



UNDERSTANDING ISLAM: DISPELLING MYTHS AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS

BARBARA G.B. FERGUSON

- **Team Lead, Cybersecurity and Communications
Department of Homeland Security**
- **Adjunct Professor, Media & Communications,
Command & Staff College, Marine Corps University**

Embedded Reporter



**Barbara Ferguson on the U.S.S. Boxer,
off the coast of Iraq, Operation Iraqi Freedom 1**

Overview:

- Islam
- Muslim world
- Prophet Muhammad, Virgin Mary, Jesus
- Five Pillars of Islam
- Shia/Sunni
- Who are the radicals? Why?
- Muslim holidays



Purpose

**Col. T. E. Lawrence
(1933)**

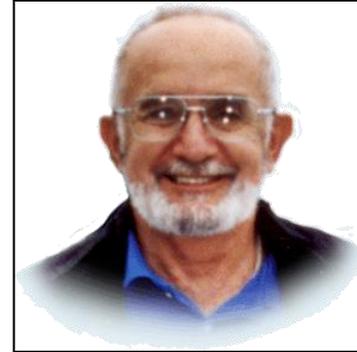


“When I took a decision or adapted an alternative, it was after studying every relevant – and many an irrelevant – factor...

“Geography, tribal structure, religion, social customs, language, appetites, standards – all were at my fingertips.”

Religious Landscape

- 1.8 billion Muslims worldwide (2.1 billion Christians)
- Globally, Islam is main religion in 55 nations
- 3.4 million Muslims in U.S.
- Majority of Arab Americans are Christian



Islam in the U.S.



Islamic Center of America in Dearborn, Michigan

- Islam and Mormonism are among the fastest growing religions in America
- U.S. Muslim community has increased 160 percent from approximately 1 million in 2000 to 2.6 million in 2010

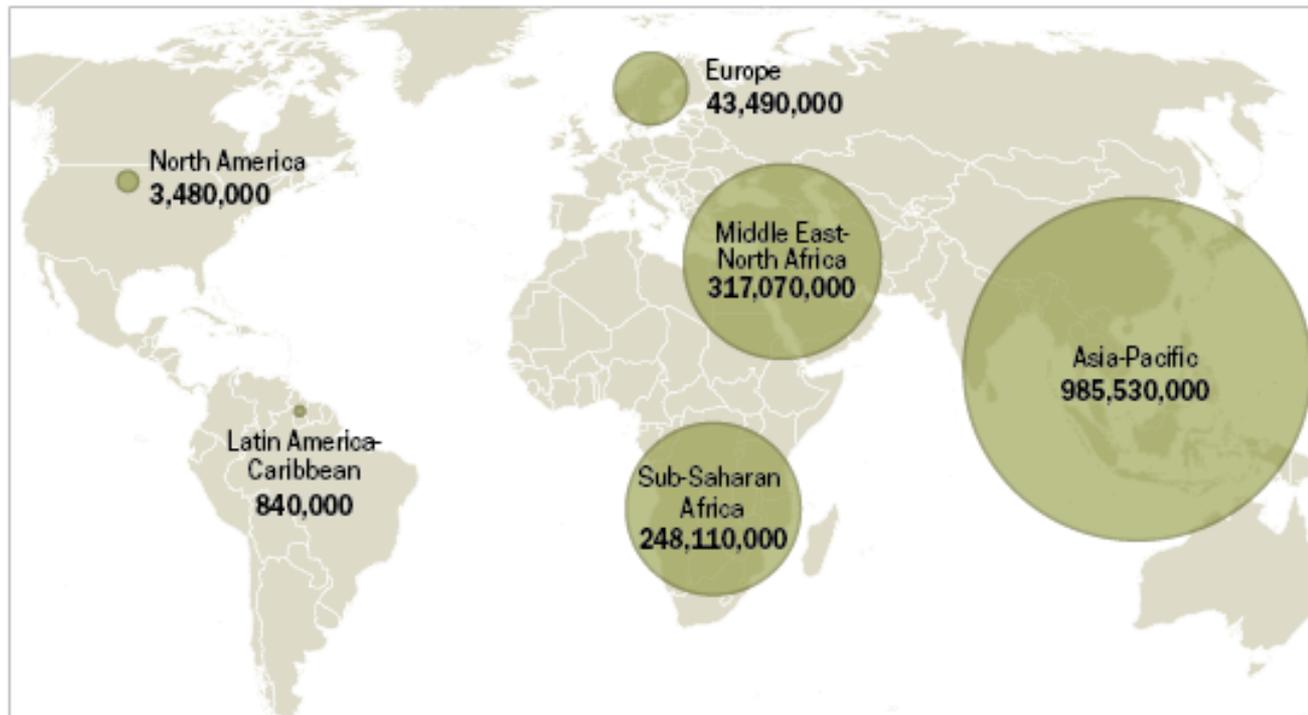
Where is the Muslim World?

