
WAHHABI ISLAM: FROM REVIVAL AND REFORM TO GLOBAL JIHAD

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INTRODUCTION

Post-9/11, Wahhabism has been identified by governments, political analysts, and the media as the major "Islamic threat" facing Western civilization and the inspiration for Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaida network. It has become infamous for its negative influence on Islam, mosques, and madrasas globally. It is described as extremist, radical, puritanical, contemptuous of modernity, misogynist, and militant in nature. It has been characterized as Islamo-facism following in the traditions of communism and nazism.¹ It is accused of inspiring militant religious extremism in movements ranging from the Taliban of Afghanistan to the so-called Wahhabis of Central Asia and Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network.² It is targeted as the most intolerant of all interpretations of Islam, seeking to impose itself alone as the expression of "true" Islam.³ Wahhabi teachings are often referred to as "fanatical discourse" and Wahhabism itself has been called "the most retrograde expression of Islam" and "one of the most xenophobic radical Islamic movements that can be."⁴

Yet Wahhabism is also the conservative creed of the ruling family of Saudi Arabia and has been defended by visionary twentieth-century reformers like Muhammad Rashid Rida of Egypt and the Palestinian American scholar Ismail Raji al-Faruqi as a mode for reforming and rejuvenating Islam in the modern era -- an interpretation considerably at odds with its supposedly violent and intolerant tendencies. Also at odds with such negative portrayals are the more positive images of Wahhabis distributing copies of the Quran and hadith (accounts of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet), funding hospitals, orphanages, and other charitable institutions; and constructing mosques worldwide. Wahhabis have also provided relief following natural disasters globally and in the aftermath of the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo. However controversial the missionary work (daw'ah) accompanying these efforts has been, a strong case can be made for recognition of Wahhabi involvement in charitable works and its provision of educational and worship institutions for Muslims throughout the world.⁵ This image does not fit with the more monolithic presentation of Wahhabism as a militant, violent, extremist movement.

For all of the press and academic coverage of Wahhabism, few attempts have been made to define and delineate what makes a Wahhabi a Wahhabi other than broad concerns about tendencies toward violence, extremism, terrorism, and indoctrination of the masses in the conservative Wahhabi creed. There has been little discussion of the Wahhabi interpretation of Islamic law or scripture outside of general assertions of "literalism," "innovation," "heresy," and obsession with ritual matters, such as the precise length and style of a man's beard or the exact fashion in which one is to pray.⁶ Having been accused of a paradoxical combination of narrow-mindedness and innovation, Wahhabism is then typically dismissed as being unrepresentative of "Islam" and unworthy of detailed attention to its doctrines.

Particularly striking is the lack of attention given to the written works of Wahhabism's founder and ideologue, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, despite the fact that it is assumed that the militance, violence, and extremism displayed by certain Wahhabis today have their origins in Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's own teachings.

Post-9/11, many in the West have struggled to understand the connection between Wahhabi beliefs and the horrendous acts of terrorism that caused the deaths of over three thousand civilians. Fear and uncertainty about the previously little known Wahhabis have led to serious questions. Does Wahhabism represent an ongoing threat to the United States and American interests? Is Wahhabism monolithic? Is it necessarily opposed to Western civilization and values? Can the United States safely have a friendly and cooperative relationship with the Wahhabi monarchy of Saudi Arabia or are Americans being deluded into consorting with the enemy due to the need for oil and a failure to understand the "true" nature of Wahhabism?⁷

In response to the demands for answers, many have asserted that the militant extremism of Osama bin Laden has its origins in the religious teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, who is believed to have legitimated jihad against non-Wahhabis and encouraged the forcible spread of the Wahhabi creed. According to this interpretation, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab is the godfather of modern terrorism and Islamic militance.⁸ Like his contemporaries, he is accused of being opposed to modernity, and extreme literalist in his interpretation of Muslim scriptures, a misogynist, and an admirer and imitator of past militant radicals, particularly the medieval scholar Ibn Taymiyya. Like Osama bin Laden, he is believed to have had little formal religious training, and his written works are generally dismissed as mere compilations of Quranic verses and hadith, without any accompanying commentary or interpretation.⁹

Finally, both Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and the Wahhabis are often accused of being outside of the Sunni tradition due to their position as "heretical innovators" and extremists.¹⁰ Although this comparison makes for a simple and clean analysis, it is not faithful to the historical record.

The real Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, as revealed in his written works, was a well-trained and widely traveled scholar and jurist, as well as a prolific writer. His extant written works fill fourteen large volumes, including a collection of hadith; a biography of the Prophet Muhammad; a collection of fatawa (juridical opinions); a series of exegetical commentaries on the Quran; several volumes of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), numerous theological treatises; and other varied works, including detailed discussions of jihad and the status of women. The scope of his scholarship stands in marked contrast to the few legal rulings (fatawa) issued by Osama bin Laden. More importantly, his insistence on adherence to Quranic values, like the maximum preservation of human life even in the midst of jihad as holy war, tolerance for other religions, and support for a balance of rights between men and women, results in a very different worldview from that of contemporary militant extremists. The absence of the xenophobia, militantism, misogyny, extremism, and literalism typically associated with Wahhabism raises serious questions about whether such themes are "inherent" to Wahhabism and whether extremists like Osama bin Laden are truly "representative" of Wahhabism and Wahhabi beliefs.

Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad presents for the first time in a Western language the themes of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings that are of greatest concern post-9/11: Wahhabi theology and worldview, Islamic law, women and gender, and jihad. Rather than reinforcing the standard image of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab as "an unsophisticated, narrow-minded wanderer" and a "disconnected, footloose son of the remote oases" who became "the archetype for all the famous and infamous Islamic extremists of modern times,"¹¹ it reveals a more moderate, sophisticated, and nuanced interpretation of Islam that emphasizes limitations on violence, killing, and destruction and calls for dialogue and debate as the appropriate means of proselytization and statecraft. This new understanding is then compared to the writings of other scholars and activists, both past and present, on the controversial topic of jihad in order to assess Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's influence, or lack thereof, on contemporary Islamic militants, most notably Osama bin Laden, and to explore the roots of the militant extremism inherent in their visions of global jihad.

