sahwa movement established Saudi Arabia's first political party, the Islamic Umma Party (*Hizb al-Umma al-Islami*).<sup>44</sup> Intellectuals of various religious and political stripes put forward reform proposals; one petition that garnered widespread support demanded "an elected parliament... and the appointment of a prime minister distinct from the king and accountable to a parliament."<sup>45</sup> One of the only oppositional groups that refused to sign the petition was the salafi Sururis,<sup>46</sup> who objected that the petition was not "Islamic" enough. However, this did not stop a number of figures associated with the Sururi movement from signing the petition individually. Overall, the petition garnered nearly 9,000 signatures within a few weeks of being posted online.<sup>47</sup>

43. The Kingdom's grand mufti described the demonstrations in Egypt and Tunisia as "planned and organized by the enemies of the Umma" in order to "strike the Umma and destroy its religious, values and morals." Quoted in Stéphane Lacroix, "Saudi Islamists and the Arab Spring," Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, London School of Economics and Political Science, London, 2014, [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/56725/1/Lacroix\\_Saudi-Islamists-and-theArab-Spring\\_2014.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/56725/1/Lacroix_Saudi-Islamists-and-theArab-Spring_2014.pdf), 3.

44. Lacroix, "Saudi Islamists and the Arab Spring," 8–9. The SCPRA was established in 2009 as Saudi's first fully independent human rights nongovernmental organization. Lacroix notes that the founders of the party were influenced by the writings of the Kuwaiti religious scholar Hakim al-Mutayri, who "attempted to justify democratic practices using Salafi references."

45. *Ibid.*

46. Sururis (so-called by their opponents) adhere to the teachings of Muhammad Surur Zayn al-Abidin, a former Syrian Muslim Brother who blended the thought of Sayyid Qutb and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Because the Sururis share an intellectual pedigree with the Brotherhood, they compete with them for recruits, royal patronage, and control of Saudi Arabia's religious and educational institutions. See 'Izzi, "Al-Ikhwan al-Su'udiyun"; Faris bin Hazzam, "Sibaq bayna Islamiyyin wa Islamiyyin: Intikhabat al-Dammam tush'il fatil 'al-Sururiyya' wa 'al-Ikhwan'," [The race between the Islamists and the Islamists: The elections of Al-Dammam ignite the fuse between the Sururis and the Ikhwanis], *Al Arabiyya*, February 28, 2005, <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2005/02/28/10767.html>.

47. Lacroix notes that most signers were young Saudis in their 20s and 30s. See Lacroix, "Saudi Islamists and the Arab Spring," 11–12.

The government's initial response included both forceful intervention and compromise. On February 23 and again on March 18, 2011, the king decreed two aid packages that targeted the most disaffected members of society, namely the poor and the young. Together the packages amounted to a total of around US\$130 billion.<sup>48</sup> The government gave civil servants—around two-thirds of the Saudi workforce—a 15 percent raise and an extra two months' pay.<sup>49</sup> The government also sought to intimidate the opposition. According to a person with contacts in the Saudi Brotherhood, Crown Prince Naif and future Crown Prince Salman gathered the more vocal Islamists and threatened them into silence.<sup>50</sup> Around this time, 'Awda lost his weekly television show.<sup>51</sup> Seven out of the 10 founding members of the Islamic Umma Party were arrested,<sup>52</sup> and security forces were deployed around the country. Echoing its past practices, the government also argued that opposition movements were the product of an Iranian conspiracy aimed at "destabilizing the Kingdom."<sup>53</sup> By designating activists as foreign agents, the government has been able to subsume all forms of opposition under the umbrella of terrorism. The promulgation of a broadly termed antiterrorism law in 2014 confirmed the government's investment in this strategy. Under the guise of enforcing this law, Saudi authorities have arrested and tried activists of all stripes.<sup>54</sup>

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48. "Saudi stocks soar after king's spending spree," Agence France-Presse, March 20, 2011, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/3/12/8119/Business/Economy/Saudi-stocks-soar-after-kings-spending-spre.aspx>.

49. Ayesha Daya and Vivian Salama, "OPEC's \$1T Cash Quiets Poor as \$100 Oil Fills Coffers," Bloomberg, September 20, 2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-09-19/opec-s-1t-cash-quiets-poor-on-longest-ever-100-oil.html>.

50. Interview with a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood, March 2, 2014, Jeddah.

51. Stéphane Lacroix, "Is Saudi Arabia Immune?" *Journal of Democracy* 22, no. 4 (October 2011): 48–59.

52. Lacroix, "Saudi Islamists and the Arab Spring," 13.

53. Ibid.

54. Most recently, the human rights activist Waleed Abul al-Khair was sentenced to 15 years in prison and a 15-year travel ban, in addition to a fine in the amount of 200,000 riyals. The charge included, inter alia, "assembling international organisations against the Kingdom"; "creating and supervising an unlicensed organisation, and contributing to the establishment of another"; and "preparing and

Back in 2011, when the Saudi government viewed these domestic developments in the context of events taking place around the region, it became increasingly focused on the Muslim Brotherhood as a political threat. The Saudis determined early on that the Islamists would be the revolutions' primary beneficiaries, and the regime worried that they would try to export their revolution to the Arab monarchies. The *Wall Street Journal* reported as far back as February 4, 2011, that "President Barack Obama's attempt to abruptly push aside Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in favor of a transition government has sparked a rift with key Arab allies Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, which fear the U.S. is opening the door for Islamist groups to gain influence and destabilize the region."<sup>55</sup>

