Chapter-2,
Saudi Political System and The Ulama
Saudi Political System and the Ulama

Religious power and authority continue to be exercised in Saudi Arabia by the Ulama along with political figures who together derive legitimacy as result of this cooperation.

This ‘religio-political cooperation’ has been in existence since 1744 following the alliance between Muhammad Ibn Abd al Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Saud. Two hundred years of mutual support have created a flexible mechanism characterizing the Saudi political system and the role of the Ulama. This prolonged relationship has created a degree of sensitivity in the Kingdom and a flexible mechanism.

In Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and his disciples made much use of the works of Ibn Taymaya while gaining a certain influence within the Hambali school. Despite tensions between religious and established state authorities, the latter continued to rely on the advice and support of the ulama in times of peace as well as crisis. This relationship has worked and survived till today.

Saudi Arabia, a Kingdom without a constitution, political parties, or trade unions, represents the traditional patronage
system in its rigid and absolute aspects. The government and state institutions are composed of the Monarch, Council of Ministers, Consultative Council, Judiciary and local government administrators. Above all the Shariah remains supreme over the civil law. The Qu’ran and the Sunna are the primary source of all legislation. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a monarchy characterized by the exceptionally important role of the royal family, the House of Sa’ud. Members of the dynasty fill most key positions and maintain a near monopoly over political activity in the country.\(^3\)

Many of the Saudi state’s unusual features can be explained by its relative newness. While some parts of the Arabian peninsula, such as the Yemen or the cities of the Hijaz on the west coast of the peninsula, have long been governed by constituted governments, the rest of the area has been dominated by tribes which lack even the most elementary forms of state authority (a police force, a fixed capital, written records). Only when their energies were harnessed to a religious cause have the tribes formed anything more enduring than transient coalitions of warriors. This happened twice, first in the seventh century under Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, and second when the religious leader Muhammad ibn Abd al Wahhab,
founder of the Wahhabi movement, joined forces with the tribal chief Muhammad ibn Sa'ud. From the time of this alliance, the Sa'udi family has always led a cause with a grander purpose than mere camel raiding or protecting water wells. Religious ideology inspired Sa'udi soldiers to conquer many of the territories of today's Saudi Arabia before the kingdom fell to outside forces in 1818. It was resurrected on a smaller scale between 1820 and 1891, before falling again. 

Thus, the Wahhabi-Saudi alliance was already 150 years old when Abd al-Aziz ibn Abd ar-Rahman ibn Faisal as-Sa'ud began to piece the present state together in 1902 in the name of Islamic purification as preached in Wahhabi doctrine. Starting with the recapture of his ancestral home, Riyadh, he expanded his rule to other parts of central Arabia, then to the east and west coasts of the peninsula. These conquests continued over a period of thirty-two years, until his territories reached approximately their present extent in 1934. His achievement, bringing al-Hasa (East Coast), Najd (inland), and Hijaz an Asir (Southwest) under a single rule was without precedent. 

Abd al-Aziz relied on an ancient method for consolidating his kingdom: marrying the widows and daughters of his defeated enemies. Exploiting the right of a Muslim man to four wives at
once and easy terms of divorce, he wed some three hundred women and had forty-five recognized sons by at least twenty-two mothers. These sons whose birth dates range from 1900 to 1952, have constituted the dominant political force in the kingdom since Abd al-Aziz’s death in 1953 and assuming the regime stays in power, they will remain in charge for decades to come. Full brothers tend to form groupings against half-brothers; and because of their mother's origins, these disputes have direct tribal and regional implications. Until now, this discord has not created irreconcilable rifts.6

The Shari'a which has its origin in Qur'an and the Hadith, is the supreme law in Saudi Arabia, "It is the fundamental assumption of the polity of Saudi Arabia that the Holy Qur'an implemented is more suitable correctly for Saudi Muslims than any secular constitution."7 The Holy Qur'an, as the constitution of Saudi Arabia, is supposed to be the fountainhead of the system. "The sanctity of the Shariah is such in Saudi Arabia that every attempt to modify or even codify the legal material in the Shari'a has so far been successfully resisted. If some portions of the Shariah are impossible to enforce in the present circumstances, they are simply set aside rather than altered or deleted. In this context, "the Shari'a is the most powerful
constitutions in the world as it is not liable to amendment." King Faisal, the former King declared in 1964 that: “Our constitution is the Qur’an and our law is Shariah of Mohammed (God’s peace and blessings be upon him). Our system of government is based on the interest of the country, Saudi Arabia, where such interest does not conflict with the principles of our religion and the Shariah”.

Beside the Qur’an, Sunnah also constitutes one of the sources of the polity of Saudi Arabia. It encompasses the tradition of the Prophet, his deeds, utterances, and unspoken approval and disapproval in different situations. While in theory the law in Saudi Arabia is simply the eternal Shariah, it does not mean that in practice enacting legislation to meet the particular needs of the time is impossible. Since the 1950s, a number of codes have been issued by royal decrees, regulating different areas of life which for one reason or another did not receive detailed attention in traditional Islamic Jurisprudence. Commerce (1954), Nationality (1954), Forgery (1961), Bribery (1962), Mining (1963), Labor and Workmen (1970), Social Insurance (1970), and the Civil service (1971) can be cited, for instance. All this is not seen as adding to or modifying the
Shariah, but simply as implementing it by appropriate administrative action.\textsuperscript{10}

The Monarchy

George A. Lipsky states that "Saudi Arabia is an independent monarchy under the predominant religious influence of the Sunnite wahhabi sect of Islam."\textsuperscript{11} In Saudi Arabia, Kingship is nothing but absolute monarchy. The King happens to be the head of state and chief executive of the government.

Abd al-Aziz captured Riyadh in January 1902, and acquired a twin title: imam (religious leader) of the Wahhabis and Prince (emir) of Najd. He became King of Hijaz after conquering that province in January 1926, and shortly thereafter, elevated his title to “King of Najd and its Dependencies.” For five years he retained this cumbersome double Kingship; then, on September 22, 1932, he announced that he had taken a new title, King of Saudi Arabia. Abd al-Aziz died in November 1953, and four of his sons have succeeded him to this position: Sa'ud (1953-64), Faisal (1964-75), Khalid (1975-82), and Fahd (1982 to present).
The title of king has several attributes, dynastic, tribal, and religious. It is as head of the House of Sa’ud that the King derives his power, for the royal family's support determines who rules. Sovereignty resides in the family; whoever leads it, is head of state. The selection of an heir-apparent takes place in advance, a tradition established by Abd al-Aziz, and is a key decision. Selecting the crown prince is perhaps the single most critical and ticklish issue in Saudi politics. Although it arises only occasionally, it touches on all actions of the royal family. Abdallah is the current crown prince.

