

# THE JOURNAL OF CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Volume 2, Issue 1, Summer 2015

[www.iscl.norwich.edu](http://www.iscl.norwich.edu)

## This Issue:

Lee Johnson

Captain Caleb P. Slayton

David L. Edwards

Robert Greene Sands

Aimee Vieira

Sam Almesfer

## Special Commentary:

Catherine Ingold and  
David Ellis



# CLASH of CULTURES



# The Journal of Culture, Language and International Security

Published by the Institute for the Study of Culture and Language

A division of NUARI at Norwich University

## **Editor**

Dr. Robert Greene Sands

## **Production Editor**

Jessica DeVisser, Five7Alpha, Inc.

## **Journal Artwork**

Brady Wyman

## **Journal Point of Contact**

Robert Greene Sands: [rsands@norwich.edu](mailto:rsands@norwich.edu)

## **About JCLIS**

The Journal of Culture, Language and International Security is a publication of the Institute for the Study of Culture and Language (<http://iscl.norwich.edu>). Located at Norwich University, ISCL strives to promote the theory, doctrine, and practices foundational to mission success in the human domain through the application of culture and language. One of the Institute's goals is to build and share a comprehensive body of professional knowledge on research, the development of learning programs and application of culture and language considered critical to the future of US military strategy and missions. The ISCL's journal, entitled The Journal of Culture, Language and International Security (JCLIS), will contribute to the ongoing development of that body of knowledge. JCLIS offers an opportunity for a wide audience of interested military and non-military academics, military professionals and operators, students of security concerns and interested colleagues - in an unofficial and unfettered vehicle - to debate and advance the theory and practice of promoting success in a very dynamic and uncertain international environment. JCLIS will be available to ISCL supporters and the wider audience interested in promoting the advancement of culture and language in shaping the 21st century security mission.

## **Creative Commons License**

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

## **Journal Affiliation**

The Journal of Culture, Language and International Security would like to acknowledge our partner association with Norwich University Applied Research Institutes (NUARI) (<http://nuari.org>) and Norwich University (<http://www.norwich.edu>). Expect Challenge. Achieve Distinction.

## **Environmental and Ethical Policies**

The Journal of Culture, Language and International Security is committed to bringing quality research to a wide and diverse audience. JCLIS strives to protect the environment by remaining 100% electronic and encourages you do to the same. Instead of printing this document, where possible, spread its influence through electronic means.

## **Permissions**

For information or to request permission to reproduce any part of this journal, please contact the editor, Dr. Robert R. Greene Sands: [rsands@norwich.edu](mailto:rsands@norwich.edu)

## **Disclaimer**

Statements of fact and opinion contained within the articles of The Journal of Culture, Language and International Security, made by the editor, the editorial board, the advisory panel or journal article authors are those of the respective authors and not of NUARI, Norwich University or the Institute for the Study of Culture and Language. NUARI, Norwich University or ISCL does not make any representation, express or implied, in respect of the accuracy of material in this journal and cannot accept any legal responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions that may be made. The reader should make his/her own evaluation as to the appropriateness or otherwise of any information presented within these pages.

## **Social Media Presence**

The Journal of Culture, Language and International Security is pleased to enjoy a presence on Facebook, Twitter and Vimeo. JCLIS invites friendly and constructive feedback and discourse in these forums.

© Copyright 2015, Institute for the Study of Culture and Language. All rights reserved

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

## **Editorial Board Members**

Allison Abbe

Gail McGinn, ~ McGinn Consulting, LLC.

Darby Arakelian ~ Command Strategies, LLC

Thomas Haines ~ Defense Intelligence Agency

Jackie Eller ~ Middle Tennessee State University

Maj. Jonathan F. Brown ~ Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group

Pieter R. DeVisser ~ Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, JBLM

Kerry Fosher ~ Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning, Marine Corps University

Robert R. Greene Sands ~ Institute for the Study of Culture and Language/Norwich University

Catherine Ingold ~ National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland

Efrat Elron ~ Centre for Global Workforce Simon Fraser University

Scott McGinnis ~ Defense Language Institute, Washington Office

Lauren Mackenzie ~ Marine Corps University/Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning

Allison Greene-Sands ~ Department of Defense

Jessica Gallus ~ Army Research Institute

Aimee Vieira ~ Norwich University

Marinus van Driel

**The Journal of Culture, Language  
and International Security**

Volume 2  
Issue 1  
Summer 2015



Editor's Welcome	<b>1</b>	The Editors
Special Commentary	<b>5</b>	Catherine Ingold and David Ellis
Where are Today's Lawrences of Arabia	<b>13</b>	Lee Johnson
The Clash of Cultures	<b>23</b>	Robert R. Greene Sands
Interpretation in Non-Permissive Environments: The Case of Arabic in Iraq	<b>32</b>	Sam Almesfer and Aimee Vieira
"Differentiating between Islamic Terrorists and Terrorist Opportunists in West Africa (Will Control of Religious Education be Effective?)	<b>49</b>	Captain Caleb P. Slayton
Diverted Attention: Why we Shouldn't Ignore ISIL in the Asia Pacific	<b>77</b>	David L. Edwards

**Journal  
Contents**

# WELCOME

## *Editor's Welcome*

*Welcome to the third issue of the Journal of Culture, Language and International Security (JCLIS). The dog days of summer seem to be lingering just a tad bit longer this year and the mosquitos might be a bit more voracious. I am joined by two co-editors, Allison Greene-Sands and Darby Arakelian as we explore the topic of "Clash of Cultures"*

*Our call for papers early in 2015 provided the following to interested submitters:*

*It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future....Civilization identity will be increasingly important in the future, and the world will be shaped in large measure by*

*the interactions among seven or eight major civilizations. These include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African civilization. The most important conflicts of the future will occur along the cultural fault lines separating these civilizations from one another.*

This passage opened up Samuel Huntington's 1993 Foreign Policy article, "Clash of Civilizations?" Over 20 years later, do the international and transnational landscapes reflect the fault lines alluded to by Huntington? Has it truly become more of a clash of cultures and worldviews? The Summer 2015 issue of JCLIS will explore whether the prisms of culture and language offer any reflection on contemporary and future relations between an array of state and non-state actors in the context of Huntington's iconic premise.

It has been 23 years since Huntington's follow-on book of the same name was published and just 15 years since 9/11 made Huntington a clairvoyant scholar to many. His thesis suggested that more emphasis should be placed on "civilizations" rather than nation-states and that cultural variables rather than the usual fare of political and economic influences should be considered when understanding global conflict. The two civilizations Huntington spent the most time on are Islam and the West, thus the interest in his theory following 9/11 and the last 14 years and counting. His thesis lives on after his death and has surfaced as recently as 2015 to explain the attack on *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris.

Notwithstanding the currency of Huntington's theory, he did draw laser focus to the importance of culture, ironically just as the Department of Defense and other security agencies were rediscovering the importance of language and culture in the two counterinsurgencies the US was involved in, with countries Huntington considers part of the Islamic civilization. So, with culture as a commonality, this issue features three articles that examine Huntington's thesis, exploring such questions as does culture create fault lines between civilizations and is there a clash of cultures and not civilizations, or perhaps does culture actually blunt any edges Huntington might have attributed to fault lines? In the remaining four articles, the authors discuss programs, learning, and assessment of culture and region (a sort of localized and specific version of cultures), trying to fathom the messiness of a clash of cultures that requires cross-cultural knowledge and skills to interact successfully in culturally complex situations while also giving the opportunity to better understand others' behavior.

In our leadoff Special Commentary reserved for esteemed language and culture professionals, Catherine Ingold, recently retired Director of the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC), and David Ellis, current Director of the NFLC, present on

the importance of STARTALK, the NFLC-managed program that provides language (and culture) training to school-aged students and faculty. The annual summer effort reaches 120-140 programs, but a more ambitious agenda is to make STARTALK a year-round program. Their commentary explores STARTALK's beginnings and current efforts, certainly laudable, and they conclude by looking ahead to the expansion of the program.

Lawrence of Arabia has been cast as a language, region and culture (LRC) savant, but his success as a leader in the battlefield in WW1 has also contributed to the study of military strategies. Lee Johnson of the US Navy appropriates Lawrence to make several points that are not usually associated with Lawrence of Arabia, but do indeed concern LRC expertise and military strategy. Not to give away any of Lee's thunder, but suffice it to say there still is a little mystery and utility left in Lawrence of Arabia to be instructional.

The human domain has been identified by the US military as a critical "space" for success in an array of operations including unconventional warfare, Foreign Internal Defense, counterinsurgency and others. However, Robert Greene Sands sees the human domain, or at least the approach of its utility, as contrary to Huntington's civilization model with its bipolar arrangement of the West and Islam. Far from the view of great civilizations marching inexorably to battle, Sands sees the experience of the last decade of COIN as more reflective of the reality of a very messy, culturally-motivated domain; one filled with identities that claim affinity to each other, or others nearby, not necessarily with Islam.

Captain Caleb Slayton considers the influence of cultural variables on Islamic terrorism, and more specifically, Islamic organizations in West Africa and Africa in general. These organizations have distinctly regional and cultural identities of their origins and location, and cannot be tied back to an "Islamic" model. Islam may play a role in root causes and counterterrorism solutions to terrorism, writes Captain Slayton, but possible control of Islamic education might be a viable approach in West Africa.

Working with interpreters in conflict and other non-permissive environments is far different and dangerous than interpreting in other situations or circumstances. Sam Almesfer and Aimee Vieira bring their collective experience to bear as Arabic conflict interpreter and academic researcher respectively to consider the lack of systematic study on the difficulties of not just the interpretation but the dangers involved that can affect the interpreter, the one being interpreted, and the veracity of the interpretation. Sam's experience is valuable as both apply it to suggest potential areas of inquiry leading to the beginnings of best practices.

ISIS is not just a Middle East phenomenon, it draws human and other resources from around the world. David Edwards casts his gaze on Asia Pacific and provides a brief but telling look at the region of the world that features the largest Muslim population, with significant strength in terms of manpower, capabilities, recruiting, extremist organizational support, and resources. Edwards considers contrary views of the importance of the region's Muslim population for ISIS, and concludes with a need to be vigilant to events that could engage these resources.

JCLIS is published twice a year. However for the near future, we will begin to feature articles and position papers periodically within the space between issues if relevant and timely to current events or programs. The first addendum will be published shortly and is entitled "Narrowing the LREC Assessment Focus by Opening the Aperture: A Critical Look at the Status of LREC Assessment Design and Development." There lacks any kind of sufficient assessment mechanism to provide organizations critical understanding of their LREC capability, while failing to also provide the individual learner with a measure of performance useful to professional career development. This article will provide a critique of current DoD LREC policy and strategy and the lack of necessary guidance on assessment beyond language programs and will propose an assessment model based on learning performance that is a more accurate reflection of LREC capability.

This is the lineup for this issue of JCLIS. Each of the co-editors thoroughly enjoyed bringing this issue together. We hope you will find the articles timely and informational.



*Allison Greene-Sands*



*Darby Arakelian*



*Robert R. Greene Sands*

ARISQ

# SPECIAL COMMENTARY

Catherine Ingold and David Ellis

As former Department of Defense Senior Language Authority Gail McGinn elucidated in her commentary in the Winter 2015 volume of JCLIS, the nation's linguistic and cultural needs have never been greater, yet the government appetite to continue funding the effort to meet such needs has been curtailed in the face of competing economic demands. One prominent exception is STARTALK, an initiative funded by the National Security Agency (NSA) and implemented by the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) at the University of Maryland, College Park, with NSA oversight and close collaboration with government language professionals.

Established in 2007, STARTALK was created to increase the learning and teaching of languages critical to national security, including Arabic, Chinese, Dari, Hindi, Korean, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Swahili, Turkish, and Urdu. Annually, 120-150 summer programs are offered throughout the U.S., providing school-age students intensive language-learning experiences and training speakers proficient in these languages to become effective language teachers.

Since its inception, STARTALK has had a remarkable impact on world language study in the U.S., not only providing training to more than 60,000 student and teacher participants over the past eight years, but also leading to the grassroots development of over 200 K-12 school-year programs in these languages. Several STARTALK participants have moved on to other more advanced programs such as the highly competitive State Department NSLI-Youth (NSLI-Y) summer and academic year study abroad programs, and the National Security Education Program (NESP) language flagship programs hosted by universities throughout the U.S.; a few early STARTALK alumni have even been hired as language professionals by the NSA. In this way, STARTALK is helping create and expand the “pipeline” of language learners that one day should help the federal government meet its world language needs. Perhaps equally importantly, STARTALK and other federal initiatives are helping increase the number of Americans generally who can participate in a wide range of international projects and initiatives, thereby strengthening global cooperation as well as our own national security.

The planning of STARTALK began early in 2006 immediately after then-President Bush announced the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) in January of that year. Through a conference of national leaders in language education, including those in the government, commonly-taught languages like Spanish, French, and German, and teachers of the future STARTALK languages,

this conference helped determine how a series of summer language programs could help promote the teaching and learning of these critical-need languages throughout the U.S., which until that time had been taught only in colleges and universities or in heritage community-based programs.

By all accounts, STARTALK has been an unmitigated success. However, the current level of funding is inadequate to expand the benefits of STARTALK to a much broader student body. For this reason, the NSA and NFLC have been working closely with its national network of language educators to lay the foundation for a robust and self-sustaining infrastructure to strengthen educational opportunities in the critical STARTALK languages across the nation. Of the many ideas discussed to date, it is generally agreed that an expansion of the teaching of critical-need languages during the school year offers one of the best opportunities to develop significant and sustainable language proficiency, something essential to strengthening our national security.

Of course, moving beyond relatively short summer programs to a series of sound school-year programs is a major undertaking. A national program to support the teaching of STARTALK languages in local schools must make available all of the resources necessary to ensure each program can provide excellent learning experiences that lead to meaningful outcomes. Such resources include not only highly qualified and effective teachers, but also a

well-organized curriculum with instructional materials sufficient to support the development of meaningful intercultural communicative competence over time, as well as assessment tools appropriate for both formative and summative assessment at multiple levels of proficiency and for learners of different ages.

In considering a national STARTALK initiative for the school year, essential steps in planning include identifying measurable qualitative and quantitative goals for enhancing critical language offerings in K-12; determining what resources are currently available and how gaps in resources can be addressed; and developing a plan for program expansion and enhancement across the U.S. over time.

To establish a baseline and identify resources for future expansion, it is important to identify and assess the strength of existing efforts around the country. Community-based programs are carrying out many of these efforts, whether in the form of heritage schools, Saturday/Sunday schools, or after-school programs. The field needs better information on which of these schools is offering one or more of the STARTALK languages for credit, as well as information about the nature and quality of curriculum and assessment materials and the profiles of the instructors in these programs.

It also seems important to work closely with relevant national language teacher organizations and heritage/foreign language associations to gather the most accurate

information available about where and by whom STARTALK languages are currently being taught and with what level of status (non-credit/community-based vs. credit-bearing school subject). Efforts are already underway to introduce programs in heritage or critical-need languages, and sites where STARTALK summer programs have already moved into the school year or have made concrete plans to do so have been identified. This information should help identify other school districts that might be interested in participating in a pilot phase of a national effort to make critical-need language learning a year-round reality.

Another task is to review existing instructional materials in these languages in light of what is known about effective language curriculum to prioritize materials development. To carry out this task, one must identify prospective members of language-specific curriculum development task forces. Such task forces would logically include educators from the relevant language communities along with nationally respected language educators in more commonly taught languages. This latter group will have had greater opportunity to work on language curriculum development in projects that are well funded and supported because of their higher demand. In STARTALK, there have been numerous successful collaborations between highly experienced teacher educators and textbook authors of commonly taught languages and teachers from heritage language schools and community organizations that have historically taught the STARTALK

languages in the U.S. This same model should prove useful in the establishment of curriculum development teams in the each of the critical-need languages.

Because some of these critical-need languages have geographic and/or cultural variants (e.g., Arabic), it might be necessary for these task forces to recommend policy decisions about which variant of a particular language should be used for instructional purposes. Availability of instructional materials might well influence these decisions, as well as geo-political considerations about where these languages can be studied onsite, or perhaps even the current state of relations between the U.S. and the countries where the languages are spoken. It would be valuable to draft a policy document regarding instructional norms for each language being promoted in K-12 language programs, one that could be developed and applied consistently across the U.S. as the number of language programs develops and expands.

Another critical component of curriculum development is the integration of language and culture. Several members of the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) have been leading the effort to ensure government linguists not only possess more traditional definitions of language proficiency, but also intercultural communicative competence. Outlined on the ILR website are the skill-level descriptions of competence in intercultural communication (<http://www.govtilr.org/skills/competence.htm#preface>).

There have been three recent ILR plenary addresses regarding the need to combine language and culture instruction, to include not only inter- (cross-) cultural competence, but also foundational cultural knowledge. In other words, it is inappropriate to think language instruction alone will provide all of the necessary cultural concepts and cross-cultural skills to become truly proficient in a language; effort must be made to utilize instructional time to promote all facets of language and culture in an integrated manner.

The importance of intercultural competence cannot be overstated. Data from STARTALK participant surveys indicate that over 90% of STARTALK student participants think “it is important to learn about other people and places,” and “learning about other people and places will help me get along better with people who are different from me.” Clearly, even novice language learners see the importance of not only speaking a different language, but also learning how to interact with and get along better with people from different national, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Developing intercultural competence is therefore an equally critical component of overall language proficiency.

Curricular materials aside, it is important to develop and disseminate comprehensive and effective instructional materials to support the teachers expected to deliver a multi-year curriculum in the highest-priority languages. Some degree of standardization is essential if students are

to be able to demonstrate proficiency for purposes of receiving advanced standing and/or college credit for proficiency developed in STARTALK school-year programs.

The question of curriculum and materials also raises the importance of keeping per-student costs reasonable while ensuring students have as much opportunity as possible for language practice both within and beyond the classroom. One possibility includes minimizing textbook costs by providing a password-protected site from which programs and students can download text, audio, and/or video materials for each lesson, printing out materials only as needed. This would require that each student have access to a device capable of supporting such practice activities. With the growing variety of personal communication devices available, a study of cost-effective options for supporting practice activities outside the classroom is an important priority. One can imagine STARTALK “apps” for use on iPads and similar mobile devices to enable language study and practice anytime, anywhere. This is an important consideration for school-based programs because every enrolled student will need to have the means to practice oral/aural skills outside class if meaningful levels of proficiency are to be attained.

How best to measure language gains is an important issue as well. Not only do students progress differently within a single classroom under similar conditions, but language programs vary enormously across the U.S. in

terms of their richness of content, effectiveness of instruction, and methods and standards for assessment. Given these variables, it seems essential to plan programs and offer resources that can accommodate variability in such factors as instructional hours per week, and to take into account a range of experience and expertise among local teachers. It is also important to support the assessment of learner progress throughout their studies, ensuring all students are making adequate progress toward the stated proficiency goals.

Another important task is to identify and meet the conditions necessary to introduce new language offerings into public schools and the factors that contribute to the success of such offerings. Sources of valuable guidance include the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL), and the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL). All of these organizations have a wealth of knowledge, experience, and resources that would prove invaluable in determining the most likely path of success to expanding summer language programs into school-year programs. Their cooperation is essential as well, given their established leadership in the field of world language education in the U.S.

The NFLC (a.k.a., “STARTALK Central”) is also well suited to organize the planning and development of resources for academic-year STARTALK programs by drawing upon the

program's wide network of leaders in foreign language pedagogy and programming. A model for such an effort is the process that was used at the beginning of STARTALK, when the ODNI and NFLC brought together a group of leaders in K-12 language education to brainstorm how such a program could be designed and implemented. A similar mix of experts could be brought together for this initiative, to design and implement a plan to introduce STARTALK languages into the school year, with the goal of offering multi-year sequences whose starting grades and number of years would be determined both by government need and reigning best practices in world language education. One means of achieving such determination would be to survey schools that have already developed school-year programs to complement their summer STARTALK programs to determine what has worked well and what obstacles have had to be overcome.

Needless to say, the effort required to make the leap from summer-only to year-round world language K-12 programs throughout the U.S. is no mean feat. In competition with the current emphasis on STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and math), the challenge of catapulting world language learning to equal prominence is all the more daunting. It is nevertheless necessary. Helping create a truly multilingual and cross-culturally attuned citizenry is not only important for social reasons, but perhaps more importantly, for economic and national security reasons as well.

# *Author Biography*



Catherine Ingold

Dr. Catherine Ingold is former executive director of the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) at the University of Maryland. She joined the NFLC in 1996 after a varied career in higher education that included service as a foreign language department chair, dean of Arts and Sciences, and provost at Gallaudet University, and as president of the American University of Paris.

Dr. Ingold's professional interests include US language policy, heritage language development, education of translators and interpreters, and support of language access under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. Her languages, in descending order of proficiency, are English, French, Spanish, American Sign Language, German, Italian, and Portuguese.

She holds a BA in French from Hollins College, a DSEF in French Studies from the University of Paris, and an MA and PhD in Romance Linguistics from the University of Virginia.

# *Author Biography*



David Ellis

David Ellis is Executive Director of the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) at the University of Maryland. He is the principle investigator for STARTALK, a multi-year federally funded initiative to increase the teaching and learning of critical-need languages to K-12 students in the US, as well as program manager of the Analysis and Language Learning (ALL) contract, the NFLC's federally-funded multi-year contract for the development of web-based learning materials for learners of critical-need languages at high levels of proficiency.

Dr. Ellis has nearly two decades of experience in foreign language teaching, training, and assessment, as well as a wealth of management experience in a variety of academic, business, and military settings. He earned his BA in Economics & Mathematics from the US Military Academy at West Point, his MA in Second Language Acquisition from the University of Hawaii, and his PhD in Second Language Acquisition from the University of Maryland, College Park, with a focus on language assessment, measurement, and statistics.



# WHERE ARE TODAY'S **LAWRENCES OF ARABIA**

LEE JOHNSON

The views presented are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of DoD, the Department of Defense and Department of Navy, or their Components.

Most likely, you are familiar with “Lawrence of Arabia,” the masterful David Lean movie with its sweeping expanse of austere desert, the medieval splendor of hardy Arabs on their magnificent camels, the drama of personal and cultural conflicts. And, hovering above it all is the towering, gallant, and handsome young Englishman hero of the story. I have been an ardent admirer of the actual T. E. “Lawrence of Arabia” since reading a boy’s book of that name while a pre-teen. I take great pride in having become well acquainted with his story before the release of the much-acclaimed film.

I love the movie “Lawrence of Arabia,” and rarely miss an opportunity to watch it. I also harbor several objections to it. These do not focus on the more common complaints about the movie’s inaccuracies. To cite two such examples, I accept that the real Lawrence was not as dashing as portrayed in the movie (the British actor and playwright Noel Coward allegedly remarked to Peter O’Toole, “If you’d been any prettier, it would have been ‘Florence of Arabia’”), nor was there an actual “Battle of Aqaba.” I consider such errors to be minor flaws, expediencies made necessary by the expectations of the typical moviegoer.

My primary objection is how the protagonist of the movie is introduced. The script writers would have us believe the hero was a highly intelligent iconoclast and visionary misfit who was scorned by his military peers, yet happened to have the “right stuff” at the right moment for the right

opportunity, and who fortuitously went on to achieve brilliant outcomes, thereby exposing his professional Saoldier contemporaries as pedestrian dullards.

