

## WAHHABISM AND THE ORIGINS OF

## Radical Islam

## What is Wahhabism? The reactionary branch of Islam said to be 'the main source of global terrorism'

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/29/what-is-wahhabism-the-reactionary-branch-of-islam-said-to-be-the/>



Islamic State militants on the march CREDIT: AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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In July 2013, Wahhabism was identified by the European Parliament in Strasbourg as the main source of global terrorism.

Wahhabism has become increasingly influential, partly because of Saudi money and partly because of Saudi Arabia's central influence as protector of Mecca.

The Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, condemned Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Isil), insisting "the ideas of extremism, radicalism and terrorism do not belong to Islam in any way".

Somewhat paradoxically, however, members of the Saudi ruling class have applauded Wahhabism it for its Salafi piety - i.e. its adherence to the original practices of Islam - and the movement's vehement opposition to the Shia branch of Islam.

In the 1970s, with the help of funding from petroleum exports and other factors, Saudi charities started funding Wahhabi schools (madrassas) and mosques across the globe and the movement underwent "explosive growth".

The US State Department has estimated that over the past four decades Riyadh has invested more than \$10bn (£6bn) into charitable foundations in an attempt to replace mainstream Sunni Islam with the harsh intolerance of its Wahhabism. EU intelligence experts estimate that 15 to 20 per cent of this has been diverted to al-Qaida and other violent jihadists.

The movement now has worldwide influence inspiring the ideology of extremists worldwide.

### A short history of Wahhabism

Founded by Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-92), it stresses the absolute sovereignty of God. Ibn Abd al-Wahhab also rejected any reliance on the intercession of Mohammed and denounced pilgrimages to saints' tombs, declaring that their domes or shrines should be destroyed.

As an opposer of innovation, he advocated a return to what he saw as the purity of the first generation of Islam, the salaf and the teaching of any school of law. His ideas were deeply influenced by the teachings of Ibn Taymiyah (1263-1328), who saw the state as an adjunct of religion and opposed discursive theology.



*Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahab*

Ibn Taymiyah also branded the Mongols of his day as kafirs (unbelievers), even though they professed the main tenets of Islam. In this, he has been imitated by modern Islamist movements which excommunicate those who profess Islam without following it rigorously. These ideas were further developed in the twentieth century by Sayyid Qutb.

Wahhabists enforce public attendance at prayers, forbid shaving and the smoking of tobacco. Their mosques are plain. By the middle of the 18th century, they dominated the Arabian peninsula with the political support of the Al Saud, the family that to this day rules through a monarchy.

In 1925, the Wahhabists seized Mecca, but the state has continued to allow pilgrims of all Muslim traditions to observe their rites during the hajj. Even so, the Interior Ministry funds the religious police, who seek out illegal alcohol and ensure shops are shut during mosque time.

Since the 1980s, unemployed young people have been attracted to neo-Wahhabist groups embracing salafiyah, the ideology of primitive Islam, who seek social justice as well as the imposition of Koranic punishments.



*Men study at a madrasa in Dhaka Bangladesh*

### Wahhabism today

The exclusivism of Ibn Taymiyah combined with the use of violence advocated by modern ultra-Wahhabists such as Al Qaeda, Isil and Boko Haram, have now given rise to cells of activists outside Saudi Arabia, ready to commit terrorist outrages such as the ones seen in Beirut, Paris, Brussels and Lahore.

Its ironic that Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali seemed to warn against the rise of extremism in Kitab Al Fitan – a compilation of hadiths (Islamic tradition) relating to the end of times, put together by prominent

scholar Nuyam bin Hammad in 229 AH. In it Imam Ali recalled the Prophet saying:

“If you see the black flags, then hold your ground and do not move your hands or your feet. A people will come forth who are weak and have no capability, their hearts are like blocks of iron. They are the people of the State (literally the people of Al Dawla), they do not keep a promise or a treaty.

“They call to the truth but they are not its people. Their names are (nicknames like Abu Mohammed) and their last names (are the names of town and cities, like Al Halabi [and now al-Baghdadi]) and their hair is loose like women’s hair. (Leave them) until they fight among themselves, then Allah will bring the truth from whoever He wills.”

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1. What is "Wahhabism"?
2. Why is it called "Wahhabism," and what else is it called (as preferred by its followers)?
3. When did it first appear, where, and why?
4. What sorts of things do those who follow Wahhabism believe are prohibited/forbidden?
5. How has Wahhabism influenced the government/society of Saudi Arabia?
6. How has Wahhabism spread, and what current examples exist of its spread?
7. The article seems to suggest that the sort of extremism seen with Wahhabism is contrary to the original vision of the prophet Muhammad, and that it is destined to fail. Do you think that claim is accurate, or do you believe there may be some bias in the article, given its source (a London newspaper)? Why or why not?