The Saudi family has no written rule of succession nor even an informal hierarchy. Muslim civilization has never decided whether succession should go by birthright or according to ability. As a result, it often led to disastrous succession crises. The house of Sa’ud has transferred power nineteen times since the eighteenth century: nine times to a brother, seven to a son, and three to a cousin. Selection of a new crown prince involves such factors as seniority, education, ability, temperament, popularity. So far as can be discerned, the Royal Council takes the actual decision on matters of succession.

As the religious leader (imam) of his people, the king is bound to carry out Islamic law, to defend the borders from
unbelievers, and to personally set a righteous example for his subjects. Saudi sponsorship of Wahhabi doctrines gives the king an unusually close connection to religion for a Muslim leader. Even more important is his role as “protector of the two Holy Cities” (Mecca and Medina). Executive, legislative, and judicial powers are derived from his role as *Malik* (King), Imam of Believers, and Shaykh of Shayukhs.

According to the tribal traditions, “As a tribal Sheikh, the Saudi King was the patriarch of his people. He was also responsible for social harmony among them. He was easily accessible to his people for redressing a grievance, solving a problem, or even mediating in a personal dispute”.

The influential religious leaders, in concurrence of the collective leadership of the Saudi family, determine the rule of succession to power and removal from office. Recently, constitutional reforms took place in Saudi Arabia in March 1992 through Royal decrees of the King. The succession clause of this Basic law implies that the crown prince will be chosen on the basis of his qualifications, rather than seniority. The criteria of the selection of this posting were on the basis of seniority. These changes signify the traditional succession procedures, which
were most probably made to dispel the ambition of numerous Saudi princes.\textsuperscript{15}

Article 44 of the Basic law proclaims:

“The authorities of the state consist of the following: the judicial authority, the executive authority, and the regulatory authority. These authorities cooperate with each other in the performance of their duties, in accordance with this and other laws. The King shall be the point of reference for all these authorities.”\textsuperscript{16}

The nucleus of Saudi Arabian government is the monarchy. The Basic law adopted in 1992 declared that Saudi Arabia is a monarchy ruled by the sons and grandsons of King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Al Saud, and that the Holy Qur’an is the constitution of the country, which is governed on the basis of Islamic law (Shariah). There are no political parties or national elections. The Kings powers are limited because he must observe the Shari’a and other Saudi traditions. He also must retain a consensus of the Saudi royal family, religious leaders (Ulama), and other important elements in Saudi society. The leading members of the royal family choose the King from amongst themselves with the subsequent approval of the Ulama.\textsuperscript{17}
Chapter 2 Saudi Political System and the Ulama

Council of Ministers (Majlis al-Wuzura)

Abd al-Aziz did not have ministers through the first decades of his rule. As a tribal leader with no administrative responsibilities, he waged war, distributed revenues, and adjudicated disputes. Around 1925, when his conquest of the Hijaz virtually ended the wars of expansion and opened a new era of consolidation and bureaucratization, this began to change. Abd al-Aziz kept some of the Hijaz's more developed political institutions (such as its directorates and consultative council), later using some of these as a basis for government institutions for the kingdom. Nonetheless, his rule remained patrimonial; Abd al-Aziz's son Faisal became the first minister in 1930, taking the foreign affaire portfolio. Abdallah as-Sulaman, the king's accountant, became finance minister two years later. Other ministers followed in due time, particularly in the 1950s and 1970s, marking the increasing size and complexity of the government. From the beginning, ministers have been both royal and non-royal.

As the bureaucracy grew, ministers also gained in importance. Although always responsible to the king, they have in fact carved out a good deal of autonomy as the complexity of their offices has increased. With time, functional division has
become more pronounced: princes still hold the most sensitive posts (defense, interior, national guard, foreign affairs), with commoners taking the more technical positions (finance, oil, planning). Religious authorities, usually of the Shaykh family, predominate in matters connected to religion, justice, and education. 18

In his last official act, in October 1953, King Abd al-Aziz established a Council of Ministers to meet the “obligations and the diversification’s of the responsibilities placed on the state.” But the Council had no prescribed functions or effective role until a Royal Decree of May 1958 (inspired by Crown Prince Faisal) specified its policymaking and policy-executing duties. Like its predecessor, a Council of Deputies, the Council of Ministers has the authority to consider all questions arising in the kingdom, including the budget, treaties, contracts administrative appointments, and court cases involving the government. Unlike the Council of Deputies, however, this new body has to refer its decisions, to the king for approval. Its decision, therefore, are recommendations only, which may be ignored or enacted by the administration, as the king directs. A quorum requires two-thirds of the members, decisions are probably reached by consensus, and the king may veto a Council
decision within thirty days. The Council functions, in part, as a legislature by formulating most government decrees.  

In the Saudi Kingdom a Council of Ministers through a Royal Decree was established in October 1953. It dealt with five issues: (i) organization of the council, (ii) jurisdiction of the Council, (iii) the Council's procedures, (iv) jurisdiction of the president of the Council, and (iv) Council's cabinets.  

Article one and two of part one, Article seven of part two, and Article eight of part three of the constitution of the council of ministers marked the council’s main recommendations.  

Article 1: A Council of Ministers shall be formed under our presidency and, in our absence, under the presidency of our Viceroy and Crown Prince.  

Article 2: the Council of Ministers shall consist of his Majesties active Ministers. The King's Advisers and these, whose attendance at the Council of Ministers is desired by his Majesty, the King.  

Article 7: The Council of Ministers shall supervise the state policy within the country and abroad.
Article 8: A meeting of the Council shall not be considered as effective except in the presence of two-third of its members and its decision shall be valid when issued by a majority of those present.21

The Council of Ministers met for the first time on March 7, 1954, in Riyadh. Ministers of the Interior, Education, Agriculture, Health, Industry and Commerce, and Information were added to Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Finance. Rivalries between ministers as well as inexperience caused numerous problems. The Ministry of Economy was created in 1953, but closed in the very next year.

King Faysal’s administrative reforms were significant and they portray his dynamic personality. He succeeded in giving an organizational framework for the government. A royal decree clarifying the duties of the Council of Ministers was issued on May 1958. This status was regarded as the beginning of the “Constitutional regime”. According to this document, the council is responsible for the budget and internal affairs. 22

The Council of Ministers functions as the formulators and implementers of the overall state policy, internal and external, financial, economic, cultural and defense-related. The Council
has authority to establish or abolish administrative departments and create working committees to study, plan, or investigate the activities of certain public or private institutions.

The members of the royal family could only be inducted in the early stages into the council of ministry. King Faysal was, however, aware of the merits and the functional capacities of the ministry. So he picked up efficient and educated persons from different walks of life, irrespective of their clan or family. Thus the efficiency of the ministry was enhanced through these qualified and capable ministers. Ahmed Zaki Al-yamani, former Petroleum Minister, and Ghazi Al-Algosaibi, then Minister of Industry were examples of this change.

