CHAPTER VI

SAUDI ARABIA :
WAHHABI - SAUDI LINKAGE
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Whether described as "patriarchal desert state" 1 or "modernizing autocracy" 2, the hallmark of the Saudi polity is its close identification with the Wahhabi orthodoxy. Contrary to the prediction made by some scholars, 3 the 'modernizing thrust' of the successive regimes has hardly resulted in the erosion of 'Wahhabi identity' though the power and prestige of the ulama has definitely declined in the twentieth century owing to its increasing bureaucratization and integration into the state structure 4. More concretely, the oil-centered modernization programme has hardly affected the value-structure of the Saudi society. It was this "resilience" of the social structure of the Saudi society which led a scholar to remark, "more than any other of the Islamic nations, and more than any other Arab nations Saudi Arabia has retained the essential elements of a value system,

1. George Lenezowski, Middle Eastern Politics (Berkely 1960), p. 66
4. Ayman Al-Yassini, Religion and state in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Boulder, 1985)
a set of behaviour patterns for both elite and mass like, and a political system which is in most respects an anachronism in the modern world. 5

The pervasive influence of religion may be traced to the country's geographical isolation and little cultural interaction with the outside world till the first half of twentieth century, its identification with the birth of Islam, the tribal structure and finally its marriage with the Wahhabi ideology. However, it is the last factor, by far the most important, which has ensured the dominant role of religion in the Saudi society. The state itself, for the sake of legitimacy, has assumed the responsibility of maintaining the 'religious character' of the polity and the society. David Apter observed, 'Saudi Arabia . . . . . . exhibits profound internal solidarity based upon . . . . religion, by means of which support is retained for the political leaders, the king who makes claims on the members of the system and controls them. 6 Indeed, Wahhabism, as a form of Islamic ideology, has served as an ideological instrument in the hands of successive regimes to expand, consolidate and legitimize their respective rule. The Wahhabi Ulama remain the 'principal legitimizer' of the regime's policies and action at both level i.e. domestic as well as foreign. Serving as guardians of public morals and

5. Wenner, n. 2, p. 167
guarantors of religious sanction for government acts, the ulama play an important part in ensuring obedience to the regime. Their role as guarantors of the orthodoxy of the regime makes the latter dependent upon them in many ways, and this is perhaps the main source of their power even today. On the other hand, the ruling regime, aware of the importance of the ulama, does its utmost to integrate and institutionalize them into the ruling elites, give them due share in the power-structure of the society and honour them in matters of protocol so that they feel full partners in responsibility for policy and political decisions.

The cooperation between the ulama and the royal house in modern Saudi Arabia has its theoretical basis in the political teaching of Ibn Taymiyya. He held that religion and state are indissolubly linked: without the coercive power of the state, religion is in danger, and without the Sharia, the state becomes a tyrannical organization. In other words, the ideal Muslim state requires close cooperation between the "ulama", in charge of religious law, and the Umara, who hold the political power to enforce it. The Umara are to consult the 'ulama' when doubts arise as to the interpretation of the law.  

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Shaykh Muhammad Ibn Abd al Wahhab invoked and propagated the political teaching of Ibn Taymiyya during the eighteenth century. He started a movement which came to be known as Wahhabism which subsequently influenced many revivalist movements in many parts of the Muslim world. Wahhabism as a movement was to restore the "purity" of Islam as practiced during the time of Muhammad and Four rightly Guided Caliph. Many saw in the development of Wahhabism as a reaction of "Arabism" to the Turkish domination. Whatever the interpretation of the origin and purpose of the movement the fact remains that Abd al Wahhab sought protection from the then existing ruling dynasty and forged an alliance first unsuccessfully with the ruler of al Uayyna and later with Muhammad Ibn Saud, the ruler of al Dariya - an alliance which succeeded and ushered in the first Wahhabi kingdom in 1744. The alliance served each other well. It provided Wahhabism with much need support and protection and offered Ibn Saud the ideological platform to justify his political design. Attacks on neighbouring principalities, and, indeed, on the whole of peninsula, were justified by the invocation of the tradition of takfir and gita\(^9\). More important, Wahhabi teaching justified and consolidated Saudi rule over Arabia. It argued that the rulers commands should be followed as long as they do not contradict the rules of religion, of which the ulama are the interpreters. The Shaykh advised patience with the oppression of rulers and denounced armed rebellion

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\(^9\) Al-Yassini, n. 4, p. 30.
against them\textsuperscript{10}. Shaykh Ibn Abd al Wahhab also conferred the title of "Imam" to Ibn Saud in order to buttress the religious character of the ruler. It is interesting to note that Abd al-Wahhab preferred the Shii innovation of Imam as against the orthodox Sunni concept of 'Caliph'. Because the Caliph, as the successors of Prophet Muhammad, were considered to be leaders of the Muslim community throughout the world but they possessed no spiritual authority. The Imams, on the other hand, were temporal rulers as well as spiritual guides of their people. The title of 'Imam' has been retained by the successive rulers of the Saudi Kingdom. The Saudi monarch in his role of Imam is the religious leader of his people and an acknowledged defender of the Sharia - in his country. It has all along been a great legitimizer of Saudi rule\textsuperscript{11}. Even today the ceremonial washing of the Kaba by the king before the Haji, his address to the pilgrims every year, and the occasional calls to liberate Jerusalem are conscious assertions by the monarch of his spiritual claims\textsuperscript{12}.

The first Wahhabi state remained in existence till the end of 1818 when it was destroyed by the combined troops of Muhammad Ali of Egypt and al Rashid, the ex. ruler of al


\textsuperscript{12} ibid
Riyadh. However it was to be revived again only with the recapture of al-Riyadh in 1902 by Amir Abdel Aziz al Saud, marking the birth of the second Wahhabi state to which modern Saudi Arabia can be traced to\textsuperscript{13}. The ulama remained an active partner in the affairs of these two states. Because of its association with the formation of kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the family of Muhammad Ibn Abd al Wahhab, known as Al-Shykh, occupies a prominent position within the class of ulama and as such can be identified as the representative of official Islam in Saudi Arabia. Its members make about one quarter of the approximately one hundred 'ulama' listed in the collection of biographies of famous Najdi ulama from the establishment of the first Wahhabi state until the late 1970's\textsuperscript{14}. They monopolize a wide gamut of important religious and other posts and they are the qadis (mostly in major cities, such as Dariyya, Riyadh, and Mecca), senior members of the judiciary (until the establishment of Ministry of Justice in 1970) such as chief gadi, muftis, including the grand mufti of Saudi Arabia, chairman of public morality committees, supervisor of mosques in Mecca and Madina, heads of institutes and academics for the study of religious law and religious justice, rectors and presidents of religious universities, and presidents of the council of the Grand