Notes:

1. The most recent example of this kind of assertion can be found in Stephen Schwartz, *The Two Faces of Islam: The House of Sa'ud from Tradition to Terror* (New York: Doubleday, 2002).
2. On the Issue of Wahhabi support for extremism in Afghanistan and Central Asia, see Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban, Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); and *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).
3. See, for example, Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 8.
4. Extracts are from Philippe Aziz, Interview, *Le Point*, 17 August 1996; and "L'arroseur arrose," *Jeune Afrique*, 17 August 1996.
5. Indeed, Saudi Arabia has not engaged in military occupations or holy wars to gain converts. Instead, the Saudis have supported what has been called "aggressive proselytizing," which is carried out through the construction of mosques and distribution of Qurans in local languages, particularly in the Balkans and the former Soviet Union. See, for example, Bruce Pannier, "Wahhabism and the CIS (From Fergana to Chechnya)," RFE/RL Internet document, 19 May 1997.
6. An example of this type of widespread contemporary anti-Wahhabi polemic can be found in Zubair Qamar, "Who Are the Wahhabees ('Salafis')?" Internet document, 31 March 1998.
7. These issues have been raised, and sharply answered in the affirmative, by Schwartz, who subscribes to the belief that Wahhabism is a threat to all who believe in the principles of tolerance and pluralism.
8. The lack of attention to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's written works is in part due to the lack of access to his writings. The research for this book was made possible by unprecedented access to these source materials generously provided by the King Abd al-Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, as facilitated by its Director General, Dr. Fahd al-Semmari, and H.R.H. Faisal bin Salman. The author is grateful for their assistance. However, the author alone retains responsibility for the interpretations presented here.
9. This characterization is contained in Schwartz, who goes so far as to refer to Ibn Abd al-Wahhab as a "bumpkin from an obscure village in a distant district nobody ever heard of" (*Two Faces of Islam*, 133), clearly rendering him incapable of appreciating the greatness of broader Islamic civilization and empires and making him "the first known exemplar of totalitarianism" (74).
10. The most recent critical work making these assertions is Hamid Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay* (Oneonta, NY: Islamic Publications International, 2002), esp. 2-5. However, the author admits that these impressions are based on only the source corpus of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's written works (14-7). Algar's analysis is based on and limited to analysis of three theological treatises, *Kitab al-Tawhid*, *Kashf al-Shubhat*, and *Three Essays on Tawhid* (the latter was translated by Ismail Raji al-Faruqi and includes the previously mentioned treatises); Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's collection of hadith, four volumes entitled *Muallafat al-Shaykh al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab*; and Mahmud Shukr al-Alusi's *Masa'il al-Jahiliyya*.
11. Schwartz, *Two Faces of Islam*, 67.

**EXCERPTS FROM CHAPTER ONE
MUHAMMAD IBN ABD AL-WAHHAB AND THE ORIGINS OF WAHHABISM: THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
CONTEXT Pages 8-13**

Setting the Stage: The Eighteenth-Century Context

Wahhabism was neither a historical aberration nor an isolated phenomenon. It did not arise in a vacuum. In fact, Wahhabism reflects some of the most important trends in eighteenth-century Islamic thought, underscoring the interactions and exchanges that took place between Muslims in cosmopolitan regions like the Hijaz. The fact that Wahhabism so clearly reflects major trends of thought apparent in other contemporary reform movements suggests that it was neither "innovative" nor "heretical." Rather, it can more appropriately be viewed as part of mainstream eighteenth-century Islamic thought, although somewhat tailored to its specific context.

The eighteenth-century is often described as the century of renewal and reform in Islam, a time when revivalist movements of various types arose in a variety of locations.^[2] Although each movement had its own specific characteristics, reflecting the environments and contests in which they arose, eighteenth-century revival and reform movements share some common themes and emphases. Unlike the movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which arose in response to external aggressions, like European imperialism, or the desire for political independence, the movements of the eighteenth century arose largely in response to internal conditions. The most important of these was the perceived deterioration in Muslim beliefs and practices.

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For eighteenth-century reformers, one of the major signs of the deterioration of Islam was the adoption of rituals and beliefs from other religions, like praying to saints and believing that saints could grant blessings or perform miracles. In some cases, people had adopted superstitious practices, like spitting in a particular way or wearing charms to ward off evil spirits. Reformers were puzzled and perturbed by these practices, particularly when they were accompanied by a failure to respect Muslim rituals and prayers. They wondered whether the people engaged in these activities knew why they were doing so or what such actions symbolized. Some questioned whether a person engaged in such activities could still be considered a Muslim since their actions reflected a belief that people and things other than God possessed the power to grant requests or provide protection.

This was a serious matter because the major distinctive doctrine of Islam is belief in absolute monotheism (tawhid). In Islam, God alone is considered to be worthy of worship and prayer. This belief is reflected in the defining act of the Muslim, the declaration of faith that proclaims, "I believe that there is no god but The God and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God." Consequently, failure to act in accordance with this proclamation of faith opened the door to questions about the person's status as a Muslim. It was for this reason that the revival and reform movements of the eighteenth century adamantly insisted that a "return" to monotheism was the necessary first step in reforming Islam. This meant getting rid of foreign and superstitious beliefs and practices. Wahhabism shared this common concern and goal, becoming famous for its strict adherence to absolute monotheism (tawhid).

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However, this was only a first step. Eighteenth-century reformers believed that adherence to absolute monotheism (tawhid) had implications beyond private religious beliefs. They believed that adherence to absolute monotheism (tawhid) should also be reflected in public life by placing God at the center of the political order. Theoretically, this meant recognizing God as the creator and sustainer of all life and as the ultimate sovereign and lawgiver. Practically, it meant reimplementing Islamic law (Sharia) as the law of the land. Eighteenth-century reformers believed that this restoration of God to the center of Muslim public life was the key to recovering the power and prestige that Muslims had enjoyed in the past during the rules of the great empires and caliphates.