The recent constitutional modifications were all-encompassing. They did not spare the Council of Ministers from defining the duties and functions of the ministry.

"Treaties and international agreements are not considered effective until approved by the Council. The decisions of the Council of Ministers are authorized to legislature for the state and all international agreements, treaties and regulations or concessions may not be promulgated or amended except the
regulations to be issued in accordance with royal decrees prepared with the approval of the Council of Ministers.” 23

One major impact of the reforms will be on the functions of the Council of Ministers in relation to the Consultative Council. Whether the reforms will reduce the power of the Ministry in relation to the Majlis-al Shura (Consultative Council) remains to be seen. The status of the Council of Ministers, anyhow, is not below any other bodies of the state polity.

The Saudi royalty has gradually developed a central government. Since 1953, the Council of Ministers, appointed by and responsible to the King, has advised on the formulation of general policy and directed the activities of the growing bureaucracy. This council consists of a Prime Minister, the First and Second Deputy Prime Ministers, 20 ministers (of whom the Minister of Defense is also the Second Deputy Prime Minister), two Ministers of State, and a small number of advisers and heads of major autonomous organizations.24

King Fahd issued additional reform decrees in September 1993. He appointed the members of the national Consultative Council and spelled out procedures for the new council’s operations. He announced reforms regarding the Council of
Ministers, including term limitations of 4 years and regulations to prohibit conflict of interest for ministers and other high-level officials. The members of 13th provincial councils and the councils operating regulations were also announced in September 1993.25

**Majlis al-Shura (The Consultative Council)**

The Holy Qur'an is the fountainhead of the principle of *Shura* to guide the community’s decision-making process. The Qur'an designates the believers “as those who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation”.26

The Hijaz had a consultative council (*majlis ash-Shura*), a representative body which can have some legislative functions) at the time of its conquest, but it was disbanded in all but name in 1928, when King Abd al-Aziz proclaimed his intent to replace it with a single consultative council for the whole kingdom. Nothing more was heard of this until years after Abd al-Aziz’s death, when in 1960 prince Talal, leader of a group called the “free princes,” announced at a press conference that a “national council” was under consideration by the Council of Ministers. The government quickly denied his statement, but Talal had raised an issue, which since then refused to go away. 27
King Saud promised a Consultative Council again almost three decades later in 1960. There was an internal power struggle between Muhammad ibn Saud and Faysal and that was the basic reason to announce the consultative council. Two years later his successor, Faysal, again revived the idea of forming a Shura through a 10-point reform program, but even Faysal, who otherwise earned a good name for being an able administrator and a successful popular king, did not keep his word. After Faysal's assassination in 1975, Khalid took over the throne. He piously declared to follow in the footstep of his predecessor, specifically on the question of establishing the consultative council. But very soon it became clear that his policy statements also were yet another ritualistic reaffirmation of the decade old promise. ²⁸

The process went on without materializing the promises mainly because of "the conservative princes, the religious leaders, the heads of tribes who are concerned not only at the reduction of their own power but also with the possibility that political reforms may pose perceptible demands for the kind of social liberalization which they disapprove." ²⁹

The revolution in Iran overthrew the dictatorial regime of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi by a popular Islamic movement led by
Khomini in February 1979. This alarmed the Saudi royal family. The takeover of Islam's holiest shrine, the mosque in Mecca by four hundred well armed Islamic militants, the Ikhwans under the leadership of Juhaiman Ibn Saif al Utaiba, had worsened the political situation in Saudi Arabia. Once again the King took out the same strategy which he had successfully played during the crisis period. After Faysal's assassination in 1975, Prince Fahd announced that a consultative assembly and a constitution would be set up, and in January 1980, after the Mecca incident, he promised that the consultative assembly (Majlis al-Shura) would be formed within two months.

A nine-man committee was formed two months later and was chaired by the Minister of the Interior, Prince Nayif ibn Abdul Aziz, to draw the statute of the assembly and make recommendations on its final form. This was taken by many qualified observers to mean that something was really going to happen, and that the royal family was at least taking the need for reform seriously; but more than a year later, in April 1981, Prince Nayif announced that "the King would soon start consideration of the committee's suggestions." It was another scene of the same drama in which nothing materialized. Then
came the Gulf crisis, which proved to be a catalyst for the Saudi political system in many ways. 31

"In the wake of the Gulf war of 1991, the issue of political liberalization and democracy reemerged in the Middle East and in Western diplomacy." 32 Different groups raised the demands for the total change in the political system of the Kingdom very openly. These open and explicit demands for reforms were the first of its kind in the history of Saudi Arabia. The monarchy was compelled to come out with a reform package in March 1992.

The establishment of the Consultative Council was one of the two major laws issued by the Kingdom, known as the Consultative Council Law. The constitution prescribes the function of the consultative council as being able to debate government policies and to propose draft regulations to the King. The functions of the Council can be described as the following:

A. Discuss the general plans of economic and social development and express opinions on it.

B. Study international laws, charters, treaties and agreements, and concessions and make appropriate suggestions regarding them (Article 15).

C. Interpret the regulations.
D. Discuss annual reports submitted by ministers and other government bodies, and make appropriate suggestion regarding them (Article 15).

E. Question the ministers and other government officials. The king has the exclusive right to choose the chairman and all sixty council members. The Council members must be male Saudi nationals, over thirty years old, residing in Saudi Arabia and known to be good and competent. According to the law, the King shall have the power to appoint and dismiss the council chairman, his deputy, and the secretary-general, but the King has no right to dismiss council members before their term is completed. The official term is four years. The King has the power to veto the council’s by-laws, and the Council’s budget is entirely controlled by the King.

The Council’s decisions are strictly advisory. Article 67, states, “The regulatory authority (consultative council) lays down regulations and motions to meet the interests of the state or remove what is bad in its affairs, in accordance with the Islamic Sharia.”

The constitution of the council states that it is to include selected people from amongst scholars and men of knowledge
and expertise. The capital city of Riyadh was chosen to be the headquarters of the Council.

An analysis of the consultative laws in its totality, projects a vivid picture that there is an unprecedented increase in the powers of the King today than was the case in the past. Persistent demand and outcry for reforms in reducing the powers of the King were made for decades. After the Gulf war, a law for setting up of a consultation council was reluctantly proclaimed by the King in fulfillment of the repeated promises of the kings who went before him. Despite tremendous pressure, the King nominated a speaker and waited for another long year before actually setting up the council in 1993. This not only demonstrates the lack of enthusiasm by the king in the whole matter, but also his unwillingness to part with the dictatorial powers.

