

# **The Taliban and Islamic State**

*Terrorists Or State Builders?*

By

**Selim Öztürk**

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# Introduction

There has been a discussion about the status of both the Taliban and the Islamic State (or the ISIS). It is disputable whether these two structures are terrorist organizations or state building attempts. All the states, especially the Western ones, and the international media in the international arena blamed the Taliban for being a terrorist group. However, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates and Pakistan recognized the first Taliban regime in the late 1990s. Then, the US and the West again started to negotiate with the Taliban in Qatar in 2014. Finally, in 2021, they left Afghanistan to the Taliban by withdrawing their troops. The first Taliban regime ruled Afghanistan with a state bureaucracy, an army and a cabinet as a normal official state having all functions. The Taliban's delegates even organized an official visit to Washington, negotiated with the UN officials and made the commercial agreements with other states in the late 1990s.

The Taliban regime was suddenly blamed for terrorist activities, then the US intervention came. The basic factor in the Taliban's turn to a terrorist organization was the presence of al Qaeda under the auspices of the Taliban. After a long period, the Taliban managed to survive underground and maintained armed struggle in the region against both the coalition forces and the central government. Although the Taliban hosted al Qaeda in the past and fought against the US, the West had to negotiate with it in Qatar, because the Taliban was a reality in Afghanistan. It was controlling a huge part of the country. If the same situation happened for the Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham (the ISIS or the Islamic State), could the Islamic State be negotiated and be allowed to turn to a state? The Islamic State demanded the other states to negotiate with itself when the official sources (its magazines) of the Islamic State were reviewed. In addition, in their peak time during 2014 and 2015, some of the scholarly western literature pointed out that the Islamic State could be recognized as the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas were recognized in the past. Hezbollah and Hamas were regarded as terror groups in the beginning but they operate officially in Lebanon and Gaza today.

Al Qaeda is a global jihad organization and targeted the US; however, the Islamic State was a regional jihadist organization. If the Islamic State managed to focus on building a Sunni Arab state and avoided overseas operations, would it have a chance to survive; and continue its state building process? The book also reviews these cases upon the Islamic State by giving its state functions in detail as reviewing the Taliban's state building case as a pre-model for the Islamic State.

On the other side, before reviewing the Taliban and the Islamic State, the book focuses on the historical roots and developments of Salafism and Wahhabism, because both the Taliban and the Islamic State embraced the Salafi-Wahhabi model of state building according to the book's main allegations. As known, the Western European states get in the third-party state building in the third world countries in the post-colonization era. In addition, the Saudis and their Wahhabi faith/ideology was also involved in building a state. The Saudis can be effective, either with their own financial and direct contribution or with their Salafi/Wahhabi faith in the state building attempts of indigenous organized groups. Therefore, the book focuses on the roots of Salafism, Wahhabism, their history and role in state building cases.

The book highlights the political situation of Afghanistan before the Taliban expansion. Then, it focuses on the third variable, Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia had the biggest role in financing the Afghan Jihad and sending Afghan Arabs to Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion during the 1980s. The book historically founds the connection and relation between Wahhabi Salafis and the Deobandi madrasa network, the religious school of the Taliban, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It focuses on Salafi effects within the Deobandi madrasas depending on exchange of cultures in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Then, the book focuses on the period of the 1990s when the Saudis financed the Taliban's state building.

The book picks up the two cases related to the current jihad movements in the world: The Taliban and the Islamic State. While examining the state buildings and state characteristics of these radical jihad movements; the book aims to review the ideological roots, which inspire these groups

(the Taliban and the Islamic State) to be involved in state building. The ideological background and roots, which are effective in state building, are conceptualized as Wahhabi Salafism. Early Salafism dates back to the Medieval Age; and the other, Wahhabi version of Salafism, dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century Arabia.

The Taliban and the Islamic State cases are important in the current world because there is a large discussion about whether they are just terrorist organizations or de facto state models. They were labeled as the terrorist groups, their leaders were sought by the international security organizations and Western states, and military operations were conducted to stop their acts and expansion. The book firstly separates these two cases, the Taliban and the ISIS, from al Qaeda. Al Qaeda is defined as a global jihad unit and it never had an experience of controlling a particular territory or borders like the other two. On the other side, the Taliban had a particular territory: Afghanistan. During its first reign, it captured almost ninety percent of Afghanistan and governed between the years 1996 and 2001. The Islamic State also ruled the territory as large as the territory of the Great Britain in the Middle East from 2014 to 2017. While al Qaeda just chose a headquarter place firstly in Sudan, then in Afghanistan mountains and directed attacks against the USA; both Taliban and the Islamic State were just involved in regional jihad and tried to create their own state formation. Their regional jihad targeted minority ethnic or sectarian groups. For example; the Islamic State targeted Shi'ites, Kurds and Yazidis while the Taliban conducted ethnic cleansing against Shi'ite Ismaili Hazaras in central Afghanistan, and Tajiks and Uzbeks in Northern Afghanistan.