In general, reformers did not seek to implement their goals by overthrowing the current regimes or insisting that their reforms be applied from the top down by force or government decree. Instead, they believed that reform should be a process, beginning at the grassroots level and moving gradually upward through society as peoples' private ethical and moral beliefs, grounded in their religion, influenced decision making and public conduct. In this way, adherence to absolute monotheism (tawhid) was intended to launch the second goal of the reformers, the sociomoral reconstruction of society.

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In addition to adherence to absolute monotheism (tawhid), eighteenth-century reformers called for a return to the fundamentals of faith -- the Muslim scriptures of the Quran (the word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad) and the hadith (records of the sayings and deeds of Muhammad) -- as the sources of guidance that would lead to the sociomoral reconstruction of society.

This emphasis on the return to fundamentals made the reformists the original Muslim fundamentalists in the same way that nineteenth-century Christian movements dedicated to a "return" to the Bible were the original Christian fundamentalists. There was nothing inherently militant or violent about this return, nor did it necessarily imply a literal interpretation of the scriptures. It was simply an attempt to move away from centuries of historical interpretations and accretions in favor of direct study and interpretation of the scriptures.

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The dual emphasis of the eighteenth-century reformers on the Quran and hadith was neither unusual nor revolutionary. Muslims believe that the Quran and hadith are complementary. The Quran, as God's Word, is a statement of God's will for all humanity.

Although it contains some legal prescriptions, it is not a lawbook. Rather, the Quran provides moral and ethical guidance and values that human beings are supposed to apply in their personal and public lives, individually and communally. The hadith provide practical advice on how this is to be done.

Muslims do not worship Muhammad or believe that he is God. Throughout history, they have emphasized that Muhammad was strictly a human being, although they believe that he was the most perfect of human beings. It is precisely because he was a real human being living in the real world in which love and war, family and marital relations, business and commercial transactions, and local and international relations exist that his example is so important for Muslims to study.

Muslims believe that Muhammad's life reflects the perfect living out of the teachings and values of the Quran. Consequently, whenever a question arises about how one should respond to a given situation, they turn to the hadith to see how Muhammad reacted. Although some Muslims have taken Muhammad's example very literally, for example, wearing their beards exactly like he did, most do not believe that such strict, literal adherence is necessary or even desirable. Rather, many point to his attitudes and values, such as respect for women, caring for the poor and orphans, and support for social justice, as the correct examples to follow.

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The reformers shared the belief that Muhammad's example was very important for Muslims to follow. Consequently, the third major characteristic of the reform movements was a renewed emphasis on the study of the hadith but in a new way. Eighteenth-century studies of hadith differed from studies of the past because they focused on the content of the hadith rather than their chains of transmission. This represented a major break from the past tradition of hadith study and authentication.

[Text omitted.]

Although the reformers believed that authentication of the chain of transmitters was an important first step in determining the potential authenticity of a hadith, they believed that verification of the chain was insufficient by itself. They recognized the potential for fabrication not only of the chains of transmitters but also of the content. Consequently, they believed that the content of the hadith should also be examined to determine whether its message was consistent with the message of the Quran. They reasoned that the Quran and hadith should be in agreement with respect to their content and the values they embodied because they were supposed to serve as complimentary sources of scripture. Thus, if a hadith had a strong chain of transmitters but contradicted the teachings of the Quran, the reformers believed that it should be declared inauthentic. The Wahhabis were important with respect to this new methodology because the written works of their founder and ideologue, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, are an excellent and compelling example of its use. The Wahhabis also became well known for their travels throughout the Muslim world in search of hadith collections. ^[4]

This new content-driven methodology of hadith criticism tied in directly to the reformists' goal of the regeneration of Muslim society through the return to scripture because it offered a new way to interpret and understand it.

These reformers did not seek to re-create literally the early Muslim community, as some later movements tried to do. ^[5] Rather, the goal was to rediscover the meaning of the hadith in their original context in order to determine the eternal value or ethical guideline contained within it. ^[6] This value or guideline was then compared to Quranic teachings about the same, setting the stage not only for a more profound understanding of Islam but also for a more meaningful application of Islamic values in both the private and public spheres. Thus, this new methodology of studying the Quran and hadith was not just an intellectual exercise. It had very practical implications for daily life, for both individuals and the broader Muslim community.

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In the more than one thousand years that had passed since the death of Muhammad, religious and legal scholars had written innumerable commentaries, analyses, and exegetical studies of the scriptures. Particularly important among these works were those that detailed and elaborated upon Islamic law. Similar to the role of the law in Judaism, Islamic law plays an important role in Muslim life. The Quran declares that the correct living out of faith (orthopraxy) is a necessary corollary to correctness of belief (orthodoxy). In other words, while it is important to have correct religious beliefs, it is even more important to live a life that reflects those beliefs. The Quran teaches that at the end of time human beings will be judged not on the sole basis of what they believe but on how they lived their lives. However, the Quran is not a lawbook along the lines of the Old Testament books like Leviticus and Deuteronomy, which outline long series of exacting legal prescriptions. Rather, the Quran provides moral and ethical values and guidelines, which Muslim legal experts have elaborated and detailed for application. While this scholarship was one of the most important contributions and efforts of early Muslim scholars, this process was understood to have been largely completed under the Abbasid Empire (750-1258 C.E.). Although there were always some independent jurists who continued to interpret the law on their own, a practice called *ijtihad*, the guidelines and teachings of the early legal specialists were broadly accepted and utilized intact until the eighteenth century, a practice known as *taqlid*. ^[7]

Eighteenth-century reformers were concerned by *taqlid* because they perceived that these interpretations had come to be considered as authoritative as the scriptures. Over time, students and scholars had begun to place a heavier emphasis on study and knowledge of the commentaries and interpretations of past scholars than on direct study of the scriptures.

The reformers believed that this practice was inappropriate. They pointed to the fact that interpretations and commentaries often reflected the context in which they were written, both geographical and political, rather than the context in which the scriptures were revealed and originally understood. They questioned whether one interpretation of a legal or religious matter could truly be authoritative for every time and place, as had been claimed by past scholars. Concluding that this could not be the case, they called on each generation and context to be responsible for revisiting the scriptures directly for fresh interpretation. The promotion and exercise of *ijtihad* therefore became another defining characteristic of eighteenth-century reform movements.

