



## Cole M. Bunzel

Research Fellow/Hoover Fellow

HOOVER RESEARCH

 Curriculum Vitae available Online

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### Bio

#### BIO

I am a historian and scholar of the contemporary Middle East, specializing in the history of the Arabian Peninsula, Islamic theology and law, and modern Islamic radicalism. In addition to more scholarly articles, I have written extensively on the Sunni jihadi movement (also known as Jihadi Salafism) for a more popular audience, including such monographs as "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State" (Brookings, 2015), "The Kingdom and the Caliphate: Saudi Arabia and the Islamic State" (Carnegie Endowment, 2016), and "Jihadism on Its Own Terms: Understanding a Movement" (Hoover Institution, 2017). My first book, which grew out of my 2018 doctoral dissertation at Princeton, is titled "Wahhābism: The History of a Militant Islamic Movement" (Princeton, 2023). In it I draw on a wide array of primary sources in Arabic, including rare manuscripts gathered from across the world, to reconstruct the history and doctrine of the controversial Wahhabi movement that arose in central Arabia in the mid-eighteenth century. The movement, as I show, was distinguished not only by a theological exclusivism that cast large swathes of the world's Muslims as beyond the pale but also by a confrontational ethic encapsulated by the requirement to show hatred and enmity to so-called polytheists and unbelievers. These characteristics of what I call militant Wahhabism defined the Wahhabi mainstream until the early twentieth century, when the founder of the modern Saudi kingdom sought to tone them down and forge a reconciliation of sorts with the wider Islamic world. The militant heritage has been rediscovered and reappropriated, however, by the ideologues of the Jihadi Salafi movement.

My current book project, tentatively titled "Refounding the Kingdom," examines how Saudi Arabia in recent years, under the leadership of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has tried to distance itself even further from Wahhabism, particularly through the refashioning of the Saudi historical narrative. The founding of the early Saudi state has been backdated (from c. 1744 to 1727) in such a way as to write Wahhabism out of the story, and a new national holiday known as Founding Day has been proclaimed to mark the new 1727 national origin story. The book aims to place this shift in historical (and historiographical) context and in the context of the crown prince's broader reform efforts. A second book project, on which I am working concurrently, is a study of the history of jihadi ideology with a focus on those scholars and actors who most critically shaped it.

#### ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- Hoover Research Fellow, HOOVER RESEARCH

#### PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

- A.B., Princeton University , Near Eastern Studies (2008)
- M.A., Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies , International Relations & International Economics (2012)
- Ph.D., Princeton University , Near Eastern Studies (2018)

## LINKS

- Hoover Inst. profile: <https://www.hoover.org/profiles/cole-bunzel>
- Academia.edu page: <https://stanford.academia.edu/ColeBunzel>
- Wahhābism book: <https://a.co/d/3HRc3Ox>
- Jihadica: [www.jihadica.com](http://www.jihadica.com)

## Teaching

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### COURSES

#### 2024-25

- Modern Islamic Political Thought: POLISCI 233R (Spr)

## Publications

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### PUBLICATIONS

- **Refounding the Kingdom: Saudi Arabia from Islamism and Wahhabism to 'Moderate' Islam** *MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES*  
Bunzel, C. M.  
2025
- **Wahhābism: The History of a Militant Islamic Movement**  
Bunzel, C. M.  
Princeton University Press.2023
- **"Al-Qaida's Failure in the Fertile Crescent"** *The Struggle to Reshape the Middle East in the 21st Century*  
Bunzel, C. M.  
Edinburgh University Press.2023: 236-260
- **"Toward the Seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca: The Writings and Ideology of Juhaymān al-'Utaybī and the Ikhwān"** *Die Welt des Islams*  
Bunzel, C. M.  
2023: 1-35
- **"'God's Righteous Allies' or 'Apostate Unbelievers': The Taliban in the Eyes of the Jihādīs"** *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*  
Bunzel, C. M.  
2023; 14 (2): 189-217
- **"Ideological Infighting in the Islamic State"** *Perspectives on Terrorism*  
Bunzel, C. M.  
2019; 13 (1): 13-22
- **"Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia, and the Islamic State: 'Abdullah ibn Jibrin and Turki al-Bin'ali"** *Salman's Legacy: The Dilemmas of a New Era in Saudi Arabia*  
Bunzel, C. M.  
Hurst & Oxford University Press.2018: 183-196
- **Jihadism on Its Own Terms: Understanding a Movement**  
Bunzel, C. M.  
Hoover Institution.  
2017
- **The Kingdom and the Caliphate: Duel of the Islamic States**  
Bunzel, C. M.  
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.  
2016

- **From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State**

Bunzel, C. M.

Brookings Institution.

2015 ; Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World