The regimes' fears were partially confirmed when Ennahda in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt dominated the voting. Saudi supporters of the Muslim Brothers lauded the open elections, a thinly veiled criticism of the Saudi regime. Next door in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), some Muslim Brothers also put their names to a petition demanding that the UAE's advisory council be empowered and that real elections be held.<sup>56</sup> There is no evidence that the Brotherhood in Egypt was pushing its fellow travelers in the Gulf to challenge the monarchies, but officials in the most politically closed of the Gulf states—Saudi Arabia and the UAE—interpreted the agitation as a conspiracy or at least part of a regional zeitgeist they disliked.

While Saudi Arabia and the UAE kept one eye on domestic Brotherhood unrest at home, they also watched the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. There the group was attempting to wrest control of the Mubarak state apparatus from the old guard and

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storing information that will affect public security." "Update—Saudi Arabia: Mr. Waleed Abu Al-Khair Receives Lengthy Prison Sentence and Travel Ban," Frontline Defenders, July 7, 2014, <http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/26509>.

55. Adam Entous, Julian Barnes, and Jay Solomon, "U.S. Pressure on Mubarak Opens a Rift with Arab Allies," *Wall Street Journal*, February 4, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704376104576122610828648254>.

56. Lori Plotkin Boghardt, "The Muslim Brotherhood on Trial in the UAE," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, April 12, 2013, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-muslim-brotherhood-on-trial-in-the-uae>.

shift away from the Saudi camp to a more neutral position vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia's enemy Iran. According to one intermediary between the Saudi government and the Egyptian Brotherhood, the Saudis were furious that the Brotherhood refused to share power with other members of the opposition.<sup>57</sup> This refusal reinforced their view that the Brotherhood is an intrinsically expansionist organization that seeks total power when the opportunity presents itself.<sup>58</sup> After Morsi followed his fund-raising visit to the Kingdom with an attempted rapprochement with Iran, the Saudi government began to suffocate the new Egyptian government by withholding its promised financing. Just two months before the overthrow of Morsi, Saudi Arabia had sent only US\$1 billion of the US\$3.5 billion in aid it had promised after Mubarak's overthrow.<sup>59</sup>

Tensions between the regime and the Saudi Muslim Brothers flared again in the summer of 2013 after the Saudi government supported the coup against Morsi. The Saudis immediately promised US\$5 billion in aid, together with US\$3 billion from the UAE and US\$4 billion from Kuwait. The Saudi king, Abdullah, also publicly supported the military's bloody crackdown on Brotherhood members protesting Morsi's ouster, characterizing it as a justified action against terrorists.<sup>60</sup> Brotherhood members and sympathizers in the Kingdom responded by criticizing their government's backing of the coup and decorating their Twitter avatars with symbols supporting the Egyptian Brotherhood pro-

57. Interview with Anwar Eshqi, March 3, 2014, Jeddah.

58. Interview with Angus McDowall, March 5, 2014, Riyadh.

59. One French journalist was told by a Saudi official that the Kingdom would spend billions to keep the Muslim Brotherhood from coming to power. He was told by numerous Egyptian journalists and officials that Saudi Arabia and the UAE view the Brotherhood as a strategic threat and will therefore continue sending money to Sisi for his social programs so that the Brotherhood cannot claim to provide services not provided by the government. Interview, May 5, 2014, Cairo. See also "Finance Minister Requests Aid from Saudi Arabia," *Daily News Egypt*, May 19, 2013, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/05/19/finance-minister-requests-aid-from-saudi-arabia/>.

60. Tariq Al-Homayed, "Opinion: King Abdullah's Egypt Speech Was Like a Surgeon's Scalpel," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, August 19, 2013, <http://www.aawsat.net/2013/08/article55314019>.

testors.<sup>61</sup> Muhammad bin Nasir al-Suhaybani spoke out against those who supported the coup during a sermon at the Prophet's Mosque in Medina.<sup>62</sup> Brotherhood sympathizer Salman al-'Awda barely concealed his criticism of the Saudi government, tweeting "It is clear who is driving Egypt to its destruction out of fear for their own selves."<sup>63</sup> The Brotherhood's spiritual leader, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, accused Saudi Arabia's close ally, the UAE, of standing against Islamist regimes.<sup>64</sup>

By March 2014, the Saudis and the Emiratis had had enough. They refused to send ambassadors to Qatar, a state they held responsible for funding, harboring, and giving media exposure to the Brotherhood. They also joined Egypt in declaring the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization. The liberal Saudi prince, Alwaleed bin Talal, removed popular Brotherhood member Tareq al-Suwaidan from al-Risala TV for criticizing the killing of Brotherhood protestors, accusing him of being part of the "terrorist Brotherhood movement."<sup>65</sup> The government also banned books by Suwaidan and 'Awda.<sup>66</sup> According to a State Department source, there was also a brief campaign by the Ministry of the Interior to detain Islamists at the local ministry branches and force them to sign a pledge agreeing to cease criticism of

61. Interview with Angus McDowall, March 5, 2014, Riyadh.

62. "Kalima 'an ahwal Misr," [A word on the situation in Egypt], YouTube video, posted by "Bandar Bouresly" August 16, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=desfNSSjd4k>; Marc Lynch, "Gulf Islamist Dissent over Egypt," *Foreign Policy*, August 18, 2013, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/08/18/gulf\\_islamist\\_dissent\\_over\\_egypt](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/08/18/gulf_islamist_dissent_over_egypt).

