[1] Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, founder of Wahhabism, was born in 1703, the son of a judge, in Uyaynah, a village in the central Arabian region of Najd. Little can be confirmed about the early life of al-Wahhab; he emerged from an emptiness that was not only physical and economic but social, intellectual, and spiritual. But he is said to have shown extremist religious tendencies in his youth. Both his father and his brother Suleyman, who were Islamic scholars, warned others against him, and Suleyman even wrote a book in opposition to him, with the piquant title *Divine Thunderbolts*.

[2] It is also said that in early adulthood al-Wahhab traveled widely, through Kurdistan, Iran, and India, intending to become a merchant. But how would an unsophisticated, narrow-minded wanderer from Najd have seen himself and his surroundings, while passing through these distinguished and opulent places? In the disconnected, footloose son of the remote oases, doubtless baffled, hypnotized, and dismayed by the life of fabled cities and great empires, we see the archetype for all the famous and infamous Islamic extremists of modern times. Some say that during this vagabondage al-Wahhab came into contact with certain Englishmen who encouraged him to personal ambition as well as to a critical attitude about Islam. Soon, the itinerant Arab and the imperial British shared a goal: the liquidation of the Ottoman Empire.

[3] Al-Wahhab returned to Najd with a group of African slaves as a bodyguard. In 1737-40, he publicly announced his call to his version of religion and was joined by some of his younger relatives. He demanded that Muslims everywhere must all surrender to his vision of an original, authentic Islam such as he imagined had existed in the time of the Prophet. He therefore advocated rebellion against the Ottoman caliphate. His chief written work was titled *The Book of Monotheism*. His main inspiration was Ibn Taymiyyah.

[4] These events occurred at a critical moment in Islamic history. The Turks had ruled Arabia a little more than 200 years at the time of al-Wahhab's birth. But as he correctly perceived, the Muslim caliphate had entered a deep crisis. Fifty years before, in 1683, the Ottoman campaign against Christian Europe had been decisively defeated at the Battle of Vienna. But the Muslim world was also affected by other social and theological turbulence from outside. Vast numbers responded to rapid change and sudden uncertainty with beliefs that the "end time" had arrived; that humanity was about to be redeemed supernaturally. Charismatic preachers rose to lead revival movements, which mobilized armies and fought wars against noble and ecclesiastical elites. Rebellious peasants and disaffected city-dwellers sometimes convinced themselves that church leaders had become satanic servants, and that the world itself was hell, ruled by the devil.

[5] Al-Wahhab's movement represented a distillation of "end time" fears in Islamic dress. Other Muslims in the Ottoman Empire had argued that the defeats of the imperial armies in Europe were caused by insufficient devotion to religious fundamentals, as well as mysticism fostered by the Sufis. But with the crisis of the empire and the caliphate, the stage was set for a new explosion of purism and fundamentalism among Muslims. In addition, al-Wahhab and others living in Najd seem to have been stirred by Arab resentment of Ottoman domination. His doctrines broke completely with traditional Islam as embodied in the Ottoman caliphate.

[6] The essence of al-Wahhab's preaching came down to three points. First, ritual is superior to intentions. Second, no reverence of the dead is permitted. Third, there can be no intercessory prayer, addressed to God by means of the Prophet or saints. This latter precept was borrowed directly from Ibn Taymiyyah. Prayers to God by means of a pious person or even honors to any individual other than God were condemned as idolatry, despite their acceptance by all previous generations of Muslims and the Prophet himself. At the same time, defying centuries of Islamic theology, al-Wahhab's followers ascribed a human form to God, as Ibn Taymiyyah had also done. An anthropomorphic view of God had hitherto been considered scandalously heretical in Islam.

[7] Al-Wahhab further condemned as unbelievers those who did not observe all the prescribed times of prayer, a position absent from traditional Islam. As to prayer itself, he called for a revision in how it was to be carried out. Specific bodily postures were imposed and supplementary prayers after the standard practices of worship were restricted. He demanded that the
Muslim profession of faith be made a second time, as an adherent to his Wahhabi sect— a practice not dissimilar to English Puritanism or contemporary "born again" Protestantism but deeply shocking to traditional Muslims, for whom the profession of faith is unquestionable. Al-Wahhab further followed Ibn Taymiyyah in assailing local religious and spiritual customs. The earlier fundamentalist had condemned river festivals and other traditional celebrations that are extremely popular in many Muslim lands, as well as visits to hot springs, forests, mountains, or caves for spiritual or physical health.