T. E. Lawrence simply did not happen upon the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Turks that broke out in the Hejaz during The Great War. The movie correctly portrays him as rebelling against strict military protocol, and at times he could be insufferably difficult. Yet, superiors did not fail to make early note of his exceptional worth. Years before the war’s start, he was identified as a promising candidate to be groomed for an important role should a conflict breakout between Britain and the Ottoman Empire. Maybe the role he ended up playing was not the one actually envisioned for him, but it was suitably similar. The notion that such figures serendipitously are provided by the fickle will of fate or the gods is ridiculous – and counterproductive.

In this article, I will outline the experiences and mentoring that enabled a young Oxford scholar to transition into the famous Lawrence of Arabia, provide examples of how he skillfully applied the lessons acquired during this process, and conclude with thoughts on how we might develop today’s Lawrences.

Jeremy Wilson, in his “Lawrence of Arabia; The Authorized Biography of T. E. Lawrence,” noted an “underlying continuity between his (Lawrence’) pre-war and wartime careers.... While some people respond to the challenge of war with hitherto unexpected ability, this was not so in his

case. By August 1914 the personal qualities which would bring him fame were already evident." Even accounting for his unique genius and the natural intellectual curiosity that propelled him toward a life of constant learning, Lawrence would not have been as ready for his role in history had more experienced men of vision not mentored him. While the promising young student and archaeologist may have provided within himself the fundamental raw material for development, senior British academics and officials have to be credited for recognizing his abilities and building him into the person able to become "Lawrence of Arabia." It is worth asking if that investment foresight exists, or even is possible, in today's U. S. military.

Lawrence's singular abilities and intellect first were noticed while he still was a student at Oxford's Jesus College. His thesis, "The Influence of the Crusades on European Military Architecture to the end of the 12th century," written following an extensive and perilous exploration of fortresses throughout France and the Levant, won him First Class Honors and still is considered a definitive work on the topic. In early 1911, having won the attention of two then-renowned archaeologists and scholars, David George Hogarth and Leonard Woolley, both of the Ashmolean Museum at the University of Oxford, Lawrence was recruited for archeological work at Carchemish, a Romano-Syrian settlement with Hittite remains that lies along today's Turkish-Syrian border.

It has been speculated the British did not chose to work the Carchemish site solely because of its historic importance. German-led construction companies building the Berlin-Baghdad Railway were located nearby, leading to conjectures about more contemporary strategic interests. In letters written from Carchemish to family and friends, Lawrence makes it known he encountered the Germans, and being very observant, developed a distinct impression of how they and their Turkish compatriots treated the Arab laborers. From there, he likely came to the realization that when foreigners gather into groups to live in isolation from the local inhabitants, they not only become insular, but lose awareness of their surroundings. I encountered this during my years of living in the Middle East. Westerners who grouped themselves onto sequestered compounds too often behaved as if local rules and mores did not apply. They failed to recognize that their activities could be observed by local staff who were sensitive to being offended. It is not much of a stretch to project that his observations of the Germans led him to reduce the number of Englishmen serving with him during the Arab Revolt so as to lessen the probability of them grating on sensitive Arab nerves.

December 1913 found Lawrence invited to participate in what was billed as an archaeological survey of the Sinai. Of course, there was a second purpose; a major section of Sinai never had been charted, and Field Marshal Lord Kitchener, British Agent and Consul-General in Egypt, wanted it mapped for military reasons. While on the

expedition, Lawrence would enhance his knowledge of Bedouin cultures, become familiar with surveying techniques, and learn more about the geology of desert landscapes. It should come as no surprise that he managed to make his way to Aqaba, the port on the Red Sea (now in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan) that would become the scene of his greatest military achievement during the Arab Revolt.

With Britain's declaration of war on Germany in August of 1914, Hogarth, Woolley, and Lawrence were eager to contribute to the war effort. In the months that immediately followed, the Sultan of the Ottomans refrained from entering the conflict. When war with the Turks did come, Lawrence was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant-Interpreter and shipped off to Cairo where he soon found himself posted to the Intelligence Department. Hogarth and Woolley also would make their way to Egypt where they, too, would serve in various intelligence-related assignments.

Knowledge and experience gained as a student and archeologist earned Lawrence several notable assignments in the early war years. In early 1916, he was selected to participate in a delicate and eventually unsuccessful plan to free units of the British Colonial Army the Turks had besieged in Kut in Mesopotamia (present day Iraq). Sir Henry McMahon, British High Commissioner in Egypt, in a letter of introduction to the British Commander in Mesopotamia, described Lawrence as "...

one of the best of our very able intelligence staff here and has a thorough knowledge of the Arab question in all its bearings." The mission's eventual failure cannot be placed on Lawrence. Before he even reached Basra from Cairo, his objective was undermined by British senior commanders who seemed incapable of grasping how desperate conditions were in Kut, preferring instead to let the siege play out to its inevitably disastrous conclusion.

One particularly interesting item from Lawrence's early war correspondence is found in a March 1915 letter he wrote to Hogarth. For years, the British Government in India had been given leave to run affairs in Arabia, and, according to Lawrence, "...used to do it pretty badly." His main criticism was the insistence on playing "...the old game of balancing the little powers there." Lawrence had the opposite vision. "I want to pull them (the "little powers" of the Arabian Peninsula) all together, & to roll up Syria by way of the Hejaz in the name of the Sherif....we can rush right up to Syria... It's a big game, and at last one worth playing."<sup>1</sup> Those few sentences are an eerily prescient summary of the as yet unanticipated Arab Revolt in the Arabian Peninsula.

From the start, Lawrence evidently was giving thought as to how best to defeat the Turks. This should not be surprising; in addition to knowledge acquired through his exploration in the Middle East, Lawrence took an early

1. Lawrence, T. E., "The Essential T. E. Lawrence," excerpts and letters selected by David Garnett, Penguin Books Ltd, 1956. All references to Lawrence's letters are from this edition unless otherwise indicated."

interest in strategy, having read Caemmerer and Moltke, Jomini, Clausewitz, and others while a student at Oxford. From there, he developed his foundational principles of war. I identify them as follows: (1) Understand the strengths and weaknesses of your men, (2) Avoid the trap of being drawn into doing what your enemy wants you to do, and (3) Manipulate your enemy to do what you want him to do. These cannot be considered a flash of insight on his part. Most likely, his fellow British officers would have been just as familiar with those principles from their professional education.

It is one thing to be aware of such foundational principles and quite another, far more difficult challenge to discern how to apply them. This last point strikes me as the key to what transformed a budding archaeologist into the renowned "Lawrence of Arabia." Because he had read extensively and been trained purposefully, he was singularly positioned to exploit the opportunities that came his way. This raises the question, how did Lawrence employ his knowledge? Both "Seven Pillars of Wisdom," Lawrence's personal account of the Arab Revolt, and "Evolution of a Revolt," an essay he wrote in 1920 explain in detail his operational concepts. I will cite a few passages below from the latter.

In his post-war writings, Lawrence outlined how he applied military principles in the context of conflicting cultures: Bedouin Arabs vs. Ottoman Turks, and Bedouin vs British attitudes. His superiors believed that an Arab

regular force must be formed and trained as soon as possible to undertake the duties of defending fixed positions and fighting in conventional military formations. Lawrence rejected this approach, preferring instead techniques more suited to the people and environment of the region. He did not try to mold the Bedouins into regular European-style Soldiers. Rather, he leveraged their inherent abilities as desert warriors to achieve success. Most likely, the operational concepts he applied throughout the Arab Revolt would have been ill-suited to a more structured, western style Army. Had Lawrence not acquired, and expertly related, his cultural expertise throughout the revolt, he certainly would have become just one more of many British military advisors to the Arabs now lost to history.

Lawrence also understood what the Ottoman's valued, and he exploited that knowledge effectively. In the early days of the revolt, the armies of the Arabs easily captured Mecca, Islam's holiest city, from the Turks. The second holiest city, Medina, was attacked soon after, but the Arabs were repulsed with serious losses. The Commander of the Ottoman Hejaz Expeditionary Force and Governor of Medina Umar Fakhur ud-Din Pasha, also known as Fakhri Pasha, stubbornly held on to the city for the remainder of the war, and did not surrender his garrison until January 1919, months after the signing of the armistice.

In truth, Fakhri Pasha did what Lawrence wanted him to do. From the perspective of the Arabs, "(T)he idea of assaulting Medina, or even of starving it quickly into surrender was not in accord with our best strategy. We wanted the enemy to stay in Medina, and in every other harmless place...." Lawrence particularly was careful when attacking the Hejaz railway used by the Turks to supply the city, noting, "If he (meaning the Turks) showed a disposition to evacuate too soon, as a step to concentrating in the small area which his numbers could dominate effectively, then we would have to try and restore his confidence, not harshly, but by reducing our enterprises against him. Our ideal was to keep his railway just working, but only just..."

The Turks considered Medina too important to surrender, but in truth, it was a burden. The men needed to defend it, and more than that, the expenditure of manpower and resources to keep its rail lines open to supply it, were wasted. As Lawrence calculated, "One half (of the Turkish forces in the Hejaz) took up the entrenched position about the city.... The other half was distributed along the railway to defend it against our threat. For the rest of the war the Turks stood on the defensive against us, and we won advantage over advantage till, when peace came, we had taken thirty-five thousand prisoners, killed and wounded and worn out about as many." It is worth noting these were troops who were not available to resist British General Allenby's breakout of Egypt through Gaza and on to Jerusalem. In short, they were worthless. Effectively,

they were lost to the Turks as certainly as if they were mortal casualties. Yet eliminating them as a force did not require a large sacrifice of Arab lives.

I specifically make note of the latter point. Based on personal observations of U. S. and allied operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, it struck me that we more closely resembled the Turks. Military and civilian leaders frequently would point to Lawrence as the model for warfare in the region, but few seemed to apply his concepts. Certainly, there were important exceptions. Most notable among them were retired Lieutenant Colonel John Nagl, author of "Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife" and Army General Stanley McChrystal. Of course, Lawrence was an insurgent, whereas the U. S. Military was engaged in counter-insurgency. But, in studying Lawrence, it seems we might have been more alert to the disadvantages of garrisoning forces in compounds that required considerable expenditures of people and material to keep supplied, isolated us from the population, and forfeited initiative to our enemies. To a large degree we did (and still do) this for the politically expedient reason of risk avoidance – as if war could be anything other than risk. Yet, we also do it because, frankly, because we really don't understand those strange people out there beyond the walls.

A corollary to this operational approach seems to be a tendency to identify locations as points of main effort for our military operations. Early in the Iraq campaign,

Baghdad was identified as the Point of Main Effort. Taking the capital became synonymous with overthrowing the regime of Saddam Hussain, and was considered the key to victory. Baghdad did have significance, but it wasn't the key to success. The people were; they should have been the Point of Main Effort. They needed assurances of security and social stability, the foundations of the confidence required to generate prosperity. It can be argued that the optimal way of providing the two is to gain control of the cities, which have, after all, the largest concentrations of people. However, failing to control territory beyond the urban centers leaves defending forces vulnerable to opponents who are free to "...cruise without danger along any part of the enemy's land-frontier, just out of sight of his posts along the edge of cultivation, and tap or raid into his lines where it seemed fittest or easiest or most profitable, with a sure retreat always behind them into an element which the (defenders) could not enter."

To win the confidence of those you want to protect, it is vital that you be present to explain to them – in their own language and in terms relevant to their cultural perspectives – what you want to do. Through experience, I have come to recognize that having language skills serves two particularly important purposes. Not only can a person then speak directly to local inhabitants without having to go through the filter of an interpreter who may, or may not, have conveyed the message accurately, but the mere act of knowing the language signals a special interest in the people. Foreign languages are difficult to

master. Making the effort required to be conversant in one (Arabic being a good example; even Arabs consider it difficult) clearly demonstrates a deep investment in, and commitment to, a region. There is no better confidence builder.

During the darker moments of the recent Iraq conflict, a former Commander, U. S. Special Operations Command asked in frustration, "Where are today's Lawrences of Arabia?" It was an excellent question. I expect he knew the answer: time invested in developing language, region, and culture had kept them out of the main career paths too long, resulting in being passed over for promotions at mid-level ranks and retired early.

An even more critical question might have been, "Where are today's Hogarths Woolleys, and McMahons?" The demands and requirements – and let me note most are legitimate requirements – of military service do not permit much flexibility in an officer's career. There are opportunities to earn a regionally focused Master's Degree, and in fact, such a degree is a plus for promotion boards. Finding time to use that degree is an altogether different issue.

It may strike some readers that the U. S. military already is building language and regional expertise through its Foreign Area Officer (FAO) or similar Service communities. FAOs are to have a Master's Degree or equivalent in regional studies, proficiency in one of their area's major languages, and increased skills through repeated

experience tours in their region of focus. While this community clearly provides great value to the nation's operational mission, Lawrence himself could not be considered a FAO. He was an officer in the field who planned campaigns and led men in battle. FAOs primarily are staff officers. There is a need to infuse some degree of regional knowledge into our Unrestricted Line (Navy) or Rated (the other Services) and Intelligence Communities, none of whom are FAOs.

A second, complimentary approach called Asia-Pacific Hands (abbreviated APAC Hands) recently was implemented by Navy to address one Area of Operations (AOR). APAC Hands was developed to support the rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific region as outlined in the Defense Strategic Guidance of January 2012. The program codes and tracks select officers from all communities who have experience and /or education related to operations in the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) AOR. Its primary goal is to build operationally relevant regional proficiency within Navy, while being non-disruptive to an officer's career progression.

One common criticism of APAC Hands is that it is not structured to build a regional expert; only in the rarest of cases will it develop an officer with the knowledge approaching that of a "Lawrence of Arabia." True enough. APAC Hands may not offer the full solution for providing regional experts. But, it is the optimal one given the many competing professional demands placed on an officer

throughout a career. It also is capable of developing the equally necessary Hogarths, Woolleys, and McMahons able of to recognize the importance of the abilities offered by today's Lawrences, and positioned to identify and mentor officers who exhibit those skills.

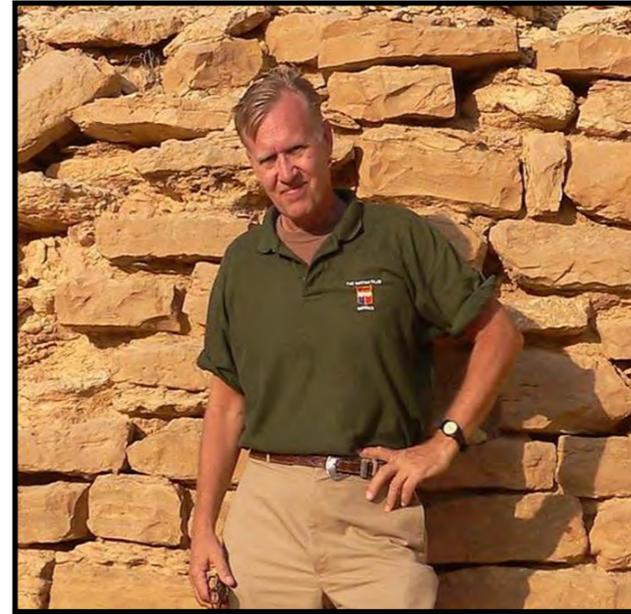
A critic of either of the above approaches could point out that Lawrence's experience did not come from his earlier military service. It does bear reminding at this point that his actual profession prior to The Great War was archaeology. The ability to translate his academic skills to military service reflected a dynamic of the early 20th Century that arguably does not exist in today's professional military. Possibly. But, if true, it is short-sighted to be limited by what we think the system will allow us to do instead of thinking how to amend that system to enable it to make the investments that need to be made. It would be sensible for the nation's military to consider how to encourage and enable future Lawrences within the context of the 21st Century. And, not just the Lawrences, or regional experts, but any number of talents essential to the missions we are certain to face.

Revisions to the military's career development approach have to be done thoughtfully. In fact, in-depth thinking along those lines is underway at the highest levels in the Department of Defense. In a speech at the U. S. Naval Academy given in May of this year, Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus announced several personnel initiatives intended to advance our Talent Management (also known

as "Sailor 2025") initiatives for both the Navy and Marine Corps. This included having the Naval Academy optimize its service assignment process by moving to a more market-based system that pairs the natural talents and interest of graduates with the focused skills needed in our warfare communities. In addition, increased opportunities for graduate education will be made available along with greater options to apply acquired skillsets to the needs of the Services by creating more flexible career paths.

Because it is bold in its vision, Talent Management has its skeptics; only time and example will confirm its merits. I sense it will succeed. Certainly, we still have young, promising "Lawrences," male and female, in today's military forces, and I am confident we have the capability and capacity to develop them. The only issue is our commitment to doing so. This reflects back to questions asked earlier in this article. We have the raw material and we are developing the process. The remaining question is whether we have the willing, supportive Hogarths, Woolleys, and McMahons needed to develop today's Lawrences?

# Author Biography



Lee Johnson

A Virginia native, Lee Johnson was commissioned an Ensign in the U. S. Navy upon graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1973. He served in various command and staff positions during his 31 years of active duty. These included assignments with the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization where he served as a Military Observer in Lebanon and Syria, Commanding Officer USS FORD (FFG-54), Commander Military Sealift Command, Central Command home ported in Bahrain, and Director for Naval Matters with the Center for Naval Analyses. Following September 11, 2001, he was assigned to DEEP BLUE, the Navy Operations Group, established to identify capabilities to improve the Navy's operational effectiveness in the Global War on Terrorism.

Immediately following retirement from the Navy, he worked in the private sector and for two years was the Prospective Ship Commanding Officer course coordinator at the Royal Saudi Navy's Operations School in Jubail, Saudi Arabia. He assumed his current position as Director of Navy's Foreign Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture office in 2008. In addition to overseeing language and culture education and training, he Heads Navy's Afghanistan-Pakistan and Asia-Pacific Hands programs.



# THE **CLASH** OF **CULTURES**

ROBERT R GREENE SANDS

The author would like to thank Dr. Allison Greene-Sands and Darby Arakelian for their insightful commentary and constructive critique of this article. Trust me if I had taken all of their suggestions it more than likely would have been a better paper, wait, I did incorporate all. However, any omission or glaring mistake, I can only blame on myself, or our dogs for getting up on the desk and by paw on keyboard inserting their own “dogma.”

*"It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future."*<sup>1</sup>

Samuel Huntington penned this iconic passage in his 1993 Foreign Policy article, "Clash of Civilizations," which thrust into academic and public discourse his notion of the West versus Islam. A fringe academician and writer at the publication of his article, Huntington was seen as prescient on the day after 9/11 when the perception of "Islam" went from being a religion to an entire civilization bent on the destruction of "the West." In Huntington's 1996 book of the same title, his thesis received more attention and references, but the notion of a civilization identity persisted. Huntington saw monolithic and monotheistic civilizations whose "fault lines" of culture grinded and grated against each other, shearing away little of the core granite of civilization identity. Edward Said saw Huntington's "civilizations" as "...the shut-down, sealed-off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents

and countercurrents that animate human history..."<sup>2</sup> Or, more simply, the old Cold War bipolar frame with new faces.

Much ink was and still is being spilled over the notion of civilizations, more ancient in genesis and stronger in indemnity than nations, clashing at momentous times in the history of humanity, with the biggest civilizations on the block being the West and Islam. The amount of ink indicates still powerful beliefs at work when it comes to explaining current events, whether they be borne of conflict such as the activity of ISIS, or isolated singular terrorists attacks. Wrote Huntington, "The relations between Islam and Christianity, both Orthodox and Western, have often been stormy. Each has been the other's Other. The 20th-century conflict between liberal democracy and Marxist-Leninism is only a fleeting and superficial historical phenomenon compared to the continuing and deeply conflictual relation between Islam and Christianity."<sup>4</sup>

The clash of anything sells, from the band of the same name to the Clash of Clans video game. But it is hard to clash with anything that isn't "clashable" or unified enough to represent contrary and enduring beliefs and values. In Huntington's case, deeply-seated religious thought has been grafted on a billion Muslims. As such,

1. Huntington, S. "Clash of Civilizations?" Foreign Affairs, 1993, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/1993-06-01/clash-civilizations>

2. Said, E. "The Clash of Ignorance." The Nation, October 22, 2001, <http://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance/>

3. Huntington, S. The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011.

Islamists and Islamic extremists are wrongly painted with the same brush of Islam. The demarcation between age-old civilizations withstands weathering. It plays well to those looking to find a clash or an enemy.

Fouad Ajami wrote in 2008, “Rather than Westernizing their societies, Islamic lands had developed a powerful consensus in favor of Islamizing modernity. There was no ‘universal civilization,’ Huntington had observed...”<sup>4</sup> Attributing a supra-cultural phenomenon to “the West,” and casting a sweeping geography as the home and purveyor of a religion, Ajami agreed with Huntington. Humanity, however, is not universal, nor is it expressed in thousands of messy culture groups. Instead, it is just a reflection of the survival of the fittest civilizations. Countered scholar Edward Said, shortly before his death, “...the major contest in most modern cultures concerns the definition or interpretation of each culture, or for the unattractive possibility that a great deal of demagoguery and downright ignorance is involved in presuming to speak for a whole religion or civilization. No, the West is the West, and Islam Islam.”<sup>5</sup>

One of the primary problems with Clash of Civilizations is that Huntington called his fault lines “cultural” and defaulted to the tried notions of religion and the economy promoting yawning divides that starkly separate out huge

chunks of people. The divides first sequester then reinforce civilization identity and to Huntington, that identity is expressed in very few global permutations.

We are two years past when the notion of Counter-Insurgency or “COIN” dominated the conversation in the security arena, and yet Islamic extremists seem to proliferate everywhere and often. If one’s gaze can be interrupted from headlines and videos of ISIS, Boko Haram, Al- Qa’ida and turned toward what is reported back from the Department of Defense and other US government deployments and assignments overseas, the West vs. Islam polarization loses its luster. If anything, the clash of civilizations has become a clash of cultures (the use of clash here has no relevance to the expected violence from the West and Islamic apocalypse), where groups align based on local beliefs and features like kinship, land, or shifting alliances based on cultivation or herding of lands that do have antiquity. Or, perhaps their alliance is based on religion that is a mix of local ritual and belief, whereas connections to any ideal monotheism may be in name only. These are the variables that define cultures, and clashes do erupt and run the gamut - from violence to negotiations. But Huntington and his followers try to get us to bundle all of these groups and identities together and brand them a civilization because the world has been explained to us this way.

In 2013, the reigning Generals of US land forces, Ray Odierno, James Amos and William McRaven, penned

4. Said, E. “The Clash of Ignorance.” The Nation, October 22, 2001, <http://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance/>

5. Huntington, S. The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011.

Strategic Landpower: Clash of Wills as a rudder shift in how the US goes to war; as a preamble, it defined a much different and more complex geopolitical landscape than one filled with metaphorical arks that go bump in the waters - some more often and with violent consequences. The Landpower whitepaper is instead a response to the messiness of an unsettled world filled, “.... with the threat of hybrid warfare, involving multiple entities; the increasing ability of non-state actors to de-stabilize entire regions and challenge national forces; the complexity of rules of engagement that constrain one side and enable the other to operate with near impunity “amongst the people”; and, importantly, the increasing pace and mutability of human interactions across boundaries, through virtual connectivity, to form, act, dissolve, and re-form in pursuit of hostile purposes.”<sup>6</sup> Whereas supposedly singular entities, or civilizations, have remained static for ages, the velocity of interdependence between human groups slows not.