63. Salman al-'Awda, Twitter post, August 15, 2013, [https://twitter.com/Salman\\_AlOdah/status/368022839666167808](https://twitter.com/Salman_AlOdah/status/368022839666167808).

64. "UAE Summons Qatar Envoy over Qaradawi Remarks," *Al Jazeera*, February 2, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/02/uae-summons-qatar-envoy-over-qaradawi-remarks-20142215393855165.html>.

65. Habib Toumi, "TV Manager Fired over Muslim Brotherhood Links," *Gulf News*, August 18, 2013, <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/tv-manager-fired-over-muslim-brotherhood-links-1.1221473>; Marc Lynch, "Gulf Islamist Dissent over Egypt."

66. "Muslim Brotherhood-Affiliated Authors' Books Pulled in Saudi Arabia," *Gulf News*, June 2, 2014, <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/muslim-brotherhood-affiliated-authors-books-pulled-in-saudi-arabia-1.1342080>.

the Saudi state. Since then, most Islamists have become more circumspect on Twitter. The popular cleric Muhammad al-Arifi, for example, has focused on personal piety or Muslim suffering abroad, for example in Burma.<sup>67</sup> He was reportedly recently arrested<sup>68</sup> and forbidden to teach at King Saud University.<sup>69</sup>

Even before the Saudis' official announcement designating the Brotherhood a terrorist organization, news of the decision had already spread in the Kingdom. A former member of the Brotherhood related that the 25,000 or so Brothers in the Kingdom were reacting by keeping a low profile and canceling some of their gatherings so as not to anger the government. At the time, they anticipated that the decree was just a warning and that the government would not arrest local Brothers en masse.<sup>70</sup> So far, they have been right.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the calm surface, the Brotherhood's anger at the Saudi regime recalls that of the early 1990s, when unrest associated with the Sahwa movement shook the Kingdom.<sup>72</sup> Based on their earlier experience in the Sahwa, the elder Brothers and Brotherhood sympathizers like 'Awda know they do not have the broad-based political support to defy the state security apparatus. Rather, they are biding their time until factions in the royal family work out their differences.<sup>73</sup> But the younger Brotherhood members may be unwilling to play the long game, especially now that Saudi Arabia is ringed by revolutions.

67. Interview with U.S. State Department analyst, March 4, 2014, Riyadh.

68. "Usrat al-Da'iyya al-Arifi tu'akkad khabr 'Itiqalihi munthu Usboa'" [The family of Al-Arifi confirms the news of his arrest a week ago], *Al-Watan*, October 15, 2014.

69. "Suhuf: Qarar bi-waqf al-Arifi 'an al-tadris wa jasn li-l-'ashaq fi al-Basra" [Papers: Decision to remove al-Arifi from his teaching, and a bridge for lovers in Basra], CNN Arabic, October 21, 2014, <http://arabic.cnn.com/middleeast/2014/10/21/arabic-papers>.

70. Interview with former member of the Muslim Brotherhood, March 2, 2014, Jeddah.

71. To date, the government has only arrested nine Brothers, all of whom were university professors charged with being involved in "foreign organizations." See "Saudis Arrest Professors Linked to Brotherhood."

72. Interview with a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood, March 2, 2014, Jeddah; interview with Yousef al-Dayni, March 2, 2014, Jeddah.

73. Interview with former member of the Muslim Brotherhood, March 2, 2014, Jeddah.

The other group that has faced a crackdown rather than accommodation since 2011 is Saudi Arabia's Shi'a.<sup>74</sup> Events in Bahrain and Syria have dramatically increased the tension between the Sunni majority and the Shi'ite minority in Saudi Arabia. Prior to the Arab uprisings, Sunni critics of the government regularly met with Shi'ite leaders and argued that the regime was just trying to divide the Islamist opposition and prevent it from pushing for political reforms. Shi'ite and Sunni activists even planned a day of countrywide protests on March 11, 2011, though this collapsed when the Shi'a began promulgating narrow sectarian demands.<sup>75</sup> The resulting mutual distrust was compounded days later when the Saudis deployed troops to put down the uprising in Bahrain, and then when Hezbollah deployed its forces to Syria and rumors began circulating of Shi'ite youth from the Eastern Province going there to fight.<sup>76</sup> Regular Shi'ite protests in the villages of the Eastern Province harken back to the protests of the 1980s in the wake of the Iranian Revolution, leading one analyst to proclaim that the current unrest has pushed sectarian tensions to "arguably . . . the highest level" since the fall of the shah.<sup>77</sup>

A journalist in Riyadh related that his government contacts were not particularly worried about the Shi'a in the Kingdom, believing "they have the situation well in hand."<sup>78</sup> According to one Shi'ite activist, the government tries to redirect Sunni anger at the royal family toward the Shi'a. He cited as evidence the destruction of a Shi'ite village in Eastern Province early in 2014.<sup>79</sup>

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74. The unwillingness of the Saudi regime to make mild concessions to the moderate Shi'a leadership has discredited the government in the eyes of many of the activist youth. As a consequence, many activists are embracing a radical program of political change, and their discredited leaders are adopting a more strident tone to maintain their leadership. Fred Wehrey, "Shia Days of Rage: The Roots of Radicalism in Saudi Arabia," *Foreign Affairs*, December 11, 2012, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138498/frederic-wehrey/shia-days-of-rage>.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Interview with a U.S. State Department analyst, March 4, 2014, Riyadh.