King Fahd announced his 60-man selection for the new Majlis al-Shura on August 20, 1993. Its members are selected and sacked by the King, who must approve any decisions they take, though they are entitled to make recommendations on areas of government policy. Shaykh Muhammad bin Ibrahim bin Jubair, a former Justice Minister, was appointed as the President of the Majlis al-Shura. The Educational, Cultural and
Information Affairs committee, which is being selected from the
*Shura* has ten members headed by Abdul Rahman bin al-Fayed
al-Ansari and Fahd al-Orabi al-Atarthi, as the Vice-Chairman.
The Health and Social Affairs Committee has seven members
headed by Ahmed bin Hamad. The Foreign Affairs committee,
Security Affairs committee has seven members each. The other
committees are the Organization and Administration Committee,
Islamic Affairs Committee, and the Economic and Financial
Affairs Committee. Each member of the council shall be
members of any one of the Ad-hoc committees.

The media had highlighted the experience and high
educational qualifications of the 60 members, half of whom hold
Ph.Ds. But Saudi reformists, who despite reservations, have
welcomed the idea as a small step in the right direction.

In March 1992, King Fahad issued several decrees
outlining the basic statutes of government and codifying for the
first time procedures concerning the royal succession. The King's
political reform program also provided for the establishment of a
national Consultative Council, with appointed members having
advisory powers to review and give advice on issues of public
interest. It also outlined a framework for councils at the
provincial or emirate level.
In 1997, the membership of the Consultative Council was expanded from 60 to 90 members, and again in May 2001, from 90 to 120 members. Membership has changed significantly during expansions of the council, as many members have not been reappointed. The role of the council is gradually expanding as it gains experience. 39

Besides that, other factors such as regional and local government, military, labor and radical organizations have also influenced the political system of Saudi Arabia.

The role of the Ulama in the Saudi political system and the consequent socio-political change during and after the Gulf War will be the focus of the discussion.

The Ulama

The absence of a clergy in Islam, however, should not lead one to overlook a category of the religiously inclined persons who study Islamic law with great care and with a well-established methodology of interpretation and with due prudence. This is to say that these individuals seek to shed light on their capacity to understand, interpret, and compare their findings with others who are similarly inclined. These are the fuqaha, (singular, Faqih) and the Ulama, (singular, Alim).
The *Fuqaha*, or legal scholars study Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) which includes ritual practices as well as legal treatises. The Ulama, on the other hand, study the unanimous doctrine and opinion of religious authorities through consensus (*ijma*). They are the guardians of the Shari'a, particularly its “five pillars” (profession of faith, prayer, fasting, *Zakat* and pilgrimage to Mecca) and its *hudud* (punishment specified in the Qur'an for crimes like murder, adultery, and theft, among others).  

The *ulama* seldom constituted, at least historically, a distinct social class with special rights and privileges. In crisis situations they did function as a group to reckon with, and it is clear that the advisory roles of the *ulama* cannot, indeed were not, ignored by political leaders throughout history.

The *ulama* study the Qur'an and the *Sunna*, as well as the life of the Prophet from whom they draw inspiration in interpreting and resolving particular legal matters. In Sunni Islam, the *ulama* as well as the *fuqaha* have traditionally supported the political institutions in power, and in Saudi Arabia this support was given to the House of Saud by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab’. 
The ulama and their movements have been aptly categorized by a Saudi scholar Abubaker A. Bagader into six different groups: (a) Spiritualists (b) Ritualists (c) Radicals (d) Brotherhood (Ikhwanis) (e) Intellectuals and (f) Traditionalists. According to Bagader, the Saudi Ulama comes into the category of ritualists. Bagader enumerates the characteristics of the ritualists who emphasize 'Islamic appearances or what is termed as Sunna.' They lay emphasis on moral issues as well as social conduct. They are not concerned with political or economic issues. They stress teaching of Tawheed. The Saudi ulama are generally concerned with preaching and sermonizing.

**The Saudi ‘Ulama**

The ulama in Saudi Arabia can be categorized into two groups: Najdis and Hijazis. Najdis are present in urban centres, small towns, and villages as well as in Beduin settlements. They are the followers of classical period. Najdi ulama were mainly concerned with the learning and teaching the principles of Wahhabism and Hambali fiqh. The descendants of the Shaykh Muhammad ibn Abd-al-Wahhab belonged to this group and always supported Saudi rule, and were known as Najdi Ulama. They were also known as al-Shaykhs. This group provided legitimacy to the system. They wrote pamphlets and texts that
emphasised Wahhabi doctrines. They also acted as judges and administrators in the Kingdom.

The ulama of Hijaz had different social, educational backgrounds and nurturing. The Hijazi Ulama were urbane and quite familiar with the politics of the state. Since Mecca, Madina, and Jedda were the main centres of the region of Hejaz, the region was prone to external influences. Consequently the Hejazi Ulama were less rigid in their social outlook and less austere in their daily lives than were their counterparts in Najd.

Nevertheless, with the changing times, the Ulama, the world over and specially in Saudi Arabia, have changed their outlook. There are instances of numerous attempts on the part of Ulama in Saudi Arabia to bridge the traditional with the modern.

The Ulama have come to terms with the status quo which ensures the Wahhabi domination and their privileged position in the Kingdom. Their real power and influence, however, were to be dependent on the sweet will of the King. They are supposed to be the junior partners of the Sauds and have prestige and privileges. With the passage of time, as the government and administration grew, their control of religious institutions also
grew. The Ulama have a powerful say in the judicial system, implementations of rules of the Islamic shariah, religious guidance, education, jurisprudence, preaching of Islam, supervision of girls' education, supervision and administration of all mosques, and scientific and Islamic research. In all these aspects of state administration, the Saudi Arabian Ulama undoubtedly enjoyed an altogether different position. The revolt of 1929, by the Ikhwans, led to the deterioration of the status of Ulama in Saudi Arabia. The Kings tried to reconcile the religious tradition with the process of modernization. In the 1930s, Abdul Aziz was being denounced by the Ulama over the introduction of the telephone till he demonstrated its utility in spreading the word of God. In the 1940s, the ulama again objected to oil concession being given to American companies. They were of the opinion that Muslims were being sold into bondage to non-believers. The Kings defense was simple, 'had not the prophets employed non-believers'.

The rise of King Faysal further eroded the position of the Ulama. Faysal frequently ignored objection to his accelerated modernization process.

The challenge of modernity posed problems for the peculiar Saudi arrangement of collaboration between the state and the
Ulama. Many traditionalists understandably opposed it, but the state and a large number of Ulama suggested a distinction between modernity as an ideology, and modernity as lifestyle. For them, there was no question of embracing the ideology of modernity that meant the adoption of secularism, liberalism (of western brand) and democracy etc., but certain aspects of modernity as a lifestyle, specially the use of scientific and technological inventions in making life comfortable, were gradually adopted. The Ulama provided legitimacy to the state whenever it adopted such components of modernity and implemented them in the Kingdom. Over the years the Kingdom has changed to a considerable extent. The religious-political collaboration, however, continues unabated.46

Much of the time they are relatively unconcerned with political and economic issues. Some of these groups stress the need to teach only the basic doctrines of Tawheed.47 The Saudi Ulama were less political in their activities like preaching and sermons. Most of the Ulama were trained in Madrassas which had functioned in different mosques before the establishment of Arabic colleges with a systematic curriculum. Despite the absence of a hierarchical organization, Najdi Ulama were
differentiated according to their scholarship. The knowledge structure of Islam was vast in its different disciplines.