\textsuperscript{13} For details, see, H. St. John Philby, \textit{Saudi Arabia} (New York, 1955)

'Ulama' and the World Islamic League and so on$^{15}$. The bond between the family of Al Shaykh and the House of Ibn Saud is also reinforced through the inter-marriage between the two. In the fact the official Ulama in general and Al Shaykh family in particular has virtually identified their own interest with the interest of state. Therefore, they take a deep interest in the affairs of the state, because their socio-economic position is very much dependent on the maintenance and stability of the Saud regime. The ulama elite today seems to include the holders of senior posts in the religious establishment, members of the Department of Religious Research, Legal Opinions, Missionary activities and Guidance as well as the Council of the Grand Ulama$^{16}$.

As Wahhabism remains an ideological-political identity of the Saudi state it is essential to have a brief survey of the Wahhabi doctrine, before one proceeds to analyze the role of religion in modern Saudi Arabia.

The doctrine of Wahhabism revolves around the following central themes :-

(i) *Tawhid* :- It implies the unity of God. Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab considered it "the eternal religion of God". The Shaykh maintain that the unity of God reveals itself in three distinct ways. First, there is *tawhid alrubbiyah*, which is the assertion of the unity of God and His action.

$^{15}$ ibid.

$^{16}$ ibid, p. 42.
"He alone is the Creator, the Provider and Disposer of the universe." The second is **tawhid al asma wa al sifat**. This concept deals with God's characteristics. He is "The Beneficent the Merciful.... the knowledgeable". The third is **tawhid al-Ilahiya**. Worship of God should be to God alone. The assertion that "there is no god but **Allah** and Muhammad is the Prophet of God "means that all forms of worship should be devoted solely to God; Muhammad is not to be worshipped but, as an apostle, should be obeyed and followed.

(ii) **Tawasul** (Intercession)

Wahhabis strongly disagreed with their opponents on the question of intercession. For Abd al-Wahhab, **Ibadat** (worship) refers to "all the utterances and actions - inward as well as outward - that desires and commands." In Kitab al Tawhid, the Shaykh wrote that to seek protection from trees, stones, and the like is a major polytheistic practice. He warned believers against showing excessive devotion to saints and the use of their graves as places of worship.

(iii) **Ziyarat al - Qubur**

The doctrine of intercession led the Wahhabis to view with utter indignation the widely followed practice of grave visitation and the building of domes near graves. The excessive veneration of the deceased who enjoyed a holy reputation, the Shaykh noted, was the first step towards idol

17. Al Yassini, n. 4, p. 27.
18. ibid.
19. ibid.
worship in the pre-Islamic period. To avoid polytheism, the Wahhabis considered it an obligation to destroy all the tombs that had already been built.

(iv) Takfir and Qital

The Wahhabi doctrine of takfir states that mere affiliation with Islam is not sufficient in itself to prevent a Muslim from becoming a polytheist. Moreover, the person who utters the shahada (proclamation of faith) and still practices polytheism, as defined by the Wahhabis, should be denounced as an infidel and killed. The Shaykh considered it the duty of every able believer to fight infidels and "hypocrite" Muslims.

(v) Bida

Innovation is defined by the Wahhabis as any doctrine or action not based on the Qur'an, the Traditions, or the authority of the Companions. Shaykh Ibn Abd al Wahhab quoted Prophet as saying, "Every muhditha (innovation) is bida, and every bida leads astray." The Wahhabis rejected as bida such acts as celebrating the Prophet's birth, seeking intercession from saints, reciting the fatiha ("the opening of the Qur'an) on behalf of the founders of Sufi orders after the five daily prayers and so on.

20. ibid, p. 27.
21. ibid.
22. ibid.
23. ibid
(iv) *Ijitihad and Taqlid*

The complete adherence to the *Quran* and the Traditions, which the Wahhabis demanded of Muslims, entailed also a rejection of all interpretations offered by the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence - including the Wahhabi's own Hanbali school if it was not in accordance with the two prime sources.\(^\text{24}\) The Wahhabis have developed strict procedures to direct the discussion of doctrinal issues. If the reference is not found in the rest of the *Quran* and the Traditions, they will look for first in the consensus of the "Virtuous Ancestors", particularly the "Companions and their Successors", and then in the *ijma* of the scholars.

As for *ijitihad*, the Wahhabis reject the idea that the "doors of *ijitihad*" are closed. Such *ijitihad* must be based on the sources of the *Quran* and the Tradition.

The modern kingdom of Saudi Arabia owes its birth to the recapture of al-Riyadh by king Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud [1925 - 1953]. In order to expand and consolidate his rule, Ibn Saud revived Wahhabism as state ideology and found a religio-politico organization called the *Ikhwan*. While the Wahhabi Ulama were to supply the religious justifications for his policies and actions, the *Ikhwan* came to serve two purposes, firstly, as a reserved military force to wage *jihad* (i.e. Holy war) and secondly, their settlements (i.e. hujar) as a

\(^\text{24}\) ibid.
part of state’s policy to weaken their tribal loyalty. The twin functions of the Ikhwan were in accordance with Ibn Saud’s need of a fighting force that had the mobility of the bedouin (of Najd) and the loyalty, bravery, dedication and stability of the townsmen (of Hejaj).

In creating the settlements, Ibn Saud deliberately emphasized a militant Wahhabi spirit among the bedouins. Delegations of ‘ulama’ were sent by ‘Abd al-Aziz to the hujar of the Ikhwan and to the bedouin tribes to spread the message of true path (Da’wa Sahiha) among tribal leaders and the Ikhwan. In fact, the belief system that rationalized and inspired the Ikhwan movement was developed by Shaykh Abd Allah Ibn Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Latif Al-Shaykh. He amplified Wahhabi principles to converge with Ibn Saud’s political objectives, and organized a network of religious instructors who propagated these principles. Above all, his writings emphasized the dual duty to obey God and the Imam. Another scholar commented, "the qadis, and especially the mutatawwiun, were instruments for indoctrinating the Ikhwan of the hujar and for training them for a holy war (Jihad) in


26. ibid, n.25(a), p.15.