At the heart of the Clash of Wills whitepaper is the human domain, a concept that is further defined in a 2015 future concept paper, Operating in the Human Domain, by Special Operations Forces (SOF) as people (individuals, groups and populations) in the environment, including their perceptions, decision-making, and behavior.<sup>7</sup> In fact,

6. Odierno, R., Amos, J. and McRaven, W. Strategic Landpower: Clash of Wills, 2013, <http://www.tradoc.army.mil/FrontPageContent/Docs/Strategic%20Landpower%20White%20Paper.pdf>

7. Special Operations Forces, Operating in the Human Domain: A Future Concept Paper, JSOU, August 2015.

the human domain has also become a discipline for SOF. The domain is comprised of social, cultural, informational, psychological and physical elements. In other words, all the ways humans can interact with self, others and the mountains and fields and grazing lands that surround them. Granted the perspective of the human domain is from a military operation, and tied to location (not so much terrain, and labeling a group of people “terrain” by the DoD perhaps was not the wisest of labels), the hard reality is that at some point, boots do go on the ground. Said newly appointed Army Chief of Staff, General Mark Milley, “War is an act of politics, where one side tries to impose its political will on the other. And politics is all about people. And people live on the ground. We may wish it were otherwise, but it is not. Wars are ultimately decided on the ground, where people live, and it is on the ground where the U.S. Army, the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Special Operations Forces must never, ever fail.”<sup>8</sup>

If there were “fault lines,” and resultant conflict, they would run through the human domain. This is where we would see cracks and fractures of the tectonic plates of civilizations as they slipped and slid upon meeting. Flags would fly, waving symbols of deep abiding allegiance (how can one not think of the Crusades right now) to the West or Islam. Obviously, in this reality of the human domain, those in battle are extremists, the advance guard of the Islamic Army. Conflict in the domain may represent the

8. Lopez, C. T. Ground Forces 'Must Never, Ever Fail,' New Army Chief Says, Army News Service, August 14, 2015, <http://www.defense.gov/News-Article-View/Article/613672/ground-forces-must-never-ever-fail-new-army-chief-says>

confusion of battle, but the enemy is known because they carry the flag, or so goes the Clash of Civilizations.

Suspend the military perspective of the human domain for a second, as well as the need to draw boundaries, any kind of boundaries, around people and their behavior. In fact, lose entirely the label of domain and instead consider just how intricate and messy the relations are between families and lineages, between villages, between communities and essentially everywhere. Now consider the various identities that form around ethnic and tribal affiliations, history, and yes, even religion. They are not mutually exclusive, but are drivers of behavior when engaged, such as when these identities interface with kinship. Then consider the various mechanisms of social control that define local behavior, and consider how family, religion and gender, for example, also are factored into social control. This is just a start to trying to untangle and tease out the meaning of culture groups; not touched were notions of conflict, honor, shame, a sense of what is family, and myriad other elements. Suffice it to say that the ramifications of behavior are deeply contextualized and layered. When the definition of the human domain includes the “sum” total of human environments as variables impacting human behavior, the thought of incredible complexity and an impossible task – to understand the human domain – is a significant consideration. Latching on to a primer of expediency can only make comprehending the complexity of behaviors, and their meaning, harder. “These two-dimensional

representations do nothing to help us make sense of what is actually going on,” David Wearing writes.<sup>9</sup>

This is the concept of culture that Huntington should have considered, but instead fell back on the bias of focus, harking back to religion as the culture cleaver. Wrote David Brooks, “I’d say Huntington was [also] wrong in the way he defined culture. Huntington minimized the power of universal political values and exaggerated the influence of distinct cultural values. He was arguing against global elites who sometimes refuse to acknowledge the power of culture.”<sup>10</sup>

Now consider just the label “Islam.” In Afghanistan and Iraq, Islam was a label that US forces found inadequate to accurately apply to the different tribal groups (Shi’a and Sunni should have been a clue), but how the U.S. forces applied a common perspective of “Islam” to the different villages and regions of each of the countries. In this human domain, the only ones confused and misguided about Islam and its different expressions were the ones just arriving with weapons and some sort of a plan. “Labels like “Islam” and “the West” serve only to confuse us about a disorderly reality,” Said wrote.<sup>11</sup>

Identity is never static for very long, for most of us. There are far more interesting and important identities that

9. Wearing, David. “No ‘clash of civilizations’ in Paris attacks,” CNN , Jan 10, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/10/opinion/wearing-paris-attack/>

10. Brooks, D. Huntington’s Clash Revisited. New York Times, March 3, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/04/opinion/04brooks.html>

11. Said, 2001.

beckon to us, depending on the context, from attributes that define self, to those that define birthright, tribe, or ethnic affiliation. For instance, rarely do I think of myself as an American - It's not that I deny or ignore it. I embrace it fully when forces create need. I never walk around thinking I am from "the West," nor have I ever claimed that identity to anyone.

I claim to being a Democrat a lot more, especially as the 2016 political campaign heats up, but as is the case, that too will fade or at least bow to other identity facets that may usurp it in immediacy or importance. Some identities, such as Democrat or Chicago Cubs fan, although lifelong, become "stronger" when context determines expression, and fade in relevance; for the Cub fan to only emerge every 20 years or so, like a locust, for a brief period of time. This cultural roulette of identity is universal. This same round and round we go, follow the ball till it stops, occurs as well in groups where Islam is just one of many identities. I know some unwaveringly devout evangelicals whose faith strongly dictates their identity, but their passion does not extend to the violent and horrible expressions of allegiance seen in ISIS or Boko Haram. Similarly, there are equally devout and conservative Muslims who also do not express their faith in negative or destructive way. Interestingly, if you take away the pretenses of faith, there could be more similarities than differences between the two groups. Amarta Sen agreed in his quote, "Perhaps the worst impairment comes from the neglect—and denial—of the roles of reasoning and

choice, which follow from the recognition of our plural identities. The illusion of unique identity is much more divisive than the universe of plural and diverse classifications that characterize the world in which we actually live. The descriptive weakness of choiceless singularity has the effect of momentarily impoverishing the power and reach of our social and political reasoning. The illusion of destiny exacts a remarkably heavy price."<sup>12</sup>

There are over a billion Muslims in the world, and most of them feel some level of affinity to Islam. But the minority who are Islamic extremists today are not the advance guards to an Islamic invasion, just like the West is not a hegemonic movement to take back whatever colonial land they once controlled. Robert Wright wrote about the fallacy of extremism equaling a much broader and diverse Islam. "When people think of extremism as some kind of organic expression of Islam, the belligerence of radical Muslims starts to seem like an autonomous, intrinsically motivated force—something whose momentum doesn't derive from mundane socioeconomic and geopolitical factors," Wright wrote. "It's something that you can stop, if at all, only with physical counter-force. In other words: by killing lots of people. I don't think it's a coincidence that commentators who dismiss attempts to understand the "root causes" of extremism tend to be emphatic in linking the extremism to Islam, and often favor a massively violent response to it."

12. Amartya, S. "What Clash of Civilizations? Why religious identity isn't destiny, Amartya Sen." Slate, March 29, 2006, <http://slate.me/1JdPGZe>

With ISIS, or the Taliban, Al-Qaida, they are not fault lines of a civilization, fronting a surge of Muslims. These extremists are part of the human domain where they exist, Johnny come lately and a blip on the edge of time, where there was a past and there will be a future after the extremists and/or their extreme worldviews die out or the original residents leave to find a haven somewhere without the violence and suffering. And to all groups at a location on planet earth, extremists included, there is a sometimes a clash of cultures, more often a reconciling of differences fueled by beliefs, local more than global identity, and expressed in different patterns of practice. There may be tugs and pulls on those nation-states that Huntington lumped into the monolithic civilizations, but present-day international relations feature less about borders and boundaries and more about genocides, terrorist attacks, bombings, and a muddled piece of land in a Middle East desert where scorecards are needed and updated frequently to identify which Islamic group is attacking and killing another Islamic group, or to further complicate things, add in the Israelis and Kurds to this volatile mix. “It seems to me, the best argument against Huntington's thesis is that it's very hard to pin down exactly what the civilizations are,” Gideon Rose said and continued, “that the borders are fuzzy, and that people can be many things simultaneously, and that the specifics of the argument - when it tries to become predictive - quickly get very either fuzzy or inaccurate.”<sup>13</sup>

13. Robert Siegal/Gideon Rose, A Look Back At A Predicted 'Clash Of Civilizations' 9/3/2013 <http://n.pr/1I5t6An>

Clash of Civilizations and its message of a bipolar world still influences how many filter the events that swirl around us. The January 2015 attack on *Charlie Hebdo* was just one instance of the clash. Likewise in the US, there have been far too many attacks by lone perpetrators, or wolves (self-radicalized) who have been used to support this narrative. “The ‘clash of civilizations’ has become a popularized frame that is wheeled out whenever an attack by Islamic extremists is carried out against a Western target,” wrote David Wearing. “It casts a democratic, liberal West as being locked in an epic struggle with a backward and violently intolerant Muslim world. According to this narrative, “the West, which treasures freedom of speech, has come under attack from an Islamic culture that refuses to accept any instance of what it regards as blasphemy.”<sup>14</sup> Wearing’s criticism further underscores the inaccurate ‘one size fits all’ explanation depicted in Huntington’s theory.

So, in a roundabout way, we have arrived at the message of this commentary and issue: the world does NOT in fact present itself as one that is overrun by civilizations, nor dominated by Huntington’s two primary mega-civilizations. Indeed, how the US military is going to war now and for the foreseeable future requires preparation for a world with a plethora of “domains” that reflect more a clash (and we use that term loosely to keep with the commentary) of cultures than civilizations. U.S. military

14. David Wearing, No 'clash of civilizations' in Paris attacks, Jan 10, 2015, CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/10/opinion/wearing-paris-attack/>

and even other U.S Agencies will encounter a whole slew of behaviors and identities that really have nothing to do with either the West or Islam, or for that matter any of the other civilizations Huntington envisioned. The DoD has enough problems with the cultural biases of its members distorting the reality of behavior encountered in deployment, assignments and exercises, let alone having to defuse the fictional view of a bipolar world held by a few.

The human domain, for as compact or as pervasive we or the mission want it to be, is more like water filled with a flotsam of cultures with no real demarcation on a map or sets of coordinates. Edward Said conveyed best the lack of need to draw artificial boundaries that live only in the minds of those who believe in Huntington's civilization paradigm in the following: "But we are all swimming in those waters, Westerners and Muslims and others alike. And since the waters are part of the ocean of history, trying to plow or divide them with barriers is futile. These are tense times, but it is better to think in terms of powerful and powerless communities, the secular politics of reason and ignorance, and universal principles of justice and injustice, than to wander off in search of vast abstractions that may give momentary satisfaction but little self-knowledge or informed analysis. 'The Clash of Civilizations' thesis is a gimmick like 'The War of the Worlds,' better for reinforcing defensive self-pride than for

critical understanding of the bewildering interdependence of our time."<sup>15</sup>

The human domain, for all its imperfections related to military perspective and utility, forces us to confront Huntington's fiction of civilizations too great to back down from each other when fault lines grow distinct. The U.S. deploys into these fault lines that are manifestations of a chaotic clash of wills, varied beliefs, and histories. Adhering to bipolar constructs of the West/Islam will guarantee missing the significance of the many different alliances, allegiance, and loyalties to group identities critical to countering instability, insurgency, terrorism. This makes it imperative to navigate in difficult and uncertain interpersonal situations, express or interpret ideas/concepts across cultures, make sense of familiar and foreign social and cultural behavior, and know the extent and influence of possible cultural biases, including the biases against the complexity of the human domain.

15. Said, 2001.

# *Author Biography*



Robert Greene Sands

Anthropologist Robert R. Greene Sands, PhD is Director and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for the Study of Culture and Language (ISCL) at Norwich University and Editor of the ISCL's online Journal of Culture, Language and International Security (JCLIS). Dr. Sands teaches in the Norwich University College of Graduate and Continuing Studies Program. From 2008 to 2011, Dr. Sands was culture chair and Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) and Air University at Maxwell AFB, AL.

Sands has authored seven books and numerous chapters and articles on topics such as cross-cultural competence, environmental security, building partnerships and sustainability, sport and culture, ethnographic theory, and the cognitive origins of religion. His seventh book (co-authored with Allison Greene-Sands) is *Cross-Cultural Competence for a 21st Century Military Culture: the Flipside of COIN* (2014, Lexington Books). His current research and development efforts center on bringing language, region and culture (LRC) together in learning events and assessment and the importance of cross-cultural competence to promoting alternate and different ways of thinking to the military mission. Dr. Sands holds a PhD from University of Illinois.



# INTERPRETATION IN **NON-PERMISSIVE ENVIRONMENTS:** THE CASE OF ARABIC IN **IRAQ**

SAM ALMESFER AND AIMEE VIEIRA

The views presented are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of Department of Defense, the U.S. Army, or their Components

## Abstract

Interpreting in conflict zones or other non-permissive environments is unlike interpreting in any other circumstances. The experiences of interpreters in these dangerous environments, the roles they play relative to those who employ them and the population amongst whom they work, as well as how language and culture complicate the difficulties of translating information from one language to another, have not been systematically studied in a significant way. While international professional guidelines exist to guide the practices of the conflict interpreter, these are influenced by conference interpreting norms, not based on substantive research, and provide, at best, limited guidance to those who must use interpreters (AIIC 2012). A sustained research effort could help determine best practices for interpreters and those who engage them in non-permissive environments, and how these best practices might vary depending on the interpreter, mission goals, and characteristics of the personnel utilizing interpreters. This essay, coauthored by an academic researcher and an experienced Arabic conflict interpreter who has been teaching Army personnel Arabic language and cultures, explores this under-researched field of inquiry, using the example of interpreting Arabic in Iraq to uncover various areas that could be ripe for future research.

Too often military memoirs and after action reports pay scant recognition to the ubiquity of the interpreter in the modern battle space (Cameron 2014). This invisibility obscures the significant role interpreters play in routine operational activities at all levels for American personnel in various deployments, including permissive and non-permissive postings. Even in the U.S. Army's (2006) Counterinsurgency manual, the role of interpreters is given little attention, being covered in a 7 page appendix that includes a list of do's and don'ts for soldiers, with no clear link to actual evidence-based assessments of best practices. In spite of the almost universal reliance of U.S. Forces on the services of interpreters in conflict postings during the past twelve years, very little research exists that explores any dimensions of this key 'third element' (Vieira, 2014). While there have been a handful of studies focusing on conflict interpreters and those personnel reliant upon them conducted while en theater (i.e. Borden, 2011; Bos & Soeters, 2006; Kennedy et al., 2007; Mahmood et al., 2013; van Dijk et al., 2010), none can be found in the literature which draw explicitly upon direct evidence collected during field-interpreted events, but rather rely on surveys, interviews or focus groups of various parties to an interpreted exchange, none of which include local resident populations who are not interpreters. *We simply do not have field-based direct evidence of best practices for interpreters or the personnel using interpreters in these demanding circumstances, although there do exist studies in other fields conducting this sort of analysis (i.e. Aranguri*

*et al, 2006; Roy, 1996)*. In this paper, we examine some of the complicating features of interpreting Arabic in Iraq (and elsewhere) to identify specific elements of the social and cultural dimensions of conflict interpreting to consider for future research efforts.

While some who provide interpretation services to the military are citizens or permanent residents of the country they assist (Takeda, 2009), in some environments, such as Afghanistan, many more are locally-sourced, contractor-supplied staff of wildly variable competence and preparation for the work in which they engage. When multinational teams deploy, the layers of interpretation can multiply quickly, with an exponential increase in the potential for the loss of critical information.

*“Simple communications are often challenging. A Norwegian trainer’s explanation of patrolling tactics in English had to be translated into French and then again by another interpreter into Hausa, a language spoken by many of Niger’s troops. Any questions started the time-consuming linguistic chain in reverse.” (Schmitt 2014: A4)*

The challenges this creates for joint exercises, partnership-building, irregular warfare or counterinsurgency operations are clear, obvious, and unmitigated by research findings based on actual field interpreted events (Vieira, 2014). After years of downrange engagements, this lack of evidence-based information highlights a glaring deficiency in U.S. training at a time when the opportunities for data collection were a constant feature of military engagements.

Even when the difficulty of utilizing interpreters is recognized by the participants, little is done to mitigate the potential harms. There is not a substantive training of personnel in how best to utilize interpreters that is based on evidence accrued through a comprehensive research effort, nor are there adequate resources supplied to ensure that locally-sourced interpreters are supported in their work through professional development, appropriate field-based supervision, and general courses in literacy, interpersonal communication skills and cultural competence (see Borden, 2011; Footitt & Kelly, 2012). Furthermore, military personnel deployed in an environment requiring interpreters may imagine that the interpreters provided are fully qualified, trained, knowledgeable, as well as literate (van Dijk & Soeters, 2008). These assumptions increase the likelihood of unmet expectations, poor communication, and increased strains on the relations between interpreters and military personnel. While there is some attention given to training military personnel who will be relying on interpreters (for example, the US Air Force offers a course devoted to working with interpreters for General Officers), the trainings available to lower level personnel are limited, and beyond whatever anecdotal materials the instructor provides, not based on research on actual field interpreted events on how best to maximize the quality of the field interpretation services.

### **The Third Element: The Interpreter**

#### *The Task and the Terminology*

Translation is done in a written format. Interpreting is oral input and oral output, “The oral translation of the oral discourse”, and is, in a sense, the interpreter’s narrative (Baker, 2001). An interpreter has to listen and speak in two languages and two cultures. While a translator may have the luxury of time and resources, such as dictionaries and other tools that aid in the translation process, the interpreter does not.

Consecutive and simultaneous interpreting are two forms of interpreting. In simultaneous interpreting, the interpreter has to render an oral formulation practically immediately while the main speaker continues talking. With simultaneous interpreting any errors committed by the speaker may be delivered as well, since there is no time lag to determine if a mistake has taken place by the speaker and stopped by the interpreter (Gile, 2001). In consecutive interpreting, the primary interlocutors will take turns, allowing the interpreter to interpret sequentially, and often interpreting for both sides in an exchange. Consecutive interpreting may allow the interpreter better opportunity to interpret contextually, which might improve the quality of the interpretation; however, the sequential exchange of information takes time. Consecutive interpreting tends to be the norm for interpreting in non-permissive environments, while simultaneous interpretation is more frequently utilized in formal or

conference environments, such as United Nations proceedings.

### *The Non-Permissive Context*

Non-permissive or conflict environments are those areas of operation where civilian/military exchanges are fraught with danger. Time is often of the essence in a military environment. If the conversation is taking place where the potential for imminent hostility exists, then circumstances may demand simultaneous interpreting. There will be no allowance for any lags in time. Based on the author's experience interpreting for the U.S. Army in Iraq, typically both sides are interested in a quick exchange of data and then continuing with mission execution. Information must be relayed quickly and efficiently with very little room for error. In an overtly hostile environment other factors come into play, such as fear, personal biases, decision making, and larger strategic concerns (Baker, 2010). If a military commander decides to take a specific action that may be risky, the interpreter might hesitate to fully relay the information out of fear for his life, because he does not agree with the course of action, or for various other reasons (Borden, 2011; Footitt & Kelly, 2012). When a unit is out in the field conducting a dangerous mission, players such as the interpreter may decide to modify the information (see also Cameron, 2014; Footitt & Kelly, 2012;).

Not all interpreted exchanges in non-permissive environments are fraught to such an extent. For example, in a planned meeting scenario a consecutive style of

interpreting is expected. Parties will usually allow the interpreter to pause and determine the contextual interpretation of the data rather than literal. In the case of Arabic, where contemplation is a culturally appropriate expectation, this type of exchange allows time for the interpreter to gather more contextual meaning and can improve the accuracy of interpretation.

However, in any of these situations, there exist distractions that may interfere with the process of interpreting. These could be anything from life threatening scenarios to general noise, the presence of a crowd, and/or difficulty in hearing or understanding the speakers.

An array of other performance constraints can also affect the quality of the interpretation. These can include, amongst others: the time delay between the initial speech act and the interpretation process into the other language; waiting for the full theme to be illustrated before interpreting; lexical incompatibility; adding or subtracting honorary titles; paraphrasing; or even the approximation and substitution of phrases (i.e. opium poppy rendered as drugs; or "terrible consequences" translated as danger) (al Qinaï, 2012). Acronyms, such as ICU (which would be fully rendered as intensive care unit), can also complicate matters.

### *Skills*

Interpretation requires more than just grammar and vocabulary skills in both languages. The mutual incomprehensibility of languages due to cultural variations

in conceptual domains requires that any interpreter select amongst an array of possible options in translating from one language to another. Heritage language speakers or those who have learned language in a school environment might lack the nuance or up-to-date variations that occur locally in all languages, and they may miss the most contemporary cultural references or local circumstances that influence linguistic norms. Interpreters sourced from the local population may lack strong cultural comprehension of the military personnel with whom they work, and may lack mission-specific vocabulary. The literacy skills of an interpreter may be inferior, equal, or superior to his or her oral capabilities in either or both languages. Variations in general English vocabularies and pronunciation (e.g. British vs. American English), also complicate matters, as do occupationally specific jargons.

A level of linguistic and translation proficiency must be attained where the interpreter is able to switch quickly between languages. Some interpreters can easily interpret from their own language to another, but not the other way around (Nida & Taber, 1964). Interpreters should be competent linguistically and non-linguistically. The actual practice of sourcing military interpreters in non-permissive environments is fraught, and exploration of this topic is beyond the scope of this paper (for some information on this, see Borden, 2011 or Baker, 2010). They must be translators who can handle the language and be able to handle the receiving, processing and delivering of language interpretation (Gerver, 1972).

Those using interpreters may be apprehensive about how the information will be relayed and whether their ideas will be adequately conveyed to the other party. The interpreter has to establish a degree of confidence and rapport with each of the other parties to allay concerns about accuracy (Baker, 2001; Baker, 2010; Borden, 2011). As this third element in the exchange, interpreters are critical to communication and therefore mission success. Incompetent interpreters whose weaknesses are revealed to the participants degrade trust and may contribute to confusion and a tense atmosphere which may result in detrimental outcomes (Borden, 2011; Dispatches, 2001).

The mechanics of interpretation include specific skills related to the process of sequential interpretation that can be taught, practiced and understood both by interpreters and by those engaging interpretation services, and which are well understood in the field of training professional, especially conference, interpreters (for an example see Gile, 2009). These aspects influence the quality of the exchange. For example, interpreters should know how to complete certain aspects of interpretation such as: positioning; turn-taking; introductions; pausing; asking for additional background if necessary to make the interpretations; filling in cultural information as necessary; and orienting their etiquette to provide the most effective exchange for their communication partners. There will likely be variation about what specific practices to engage given a particular situation or context. Those who engage interpreters can be trained to better understand the variety

of specific tools that an interpreter might employ, as well as to parse language and thoughts into a more readily translatable form, and even to develop skills in waiting for the interpreter to do his or her job. Future research should seek to identify specific interpretation practices, when they are most likely to be engaged, how they influence the exchange, and how best to deploy particular practices to achieve specific outcome goals in non-permissive environments, as the guidelines and training that exist are primarily modeled on conference, court or medical interpretation, all of which vary significantly from the conflict environment..

### **The Complexities Associated with Interpreting Arabic in NPEs**

As a case in point, consider Arabic and interpreting in Iraq during the surge in American troop presence. The use of Arabic language interpreters in theatre presented a steep learning curve for the US military. Linguistic variations and the degree of diversity in languages and dialects in the Middle East created many challenges, including the selection of suitable interpreters for the task (see also Fatahi et al., 2010).

Interpreting messages from Arabic to English and back requires a great deal of contextualization. For example, in Arabic when you say “he does not speak” (Huwa Ma Yatakallam”), it can mean he does not speak, he may not speak, or he will not speak. This can change the interpretation significantly on many levels. Literal interpretation does little to improve understanding of a

situation or of the translation of specific utterances. Arabic language comprehension demands cultural understanding and familiarity with Islamic practices.