Apart from the Qur'an and the Hadith, jurisprudence (Fiqh), Qur'anic exegesis (Tafsir), Arabic grammar (Nahuv), syntax, logic (Manthiq), philosophy (Falsafa), history (Thareekh), and traditional Islamic sciences were the major disciplines, taught in madrassas of the Muslim World. The Najdi Ulama had concentrated both in learning and teaching the principles of Wahhabism and Hambali Fiqh, with little interest in grammar, syntax or other subjects of Islamic knowledge. The Najdis trained their students with special attention on Tazkiyah (chastity). According to them, “knowledge alone cannot liberate a man from his prejudices and passion, for his knowledge can always be manipulated to serve his passion and prejudices.” A disciplined and ritualistic life style was hence the main distinctive aspect of their character. The descendants of Shaykh Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the group which always supported Saudi rule, were the part of the Najdi Ulama known as al-Shaykhs. They justified the policies of Al-Saud rulers by authoring pamphlets and texts that amplified Wahhabi doctrines, by acting as judges and administrators in the Kingdom.
The Ulama of Hijaz differed from their Najdi counterparts in social background, education and outlook. Naturally it had always been subject to the influence of cultures external to the peninsula. Makkah, Madina, and Jidda were the min centers of Hijaz region; so the acquaintance of the people with pilgrims to the holy shrines brought the minimum contact with the outside world and culture. Because of this social and cultural interaction, "Hijazis, including their Ulama, were less rigid in their social outlook and less austere in their daily lives than were their counterparts in Najd."\textsuperscript{50}

The Hijazi Ulama’s realm of knowledge was much wider than Najdis. They specialized in Fiqh, Qur'anic exegesis, tradition, Arabic grammar, syntax, prosody, logic, and philosophy.\textsuperscript{51} The difference in educational background between the Najdi and Hijazi Ulama made the former more fanatical and literal in their understanding and application of religion. The educational centers (Madrassas) were wide spread in Hijaz because historically Makkah and Madina were the centers of learning right from the time of Prophet Muhammad. Thus the Ulama were ready to accommodate non-Wahhabi ideas and principles.
A drastic change has occurred, however, in the character of the Ulama in entire world. Saudi Arabia is not an anomaly to this process. These Ulama had to gradually emerge into the mainstream of the world. They are traditional but are aware of the modern world. As far as the Ulama and other traditional, spiritual authorities are concerned, it has already been shown that they usually do not possess a profound knowledge of the modern world nor its problems and complexities. They are usually criticized by the modernists for not knowing European philosophy and science or the intricacies of modern economics and the like. This criticism is no longer valid. Those who possessed financial and political power in the Islamic world during the past century, rarely allowed the Madrassas to develop in the direction of making it possible for the Ulama to gain a better knowledge of the modern world on the pretext that they would ‘become corrupted by it.’ Now attempts were made to modify the Madrassas curriculum. Few attempts have been made by Saudi Ulama in the last three decades to create institutions which would provide a bridge between traditional Madrassas and modern educational institutions. Now the Madrassas themselves have been developed into full-fledged universities. With this professional approach, the Saudi Ulama
Recent Crisis of Saudi Political System

The Gulf crisis of 1990 and its aftermath prompted unprecedented rumbling of discontent and public debates in the Kingdom on political reforms and issues of religious orthodoxy. Unlike many decolonized Muslim countries where the debate continues whether there should be an Islamic or secular state, the place of Islam in Saudi Arabia was never a matter of controversy. In the past two decades, however, social institutions and physical infrastructure have undergone a great deal of modernization, yet secularization seems to have affected only the top of society. In a large society, there seems to have quietly emerged, over the years, an Islamic movement which can no longer be ignored.

The Saudi Ulama now represent two streams of thought and action. Senior Ulama led by Shaykh Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz uphold the traditional, puritanical Islam. They defend the ruling royal family through their efforts, but the young Ulama, like Safar al-Hawali, with the support of university professors, students, and other liberals, stand for change in the system.
Their language is an amalgam of puritanical Islam and modern political Islam.

Taha Jobir al Ulwani, an Arab thinker and writer observes that the Muslim students of the Arab World, who attain Islamic education after overcoming so much opposition within the society, have been considered as outcasts and face social discrimination on that account. Both in the work place and civil society, they are subjected to social discrimination, and this affects their personality and destroys their self-confidence. Their numbers and standards have been reduced on this account. Various day-to-day problems faced by them in non-curricular field have also started affecting them. Their dignity and identity are often being questioned in a place where their services are no longer required. In such a situation, they are forced to render their services at the theological institutions run by the state and become part of the system. The common man has also started losing his faith in the integrity of these Ulama. At the same time those who fight against the existing regimes and states are not worried about their future lives; jihad (Holy War) as interpreted by modern Islamic scholars inspire them.  

According to a pamphlet released by organization of Islamic Revolution in the Arabian peninsula (CIRAP);
“There is no constitution, parliament, or judicial system. The Al-Saud family controls everything, for instance, most of the ministers are princes. Moreover, any ministry without a prince-minister has a higher council headed by a prince who has more authority than the minister himself ... In accordance with the teaching of Islam, our nation has begun its struggle against the infidels, Al-Saud and western super powers. Our nation has decided to break the chain of slavery and to send the Al-Saud clan to hell, not fearing the Saudi SAVAK, prisons, torture or martyrdom.”

The religious radicals appeared on the political scene of Saudi Arabia to achieve a society based on Islamic order. According to them revival of the Islamic society is to be achieved through Mahdi\textsuperscript{57}, which would end the tyrannical kingship and would restore governing with justice and compassion. They accused the Saudi family for religious and moral bankruptcy and pleaded for the resurrection of the seventh century Islamic government. The members of the movement contemplated the existing culture as unsatisfactory and strove to innovate or revitalize a new or old cultural system, which is appropriate for their conditions.

After the uprising, the state tightened the security measures, and the mukhabarat (secret police) network was established to monitor the activities of the people. Hundreds of
suspected political opponents have been arrested and detained without trial. Most have been Muslims from the Eastern province. According to one report, at least 100 such detainees were held in 1989 alone. In 1982, Amnesty International learned about the cases of over 120 political detainees who were not tried. Among those detained were Fawzia al-Bakr, lecturer of the sociology department of the University of Riyadh, Salih al-Azzaz, Editor-in-Chief of al-Yawn newspaper, as well as a number of journalists, teachers, and students.