The Salafi Arab jihadist involvement, which was mainly consisted of the Saudis and Egyptians, caused these regional state-building attempts to decline because of causing their jihad to go global. Al Qaeda leaders took shelter under the Taliban regime, and they committed suicide attacks to World Trade Centers and Pentagon in 9/11, 2001. This suicide of the Arab jihadists caused the US intervention, Operation Enduring Freedom, on the Taliban regime. In addition, the foreign jihadists, mainly the members of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (in other name, al



Qaeda in Yemen), conducted attacks on the different parts of Europe, primarily France; and attracted international hatred to the Islamic State. These regional jihad groups or their state making attempts had many internal dynamics and components. For example, the Pashtun tribes, Deobandi madrasa circles, ex-communist Khalqi faction officials and Pashtun originated ex-mujahideens were the components of the Taliban. For example, Mullah Omar, the head figure of the Taliban, was a member of the Pashtun Ghilzai tribe and a teacher in the Deobandi madrasahs. Besides, the Islamic State did not just consist of foreign Arab jihadists but there were also Sunni Iraqi and Syrian tribal confederations, the former Ba'ath officials and members, other insurgent Sunni Islamic groups within the administrative body of the Islamic State. Al Qaeda turned into a component of the Taliban after bin Laden's arrival and stay in Afghanistan under the host of Mullah Omar in 1996. Then, bin Laden caused the international intervention in the Taliban in 2001 with the jihad attacks on the US. One component, a foreign element (al Qaeda), within the Taliban's state building structure destroyed the probable legitimacy of the state building attempt. The Taliban had taken diplomatic recognition from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan at that time. Reciprocally, the regime appointed his *chargés d'affaires* to these countries. The Taliban's diplomatic delegates visited the Western capitals for negotiations. They also signed the commercial and energy agreements with neighboring countries.<sup>1</sup> They demonstrated their state characteristics in many aspects. According to the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, there are two types of states: declaratory and constitutive states. Declaratory state is defined as an entity, which has economic resources, a defined territory, an army, bureaucratic institutions and functions, but it lacks international recognition. The other one 'constitutive state' has all functions and additionally fulfills the condition of the international recognition from other states, too.<sup>2</sup> According to this aspect, the Taliban

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<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Crews, "Moderate Taliban ?" in *The Taliban and the Crisis of Afghanistan*, ed. Robert D. Crews and Amin Tarzi, (Cambridge, Massachusetts : Harvard University Press, 2008) ,p.251.

<sup>2</sup> Abdel Bari Atwan, introduction to *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, (London: Saqi Books, 2015), p.xi.

has all functions to be a state but has limited diplomatic recognition, because it was just recognized by the three states. According to the literature, al Qaeda's presence in the control of the Taliban was the biggest obstacle to its international recognition and was the main reason to be criticized for helping international terrorism. After a while, the Taliban regime was dragged into a terror group. In spite of the blames on the Taliban for being a terror organization and even the US intervention in the name of the struggle against terrorism, the US started negotiations with the Taliban regime through the Gulf sheikhdome, Qatar in 2014. The US had to negotiate because the Taliban secured its power and controlled many parts in Afghanistan in a de facto way even after the US invasion. Between 2014 to 2021, the Taliban office in Doha maintained negotiations with the US and the official central government of Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> The US, in the end, had to leave the country to the Taliban by withdrawing his support behind the central government in 2021. Twenty years later, the Taliban became a state again and the second Taliban reign started although no other country recognizes it diplomatically.

The Islamic State as a regional jihad group took a different form after the merging of al Qaeda in Iraq with the other jihad and insurgency groups in the region. It established a state-like structure over the Sunni regions of Iraq and Syria. While al Qaeda is a global jihad group, the Islamic State preferred to stay as local in Iraq and Syria and got involved in state building. Its state model is similar to a declaratory state. It has its own economy, administrative functions, own cabinet, army, security forces, judiciary bodies, currency and the state ideology (Wahhabism). The Islamic State's state building process looks like the Taliban. While the Taliban had Pashtun nationalist characteristics and conducted a Pashtun nation building, the Islamic State followed the way of constructing a Sunni Arab state based on the Salafi/Wahhabi principles. It enforced mass migration of other religious and sectarian communities in the region and even applied ethnic cleansing on them. The Islamic State did not avoid fighting against other rival Sunni – Salafi insurgent and

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<sup>3</sup> "Why Qatar, world's richest nation, is hosting Taliban talks" , *CNN.com*, January 4, 2012.

jihad groups to take control of the Sunni Arab dominated regions in Iraq and Syria. They purposed to stay permanently in the region by penetrating the Sunni populated regions. They gave importance to the mass Sunni sectarian support for the state building process. The two important factors helping their state building: the failed state situation of Iraq firstly, and the mass support of Sunni tribes and population in the Sunni dominated regions. They also entered alliance with the ex-Ba'ath regime's officials and members like the Taliban had done with ex-communist Khalqi faction's officials in their state building attempt.

The literature on the Islamic State is very limited because of being a recent issue. The case of the Islamic State entered the world agenda in 2014 with their capture of Mosul suddenly even though it was known as the al Qaeda affiliated branch in Iraq, which launched attacks on the Shi'ite government and US targets. It is very difficult to find a scholarly literature on the Islamic State but there are think-tank reports prepared by the Western organizations, and journalists' books although they give limited information. The internal dynamics and features of the Islamic State are still mysterious and unknown. The book benefits from the limited literature about the Islamic State like news, reports and the Islamic State's own official magazines. The Islamic State's own magazine is the basic supplementary source for the general literature over the Islamic State. The only first-hand sources are Dabiq and Rumiya Magazines. In addition, there is also conceptual confusion about the official name of the state. The literature mentions the Islamic State or the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham. However, the last name of the organization was the Islamic State since 2014. They officially called themselves "Dawlah" meaning a state in Arabic.