### **Language**

Arabic is viewed generally as either formal or non-formal. As a diglossic language, formal Arabic dominates in writing, administration and education. The media of oral exchanges, non-print media, poetry and plays lends itself to the non-formal (Haeri, 2000). The language can be divided into three categories: Classical Arabic (CA) as it is written in the Quran, the holy book for Muslims; Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) as the written language of education and administration; and colloquial or spoken Arabic. Many different colloquial dialects exist that are not mutually comprehensible. Arabic speakers in the Middle East generally learn the colloquial form at home and do not get exposed to MSA until they are in school. Culturally, politically and legally, CA continues to be used as the official language (Cooper, 1989). Nevertheless a conflict is present between the local colloquial form of the spoken language and MSA. MSA is not generally used as a spoken language due to the fact that it is not a mother tongue language, and it is learned only through the school system.

Education in the Middle East shifted the focus to develop MSA as a derivative of CA. Many countries gaining independence from colonizers allowed for state schools to expand their educational curricula to include other subjects that necessitated the application of MSA in

addition to the Quran, Hadith and Jurisprudence classes offered in CA (Haeri, 2000). CA is complex grammatically, difficult in syntax and style. Arabs knew Classical Arabic only to conduct their religious duties such as prayers, and readings of the holy Quran, but were not generally familiar with the structure of the language. It was only in the post-colonial period that MSA was introduced for reading and writing.

The Arabic language is a collection of many dialects and sub-dialects where CA and MSA are the only forms of the language that are written as well as spoken formally, while dialects are for the most part only oral forms and rarely written. Today, due to the widespread adoption of technology, dialects can be found in a written form online in chats, blogs, and various Internet outlets. Maghrebi (North African), Egyptian, Levant, Gulf/desert, and Iraqi are the major dialects in the Middle East (Habash, 2010; Versteegh, 2001). Speakers across the dialects understand each other to a certain extent, but how well they comprehend the information can depend on both the dialect spoken and exposure to cultures outside of their own regions. Countries such as Iraq which include and border with states hosting many different languages and cultures are home to many different dialects. Nevertheless, Arabs consider the dialects to be simply variations of the Arabic language. They may even consider the variations to be an imperfect or improper form of the language based on the degree of deviation from MSA (Suleiman, 2003).

### **Literacy**

Interpreters who speak a local dialect of Arabic but cannot read or write MSA may overlook several forms of communication in Arabic. Within each country in the Middle East there exist many subcultures and forms of communication. Sociolinguistic aspects of language use also guide the communication process: feminine versus masculine, older as oppose to young, rich or poor, and casual or formal. Feminine does not only address the gender of the speaker(s), but it can also be divided into age, rank within the group, or education, likewise for masculine; politicians, religious clerics, commoners, educators, sellers and buyers, friends, strangers, and relatives all have a designated way of being addressed. In a strongly collectivist culture, those who are part of the culture can handle the various layers of complexity. Communication can easily break down if any communicative norms are violated. A delicate balance between culture and language expertise is essential for a successful communication, which can even come down to something as basic as tone of voice (Feghali, 1997).

### **Religion**

For Arabs in the Middle East, Arabic is mostly taught through Islamic literature. Finding a secularized version of the Arabic language is difficult. The Arabic language has lent itself to be an extension within Islam and Islam has made Arabic the language of choice, especially when practicing religious rituals. The true blend between the faith and the culture for the individual is what promotes a

level of expertise in the language through religious teachings and knowledge of the language.

Islam has infused the Arabic language with many expressions and words that stem from the Islamic culture. Many words such as Allah, meaning God, are embedded in Arabic expressions. This makes the language unique in a sense where such expressions as insha' Allah [God Willing], alhamdulillah [Praise be to God], subhan Allah [Glory be to God], masha Allah [It is the will of God], baraka Allahu fik [May God bless you], jazaka Allah khayr [May God reward you], fi amanillah [In God's safety], inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un [From God we come and to Him is our return], and many others reflect the Islamic culture that is created by the religious presence (Abu-Absi, 1986).

For interpreters from the Middle East the use of the Allah lexicon linguistically, culturally, and religiously is part of the identity of the people and the native interpreter. Native interpreters view the Arabic language and Islam as inseparable (Turner Medhi. 1978). Since Arabic is the language of the Quran and the messenger of Islam Mohammad, the language shapes the worldview of the Muslim (Desmond 1968). Arabic is viewed by those who speak it as a language dedicated to God's word, and the delivery of the word of those who spoke it before. Native interpreters are generally Muslim or have at least been exposed a great deal to Islamic literature, culture and practice. This gives the interpreter more insight into the language and its use. Translating such expressions is

interpreting culture and religion where the process has to focus on the context rather than the content.

### **Social Location**

The dialects of Arabic are complex based on the local culture that influences the way people behave, interact, and engage with each other and with their groups (Al-Khatib, 2000). The dialects reveal the social location of the speaker, including character, origin, level of education, and other aspects that Arabs consider essential to know when communicating. Knowledge of relative social positions establishes "right relations" in forms of address and level of shared contextual knowledge (see also Emery, 2000 and Abdel-Jawad, 2000). Dialect informs these "right relations". For a native speaker, listening to individuals interact within the society will give away a number of identifying points about the relative social locations of the interlocutors.

Interaction management in Arabic, such as the culturally and socially "proper" beginnings, middles and endings of locutions, can be observed in the sociolinguistic patterning in many common situations such as discussions, sermons, lectures, interviews, meetings, or even ordering food in a restaurant or café. Ting-Toomey (1999) provides an excellent overview of how these complex interactions influence communications both intra and interculturally. Again, violations of such foundational rules by native speakers would be noted and maybe even commented on since most of these are cultural rules as much as linguistic rules. If violations of these

sociolinguistic norms occur by non-native speakers, or culturally distant Arabic speakers, it could lead to potentially significant misunderstandings resulting from different cultural assumptions and attitudes. An example of this can be seen in the use of honorifics. While in the US titles are somewhat limited, social rankings through titles are extremely rich in Arabic. Addressing a gentleman who is well dressed may be addressed as “afandim”, and one who appears to be in high status is “be-h”. A term left over from Turkish is “basha”, which outranks “be-h”. “Afandi” would be used in a sarcastic form of “afandim”. Respectful but deferential honorifics that might be employed include “ustaz” meaning teacher, “siyadtak” (sir) or “hadritak” (ma’am), “hajj” for those who look more pious or religious and may have made the pilgrimage, “sayid” (Mr.), “sitt” (Mrs.), or “anisa” (Miss). The term “mu-allim” could refer to a teacher or educator but could even be used to address a floor supervisor, foreman or even a hashish dealer. Young men may be called “arees” meaning bridegroom, or “aumm”(uncle), as a respectful term to be used not only with relatives but also with elders who are strangers. If a young man looks like they are in the military the use of “kaptin” is applied. “Rayyis” is boss but is used for waiters also. The familiar, “ibni” (my son), is a friendly term as well, utilized when trying to convince someone who is younger of some idea or concept. Using “walad” (boy) or “bint” (girl) to address a young person suggests an unfriendly manner usually followed by an order.

### **Social Location of Interpreters of Arabic**

Many factors act either in favor of, or against, Arabic interpreters working in Iraq. Their ethnicity, religious preference, political affiliation, dialect and region of origin can all affect the cooperation that they will or will not receive from the local population. Often cultural enhancements such as gifts, cash bribes, and investment in building relationships over time can help in repairing relations. Arabic interpreters may attempt to assure the locals that they are on their side and not the visitors’, even when this is not case, simply to improve their reception vis-à-vis the local population. The ethical and professional dimensions of the work of the interpreter are very real challenges that anyone engaging services need be alert to (Baker, 2010; Cameron, 2014; Inghilleri, 2008).

The language proficiency of Arab interpreters who are born in the Middle East will generally depend on the level of education, and time spent in their native culture. The level of their proficiency in English typically reflects their education in English either in their native country (or outside in the case of migrants) and the amount of time spent in an English-speaking country, which will affect their proficiency in both English and their native language. It may improve their English while decreasing their native language proficiency. Those educated in English-speaking countries will generally have much more proficient English language skills and cultural comprehension relative to the English speakers for whom they are interpreting, but their Arabic skills may lack local currency.

Arabs in most regions of the Middle East may look down at those who leave to live in European or American countries. This is a situation that can increase the difficulties for interpreters in many instances. Interpreters who are native to a region and return to their region to operate as an aid to westerners will not be favored or given a better treatment. The westerners that are accompanying the interpreter may get a better treatment than the interpreter as strangers and, as such, guests. Hostility accrues towards an individual of their own that is aiding the “other side”, and if the westerners are not Muslims, there will be additional complexity that the interpreter has to deal with regarding how the group will view him.

Local and/or native interpreters know the culture, so speaking in a cultural context may come naturally to them. Native interpreters may hesitate to translate information that might be culturally inappropriate. They might not relay information if they believe it may potentially impact their family and friends, or threaten their own lives, and may hesitate to disclose their actions/inactions to their employer. They may simply, in these cases, resort to mistranslating, offering different information than otherwise relayed, by refusing, by changing the subject or indicating that it may not be culturally appropriate.

Interpreters can be very instrumental in navigating through the cultural terrain provided they are from the region or, better yet, the local area. If the interpreter is from a region that is neutral or non-hostile to the target audience's

region, maximum benefit may be obtained during the interpretation process. It is also important that the interpreter is familiar with the dialect of the target audience, because, while speaking MSA is helpful, better results are obtained when the interpreter is speaking the local dialect or sub-dialect. The target audience will simply dismiss the interpreter's points or questions if dialects or cultural etiquettes are mishandled. Most audiences in the Middle East tend to be very particular about such mechanics and in are in some cases non-forgiving, especially toward those who are native interpreters. This marks a disadvantage to using a native interpreter since the target audience will have higher expectations of the individual than they might from a non-native interpreter. Arabs tend to have higher expectations of other Arab natives when it comes to following cultural and language rules and expectations.

Often the military will not have the luxury of having an optimally socially-located individual as an interpreter. However, close attention must be given to the difference between the culture of the target area and that of the interpreter's native culture. The target audience that the military intends to conduct a meeting with using an interpreter may or may not be receptive to the individual interpreter, for reasons that have nothing to do with his or her skills in translating from English into Arabic, and which may not be readily apparent to the American engaging the services of the interpreter. For an excellent introduction to

the complex social locations of military interpreters in Iraq during 2003-2011, please see Cameron (2014).

Interpreters who are not from the culture will have to interpret twice; first interpreting the language and secondly the culture. In these cases it is important to note that interpreters who are not native to the region must learn or become intimate with the target culture in order to interpret most accurately. Arab interpreters, especially, will perform many checks and balances on the appropriateness of information and its value in a cultural context before a translation is rendered. Using native interpreters may sometimes be disadvantageous to the commander as these interpreters may be more reserved about their actions, answers and interpretations. The interpreter may find him or herself alienated from both sides.

### **Conclusion**

During an interpreted exchange in a non-permissive environment, all eyes are on the interpreter to ensure the message is interpreted as it was intended to be. In military After Action Reports and soldier's stories, the individual efforts of interpreters may disappear entirely, and a great deal of crucial information about the exchange is lost. The soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines present know that the interpreter played a crucial role in relaying mission-critical information, but they lack an evaluative framework that allows them to account for their reliance on interpreters to mediate relationships with local populations. Anecdotal evidence abounds about

interpreters, mistranslations, confusion, successes and errors, but very little research exists that studies actual acts of interpretation in non-permissive environments. Without direct data about how interpreted exchanges occur in non-permissive environments, no correlations can be examined to help: develop substantive trainings to improve how military personnel utilize interpreters in non-permissive environments; improve the assessment and evaluation of interpreter performance; create guidelines for interpreter actions in fraught circumstances; or develop an relevant assessment of an interpreter's social location vis-à-vis the local population. While units might have to accept whatever interpreter is provided, better preparation of the unit to assess and utilize the interpreter in accord with that individual's strengths and weaknesses within a specific operational environment is crucial, and developing those tools must be based on high quality field-based social science research.

## References

- .(2001). Negotiations during Peace Support Operations. Dispatches, 8(2), Kingston, Canada: Canada Army Lessons Learned Centre.
- Abdel-Jawad, H. (2000). A Linguistic and Sociopragmatic and Cultural Study of Swearing in Arabic. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 13(2): 217-240.
- Abu-Absi, S. (1986). The modernization of Arabic: Problems and prospects. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 28(3): 337-348.
- AIIC. (2012). Conflict Zone Field Guide for Civilian Translators/Interpreters and Users of Their Services, Version 3/2012. International Association of Conference Interpreters. Retrieved from <http://aiic.net/page/3853/aiic-red-t-and-fit-introduce-the-first-conflict-zone-field-guide/lang/1>
- Al-Khatib, M. (2000). The Arab World: Language and Cultural Issues. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 13(2): 121-125.
- Al Qinaï, J. (2012). Convergence and Divergence in the Interpretation of Quranic Polysemy and Lexical Recurrence. *Journal of the Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 16(10): 83-109.
- Aranguri, C., Davidson, B., & Ramirez, R. (2006). Patterns of communication through Interpreters: A detailed sociolinguistic analysis. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 21: 623-629.
- Baker, C. (2010). The Care and Feeding of Linguists: The Working Environment of Interpreters, Translators, and Linguists During Peacekeeping in Bosnia. *War & Society*, 29(2): 154-175.
- Baker, M. (2001). *Routledge encyclopedia of translation studies*. London: Routledge.
- Borden, J. (2011). A Crisis of Trust and Cultural Incompatibility: A Red Team Study of Mutual Perceptions of Afghan National Security Force Personnel and U.S. Soldiers in Understanding and Mitigating the Phenomena of ANSF - Committed Fratricide-Murders. Unclassified U.S. Army Report.
- Bos, G. & Soeters, J. (2006). Interpreters at work: Experiences from Dutch and Belgian peace operations. *International Peacekeeping*, 13(2);261-268.
- Cameron, I. (2014). Social Positioning of Translators in the Iraq War 2003-2011. (Unpublished Master's thesis). Trinity College, University of Oxford; Oxford, U.K.

- Cooper, R. L. (1989). *Language planning and social change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Desmond, S. (1968). *The Arab World*. New York: Time-Life.
- Emery, P. (2000). Greeting, Congratulating and Commiserating in Omani Arabic. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 13(2): 196-216.
- Fatahi, N., Nordholm, L., Mattsson, B., & Hellstrom, M. (2010). "Experiences of Kurdish warwounded refugees in communication with Swedish authorities through interpreter." *Patient Education and Counseling*, 78(2): 160-165.
- Feghali, E. (1997). Arab cultural communication patterns. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. 21(3), 345-378.
- Footitt, H. & Kelly, M. (2012). *Languages at war: Policies and practices of language contacts in conflict*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gerver, D. (1972). *Simultaneous and consecutive interpretation and human information processing: Research report HR*. London: Social Science Research Council.
- Gile, D. (2001). *Consecutive vs. simultaneous: Which is more accurate?* University of Lyon. Available at: <http://www.soc.nii.ac.jp/jais/kaishi2001/pdf/03-danielgilefinal.pdf>
- Gile, D. (2009). *Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Habash, N. Y. (2010). *Introduction to Arabic Natural Language Processing*. Morgan & Claypool.
- Haeri, N. (2000). "Form and ideology: Arabic sociolinguistics and beyond." *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 29: 61-87.
- Inghilleri, M. (2008). *The ethical task of the translator in the geo-political arena: From Iraq to Guantanamo Bay*. Translation Studies.
- Kennedy, C. H., D. E. Jones, and A. A. Arita. (2007) "Multicultural Experiences of U.S. Military Psychologists: Current Trends and Training Target Areas." *Psychological Services* 4(3) : 158-167. PsycARTICLES. Web. 25 Feb. 2014.
- Mahmood, M., A. Alameri, S. Jawad, Y. Alani , S. Zuerlein , G. Nakano, W. Anderson, C.
- Beadling. 2013. "Cross-Cultural Communication Capabilities of U.S. Military Trainers: Host Nation Perspective." *Military Medicine* 178(6): 631-637.
- Nida, E & Taber, C. (1969). *The theory and practice of translation*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Roy, C. (1996). *An Interactional Sociolinguistic Analysis of Turn-Taking in an Interpreted Event*.

Interpreting, 1: 39-67.

Schmitt, E. (2014). U.S. Takes Training Role in Africa as Threats Grow and Budgets Shrink. NY Times March 5, 2014, on page A4. Retrieved from <http://nyti.ms/1dpybsD>

Suleiman, Y. (2003). The Arabic Language and National Identity. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Takeda, K. (2009). War and Interpreters. *Across Languages and Cultures*, 10: 49-62.

Ting-Toomey, S. (1999) *Communicating Across Cultures*. New York: Guilford Press.

Turner Medhi, B. (Ed.). (1978). *The Arabs in America: 1492-1977: A chronology and fact book*. Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana.

U.S. Department of the Army. (2006). *Counterinsurgency. Field Manual 3-24*. Headquarters, Department of the Army: Washington D.C. Available online at <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/Repository/Materials/COIN-FM3-24.pdf>

Van Dijk, A., & Soeters, J. (2008). Language matters in the Military. *Contributions to Conflict Management, Peace Economics and Development*. 7: 303-325.

Van Dijk, A., & Soeters, J. & De Ridder, R. (2010). Smooth Translation? A Research Note on the Cooperation between Dutch Service Personnel and Local Interpreters in Afghanistan. *Armed Forces & Society*, 36(5): 917-925.

Versteegh, K. 2001. *The Arabic Language*. Edinburgh University Press.

Vieira, A. 2014. Complications in Cross-cultural Communications: Using Interpreters. *Cross-Cultural Competence for a Twenty-First Century Military: Culture, the Flipside of COIN*, R. Greene Sands & A., Greene-Sands (eds.) Lexington: Lanham MD. Pp.195-210.

# *Author Biography*



Sam Almesfer

Sam (Bassam) Almesfer is a member of the TRADOC and Army Culture Center. He is a native speaker of Arabic, studied in Saudi Arabia literature and religion, traveled and lived for over twenty years in the Middle East, and is well versed in Levantine, Peninsula and Gulf, Iraqi, and Egyptian dialects. He deployed with the US military to the region on multiple occasions as an interpreter and as an analyst. He teaches and conducts discussion seminars in culture, language and other topics pertaining to the Middle East. He is a graduate of the University of Arizona with a Masters degree in Educational Technology. His topics of focus include cultural linguistics, and understanding the Arab world.

# *Author Biography*



Aimee Vieira

Aimee Vieira, sociologist, is a Senior Research Fellow of ISCL and an Associate Professor of Sociology in Norwich University's School of Justice Studies & Sociology, one of the six senior U.S. military colleges. As such, she has been educating future military leaders for the U.S. Air Force, Army, Marines, and Navy since 2006. Dr. Vieira also manages ISCL's Annual Fellows Program. For nearly twenty years, Dr. Vieira has investigated variations in the experiences of different language speakers in contact. This has ranged from research on English second language post-secondary students in the United States, to rural linguistic minority communities in Quebec, and stems from her early experiences in international exchanges with both English and non-English speakers, as well as from her own linguistic and cultural experiences.

Dr. Vieira regularly serves as a consultant on curriculum design, assessment and textbook development for a variety of clients. Some of her past clients include: the American Council on Education; Educational Testing Services; Sage Publications; Creative Academic Solutions LLC; and Tailored Training Programs LLC. Dr. Vieira completed her PhD at the Université de Montréal in Sociologie, and her MA (Sociology) and BA (Interdisciplinary Humanities) at Michigan State University.



DIFFERENTIATING BETWEEN **ISLAMIC TERRORISTS**  
AND TERRORIST OPPORTUNISTS IN **WEST AFRICA**  
(WILL CONTROL OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION BE EFFECTIVE?)

CAPTAIN CALEB P. SLAYTON

# Abstract

The study of Islamist terrorism in relation to other forms of violence and insurgency in Africa is in need of reframing. The first error of analysis comes in applying single case studies to the continent as a whole. Africa is a continent, host to dozens of intertwined religious practices, hundreds of cultural influences and thousands of ethno-linguistic backgrounds. Second, despite over a hundred years of transformative history on violent conflicts, the information is too easily neglected in favor of the latest terrorist theory or "ideological" root cause.

Africa includes 54 countries.<sup>1</sup> Poor analysis generalizes Islamic State activity in Libya as "African terrorism." Not much better; Al-Shabaab becomes all of "East Africa" and a singular group like Ansar Dine of Northern Mali is quickly designated "Sahel terrorism." Good analysis should look not only to where terrorism and specific ideologies are, but with more specific geographic scrutiny explore where they are NOT and why.

This paper will argue that while Islamist terrorism includes an ideological root, each specific African country's historical, political, social, religious, economic and ethnic context, continues to influence new and resurgent groups. The Islamist threat is real, along with the Islamist terrorist ideology that morphs and molds to fit the above mentioned environment context. This paper will discuss the general theories of violence put forth for the continent. The paper will then seek to argue that current day Islamist organizations are still unique products in part due to their regional influences, looking at West Africa as the region of focus. Finally, while religion plays a role in root causes and possible counter-terrorism solutions, the overall thesis will question whether the control of Islamic education is a viable approach in West Africa.

1. For a recent example, notice how barely a half-dozen countries quickly become "terrorism" on the entire continent: "Thomas Joscelyn Testimony: "Terrorism in Africa: The Imminent Threat to the United States", in House Committee on Homeland Security (Washington D.C.: Foundation For Defense of Democracies, 2015).

### Literature Review: Africa Security Analysis

Africa's many wars have often lent themselves to tidy sub-descriptions. Christopher Clapham famously catalogued Africa's violence into the following categories: liberation wars, separatist movements, reform (ideology) movements, warlordism. Morten Bøås and Kevin C. Dunn contend that now mostly the latter is present on the African landscape.<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Gettleman has recently argued that Africa's "Forever Wars" appear to have no root ideology, goal or discernible ethnic or political cause to violence. Gettleman's broad theory blames self-interested leaders, opportunists of the structural space for perpetuating violence across the continent.<sup>3</sup>

Joseph-Achille Mbembe attempts to correct this frustrated and partly exotic view of violence on the diverse African continent. Instead of dissecting the distinct political situations, authors wrongly regard them as "incomprehensible, pathological, and abnormal." The negative, self-destructive caricature sadly becomes the entire continent of 54 countries.<sup>4</sup> In the last ten years, journalists and analysts overly familiar with neighboring regions have attempted to overstate the Islamist terrorist threat from Senegal all the way to Kenya. The news paints a picture of terrorist domination. But in Smith's outstanding edited work, the authors discuss the pitfalls

of generalizing terrorism and its so called "root causes."<sup>5</sup> Africa's wars are not inexplicable, exotic or dominated by terrorism.

In an attempt to correct the generalized analysis of a diverse continent, many analysts have settled on oversimplified regional security descriptions. It is still too simple to describe regional challenges as Arab verses non-Arab, Muslim verses Christian, Islamist verses pacifist or China verses the rest. Anna Simons considers the youth bulge, rural to urban migration and the loss of traditional manhood transitions in Africa as ingredients to unrest. Young men need an outlet, a way to test their limits. The elders and religious wise men are losing their disciples to competing invitations of tests of strengths.<sup>6</sup>

Moving to West Africa specifically, Ben Ezeamalu, Patience Ogbo, and Danny Hoffman researched gang activity and child soldiering in Nigeria and Sierra Leone. They concluded that poor economies and competing political powers can create long-term instability. Poor job markets push youth to a circle of violence, searching out the next gang leader or guerrilla officer who will hand them a gun and a salary.<sup>7</sup> In complimentary research, writers like Henrik Vigh conclude that youth are simply

2. Morten Bøås and Kevin C. Dunn, *African Guerrillas: Raging against the Machine* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2007), 3-5.