77. Wehrey, "Shia Days of Rage."

78. Interview with Angus McDowall, March 5, 2014, Riyadh.

79. Interview with Shi'ite activist, March 5, 2014, Riyadh. Madawi al-Rasheed also concluded that the Shi'ite protests were "God-sent" for the regime. See "Egypt's

Although no such destruction has been reported in the media, it is certainly the case that the Saudis have killed Shi'ite protestors and gunmen during clashes in the province.<sup>80</sup> The incidence of armed clashes in the Eastern Province is increasing, "indicating that militants have improved access to firearms" and "signaling a growing risk of radical Shia opposition factions resorting to terrorism against the Saudi state."<sup>81</sup>

Even amidst the recent crackdowns on Sunni and Shi'ite opposition figures alike, there remain individuals and currents within Saudi Arabia that walk the line of criticism and ingratiation. One example is Nasir al-Umar, the leader of the salafi Sururi movement in Saudi Arabia and an anti-Shi'ite firebrand who called on Sunni Muslims to fight Americans in Iraq.<sup>82</sup> Umar has obliquely criticized Saudi Arabia's handling of the Arab uprisings by praising the ascent of Islamists to power in Egypt and Tunisia in 2012. Not an advocate of democratic reform before 2011,<sup>83</sup> Umar has come to view such reform as a positive if limited step toward realization of an Islamic state.<sup>84</sup> As for the

Coup and the Saudi Opposition," *Foreign Policy*, August 19, 2013, [http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/08/19/egypts\\_coup\\_and\\_the\\_saudi\\_opposition](http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/08/19/egypts_coup_and_the_saudi_opposition).

80. "Saudi Forces Shoot Dead Shia Protester," Agence France-Presse, January 13, 2012, [https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/nownews/saudi\\_forces\\_shoot\\_dead\\_shia\\_protester](https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/nownews/saudi_forces_shoot_dead_shia_protester); "Four Killed in Crossfire between Saudi Police, Gunmen," *Finland Times*, February 21, 2014, <http://www.finlandtimes.fi/worldwide/2014/02/21/4985/Four-killed-in-crossfire-between-Saudi-police,-gunmen>.

81. "Small-Arms Attacks Likely to Increase in Saudi Arabia's Oil-Rich Eastern Province," *IHS Jane's Intelligence Weekly*, February 26, 2014, <http://www.janes.com/article/34681/small-arms-attacks-likely-to-increase-in-saudi-arabia-s-oil-rich-eastern-province>.

82. "Interview: Sheikh Nasser al-Omar," *Frontline*, February 8, 2005, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/saud/interviews/alomar.html>.

83. Saud al-Sarhan, "The Neo Reformists: A New Democratic Islamic Discourse," Middle East Institute, Washington, DC, October 1, 2009, <http://www.mei.edu/content/neo-reformists-new-democratic-islamic-discourse>.

84. Yusuf al-Hazza, "Al-Sahawiyun al-Sa'udiyyun yatalamma sun atharan bil-thawrat wa-l-Hawali ila al-wajih," *Elaph.com*, December 18, 2011, <http://www.elaph.com/Web/news/2011/12/703390.html>; interview with State Department analyst, March 4, 2014, Riyadh; "Jadal al-Dimuqratiyya . . . kitab jadid lil-shaykh al-'Umar" [The Controversy of Democracy . . . A new book by Shaykh al-'Umar], *Almoslim.net*, February 10, 2013, [http://www.islamicfinder.org/dateConversion.php?mode=hij-ger&day=29&month=3&year=1434&date\\_result=1](http://www.islamicfinder.org/dateConversion.php?mode=hij-ger&day=29&month=3&year=1434&date_result=1).

ratification of the Egyptian constitution approved when the Brotherhood was in power, he seemed to consider it the lesser of two evils: “Infidelity is not permitted unless under duress. The jurist, however, is one who distinguishes between two corrupt positions by treading on the lesser one in light of that fact that (not voting) would do more to assist falsehood.”<sup>85</sup>

Umar’s support for elections abroad contrasts with his silence about the lack of political reforms at home. When the Saudi government supported the coup against Morsi, Umar thinly veiled his anger: “Don’t those who support the Felul’s revolution and the Tamarrud movement in #Egypt against their legitimate leaders know that by doing so they validate the legitimacy of revolution in their countries and revolt against their rulers!”<sup>86</sup> Although three days later he was careful to reaffirm his official stance of not supporting revolutions against the state,<sup>87</sup> after several weeks Umar again voiced his anger at the coup’s supporters: “All those who carried out or aided the #slaughter\_Rabi’a\_al-Adawiyya, even if it was just a word, is falling under the promise [from the Qur’an]: ‘his recompense is Gehennam, therein dwelling forever, and God will be wroth with him and will curse him, and prepare for him a mighty chastisement.’”<sup>88</sup>

#### ACCEPTABLE AND UNACCEPTABLE RADICALISM IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

Saudi ambivalence toward radicalism in general and hostility toward challenges to its power—from the Brotherhood and now via the claims of the Islamic State—have shaped its sup-

85. Abd Allah al-Rashid, “Al-Salafi al-Dimuqrati,” *Asharq Al-Awsat*, March 25, 2013, <http://classic.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=39&article=722183&issue=12536#U6nE6PldX7M>.