The case of foreign fighters within the Islamic State ranks is also another matter worth discussing. The foreign jihadists within the Islamic State were mainly from Arab countries, mostly the members of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula branch and Ansar al Sharia group in Northern Africa, the affiliate groups to the Islamic State.<sup>4</sup> However, the locals,

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<sup>4</sup> "Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq", New York: The Soufan Group, December 2015, p.16; Charles

particularly the Iraqis, had the main ruling power within the state mechanism. Their leaders and most of the cabinet members were Iraqis.<sup>5</sup> There is also another reality that the ex-Ba'ath members and soldiers took place within the administrative units of the Islamic State. The literature particularly focuses on the Ba'ath involvement in the Islamic State and points out the Sunni resistance character of the State against the Shi'ite dominance in Iraq and Alawite-Nusayri dominance in the Syrian regime. The book examines the period of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime and Salafi influences' intervention in Iraq during the embargo years just after the Gulf War. The Salafization of the Ba'ath cadres and units prepared a suitable atmosphere in Iraq in terms of welcoming al Qaeda affiliated groups and jihadists like Abu Musab al Zarkawi, the leader of al Qaeda in Iraq branch, according to some journalistic literature.<sup>6</sup> The US intervention, Iraq's failed state situation after the 2003 war, civil chaos between Shi'ites and Sunnis, the sectarian policies of the Shi'ite government in Baghdad also caused the Islamic State to take root in Iraq. The developments in terms of Islamization and Salafization in Iraq are parallel to the other countries in the region. Syria's harsh sectarian and ideological policies caused the increase of Salafi influence in the country, too. When the Salafi groups' gaining power merged with the Gulf financing, they turned into war machines transforming both Iraq and Syria into a jihad field, like Afghanistan. On the other side, the Islamic State is different from other Salafi-Wahhabi jihadist groups in the region because of its state similar character in terms of financing. The Islamic State collected taxes and had its own economic and fiscal system. The oil revenues within the de facto controlled territories of the Islamic State supplied a huge economic income to the State's economy. With this feature, it is not a rentier or donor backed organization like Nusra Front, Ahrar al Sham group and others. It did not need any

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Lister, "Profiling the Islamic State", *Brookings Doha Center Analysis Paper 13*, (Doha: Brookings Doha Center, November 2014), pp.57-58.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Lister, *The Islamic State: A Brief Introduction*, (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, March 25, 2015), pp. xi and 76-84.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Weiss and Hassan Hassan, *ISIS: inside the army of terror*, (New York : Regan Arts, 2016), 25; Abdal Bari Atwan, *Islamic State: The Digital Caliphate*, (London: Saqi Books, 2015), p. 33.

external financing. In addition, the Islamic State acted with regard to a state-based policies in its period of expansion. It preferred to fight against the Salafi Sunni groups rather than the Assad regime, because its agenda was to establish control over the Sunni dominated regions demographically in order to take root better. Its secret agenda was to be permanent in the region as a state rather than just a fighting jihad group. It displayed a Western/ European style state model in the concept of “a war makes a state and a state makes a war” as Charles Tilly pointed out in his well-known article “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime”.<sup>7</sup> As known, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan were established artificially by drawing their borders by the mandate regimes of the Western imperial powers in the post-Great War era. The Islamic State tried to change the Sikes-Picot system in the Middle East by drawing the borders through jihad. Their attempt was also a revolt towards the colonial design of the Middle East. They applied Salafi –Wahhabi jihad principles by trying to build their own state. They also got involved in nation building in addition to state building by applying Wahhabi jihad’s main characteristics. They purged Iraqi Shi’ite population, Syrian Nusayris and Kurds, launched ethnic cleansing on Yazidi community, and pressed on Christian community. They drew the main characteristic of their state with the Sunni identity. They were harsher than the Ba’ath regime of Saddam Hussein about Sunni policies. They aimed to Sunnify the territories, which they controlled, through Wahhabi ideology’s practices. Sunni Arab identity was their main argument for nation building; and Salafi-Wahhabi ideology is the main state ideology. They (the Islamic State) could not get recognition like the Taliban but it is a fact that they made oil trade illegally with neighboring states, especially with the Assad regime in Syria. The Western literature points out that the Islamic State is a terror group but might be recognized as a formal entity and an official state in future. The literature gives examples of the Bolsheviks, French Revolutionaries, the Irgun terror group before the independence of Israel, Hezbollah and the Revolutionary regime in

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Tilly, “ War Making and State Making as Organized Crime”, in *Bringing the State Back in* edited by Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 169.

Iran.<sup>8</sup> It is a fact that the Islamic State faced an international intervention and fell down as the first Taliban state did. There is also another fact that the Sunni Arabs in the region are in the majority, and they have not seemed to accept their fall from the power in Iraq since 2003. In addition, the Sunnis in Syria form the majority. They also will not accept their secondary position in the country. The Wahhabi ideology is still alive and continues to expand in the region. The US intervention in Afghanistan could not destroy the Taliban totally during twenty years. The Islamic State is a second attempt of Salafi-Wahhabis for building a jihadist state in the Middle East after the ideologically and technically Wahhabi backed Taliban regime, and will not be the last one. As long as the Wahhabi faith survives, the Arabs and their allies from other Muslim nations will resist against the foreigners, Persians, Westerners and non-Sunni rules in the Middle East. In sum, either global or regional jihad is their main tool for the resistance, and ideology to export.