3. Jeffrey Gettleman, "Africa's Forever Wars: Why the Continent's Conflicts Never End," *Foreign Policy* (2010).

4. Joseph-Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, *Studies on the History of Society and Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 8-9.

5. Malinda Smith, *Securing Africa: Post-9/11 Discourses on Terrorism* (Farnham ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).

6. Michael Freeman and Hy Rothstien, eds., *Gangs & Guerrillas: Ideas from Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism* (Naval Postgraduate School (technical report book edition), 2011).

7. Danny Hoffman, "The City as Barracks," *Cultural Anthropology* 22, no. 3 (2007). And, Ben Ezeamalu and Patience Ogbo, "The Lagos Gang War ", <http://234next.com/csp/cms/sites/Next/Home/5664200-146/story.csp> (accessed 17 February 2011).

looking for a place to belong. Even an ideology encompassing violence will suffice.<sup>8</sup>

Michael Freeman elaborates on the arguments of psychologist Fathali Moghaddam to explain that any brand of terrorist arrives at their conclusion through a series of mental steps. No social, economic, or political condition guarantees that a youth will join a terrorist group. At any given time, there are millions of West Africans, concerned with their condition but exploring various options before, only possibly, committing to terrorist acts.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to Gettleman, David Rosen concluded that child soldiering and guerrilla warfare in the Mano River region, which includes Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, did have an underlying ideology. He suggested that a localized culture of secret organizations and customs directly influenced the strategies of warlords. While economic incentives were strong recruitment factors, patrimonial systems could explain in part the structure of the organizational networks.<sup>10</sup> Returning to Boas and Dunn, the authors suggest dissecting the prescriptive "warlordism" of Africa's conflicts into distinct historical, social and political factors for each region.<sup>11</sup> The authors

should also reconsider including "reform," specifically religious reform movements, as an influence in current security challenges.

Paul Williams in "War and Conflict in Africa," while still mismanaging the "Africa" title, analyzes the continent's violence through its various contexts, "ingredients," and possible solutions to the violence.<sup>12</sup> Many authors have blamed colonialism, ethnicity, greed, grievance or religion as the foundational scapegoat. Williams' research rejects a single root cause of conflict but instead concludes that while elements of each could be present in all conflicts, each conflict need not have the same root cause. Despite Gettleman's generalized Africa approach and Williams' carefully dissected approach, they each agree on at least one point. Self-interested politicians and power-hungry leaders are a significant ingredient to every conflict.

Like Boas and Dunn, Williams sidelines the "reformist" or religious root cause of violence. At the publication of his convincing work, only Sudan was said to have had a strong Islamist agenda behind its civil war. Perhaps redeeming Williams' exclusion, Baffour Ankomah argues that militant Islamist groups, like Boko Haram in Nigeria, utilize terrorist tactics in a manner that inhibits their political goals. Their tactical practices appear to contradict their stated political agenda. Instead, Boko Haram is said by many to respond to society much like civil war warlords of the same region decades earlier.<sup>13</sup>

8. Henrik Vigh, "Conflictual Motion and Political Inertia: On Rebellions and Revolutions in Bissau and Beyond," *African Studies Review* 52, no. 2 (2009).

9. Freeman and Rothstien, eds.

10. David M. Rosen, *Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism* (Piscataway, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005). See also, Bøås and Dunn, Chapter 3.

11. Bøås and Dunn, 9.

12. Paul Williams, *War & Conflict in Africa* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

13. Baffour Ankomah, "How Africa Can Beat Terrorism," *New African*, June June, 2014.

Even after joining insurgent or terrorist groups, the motivation to remain a fighter can still change. Freeman notes that some insurgents who have joined for various reasons maintain their violent occupations but may convert them into money-making ventures. Herbert Howe adds that the economic incentive sustained other West African civil wars far beyond their ideological root cause.<sup>14</sup> While outside African observers may be tempted to blame international meddlers, neo-colonialism<sup>15</sup> or other general factors, the reality of West Africa's conflicts deserves much greater research integrity.

As this literature review shows, the tendency to generalize Africa's conflicts is common. Arguments that include the neo-colonial boogeyman too often discount the sovereignty of Africa's many countries and heads of state. It is also misleading to blanket African states as wholly corrupt castles or land masses of rebellion and pillaging. African countries that depend on tourism do not appreciate the hyperbole. The best analysis on Africa's security challenges looks at each country's history, social factors, religious and cultural movements on their own; considering the similarities of current terrorism and past violence.

The intent of this paper is to describe the root causes and contexts of Islamist terrorism in West Africa. While there

14. Herbert Howe, *Ambiguous Order: Military Forces in African States* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 88.

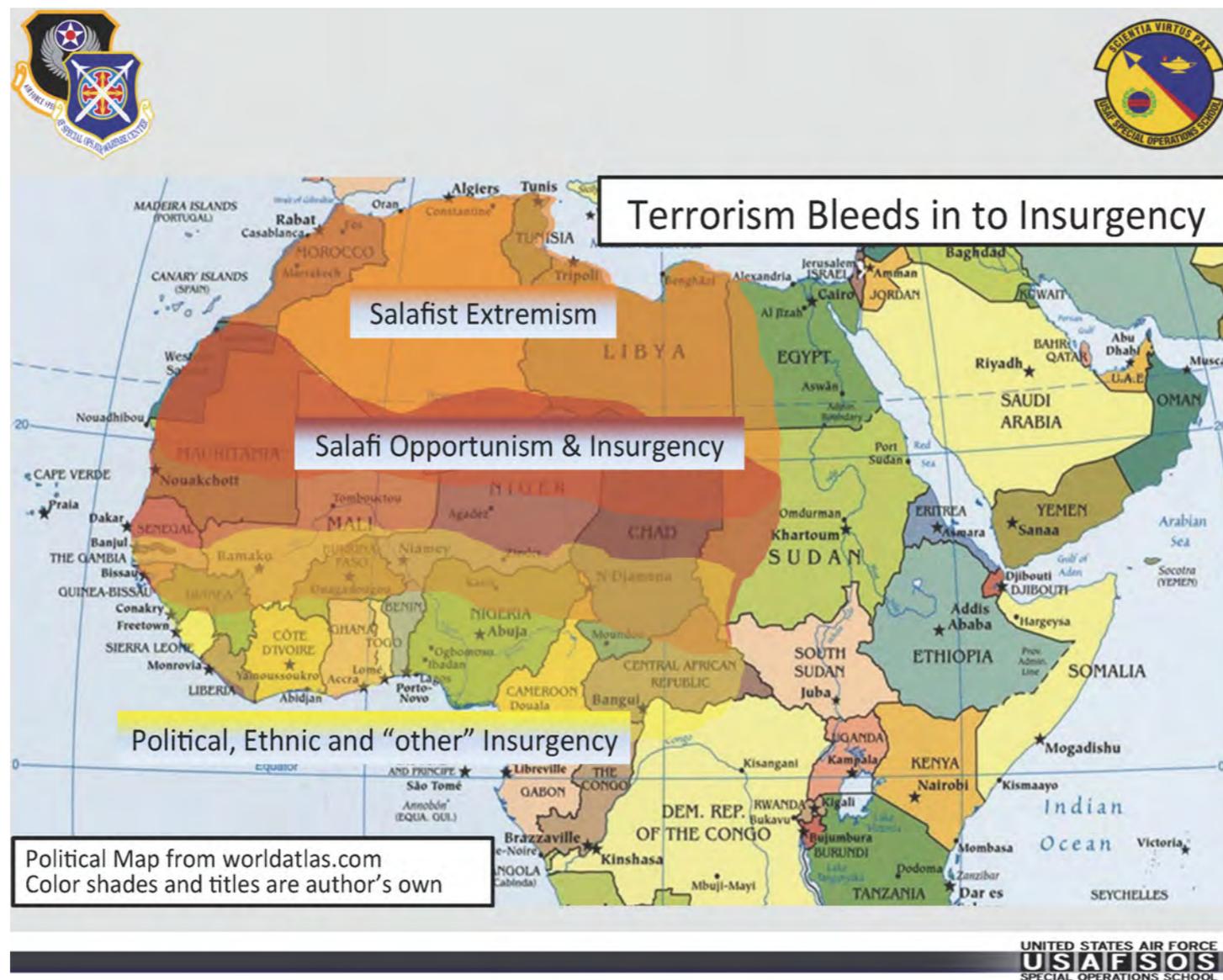
15. Jeremy Keenan is one of a handful of authors severely skeptical of Western motives in West Africa see: Jeremy Keenan, *The Dark Sahara: America's War on Terror in Africa* (London: Pluto Press, 2009).

may be a few general characteristics of Islamist terrorism in West Africa, depending on the region, country and social groupings, the recruitment influence and ideological strength changes drastically. Terrorism and Salafi extremism have dominated the recent commentary on West Africa's violence. It is time to bring the pendulum back to center.

### **West African Violence in a Graphic**

The first Africa graphic on the following page depicts three overlapping zones. Admittedly, the color swathes violate the generalization "rule" but they provide a framework from which to consolidate more specific research. The orange zone depicts the general area where "Islamist Extremists" tend to have stronger ideological following and roots. As it will be noted in this paper, the Islamist message achieves greater numbers of recruits in the orange zone even if its message is still rejected by the vast majority of the population.

The red zone is the "Islamist Extremist & Insurgent Opportunist" zone. In this color swathe, the Islamist message is weak and prone to rapid compromise in order to adapt to the environment. Insurgents of all kinds overlap loosely with Islamist extremists in opportunistic fashion. This zone is perhaps the most difficult to read in relation to violent group motives and is also the most misunderstood and falsely generalized. The last yellow zone represents violence that is rarely Islamist inspired at the root. Ethnic conflict, social and political grievance



along with dozens of other factors, mostly associated with Williams' analysis, fan the flame of violence in the yellow zone. The same color zones could apply to East Africa and the Horn, a subject for further research.

Caveat: the color zones certainly do not imply that violence exists in every colored location. The colors simply represent the regions where three different manifestations of violence in relation to Islamist terrorism tend to appear, if ever.

### Islamist Influence in North Africa

The political, tribal and social dynamics are part of North Africa's unrest but the Islamist presence is overt and powerful.<sup>16</sup> Tunisia is a unique case study. It was awarded the Economist's "Country of the Year" for 2014 as a result of its relatively smooth political transition post Arab spring<sup>17</sup> In stark contrast, it also has one of the highest single rates of Islamist fighters flowing to Syria. The U.S. Department of State and the Tunisian government declared Ansar al-Shari'a's (AAS) various branches as terrorist groups responsible for terrorist attacks inside Tunisia and the larger scale insurgency in Libya.<sup>18</sup> Some AAS branch leaders have since pledged loyalty to the so called Islamic State based in Iraq and Syria.

Libya is a much more complex case study. Much of the Arab media paints a black and white picture of Islamists verses nationalists where groups such as Ansar al-Shari'a, 17 February Martyrs Brigade, Libya Shield, and most all Misratan revolutionaries are enemy-Islamists funded by Qatar, Sudan, and Turkey.<sup>19</sup> The "nationalists," fighting to expand power beyond their Eastern capital of Tobrouk, are led by General Khalifa Hiftar, who recently returned from two decades in the U.S. Since Spring 2014, large

numbers of militia units and the greater Libyan National Army (LNA) have sworn allegiance to General Hiftar.<sup>20</sup>

Andrew Engal and Ayman Grada in a "Policy Watch" report clarify that while the Islamist threat is significant in numbers and ideology, the ground truth is much more politically and socially complicated, especially in Western Libya. When Qaddafi's regime tumbled in 2011, the "orderly" system of illegal trade, illicit networks and controlling regime beneficiaries also fell apart. What used to be a fragile but heavily monitored gray market between Tunisia, Libya, and even South to the Sahel, outgrew the security checks. Many original turf leaders and newcomers were flush with weapons and potential allies to carve out or maintain their fiefdoms.<sup>21</sup>

Islamists searching for allies promised Libyan Amazigh more cultural respect in exchange for their assistance. Religious ideas are not the only bargaining chip. The Libyan transitional government originally offered youth and militias attractive packages to join the national army. The response was overwhelming and unsustainable. With tens of thousands of militia men, gangs and warlords there was no way to create a dignified outlet that so many youth craved. Parts of Libya did become recruiting and training grounds for the Islamic State and other Islamist groups.<sup>22</sup> As recent groups of fighters and influential

17. "Our Country of the Year: Hope Springs," The Economist, 20 December 2014.

18. Terrorist Designations of Three Ansar Al-Shari'a Organizations and Leaders, 2014. And Monia Ghanmi, "Tunisia Declares Ansar Al-Sharia Terrorist Group", Magharebia [http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/awi/features/2013/08/28/feature-01](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2013/08/28/feature-01) (accessed 20 March 2014).

19. "Rogue Libya General Gains Stream of Allies", ArabNews.com <http://m.arabnews.com/content/1400720069913187100/Middle%20East> (accessed 23 May 2014). And Andrew Engel and Ayman Grada, Libya's Other Battle (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2014).

20. "Guide to Key Libyan Militias", BBC News <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-19744533> (accessed 26 Sept 2014).

21. Engel and Grada.

22. Christopher S. Chivvis and Jeffrey Martini, Libya after Qaddafi: Lessons and Implications for the Future (RAND Corporation, 2014).

leaders of hardline rebel groups pledge loyalty to ISIS, they take their weapons with them. Opportunism has a key role to play in Libya, but the Islamist extremist ideology is also a strong factor used in recruitment.

Egypt took a black and white description of the Islamist threat and prescribed the solution accordingly. The government outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood organization, on 16 June 2015 upholding the death sentence against their Supreme Guide, Mohammed Badie and former president, Mohamed Morsi.<sup>23</sup> Dozens of private mosques reverted to national leadership control and hundreds of suspect private social services were dismantled. Hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood supporters were jailed and sentenced to death.<sup>24</sup> The lead threat in Egypt is Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis who has avowed allegiance to the Islamic State (IS).<sup>25</sup> While Egypt's President, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, agrees to military offensives, he regards the threat to be one of ideology. Destroy the ideology and its military base and the problem should cease to exist

### North Africa's Counter-Islamist Strategy: Education

The descriptive analysis from North Africa's political, religious, and military leaders lends itself to a very specific

23. "Update: Morsi Sentenced to Life in Prison over Spying with Hamas, Iran", The Cairo Post <http://www.thecairopost.com/news/155704/news/update-morsi-sentenced-to-life-in-prison-over-spying-with-hamas-iran> (accessed 30 June 2015).
24. Habib Toumi, "Saudi Arabia Sacks Preachers for Brotherhood Links", GulfNews.com <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudi-arabia-sacks-preachers-for-brotherhood-links-1.1331677> (accessed 21 May 2014). Daniel Atzori, "Egypt, Saudi Arabia Ban Muslim Brotherhood", About Oil <http://www.abo.net/oilportal/topic/view.do?contentId=2232818> (accessed 7 July 2014).
25. Shaul Shay, Egypt and the Threat of Islamic Terror (Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2014).

counter-Islamist strategy: education. Even before President Sisi commanded the most prestigious Sunni institution of learning, the Al-Azhar University, to revolutionize its approach to Islamic education, many of the school's leaders had already supported the initiative.<sup>26</sup> The Sheikh of Al-Azhar, Ahmed Al-Tayeb and the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Dr. Ali Al-Gomma', quoted ISIS and its ideology to be the worst enemy of Islam.<sup>27</sup> A recent poll shows that North Africa's youth see ISIS as the biggest threat to the region; even more serious than corruption and economic woes.<sup>28</sup>

From Pakistan's popular Sheikh Tahir Ul-Qadri to Saudi Arabia's monarchy to Morocco's female Ambassador to Ghana, moderate Islamic education is said to be the best offense and defense against Islamist threats.<sup>29</sup> Saudi Arabia has donated millions of dollars to support the writing of fatwas and the propagation of Islamic education to the world.<sup>30</sup> Egyptian Sheikh Al-Tayeb said the Muslim world needs more than education; it needs to control the

26. "Egyptian President Al-Sisi at Al-Azhar: We Must Revolutionize Our Religion", MEMRITVVideos <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEhNarfrlec> (accessed 28 Jan 2015).
27. "Top Muslim Cleric: Islamic Terror Is Ideologically Motivated", UnitedwithIsrael.org <http://unitedwithisrael.org/top-muslim-cleric-islamic-terror-is-ideologically-motivated/> (accessed 27 March 2015). YOUSUF MUHAMMAD, "Flawed Curricula to Blame for 'Takfir' Mindset: Scholars", Arab News <http://arabnews.com/saudi-arabia/article505298.ece> (accessed 26 Jan 2012).
28. Asda'a Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey, (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2015).
29. MUHAMMAD. Muhammad Tahir ul-Qadri, Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombings (London: Minhaj-ul-Quran International, 2010).
30. "Saudi Kingdom Donates \$100 Million to the Center for Counter-Terrorism (Arabic)", New Today <http://www.newtoday.ae/saudi/63861.html> (accessed 16 Aug 2014).

education.<sup>31</sup> Moroccan political policy is to spread proper Islam throughout the Muslim world as the immediate response to thousands of Moroccans fighting in global jihadi movements. In an overt marriage of religion and state, the Moroccan Ambassador to Ghana strongly urged one of the largest West African Sufi leaders to proselytize moderate Islam throughout West Africa.<sup>32</sup>

North Africa sees the rest of Africa in binary fashion. In Muslim majority countries with insurgent conflict there is either a false representation of Islam or a conspiracy to disrupt Islamic influence.<sup>33</sup> Both are root causes of conflict. The Algerian government mandated new religious training for its 23,000 Imams. While Algeria typically refrains from uninvited external assistance, Morocco and Egypt have developed large Imam exchange programs. Hundreds of religious leaders from places like Senegal, Mali, and Mauritania will receive North African Islamic training in order to control the Muslim message in West Africa.<sup>34</sup> The Al-Azhar University is implementing carefully

crafted Islamic education that they hope will carry through satellite and internet feeds the world over.

North Africa's influence into Sub-Saharan Africa of recent has been more religious than anything else. Economic investments and development assistance have been both minuscule compared to trade outside Sub-Saharan Africa and when present, it is tied to Islamic soft power.<sup>35</sup> In places where ideology forms a strong basis for Islamist recruitment, Islamic education from a more moderate supplier could be an important counter-terrorism strategy. But what happens when Islamic education from one cultural, political identity seeks to control its message in a foreign and over-generalized West African context? Islam in West Africa is incredibly diverse in history, practice and pluralistic behavior; none of which is respected or understood by North Africa's religious or academic scholars.

### Islamist Influence in the Sahel

The next sections will look at the terrorist and insurgent groups in three layers. The top layer is the easiest to describe and the most common narrative of the media. It lists the various actors in the terrorists groups, connects them to acts of violence and often attempts to connect their movements directly to a single global trend or ideology. The second layer looks into the unique social, political and ethnic realities influencing each group. These

31. "Top Muslim Cleric: Islamic Terror Is Ideologically Motivated".

32. Adnan Adams, "Moroccan Ambassador Meets Leader of Tijaniyya Council in Ghana", Modern Ghana <http://www.modernghana.com/news/609795/1/moroccan-ambassador-meets-leader-of-tijaniyya-coun.html> (accessed 3 May 2015).

33. Sheikh Ahmed Al-Tayeb has expressed this view numerous times. Here is a recent example: "Top Muslim Cleric Ahmed Al-Tayeb Urges Education Reform to Counter Extremism", The Guardian <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/23/top-muslim-cleric-ahmed-al-tayeb-urges-education-reform-to-counter-extremism> (accessed 31 March 2015).

34. See Ahmed Charai, Morocco, Counter-Terrorism, and the Us-Africa Summit (Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2014). Walid Ramzi, "Maghreb Religious Leaders Tackle Takfirism", Magharebia [http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/awi/features/2014/10/07/feature-02](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2014/10/07/feature-02) (accessed 30 October 2014). Frederic M. Wehrey and Anouar Boukhars, eds., Perilous Desert: Insecurity in the Sahara (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013), 130.

35. "Looking up the Nile", The Economist <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21646259-after-decades-ignoring-africa-egypt-re-engaging-continent-looking> (accessed 27 March 2015).

factors take time to study and understand. The third layer and the direct focus of this paper will look at religious education movements and forms of religious control in the last 200 years in West Africa. The three layers taken together will identify unique challenges to each country and will hopefully discourage a generalized approach to counter-extremism in the Sahel.<sup>36</sup>

Terrorist personalities are rarely the most influential in their respective religions but they steal most of the attention. Abdelmalek Droukdel is the current leader of the fragmented al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) based out of Algeria. It is questionable how sincere the leader's efforts are in areas south of Algeria. He has limited his appearance on the media scene and interestingly came out of a two-year silence only to congratulate counter-Assad rebels in a victory in Syria.<sup>37</sup> While AQIM is still responsible for the highest number of terrorist attacks in Algeria in recent years, Droukdel does not seem to nurture much sentiment for non-Arab Africa.

The splinter groups in Mali and Niger, often called AQIM affiliates, are often the result of leadership disagreements and monetary disputes. As is common in terrorist group formations, the leadership has a network but they are by no means close comrades in the Sahel. Mokhtar bil Mokhtar (MBM), also known as Khaled Abou El Abbas, is

not only one such dissenter from the AQIM ranks but a fierce competitor for power and resources. In the last three years, he has proclaimed himself leader of three different groups, El Moulethemoun (Veiled Ones), Tawqi' bil dam (Signed in Blood) and Al Mourabitoun; the latter an alliance with the Movement for Unity and Justice in West Africa (MUJAO). To gain the media attention and maintain prestige, MBM commits high profile attacks, assuring legitimacy.<sup>38</sup>

The Movement for Unity and Justice committed its first attack in October of 2011. The group was initially formed from within the ranks of Tilemsi Arab drug traffickers. It is no coincidence that Ansar Dine, another high profile yet small terrorist group operating on the border of Mali and Algeria, formed under Iyad Ag Ghali two months later.<sup>39</sup> Iyad Ag Ghali has an intricate biography which includes political posts in Saudi Arabia, member of the Qadhafi presidential guard-core and key leader within the Iriyakin Tuarag. The Ansar Dine leader is said to have converted years ago during the Islamic missionary Tablighi Jamaat movement, which influenced conservative Muslim social changes throughout the region.<sup>40</sup>

36. The "Sahel" is an environmental term to describe a band of land where the Sahara Desert yields to semi-arid lands. Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Nigeria all contain this type of environmental landscape.

37. "Le Chef D'aqmi Félicite Les Jihadistes Syriens Dans Un Message Twitter", RFI <http://rfi.my/1J8ncz4> (accessed 3 May 2015).

38. Caleb Weiss, "Al Murabitoon Claims Ansongo Suicide Attack," The Long War Journal (April 2015). <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/04/al-murabitoon-claims-ansongo-suicide-attack.php> (accessed 3 May).

39. Ivan Briscoe, *Crime after Jihad: Armed Groups, the State and Illicit Business in Post-Conflict Mali* (Clingendael: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2014).

40. Mike McGovern, "Chasing Shadows in the Dunes: Islamist Practices and Counterterrorist Policy in West Africa's Sahara-Sahel Zone," in *Securing Africa: Post-9/11 Discourses on Terrorism*, ed. Malinda Smith (Farnham ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 79-98.