27. Al Yassini, n.4, p.51
the service of the Wahhabi state.28 Further the hujar was established to transfer allegiance from the tribe to the religious framework, and it created a tool for controlling the bedouin.29 The hujars were cooperative agriculturally oriented colonies that recognized al Saud as the holder of the lawful Islamic leadership or the Imamate.30 Starting with al Artawiya in December 1912, the hujars reached to 22231 in 1926, giving Abd al-Aziz a formidable Ikhwan army of 150,00032. Al-Yassini remarked, the broad geographical distribution of these settlements in the region made Ibn Saud’s physical presence felt across the peninsula and provided line with military bases, supply bases and religious outposts33.

Schooled in the notion that Wahhabism is the only path for Muslims to follow, the Ikhwan were able to win for Ibn Saud every battle in which they were engaged between 1914 and 192734. Finally in 1928, the Ikhwan struck at Mecca, confirming the apprehension of Sherif Hussain of Mecca, who called the Ikhwan "a political society in the cloak of

29. ibid.
31. Habib, n. 25(a), p. 58.
33. Al-Yassin, n.4, p.52.
34. ibid, p.54
The ulama provided the religious sanction to wage war against the infidels (i.e. non-Wahhabis). In other words, the ulama provided the ideological justification for Ibn Saud’s expansionist policy. At this juncture, it is worth quoting John S. Habib on the political use of Ikhwan by Ibn Saud.

"...... Rather his (Ibn Saud) genius reflects itself in the creation of the Ikhwan movement, formed by preaching on Islamic revival among the bedouin and by persuading them to settle in semi-religious military - agriculture communities called hujar. Created and fostered over the objections of many of his closest family members and friends, the Ikhwan provided a unique solution to the military - political problems which the bedouin had posted for centuries to those who would conquer and rule the peninsula, a solution which has eluded his illustrious ancestors and no less a genius than the Prophet Muhammad himself. Although it caused Ibn Saud many serious problems during its short span of life, the Ikhwan movement ultimately vindicated his vision of it as his principal instrument to unify the peninsula. 36

With the conquest of Hejaz, Ibn Saud’s territorial shaping of the kingdom was completed. He no longer needed the Ikhwan as a fighting force, and their religious fanaticism became a potential threat to his regime. What he

35. Habib, n. 25(a), p. 20.
36. ibid, p. 6.
needed now was how to diffuse the Ikhwan fanaticism. Accordingly, the Riyadh Ulama recalled their mutaw'ia from the Ikhwan settlements and instructed them to preach that Islam is the religion of the middle road (al Islam din wassat) and that Islam is not opposed to material comfort and wealth. The implications of the new dogma were two folds - first, the Ikhwan were expected to shun their religious fanaticism; second, the Ikhwan were to devote their time and resource to cultivation of the land and the acquisition of wealth.

However, the Ikhwan rejected the moderate interpretation of Islam. In fact, they came to visualise their role as the true defenders of Wahhabi Islam and to launch jihad against infidel remained their principle goal. They looked down Ibn Saud's hobnobbing with the British as a sign of weakness and a slackening of religious faith. At their first conference in Artawiyya in 1926 they denounced the king for sending his sons Saud and Faysal to Egypt and Britain respectively, for introducing innovations in transport and communications, for imposing non Sharia taxes; for shirking from enforcing the Wahhabi doctrine on the Shiis of al Hasa and al Qatif; for recognizing the emirate of transjordan and halting Ikhwan attacks on Iraq, and for prohibiting raids in general.

In order to deal with the growing criticism by the Ikhwan Ibn Saud convened a conference of ulama in 1927 to

37. Al Yassini, n. 4, p. 55
38. ibid, p. 55, also, Layish, n.14, p.46.
seek their opinion. Though ulama favoured a number of actions of the Ikhwan they also made it clear that even if 'Abd al Aziz did not abolish the illegal taxes, a revolt was not permitted. The ulama also insisted that it was the Imam's responsibility alone to declare jihad. The Ikhwan pressure was so intense that Imam al Aziz Ibn Saud was indeed compelled to prevent the entry of the Egyptian mahmal, demolish the mosques and discontinue the telegraph service far a time in order to calm the Ikhwan and prevent the spread of the disaffection. However, these concessions could not prevent the Ikhwan leaders Faisal al-Duwaish of the Mutayr tribe, sultan Ibn Humaid Ibn Bijad of the Utaiba, and Didan Ibn Hithlin of the Ujman, from launching a series of military attacks against not only Iran and Kuwait but also some Najdi tribes that were loyal to Ibn Saud. This led Ibn Saud to crush the Ikhwan movement forever in the battle of Sibila (1929). The settlements were dismantled and the Ikhwan were converted into the National Guard.

Hafiz Wahba remarked that Ibn Saud's secret weapon against the Ikhwan was the support of the ulama. The suppression of the Ikhwan revolt marked the decline of their

39. For details, see, Layish, n. 14, p. 47, also Al Yassini, n. 4, p. 56.
40. ibid, p. 47.
41. Al Yassini, n. 4, p-56.
42. ibid, p. 56.
43. ibid.
44. H. Wahba, n. 25(e), pp. 321-3.
importance as a military force and the focus of the political power, and the establishment of the undisputed rule of the house of the Saud.45

The creation of complex administrative institutions, owing to the development of oil economy, led to two fundamental changes affecting the traditional relationship between religion and state in the Saudi Kingdom. First, it has increased the role differentiation between the religious and political spheres. Second, it has routinized state control of a broad range of areas that were formerly dominated by religion and the religious establishment. Subsequently, due to this routinization, the ulama lost many of their traditional functions and became only a pressure group and were limited to exerting influence over governments activities and policies but never acting as an autonomous center of power. Indeed, the ulama in the current Saudi state are dependent on the state for their survival. They have been reduced to the level of paid civil servants whose activities are determined by the needs of the political sphere. Ulama leaders are appointed by the king, and ulama activities are regulated by state laws.