The reformers understood their movements to be a process that would necessarily occur gradually. They were evolutionary, not revolutionary, in approach.

In general, the movements did not seek to topple governments, engage in coups to replace one political system with another, or organize their followers into cells to carry out terrorist activities or guerrilla warfare against existing governments.

They did align themselves with political leaders, but their purpose in doing so was not overtly political. ^[8]

What mattered to the reformers was that the political system in place reflected and supported Islam in both private and public life. They were more concerned with matters of religious practice and adherence to Islamic law than with political systems or geographic boundaries.

The reformers sought to implement a two-tiered approach to the sociomoral reconstruction of society. At the grassroots level, they sought to continually add to the number of their followers, believing that this was the level at which real change needed to occur. Once individuals began to reform their religious beliefs and practices, it was expected that these private beliefs would have a broad impact on public behavior.

At the same time, the reformers were practical enough to anticipate popular resistance to the proposed reforms because they represented a change not only in beliefs but also in behaviors at both the private and public levels. Consequently, the reformers sought protection and assistance from local political leaders. According to this arrangement, the political leaders acted as protectors who ensured that the religious teachings of the reformers

were respected and implemented. In return, the reformers supported the political rule of their protectors and provided religious legitimation for it. ^[9]

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There were times when military activity occurred under this arrangement, particularly when issues of self-defense arose. However, jihad as holy war was not the primary purpose of the eighteenth-century reform movements. The reformers were not engaged in battles for independence, the end to colonial rule, or global jihad. Engagement in jihad as holy war was not one of the movements' defining characteristics. If anything, their downplaying of jihad as holy war distinguished them from the independence movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which specifically called for jihad as holy war in order to shake off colonial overlords or respond to other aggressions.

One final hallmark of eighteenth-century reform movements was the fact that they were inspired and led by scholars (ulama) rather than lay activists, as is so often the case in the contemporary era. This does not mean that there was a broad consensus among all ulama that reforms were necessary. In fact, some of the strongest opposition to the reform movements came from the ulama, typically those who held a position within the official religious establishment. These establishment ulama often owed their positions to nepotism and the sale of offices rather than to their scholarly achievements. As a result, they were often more interested in maintaining their own power bases than in the "correct" practice and interpretation of Islam. The reformers, on the other hand, tended to either occupy the lower echelons of the religious establishment or stand outside it altogether, often enjoying mass popularity rather than government favor. Consequently, a subtheme of the reform movements was opposition to reform-minded scholars by establishment ulama, who supported a continuation of the status quo in order to maintain their own positions of power.

Terms:

- tawhid - absolute monotheism
- hadith - records of the sayings and deeds of Muhammad
- ijtihad - independent reasoning in the interpretation of Islamic law
- taqlid - imitation of past interpretations of Islamic law
- ulama - scholars

Notes:

2. For an excellent analysis of the eighteenth-century Islamic world, see John O. Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, 2d ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994), esp. 24-83.

4. See, for example, the Egyptian historian, al-Jabarti's, observation of his encounter with Wahhabi scholars as found in Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabarti's *History of Egypt*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Moshe Perlmann, 4 vols. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994), 3-4:321.

5. The Sudanese Mahdi is a good example of a later movement that sought to recreate literally the early Muslim community.

6. Esposito has noted, "Islamic revivalism is not so much an attempt to reestablish the early Islamic community in a literal sense as to reapply the Quran and Sunna rigorously to existing conditions." See John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 117-18.

7. Important research on this practice has been carried out in recent years, most notably by Wael Hallaq. Hallaq's research has revealed that the practice of ijtihad never completely ended, as some scholars had claimed. However, the practitioners of ijtihad were typically a minority and belonged mostly to the Hanbali and Shafii schools of Islamic law. Taqlid was the broad norm historically.

8. A more militant approach was undertaken by nineteenth-century movements that claimed inspiration from the teachings of eighteenth-century reformers but took a more activist political-military approach, typically in the face of European colonialism. In the nineteenth century, Islam served as the inspiration for resistance movements, necessarily lending them a more militant character. The Indian Ocean region and the Sudan are excellent examples of more militant interpretations of the eighteenth-century reform movements.

9. Although this type of religio-political alliance was a characteristic of the eighteenth-century reform movements, it was not unique to this time period. The Hanbali school of Islamic law supported this type of arrangement historically, both during the caliphate and during the medieval era, as recorded in the works of Ibn Taymiyya. See George Makdisi, "The Sunni Revival," in *Islamic Civilisation, 950-1150: A Colloquium Published under the Auspices of the Near Eastern History Group*, Oxford, and the Near East Center, University of Pennsylvania, ed. D. S. Richards (Oxford: Faber, 1977), 164-65; and Joseph A. Kechichan, "The Role of the Ulama in the Politics of an Islamic State: The Case of Saudi Arabia," *Middle East Studies* 18 (1986): 54.

EXCERPTS FROM CHAPTER FOUR

WOMEN AND WAHHABIS: IN DEFENSE OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS Pages 123-124

Wahhabism in the contemporary era is largely portrayed as misogynist, denying women their human rights, insisting on strict gender segregation, forbidding women access to public space, and subjugating them by considering them inferior to men. Women under Wahhabi regimes are assumed to have second-class citizenship, if not slave status. Critics of Wahhabism point to extreme examples like the Taliban and Saudi Arabia's requirement that women wear the full burqa' or abaya covering them from head to toe, leaving barely enough room to breathe; the ban on women driving or being recognized heads of households; and the Taliban's forbidding women to go to school, work, or seek medical care as evidence of Wahhabism's oppression, suppression, and repression of women in accordance with an extremely conservative interpretation of Islamic law. ^[1] All of these stereotypes and images are assumed to be based on the conservative Wahhabi interpretation of Islam despite the fact that no systematic analysis of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings about women and gender has ever been undertaken. In addition, no distinctions have been made between tribal customs, local traditions, and Islamic law in these portrayals.