Ivan Briscoe provides one of the best descriptions of Mali's "opportunist" context. In the same month that MUJAO went public, the National Liberation Movement for the Azawad (MNLA) was formed. The list of competing leadership grew as the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA) was formed in 2013 under the most influential Ifoghas leader in the Adagh region centered in Kidal, Intallah ag Attaher. In a context where power and influence is more important than ideology, the Ifoghas' chief's son, Alghabass Ag Intallah, joined ranks with the capable Ansar Dine instead of the MNLA. Merely weeks after France intervened in Mali, January of 2013, Alghabass took over the HCUA, bringing up to 80 percent of Ansar Dine's fighting force with him.<sup>41</sup> Ansar Dine itself would second-guess its strict Sharia policy and tone down its extremism in order to win back popular support.<sup>42</sup>

The Azawad movements, MNLA cited as the most secular, are all pushing for more autonomy in Northern Mali. Sporadic clashes continue between separatist, terrorist and government and United Nations forces in Mali. The surface layer of analysis would easily miss the ethnic, racial, historical and political grievances that place so called "Salafist terrorist" groups into their proper context.<sup>43</sup> One of the most recent violent groups to form is made up

of Fulani herdsmen, defending their livelihoods within the security void.<sup>44</sup>

The last group to be mentioned here is Boko Haram. The group was founded in 2002 by a Muslim teacher, Muhammad Yousouf. Taking note of poor economic conditions and lack of job opportunity for even educated Nigerians, he concluded that the West's ideas of liberalism and development were not only defunct but corrupting. Yousouf's influence grew in Northern Nigeria and clashed with political authorities. After the mysterious death of the Boko Haram leader at the hands of security forces, Abubakr Shakau took over the group. Shakau added takfirist teachings and transformed the group into the indiscriminate killer that it is today. In the first quarter of 2015, Boko Haram had kidnapped over 500 additional youth and unleashed the largest series of suicide attacks to date. As the terrorist group loses ground against the Lake Chad coalition offensive they leave a trail of destruction and bitter pillage.

Despite the recent acceptance into Al-Baghdadi's global Caliphate (IS) and attempts by journalists to market Boko Haram as yet another Islamist terrorist clone with international identity, the next two layers of analysis suggest a more involved storyline. Unless strategists can

41. Andy Morgan, "Interview: Alghabass Ag Intalla, Head of the Mia", Andy Morgan Writes <http://www.andymorganwrites.com/interview-with-alghabass-ag-intalla-head-of-the-islamic-movement-of-azawad-mia/> (accessed 30 June 2014).

42. Jemal Oumar, "Ansar Al-Din Shift Creates Doubts in Mali," Magharebia (2011). [http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/awi/features/2012/11/15/feature-02](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2012/11/15/feature-02) (accessed 15 Nov).

43. Stephanie Pezard and Michael Shurkin, "Achieving Peace in Northern Mali," (Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 2015). [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR892.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR892.html).

44. Matthieu Jublin, "Group Emerges in the Central Region", Vice News <https://news.vice.com/article/violence-on-the-rise-in-mali-as-new-armed-group-emerges-in-the-central-region> (accessed 4 May 2015).

begin to understand the violent context outside the terrorist's claims and media communications, it will be difficult to address the root of the problem.

### **Social, Ethnic, Political and Economic Context**

University professor, Umar Bashir from Khartoum, was in a very appropriate position to dissect the relationship between Arab Africa and non-Arab Africa. While highlighting the many historical and religious connections between the regions, he offered humble criticism against Arab indifference towards black Africa. More striking however, he argued that even though the West over-exaggerates the racial tensions in the Sahel, the self-defensive Arab approach of emphasizing only the mild Arab slaving elements is equally as damaging.<sup>45</sup> Another opinion, this time from Lebanon, urges Arabs to address the ignored historical grievances between the two regions.<sup>46</sup> The balanced view is instructive not only to counter-terrorism strategy but for much needed reconciliation.

Race relations in the Sahel are a minor factor within terrorist dynamics. It is evident, however, that racial tensions have both hindered and helped in terrorist recruitment strategies. Starting with Mauritania, where the ban on slavery is barely enforced, tension between the

white Berber class and black African linguistic groups such as the Wolof, Soninke and Pulaar peaked in 1989. Between 50,000 and 80,000 were exiled to neighboring Mali and Senegal.<sup>47</sup> Despite gradual reform in the last 20 years, AQIM was unable to depend on many non-Arab recruits to its ranks. Arab superiority over especially non-Arabic speakers severely stunted the terrorist potential.<sup>48</sup>

The Tuareg movements in Mali, Algeria, and Niger suffered under the same ethnic discrimination. Overly simplistic analysis names "Tuareg" as a single entity. While French colonial strategy succeeded in empowering some clan networks over others in order to prevent a unified counter-colonial front, existing racial discrimination facilitated the process. By the late 1950s it was clear that independence from France was close at hand. Today's tensions are still related to the attempt made by some influential Northern Mali leaders to carve out a white autonomous zone called the OCRS (Organisation Commune des Regions Sahariennes), disdaining the idea of black majority rule.<sup>49</sup> Today's MNLA and HCUA movements not only battle the racist undertones from within but compete with similar conservative Arab movements disgusted by MNLA's secular compromises.

45. Mohamed Omer Beshir, *Terramedia: Themes in Afro-Arab Relations* (Khartoum, Sudan: Institute of African & Asian Studies, University of Khartoum, 1982), 24.

46. While many Arab and Muslim writers will admit to indiscriminate views of black Africans by Arabs, the introspective statements are quickly followed by blaming Europe for the initial seeds of prejudice that the rest of the world tacitly mimics. Susan Abulhawa, "Confronting Anti-Black Racism in the Arab World", *Al-Jazeera English* <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/06/201362472519107286.html> (accessed 3 May 2015).

47. Wehrey and Boukhars, eds., 126.

48. Beshir, 15. And Wehrey and Boukhars, eds., 133.

49. The autonomous Sahara zone never came to fruition but is mentioned frequently in contemporary literature and journalism critiquing current political challenges and even suggesting foreign intervention conspiracy. See also: Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960*, African Studies (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 299-316.

Judith Scheele adds another dimension to the region's unspoken tensions, arguing that perhaps it is less the color of skin that promotes racial divides but instead a more cultural division. Cultural superiority comes from fluency in the Arab language. Adding Arab customs and dress is an identifier between "lesser" African ethnic groups and more elite and cultured "white" groups. Definitions of race can be flexible, attached to education, language and even adopted customs.<sup>50</sup>

While Libya's 2011-2012 revolution-turned-civil-war indeed led to an increase in terrorist activity in Mali and Niger, the terrorist headline obscured the internal realities. As the Malian army and French forces pushed north from Bamako to oust the terrorist elements and proponents of extreme Sharia interpretations from Timbuktu, Gao, and Kidal, even non-rebel light skinned Malians fled in fear.<sup>51</sup> In a few documented cases, the Bambara-dominated Malian army exacted reversed racist revenge on any "white looking" northerners.

The tit-for-tat struggle is decades old. The current High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA) leader not only distinguishes himself from lesser vassal tribes, he is wary of any government compromise that supports "Bambara colonization."<sup>52</sup> In May 2014, the Malian government miscalculated its diplomatic efforts, sending 1500 troops

to Kidal to avenge the prior week's clashes during the Prime Minister's visit, which left 36 people dead. The insurgent groups defeated the "Bambara imperialists," killing at least 50 and acquiring the weapons of 900 surrendering soldiers.<sup>53</sup> The ongoing peace-talks between roughly half a dozen separatist and insurgent groups openly distrust both Algerian neutrality and Malian motives.

Racial tensions, ethnic dimensions, political grievances and other economic and social conditions are all extremely important in understanding how terrorists exploit the recruitment space. The pyramid graphic below is an attempt to describe this complex recruitment environment. The pyramid represents Islamist terrorism and its recruits. The pyramid is supported by the pillars of takfiri ideology or Wahhabi extremism. The first small area inside the base of the triangle represents the leadership and those who join because they are attracted to the takfirist and Wahhabi teachings. The "ideological" recruits are small so the pillars must be creative, looking for recruits beyond ideology. The recruiters extend their green arrows into other potential pools to include economic or political grievances, claims of "colonial" invasion, nationalistic sentiments or youth unrest. The other recruitment pools are larger and in West Africa, tend to make up the majority of the group's active membership.

50. Judith Scheele, *Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century*, African Studies Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 226-231.

51. Patricio Asfura-Heim, *The Tuareg: A Nation without Borders?* (CNA Strategic Studies Conference Report, 2013).

52. Morgan.

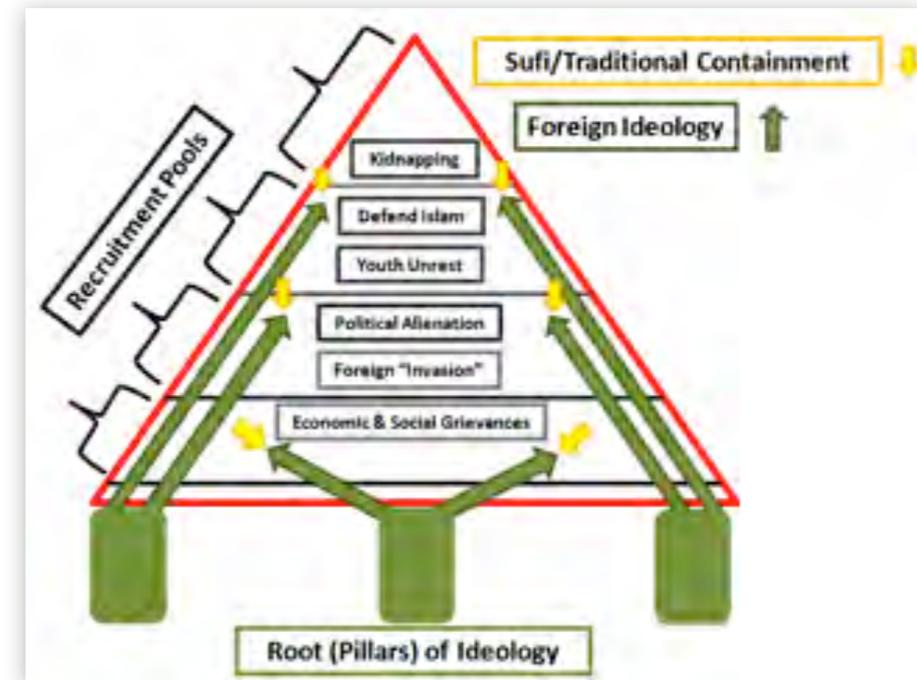
53. "Mali Tuareg Rebels Kidnap Soldiers Amid Deadly Clashes", BBC Africa <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27462324> (accessed 18 May 2014). And "The War Is Far from Over," *The Economist*, 31 May 2014.

At the same time that the recruitment arrows actively and passively attract members, the yellow arrows represent unique social, cultural, and religious factors in the environment that prevent recruitment. The counter-arrows could include anything from religious education to traditional leadership structures or manhood rituals. There is no single recruitment strategy for the whole of the Sahel just as the counter-recruitment arrows resemble different forces from one country to the next.

The graphic is structured in such a way to indicate three important aspects. One, the number of takfiri jihadists is small, even if they do represent the core of leadership. Two, absent the supporting pillars of ideology, the Islamist terrorist group would topple. Three, eliminating the ideology may eliminate a terrorist group but it leaves instead a rebel insurgent group, grievances unsatisfied, recruiting from the same pools.

How strong is the Islamist ideology in the Sahel and what exactly have been the most effective "recruitment" methods for insurgent and terrorist groups alike? Augustin Loada and Peter Romaniuk completed one of the most quantitative and qualitative studies on these very questions for Burkina Faso. The "pull" factors are those that recruit by ideology, often called radicalization. The "push" factors include everything from social grievances to monetary incentives and other structural reasons.<sup>54</sup>

Burkina Faso overlaps the color swathe borders of "Islamist opportunism" and "ethnic, political and "other" grievances." How far south in West Africa had Islamist ideology managed to



54. Augustin Loada and Peter Romaniuk, Preventing Violent Extremism in Burkina Faso: Toward National Resilience Amid Regional Insecurity (Global Center on Cooperative

57. Tunisia's Borders: Jihadism and Contraband, (International Crisis Group, 2013).

58. Ivan Briscoe, Crime after Jihad: Armed Groups, the State and Illicit Business in Post-Conflict Mali (Clingendael: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2014).

"pull" in recruits? While many Burkinabe had been enticed to join Islamist groups in exchange for payment or as a result of other social factors, Loada and Romaniuk had yet to identify anyone who had joined as an Islamist loyal.<sup>55</sup> Islamist groups are creative and opportunistic, just like their recruits. If various pull factors are absent in some West African regions, it is logical to assume that the counter strategy should shift as well.

The various separatist groups of Northern Mali have proven to be pragmatic and opportunistic. Fighters frequently switch from one rebel group to another, gauging power status and supporting self-interests. The MNLA is not a universal Tuareg movement. It does not represent Niger's clans. Vassal tribes not privy to MNLA power status find reason to support the Malian government against even their elite Tuareg neighbors. By one account, there are as many as 6,000 trained fighters all roving in and out of various rebel menu options of the Azawad and its border areas.<sup>56</sup>

This does not mean that minority groups in northern Mali, the impoverished of Niger, or the disenfranchised political parties in Chad or Mauritania do not have legitimate grievances as they all do. But in addition, MUJAO is adept at manipulating the loss of grazing lands between Fulani and Tuareg herdsman. Mokhtar bil Mokhtar, as another

example, knows better than anyone else how to navigate the social structures within Tuareg and Arab hierarchies.

Finally, violent groups, takfiri terrorists or not, are one strategy to maintaining or gaining access to economic livelihoods. The timing of Ansar Dine, MUJAO, the MNLA formation and less influential groups coincided with the fall of Libya. Prior to the Arab Spring, illicit smuggling between Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and the Sahel was well known. However, there existed a manageable balance between the smuggler's interests, border security, and police networks.<sup>57</sup> The players were a known entity. With the collapse of government control, albeit self-serving "monitoring," some have argued that violent groups arose to protect their smuggling turfs. Zealous defense for a way of life intersected with nationalist movements and Islamist opportunism. Drug smuggling and even kidnapping operations are lucrative sources of income where even non-terrorist entities are known to play the middle man for a cut of the earnings. Total ransom payments in Mali between 2003 and 2013 could have been as high as \$120 million.<sup>58</sup>

55. Burkina Faso is a Muslim majority country; it is also important to note that despite massive uprisings in 2011 and the 2014 protests that ousted then-president Blaise Compaore, there was no religious extremism to speak of.

56. Asfura-Heim.

It is this very brand of political corruption interweaved with Islamist opportunism that has made defeating Boko Haram so difficult. While the leaders of Ansaru and Boko Haram embrace the takfiri ideology, the latter joining the Islamic State<sup>59</sup> fold in early 2015, they are sustained by passive government indifference, suspect support from leadership figures and military equipment laundering.<sup>60</sup> Local governments engage in campaigns of scape-goating instead of responsible counterterrorism cooperation. Boko Haram has been called everything from mindless "thugs" to Kanuri separatists. The social, political, and ethnic labels all have an element of truth but have all served to promote inaction. Once Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Nigeria agreed that Boko Haram was a mix of terrorist and "other," their military coalition and whole of government strategy began to whittle away at the group.<sup>61</sup>

### Controlling or Renewing Religious Knowledge

Dr. Tahir Ul-Qadri is one of the lead scholar strategists in today's moderate Islamic messaging.<sup>62</sup> In his careful writings, he firmly rejects the takfiri beliefs that inspire killing Muslims for apparent apostasy. While there exists a legitimate case for proper violent jihad and strikes against

terrorists, Ul-Qadri argues that the Sharia prerequisite for both is an invitation to return to the correct Islam.<sup>63</sup> Mass education has historically been the first step in West Africa's Islamic renewal movements.<sup>64</sup> In West Africa, the "Mujaddid" or leader of the renewal movement, mimics the Prophet Mohammed's own life as the example to progressive jihad.<sup>65</sup> Interpreting and controlling Islamic knowledge has been the strategy of Sufis, Sunnis, Salafists, Shi'a, Mujaddids, and colonialists alike.

Sheikh Amadu Bamba was the founder of the Mouridiyya Sufi order in the late 19th century. Founded in Senegal to encourage proper Islam and to form a sanctuary against outside corruption, Sheikh Bamba was the first black African to formulate his order and *wird*<sup>66</sup> apart from Arab lineage or identity. His jihad was adamantly peaceful despite the accusations of the French and his subsequent exiles to Gabon and Mauritania.<sup>67</sup> While Sheikh Bamba's teachings grew into a larger renewal movement, it is the unique social and cultural context that is most informative.

Shiekh Bamba, recognizing the racial tensions against his claims, initially began his written works with the warning not to underestimate his teaching due to his race or non-

59. Boko Haram has since been granted the name "Islamic State in West Africa" by al-Baghdadi's organization.

60. John Campbell, U.S. Policy to Counter Nigeria's Boko Haram (Council on Foreign Relations, 2014).

61. The decisive military offensive along with air strikes beginning in February of 2015 by Nigeria, Niger and Chad inside Northern Nigeria were a key turning point.

62. Dr. Tahir Ul-Qadri, from Pakistan, is heavily influenced by Sufi beliefs. His writings and Islamic education strategies have made him one of the most influential Sunni scholars today.

63. Tahir ul-Qadri, 338.

64. Stefan Reichmuth, "Islamic Education and Scholarship in Sub-Saharan Africa," in *The History of Islam in Africa*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Lee Pouwels (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 421.

65. Before the Hijrah to Medina, Mohammed spent his prophet years preaching, warning and teaching. After the Hijrah, his forces were properly prepared for battle in education and in numbers.

66. Sufi ritual rights specific to an order

67. Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2007).

Arab credentials. In the Arab-dominated Mauritania, his teachings were less influential. Sheikh Bamba also crafted his Sufi order, dedicated to tarbiyya,<sup>68</sup> to appeal to the economic conditions of fellow Africans. The pilgrimage to closer Touba, the sanctuary of the order, was put on par in religious achievement to a pilgrimage to Mecca. The Mouridiyya order, unlike its Tijaniyya neighbor, was inclusive in terms of where a disciple could complete initial studies in Sufi esoteric knowledge.<sup>69</sup> Due to the intimate connection that the order has with Senegalese culture, its influence remains largely within the country and the Senegalese Diaspora. Yet its internal influence, commending peaceful jihad holds sway over more than 4 million.<sup>70</sup> Ranks of Senegalese politicians would be powerless without the Sufi endorsement.

As Islam became more globally connected, the prestigious Al-Azhar University availed itself to student exchanges. The son of Sheikh Bamba created a network of limited scholar exchanges with the Egypt-based religious university. But some analysts argue that Al-Azhar's influence created the opening for Salafist penetration in later decades. When Mauritania "Arabized" its education curriculum in the 1960s, it invited the more conservative Al-Azhar and Saudi faculty to lead the initiative.<sup>71</sup> What is termed moderate in the Middle East could easily be

stringent in West Africa. What is moderate and inclusive in West Africa is easily pluralistic and errant in Al-Azhar's curriculum.

A wrong assumption of many Muslims and West African analysts is that Islam has been the majority religion in the Sahel countries for centuries. In reality, it wasn't until the 19th century, through violent jihad and colonial dynamics (positive and negative) that Islam became majority<sup>72</sup>; in Southern Mali it was not the majority until the first quarter of the 20th century.<sup>73</sup> While the seat of leadership in places like Timbuktu in Mali, Kanem-Borno in the Lake Chad region, and other notable empires acquired Islamic identities, the majority of the populations maintained their indigenous religious practices.<sup>74</sup> Sixteenth century Timbuktu, the center of Islamic learning, provides an early example of the competition between inclusive African traditional practices and more orthodox Muslim education. The region accepted the Egyptian Al-Suyuti's inclusive stance rather than the more hard-line, jihad-inspired Abd al-Karim al-Maghili's pressures.<sup>75</sup>

The 18th and 19th century jihads were both an internal reaction to what the jihadist's considered "bad" Muslim

68. The spiritual insights gained through Sufi practice gained only by learning under a Sufi master.

69. Babou, 96.

70. Charlotte A. Quinn and Frederick Quinn, *Pride, Faith, and Fear: Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 96-101.

71. Wehrey and Boukhars, eds., 130.

72. Quinn and Quinn, 20-21. And Jean-Louis Triaud, "Islam in Africa under French Colonial Rule," in *The History of Islam in Africa*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Lee Pouwels (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 169.

73. Dorothea Elisabeth Schulz, *Muslims and New Media in West Africa: Pathways to God* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 28.

74. Nehemia Levtzion, "Islam in the Bilad Al-Sudan to 1800," in *The History of Islam in Africa*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Lee Pouwels (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 65.

75. *Ibid.*, 73.

practice but also an offensive against colonial influence. The French in response executed their own strategy to control Islamic education in the Sahel. Whether wholly correct or not, the colonial program described a competing dichotomy between black Islam and Arab Islam. The identities were arguably semi-created but were also reflections of a racial dynamic reality described in the previous section. In an attempt to maintain control of its colonies and defend against more extremist Islamic teachings the French varied their strategy between regions. In the first quarter of the 20th century, the French limited Arabic education to the northern "white" populations. In black Africa, Islamic education was encouraged through the Madrassa system in French and local language.<sup>76</sup>

The colonial strategy developed allies with more "docile" and inclusive Muslim teachers in black Africa while appeasing the white minorities to the North with exclusive Arabic instruction. The Muslim elite with access to the French Islamic system considered the marriage one of economic potential. The poor and some Arabic speaking classes still considered traditional and marabout systems legitimate, not for their Muslim credentials, but for their "cultural moral superiority".<sup>77</sup>

Islam spread rapidly during this era regardless of educational source, but it developed into a competition

76. Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

77. *Ibid.*, 75-76, 232, 307. See also Triaud.

between the modernists and the counter-colonial agenda of the Al-Azhar and Saudi curriculums.<sup>78</sup> It is important to note that Muslim and Arab scholars condemned the colonialists for advancing only the docile and accommodating Muslim populations.<sup>79</sup> However, the proud jihadis of the 18th and 19th centuries in West Africa, hailed as the defenders of Islam, are now the same ideologies that the Muslim moderate elite are attempting to suppress themselves.

On the one hand, the colonial Islamic alliances were an attempt to discourage extremist or more conservative ideas from outside the region. On the other hand, the control of knowledge led to Islamic expansion and an Arabic language interest increase post-independence. In Mali and Niger, other conservative social movements like the Tablighi began to spread through the North. That same movement throughout the 1990s encouraged many Tuareg to exchange cultural and social customs for proper Islamic perceptions of items, such as patrilineal verses matrilineal mandates.<sup>80</sup> Al-Azhar had a difficult time appealing to the southern Malian inclusive and pluralistic Islamic identity through the 1950s. But by the 1960s, Bamako was sending upwards of 12 students a year for study in Cairo.<sup>81</sup>

78. Lansine Kaba, "Islam in West Africa: Radicalism and the New Ethic of Disagreement, 1960-1990," in *The History of Islam in Africa*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Lee Pouwels (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000), 189-208. See also Schulz, 30-31, 138-139.

79. Beshir, 43. See also, Ali A. Mazrui, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1986), 286.

80. McGovern.

81. Brenner, 212-213.

Ansar Dine as an organization brings to mind the terrorist movement under Iyad Ag Ghali with barely a few hundred in his following. This bias ignores how dozens of other non-violent renewal movements influence literally millions of West Africans. The larger "Ansar Dine" movement was led by a man named Sheikh Haidara from Guinea, but with followers throughout the region. His movement highlights a pragmatic African heritage with religious renewal that includes more conservative conditions. The movement is far from Salafist, using local language translations of the Qur'an to reach wider audiences.