86. Nasir al-Umar, Twitter post, July 5, 2013, <https://twitter.com/naseralomar/status/353149894732685312>. “Felul” refers to the “remnants” of the Mubarak regime seeking a return to power. Tamarrud was the name of the youth-led movement that called for mass protests to force Morsi from power.

87. Nasir al-Umar, “Bayan hawl ahdath Misr” [Statement on the events in Egypt], *Almoslim.net*, July 8, 2013, <http://www.almoslim.net/node/186224?page=2>. See also Stéphane Lacroix, “Saudi Arabia’s Muslim Brotherhood Predicament.”

88. Nasir al-Umar, Twitter post, July, 27, 2013, <https://twitter.com/naseralomar/status/361220827397632000>.

port for the Syrian rebels and the opposition in exile.<sup>89</sup> As one leader of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Riad al-Shaqfa, has pointed out, “The Saudis say ‘No to the Brotherhood,’” whereas the Qataris are “playing a positive role.”<sup>90</sup> The tussle between Saudi Arabia and Qatar for control of the regional and ideological orientation of the opposition has had a profound effect on the coherence of the armed opposition fighting Assad inside Syria. Despite being united in supporting the armed overthrow of Assad in early 2012,<sup>91</sup> they have disagreed sharply on whom to fund. As they did with their support to the external opposition, the Qataris have favored funding Islamists with transnational agendas—typically the Brotherhood or salafi groups. Saudi Arabia, in contrast, has favored non-Islamists or so-called soft Islamists with a nationalist bent and often aligned with the Free Syrian Army.<sup>92</sup> With Qatar’s help and Saudi Arabia’s early

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89. Saudi Arabia, for example, funneled a lot of its early money to Jamal Maarouf’s Martyrs of Syria Battalion in Idlib because Maarouf disliked the Brotherhood. Maarouf’s group would later form the backbone of the Syrian Revolutionaries Front (SRF), which began the winter 2013 push against the Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (ISIS). Qatar’s favorite rebel conglomeration, the Salafi Islamic Front, was much slower to act against ISIS, with which it often cooperated. It has also clashed at times with the Saudi-backed SRF. Marlin Dick, “FSA Alliance Pushes Back against Islamic Front,” *Daily Star*, December 17, 2013, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Middle-East/2013/Dec-17/241361-fsa-alliance-pushes-back-against-islamic-front.ashx#axzz2zXuLKY2R>.

90. “How Qatar Seized Control of the Syrian Revolution,” *FT Magazine*, May 17, 2013, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/f2d9bbc8-bdbc-11e2-890a-00144feab7de.html#axzz2ub3wwtoo>. According to Anwar Eshqi (interview, March 3, 2014, Jeddah), the Saudis have extended only limited support to the Syrian Brotherhood as part of their aid to the exiled opposition because it has not met certain conditions.

91. “Syrian Opposition Praises Saudi FM Position,” *Asharq al-Awsat*, February 25, 2012, <http://www.aawsat.net/2012/02/article55243080>; James Hider, “Gulf Countries ‘Have Secret Arms Deal with Resistance,’” *Times* (London), January 26, 2012; Justin Vela, “Arab States Arm Rebels as UN Talks of Syrian Civil War,” *Independent*, June 13, 2012, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/exclusive-arab-states-arm-rebels-as-un-talks-of-syrian-civil-war-7845026.html>.

92. Rania Abouzeid, “Syria’s Secular and Islamist Rebels: Who Are the Saudis and the Qataris Arming?” *Time*, September 18, 2012, <http://world.time.com/2012/09/18/syrias-secular-and-islamist-rebels-who-are-the-saudis-and-the-qataris-arming/>; Phil Sands and Suha Maayeh, “Syrian Rebels Get Arms and Advice through Secret Command Centre in Amman,” *National*, December 28, 2013, <http://www.thenational.ae/world/middle-east/syrian-rebels-get-arms-and-advice-through-secret-command-centre-in-amman>.

neglect,<sup>93</sup> the Syrian Brotherhood came to dominate the main exile organization, the Syrian National Council.