[8] Many more long-established Muslim practices were assailed by al-Wahhab, including praying in favor of Muhammad and the recitation of blessings on the Prophet at the beginning of Friday congregational prayers. Al-Wahhab is said to have killed a blind caller to prayer, or muezin, who insisted on praying for the Prophet at the conclusion of his summons to worship, as required by the four established legal schools. Al-Wahhab also condemned the habit of those making hajj in Mecca to visit the Prophet's tomb in Medina. He particularly hated celebrations of the Prophet's birthday, or mawlid an-nabi, which had given rise to a noble and beautiful corpus of religious compositions in every language spoken by Muslims. He would not even permit the name of the Prophet Muhammad to be inscribed in mosques, which he ordered should be free of all decoration. He and his followers demanded that Muslims not shave or trim their beards, supposedly in emulation of the Prophet.

[9] Wahhabis explain their hatred of traditional praise for the Prophet by comparing it to the Christian worship of Jesus, which, because it treats Jesus as God, is rejected by Muslims. In Islamic parlance, Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus means adding "partners" to God, which is to say, denying monotheism and returning to the pagan belief in many gods. But anti-Wahhabi polemics point out that the Muslim profession of faith, as well as the call to prayer, include two parts: "I affirm there is no God but Allah; and I affirm Muhammad is the Prophet of God."

[10] Al-Wahhab's doctrines explicitly downgraded the status of Muhammad. Yet he claimed to live a life so close to the exemplary Sirah of Muhammad that he could stand as a peer to the Prophet himself. It seems clear that al-Wahhab saw himself as an equal of the Prophet, a view that is also thoroughly heretical in Islam. Some critics assert that he even saw himself as surpassing the Prophet. His brother Suleyman accused him of trying to add a "sixth pillar" to Islam: the infallibility of al-Wahhab.

[11] Al-Wahhab "made no secret" of his opinion that all Muslims had fallen into unbelief and that if they did not follow him, they should all be killed, their wives and daughters violated, and their possessions confiscated. Shi'as, Sufis, and other Muslims he judged unorthodox were to be exterminated, and all other faiths were to be humiliated or destroyed. With this terrible doctrine, the basis had been laid for two and a half centuries of Islamic fundamentalism, and ultimately terrorism, in response to global change.

[12] Muhammad never once forecast that the Muslims would fall back into polytheism, as Wahhabis have strenuously accused them of doing since the 18th century . . . Soon al-Wahhab ordered that graves of Muslim saints be dug up and scattered, or turned into latrines. He also burned many books, arguing that Qur'an alone would suffice for humanity's needs. Above all, Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and his followers despised music, which they viewed as an incitement to forgetfulness of God and to sin. The innovations proposed by al-Wahhab seem bizarre and repulsive to traditional Muslims, who have often sought the intermediation of the Prophet, of saints, living and dead, have visited tombs, and have celebrated the Prophet's birthday for generation upon generation. But the Wahhabi loathing of music must identify them to normal people throughout the modern world as extremist to the point of derangement.

[13] Music is perhaps the greatest glory of Islamic civilization, as well as having been a major form of social communication and means for preservation of culture throughout the history of the ummah. Of the magnificence of Islamic Spain, one of the greatest living memories consists of the schools of "Andalusian music" that flourish today in North Africa. In the same region, Moroccan Sufis play music, chant, and sing with a unique freedom of inspiration and mystical fulfilment. The stringed instruments of the Atlas Mountains convey the purest ecstasy of union with God. Turkish bands with percussion, brass, and wind instruments transformed Western classical and military music . . .

[14] Al-Wahhab began his campaign of "reform" in Islam by cutting down a tree beloved of local mystics. Soon he organized a demonstration for the education of the populace: the stoning of a woman in Uuyaynah accused of "fornication." Al-Wahhab had
mounted a challenge to the Ottoman order, and a fatwa was issued calling for his arrest. Like his own family, the people of Najd began to split between his supporters and his opponents. In 1744 he took refuge in the village of Dariyah, in a district that was ruled by a local rebel, Muhammad ibn Sa'ud, and his family, known as Al Sa'ud.