The incorporation of the ulama into the state administration has also helped to routinize the use of religion and of religious establishment as a source of legitimacy for the rulers. The ulama's role in society and

their activities in the administrative structure are channeled through the following main fields and agencies:

The Committees for Commanding the Good and Forbidding Evil:

The ulama exercise a monopoly on religious and social morals through the Committees for Commanding the Good and Forbidding Evil, known in the West as public morality committees or religious police. This is a modern version of the hisba, the office of the inspector of the market, based on the Quran. These committees were set up and consolidated in the 1930's as part of 'Abd al Aziz's efforts to bring the bedouin within the orbit of the Sharia, through the mutawia, the religious teacher sent to the higher settlements of the Ikhwan. In enforcing Wahhabi principles and establishing control over society, the activities of the mutawia often covered a wide range of areas. These activities aimed at eradication of such behavior as the consumption of alcohol and tobacco, gambling, infringement of the fast of Ramadan, unveiling a woman's face, prostitution, Western style entertainment, modern music, superstition etc. The committees were empowered to arrest, bring to trial, and imprison those found guilty of offending Wahhabi teachings. In fact the application of these principles enabled Ibn Saud to control all the activities of his citizens and to consolidate his rule. 46

As Ibn Saud’s authority became well entrenched in the

46. Al Yassini, n. 4, p. 69.
region, and as the process of creating a modern administrative structure succeeded, the mutawia institution was no longer needed. Instead of eliminating the mutawia, a measure that might antagonize the ulama, Ibn Saud by a royal decree in 1930 incorporated this institution into the Directorate General of the police force and stripped its power of arrest and restricted their functions to reporting violation to the police. The present position of mutawia remains the same as established by the royal decree of 1930. Despite the considerable decline in the influence of public morality committees, their members continue to enjoy high public prestige. In fact, they more than anything else, were responsible for the society's seclusion from outside influences.47

The Directorate of Religious Research, Ifta, Da'wa and Guidance

Like the Committees of Commanding the Good and Forbidding Evil, the Directorate of Religious Research, Ifta, Da'wa and Guidance is an independent state department that is accountable directly to the king. Royal decree number 1/137, issued in 1971, specified that members of the higher council of the Ifta are to be appointed by the king.48 The directorate of Religious Research, Ifta, Da'wa and Guidance publishes religious books propagating Wahhabi views and principles. It sponsors research projects on Islam and

47. Layish, n. 14, p.36.
Wahhabism, organizes seminars, conference and congresses for training preachers and sends preachers on foreign assignment. The decision taken in these forums are implemented by the Waqf Department of the Ministry of Pilgrimage. The ulama maintain direct contact with Islamic governments and movements and assist them with money and advice. Moreover, da'wa drives are conducted among pilgrims during the hajj season. The ulama use the state communication media for the dissemination of da'wa.

The symbolic consequence or the publication and distribution of religious texts is the projection of Saudi rule as the propagator of Islam, as well as the reaffirmation of its identification with Wahhabism. Schools, libraries, mosques and centers for the training of propagandists have been established in all parts of Saudi Arabia, even in the vicinity of prisons. The mosque is the most essential instrument for bringing the masses closer to the policies of the government. There were 17,000 mosques in Saudi Arabia in 1979, an average of one for every 250 peoples. The mosque functionaries like imams, khatibs, muezzins etc. are paid by the government and the content of Friday sermons are supplied by the Directorate of Religious Research, Ifta, Da’wa and Guidance. By preaching in mosques, the religious functionaries are able to influence public opinion and to control the social order, and that

49. Layish, n.14, p.41.
50. ibid.
edifice is, therefore, one of the most important sources of their power.

**Pilgrimage and Waqf**:

The Ulama also control the pilgrimage (hajj) and the waqf. An alim serves as a minister of Pilgrimage and Awqaf in perpetuity. Until the development of oil, the hajj was regarded as the principle revenue earner of the kingdom and even today the pilgrimage is the chief social, political and religious event of the year.51

The minister of Awqaf is responsible for the administration of the waqf Khayri. The administrative regulation of the Sharia courts, No. 109 of 1962 prescribed that upon the extinction of beneficiaries under a waqf deed the income shall pass to charitable purposes and a nazir, preferably the director of the waqf administration be court appointed by court.52 The distribution of waqf income is determined by the considerations of the ministry. A sizable proportion is devoted to needy persons not in receipt of pensions from social insurances and other funds. About one quarter of the waqf income goes to the needy and the remainder to the treasury.53 According to Aharon Layish, the

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52. Layish, n.14, p.38.


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income of the wagf property in Mecca is the highest. 54

The personal involvement of the ulama in the wagf both as beneficiaries and as administrators, fortifies their economic position. The government has recently tried to further weaken the link between the ulama and endowed property by increasing the involvement of government departments in wagf management. 55

The Educational System

Being the custodian of society's culture, morality and ethics, ulama, until recently, monopolized all levels of the educational system ranging from schools for Quranic studies to institutions of higher learning. Three of the six universities in Saudi Arabia today are either religious institutions or place special emphasis on religious instructions. The Imam Muhammad Ibn Sau’d Islamic university trains gadis for Sharia courts, and the Higher Institute of Islamic propaganda (da'wa) trains propagandists of Islam, the Islamic university of Medina, established in 1961, specializes in the study of Islam and Arabic language and the king Abd al-Aziz university established in 1967, comprises of the faculty of Sharia and Islamic studies. The higher educational system is supervised by Al Shaykh and the conservative ulama and has been developed as a vehicle of religious and political indoctrination intended to further

54. Layish, n. 14, p. 38.
55. ibid
the position of the ulama in Saudi society.\textsuperscript{56}

Schooling for girls, introduced in the early 1960's was subjected to supervision by the grand mufti's office.\textsuperscript{57} Completely modern Universities, specializing in the humanities, and the social and natural sciences, outside the control of ulama, have been established quite recently.\textsuperscript{58}

\textbf{The Judicial System}

The Sharia courts enjoy to this day the status of general judicial authorities with extremely wide powers unparalleled in the Sunni Middle East. Until the mid-seventies the Sharia judicial system consisted of three grades - an expeditious court, a greater Sharia court and the commission on Judicial supervision. In 1970 a Ministry of Justice was set up and in 1974 the Sharia judicial system was restructured along the Western pattern: summary courts, general courts and a court of causation.

In addition, from time to time the king confers quasi-judicial powers on various bodies to deal with the problems created by economic, administrative and social development in modern Saudi Arabia. Some of these bodies, especially the Grievance Board and the commercial tribunals, enjoy extremely wide powers. These developments have reduced the judicial functions of ulama, though they still maintained their

\textsuperscript{56} See, Alyami, n. 53, p.21, also, Ochsenwald, n. 51, p.278.
\textsuperscript{57} Piseatori, n. 7(c), p.129
\textsuperscript{58} ibid, n. 7(c), p. 129, also, Alyami n. 53, p. 21.

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monopoly in matters of civil and criminal cases.