Another question about the state building of the Islamic State is whether they could take recognition from the international system. Although it seems it was a very difficult issue with the current situation of the group, the Hezbollah case as a Shi'ite terrorist group in the 1980s presents us a model for a transformation of a terror group into an official-recognized entity in a time. The literature mentions the Hezbollah as an armed Shi'ite resistance group, and the increase of this group as the first local Islamic group in the Middle East. Hezbollah turned from a Shi'ite terror group to an official and recognized Shi'ite political party in Lebanon. They practiced the first suicide attacks among Islamic terror groups in the early 1980s against the United Nations and Israeli forces in Lebanon. Then, they normalized and adopted the democratic system in Lebanon by taking their place in the Lebanese Parliament and even in the cabinet. Even, they became a state within a state in Lebanon during the process. The Islamic State looks like Hezbollah's progress in some aspects. In spite of sectarian difference – the Sunna and Shi'a –

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Mulligan, "Conceptualizing an internal conflict: ISIS and international law", *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 10, no.1-2 (2016) : 82-83; Stephen M. Walt, "ISIS as Revolutionary State: New Twist on an Old Story", *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2015 : 44 and 49.

between two groups, the Islamic State tried to build their own authority through violence and religious ideology, and represented one sectarian group, similarly to once upon a time Hezbollah. It is a disputable and unknown issue whether the Islamic State could gain recognition and could normalize as Hezbollah had succeeded. There is also a difference between two groups. Hezbollah made its resistance within a given territory and did not try to change borders as the Islamic State did; and just preferred to stay as a local organization within an official country rather than to build a new state as the Islamic State tried. If the Islamic State's ideological and human source presence continues to survive underground in the region and it again revives, it may be probable that they would be invited to the negotiation table one day as the Taliban was invited in Doha.

## Chapter 1

### Jihadist State Building

The influence of ibn Abd al-Wahhab's movement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century continued for long centuries, even until today. The Saudis who had a social, religious and political contract with the Wahhabi clerics and Najdi people, who were originally Hanbalis, were involved in the strong state building with the help of the unifying power of Wahhabi *Salafi* monotheism. Although they were exposed to foreign invasions by the Egyptian at first and later Rashidi clan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the Wahhabi state managed to sustain. The influence of Egyptians and then the Rashidis was gone after some time and the Wahhabi creed took roots within the Peninsula society as a religious and political idea. The Wahhabi creed could not be uprooted from Arabia, especially from Najd; on the contrary, it expanded fast and strongly during the decades. Although the Saud family was expelled from Najd twice, they returned after some time due to the strong and permanent influence of Wahhabism among the Bedouin and urban society in Arabia. Even, the Rashidi clan that invaded Najd with the support of the Ottomans, got Wahhabized during their reign in Najd. The Wahhabi creed founded three states in Arabia. The First Saud State lasted from 1744 (or 1747 in some claims) to 1818, the Second State lasted from 1818 to 1891 and the Third one was founded in 1902 by Abd al Aziz ibn Saud after which it became the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. Ibn Saud's project of creating an urban society from Bedouins in the form of *Ikhwan* warrior raiders, a type of regular army in agricultural small towns called *hijar* in 1912 was an urbanization attempt for nomadic Arabs. It was an important parameter on the way of creating a modern state in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Arabian Peninsula. Through the raids of the *Ikhwan* jihadists throughout the Peninsula, the Saudi State expanded again. In brief, the Saudi method of merging Wahhabi creed with their state policies created the jihadist state building model resembling the typical state model of Europe based on the analogy of "war making and state making". The borders of the Saudi state were not drawn by



a third party, instead were drawn through the jihad launched by the Saudis with Wahhabi ideology. Wahhabism spread through its holy war around Najd, alongside the Gulf, into Hejaz and the whole Arabia. The creed did not remain limited within the frontiers of the Saudi state. It spread towards the other Gulf sheikhdoms like Kuwait, Qatar, the Trucial sheikhdoms and Bahrain. All of the ruling families of these monarchies were Najdi originally and had kinship ties with each other. The jihadist state building model helped to establish the first, second and the third Saudi states. Even, the creation of Trucial sheikhdoms, later transformed into the United Arab Emirates, was derived from jihadist state building in maritime. The Wahhabi pirates responding to the Najdi call had their rules in the emirates like Qawasim and Ra's al Khaymah for long years. They were backed by the Saudis and launched jihad raids to India and the British naval forces in the Gulf. Al Khalifah clan of Bahrain owed their rule to the Saudis, because they captured Bahrain from Persians with the aid of the Wahhabis in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The building of Bahrain's sheikhdom was largely through the third-party state building of the Wahhabis. The Persian descent and Shi'ite communities alongside the Gulf were suppressed and taken under control by the today's Gulf Sheikhdoms' Bedouin tribal ancestors with the aid of the Wahhabis in Najd region. Their state building efforts were cemented by the Wahhabi faith's influential power and Najd's support.

### **The State Building of the Saudis and the Wahhabi faith: The Jihadist State Builders**

The state building concept has many definitions in the literature. In addition, it is widely accepted that state building is a product of the Western thinking. The West applies to the state building for the third world countries to save them from failed state situations or prevent fragility in their state systems. On the other hand, the Western states also went through state building processes under the model of western type of state based on war making, because of long time centralization, social contract between the ruling and the ruled classes and obtaining

the private and citizenship rights.<sup>9</sup> There are two types of state building in the literature: indigenous state building and third party state building. If the local and indigenous actors manage to complete their own state building process themselves without any intervention, it is called as local state building. If a third foreign or donor party is involved in state building; it is called as third party state building. In the modern age and currently, third party state building also has some versions and branches such as the humanitarian state building, international state building and democratic state building. When we look at the definition of state building, the literature in general summarizes the concept as the process of the reconstruction of capable and strong state institutions, centralized army, police, bureaucracy and judiciary, governance of effective economic and physical activity for people, most importantly provision of security. Such definitions generally concern the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>th</sup> century conditions. However, some definitions highlight the first experiences of state building as the end of the Middle Age in Europe, probably the Westphalian state system in 1648 as the beginning of the modern nation state.<sup>10</sup> The experience of the East or the Muslim East is quite different from Europe in state building. They met with Modern Europe through modern naval powers when Napoleon stepped in Egypt in 1798. Perhaps Arab people first witnessed the foundation of the first modern Arab state at Muhammad Ali and his son Ibrahim's Modern Egypt. While the Wahhabi State was a unique case in history, it was comparable with other examples in the West. State building and nation building generally have parallel processes. Nation building requires a broader and grand scale planning compared to state building, as the project needs to be internalized by the society to be successful. It even requires a fundamental focus of identification from local, regional, ethnic or religious to national level.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Rolf Schwarz, *War and state building in the Middle East*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), pp.3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Shahida Aman and Shagufta Aman, Theory and Practice of Interventionist State Building: Paradoxes and Limitations, *Journal of Political Studies* 21, no. 2 (2014): 32.