While these contemporary views and concerns have come to define Wahhabism for Western human and women's rights activists and Muslim feminists alike, the assertion that these attitudes are characteristic of Wahhabism risks inaccuracy because the term Wahhabism is rarely defined. Many of the regimes and movements labeled as Wahhabi in the contemporary era do not necessarily share the same theological and legal orientations. ^[2] The reality is that Wahhabism has become such a blanket term for any Islamic movement that has an apparent tendency toward misogyny, militantism, extremism, or strict and literal interpretation of the Quran and hadith that the designation of a regime or movement as Wahhabi or Wahhabi-like tells us little about its actual nature. ^[3] Furthermore, these contemporary interpretations of Wahhabism do not necessarily reflect the writings or teachings of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

In fact, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's life and writings reflect a concern for women and women's rights reminiscent of Muhammad. Like Muhammad, he sought to ensure that women's rights, as granted by the Quran, were implemented and that women were aware of them. Like other jurists and Muslim legal thinkers of his time, he was engaged in the discussion of the appropriate place of women in Muslim society. ^[4] His interactions with women indicate that he recognized them as human beings capable of serving as positive, active agents in both the private and public realms and who therefore deserved access to both education and public space. Rather than demonstrating misogyny or the relegation of women to seclusion, these interactions and encounters reflect the consistent application of the principles of social justice, the equality of all believers, and the need to preserve public welfare and order that permeate all of his other theological and legal writings.

These interactions also stand in marked contrast to conventional wisdom about customs and traditions in Arabia both during this time period and in the contemporary era, as well as traditional interpretations of Islamic law. Consistent with his legal and theological methodologies, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab sought to rediscover the earliest sources of Islamic revelation with respect to gender issues in order to reinterpret them (ijtihad) through contextualization, both historically in terms of the broad values taught by the Quran and hadith. He used this methodology to construct an Islamic vision of gender.

Terms:

- abaya - Islamic dress that covers a woman from head to toe
- hadith - written accounts of the sayings and deeds of Islam's prophet, Muhammad
- ijtihad - independent reasoning in the interpretation of Islamic law

Notes:

1. One example of the abundant popular literature making such claims is Jean Sasson, *Princess: A True Story of Life behind the Veil in Saudi Arabia* (New York: Morrow, 1992).
2. For example, the Taliban was Hanafi in its orientation to Islamic law, while the Saudis are Hanbali.
3. For example, in the former Soviet republics the ruling regimes have labeled Wahhabi any Muslim who challenged either the religious or political status quo. Muriel Atkin, "The Rhetoric of Islamophobia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus: Journal of Social and Political Studies* 1, no.1 (2000): 130.
4. For an analysis of some of his contemporaries in Palestine and Syria, see Judith E. Tucker, *In the House of Law: Gender and Islamic Law in Ottoman Syria and Palestine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). For coverage of gender issues from the same time period, see the collection of historical essays in Amira El Azhary Sonbol, Ed., *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

EXCERPTS FROM CHAPTER FIVE**JIHAD: CALL TO ISLAM OR CALL TO VIOLENCE Pages 193-194, 224-225**

There is no more controversial or troubling topic with respect to Islam than that of jihad. Public debates over whether to use a term that many have come to associate with terrorism should even be permitted in the public sphere have come to dominate American discussions of Islam in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. ^[1]

These events raised many questions about the relationship between Islam and terrorism. Were the two irrevocably connected or was this a perverse distortion of Islam's teachings.

As information about the perpetrators of these horrific events slowly became available, Americans not only heard a great deal about the exiled Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden and his shadowy Al-Qaida terrorist network, but they also became familiar with the term Wahhabi and the fact that fifteen out of the nineteen hijackers involved in these attacks were Saudi. For some, the implications were clear. Wahhabis and Saudis were inherently terrorists.

However, this portrayal makes many assumptions that are based more on reactive emotions than they are on data and factual evidence. In the aftermath of 9/11, soul-searching for answers to the question, What went wrong? ^[2] has been accompanied by a national need to assign blame and seek justice for victims.

Unfortunately, these quests for definitive answers have tended to project current events backward in time rather than analyzing the past within its own context and trying to understand how events, contexts, and new developments over time have resulted in reinterpretations and even distortions of the past that have led some to proclaim the militant version of Islam preached by Osama bin Laden and his followers.

Sadly, in the process not enough recognition has been given to the fact that the majority of Muslims throughout the world, including in Saudi Arabia, decried and denounced the attacks of 9/11 as being anathema to Islam rather than inherent to it. The actions of a minority of extremists have come to define for many non-Muslims the religion of Islam, creating another barrier to understanding between world religions and fueling fears of an impending clash of civilizations. ^[3]

This chapter fills an important void in the quest for answers by analyzing the writings of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab on the important topic of jihad.

If militant extremism is inherent to Wahhabism, then this theme should dominate the writings of its founder and ideologue. The fact that it does not suggests the more careful attention needs to be paid to when and how this term was used by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and for what purposes.

The chapter begins by asking, "How did Ibn Abd al-Wahhab believe that Islam should be spread?"

Although many have claimed that Wahhabis believe that jihad is the appropriate means of proselytization, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings make it clear that he believed that da'wah, or missionary work, was the preferred method for gaining true adherents. According to his vision, becoming a Muslim was to be the result of an educational process rather than a one-time declaration of belief made under the threat of death. Only when this approach to the call of Islam is made clear can the topic of jihad be undertaken -- What is its purpose; against whom is it to be undertaken, and under what circumstances is it invoked? What is revealed is an approach to jihad that places severe and strict limitations on its declaration, scope, and purpose rather than one that seeks to expand its appropriateness and engagement at all times and against all people. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings are then compared to the writings of other jurists and activists on this topic, both past and present, placing him within a long tradition of jurisprudence on this topic and demonstrating a marked contrast between his teachings and those of contemporary militants.

[next excerpt]

Conclusion

Across time and space, the Wahhabis have been depicted as violent fanatics, wreaking havoc, death, and destruction against anyone whom they considered to be unbelievers or associationists.

This depiction clearly has no basis in the written works of Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab. Although he taught that monotheism should always be upheld and associationism must be eradicated, violence and killing were not the prescribed methods for achieving these goals.