Legal Opinions :-

The office of mufti became completely institutionalized upon the establishment in 1953 of the Dar al Ifta (Institute for the Issue of Religio - Legal Opinions) and Majlis Hay'at Kibar al Ulama (Council of the Grand Ulama) in 1971. Membership in the two bodies is by government appointment. The last grand mufti of Saudi Arabia died in 1969 and his legal functions were assumed by the Ministry of Justice.

Opinion of ulama, solicited either by individuals or by government authorities, are quite numerous and deal with a wide gamut of subjects. But the power of the ulama, in this context is mainly derived from fatwas on political questions.

Besides these administrative channels, an important official channel through which the ulama influence the decision making process is the "regular weekly meeting" of the former with the king. However, the unofficial channel of daily encounters of members of Al Shaykh family with their relatives within the royal family is far more significant in fostering the cooperation between the two. As one writer commented, though it may be hard to prove, but the tribal manner of personal politics and family decisions may well suggest that this is the real level of political cooperation.

between the princes and the Ulama.  

Notwithstanding the integration of ulama in state structure and considerable decline in their power and position, Islam remains the most powerful legitimizing force of the successive Saudi regimes. In order to buttress the religious character of the Saudi polity, the Holy Quran has been declared as the constitution of the kingdom. Furthermore, in response to the demand, coming from both internal and external sources, of promulgation of a constitution with small "c", the king has often taken the stand that the elements of a constitution can be found in the Quran, the Sunna of the Prophet and the practice of the Four Medinese Caliphs. An expression of this concept may be seen in the Basic Law for the kingdom of Hijaz (Styled as the constitution of Hijaz) of 1926 which provides that the king be limited by the Sharia and that legislation be in accordance with the Sunna of the Prophet and the consensus of his Companions. The Hijazi constitution refers the king to consult the ulama for an authoritative interpretation of the Sharia. His being bound by the Sharia finds symbolic expressions in the ceremony of the baya, the oath of allegiance, which is the kind of contract between the ruler who pledge to reign in accordance with Sharia law, and the


ruled, who pledge to obey in accordance with it. In fact, the constitution of Hijaz is still in force, with certain modifications.\(^62\)

Similarly, against the background of president Gamal Abdel Nasser's political threat in 1960's, king Faisal as a part of his Ten Point programme\(^63\) promised to set up a consultative council (Majlis as Shura) and to promulgate "a basic law of governance" (i.e. constitution) with Sharia as the source of sovereignty.\(^64\) In 1975 king Khalid retained the promises of king Faisal and in 1980 the then crown prince Fahd went to the extent of constituting a constitutional committee in order to frame what is called "a basic law of governance and to set up a consultative council. The Sharia was to be retained as the basis of sovereignty. However, this policy statement of king Fahd should be seen as a "fallout" of the Islamic revolution in Iran in general and Kaba incident in particular, and not as a manifestation of real intention on the part of the king. In fact, the promises of having a Sharia-based constitution and the consultative council has till now not been implemented since the inception of the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Rather the successive regimes have used these declarations as


\(^{63}\) For the full text of the programme, see, Prince Faisal Speaks (Saudi Arabian Govt. Publication, n.d), pp. 5-9.

"safeguard measures" whenever the regime is threatened with a serious legitimacy crisis.65

It is noteworthy that the Saudi regimes have used Islam to justify the absence of several institutions. In addition to a legislature, Saudi Arabia lacks political parties and trade unions. It is urged that parties on the one hand are superfluous since justice prevails throughout the land because of the Sharia sway, and, on the other hand, scriptural prohibition on divisive sects.66 Trade unions, for their part, are rejected as being dangerous to a fledgeling economy and unnecessary in a country like Saudi Arabia where the law of land is fully protective of the worker.67

Fatwas on political questions rendered by the ulama during critical situations illustrate their power and their political involvement in the affairs of the kingdom. It is the powerful instrument which has been used by the successive Saudi regime to justify their political acts, King Abd al Aziz used to consult the ulama and manage to secure the latter's fatwa on almost every important political move - whether it was the issue of suppression of the Ikhwan, conquering Mecca, meeting with American President Roosevelt and British P.M. Churchill in December 1944 or engaging

65. See, Piscatori, n. 7(c), pp. 126-128, Layish, n. 14, pp. 42-44; also, Dhanani, n. 11, pp. 67-68.
66. Piscatori, n. 7(c), p. 128.
67. ibid.

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Americans in the oil exploration activities. He also employed Islam to achieve the national cohesion of Saudi Arabia. Thus a fatwa was issued calling upon tolerance among all Muslims adhering to the Wahhabi doctrine, stating that there is no difference between those wearing the iqual and those wearing the imama so long as their belief is the same. Without express permission from the ruler or Sharia qadi, no one has the right to compel another, whether bedouin or townsman, to settle in a hujar. Following this fatwa, Imam Abd al Aziz and the ulama declared that the belief of all Muslims, whether bedouin or townspeople, was the same, while difference might exist between branches (furi) as they did between the different sunni schools, all Muslims shared a common root (ash).

The crucial role of fatwa can also be seen in matters dealing with the legitimate transfer of power, without setbacks to the regime, from Saud to Faysal. The reasons for the deposition were Saud’s prolonged absences abroad for medical treatment, his wastefulness, a lack of orientation in regional policy (rapprochement with Abdel Nasser and with Salal in Yemen) against the background of a real threat to the country due to Egypt’s intervention in the Yemeni War, as well as internal pressure for reform. With these considerations the ulama headed by Grand Mufti invoked the

68. ibid, p.134.
70. De Guary, n. 64, p. 127.
principle of public interest and issued a fatwa on 29 March 1964 calling for the transfer of all powers in domestic and foreign matters to Faysal, the heir to the throne and prime minister, though king Saud would remain sovereign of state in a purely ceremonial sense. Sixty-eight princes of the royal house confirmed the fatwa and on 30 March 1964, the council of ministers, having regard to the fatwa and to public interest, resolved to transfer the legislative, executive and judicial powers exclusively from King Saud to the Crown Prince. On 2 November 1964 Faysal was sworn as king and pledged himself to govern the state in accordance with the laws of the Sharia and of tradition. Thus the fatwa of ulama and other religious features such as the baya are necessary for the legitimization of an orderly transfer of power. However, Saud Faysal episode also clearly reveals the struggle for power between the various factions of Royal House in which the support of ulama is crucial.