<sup>11</sup> Erich Weede, "Nation-Building in the Middle East: The new Imperialism?", (presentation, The Future of International Governance" organized by the Liberal Institute of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, Potsdam, Germany, November

The literature underlines four types of state models: The Western, developmental, rentier and predatory models. Western state model comes from the logic of “a war makes states and a state makes wars”. Warfare and state formation in the West have deep roots in the process of state building, historically dating back to the Middle Age. There has been a competition and conflict among classes of society in Europe including kings, nobles, merchants, all of which had different opinions and priorities regarding the reshaping of society and state.<sup>12</sup> There was a development of a centralized professional army; and the sovereignty which had been once owned by the nobles was transferred to central rulers. Bourgeoisie and merchants received private property rights while parliamentary democracies followed constitutional monarchies. In the end, the logic of “no taxation without representation” was embedded in the mentality of state and society.<sup>13</sup> Since this type of state model developed in Europe, external threats, focus on security, centralization of forces, monopoly of violence played an important role in the state formation. For this reason, the process of the emergence of these states can be called as European model of states. In the Western understanding of state building, the logic of war is the basic determining factor. The concept of “war makes states and state makes wars” keeps them consolidate their central rule and power as Charles Tilly pointed out in his well-known article. These types of states necessitate the centralization of the security apparatus. It is argued that state building in the West emerged as a response to the need for centralized administrative structures for organizing the war machine.<sup>14</sup> The state-society relations under the logic of

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9-11, 2007),p.6.

<sup>12</sup> Herman M. Schwartz , *States versus Markets: The Emergence of a Global Economy* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed), (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000) ,pp.18-21; Willemijn Verkoren and Bertine Kamphuis, State Building in a Rentier State: How Development Policies Fail to Promote Democracy in Afghanistan, *Development and Change* 44, no.3 (2013): 504.

<sup>13</sup> Herman M. Schwartz, pp.18-21; Willemijn Verkoren and Bertine Kamphuis, p.504.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime”, in *Bringing the State Back In* edited by Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp.169-172; “*Supporting Statebuilding in Situations of Conflict and Fragility*”, Policy Guidance, OECD, 2011.p.24.

war making, and social contract between state and society depended on the population's loyalty and willingness to pay taxes in exchange for security provision and other forms of public services by the state.<sup>15</sup> In the Western approach, security oriented perspective comes first in state building, and shapes the state-society relations. A Weberian approach defines the state as a western product. In addition, it views "the state as defined by its capacity to exercise a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within its territory".<sup>16</sup>

The First, Second and Third Saudi States are similar to the western type of state model. The Saudi states did not only depend on jihad making but also on political and religious ideology, monotheism and Wahhabism, in order to build the state and even the nation. Wahhabism was such an ideology that it was involved in the construction of the state through an alliance between the Wahhabi *ulama* and state leaders. Later, the Bedouins and town dwellers were invited into this social contract through preaching and war. War is the main element of the state formation in the Western state model and jihad replaces the war at the Wahhabi Salafi states. The difference between jihad and war was the jihad's divinity feature. Jihad was the rule of Allah upon true Muslims and must be carried out against the infidels and polytheists. The Saudi rulers managed to reconstruct this divine rule on realpolitik and according to their interests. The centralization of sovereignty, governance and military in European states is similarly witnessed in state practices based on jihad, too. The disorderly anarchical tribes were forced to settle in towns. The state formed stable armies as it was seen in the *Ikhwan* project of ibn Saud in the Third Saud State. *Tawhid* is not only a divine and religious concept, but also refers to monotheism. It also aims to unify the dispersed Bedouin society around the Amir of the State of True Believers, in addition to the unity of a single God against polytheist innovations. The Saudi State also did not pursue aims of the caliphate like the Sharif dynasty in the Hejaz. They did not have a universal aim even in discourse like unifying the Sunni Muslim world.

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<sup>15</sup> Tilly, 171 and 181-183.

<sup>16</sup> Sarah Lister, "Changing the Rules? State-Building and Local Government in Afghanistan", *Journal of Development Studies* 45, No. 6, (2009): 991.