He always emphasized education and discussion as the appropriate means for calling people to monotheism. Rather than calling for violence and destruction, his writings on jihad were permeated with an emphasis on the importance of the preservation of life, human, plant, and animal, and property, both human and material.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings reflect a constant emphasis on the importance of individual knowledge to be gained through education and the need for believing Muslims to be engaged in missionary work (da'wah) in order to call others to the faith. The preferred method for carrying out these activities was a process of dialogue, debate and discussion rather than violence and militancy. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab asserted the need for all believers, both male and female, to acquire individual knowledge of the Quran and Sunna not only to strengthen them in their faith but also to help them in the critical duty of evaluating correct religious belief and behavior, as well as to choose appropriate religious and political leaders.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's careful, and detailed discussion of jihad -- how it is defined, who is to carry it out, and under what circumstances and the regulations applying to it both during and afterward -- demonstrates a concern for placing limitations of violence and destruction rather than calling for indiscriminate militance against nonadherents to his teachings. His focus on the preservation of life -- human, plant, and animal -- as well as property reflects his concern for respect of others and the desire to pursue peaceful means of conversion and the establishment of cooperative relationships with others. In keeping with this vision, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab sought to limit violence, particularly applications of the death penalty, because he believed that this was counterproductive and likely only to produce fear, not faith.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's overwhelming concern was the winning of adherents through faith of the heart -- a goal that he believed could best be achieved through dialogue rather than destruction. According to this vision, jihad has no place as an offensive activity. It is a method of last resort in defending the Muslim community from aggression so that the work of proselytization can continue.

Terms:

- da'wah - missionary work, proselytizing

Notes:

1. See, for example, the furor over the address by a Muslim student at Harvard University's commencement ceremonies in May 2002 entitled "My Personal Jihad." Although the content of the speech remained the same, he was ultimately pressured into altering the title because the term jihad is offensive to so many.
2. See Bernard Lewis's book by this title: *What Went Wrong: Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
3. See the landmark article by Samuel P. Huntington, "A Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* (summer 1993): 22-39.

EXCERPTS FROM CHAPTER SIX AND THE CONCLUSION**CHAPTER SIX - FROM REVIVAL AND REFORM TO GLOBAL JIHAD Pages 278-279****Chapter Six Conclusion**

The global jihad espoused by Osama bin Laden and other contemporary extremists is clearly rooted in contemporary issues and interpretations of Islam. It owes little to the Wahhabi tradition, outside of the nineteenth-century incorporation of the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya and the Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawhziyyah into the Wahhabi worldview as Wahhabism moved beyond the confines of Najd and into the broader Muslim world.

The differences between the worldviews of bin Laden and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab are numerous. Bin Laden preaches jihad; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab preached monotheism. Bin Laden preaches a global jihad of cosmic importance that recognizes no compromise; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's jihad was narrow in geographic focus, of localized importance, and had engagement in a treaty relationship between the fighting parties as a goal. Bin Laden preaches war against Christians and Jews; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab called for treaty relationships with them. Bin Laden's jihad proclaims an ideology of the necessity of war in the face of unbelief; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab preached the benefits of peaceful coexistence, social order, and business relationships. Bin Laden calls for the killing of all infidels and the destruction of their money and property; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab restricted killing and the destruction of property. Bin Laden calls for jihad as a broad universal prescription for Muslims of every time and place; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab confined jihad to specific and limited circumstances and contexts. Bin Laden issues calls to violence and fighting; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab sought to curtail violence and fighting. Bin Laden provides an ideological worldview based on jihad; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab provided legal justifications for the mechanics of jihad. Bin Laden calls for jihad as an individual duty; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab upheld jihad as a collective duty. Bin Laden requires no justification for jihad outside of the declaration of another as an infidel; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab limited justifications for jihad and restricted the use of the label infidel. Bin Laden's vision of jihad clearly belongs to the category of contemporary fundamentalists; Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's vision of jihad contains elements of both classical and modernist interpretations of Islam.

Wahhabi Islam is neither monolithic nor stagnant. Changes in thought, topics addressed, and emphases on different themes have clearly occurred over the past 250 years. The militant Islam of Osama bin Laden does not

have its origins in the teachings of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and is not representative of Wahhabi Islam as it is practiced in contemporary Saudi Arabia, yet for the media it has come to define Wahhabi Islam in the contemporary era. However, "unrepresentative" bin Laden's global jihad of Islam in general and Wahhabi Islam in particular, its prominence in headline news has taken Wahhabi Islam across the spectrum from revival and reform to global jihad.

EXCERPTS FROM BOOK'S CONCLUSION (Pages 281-290)

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab clearly is an important figure in terms of both his representation of broad trends in eighteenth-century Islamic thought and his influence and impact on contemporary Islamic thought and activism. The breadth of his scholarship and the importance of the themes he emphasized -- theology and worldview, Islamic law, education, missionary work (da'wah), jihad, and women and gender -- were relevant not only for reforming and rejuvenating his own society, but also for the revival and reinterpretation of Islam in the twenty-first century as Muslims seek methodologies for the rejuvenation of Islamic practice and the Islamization of modernity. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's emphasis on the importance of Islamic values and the intent behind words and actions, as opposed to concern for ritual perfection, has opened the door for reforms in Islamic law, the status of women and minorities, and the peaceful spread of Islam and the Islamic mission in the contemporary era.

As an eighteenth-century activist, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab reflected some of the most important intellectual trends of his time, notably a new methodology of hadith criticism that was driven by content rather than form. While he acknowledged the importance of verifying that the chain of transmission (isnad) was viable, he did not consider this issue of form to be as substantial or important as the more complex task of reviewing the content of the hadith in order to determine whether its values and interpretations of issues, whether legal, religious, social, economic or political, were in keeping with the broader values taught by the Quran and other hadith already accepted as being authentic.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab did not invent this method of hadith criticism. Rather, he like other contemporaries, such as Shah Wali Allah, learned it from his teachers in Mecca and Medina. It was this contact with the methodology of content-driven hadith criticism that sparked his concern with directly returning to the scriptural sources of Islam -- the Quran and hadith -- for interpretation rather than relying on classical jurisprudence.