**The alliance between the house of Al Saud and Wahhabism.**

[15] The early history of Al Sa'ud, like that of al-Wahhab, is almost nonexistent. Prior to the 18th century, this Arab clan was largely unknown to the broader societies of the Peninsula. As rulers of Dariyah, the Al Sa'ud engaged in the only organized economic endeavor found in the backward environment of Najd: banditry. This brought them into constant conflict with the Ottomans. It also created a propensity for them to ally with the British, who were then taking control of the richer and more valuable parts of the Arabian Peninsula: the coastal emirates from Kuwait to Aden.

[16] Dariyah was a lawless place ruled by the whims of Al Sa'ud until 1747, when al-Wahhab and Al Sa'ud established a crude government based on a unique power-sharing agreement, with the former as religious authority and the latter as political ruler. They contracted marriage between their families—a typical means of cementing alliances in tribal and clan-based societies—and agreed that power should be inherited exclusively by their descendants.

[17] This alliance between two families of outsiders, in a place God seemed to have forgotten, represented a historical novelty. Marriage pacts are usually contracted to preserve the wealth and power of each family or to bring an end to feuds or other conflicts. But the two men who came together at Dariyah had no significant wealth or power to share and no grievances to settle. Their true aim was conquest. For his part, al-Wahhab imagined himself a new Prophet who would replace the Ottoman caliph as the sole theological authority within the global Islamic ummah. For Al Sa'ud, meanwhile, the extremism of the Wahhabs provided a means for the legitimation of political power. Many commentators, Muslim and non-Muslim, have characterized the Wahhabis' labeling of other Muslims unbelievers as nothing more than a pretext for robbery, murder, and rape, which would naturally appeal to the desert brigands who rallied to Al Sa'ud.

[18] By marriage and inheritance, the bloody swords of Al Sa'ud came to aid the perversive vision of al-Wahhab in a unique fusion of religious and political control, a system in which faith and statecraft would be run as a family business. This political formula has its fullest expression in modern Saudi Arabia. It also represents a complete break with the traditions of the scholars of Islam, who were typically thoughtful, unworldly men, not political schemers after global power.

[19] The Wahhab-Sa'ud alliance first conquered a few local settlements and imposed al-Wahhab's doctrines on them. The first of his political partners, Muhammad ibn Sa'ud, died in 1765 and was succeeded by his son Abd al-Aziz ibn Sa'ud. By 1788, the Wahhab-Sa'ud alliance controlled most of the Arabian Peninsula. In 1792, al-Wahhab died, and Abd al-Aziz took over leadership of the Wahhabi-Saudi alliance, extending their raiding over the next three years to Medina, Syria, and Iraq. These campaigns saw mass murder and rape of Shi'a Muslims as well as adherents of the Hanafi and other legal schools rejected by al-Wahhab.

[20] The Wahhabs had an extraordinary hatred of Shi'ism, which became an early target of their violence. Some of this rage may have originated during al-Wahhab's travels in Shi'a Iraq and Iran, but it is also known that the Shi'as of Hasa, the region directly east of Najd, contemptuously rejected his pretensions. However, the Shi'a may simply have become objects of Wahhabi assault because they were richer than the Bedouins of Najd and offered tempting opportunities for plunder. Whatever its source, however, bile against the Shi'as has remained a constant throughout Wahhabi-Saudi history. Today the Saudi school systems, following Wahhabi tenets, teach their children throughout the ummah that Shi'a Islam was invented by an imaginary Jewish convert, that Shi'a theologians are liars, that their legal traditions are false, and that they are not Muslims at all.

[21] In 1801, the Wahhabis attacked the Shi'a holy city of Karbala, in Iraq between Baghdad and the Arabian frontier, and in a horrifying magnification of the atrocities enacted there more than 10 centuries before they slaughtered thousands of its citizens. They also wrecked and looted the tomb of Husayn, grandson of the Prophet. As a result, the second battle of Karbala retains immense symbolism for the Shi'a and other enemies of Wahhabism.

[22] The Saudi chief al-Aziz was murdered in 1803, possibly by a Shi'a avenger. His son Sa'ud bin Abd al-Aziz succeeded him. The year before Mecca fell to the Wahhabis, who forbade the entry of a caravan of Ottoman pilgrims. These events were of
such moment that they were reported in Christian Europe. But for more than two centuries, real understanding of Wahhabism eluded Westerners, even though it ultimately grew to become a world power under Saudi patronage.