During 1983 Amnesty International published the names of over 120 political detainees who were not tried. In 1984, between August and December, 62 people were detained in connection with an attempt to organize a political party. During 1985, over 100 alleged political opponents of the government were arrested and held in detention without trial. 58

The dependence of Saudi Arabia on foreign infidels for protection caused bitter queries both among the Ulama, especially the younger generation, and the new liberal elite. The pro-established of the Ulama were greatly disturbed by the activities of the younger Ulama because, unlike the older generation, the younger Ulama had an agenda to transform social conduct and the system by their modern methods. They
were acquainted with the programmers and strategies of other Islamic movements of West Asia through the Brotherhood activists of Saudi Arabia. So many leading Muslim Brothers including Muhammad Qutb, had been given asylum in Saudi Arabia. They set up an Institution, the Islamic University of Madina. 59

The house of Saud has always relied on foreign troops for protection. The younger Ulama again raised the Qur'an, saying that the Qur'an clearly prohibited Muslims from taking Jews and Christians as protecting friends (H.Q. 5:51). It has further commanded Muslims not to choose friends ‘those who received the scripture before you and of the nonbelievers (kafirun), as make a jest and spurt of your religion (H.Q. 5: 57).’ Because Allah says in the Qur'an: They surely disbelieve who say: “Allah is Christ, the son of Mary”. The Messiah (himself) said O children of Israel, worship Allah, my lord and your Lord. ‘Lo! Who ascribes pastors unto Allah, for him Allah has forbidden paradise. His abode is the fire. For evildoers there will be no helpers. They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of the three: when there is no God save the one God (H.Q. 5:72-73).’
By quoting the above Qur'anic verses, the Ulama argued that those who associate partners with Allah are committing *shirk* and hence are among the disbelievers. Most people today who call themselves Jews or Christians would fall into this category. They associate partners with Allah. They make fun of Allah's *din* (Islam), are rebellious against Allah's commands, and are extremely antagonistic to Muslims. So King Fahad aligned with the forces of Kufr (infidel) and was working for the enemies of Allah. 60

Hence forth, the younger Ulama called for an Islamic-Arab solution to the crisis rather than allowing the non-believers to protect the Holy land of Islam to fight the Iraqis to liberate Kuwait. For them the presence of “infidels” in Arabia was anathema.

Insensitive American Journalists and television networks made Fahd’s tasks more difficult by writing about or displaying footage of entertainers performing before American troops, and women dancing in-front of US soldiers in Dhahran. IRAQI TV taped those performances and broadcasted them in Bhagdad, and copies of the tapes gained wide circulation in the Kingdom.61
This again infuriated the neo-fundamentalist Ulama and a number of Imams of Masjids. These prayer leaders have become famous throughout the kingdom for their anti-Saud family speeches circulated by audiocassettes in the country. Saudi observers say that “the list of names suggests a new unity between liberal figures of the Islamic movement and its more extreme thinkers.” The Ulama parched their ideas and protested through these audio cassettes throughout the country. The speeches of Shaykh Hamdan, al-Hamdan’s (the leader of the Friday prayers) speeches were also recorded and circulated by the students of the University. The pro-established Ulama were greatly disturbed. 62

The supreme Ulama council immediately convened a meeting and came forward to defend the government’s position. Shaykh Abdul ‘Aziz ibn Baz issued a fatwa “that even though the Americans, in the conservative religious view, equivalent to non-believers as they are not Muslims, deserve support because they are here to defend Islam”. 63 This fatwa was a partial recognition of the position of younger Ulama by the supreme body of the senior Ulama, because they failed to answer to the questions which had been raised by the younger Ulama on the basis of the fundamental sources of Islam. The wording of the fatwa was a
clear indication of the acceptance of the argument of the young Ulama in principle. But the Ulama council gave legitimization to the stationing of ‘infidel’ forces, considering only the security of the state.

In the view of the ongoing debate among Muslim theologians on whether Muslims are allowed to use ‘infidel’s support in battle, Fahd invited 350 Islamic leaders and scholars to Makkah to discuss ‘the theological justification for calling in non-Muslim troops to defend their Kingdom.’

Even though the state propaganda machinery worked hard to counter the criticism against the regime and its policies by the opposition groups, it failed to overcome the Ulama and their allies because their platform was much wider and more effective. The lectures in Islamic universities, theology faculties and other institutions, and in Friday sermons at different mosques in Riyadh, in Najd’s lesser towns and villages, and to some degree, in Asir, served their purpose. Their most effective weapons were pamphlets and Islamic cassettes. Shaykh Salman al-Odah, a Najdi alim spearheaded the cassette revolution in the Kingdom. According to one report 100,000 copies of an anti-American book, published at the beginning of 1991, were sold within a month. This is the clear evidence of the anti-American and anti-
regime feeling, which prevails, in Saudi society. The activities of these university-educated junior Ulama, professors of Islamic studies, and other liberals led to the submission of memorandum to the king demanding the total change within the Saudi social and political system.

**Requires for Socio-Political Change**

Relying on the immense studies on the stability of Saudi Arabia produced by Western scholars during the period of the Gulf War, an American scholar observes with optimism that, “Despite the possibility that Saudi Arabia could go through a period of political instability after the Kuwait crisis, there appears to be an even greater likelihood that the Kingdom will remain politically stable well into the 1990s and beyond.” 66

The irony of this kind of observation is that the stability of Saudi Arabia means the stability of the regime, but not the stability of the state and people. When “Operation Desert Storm” settled down, the simmering discontent and demand for change from both the opposite forces came to the fore. King Fahd was thus trapped between Islam and liberalism.

In February 1991, the liberal group led by Muhammad al-Yemeni, a former Information Minister, submitted a
memorandum signed by 43 intellectuals to the King. It demanded for citizen rights, equal status for women, modernization of the judicial system, and above all the creation of a consultative council. To quote from the petition: 67

While the noblest vocation of the Muslim woman is the raising of her children, she should not be excluded from having a public voice and enjoying the basic legal and social rights afforded to all citizens as long as this is within an Islamic context.

This demand was in the context of the wake of 40 women, who in November 1990, drove across Riyadh in a convoy to protest the ban on women driving in Arabia. In response to this memorandum King Fahd proclaimed in the Council of Ministers that “we have almost completed the final revision of the regulations concerning the proposed shura” 68. At the same time, the Monarch appointed a moderate alim Shaikh Abd al Rahman al Said to head the Morality Police (muttaiwwan) with strict regulation for better relations with the people as per the demand of the liberals. 69

The liberal intelligentsia’s petition followed by King Fahd’s declaration of the planned reforms in April instigated the Ulama to follow the same path. They came out with their own memorandum for Islamic Reforms. The younger Ulama
succeeded in canvassing the support of the Shaykh ibn Baz. On 18 May, a memorandum signed by 400 Ulama led by Ibn Baz was presented to the king. The memorandum demanded the implementation of twelve necessary reforms (Islah) such as:

[1] Creation of an independent consultative council with actual power to determine both domestic and foreign policy of the kingdom.