[passage omitted]

This is not to say that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab rejected familiarity with theological or juridical writings, however. Having received a broad education in jurisprudence (fiqh) from his father and having had contact with the judicial system in which his father, grandfather and uncle held prominent positions, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab was familiar with a broad base of classical jurisprudence. This familiarity is clear in the numerous references to a variety of jurists in his writings. By placing himself well within the context of classical Islamic jurisprudence, he was able to declare subtly his continuity with the Islamic intellectual tradition, exonerating him from the charges of his critics that he was engaged in innovation (bid'a).

[passage omitted]

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab believed in the importance of reinterpretation of scripture in one's own time and place as a means of demonstrating the ongoing relevance of God's revelation in the daily personal and communal lives of Muslims.

By stripping taqlid of its authority and returning that authority to God alone through His revelation, he sought to push Muslims into their own personal encounters with God by direct reading and interpretation of scripture.

At the same time, he was mindful of the need to conceptualize revelation -- both in terms of why it had occurred and what it would have meant to the people hearing it -- in order to interpret it accurately. By insisting on historical contextualization, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab rejected literal interpretations of scripture. He did not believe in simply reading part of a verse of the Quran and making a broad proclamation about its meaning without understanding the context in which it had been revealed because he believed that such a method would lead, and, indeed, had led, to errors in interpretation.

[passage omitted]

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's insistence on the recognition of a broad Quranic worldview and its inherent values lent a consistency and logic to his interpretations of scripture that would not have been possible for a literalist. His emphasis on Quranic values, rather than detailed prescriptions, has been adopted by many contemporary Muslim scholars as a guideline for implementing reforms.

[passage omitted]

Most prominently Ibn Abd al-Wahhab emphasized the legal principle of public welfare or interest (maslahah) as a guiding factor in the interpretation of Islamic law because this principle established the right and responsibility of the Muslim leadership to consider the welfare of the people as being of greater importance than strict and literal adherence to ritual. He was careful to emphasize that, while the principle of maslahah is in some cases to be restricted to cases of extreme necessity, such as delaying almsgiving (zakat) during a period of severe drought because it would represent too great of a hardship, at other times it can be used to restore Quranic values to the actual practice of Islamic law, such as the broad protection of women, the poor, and orphans from exploitation. Behind his use of this principle lay a broader theme in Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings, that of the importance of intent.

In Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's understanding of faith and law, intent is the driving force that determines the permissibility of any statement or action. He was not so much concerned with ritual perfection as he was with the more critical matter of the heart -- intent -- behind that perfection. Likewise, in legal matters, he was more interested in the intent behind a particular transaction or undertaking than he was in its form because he recognized that there were cases that adhered to the letter of the law in outward appearance yet had as their ultimate goal the circumvention of the law.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's rejection of literalism in favor of the recognition of broad Quranic values is nowhere more apparent than in his teachings about women and his construction of gender. His vision of gender balance defies standard stereotypes of Wahhabis as misogynists by placing women on a balanced footing with men.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab wrote extensively on the topics of marriage and divorce and the woman's place within those transactions. Rather than excluding her from the process as simply a party to be bargained for and sold, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab emphasized the right of the woman to participate throughout the process of contracting and negotiating the marriage. Although he did not permit women to carry out the administration drafting of the marriage contract, he insisted that they be allowed to propose prospective husbands, stipulate favorable conditions in the marriage contract (such as limitations on polygyny and situations that would result in divorce), receive her dower in full as her own property to manage, and be paid maintenance for the duration of the marriage. He further required the woman's consent to the marriage in order for it to be recognized as valid.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's prescriptions for the woman's role and participation in the process of contracting the marriage were based on recognition of the girl/woman as a legal person with a vested interest in the marriage. The only distinctions he made, therefore, with respect to the issue of consent were between virgins and deflowered women in the manner in which their consent was to be indicated. He made no distinctions on the basis of age, other than to indicate where classical jurisprudence on this topic fell short with respect to the minor girl. His granting of even a minor girl the right to consent in order for the marriage to be valid was a major and important reform. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab further decried the practice of child marriage and set limitations on ages and maturity levels accordingly because he recognized the potential for literalism to allow for legal circumvention of the intent behind this prohibition.

Although divorce via repudiation (talaq) has historically been the prerogative of the man -- and, indeed, this practice has continued into the present era in the Muslim world -- Ibn Abd al-Wahhab sought to redress this violation of what he considered to be the Quranic order of balanced rights in divorce by emphasizing the woman's absolute right to demand a divorce via compensation (khul'). Noting that the man has the right to unconditional divorce by talaq, with no requirement for justification, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab granted the woman the reciprocal right by allowing her to cite vague concerns that she would not be able to fulfill her marital duties as the justification for khul' divorce. Recognizing the abuse of power often exercised by men in such cases, he required that the woman return the amount of her dower in exchange for her freedom, comparing this type of divorce to a business contract in which the return of the amount that was paid in order to enter into the relationship symbolizes its end. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab did not allow the man to deny his wife her right to divorce either by refusing her request or by setting the amount at such an excessive rate that she should not possibly pay. By placing checks on the man's power to deny the woman her right to divorce, he made divorce by the woman a real possibility rather than a theoretical right with no means of being enforced.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings make clear his broad respect for and protection of women. Recognizing a woman's vulnerability, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab not only sought to grant her power in matters directly related to her family status -- marriage, divorce, childbearing, and inheritance -- but also in the most personal of matters, sexual relations. On the one hand, he assured women that they, as well as men, were entitled to sexual relations and satisfaction in their marital lives. He underlined the importance of respecting a woman with whom one is engaged in sexual relations by protecting her right to privacy in the marriage bed, as well as making even the most intimate matter of sexual intercourse a matter for negotiation between husband and wife rather than a position in which the man was all powerful. Further, he insisted that husbands treat their wives respectfully and with dignity and forbade husbands to beat their wives.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab also sought to protect women from male sexual aggression by condemning the practices of rape and sexual relations with female slaves and servants. This, again, marked a major departure from classical interpretations of permissible sexual relations, which included concubinage as a legally recognized and approved activity. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, however, noted the broad Quranic value of sexual relations occurring legally only within the state of marriage so that all other activities are illicit (zina'). By emphasizing the appropriate place of sex only within marriage, he not only denounced the practices of fornication and adultery but squarely placed the responsibility for both on both genders. In cases in which a woman was a willing partner to sexual relations outside of marriage, he taught that both the man and the woman should be punished if they either confessed to the act or there were viable witnesses to the action itself. However, he also recognized that there were cases in which a woman might not be a willing participant. In such cases, he laid the blame entirely on the man in question. It is significant that Ibn Abd al-Wahhab not only recognized rape as a type of sexual relations, but he also declared it to be a punishable act for the man involved. He did not prescribe punishment for the woman or charge her with having engaged in zina'.