[23] *Jihad*, or struggle to promote the faith, had been the guiding principle throughout a millennium of uninterrupted Islamic expansion. Al-Wahhab and his followers called for *"jihad"* against Muslims. In this they imitated the grim example of the "reformer" Ibn Taymiyyah, who had incited *"jihad"* against the Islamized Mongols. Turkish scholar Hilmi Ishik has assembled an authoritative chronicle of religiously motivated Wahhabi cruelty. After the sacking of Karbala, this was most dramatically illustrated by their conduct following the surrender of Ta'if, a western Arabian city assaulted in 1802 during the Wahhabi campaign against Mecca.

[24] In the taking of Ta'if, it is said that the Wahhabis "killed every woman, man, and child they saw, slashing with their swords even babies in cradles. The streets were flooded with blood." Citizens who surrendered in their houses were executed, their bodies trampled by horses and left unburied. Their homes were looted and their possessions scattered, later to be washed away by rain. The Wahhabis then set about destroying all the holy tombs and burial grounds in the city, followed by the mosques and Islamic schools, or *medresas*. When a scholar of the city pleaded that a certain mosque be spared, a radical among the Wahhabis, named Matu, commented, "anything doubtful should be annihilated." This would prove the quintessence of the Wahhabi outlook. As the historian Al-Zahawi wrote,

[25] They killed everyone in sight, slaughtering both child and adult, the ruler and the ruled, the lowly and well-born. They began with a suckling child nursing at his mother's breast and moved on to a group studying *Qur'an*, slaying them, down to the last man. And when they wiped out the people they found in the houses, they went out into the streets, the shops, and the mosques, killing whoever happened to be there. They killed even men bowed in prayer until they had exterminated every Muslim who dwelt in Ta'if and only a remnant, some 20 or more, remained.

[26] For when the Wahhabis entered, they seized their weapons and slew them to a man. They induced others to surrender with a guarantee of mercy and took them to the valley of Waj where they abandoned them in the cold and snow, barefoot, naked and exposed in shame with their women, accustomed to the privacy afforded them by common decency and religious morality. They then plundered their possessions: wealth of any kind, household furnishings, and cash.

[27] They cast books into the streets, alleys, and byways to be blown to and fro by the wind, among which could be found copies of *Qur'an*, and other canonical collections of *Hadith* and books of Islamic jurisprudence, all mounting to the thousands. These books remained there for several days, trampled upon by the Wahhabis. None among them made the slightest attempt to remove even one page of *Qur'an* from underfoot to preserve it from the ignominy of this display of disrespect. Then, they razed the houses, and made what was once a town a barren waste.

[28] Next the Wahhabis entered Mecca. While they controlled the Two Holy Places, they imposed Wahhabism as an official creed, barred pilgrims from performing the *hajj*, covered up the Ka'bah with a rough black fabric, and began the demolition of shrines and cemeteries. The disruption of the *hajj* provoked an uproar throughout the Muslim world. Murders of leading citizens of both holy cities continued. The Wahhabis, under the third Saudi ruler, Sa'ud bin Abd al-Aziz, had established a prototype for a modern "Islamic" terrorist regime.

[29] Ten years later, Muhammad ibn Sa'ud died and his son Abd al-Aziz became the ruler of Dariyah. During the following two decades, the Wahhab-Sa'ud alliance further extended its area of influence, paralleling British infiltration in the Peninsula. Britain again showed interest in Kuwait in 1775, seeking protection for their mail service through the territory, and attempted unsuccessfully to take Kuwait in 1786, when they were defeated by the Ottomans. The next year, al-Wahhab declared himself leader of the worldwide ummah. This was backed with a *fatwa* in which al-Wahhab ordered *"jihad"* against the Ottomans. The full import of al-Wahhab's pretensions to universal religious authority became clear in 1788, when Abd al-Aziz ibn Sa'ud was joined by British forces in occupying Kuwait. The Wahhabis turned to the Christians for direct military help in their *"jihad"* against the Turks . . .
Princes of Darkness: The Saudi Assault on the West  (2005)
Laurent Murawiec
Excerpts from Ch. 3