- Top ten countries with the largest Muslim populations:
 - **Indonesia** (172 million), **Pakistan** (137 m), **Bangladesh** (108 m), **India** (103 m), **Turkey** (62.4 m), **Iran** (60.7 m), **Egypt** (53.7 m), **Nigeria** (47.7 m) and **China** (37.1 m)
- Of these countries, only Egypt is an Arab country.
- Most Arabs are Muslims, but most Muslims are not Arabs.

Where do Muslims live?

Regional Distribution of Muslims

Population by region as of 2010

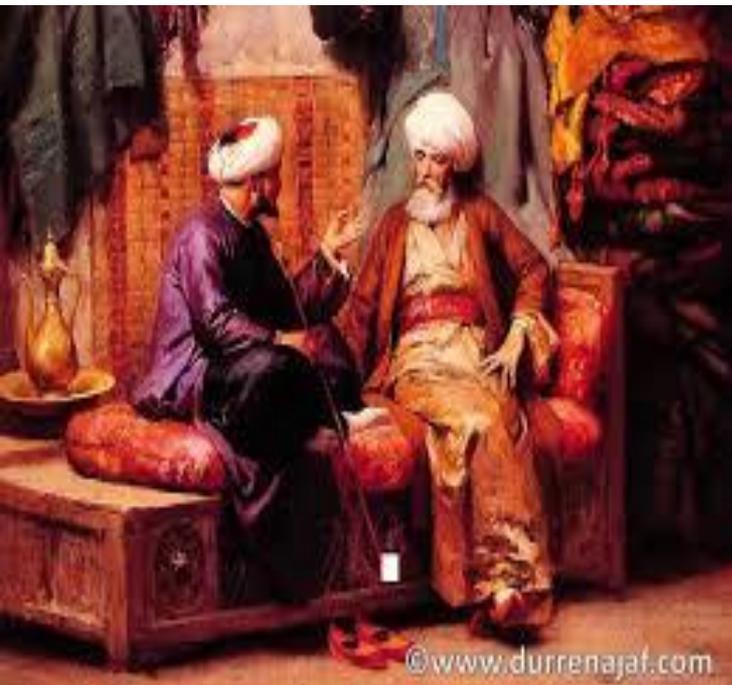


Percentage of world Muslim population in each region as of 2010



Population estimates are rounded to the ten thousands. Percentages are calculated from unrounded numbers. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life • Global Religious Landscape, December 2012

Islamic Cultural Values



- Strong sense of destiny & fate.
- Relationships important to live/work.
- Family highly valued.
- Consensus-building decision making.
- Expressive and emotional.
- Honor, dignity, respect essential.
- Hierarchy, rank and formality honored.
- Religion influences life, work and business.

Basic Terms

- **Islam:**
The religion meaning, “surrender, submission, commitment, peace.”
- **Muslim:**
The person who believes and practices Islam.

إسلام

مسلم

The Holy Qur'an

- Muslims believe the *Qur'an* is the record of the exact words of God Prophet Muhammad in Arabic Angel Gabriel.
- The *Qur'an* is the primary source of Islamic guidance.
- Muslims believe that Islam is a religion for the descendants of Ismail, as Judaism is the faith of the children of Isaac.



Who is 'Allah' or God ?