Similarly, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab did not hold women responsible for men's failure to control their sexual desires. He never equated women with chaos (fitnah) or accused them of inciting male desires. Rather, he held men responsible for controlling themselves, much as he held women responsible for controlling themselves. It was for this reason that, although he believed that both men and women should dress modestly, he did not require women to wear the full abaya, including a veil to cover the face. Instead, he taught that women could expose their hands, feet, and faces in public. He further granted couples contemplating marriage the right to meet and view each other more extensively in a more relaxed setting because he believed that this would spare the couple the unpleasant surprise of finding themselves incompatible after agreeing to the marriage contract. His permission granted to unrelated men and women to meet for business and medical purposes and to engage in commercial partnerships also served to create and protect women's access to public space.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab believed that women have important roles to play in both the private and public spheres and sought to guarantee their access to both by enforcing their rights. He particularly guaranteed their right to education so as to be able to fulfill their religious responsibilities -- a task that could not be completed without knowledge of both correct beliefs and practices.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's worldview focused heavily on the theme of education. He believed that acquiring and sharing religious knowledge with others was the most important responsibility of Muslims, both male and female. He held both men and women responsible for correct belief and practice, the heart of which was a solid foundation of knowledge. He encouraged all of his followers to study the Quran and hadith directly for guidance in their personal lives, as well as in their interactions with God and others.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab taught that knowledge was also necessary for public order. He charged people to become educated so that they will be able to select appropriate leaders and verify that they are worthy of their jobs. He described those fit for leadership as being, first and foremost, knowledgeable about the sources of scripture so that their actions as public figures will be in accordance with the precepts of Islamic belief and law. He charged his followers with the responsibility of recognizing and being able to distinguish between truth and falsehood on the basis of their own knowledge so that they will know for themselves whether a leader is fit to lead.

Because of the importance he placed on knowledge, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab emphasized not only the personal pursuit of education but also the responsibility of Muslims to engage in debate with others about their beliefs in order to educate them. His concern for the need to educate was based on his recognition of the command to spread Islam. That he chose to do so by educational means -- dialogue, discussion, and debate -- rather than more militant methods, such as conversions of the sword, is particularly noteworthy in the light of standard stereotypes of Wahhabis as militant, violent and destructive.

[passage omitted]

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's insistence on peaceful calling to Islam reflected his broad worldview, in which the ultimate goal of every action undertaken by the Muslim should be personal belief in and adherence to monotheism while calling others to the same. He believed that this could be achieved most effectively through education, so that even jihad included as its main goal the winning of adherents or at least placing them in a protective, cooperative relationship with Muslims through the establishment of a protective treaty (dhimmi) relationship. Thus, his vision of the world was not one in which Muslims could only coexist peacefully with other Muslims but rather one in which Muslims were expected to co-exist and even cooperate peacefully with others, even though their religious beliefs and practices might differ.

[passage omitted]

Like the modernists, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's vision of jihad was purely defensive in nature. He legitimated jihad only in cases in which Muslims had experienced an actual aggression. He did not glorify martyrdom because he believed that the only intent a person should have in carrying out jihad was defense of God and God's community, not the desire for personal rewards or glory, whether on earth or in the Afterlife.

Further Ibn Abd al-Wahhab did not permit the use of jihad in aggressive activities directed against others. By limiting jihad to cases that were strictly defensive in nature, he precluded the possibility of using it as a means of consolidating political power or forcibly spreading Wahhabi rule on a religious basis.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's teachings on jihad stand in marked contrast to contemporary fundamentalists, most notably Osama bin Laden. Although it is often posited that bin Laden's ideology of global jihad has its origins in Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings because both are Wahhabis, the reality is that bin Laden's ideology owes far more to the writings of the medieval scholar Ibn Taymiyya and his contemporary interpreter, Sayyid Qutb, than it does to the writings of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab.

Bin Laden, like Ibn Taymiyyah and Sayyid Qutb before him, envisages the world as divided into two absolute and mutually exclusive spheres -- the land of Islam (dar al Islam) and the land of the unbeliever (dar al-kufr) -- a division that results in a necessarily hostile relationship. For bin Laden, jihad is intended to be the modus operandi of Muslims, not a restricted method of self-defense. Because bin Laden espouses a vision of a world in which good and evil are engaged in cosmic conflict, he believes that jihad must take on offensive, as well as defensive, capabilities and should be a permanent state of being for Muslims. According to this vision, martyrdom should not be feared but actively pursued. The enemy is not to be called passively to Islam but must be actively, physically engaged. Anyone who resists the message of Islam or Muslim domination is to be fought and killed.

There is a serious disconnect between the writings of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and bin Laden, a fact that is attributable not only to the different contexts in which they have lived and written but also to their approaches to scripture.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab searched for intents and values.

Bin Laden's readings are more literal in their approach.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's quest was for a broad social order in which Muslims could live peacefully and respectfully with both Muslims and non-Muslims.

Bin Laden's vision leaves no space for non-Muslims or those who claim to be Muslims but do not act the part.

Ibn Abd al-Wahhab's writings have inspired a variety of contemporary reforms, from a context- and value-oriented reading of the Quran to legislation expanding women's rights and access to public space.

Bin Laden's social vision is limited to jihad, suggesting a future of violence and destruction rather than peaceful construction.