In the state model depending on jihad making, the state formation process progressed with the spread of the divine law and new spiritual faith, Wahhabism. Wahhabism required state building through monotheism and led Bedouins to give up polytheism and to adopt monotheism by settling in towns. It also reserved a privilege for the leader of the state to proclaim jihad. It forced state building by referring to the traditional way of Arab Islam, returning to the pious ancestors, Salaf era in Islam, by proclaiming non-Arab nations around or within the Peninsula as infidels or polytheists. It gathered the Najdi people under a single banner and a single sovereign ruler while mobilizing Bedouins for *jihad*, thus managing to create a security motive on the way of state building. The Wahhabi Salafism also maintains the tradition of Arabhood through referring to the early era of Islam during the pious ancestors' reign. Actually, the traditions of the pre-Arab time were an ongoing process within the practices of the pious ancestors or *al Salaf al Salih*, the strife between Ali and Mu'awiyah and arbitration case. In addition, many pagan Arab traditions, cultural elements and customs were included in Islam in their reformed forms. In sum, dividing the history of Arabs before and after Islam is not a true analysis in many aspects. Islam was a parameter in the long history of Arabs and Arabhood but Arabs have a large culture and history even before the revelation of Islam. The Prophet's role in this case was not primarily to restart a new historical page for Arabs but to unify them under one banner, bring order and end anarchy through divine law, and to expel the foreign occupiers from the motherland. As a result, Arabs had a strong background for state building in history: two great empires, the Umayyad and Abbasid. The Wahhabi faith was only a tool here to delineate these arguments and transform them to unifying cements their project. To give another example, the Sunni identity's prominent role in the worldviews of ibn Taymiyyah for the ideal state and social order for Arabs and other Muslim communities is the product of a long period of the formation and institutionalization of the Sunni tradition throughout Arab history. The Umayyads' harshness about imposing the Sunni identity, the Abbasids' internal conflicts between Sunni *Salafis*, rationalist *Mu'tazilas* and the Shi'as, the destruction of the Caliphate by the infidel Mongols, the natural social contract between Sunni Arabs

and the nomadic Turkish army states over the maintenance of the Sunni rule and identity in the Muslim East are only few components of the formation and institutionalization of Sunni identity. This identity was a key instrument in the nation and state building process of all Wahhabi states and even for the decolonized Arab states in the Fertile Crescent. Sunnism became the most important element indisputably not only in nation building but also in state building. Salafi Sunni School, which had been active in Islamic empires and states throughout the Islamic history as in the time of the Abbasids and the Mamluks, revitalized in the process of the formation of all the Saudi States. Wahhabism was harsher in religious practices, in terms of belief, faith and social discipline than ibn Hanbal and Ibn Taymiyyah's Salafi schools. In brief, it is more extreme than other Salafist, literalist and traditionalist schools under the desert conditions. This Wahhabi oriented state building within the conditions of the desert Arabia would later lead future states to bloom and flourish in different parts of the world. The involvement of the Wahhabi faith in state and nation building processes began at the same time when an alliance between the ruler of the local Saudis and a Wahhabi preacher was formed in 1747. The Wahhabi divine faith, the allegiance between the new faith and local actors, the enforcement or preaching of this new faith over the desert people created the new state's identity and the institutionalization of a new reshaped nation in the desert. Jihad making underlined by the Wahhabi faith enabled the state power to strengthen in the region. Loyalty to the Wahhabi faith for a long time despite many invasions and attacks and even the destruction of the state twice in the process is striking and perhaps the most important element behind state building.

The Wahhabi Saudi states were involved in state building four times in their history, and it can be said that there have been three states founded via jihad making by the Saudi dynasty in Arabia in the modern age. The First State ruled from 1747 to 1818. The date of proclamation of the first state was the allegiance between ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Saud. The Second State ruled from 1824 to 1891 and the Third one in 1902 and the current one was the continuation of the third one as officially recognized by the League of Nations in 1932. The seeds of

unity and the new nation launched by the Wahhabi ideology spread throughout the region and never lost its influence despite the state collapse. Central Arabians, whom the Saudi family had to leave behind and to flee to Kuwait during the invasion periods, remained loyal to Wahhabism. Even, they converted invading actors such as the Rashidis into Wahhabi faith. When the Saudis returned to Najd, they found the society still loyal to Wahhabism. The Wahhabi society maintained itself even if the state did not exist. It is clearly a central element in state building project when taking the regional and Arabs' own conditions into account. Indigenous and local actors conducted these nation and state building processes rather than colonizing third parties.

The literature also points out the conceptual distinction of Richard Caplan regarding state building: third party state building and indigenous state building. While indigenous state building is defined as a regional/local community's construction of state with its own capacity and capabilities, third party state building includes both international administration of war torn territories and the Western-led reconstruction of third party states.<sup>17</sup> Jihad maker state is very similar to indigenous state building because the local community, indigenous dynamics, and the society's own capacity and capabilities shaped by its own identity, culture, historical experiences and values are the main contributors in this local state building. The Saudis' jihad based state building in all their states took place without any third party intervention and ultimately based on the local actors. During the process, the Wahhabi states had to defend themselves against the third party actors threatening them and were able to establish their states in spite of the conditions of Arabia. On the other side, other Arab states such as the one led by the Sharif dynasty in Hejaz, Syria, Iraq and Transjordan were all created by the third party actors. The British and French mandate regimes drew the borders of these states and built the administration of these states through the cooperation with the local actors. These states such as Syria,

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<sup>17</sup> Abu Bakarr Bah, *Humanitarian Intervention and State-Building: New Humanitarianism in Theory and Practice* (presentation, Third International Studies Conference, organized by World International Studies Committee, International Studies Association, Porto, Portugal, August 17-20, 2011), p.20.