- Muslims believe that **God revealed three holy books**: the **Torah, Bible** (Injeel) and the Final word of God (Allah), called the **Qur'an**.
- Muslims also believe (through God's revelation on his messengers) that **Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad were all His prophets** and messengers.
- **“Allah” is the Arabic word for God**; not the Muslim word for God.

Major Islamic Beliefs



- Belief in God, and oneness of God
- Belief in Angels, created by God
- Belief in God's Prophets : Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Isaac, Noah, David, Jacob, Jesus
- The Virgin Mary
- The Holy Books (Torah, Bible, Qur'an)
- The Day of Judgment
- Belief in Divine Predestination

The Abrahamic Faiths

- Christians, Jews and Muslims all trace their religions to Prophet Abraham.
- *“Say (O Muslims), “We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) Prophets from their Lord: we make no difference between one and another of them: and we bow to God in submission.”*
Qur’an - Surah 2:136
- *“Verily, those who have attained faith, as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians – all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – no fear need they have, and neither should they grieve.”*
Qur’an – Surah 5:69

Common Muslim Beliefs:

- Islam acknowledges that God's revelation was received in the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospels, and the Qur'an:
- "We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Torah that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel with which is guidance and light, and confirmation of the Torah that had come before him, a guidance and an admonition to those who fear God." - *Qur'an 5:46*

Genesis 21:11-13

- “God said to Abraham: ‘Do not be distressed about the boy or about your handmaiden. Heed the demands of Sarah... for it is through Isaac that descendants shall bear your name.’”
- “As for the son of your handmaiden [Ismail], I will make a great nation of him also, since he too is your offspring.”

-The New American Bible, St. Joseph Edition

Prophets before Muhammad

- Numerous prophets came before Prophet Muhammad
- Some of these prophets that are also mentioned in the Qur'an are the following:
 - David Dawood
 - Jacob Yaqub
 - Ishmael Ismail
 - Joseph Yousuf
 - Moses Moussa
 - John (the Baptist) Yahiya
 - Jesus Issa
 - Sara Sarah
 - Mary Miriam

Congressman Darrell Issa, R- CA.



- **Issa**, was born in Cleveland, Ohio, the son of Martha (née Bielfelt) and William **Issa**, who sold trucks and ground valves. His father was a **Lebanese** American of the Maronite Catholic faith and his mother is of German and Bohemian (Czech) **descent**.
- (Wikipedia)

Who Was Prophet Muhammad?



- An aristocratic Arabian born in the Quraysh tribe, Muhammad was raised an orphan, age 6, in Mecca.
- Muslims believe Prophet Muhammad brought the last message of God (Allah), they also believe the Koran (Qur'an) is God's last revealed book.
-
- At 40, Muhammad received his first revelation from God through Angel Gabriel. The revelations continued for 23 years and are known as the Qur'an.
- Before Muhammad died, age 63, 632 A.D. Most of the Arabian Peninsula had become Muslim, and within a century of his death, Islam had spread to Spain in the West and China in the East.

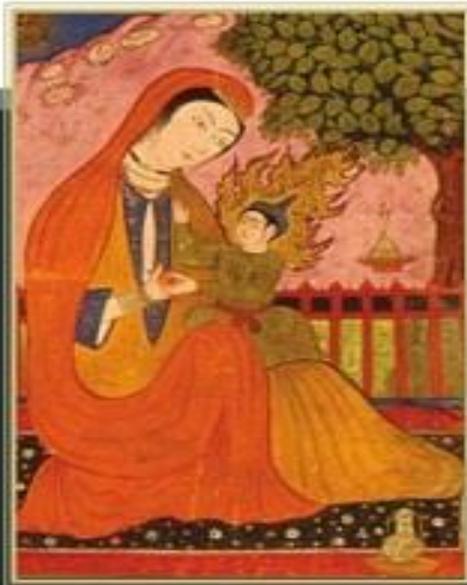
Common Muslim Beliefs about the Virgin Mary