Personalities like Sheikh Haidara have developed an Islamic praxis, intertwining local tradition with intellectual influence. Female disciples of the movement became easily identified against their Muslim compatriots by donning the hijab; a religious requirement, according to the Al-Azhar, that in many parts of West Africa is in conflict with proud displays of cultural identity.<sup>82</sup> Recently, after a 15 June suicide attack in N'Djamena Chad, the country banned any religious garb that reveals only the eyes. In the small controversy that followed, Chad's religious leadership even suggested that wearing the hijab was a personal choice, not a religious mandate.<sup>83</sup>

Modern day Nigeria is also a product of religious interpretation and Islamic competition, centered on the

northern Hausa states. Prior to Uthman don Fodio's jihad in the first decade of the 19th century, the Kano chiefs were recognized for their pragmatic selection of religious ritual. Self-proclaimed Muslims, the chiefs maintained various other religious practices that would best serve their interests.<sup>84</sup>

Uthman don Fodio was a Fulani in a politically Hausa dominated region. His earliest followers consisted of the poorer classes, the disenfranchised and majority Fulani. Uthman was highly influenced by the Qadariyya Sufi order, more inclusive in its search for mystical knowledge than the Tijaniyya Sufi order. Uthman's other influences included the hardline writings of Al-Maghili and the Timbuktu inspired Islamic education model. As a true Mujaddid (one who leads a renewal movement), Uthman cited a list of corrupt activities and non-Islamic rituals prevalent in the region. His peaceful renewal movement gained in popularity and many of the Hausa leaders and those within the Kanem-Borno kingdom to the northeast were concerned both for their own preservation of power but also wary of the cultural revolution that was rapidly diminishing local customs and traditions.<sup>85</sup>

Like Sheikh Bamba of the Mouridiyya, Uthman don Fodio patterned his movement after the life of the Prophet Mohammad. Ibraheem Sulaiman, perhaps Uthman's most

82. Schulz, 8, 163.

83. "Chad's Outright Ban on Islamic Veil after Attacks Divides Muslims; Second African Nation to Do So", Mail and Guardian Africa <http://mgafrica.com/article/2015-06-21-chads-ban-on-islamic-veil-after-attacks-divides-muslims> (accessed 1 July 2015).

84. Levtzion, 84

85. John Alembillah Azumah, *The Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa: A Quest for Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 75. See also the perspective of Ibraheem Sulaiman, *The Africa Caliphate: The Life, Works & Teaching of Shaykh Usman Dan Fodio (1754-1817)* (London: The Diwan Press, 2009), 178.

generous biographer, describes how the jihadist followed carefully the proper steps from mass education, to madrasa expansion to mass social endorsement. Having then been bestowed the rank of "leader of the faithful" along with assurance of victory in battle; his peaceful movement adopted the logical violent evolution.

It is important to note that African Muslim Mujaddid's in the 18th and 19th centuries are often described by their biographers in a tone of African exceptionalism. As Sulaiman argues, during the time of Uthman there was no one even in Medina, Saudi Arabia qualified to do what only the West African and Uthman don Fodio was prepared to give to the Muslim world.<sup>86</sup> In the same style of West African pride, Timbuktu was described as the model of Islamic education; perfect until it was dismantled and polluted by the Moroccan invaders in 1591 A.D.

The Sokoto Caliphate, the result of Uthman's jihad, established its rule on good governance by moderate Sharia. It was pragmatic in order to appeal to the traditional context and, in contrast to the original conquest, compromised in favor of many popular non-Islamic social structures. The Sokoto caliphate influenced the Northern half of Nigeria, emphasizing the importance of the madrasa network, and created a unique and perhaps unsustainable understanding between conservative Islam and cultural identity.

86. Sulaiman, 31, 48, 225.

As in Senegal, Mali, and Niger, the traditional marabout madrasa system has come under scrutiny by local government.<sup>87</sup> Imams are losing spiritual and moral control over the youth.<sup>88</sup> Originally a model of good moral education, the marabout's credentials also went unchecked. Not only had many madrasa teachers degenerated the system into an exploitative student begging program, but even the best religious education provided few job prospects for Qur'anic school graduates. Tens of thousands of youth have few job prospects following limited religious training which indirectly leads to massive social frustration.<sup>89</sup> Many regions are now encouraging madrasa training early and then mandating broader education from later primary school on.

Sufi scholars, Mujaddids, colonial institutions, newly independent West African states, traditional and foreign religious centers have all competed for control of religious knowledge, some creating revolution. In each instance, the initiatives exercised limited compromises in relation to the cultural environments. Colonial rule had a way of expanding Islam, albeit partnering with the more moderate

87. Exploitation in the Name of Education: Uneven Progress in Ending Forced Child Begging in Senegal, (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

88. Julius Kithuure and Bosire Boniface, "Mosque Power Struggles Set Backdrop to Cleric Killing in Mombasa ", Sabahionline [http://sabahionline.com/en\\_GB/articles/hoa/articles/features/2014/06/10/feature-01](http://sabahionline.com/en_GB/articles/hoa/articles/features/2014/06/10/feature-01) (accessed 17 June 2014); Quinn, Charlotte A., and Frederick Quinn. *Pride, Faith and Fear: Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa*: Oxford University Press, 2003. pg 58; Anna Simons, "Mobilizable Male Youth, Indigenous Institutions, and War," in 17th Conference of the German African Studies Association (VAD) (Leipzig, 30 March - 1 April: 2003).

89. As the following authors explain, the Nigerian government funds over 50,000 Islamic teachers, enough to keep the system economically afloat but nowhere near sustainable. Quinn and Quinn, 32-55.

and accommodating Sufi sheikhs, political, and clan leaders. This mix of religious influence and control has produced a separation between religion and state in the Sahel with Muslims pushing for secular, democratic, and capitalist systems. Even in volatile Nigeria, Christians, Traditionalists, and Muslims will vote for good leaders above religious affiliation. The former Christian president from the South, Olusegun Obasanjo, is one example<sup>90</sup> as is the most recent collective effort that put President Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim, in power, 2015.

### **Would Islamic Education Defeat Terrorism in West Africa?**

In April 2015, Addis Ababa in Ethiopia hosted the annual Tana Forum discussing how Africa should deal with religion in the political arena. The conclusion called for continued separation of religion and state along with secular institutions that endorse religious tolerance.<sup>91</sup> Very few would argue against the need for religious accountability from within the religious leadership. Officials of majority Christian Kenya, President Mahamdou Issoufou of Muslim majority Niger, Nigeria's national security strategy and President Idriss Deby of Chad overtly call for positive religious influence on the society. But where it comes from and how it is implemented will determine the success of this African solution.

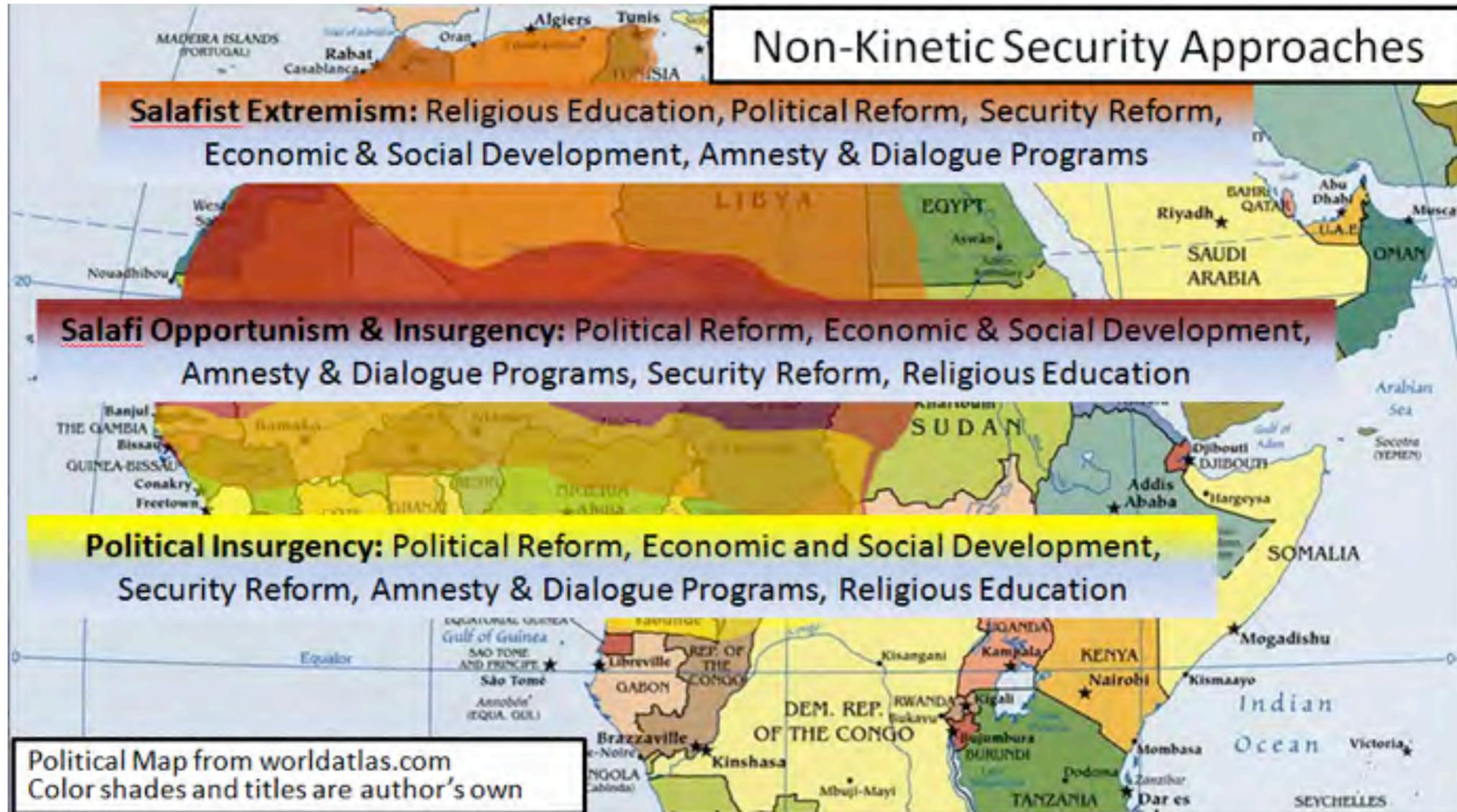
90. Ibid., 56.

91. The powerful speaker list included: Ghannoushi (Tunisia's Muslim Brotherhood), Archbishop Valentine Mokiwa, the Emir of Kano Sanusi and former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo: "Tana Forum", <http://tanaforum.org/> (accessed 3 May 2015).

92. See the following: Spencer Ackerman, "Top U.S. Officer: Stop This 'Total War' on Islam Talk", *Wired* <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2012/05/dempsey-islam-irresponsible/> (accessed 15 May 2012). Daniel P. Aldrich, "Radio as the Voice of God: Peace and Tolerance Radio Programming's Impact on Norms," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 6, no. 6 (2012). Adam Mazmanian, "Dod Shuttles Two 'Influence' Websites Covering Africa", *FCW.com* <http://fcw.com/articles/2015/02/13/african-web-sites.aspx> (accessed 31 March 2015).

Islamic education is becoming a preoccupation of non-Muslim military strategists. The approach is used in information operation campaigns across the Sahel.<sup>92</sup> Taking a hint from Islam control centers of Egypt, moderate Islamic education could be part of a larger counterterrorism strategy. However, as this paper has argued, the West African security challenge involves much more than a clash of religious ideals. Considering the diversity of West Africa's population, especially the Sahel, controlling religion will not even begin to address the social conditions and perceptions that contribute to overall violence. Governance reform, social and economic development, security reform, along with amnesty and dialogue programs are the only long-term solutions to the violent context of West Africa.

On the following page, the early color-band graphic is a template on which to consider other appropriate counter-extremist programs specific to each region or country. Depending on the many social, cultural and especially religious beliefs of a country, the non-kinetic options to counter-extremism should differ in priority if still applied simultaneously. Even if North Africa prioritizes Islamic education as the top priority, each West African country should prioritize a strategy according to their own needs. Impressing the Islamic education priority on Sub-Saharan Africa not only ignores the realities of the threat environment, but could easily contribute to current tensions as it did in the jihads of the 18th and 19th centuries. Africa is no more a country than Islam is a



monolithic institution. As this paper has argued, the sources and methods of violence in West Africa all influence the current terrorist trends.

Controlling and enforcing a single global Islamic message is effective in the same way that ensuring any one religious idea over all the others would bring universal unity. It is impossible to control religious knowledge

without introducing your own political and social commentary. To monitor religious institutions is one thing, to control them is an approach that should best remain in North Africa, if at all.

## References

- Abulhawa, Susan, "Confronting Anti-Black Racism in the Arab World", Al-Jazeera English <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/06/201362472519107286.html> (accessed 3 May 2015).
- Ackerman, Spencer, "Top U.S. Officer: Stop This 'Total War' on Islam Talk", Wired <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2012/05/dempsey-islam-irresponsible/> (accessed 15 May 2012).
- Adams, Adnan, "Moroccan Ambassador Meets Leader of Tijaniyya Council in Ghana", Modern Ghana <http://www.modernghana.com/news/609795/1/moroccan-ambassador-meets-leader-of-tijaniyya-coun.html> (accessed 3 May 2015).
- Aldrich, Daniel P. "Radio as the Voice of God: Peace and Tolerance Radio Programming's Impact on Norms." *Perspectives on Terrorism* 6, no. 6 (2012): 27.
- Ankomah, Baffour. "How Africa Can Beat Terrorism." *New African*, June June, 2014.
- Asda'a Burson-Marsteller Arab Youth Survey. ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2015.
- Asfura-Heim, Patricio. *The Tuareg: A Nation without Borders? : CNA Strategic Studies Conference Report*, 2013.
- Atzori, Daniel, "Egypt, Saudi Arabia Ban Muslim Brotherhood", About Oil <http://www.abo.net/oilportal/topic/view.do?contentId=2232818> (accessed 7 July 2014).
- Azumah, John Alembillah. *The Legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa: A Quest for Inter-Religious Dialogue*. Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 2001.
- Babou, Cheikh Anta. *Fighting the Greater Jihad*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2007.
- Beshir, Mohamed Omer. *Terramedia: Themes in Afro-Arab Relations*. Khartoum, Sudan: Institute of African & Asian Studies, University of Khartoum, 1982.
- Bøås, Morten, and Kevin C. Dunn. *African Guerrillas: Raging against the Machine*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2007.
- Brenner, Louis. *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Briscoe, Ivan. *Crime after Jihad: Armed Groups, the State and Illicit Business in Post-Conflict Mali*. Clingendael: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2014.
- Campbell, John. *U.S. Policy to Counter Nigeria's Boko Haram*. Council on Foreign Relations, 2014.

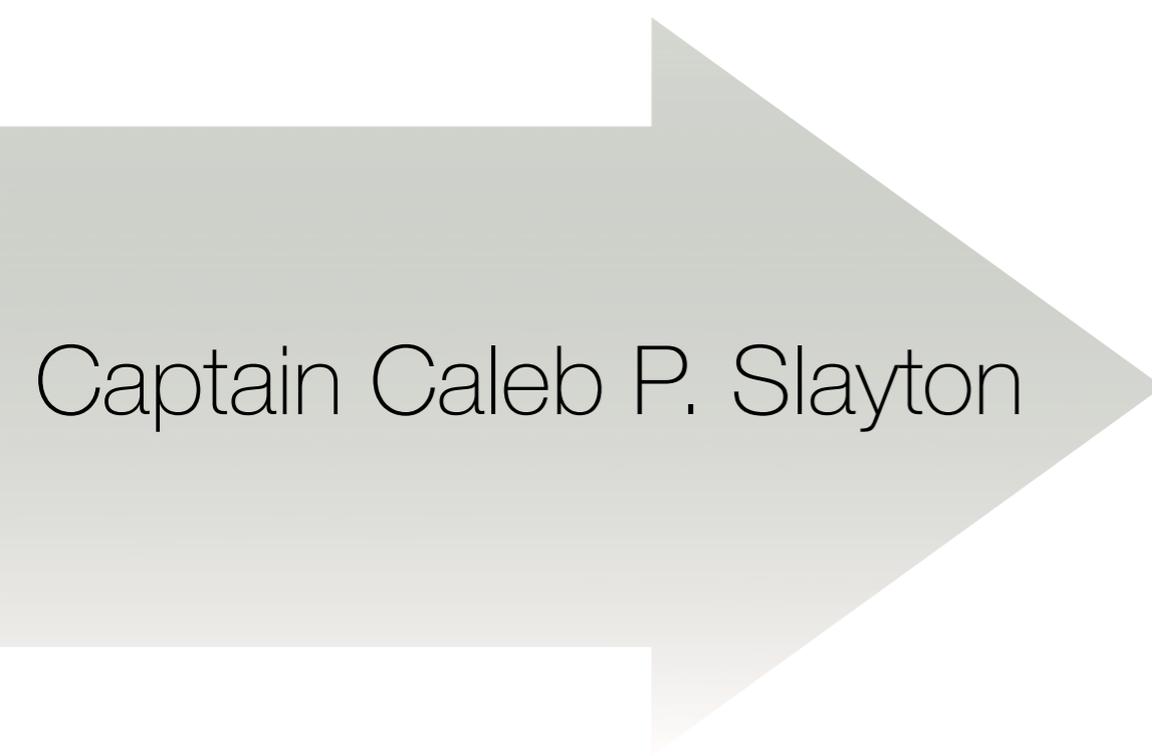
- "Chad's Outright Ban on Islamic Veil after Attacks Divides Muslims; Second African Nation to Do So", Mail and Guardian Africa <http://mgafrica.com/article/2015-06-21-chads-ban-on-islamic-veil-after-attacks-divides-muslims> (accessed 1 July 2015).
- Charai, Ahmed. Morocco, Counter-Terrorism, and the Us-Africa Summit. Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2014.
- Chivvis, Christopher S., and Jeffrey Martini. Libya after Qaddafi: Lessons and Implications for the Future. RAND Corporation, 2014.
- "Egyptian President Al-Sisi at Al-Azhar: We Must Revolutionize Our Religion", MEMRITVVideos <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEhNarfrlec> (accessed 28 Jan 2015).
- Engel, Andrew, and Ayman Grada. Libya's Other Battle. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2014.
- Exploitation in the Name of Education: Uneven Progress in Ending Forced Child Begging in Senegal. Human Rights Watch, 2014.
- Ezeamalu, Ben, and Patience Ogbo, "The Lagos Gang War", 234Next <http://234next.com/csp/cms/sites/Next/Home/5664200-146/story.csp> (accessed 17 February 2011).
- Freeman, Michael, and Hy Rothstien, eds. Gangs & Guerrillas: Ideas from Counterinsurgency and Counterterrorism: Naval Postgraduate School (technical report book edition), 2011.
- Gettleman, Jeffery. "Africa's Forever Wars: Why the Continent's Conflicts Never End". Foreign Policy (2010).
- Ghanmi, Monia, "Tunisia Declares Ansar Al-Sharia Terrorist Group", Magharebia [http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/awi/features/2013/08/28/feature-01](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2013/08/28/feature-01) (accessed 20 March 2014).
- "Guide to Key Libyan Militias", BBC News <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-19744533> (accessed 26 Sept 2014).
- Hall, Bruce S. A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960 African Studies. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Hoffman, Danny. "The City as Barracks." Cultural Anthropology 22, no. 3 (2007): 400-428.
- Howe, Herbert. Ambiguous Order: Military Forces in African States. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001.
- Jublin, Matthieu, "Group Emerges in the Central Region", Vice News <https://news.vice.com/article/violence-on-the-rise-in-mali-as-new-armed-group-emerges-in-the-central-region> (accessed 4 May 2015).
- Kaba, Lansine. "Islam in West Africa: Radicalism and the New Ethic of Disagreement, 1960-1990." In The History of Islam in Africa, edited by Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Lee Pouwels, 189-208. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000.

- Keenan, Jeremy. *The Dark Sahara: America's War on Terror in Africa*. London: Pluto Press, 2009.
- "Le Chef D'aqmi Félicite Les Jihadistes Syriens Dans Un Message Twitter", RFI [http://m.rfi.fr/afrique/20150409-abdelmalek-droukdel-chef-aqmi-felicite-jihadistes-syrie-victoires-jabhat-al-nosra-idlib/?aef\\_campaign\\_date=2015-04-09&aef\\_campaign\\_ref=partage\\_aef&dlvrit=1448817&ns\\_campaign=reseaux\\_sociaux&ns\\_linkname=editorial&ns\\_mchannel=social&ns\\_source=twitter](http://m.rfi.fr/afrique/20150409-abdelmalek-droukdel-chef-aqmi-felicite-jihadistes-syrie-victoires-jabhat-al-nosra-idlib/?aef_campaign_date=2015-04-09&aef_campaign_ref=partage_aef&dlvrit=1448817&ns_campaign=reseaux_sociaux&ns_linkname=editorial&ns_mchannel=social&ns_source=twitter) (accessed 3 May 2015).
- Levtzion, Nehemia. "Islam in the Bilad Al-Sudan to 1800." In *The History of Islam in Africa*, edited by Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Lee Pouwels, 63-91. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000.
- Loada, Augustin, and Peter Romaniuk. *Preventing Violent Extremism in Burkina Faso: Toward National Resilience Amid Regional Insecurity*. Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2014.
- "Looking up the Nile", *The Economist* <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21646259-after-decades-ignoring-africa-egypt-re-engaging-continent-looking> (accessed 27 March 2015).
- "Mali Tuareg Rebels Kidnap Soldiers Amid Deadly Clashes", *BBC Africa* <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27462324> (accessed 18 May 18 May).
- Mazmanian, Adam, "Dod Shatters Two 'Influence' Websites Covering Africa", *FCW.com* <http://fcw.com/articles/2015/02/13/african-web-sites.aspx> (accessed 31 March 2015).
- Mazrui, Ali A. *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*. Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1986.
- Mbembe, Joseph-Achille. *On the Postcolony Studies on the History of Society and Culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001.
- McGovern, Mike. "Chasing Shadows in the Dunes: Islamist Practices and Counterterrorist Policy in West Africa's Sahara-Sahel Zone." In *Securing Africa: Post-9/11 Discourses on Terrorism*, edited by Malinda Smith, xxiii, 247 p. Farnham ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009.
- Morgan, Andy, "Interview: Alghabass Ag Intalla, Head of the Mia", *Andy Morgan Writes* <http://www.andymorganwrites.com/interview-with-alghabass-ag-intalla-head-of-the-islamic-movement-of-azawad-mia/> (accessed 30 June 2014).
- MUHAMMAD, YOUSUF, "Flawed Curricula to Blame for 'Takfir' Mindset: Scholars", *Arab News* <http://arabnews.com/saudi Arabia/article505298.ece> (accessed 26 Jan 2012).
- Oumar, Jemal. "Ansar Al-Din Shift Creates Doubts in Mali." *Magharebia* (2011). [http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/awi/features/2012/11/15/feature-02](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2012/11/15/feature-02) [accessed 15 Nov].