The Saudi regime has been very careful not to back rebel factions that may one day turn their sights on the Kingdom. But some factions within the regime have not been so cautious about citizens' support for those extremist groups. To be sure, the government has officially banned its citizens from fighting in Syria or sending money to rebel groups through private channels. The Senior Ulema Council ruled in June 2012 that Saudi citizens could not fight against the Assad regime. The Saudi Ministry of the Interior's security spokesman repeated the same prohibition in September 2012. Senior Saudi clerics forbade youth from going to fight abroad, and the government has warned religious scholars not to encourage defiance of the ban. Saudi's grand mufti repeated the prohibition in October 2013 and criticized religious scholars who did not heed the government's warning.<sup>94</sup>

The Saudi government has also tried to curb private funding for extremist rebel groups in Syria. In 2012, King Abdullah banned religious scholars from raising money for Syria without state sanction.<sup>95</sup> Salman al-'Awda called on his followers to circumvent the ban, and the popular cleric Muhammad al-Arifi publicly groused when the government forced him to sign a pledge to stop soliciting money for Syria<sup>96</sup> (a fund-raising effort that included support for Jabhat al-Nusra, according to a

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93. Reportedly, the Saudis initially allowed the Qataris to take the lead role in shaping the exiled opposition. See Roula Khalaf and Abigail Fielding Smith, "Qatar Bankrolls Syrian Revolt with Cash and Arms," *Financial Times*, May 16, 2013, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/86e3f28e-be3a-11e2-bb35-00144feab7de.html#axzz2ub3wwt00>.

94. Fred Wehrey, "Saudi Arabia Reins in Its Clerics on Syria," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, DC, June 14, 2012, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/06/14/saudi-arabia-reins-in-its-clerics-on-syria/bu10>; Kevin Sullivan, "Saudis Line Up against Syria's Assad," *Washington Post*, October 7, 2012, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/saudis-line-up-against-syrias-assad/2012/10/07/7b06de8e-0e51-11e2-bd1a-b868e65d57eb\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/saudis-line-up-against-syrias-assad/2012/10/07/7b06de8e-0e51-11e2-bd1a-b868e65d57eb_story.html); Ben Gilbert, "Saudi Arabia Walks a Fine Line in Backing Syrian Rebellion," *Al Jazeera America*, January 20, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/1/20/saudi-arabia-walksafinelinkinbackingsyriarebellion.html>.

95. Interview with Anwar Eshqi, March 3, 2014, Jeddah.

96. Wehrey, "Saudi Arabia Reins in Its Clerics."

U.S. State Department source).<sup>97</sup> In the summer of 2012, King Abdullah sponsored a public fund-raiser for Syria,<sup>98</sup> donations to which were dispersed by the Ministry of the Interior. By the winter of 2013, the Ministry of the Interior threatened to arrest anyone who gave donations to unapproved fund-raisers.<sup>99</sup> This spring, the king vowed that anyone fighting abroad would be punished with up to 20 years in prison.<sup>100</sup>

The threats meant to discourage foreign travel or illicit fund-raising have not worked, which suggests the government cannot or will not enforce its edicts. As of May 2014, some 2,500 Saudis had traveled to fight in Syria.<sup>101</sup> Saudi youth are motivated to fight for a variety of reasons. Some are enticed by the chance to be part of what they consider the final battles leading to the Day of Judgment.<sup>102</sup> Others have grown weary of patiently working their way up the ranks of Islamist study circles and are seeking to burnish their Islamist credentials by fighting in Syria.<sup>103</sup> Many of the young men going to fight are from Burayda, which has been a breeding ground of conservative Islamist activism for decades. A number of the men do not identify as radicals, but they strongly dislike the Saudi government.<sup>104</sup> They have been encouraged by clerics who coyly acknowledge the ban against

97. Interview with State Department analyst, March 4, 2014, Riyadh.

98. Sullivan, "Saudis Line Up"; Elizabeth Dickinson, "Saudi Arabia Almost Doubles Aid to War-Torn Syria with US \$72M Donation," *National*, July 31 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/saudi-arabia-almost-doubles-aid-to-war-torn-syria-with-us-72m-donation>.

99. "Saudi Warns against Illegal Fund Raising for Syria Refugees," Agence France-Presse, December 30, 2013, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Article.aspx?id=242674>.

100. "Saudi Arabia Jails 13 for Security Offences," *Al Jazeera*, April 24, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/04/saudi-jails-13-security-offences-20144145389450328.html>; Theodore Karasik, "Saudi Arabia and the U.S. to Cooperate on Syria," *Al Arabiya*, February 23, 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/views/news/world/2014/02/23/Saudi-Arabia-offers-U-S-solutions-over-Syria.html>; interview with Anwar Eshqi, March 3, 2014, Jeddah.

101. Barrett, *Foreign Fighters in Syria*, 13.

102. Interview with State Department analyst, March 4, 2014, Riyadh; Mariam Karouny, "Apocalyptic Prophecies Drive Both Sides to Syrian Battle for End of Time," Reuters, April 1, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/01/us-syria-crisis-prophecy-insight-idUSBREA3013420140401>.

103. Interview with Yousef al-Dayni, March 2, 2014, Jeddah.

104. Interview with a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood, March 2, 2014, Jeddah.

encouraging youth to fight in Syria while also saying youth who do fight would be martyrs.<sup>105</sup>

The government has also been unable to completely stem the flow of illicit money to Syrian rebels. Saudis who want to circumvent the ban send money to other Gulf countries with lax counter-threat financing laws, especially Kuwait.<sup>106</sup> Bundlers in those countries routinely brag about receiving money from Saudi citizens.<sup>107</sup> Saudis also send money through *hawalas* (informal systems used to transfer assets).<sup>108</sup> Soon after the Saudi foreign minister called for aid to Syrian fighters, Nasir al-Umar tried to organize an online fund-raising campaign. The Saudis shut it down.<sup>109</sup> In December 2013, Umar and 71 other imams called on the government to throw its weight behind the Islamic Front,<sup>110</sup> implicitly criticizing the government's support for non-salafi groups. Saudi officials and non-Saudi diplomats have also admitted that the state has been unable to stem the flow of money.<sup>111</sup>

105. Ibid.

106. Gilbert, "Saudi Arabia Walks a Fine Line"; interview with U.S. State Department analyst, March 4, 2014, Riyadh; interview with Yousef al-Dayni, March 2, 2014, Jeddah.