- Mary, the mother of Jesus, is prominent in Islam, and the only woman to be mentioned by name in the Qur'an.
- The Qur'an upholds Mary as a perfect example of womanhood.
- Surah 19, is dedicated to her and her history.
- Mary is mentioned 34 times in the Qur'an, more than in the entire New Testament.
- The Qur'an affirms the virgin conception and birth of Jesus:

“Remember her who preserved her chastity, into whom we breathed a life from Us, and made her and her son a token for mankind.” - Qur'an 21:91

SHARING MARY

Bible and Qur'an Side by Side



MARLIESTERBORG

*With an introduction by Prof. Andrew Rippin
and reflections by Prof. Khaled Abou el Fadl*

Common Muslim beliefs about Jesus

- Jesus is a very important figure in the Qur'an, and affirms the direct teachings of Jesus found in the Bible as truth.
- Like Christians, Muslims believe in the virgin conception of Jesus by God's spirit.
- Muslims believe Jesus is the Son of Man, not the Son of God.
- Muslims do not believe in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (*Qur'an 4:57-58*), but believe God raised Jesus to Himself.

The Islamic Jesus

"Profound...about the very bridge that connects
Jews and Christians with the followers of Muhammad."
—Reza Aslan, author of *No god but God* and *Zealot*

*How
the King
of the Jews
Became
a Prophet
of the Muslims*

THE ISLAMIC JESUS

MUSTAFA AKYOL

Jesus

- **Isa Ibn Maryam** عيسى بن مري
- *‘Isa ibn Maryām*; English: Jesus, son of Mary), or Jesus in the New Testament, is considered to be a Messenger of God.
- and *al Masih* (the Messiah) in Islam who was sent to guide the Children of Israel (*banī isrā’īl*) with a new scripture, al-Injil (the Gospel).
- **The belief that Jesus is a prophet is required in Islam.**

Prophets in Qur'an

- Prophet Musa (Moses) is mentioned most in the Quran, 135 times.
- Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) mentioned 67 times in Qur'an.
- Prophet Muhammad mentioned 6 times in the Qur'an.
- God Almighty's name "Allah" is mentioned 2,584 times in the Qur'an.
- Jesus is mentioned in 93 verses in the Qur'an.

Five Pillars of Faith



- **Profession of faith - *Shahadah***
- **Prayer - *Salaat***
- **Fasting - *Sawm***
- **Charity - *Zakat***
- **Pilgrimage - *Hajj***

'Shahadah'



- **The Declaration of Faith**
- Individual becomes Muslim with this declaration.
- No other rituals or studies are necessary.

Prayer – ‘*Salah*’

- 5 times a day, each prayer lasts 5–15 minutes.
- Wash hands, face, feet before prayer (rite of purification, or ablution).
- Pray in quiet, dry, clean place.
- Pray most anywhere, at anytime.
- Call to prayer – ‘adhan’.
- Pray facing the Ka’aba in Mecca.
- Bowing and prostration while praising God.
- Friday is communal worship, lasts 60–90 min in early afternoon.
- End prayer with blessings to Prophets and their families – including Jews, Christians and Muslims.



Charity or '*Zakat*'

- Obligatory for every financially able Muslim, once every year.
- Must give no less than 2.5 % of their wealth, which includes jewelry.
- Payable to the needy, which may include members of their own family, extended family, clan or tribe.