A further instance in which the royal house availed itself of the ulama to obtain legitimization of a political act was the fatwa issued after a Mahadist group seized control of the Kaba Mosque, employing violence despite the holiness of the site. King Khalid asked the Ulama for an opinion that would sanction the use of force against the


72. Layish, n. 14, p.49.

73. See, Bligh, n. 60, pp. 46-47.
Mahadist group. The ulama complied, issuing a fatwa to the effect that the rebels should be first called upon to surrender and lay down their arms. If they did so, they should be imprisoned pending their trial, and if they refused, all measures (including force) should be taken to arrest them. The ulama found support for this advice in a Quranic verse and in Hadith attributed to the Prophet.74 Armed with this fatwa, the Saudi state finally managed to overcome the crisis.

Likewise all socio-economic and technological innovations have been introduced in Saudi Arabia with the stamp of Islamic justification, despite the initial protest of the ulama to many of these innovations. In fact, there has never been a major confrontation between the Ulama and the House of the Saud in which the former won, but it is equally true that no major change have been undertaken without the ulama's consent. Piscatori says that they (ulama) represent an institutionalized conscience, a kind of brooding omnipresence with which the would be modernizer must contend.75 Thus king Abd al Aziz legitimized photography as bringing together of light and shadow, both divine creations, and thus acceptable despite the idolatry of pictorial art.76


75. Piscatori, n. 7(c), p. 128.
76. ibid, p.132.
The radio became acceptable after the king arranged for a demonstration of Quran reading over the air, because they witnessed the faithful transmission of the holy words, the ulama concluded that the radio could not be the evil's work and hence ought not to be banned. In the same manner ulama gave up their opposition to the introduction of telephone and television during the Faysal's regime when they came to understand the benefits of the mass communication system in the teaching and practice of Islam. These changes are considered valid precisely because the vocabulary of Islam frames and expresses them. The ulama, invoke a convenient legal fiction to avoid even the slightest appearance of encroaching on the divine prerogative of legislation. Rather than referring to an innovative royal ganun (law), they label it nizam (rule). More than mere rhetorical quibbling, this distinction allows for legal and social change without transgressing fundamental beliefs.

Islam has been now in promoting foreign policy also. Saudi international behaviour while emphasizing the primacy of Islam, pursues a close strategic alliance with the dominant Western power, and promotes "moderate" or pro-Western regime in the Arab-Islamic World, with the specific aim of securing two major goals - the stability and security of the Saudi regime. In fact the concern for 'regime's security and stability' has been the hallmark of the Saudi

77. ibid
78. Kechichian, n.74, p. 57
foreign policy since its inception. Islam has been used as the "principal" instrument by the successive regime to achieve these two ends.

As early as in 1926, king Abd al-Aziz convened a Muslim World Conference in Mecca with the specific objectives of securing Islamic international approbation of his control of the formerly Hashimite territory and also to counter the move of revival of Caliphate by king Farouq of Egypt which would pose a direct challenge to the security of his political base.\(^79\) Abd al Aziz has always been awry of the intention of the Hashimite rulers of neighbouring Trans-Jordan and Iraq who might be tempted to avenge the Shariffian loss. Thus on the one hand he cultivated friendly relations with the United States and Britain with the specific objective of restraining Hashimite states and on the other hand he, in post-War period, apposed the Greater Syrian plan, proposed by king Abdullah of Trans-Jordan and the Fertile Crescent plan, proposed by Iraqi prime minister Nuri-al Sa'id, which appeared as a threat to his political independence.\(^80\) In fact he made no secret to his acute hostility to the formation of either a general Arab Union or a particular union of countries to the north of his border. His opposition to the strong Arab League in 1945 had an Islamic overtone - "the


\(^{80}\) ibid.
attempt to unify educational and constitutional methods in Arab countries is to be praised. However, the Saudi Arabian kingdom, whose territory includes certain holy places, thereby claims a special status and cannot sanction any educational or constitutional program that is not consistent with the tenants and traditions of Islam. The country adopted a particularly rigorous religious foreign policy during king Faysal's time. The Arab nationalist ideology of both Nassirism and Bathism during the sixties was threatening the very legitimacy of the Saudi state. The Egyptian intervention in the Yemen civil war (1962-5) posed a real danger to the security of the Saudi regimes. Saudi Arabia under king Faysal reacted to this trend by emphasizing its distinctiveness from the so called Arab - Islamic tradition, by asserting the Islamic credential of the country and promoting even more ardently a pan-Islamic view of the World. In 1963, king Faysal expressed the inherent opposition between Nassirist pan-Arabism and Saudi pan Islamic World view - "We do not need to import foreign traditions. We have history and a glamorous past. We led the Arabs and the World. With what did we lead them - the word of God and the Sharia of His Prophet." The Saudi Ulama supplied the Islamic justification in denouncing the doctrine of Pan-

81. ibid, p. 37, quoting, Letter No. 17/9/1/278, Shaykh Yusif Yassin (Saidi Deputy Foreign Minister) to Ahmad Maher Pasha (Egyptian Prime Minister and Head of Preliminary Committee to Pan Arab Conference of 1945).

Arabism. Thus Sheikh Abd al Aziz Ibn Al Baz in his Critique of Arab Nationalism Based on Islam and Reality, wrote, "..... Thus Arab nationalism is an assault against Islam and its followers .... Thus call to Arab nationalism differentiated between Muslims; it separates the non-Arab Muslim from his Arab brother; it divides the Arabs among themselves, because not all of them accept it, any idea that creates divisions in the rank of Muslims is rejected because Islam calls for unity, solidarity and cooperation to help the poor and enforce the Word of God.\(^\text{83}\)

As a counter-move to the perceived threat of Nassirism (and Pan-Arabism) Saudi Arabia under King Faysal sponsored an international Islamic conference in 1962 at Mecca, attended by delegates of 43 countries and declared that "those who disavow Islam and distort its call under the guise of nationalism were actually the most bitter enemies of the Arabs whose glories are inseparable from the glories of Islam.\(^\text{84}\) The conference established the World Muslim League, with headquarters in Mecca, whose objective was to counter "all alien ideologies and habits inconsistent with Islam and to co-ordinate the effort of Islamic organization around the World.\(^\text{85}\) Since its inception, the league continuously functioned in effect as a non-governmental Saudi spokesman.