107. Hay'at al-Zakat al-Sha'biyya, Twitter post, August 17, 2013, <https://twitter.com/alhayahalshabyh/status/368827241293037569>.

108. Interview with U.S. State Department analyst, March 4, 2014, Riyadh. Even the wife of the Ministry of the Interior spokesman Gen. Mansour al-Turki has received pleas for private donations. "She gets a text message or email, and I have to tell her, 'No, that's not legal, and you can do it through the approved channels.' We can't guarantee that the money will end up in the hands of the right people." Gilbert, "Saudi Arabia Walks a Fine Line."

109. "Lajnat al-'ulama' li-nusrat Suriyya ta'lin iqaf hamlat al-tabarru'at" [The committee of Ulema for helping Syria announces the end of the campaign for donations], *Almoslim.net*, May 28, 2012, <http://www.almoslim.net/node/165719>; Wehrey, "Saudi Arabia Reins in Its Clerics on Syria."

110. Gilbert, "Saudi Arabia Walks a Fine Line"; David Weinberg, "Saudi Clerics Endorse Jihadists in Syria," Foundation for Defense of Democracies, Washington, DC, December 5, 2013, <http://defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/saudi-clerics-endorse-jihadists-in-syria>. For text of the statement, see "Al-'Ulama' wa du'aat fi-l-mamlaka yasdurun bayanat li-ta'yiid 'al-Jabha al-Islamiyya' fi Al-Sham wa yad'un ila da'miha" [Religious scholars and missionaries in the Kingdom publish a statement in support of the "Islamic Front" in al-Sham and call for supporting it], *Almoslim.net*, December 5, 2013, <http://almoslim.net/node/195146>.

111. Interview with Angus McDowall, March 5, 2014, Riyadh.

Some observers have attributed the Saudis' schizophrenic counterterrorism policy to a rift in the royal family between the hawkish Prince Bandar, who had controlled the Syria file until recently, and the more reticent Prince Muhammad bin Naif, who took it up after Bandar fell ill.<sup>112</sup> In this interpretation, Bandar encouraged the Saudi government to turn a blind eye to private efforts to support the Syrian fighters, whereas bin Naif has tried to clamp down on private support because of the potential blowback in the Kingdom.<sup>113</sup> Other observers disagree with this interpretation and suggest that Bandar could take up the Syria portfolio again once his health improves.<sup>114</sup> The fact that Bandar was recently removed as head of Saudi intelligence gives more credence to the factional explanation for the Saudis' counterterrorism policy.<sup>115</sup>

In response to the emergence of the Islamic State as the focal point of regional concern over militancy, the official Saudi position toward the group has hardened, and the Saudi state has once again enlisted the support of the official ulema—this time to delegitimize the Islamic State while leaving open the possibility of Saudi aggression toward it. Abdulaziz Al al-Sheikh, the Saudi grand mufti, declared in August 2014 that the Islamic State and al Qaeda are “enemy number one of Islam” and that “extremist and militant ideas and terrorism which spread decay on Earth, destroying human civilization, are not in any way part of Islam . . . and Muslims are their first victims.”<sup>116</sup> The grand mufti also referred to the Islamic State as a modern incarnation

112. Bruce Riedel, “Saudi Arabia Plans to Pitch Obama for Regime Change in Syria,” *Al Monitor*, February 15, 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/02/saudi-arabia-barack-obama-syria-fighters.html>.

113. This reading is supported by sources in Riyadh. Interview with U.S. State Department analyst, March 4, 2014, Riyadh; interview with former member of the Muslim Brotherhood, March 2, 2014, Riyadh.

114. Interview with Anwar Eshqi, March 3, 2014, Jeddah; interview with Angus McDowall, March 5, 2014, Riyadh.

115. Khalil al-Harb, “Al-Mufaja’at al-Sa’udiyya tatawali fusulan” [The Saudi surprises come one after another], *As-Safir*, May 15, 2014, <http://www.assafir.com/Article/1/350659>.

116. “Saudi Grand Mufti Denounces Iraq’s Islamic State Group,” Reuters, August 19, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/08/19/us-iraq-security-saudi-mufti-idUSKBN0GJ1S20140819>.

of the Kharijite movement in early Islam, a designation that rejects the group's claim to authority over the Muslim community and emphasizes its heresy instead.

## **CONCLUSION**

Although the Saudi state sometimes characterizes its detractors as religious extremists, religious extremism is not really what worries the Saudi family; by Islamic standards, the Wahhabi religious establishment that supports the state prides itself on not being moderate on a range of issues. What really concerns the Saudis is perceived threats to their continued rule of the Kingdom, including challenges to the state's claim to represent Islamic legitimacy. The state's current zero tolerance for domestic dissent—whether Sunni or Shi'ite—and its effort to delegitimize the Islamic State's claims to authority indicate the depth of its concern.