[1] Other victims of official [Wahhabi rule in Saudi Arabia] are the Shiites, who perhaps represent 80 percent of the population of the eastern oil province of Hasa and of the southwestern province of Asir bordering Yemen, making up in all between 18 and 20 percent of the Saudi population. In the eyes of the Wahhabis, beginning with their founder, Shiism is the worst abomination. On the ladder of creation, the Shiites are located beneath Christians, Jews, and pagans. Or, as Wahhabi theorists assert, Shiism was in fact invented by a Jew who had pretended to convert to Islam, in connection with a conspiracy intended to destroy Islam. That explains everything. The furious hatred of the Wahhabis against the Shiites was unleashed on many occasions, with the capture and sacking of the holy city of Karbala in 1802 as one of the bloodiest examples.

[2] With the conquest of the Shiite territories in the 1920s, the Wahhabis fell on their victims with ferocious cruelty. The conquest was punctuated with countless massacres. The obstacles put in the way of the extermination of Shiites by Ibn Saud (who preferred subjects to corpses) were among the complaints extremists made against the king. In the eastern province, the police, the National Guard, and the army are quick on the trigger whenever Shiites show any inclination to protest. What is the situation today? Wahhabis enjoy a complete monopoly in education, which excludes Shiism from teaching, schoolbooks, or any other pedagogic material. In universities,

[3] Shiism is presented as a perverse deviation and a Jewish plot. An iron-clad segregation is maintained in employment: No Shiite, whether Jaafari, Ismaili, or Zaidite, can be appointed as a judge, an imam, a teacher of religion, the director of a school, a minister, a diplomat, and so on: in short, a second class subject can never accede to the first rank. All judges come from Najd and must be Wahhabis. Of all the schools of Muslim law, only Hanbalism, from which Wahhabism derives, is authorized; the others—the Shaafi, Maliki, and Hanafi schools, not to mention Shiism—are banned.

[4] Shiites are excluded from religious institutions, the Senior Ulama Council, the High Council of Justice, the Council of Fatwas, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Foundations, the Ministry of the Hajj, and so on. Shiites are forbidden to publish books and newspapers, or to speak on radio and television. They are virtually forbidden to build mosques. Over the past twenty years, a dozen existing Shiite mosques have been confiscated by the authorities. The large Shiite community of Medina, for example, saw its mosque confiscated, was forbidden to assemble, and its leader, the ninety-year-old Sheikh Muhammad Ali Al-Amri, was arrested on numerous occasions.

[5] Officially, none of that exists. "Shiites are not subject to any discrimination. They are Muslims and citizens of Saudi Arabia. Discrimination has never been acceptable in Saudi Arabia, from the very foundation of the state, nor is it acceptable today," explained the assistant minister of Islamic affairs, Tawfiq al-Sediry, as persuasive as a Soviet minister explaining the superior form of democracy prevailing in his country. Prince Talal bin Abdulaziz has conceded that "the Shiite minority is suffering and consider that they are second class citizens, which is true. They are deprived of their rights."

[6] The Wahhabi ulamas are definitive: "Shiites are the principal enemy. But victory will always be ours because God is on our side." The Shiites are apostates, a crime punished with death in Islam. The Shiites in the city of Qatif, in Hasa province, galvanized by the events in nearby Iran, demonstrated in 1979-1980 and were shot down like flies; the Saudi government ordered the old city to be demolished. In May 2000, seventeen Ismaili Shiites from Najran were sentenced to death—you don't treat apostates with kid gloves—for having protested against the closing of their mosque on government orders. International pressure forced the king to commute their sentences in December 2002.

[7] One hundred twenty-five years ago in Qatif, a local sheikh acquired a 90-hectare strip of land on the shore of the Persian Gulf and bequeathed it as a community foundation to the inhabitants of the village of Awamiya in the form of a waqf, a common Muslim form of permanent endowment. In 1996, one of King Fadh's brothers seized the land unceremoniously and sold it to a private promoter. Protests by the villagers were put down with violence and arrests. The official world claims that the villagers had never held legal title. The villagers are Shiites. Saudi Arabia has refused to sign the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, because man has no rights and God has all, through the intermediary of his favored creatures, who turn out to have Saudi passports.