Iraq, Jordan and Hejaz could not be only identified as third party state building but also as hybrid model state building. According to hybrid model, there is a combination of services of international administration with local entities in terms of transferring skills and techniques from the West, and monitoring enforcements of financial revenues by the West. In other words, global southern states are constructed and structured while being dependent on global north in many aspects.<sup>18</sup> In hybrid model, states are not local/national majority groups' own making instead they are shaped by the imperial power and a particular faction of the local elite. In shaping social contract and political settlement, local/national society plays a limited role. It is difficult to explain the state formation processes of Arab states during the 1920s and 1930s in the Fertile Crescent with third party or hybrid models but the similarity is striking in terms of the cooperation between the colonial powers such as the British and French and the local actors. In sum, the Saud-Wahhabi states were completely different from these decolonized Arab states in Hejaz and Fertile Crescent and even different than Egypt, which had a long-colonized past. The other Arab countries, which became independent in the decolonization era during the 1960s in North Africa, were products of either third party state building or hybrid state building models. However, the Saudi states emerged due to indigenous state building based on jihad making. Briefly, it constructed itself through ongoing wars, the divine faith and law while creating a central state mechanism. The security understanding was also very significant for jihad making. Security was two-dimensional in the Wahhabi Saudis' jihadist state building case: the security of the divine faith against polytheism and idolatry within the borders of Arabia, and the security of the holy motherland against the foreign occupiers and interveners. It is also argued that Arabian Peninsula did not experience foreign rule, which is not correct as many parts of the homeland were under colonial rule such as Hejaz, Bahrain and some parts of the eastern coastal side alongside the Gulf. Only Najd was not under foreign occupation but it was in an anarchical status with no state authority until the alliance of ibn Abd al Wahhab and Muhammad ibn Saud.

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<sup>18</sup> Shahida Aman and Shagufta Aman, p.37.



In the Western scholarly literature, it was highlighted that Western or European states were involved in the state building of third world countries, including the Middle Eastern states. The Wahhabi-Saudi states are unique in this sense. The Arabian Peninsula did not come into the foreign colonial rule but remained in anarchy perhaps since the collapse of the Abbasids. The Wahhabi states were also involved in jihad against the foreign occupiers or rule alongside the Gulf and in the Hejaz. In addition, the Wahhabi state towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century acted as a third party in state building of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The Wahhabis also supported the tribal Gulf Sheikdoms such as Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the Emirates in their struggle against Iranians or the British in the region during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and creating their authorities. It should be emphasized here that the Saudi state was not involved in state building in third countries through international or global criteria, instead, through the Wahhabi ideological perspective, its religious institutions or direct finance, in sum different indigenous methods.

### **The State Models and the Wahhabi State**

The other condition that helped the emergence of the Saud states in the desert was the chaotic atmosphere in which Arabia existed for long centuries. The chaotic atmosphere can be summarized as the dispersed tribal society, anarchical structure of the tribes without a central authority above them, and the power vacuum. The modern literature proposes failed state and collapsed state concepts for these types of situations. However, the distinction between the situation of chaotic desert Arabia and failed or collapsed state was that there was no state authority in the first place to call it failed or collapsed. There were only tribes or towns ruled by clans which might be claimed as semi-state structures. However, when we take the conditions and cultural characteristics of the region, the situation of Arabia in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century can be regarded as a failed or maybe a collapsed state. The literature categorizes states on security basis into four as strong, weak, collapsed, failed states. Robert Rotberg, an American scholar and the author of

“When States Fail: Causes and Consequences”, gives a detailed analysis on failed, weak and collapsed states. In the literature, a failed state is briefly defined as a tense and deeply conflicted state, which is involved in war and divided into various factions, while a collapsed state is a severe version of a failed state. Jean Germain Gros, the author of “State Failure, Underdevelopment, and Foreign Intervention in Haiti” emphasized the importance of social contract and decline of this contract in the failing of a state. On the other side, William Zartman, an American scholar and author of “Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority”, defines collapsed state as “the situation where the structure, authority (legitimate power), law, and political order have fallen apart and must be reconstituted in some form, old or new”.<sup>19</sup> It should not be forgotten that these theories, concepts and terms are related to the recent cases and are not applicable to the states of the 18<sup>th</sup> or the 19<sup>th</sup> century directly. However, the book proposes that similarities exist between the modern ones and the semi-states of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, especially the Saudi states.

The situation in the Arabian Peninsula before 1747 was similar to conditions of a collapsed state. There was no tax giving population or any authority that could collect taxes. The first Saudi State managed to recover “the collapsed state” through unification of tribes, purification of polytheist beliefs which prevented unity in belief, and promoted unity in authority while being involved in the reconstitution of the state, institutionalization of the divine law, authority, and judiciary, as well as the securitization of economic and commercial activity, travel and communication infrastructure. The Egyptian invasion of 1818 destroyed the system and left the country in an endemic anarchy, in other words, the state failed and state authority was lost for a period. The Second Saudi state involved in internal conflicts between the ruling elites and failed while an external power, the Rashidis, intervened and occupied the state. However, the power and the strong influence of Wahhabi ideology upon the society enabled the Wahhabis to hold on to the region even if they did not own the governance and authority

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<sup>19</sup> Abu Bakarr Bah, p.16; Aidan Hehir and Neil Robinson, *State-building Theory and practice*, (Taylor & Francis, New York and London, 2007).p. 6.

de jure and de facto. The Saudi family went into exile and returned to Najd to reclaim the authority. Even under the rule of the Rashidis, Najd was similarly a collapsed state as the only functioning institution was Wahhabism in the society. The social contract between the state and the society was severed by external invasions or internal conflicts within the ruling elite but the social contract between the reformed divine faith of Wahhabism, and the society was never severed or never lost its efficacy.