[2] Elimination of all political, administrative and economic laws and regulations that contradict the shariah (religious law).

[3] A code of conduct should be implemented for all state officials and representatives both within and outside the country on the basis of Islamic principles.

[4] Realization of justice and equality among all members of society in fully attaining their rights and duties regardless of one’s high or low status.

[5] Supervision and strict accountability of all officials without exception; cleaning of the state apparatus of corrupt individuals.

[6] Equitable distribution of wealth among all members of the nation, cancellation of all taxes and reduction of fees; lifting
of restrictions on Islamic banks and purification of public and private financial institutions from usury (riba).

[7] Fundamental reform of the army, through the creation of a modern strong and independent Islamic army. This army's goal has to protect the country and its holy places.

[8] Total reform of the press, the creation of a strong Muslim media to reflect the ethics of society, elevating its culture, with a guarantee of its freedom to spread awareness through accurate news and constructive criticism within the limits of Islamic principle.

[9] Development of foreign policy to protect the interest of the Ummah (Muslim community); complete reform of the Kingdom's embassies abroad to bring them into line with the laws and interests of Islam.

[10] Improvement of the countries religious institutions, granting them more funds and other facilities.

[11] Radical reforms of the judicial system, granting them total and actual independence; creation of a supreme judiciary council to implement Islamic laws.
[12] Guaranteeing the rights of the individual and society and eliminating all traces of harassment of the people’s will and right; complete protection of all basic human rights.  

This was the most dramatic challenge to the authority of the Saudi regime and to its Islamic legitimacy, ever made by the religious establishment in that country. As a result of the pressure from the monarch, the council of the assembly of senior Ulama, the apex body of the Saudi Ulama, convened an immediate meeting and strongly denounced the petition of 400 Alims, and especially of its being public. It emphasized the fact that although a Muslim has a right to counsel his leader in private, such advice must not be made public nor used to incite others. Shaykh ibn Baz and Muhammad ibn Uthaymin, the signatories of the memorandum went back from their earlier position and apologized to the King. These two Ulama came under scathing criticism from the younger Islamists.

In June 1991, the government’s Higher Judicial Council issued a statement warning the signatories of the consequences of issuing any further criticism against the King. The creation of the Higher Judicial council, within the Ministry of Justice, is considered to be an institutional challenge to the judicial powers of the Ulama in Saudi Arabia. The petitions illustrated growing
assertiveness of Islamists in the domestic debate on the political future of the country.

At the end of January 1992, there were widespread reports of repression of Islamists in the previous two months. On 29 January, it was reported that the Shaykh Abd al-Ubaykan, the president of Riyadh's main court, was deposed by an order of the Ministry of Justice. He had criticized government policies in his Friday sermons and opposed the deployment of US troops in Saudi Arabia. The senior Ulama exhorted the people of Saudi Arabia to ignore the “smear campaign” against the government and praised the ‘determination’ of the King to implement the Shariah.

Against this backdrop of controversy, in 1992, in an interview with the Kuwait newspaper Al-Siyassa, King Fahd stated that the “providing a democratic system” was unsuited to the Gulf region, and that Islam favored the consultative system and openness between a ruler and his subjects, rather than free elections. The Government Higher Judicial Council’s ban on raising any criticism did not work well. In September 1992, over one hundred prominent Islamists drawn from all walks of life, presented another memorandum to the king, albeit through Shaykh ibn Baz. Unlike the previous one, which had confined
itself to simply pointing out the areas of policy and administration that were in urgent need of reform, it was daring and detailed 45-page document that provided both a critique and agenda for reform. It charged the authorities with violating the rights of the people and denying them their freedom, and dwelt upon economic and social chaos in the country, corruption, inefficiency, racial discrimination, and the poor and powerless machinery of justice. 75

Ibn Baz once again came forward to defend the regime from the vociferous attack of the reforms of Ulama. In response, three leading Islamists wrote an “open letter” to Ibn Baz accusing him of being an agent of the enemies of Islam. This open debate gave the Islamists a partial victory because the traditional Ulama failed to prove their arguments in the light of Islamic Shari’a.

The Fatwa of the "High Committee of the Senior Ulama’ (Haiat Kibar al Ulama) clearly stated that the memorandum contained falsehood and its authors have in this manner worked to propagate the causes of division, and it also said that the method of preparation and dissemination of the memorandum was also in conflict with the Islamic method of rendering advice.76
This debate resulted in the withdrawal of seven of the eighteen senior Ulama of the Council from signing the *Fatwa*, denouncing the Islamists. Following this incident in November 1992, a major reorganization of the 18 member supreme council of the Ulama was instigated by royal decree.

The Ulama opined that a closer look at the proposed constitution reveals that hopes for a truly Islamic system in the Kingdom are unrealistic. This document protects only the power of the monarchy. It lashed out at the claim of Fahd that the new rules have been established after a thorough study of Kingdom’s Islamic tradition. According to them, the document leaves the King’s powers intact, “it is democracy for one and Islam for none!” This was one of the comments. The reformists viewed that these are not reforms but “codification of the existing structure,” because the members of the body are to be appointed by the King himself. They are for a four-year term, but their decisions are not binding on the government. 

Shaikh Hassan al-Saffar, the leader of the Saudi opposition party, severely criticized the reform package of King Fahd. He even questioned the authenticity of the law in compliance with the Holy Qur’an. The Islamists published many books that contain severe criticism of the regime’s reforms package, judging
it as only a tactical move of the regime.79 Some of the liberal intellectuals also expressed their anguish at these reforms. A secular Saudi exile, Tawfiq al-Shaykh, told the Independent that he did not think they would provide additional protection for the Saudi Arabian citizen.