\(^{84}\) ibid, p. 13

\(^{85}\) ibid
Following the Arab defeat in 1967 war and the attempted arson at al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem in 1969, the third holiest mosque, Saudi Arabia consciously tried to project itself as the leader of the Muslim World. It deliberately emphasized the pan-Islamic dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict and even succeed in convening the first pan-Islamic Conference, attended by 25 Muslim states; in 1969 at Rabat (Morocco) in the wake of the attempted arson at Al Aqsa mosque. King Faysal proved remarkably successful at transferring the Arab-Israeli conflict from the exclusively Arab plane to the broadly Islamic one. Stressing the Islamic dimension of the issue was an effective way of certifying his commitment to the Arab cause, thereby helping to legitimize his regime in the eyes of the common people and other Arabs - a constant necessity for a dynastic ruler even in favourable time. Hence the successive Saudi rulers seized the opportunity of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca to emphasize the regaining of the third holiest mosque in Jerusalem, and noble Jerusalem itself, and for clearing them of all the impurities.

Taking the benefit of "ideological vaccum" created by the demise of Arab nationalism following the 1967 war, and backed by the booming petro-dollar, Saudi Arabia under Faysal

86. Piscatori, n. 79, p.42.
87. ibid.
played crucial role in establishing the organization of the Islamic conference (O.I.C.) in 1972 - a move essentially aimed at buttressing the regime's Islamic commitment to achieve the goal of "Islamic solidity", if not the Islamic unity. The OIC provided a permanent institution through which the Saudis could express their views and emphasize their special role in the Islamic world, thereby strengthening their position among the Arabs. To achieve Islamic solidarity, several Islamic agencies and institutions have been established with the Saudi financial help. Among them are the World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), created in December 1972 and whose activities attempt to assert Saudi leadership among Muslim states. The WAMY's activities include the building of mosque and religious schools abroad, sponsoring of preachers visit to Muslim communities abroad, the hosting of annual conferences of Muslim Youth Organizations and the publication and distribution of religious texts. A survey of the books published or distributed by WAMY reveals the use of religion to be an instrument of legitimation of the Saudi's regime.89 The Muslim World League also performs similar kind of activities and is used for the purpose of regime legitimation.90 Islam was also employed as a defensive mechanism by the Saudi regime when the kingdom's legitimacy, security and stability were seriously threatened from two activist radical Islamic regimes - Qaddafi's Libya (1969) and Khomeini's Iran.

89. Al-Yassini, n. 4, pp. 72-73.
90. Piscatori, n. 79, p. 48.
(1979). In October 1980, Qaddafi accused the Saudis of defiling the holy places by letting American military planes fly in their air space (Saudis had invited the U.S. to send four E-3 AWACS places to detect any potential threats to oil lines or the kingdom itself). He also urged Muslim pilgrims not to make the traditional trip to Mecca "that year because Saudi Arabia and its Muslim holy places were under U.S. occupation" and called for jihad to liberate them. Saudi Arabia responded to Qaddafi's threat by branding him as "communist agent" and by breaking off diplomatic relations with Libya on the ground that Qaddafi was disparaging Islam and sowing discord among the Muslim people. The Saudi based Council of High Ulamas described colonel Qaddafi as a "heretic" and "a devout servant of evil" who had publicly ridiculed the teachings of Islam, urged pilgrims not to go to Mecca, and dedicated himself to spreading anarchy and dissension.

Saudi Arabia tried to counter the "Islamic threat" of Ayatollah Khomeini first by calling it as "Shiite revolution", than accusing Ayatollah of cooperating with Israel in draining Iraq's energy away from the conflict with

91. ibid, p. 45.
94. ibid.
Israel. However, more than Islam, it was the "Arab card" which was used by the Saudi regime to contain the Islamic threat of Khomeini's Iran. As the Saudi minister of the interior, Prince Nayef, said that Iraq's war against Iran was "not in defense of its lands and sovereignty alone, but also of the whole Arab nation and that" Saudi Arabia stands with Iraq in the same position ... in facing the dangers confronting the Arabs. In fact, Khomeini's repeated call for the abolition of monarchy on the ground of its incompatibility with the basic tenents of Islam compelled Saudi Arabia and other Shiekhdoms in the Persian Gulf regime to give "total" support to Iraq in its war with Iran.

For the same reasons, the Saudi feared the then communist military threat, the revolutionary ethos of its doctrine, and the radicalism of its regional allies, but they couch their distrust in terms of inherent opposition between spiritual Islam and atheist, materialist communism. Thus the soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1980) was identified as a "threat against Muslim peoples as a whole, though the real motive was to protect the oil fields in Persian Gulf from Soviet danger. In his address to the Islamic Conference convened in Pakistan in 1980 against the background of Afghan

95. ibid, 253.
96. ibid.
97. ibid, p. 254.
crises, Saud Al--Faysal, the then Saudi Foreign Minister, described the Soviet action as a "flagrant challenge to the Islamic World, a gross disregard for Muslims and Islam." The conference declared its "complete solidarity with the Islamic countries neighbouring Afghanistan," and called for non-participation in Olympic Games being held in Moscow in July 1980.

99. ibid.
100. ibid.
Having crushed the threat of Ikhwan in late 1920’s the Saudi state sought to monopolize Islam and has been suspicious of any move that seeks to activize Islam, politically or otherwise, within the kingdom outside the official sphere. It has made all religious functionaries and the ulama part of the state bureaucracy. The Saudi Government allows Islamic political trends to manifest themselves only to the extent that they strengthen its own religious legitimacy.101 There are even the Muslim Brothers in Saudi Arabia and they are mostly associated with the government sponsored magazine, al Da’wa.102

Saudi society, however, has not been immune to opposition movements, but these have been ignored, mislabelled, or crushed with the active support of the population under the supervision and guidance of the ulama. Despite that opposition to the established authorities continues to be manifested periodically. Thus, the ulama voiced strong disapproval of the telegraph and the radio in the 1930’s. They protested against the introduction of the use of bugles in military parades and of tight trousers as