According to Robert Rotberg, there are some conditions and parameters for a state not to fail or recover from failing. There are basic political goods that states have to provide to their citizens. The primary and most important parameter is security. Security does not only mean the security of the borders or the state entities but also the security of physical infrastructures such as roads, communications, commerce, harbors and so on.<sup>20</sup> The Wahhabi state provided the security of the infrastructural services such as the establishment of security along the roads, institutionalization of commercial contracts and legal status of these contracts, construction of written systems of communication between Riyadh and other towns to reach out to the desert society<sup>21</sup>. DeLong-Bas even claimed that ibn Abd al-Wahhab's aim of reformation of Islam to purify it from polytheism and idolatrous innovations was overshadowed by Muhammad ibn Saud's quest for the consolidation of state. The Wahhabi faith used by the Saudi dynasty enabled state building and consolidation.<sup>22</sup> Even, the residents in Hejaz under the Sharif dynasty welcomed the Saudi conquest in 1925 because of high level of governmental corruption and the weak state situation of the Sharifs.<sup>23</sup>

Alongside failed and collapsed state types, there is also a weak state type, which can be defined as authoritarian entities, which can fall from

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<sup>20</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, (Princeton University Press, 2003), p.3.

<sup>21</sup> Natana J DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: from revival and reform to global Jihad*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.36-37.

<sup>22</sup> Natana J DeLong-Bas, p.38.

<sup>23</sup> H. St. J. B. (Harry St. John Bridger) Philby, *Arabia*, (London: Ernest Benn, 1930), pp.302-308.

manageable to unmanageable situations in the case of an internal antagonism, despotism, elite cleavage, corruption or external attacks.<sup>24</sup> The Arab monarchies under the rule of the Sharifs such as Syria and then Iraq under Faisal I of the Hashemites and Hejaz under Sharif Hussein or Iraq and then Jordan under Abdallah of the Hashemites could be regarded as weak states because they, especially Syria, Iraq and Trans-jordan, were decolonized states and were previously mandate regimes. For example, the regime in Iraq was overthrown through a coup, and the regime in Syria led by Faisal at first was ousted by the French colonial power and Faisal of the Hashemites had to move to Iraq as a ruler under the auspices of the British. However, the contract between the ruling elite and Wahhabi preachers enabled the Saudi states to recover from their weak or failed state positions in each predicament. The Arab client states were vulnerable and fragile because of the lack of a bounding ideology. They were artificially reconstructed, and their weak state status was embedded in their governance and administrative structures. They were the products of a third party involvement of the mandate regimes.

On the other hand, the Saudi regimes, which had made an alliance with ibn Abd al-Wahhab, maintained this alliance for centuries, managed to recover from any problems, attacks, even the decline of the state due to an external attack. The state only became fragile when it failed to follow the strict principles of the Wahhabi faith as in the case of the *Ikhwan* revolt in 1927 against the Saudi regime. The reason of the revolt consisted of modernization attempts of the state led by ibn Saud, and the claims of *Ikhwan* warriors on the diminishing influence of the Wahhabi faith on public life rather than an inter-elite cleavage, oppositional activity, economic reasons or external attack.

In order to discuss the arguments on the Third Saudi State's "half rentier" or "rentier state" character, the book reviews the Saudi states before the oil discovery. Rentier state model falls under the categorization of states through their economic means and is defined as a state deriving almost all of its income from mining, oil revenues or official

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<sup>24</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, p.4.

developmental assistance from the outside world rather than tax collection from the society. In such states, tax collection is not a prominent element for the formation of state.<sup>25</sup> However, the Saudi states and their clients alongside the Gulf had existed before the discovery of oil in the Peninsula. It had been ruled since 1747 to the discovery of oil in 1932 without any oil revenues. The Wahhabi faith gathered the dispersed society under one single banner, centralized and urbanized them and even supported the Gulf sheikhdoms in their reconstitution of small semi-states through this spiritual national feeling. Debating about the rentier state economy that sustains the Third Saudi state is complex and unfruitful. Tax collection after the state sovereignty was enforced in the region with the effect of urban civilization in early Saudi states. Pearl trade in the Gulf was the previous source of income contributing for the Wahhabi States' economy.

These state models and state building theories cannot be a direct standard or criteria for analyzing the 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century Saudi states and their clients in the Gulf because these concepts and models are structured for the states emerging in the decolonization era of the 1960s and the new states of the post-Cold War era. The Muslim East has different cultural, historical and sociological parameters within itself. Perhaps, the Saudi states cannot be reviewed in the category of the modern nation states but Islam and Wahhabi reforming faith that had a great impact over Arab society in the region is equivalent to 'nationalism' in the West. The impact was alike in its national spiritual feeling and zealotry, which served to unify the dispersed tribal societies. On the other side, some concepts about state models and state building theories are useful in terms of the emergence of the early Saudi states and the implementation of their state governance and administrative structures. Indeed, the early Saudi states and the Western states that date back to the Middle Ages have more in common, because the Western states were formed as a result of long-lasting wars as the Wahhabi states were. The Western states provided centralization through war making, and struggles against the noblemen class while the Wahhabi states

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<sup>25</sup> Willemijn Verkoren and Bertine Kamphuis, pp. 502-508.

struggled for a long time against the tribal and anarchic structure of the Bedouin life in Arabia for the centralization of the state and urbanization of the society. Both of them depended on taxation systems. As known, the Saudis with the Wahhabi ideology are the architects of today's modern Arabia. While that model of states created in Europe are conceptualized by Charles Tilly with his theory "the analogy of war making and state making"; the experiences in Arabia can be defined as "jihad making and state making", because jihad as a particular war has another connotations and different aims with its religious character. Since jihad culture emerged among the Arabs, it was stronger in Arab societies. This particular Salafi jihad concept, which was inspired from the experiences of the early Saudi states, can be regarded as a political tool for the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, the Nusra Front in Syria and the Taliban in Afghanistan as well as any other jihadist state building attempts in Africa or Maghreb.