"I do not think it will perfect individual liberty, because there is no system to protect people, no free press, no parliament, no independent Judiciary. The reform is a timid attempt to satisfy traditionalists who are alarmed by the encroachment of western lifestyles." 80

Fred Halidy, professor of the London School of Economics, opined that nothing in the history of the Kingdom held out any hope that what little reforms Fahd had introduced would be built on in the future. He suggested that permission of political freedom, simultaneously with imposing a ban on political organizations based on religion, would serve as a solution.81 The applicability of Halide’s proposition in a society where religion is intrinsically political is contested. This would further lead only to the preservation of the existing monarchy, for the scope of secular organization is nil.
The Ulama not only acclaimed the reform moves of the King, but also all of their efforts to ‘educate’ the masses about it. Shaykh Muhammad ibn Ibuchi al Jubair, the Chairman of Consultative Committee, said in first of the Council stated:

“Today we witness the beginning of a significant historical phase that the respectable King has set in motion. In fact he is the pioneer of modern renaissance in this country, with his experiences, perspicacity, and prudence we have the outdoors wide open between the ruler and ruled.\(^2\)

The King assigned some senior Ulama to counter the arguments of the critics, and Thaufiq ibn Abdul ‘Aziz al-Sudairi is one of them. He put forth his arguments very systematically and explained the glittering aspects of the reform. Al-Sudairi categorically declared that Saudi Arabia is an Islamic State, and its system consists of three cardinal points:

1. The Qur’anic and prophetic version forms the constitutional system in the Islamic country.

2. The established constitutional conventions are drawn from those facts. These conventions are also drawn from constitutional events that took place in the Islamic state, during the prophetic rule, orthodox Caliphate, and successive regimes.
3. Codified constitutional documents either in the form of agreements, commitments and regulations on specific issues or in any other form that suits the description of constitutionality.  

Theorizing the character of an Islamic state, he reiterated that Saudi Arabia is the only pure Islamic State in the Muslim world; so most activities against the Saudi State is anti-Islamic. King Fahd echoed the same thing in a different way saying, “the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an Arab Islamic country. Whoever concerns the Arabs and the Muslim will concern it also. It strives for their solidarity and for the unification of their slogan and it would contribute them everything it has at its disposal.”

The monarchy and the senior Ulama confronted the critics by projecting Saudi Arabia’s Islamic character and symbols, but it is doubtful whether they could diffuse the arguments of Islamists against the Kingdom and its activities.

Modernists recall that traditional Islam “was shaped by scholars who were concerned to deduce an Islamic way of life which would fit the conditions of their time.” Furthermore, modernists understand the Shari’a to be the “result of a long process of jurisprudence” and not a “fixed repository of
commands and prohibitions." This does not seem to be the perspective opted for by the Saudi Ulama, who conceptualize Islamic jurisprudence as requiring a more fundamentalist approach. Modernists, on the other hand, conceptualize Islamic jurisprudence, especially *maslaha* and *ijtihad*, as the best methods available for codifying modern Islamic legislation. The 1979 *fatwa*, issued subsequent to the Mecca Mosque takeover, may thus be interpreted as a ruling which relied heavily on the "modernist" approach, clearly demonstrating the power of the King as well as the support of the public, what was perceived to be in the best interests of the country. Despite this "cooperation" with the King, it was clear that subsequent change by way of public demotions and appointments did reinforce the position of the ulama.

In Saudi Arabia, the ulama continue to accept the legitimacy of the government because the Sa‘ūd’s rule according to the Shari‘a and consult regularly with the recognized interpreters of the Shari‘a, namely the ulama. We must ask, however, whether the Kingdom will be successful in "codifying" the "legal materials in the Shari‘a on the basis of the doctrines in it which conform most rigidly to the Qur‘an and the example of the Prophet."
The ulama objected first to King ‘Abd al-Aziz in 1927 when he proposed such “codifications,” for fear that codification could lead to tampering and selection of certain texts at the expense of others, thus reflecting the Hanbli school’s particular emphasis on the conservative approach. It is equally possible that most ulama would object today if similar proposals were made by King Fahd, perhaps the monarch whose views are most identical to those of most modernists.

King Fahd, in fact, has suggested that Muslim fuqaha and ulama, presumably from different countries, ought to reconsider the practice of ijtihad as a useful approach in “reconciling Islamic Law with modern life.” Addressing Islamic scholars at a meeting of the Islamic Conference Organization (ICO), the King reflected on the issue and stated that “the problems are enormous and the responsibility we have before God is bigger than any one man’s ijtihad of the events of life, unless that ijtihad is acceptable to the ulama who have thoroughly researched and examined old and new Islamic jurisprudence.”

Historic evidence suggests, furthermore, that “the incidents and the authority of ijma’ had been laid down to classical Muslim jurisprudence and not by any unequivocal dictate of divine revelation, so that it might well appear that a self-
constituted human authority had arrogated a legal sovereignty which belonged to God.\textsuperscript{90} Thus, conceivably, the ulama today could share their common wisdom in addressing, within the legal framework, some of these pertinent issues which their predecessors did not face. This bold message from the King will no doubt be hotly debated among the ulama, and it is unclear whether such an examination of this point will drastically alter the role of the ulama in Saudi political life.

The above discussion outlined the fundamentals of the philosophy of Ulama vis-à-vis Saudi Political System. It has been noticed that despite its foundations and principles with Quranic views, the Saudi political system has earned considerable criticism at least since the 1980s. The main focus of the criticism is the system of monarchy available in Saudi Arabia. As a person, King Faisal faced most of the criticism due to his association and friendship with the USA. The recent role of the USA in course of aggression against some Gulf countries aggravated the image of the monarchy of Saudi Arabia. The traditional unity of the ulama and the Saudi political system is almost at stake. The monarchy is not indifferent to the situation either. A group of ulama with the patronage of the monarchy has come forward with a view that the friendship with the USA is
warranted to save Islam. Clearly, this deserves attention. Both the intimacy of the monarchy with a group of Ulama and hostility with another group of Ulama is prevailing simultaneously in the political system of Saudi Arabia with considerable differences between them. In the consequence of developments of world politics, of late, the differences are growing fast. One of the effects of these is that the traditional purity and authenticity of the ulama is facing a real test.
References


4. Ibid., p 875.

5. Ibid., p.875.

6. Ibid., p.876.


13. Ibid., pp. 876-877


17. U. S. Department of State: http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/world/saudiarabia.htm


19. Ibid., p. 878-879.

21. Fouad Al Farsy, note, 7 p.44.

22. Summer Scott Huyette, note. 20, pp. 69-70.


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25. Ibid., P. 2.


33. Tarazi A. Nichau, note. 15, p. 311.


38. U. S. Department of State, note, 24. P.1

39. Ibid., pp. 1-2


47. Abubaker A. Bagader note, 41, p.119.


51. Ibid., p.48-49


56. Pamphlet-dated December 8, 1982 released by Organization of the Islamic Revolution in the Arabian Peninsula (CIRAP).

57. According to the Sunni Muslims Mahdi is a ruler who shall in the last days appear upon the earth and establish Alla’s sovereignty on earth through an Islamic revolution.


64. Mordechai Abir, note. 61, p. 178.


68. *Deccan Herald* (Bangalore 17 June 1901).


70 Mordechai Abir, note. 61, p. 192.


72. Ibid., p. 832-3.


74. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (Saudi Arabia, September 18, 1992)


76. *Honkong Muslim Herald* (Honkong, April 1992).


82. Ibid., (22 August 1993).


84. Ibid., p.5.

85. Ibid., p.8.