part of the military uniform.\textsuperscript{103} Due to the strong protest of \ulama to the codification of \textit{Sharia}, king Abd al Aziz had to abandon the idea.\textsuperscript{104} In 1950, when the \ulama objected to the king’s plans to celebrate a golden jubilee marking the fifteenth anniversary (in lunar years) of the capture of Riyadh from the al Rashid, the project was duly abandoned.\textsuperscript{105} A more serious opposition of the regime’s modernization programme emerged in 1960’s. In 1965, the \ulama for the first time took to the streets to express their resentment against the government’s decree to construct television stations in the kingdom. In the ensuing firing by the police and the internal security forces, some demonstrators, including Faysal bin Musaid; nephew of king Faysal who vigorously sided with the religious zealots in their fight against television; were killed.\textsuperscript{106} The incident being described by Arab newspapers as an "abortive Islamic coup de'tat."\textsuperscript{107} Saudi society being structured on tribal lines, the effectiveness of the opposition depends upon the inter-tribal relations and the support a man enjoys through family and tribal connections which matter.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{103} Bligh, n. 60, p.40.
\item \textsuperscript{104} N. Anderson, \textit{Law Reform in the Muslim World} (London, 1976) p. 184.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Bligh, n.60, p.41.
\item \textsuperscript{107} Ibid, quoting al-Difa (Jordan), September 23, 1965; al-Hayat (Lebanon), October 1, 1965.
\end{itemize}
Religious opposition grew much stronger with the social tension fostered by the oil boom of the 1970's demanding the overthrow of Saudi rule and the creation of a "genuinely Islamic republic." However, moral laxity and neglect of religion were not the only issues. There was also the issue of income distribution. Observers of the Saudi scene noted early in the 1970's that crucial deputy ministerial posts were being held by graduates of American universities rather than by graduates of Saudi institution.\footnote{Ochsenwald, n. 51, p. 278.}

It was in this background that in November 1979 an armed group of religious zealots seized the Kaba, the Grand Mosque of Mecca - by far the most serious threat to the stability of the regime since the suppression of Ikhwan in late 1920's and an incident which marked the birth of neo-Ikhwan.\footnote{On the dimension of neo-Ikhwan, see, James Buchan, "The Return of the Ikhwan - 1979", in David Holden and Richard Johns ed., The House of Saud: The Rise and Rule of the Most Powerful Dynasty in the Arab World (New York, 1981), pp. 511-526.}

The leader of the group, Juhayman at - Utaybi, belonged to the well known Utayba tribe," who served for about 18 years in the National Guard and began his activity in 1978.\footnote{Layish, n.14, p.50.}

Reports from Saudi Arabia prior to the capture of the Kaba had indicated that secret groups, including in segments in the armed forces, were being formed in the kingdom and that leaflets were being distributed in the country calling upon the Royal family to follow Islam in its right form according to the teaching of
the Salaf.\textsuperscript{111} From all accounts, the kaba incident was a protest not only against the royal house but also against the 'ulama' that was integrated in the political establishment. In 1978, Utaibi alleged that the Najdi ulama were bought and asked how the religious authorities could be so prosperous without active financial support from the Royal family.\textsuperscript{112} In another pamphlet Utaibi wrote that, "Sheikh 'Abd al - Aziz Ibn Baz, the blind theologian and chairman of the supreme religious council (Ifta’a) was in the play of al Sauds, little better than tool for the family’s manipulation of the people .... Ibn Baz may know his Sunna well enough, but he uses it to bolster corrupt rulers.\textsuperscript{113}"

The incident was purely an internal development of Saudi Arabia and was not linked to any outside influence, though Teheran Radio was engaged in incitement at the time of the rebellion.\textsuperscript{114} As such, it was an Islamic uprising in protest of what its members described as the religious and moral laxity and advocating the revival of seventh century Islamic society.\textsuperscript{115} The events of 1979 unfolded amidst a widespread feeling that tribal land had been unjustly appropriated by the Royal Family.\textsuperscript{116} The real estate transactions in 1979

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{111} Bligh, n. 60, p. 47.
\item \textsuperscript{112} Buchan, n. 109, p.515.
\item \textsuperscript{113} ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Layish, n. 14, p.50.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Al-Yassini, n. 4, p.124.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Bari, n. 101, p.62.
\end{itemize}
were many and massive but limited generally to a few families. 117 Like early Ikhwan, the religious zeal was reinforced by a strong feeling of injustice in the rebels.

With the ideological support of the ulama, the regime succeeded in crushing the revolt. Juhayman and dozens of his associates, including Egyptians, Yemenites, Kuwatis and others, were beheaded. 118

More recently, the Saudi regime faced a serious criticism from a section of Saudi intelligentsia for inviting the Western troops on the Saudi soil in the wake of the Kuwait crises. For example, the Western educated Safer al-Hawali was harsh in his criticism of Saudi's pro-Western policies. The tribal federation to which he belonged is said to be one of the largest in the country. 119 He contested the fatwa of the ulama which justified the Saudi invitation to Western troops and also wrote a rejoinder on the subject to the Board of senior ulama in Saudi Arabia. 120 al-Hawali pointed out, that the reality was that the fatwa made the invitation to half a million crusaders (read Western Christians) and Jews to the Arabian peninsula lawful (in Islam)', and said what we are afraid of is that this will result in (our) submission to the enemies of Allah instead of

117. Ghassan Salame, n. 102, pp. 312-3
118. Layish, n. 14, p.51.
119. Bari, n. 101, p.64.
120. ibid.
getting help from them."121 He further castigated the Saudi regime for the flagrant violation of Sharia and said "nothing of the Sharia was left with us except what (was described) .... as the law of personal status and some hudoud (revealed law relating to certain punishments), the purpose of which was the control of security." 122

Although al Hawali did not question the legitimacy of the kingdom, these criticisms offered by him were too harsh for the Saudi Government to stomach. The Government played hide and seek with him for some time and, eventually, banned him altogether from public activity.

In contrast with this approach, al - Oibla a magazine published in a clandestine manner, represents extremist Islamic opposition. Its world view is Islamicist, its criticism being directed mostly against the Saudi Royal Family and other member of the ruling class. It has given a call for the replacement of the monarchial system in Saudi Arabia by the Shura system123 What is more important is that it has alleged widespread corruption among the members of the Royal Family, and in this matter it expresses a view similar to the ones that Juhayman had done some fourteen years ago.

It thus seems clear that Islam is binding, if not also central, reality in Saudi Arabia because the Saudis have

121. ibid, p. 65.
122. ibid.
123. ibid.
relied on it to help unify a disparate peninsula, structure the polity itself, inform their decisions, frame their innovation, and legitimate their role. Change has been possible, but the type, of change and the pace of change have had constantly to be calibrated with Islam. The ulama have been a crucial partner in the over-all shaping and legitimizing of the policies of al-Saud's regimes. For this reason, the Royal House, despite the weakened position of the ulama, avoids open confrontation with them and seeks to obtained their supports for reforms through persuasion and propitiation. The ulama on the other hands, take a deep interest in the affairs of the state because they have identified their own 'good' with the 'good' of the Saudi state. Such is the pervasive impact of religion in Saudi society that even the emerging new middle class seems to be more inclined to articulate its socio-economic and political interest in religious terms.