- "Our Country of the Year: Hope Springs." The Economist, 20 December 2014.
- Pezard, Stephanie, and Michael Shurkin. Achieving Peace in Northern Mali. Electronic ed. Santa Monica, California: RAND Corporation, 2015. [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR892.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR892.html).
- Quinn, Charlotte A., and Frederick Quinn. Pride, Faith, and Fear: Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Ramzi, Walid, "Maghreb Religious Leaders Tackle Takfirism", Magharebia [http://magharebia.com/en\\_GB/articles/awi/features/2014/10/07/feature-02](http://magharebia.com/en_GB/articles/awi/features/2014/10/07/feature-02) (accessed 30 October 2014).
- Reichmuth, Stefan. "Islamic Education and Scholarship in Sub-Saharan Africa." In The History of Islam in Africa, edited by Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Lee Pouwels, 419-440. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000.
- "Rogue Libya General Gains Stream of Allies", ArabNews.com <http://m.arabnews.com/content/1400720069913187100/Middle%20East> (accessed 23 May 2014).
- Rosen, David M. Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism. Piscataway, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005.
- "Saudi Kingdom Donates \$100 Million to the Center for Counter-Terrorism (Arabic) المملكة تدعم مركز مكافحة الإرهاب بـ100 مليون دولار", New Today <http://www.newtoday.ae/saudi/63861.html> (accessed 16 Aug 2014).
- Scheele, Judith. Smugglers and Saints of the Sahara: Regional Connectivity in the Twentieth Century African Studies Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Schulz, Dorothea Elisabeth. Muslims and New Media in West Africa: Pathways to God. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.
- Shay, Shaul. Egypt and the Threat of Islamic Terror. Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2014.
- Smith, Malinda. Securing Africa: Post-9/11 Discourses on Terrorism. Farnham ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009.
- Sulaiman, Ibraheem. The Africa Caliphate: The Life, Works & Teaching of Shaykh Usman Dan Fodio (1754-1817). London: The Diwan Press, 2009.
- Tahir ul-Qadri, Muhammad. Fatwa on Terrorism and Suicide Bombings. London: Minhaj-ul-Quran International, 2010.
- "Tana Forum", <http://tanaforum.org/> (accessed 3 May 2015).
- Terrorist Designations of Three Ansar Al-Shari'a Organizations and Leaders. 2014.

- "Thomas Joscelyn Testimony: "Terrorism in Africa: The Imminent Threat to the United States"." In House Committee on Homeland Security. Washington D.C.: Foundation For Defense of Democracies, 2015.
- "Top Muslim Cleric Ahmed Al-Tayeb Urges Education Reform to Counter Extremism", The Guardian <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/23/top-muslim-cleric-ahmed-al-tayeb-urges-education-reform-to-counter-extremism> (accessed 31 March 2015).
- "Top Muslim Cleric: Islamic Terror Is Ideologically Motivated", UnitedwithIsrael.org <http://unitedwithisrael.org/top-muslim-cleric-islamic-terror-is-ideologically-motivated/> (accessed 27 March 2015).
- Toumi, Habib, "Saudi Arabia Sacks Preachers for Brotherhood Links", GulfNews.com <http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/saudi-arabia/saudi-arabia-sacks-preachers-for-brotherhood-links-1.1331677> (accessed 21 May 12 May).
- Triaud, Jean-Louis. "Islam in Africa under French Colonial Rule." In *The History of Islam in Africa*, edited by Nehemia Levtzion and Randall Lee Pouwels, 169-187. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2000.
- Tunisia's Borders: Jihadism and Contraband. International Crisis Group, 2013.
- "Update: Morsi Sentenced to Life in Prison over Spying with Hamas, Iran", The Cairo Post <http://www.thecairopost.com/news/155704/news/update-morsi-sentenced-to-life-in-prison-over-spying-with-hamas-iran> (accessed 30 June 2015).
- Vigh, Henrik. "Conflictual Motion and Political Inertia: On Rebellions and Revolutions in Bissau and Beyond." *African Studies Review* 52, no. 2 (2009): 143-164.
- "The War Is Far from Over." *The Economist*, 31 May 2014.
- Wehrey, Frederic M., and Anouar Boukhars, eds. *Perilous Desert: Insecurity in the Sahara*. Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013.
- Weiss, Caleb. "Al Murabitoon Claims Ansongo Suicide Attack." *The Long War Journal* (April 2015). <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/04/al-murabitoon-claims-ansongo-suicide-attack.php> [accessed 3 May].
- Williams, Paul. *War & Conflict in Africa*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.

# *Author Biography*



Captain Caleb P. Slayton

Captain Caleb Slayton is an active duty officer in the United States Air Force. He has completed a Masters with Troy University in International Relations, a Masters in Middle East Security Studies from the Naval Post-Graduate School in Monterey along with a Defense Language Institute Arabic language degree. Captain Slayton's additional background and experience include living ten years in East, West and the Horn of Africa, study immersions to Northern Cameroon and Tunisia and frequent personal travels to the rest of Africa and the Middle East.

Capt Slayton is fluent in Arabic, French and Portuguese. If study or work does not send Capt Slayton to the continent, a planned vacation accompanied by his incredible wife is the next best thing. In his opinion, no one should let the security hype overshadow the welcoming people and enjoyable experiences found on the continent as a whole. Capt Slayton is currently the Director of the Africa Theater Course for Special Operations Forces for the U.S. Air Force Special Operations School, based at Hurlburt Field, Florida.



DIVERTED ATTENTION: WHY WE SHOULDN'T  
IGNORE ISIL IN THE **ASIA PACIFIC**

DAVID L. EDWARDS

The world watches with bated breath the every movement of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). British Prime Minister David Cameron has declared that ISIL is “the struggle of this generation” (BBC 2015). And so the gaze of the world’s citizenry is fixated on ISIL’s activities in the Middle East and westward, yet another world region must not be neglected: Asia Pacific. Of this region President Barack Obama stated, “[the U.S.] will continue to focus on the Asia-Pacific, where we support our allies, shape a future of greater security and prosperity, and extend a hand to those devastated by disaster” (2014). Cameron and Obama, two of the world’s foremost leaders, have identified both the region and topic that at present require greater attention: Asia Pacific and ISIL.

Why then should the topic of Asia Pacific and ISIL collide? Over sixty percent of the world’s Muslim population resides within Asia Pacific, which translates to an astounding one billion adherents (Pew Research Center 2011)! Furthermore, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan during the 1980s, Asia Pacific contributed a sizeable number of fighters to the Middle East that subsequently returned to the region and created or went on to lead numerous extremist organizations (Edwards, 2015). In comparison to Asia’s 1980s response to the Middle East, Asia Pacific has seen a 160% increase in fighters traveling to support ISIL in the present struggle (Locklear, 2015). What brings greater concern to this issue is that this increase has occurred despite significant

policing by the respective governments of Asia Pacific (Abuza, 2015).

Asian support for ISIL originates predominately from Southeast Asia, which contains the largest Muslim population in the world, and is witnessed by Asian nationals traveling to the Middle East, an increase in regional violent extremism, uneasiness that has generated perhaps the greatest governmental response of any world region, and the possibility of heightened sectarian tension between Sunni and Shia in Southeast Asia.

### **Asian Supporters and Travelers**

Asia Pacific has supported ISIL with numerous supporters and sympathizers. Admiral Samuel Locklear, Commander of the United States Pacific Command, recently testified before Congress that, “current assessments indicate approximately 1,300 foreign personnel fighting alongside the self-proclaimed Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant are from the Indo-Asia-Pacific” (2015). This represents a small but significant portion of the estimated 20,000 ISIL foreign fighters, of whom over half are from the Middle East (Liddy & Gourlay, 2015). North Africans also make up a sizeable percentage of ISIL’s ranks. While Asia Pacific only makes up slightly over 15 percent of ISIL’s foreign fighters, their contributions are disproportionately larger (Abuza, 2015). There is great alarm for the return of this 15 percent, which is best understood within the region’s historic context: during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979-1989, Asia provided 800 fighters to the Middle

East. Subsequent to their return, a number of the 800 fighters created their own extremist organizations, like Jemaah Islamiyah, and others formed the core of other terrorist organizations (Edwards, 2015). Jemaah Islamiyah went on to commit numerous acts of terrorism on a large scale, to include the Bali bombing in 2002 and the Australian Embassy bombing in Indonesia in 2004 (*ibid.*). In like manner, Filipinos that traveled to the Middle East during the Soviet invasion led to the formation of the terrorist organization known as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). ASG has instilled fear and wreaked havoc in the Philippines. Additional Asian extremist groups whose leadership participated in the 1980s Middle East jihads include the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the Gerakan Mujideen Islamliya Pattani, and Laskar Jihad (Abuza, 2015). Furthermore, Asian jihadists are much more integrated into current operations than the 1979-1989 engagement, where Asian supporters were segregated into various camps according to national origin and language (Liow, 2014). Hence, there is significant concern as the estimated 1,300 Asians return to the region. This number does not indicate the total number of ISIL sympathizers in the region, as many have not traveled to the Middle East; little attention has been paid to this group—though they are an integral component to the strength, success, and local reception of ISIL.

### **Sympathizers and Increased Regional Violent Extremism**

Asia Pacific possesses a considerable number of ISIL sympathizers and has witnessed an increase in regional violent extremism. It is integral that these two realities be discussed in unison, as Asia Pacific has demonstrated a correlation between ISIL sympathizers and increased extremism. Abu Bakar Bashir, a leader of the terrorist organization Jemaah Islamiyah, has pledged allegiance to ISIL numerous times. Additionally, Rommel Banlaoi, Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research chairman, recently stated that Abu Sayyaf, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters, and the Black Flag Movement (also referred to as the Khilafa Islamiyah Mindanao) of the Philippines have pledged allegiance or support to ISIL (Calica, 2015). Other sympathizers have saturated the region with ISIL flags, propaganda, social media, recruiting efforts, and resources. Still other sympathizers have plotted terrorist attacks, to include bombing attempts in Indonesia and Malaysia. At the end of April 2015, Malaysia arrested 12 individuals for plotting numerous attacks in Kuala Lumpur (MacCormac, 2015). These activities are tied directly to ISIL leadership. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was holding meetings during the same weekend in Kuala Lumpur—though connection between the two events is uncertain at this time. Additionally, in April, Malaysia detained 17 individuals who were suspected of plotting an attack on army camps, police stations, and banks to

accumulate weapons and funding for subsequent terrorist activity in the country (Parameswaran, 2015). This incident has generated consternation in Malaysia, as the country's police chief, Khalid Abu Bakar, stated that "the purpose of this new terrorist group is to establish an Islamic country a la IS in Malaysia" (*Ibid.*). Prior to the April incident, the Malaysian government also arrested 19 individuals who planned to bomb bars and a brewery near the capital (Regency, 2014). Dr. Zachary Abuza, a research professor at the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute, perhaps said it best, "ISIS has rekindled terrorism in Southeast Asia after years of decline" (2015).

### **Governmental Response to ISIL**

The regional fear of ISIL is palpable and has sparked perhaps greater governmental response than any other world region. In June 2015, Australia hosted a two day summit that brought together 24 nations and where "Asia-Pacific ministers...vowed to counter violent extremism promoted by jihadist groups such as Islamic State" (AFP, 2015). The summit resulted in a communique that identified the uniformity of the region to combat such violent extremism and augment regional collaboration. Additionally, many of the region's governments have instituted means to mitigate citizen participation in ISIL engagements. For example, Australia recently announced new measures to improve their national security that would make traveling to terrorist locations a crime (BBC, 2015). The measure also provides increased funding to security and police agencies. Malaysia passed

antiterrorism legislation with the intent to combat Islamic militants (News Wires, 2015). Indonesia is also working to strengthen their antiterrorism law to combat the threat posed by ISIL (Brummitt, 2015). The ISIL killing of Japanese hostages in February 2015 has been described by Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as rationale for increasing Japan's military presence and capabilities (Fackler, 2015). Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who actively engages on the importance of fighting ISIL, held a counterterrorism symposium on the topic in April 2015 (Parameswaran, 2015). Additionally, Lee stated that ISIL is using Southeast Asia as a "key recruitment center," and underscored this reality by the formation of the ISIL unit *Katibah Nusantara*, or the Malay Archipelago Combat Unit (*Ibid.*). The governments in Asia Pacific have reacted through numerous means to combat the ISIL threat.

The governmental actions aforementioned have generated results. For example, in January 2015, Malaysia detained or imprisoned over 120 citizens that were linked to ISIL—many of which were preparing to travel to Syria or Iraq (AFP, 2015). Likewise Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia, and others have similarly detained individuals, which impeded ISIL activities within their respective nations. However, despite such actions, the citizenry of Asia Pacific continue to supply ISIL with recruits, supporters, and sympathizers.

**Culture: Sunni and Shia**

Another contributing factor to ISIL's success in Asia Pacific is the cultural connection with Sunni Muslims. ISIL's origins trace to a strong Sunni backing, which it has leveraged both strategically and operationally. ISIL was previously known as al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI) and targeted Shia with intent to lure the United States into conflict (Laub, 2015). Eventually, AQI was weakened, as its leadership was killed; however, a successor was appointed and the rebranding phase brought with it a new name: the Islamic State of Iraq. As ambitions grew, so too did the locations, to include the Levant, which brings us to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). From inception to present, AQI to ISI to ISIL, what has remained constant is a strong Sunni population that targets Shia and other ideologies.

In addition to the aforementioned Asia Pacific support of ISIL, it is important to note that potential conflict can emerge from the cultural distinctions between Sunni and Shia in the region. Over sixty percent of the world's Muslim population lives in Asia Pacific (Pew, 2011). Indonesia, which has the largest Muslim population in the world, is predominantly Sunni, yet has approximately three million Shia across the nation—the majority of whom live in West Java (Dipa, 2014). Indonesia has witnessed clashes between Shia and Sunni prior to the formation of ISIL. For example, in 2012 Shia homes were burned in the town of Madura (BBC, 2012). It would appear, however, that matters have only worsened between the two sects in

Indonesia since the emergence of ISIL. In April 2014, the first ever anti-Shia convention was held in Jakarta, Indonesia. The convention yielded an anti-Shia declaration. Two of the four declaration points are included here: “The alliance will take any necessary measure to maximize the prevention of the proliferation of heretical teaching by Shia followers” and “The alliance will demand that the government immediately ban Shia and revoke all licenses for foundations, organizations and institutions owned by Shiites” (Husain, 2014). It is important to note that the anti-Shia convention occurred post-ISIL successes. Another potential area for sectarian contention between Shia and Sunni is Malaysia, where anti-Shia sentiment has been rising (Middle East Institute, 2014). Shia in Malaysia are under the Internal Security Act, which means they may be detained without trial (Haji, 2014, 13). Numerous Shia have been arrested under this Act. In December 2010, 200 Shia were detained while commemorating the Prophet Muhammad's grandson's death. Later, in December 2013, the “Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, called for an amendment to the Malaysian Federal Constitution, with the addition of the word ‘Sunni’ to be inserted after Islam as the official religion of Malaysia” (*Ibid.*, 14). Contention between Shia and Sunni populations in Asia Pacific has occurred historically, yet with the increasing role of ISIL in the region, it appears to be a topic that merits further attention.

### **Contrarian View**

Joseph Chinyong Liow, a senior fellow at the Brookings Center for East Asia Policy and professor of comparative and internal politics at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore, stated that Southeast Asian economies are much stronger today than they were during the Soviet occupation in the Middle East during the 1980s. He postulated that, “Muslims in Indonesia and Malaysia enjoy social and economic conditions far better than those of their coreligionists in the Levant (or even in Europe, where there is a palpable sense of alienation and marginalization among Muslim immigrant populations). By and large, Southeast Asians simply have fewer incentives to travel to Syria or Iraq” (2014). An additional assertion to minimize Southeast Asia’s import and relevancy to ISIL are the cultural distinctions between Asian and Middle Eastern Muslims. Most Asian Muslims’ Arabic proficiency is found wanting. Interestingly, ISIL translates the vast majority of its messages into Indonesian and Malay, among a few other languages (Abramson, 2014). This is necessary because of the lack of Arabic proficient Asian Muslims. These distinctions between the Muslims of Asia Pacific and the Middle East are identified as reducing the credible threat to the region.

The veracity of the above claims is not in dispute. Asia Pacific does indeed enjoy greater economic strength than it did during the 1980s. It is also true that significant cultural distinctions exist between the Muslims of Asia Pacific and those of the Middle East—one of the greatest

being the medium of communication: Arabic. Yet despite this reality, over 1,300 Asians have traveled to the Middle East in support of ISIL, numerous Asian terrorist groups have pledged allegiance to the caliph, and violent extremism has increased in the region. Neither economic prosperity nor cultural divergence has eliminated Asia Pacific’s ISIL response.

### **Conclusion**

ISIL’s actions in the Middle East should in nowise divert attention from the remainder of the world. Asia Pacific is of particular import as it boasts the largest Muslim population in the world and has provided ISIL with significant strength in terms of manpower, capabilities, recruiting, extremist organizational support, and resources. Careful attention must be paid to Asian jihadists traveling to and returning from the region; existing terrorist organizations that have pledged allegiance or support to ISIL, as well as others that increase violent extremism locally; and, finally, the cultural divide between Shia and Sunni must not be ignored so as to prevent further effects of sectarian conflict.

## References

- Abramson, Daniel N. "Islamic State Online: Jihadist Propaganda 2.0." *Geopolitical Monitor*, September 23, 2014, accessed July 1, 2015), <http://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/islamic-state-online-jihadist-propaganda-2-0/>.
- Abuza, Zachary. "Joining the New Caravan: ISIS and the Regeneration of Terrorism in Southeast Asia." U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute. June 25, 2015, accessed June 26, 2015, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/joining-the-new-caravan/2015/06/25>.
- AFP. "Asia-Pacific ministers vow to fight against Islamic State." *IBNLive*, June 12, 2015, accessed June 30, 2015, <http://www.ibnlive.com/news/world/asia-pacific-ministers-vow-to-fight-against-islamic-state-1005405.html>.
- AFP. "Malaysia arrests 17 on suspicion of plotting terror attacks in Kuala Lumpur, police say." *ABC News*, April 6, 2015, accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-06/malaysia-arrests-17-in-suspected-terror-plot-police-say/6373468>.
- BBC News. "Australia PM Tony Abbott urges regional action against IS." June 11, 2015, accessed June 11, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-33089970>.
- BBC News. "Shia Muslims: Indonesian villages burned down." December 26, 2012, accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-20843259>.
- BBC News. "Tunisia attack: Cameron Says IS fight 'struggle of our generation.'" June 29, 2015, accessed June 29, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-33307279>.
- Brummitt, Chris. "Indonesia Dusts Off 1920s Law to Tackle Islamic State." *Bloomberg*, May 28, 2015, accessed June 29, 2015, <http://www.msn.com/en-sg/news/other/indonesia-dusts-off-forgotten-1920s-law-to-tackle-islamic-state/ar-BBkjRtL>.
- Calica, Aurea. "Islamic State threatens Mindanao, Philippines tells Asean." *The Philippine Star*, April 27, 2015, accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2015/04/27/1448336/islamic-state-threatens-mindanao-philippines-tells-asean>.
- Dipa, Arya. "Organized persecution of Shiites launched." *The Jakarta Post*, April 21, 2014, accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/04/21/organized-persecution-shiites-launched.html>.
- Edwards, David L. "Ignored in Asia: The ISIL Threat." *Small Wars Journal*. Vol. 11, No. 1. January 21, 2015.
- Fackler, Martin. "Departing From Japan's Pacifism, Shinzo Abe Vows Revenge for Killings." *New York Times*, February 1, 2015, accessed June 27, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/02/world/departing-from-countrys-pacifism-japanese-premier-vows-revenge-for-killings.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/02/world/departing-from-countrys-pacifism-japanese-premier-vows-revenge-for-killings.html?_r=2).
- Haji, Muhammad. "The Shi'a Muslims of Malaysia." *The Centre for Academic Shi'a Studies*. February 2014.

- Hashim, Ahmed S. "The Impact of the Islamic State in Asia." S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies. Policy Report. February 2015.
- Husain, Rahat. "World's first Anti Shia Alliance convention results in calls for violence and sectarian purging." Communities Digital News, April 25, 2014, accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.commdiginews.com/world-news/worlds-first-anti-shia-alliance-convention-results-in-calls-for-violence-and-sectarian-purging-16020/>.
- Laub, Anthony. "The Islamic State." Council on Foreign Relations, May 18, 2015, accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/islamic-state/p14811>.
- Liow, Joseph Chinyong. "ISIS Goes to Asia." Foreign Affairs, September 19, 2014, accessed October 17, 2014, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/142004/joseph-chinyong-liow/isis-goes-to-asia>.
- Locklear, Samuel J. "Senate Armed Services Committee on U.S. Pacific Command Posture." Senate Armed Services Committee. April 16, 2015.
- MacCormac, Sean. "Islamic State Terror Attack Foiled in Malaysia." Center for Security Policy, April 27, 2015, accessed April 27, 2015, <https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/2015/04/27/islamic-state-terror-attack-foiled-in-malaysia/>
- Matthew Liddy and Colin Gourlay. "Explained: Where do foreign fighters in Iraq and Syria come from?" ABC News, February 5, 2015, accessed June 29, 2015 <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-02-06/map-foreign-fighters-iraq-syria/6052544>.
- Middle East Institute Staff. "Sectarianism in Muslim Majority/Minority Countries in the Middle East and Asia." Middle East Institute, August 1, 2014, accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.mei.edu/content/map/sectarianism-muslim-majority-minority-countries-mena-and-asia-pacific-regions>.
- News Wires. "Malaysian anti-terror law revives detention without trial." April 7, 2015, accessed June 29, 2015, <http://www.france24.com/en/20150407-malaysia-anti-terror-law-human-rights>.
- Obama, Barack. "President Barack Obama's State of the Union Address." The White House, January 28, 2014, accessed June 10, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/28/president-barack-obamas-state-union-address>.
- Parameswaran, Prashanth. "Malaysia Says New Terror Group Trying to Create Islamic State." The Diplomat, April 8, 2015, accessed June 29, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/04/malaysia-says-new-terror-group-trying-to-create-islamic-state/>.
- Parameswaran, Prashanth. "Singapore Warns of Islamic State Base in Southeast Asia." TheDiplomat, May 30, 2015, accessed June 29, 2015 <http://thediplomat.com/2015/05/singapore-warns-of-islamic-state-base-in-southeast-asia/>.
- Pew Research Center. "The Future of the Global Muslim Population." January 27, 2011, accessed May 25, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/>.

Regencia, Ted. "Islamic State's Support Spreads into Asia." Aljazeera, July 19, 2014, accessed October 30, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/07/islamic-state-support-spreads-into-asia-201471392121686815.html>.

United Nations, "Advanced Unedited Version: Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the human rights situation in Iraq in the light of abuses committed by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and associated groups." Human Rights Council, 28th session. March 13, 2015.

Wagner, Meg. "Boko Haram beheads two alleged spies in ISIS-style execution video." New York Daily News, March 3, 2015, accessed on March 3, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/boko-haram-releases-isis-style-execution-video-article-1.2135326>.

# *Author Biography*



David L. Edwards

Mr. David L. Edwards is the program manager for The Language Flagship, Language Training Centers, and Project Global Officer at the National Security Education Program. He is primarily responsible for The Language Flagship technology, culture, and K-12 initiatives. Prior to joining NSEP, he served as a Plans and Policy Analyst, responsible for writing congressional testimony, speeches, strategy, and policy for senior Department of Defense officials, to include the Secretary of Defense, Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Readiness. In this capacity, he also oversaw the Strategic Foreign Language Expansion Program, a K-12 partnership with the Department of Defense Education Activity. Mr. Edwards also served as a Foreign Language and Cultural Analyst in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs where he advised the Assistant Secretary on language, regional, and cultural policies, programs, and initiatives.