The Saudi state employs the language and legal apparatus of counterterrorism to justify its repression of dissent, singling out the Muslim Brotherhood because of its early successes against Saudi Arabia's allies after the Arab uprisings. As in Egypt, non-violent salafi activists who are critical of the Saudi government do not receive the same treatment as Brotherhood members unless they closely align with the group. Despite its nonviolent stance and longtime cooperation with Saudi authorities, the Brotherhood's organization and anti-autocratic message seem to pose a unique threat in the eyes of the Saudis after the Arab uprisings. But this threat is not principally related to the ideology or religious views of the Brotherhood; rather, it stems from the group's perceived political power and ambitions in the wake of the Arab uprisings.

Earlier Saudi leaders faced similar Islamist dissent and managed it with more velvet glove and less iron fist than today's leaders, who are worried with good reason. The last of the first generation of princes who have led the country since its founding could soon die, and a chaotic transition of leadership is possible, though by no means certain. The country's population continues

to swell, placing greater strain on the state's coffers. Its neighbors to the north and west are battling insurgencies of low or high grade, the government in Yemen has been seized by Houthi rebels, and a major Shi'ite uprising took place in Bahrain, which has sporadically turned violent. The Saudi state could move to liberalize its political system, but its leaders doubtless judge that a move of this kind is too risky while a storm is raging in the region. Better to batten down the hatches and ride out the storm.

The royal family may not be able to wait long enough. The Islamic State now controls significant territory in neighboring Iraq, and a substantial number of its fighters are Saudi citizens. Until recently, the Saudis treated the Islamic State as a terrorism problem,<sup>117</sup> but it threatens to become an insurgency problem if the well-funded and well-armed extremist group decides to send a convoy into Saudi Arabia. "Tens of thousands" of Islamic State supporters and Saudi detractors retweeted the Arabic hashtag #IslamicStateOnSaudiBorder after the group captured the town of Rutba, 70 miles from the Jordanian and Saudi border. Islamic State supporters also posted maps indicating their desire for the group to push into the Kingdom.<sup>118</sup>

There is no question that the Saudis would eventually be able to beat back the challenge, especially with the aid of their allies;

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117. Huda al-Saleh, "Saudi Arabia Arrests First ISIS-Related Terror Cell," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, May 7, 2014, <http://www.aawsat.net/2014/05/article55332025>. A good example of the current state of Saudi thinking about the threat posed by the Islamic State is offered by a recent article by Nawaf Obaid, a confidant of the hawkish Prince Turki. Although Obaid acknowledges the threat posed by the Islamic State and its seizure of territory, he recommends a counterterrorism approach at odds with the Islamic State's behavior as a sophisticated insurgency: "The advances by ISIS—an al Qaeda splinter group—are another reminder that a key element of any nation's defense must be a counter-terrorism capability. After all, the militant "legions" that have seized Iraq's second city among others are basically non-state actors. It is therefore essential that Saudi Arabia continue to invest in what is already one of the largest and most efficient counter-terrorism programs in the world to ensure that the threat is managed both within and outside the Kingdom's borders." Nawaf Obaid, "Why Saudi Arabia Needs a New Defense Doctrine," CNN, June 23, 2014, <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2014/06/23/why-saudi-arabia-needs-a-new-defense-doctrine/>.

118. Rachel Levy, "Could Saudi Arabia Be the Next ISIS Conquest?" *Vocativ*, June 23, 2014, <http://www.vocativ.com/world/iraq-world/saudi-arabia-next-isis-conquest/>.

the Saudis have already partnered with the United States for airstrikes against the Islamic State to curtail its ability to wage an insurgency inside the Kingdom. But should the Islamic State invade, it would not have to get far to cause a political upheaval in the Kingdom. Two other comparable events of this kind—the seizure of the Grand Mosque by salafi apocalyptists and Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait—led to severe legitimacy crises for the regime because they challenged its competency to protect the holy places in the Hijaz. With the Saudi government keeping such a tight lid on domestic Islamist political pressure, an outside attack by an extremist Sunni group would cause a dramatic explosion with far-reaching consequences. Such an attack could be exacerbated by jihadi-salafists inside the Kingdom who are waiting for a propitious time to strike.<sup>119</sup>

As for the nonviolent Sunni opposition, its members are also biding their time, waiting for an opportunity to again press for political reform. The Saudi Muslim Brotherhood and its supporters know they now have to tread lightly given the threat of arrest for membership in the group and the lack of support from the masses. Nonviolent activist salafists like the Sururis also know they are on a short leash and have become more muted in their criticism of the Saudi government. Of course, a sudden political opening by the Saudi government would change their calculations. But that is unlikely because Saudi Arabia’s leaders are convinced now is not the time to create space for domestic dissent. They are determined that the public pressure for political reforms that toppled their allies will not topple them, even if they end up creating more pressure for such reforms by smothering dissent.

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119. In May, Saudi authorities arrested 62 members of an ISIS cell, 35 of whom were “Saudi nationals previously detained on terrorist-related charges.” See Huda al-Saleh, “Saudi Arabia Arrests First ISIS-related Terror Cell.”