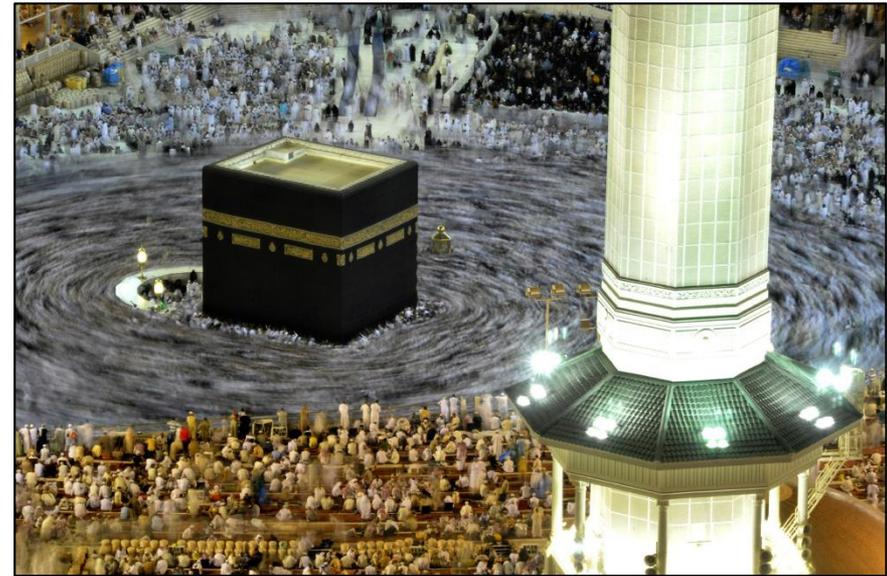


Give Zakat

2.5% of your
income can
change the
world



Pilgrimage or ‘Hajj’



- Ninth day of the last month of the Lunar calendar.
- Performed only in Saudi Arabia: at Mecca, Mina and Mount Arafat.
- Usually ten days, not including travel.
- Tenth day is the Feast of Sacrifice, “*Eid Al-Adha*”.

Abraj al Bail Mall (Makkah Clock Tower)

Towering over Mecca, this is the world's second-tallest building – and it is just a tiny part of a voracious development that has seen historic sites bulldozed and locals forced into shantytowns.

Prophet's Wife's House

The house of the Prophet's wife Khadijah was destroyed and replaced with a public toilet block. After lengthy negotiations the site was briefly excavated with artefacts found dating back to the Prophet's time.

The Prophet's Birth House

The building where the Prophet once lived lies just a few hundred yards from the Grand Mosque. Currently a library, the fear is that it could suffer the same fate as his wife's house when the mosque expands.



Expansion of the Grand Mosque

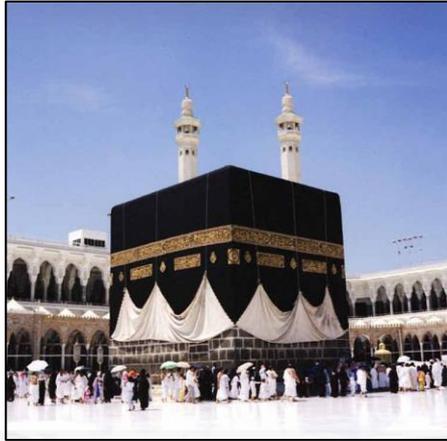
In order to accommodate the ever growing pilgrim numbers, the authorities have begun a £690m expansion. Houses have been pulled down, and it is likely the old Ottoman and Abbasi columns will also go.

Royal Mecca Clocktower

In order to build the clock tower and its surrounding skyscrapers – most of which house luxury hotels – the Saudi authorities approved the destruction of an entire mountain and the Ottoman Ajyad Fortress that lay on top.



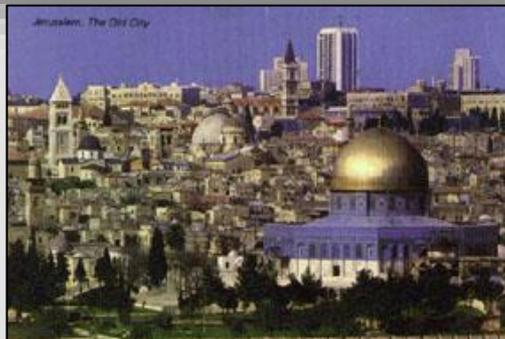
Three Holy Sites of Islam



- **Ka'aba** - located in Makkah (Mecca) is the most sacred site in Islam, built by Prophet Abraham



- **Medina** – where Prophet Muhammad is laid to rest



- **Jerusalem** – where Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven to meet God, and then returned to earth

Denominations



- Both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims share the most fundamental Islamic beliefs and articles of faith. The differences between these two main sub-groups within Islam initially stemmed not from spiritual differences, but political.
- **Shi'as** – Believe the only legitimate Muslim leadership can come from a descendant of Prophet Muhammad's family.
- **Sunni** – Believe leadership should go to a qualified person.

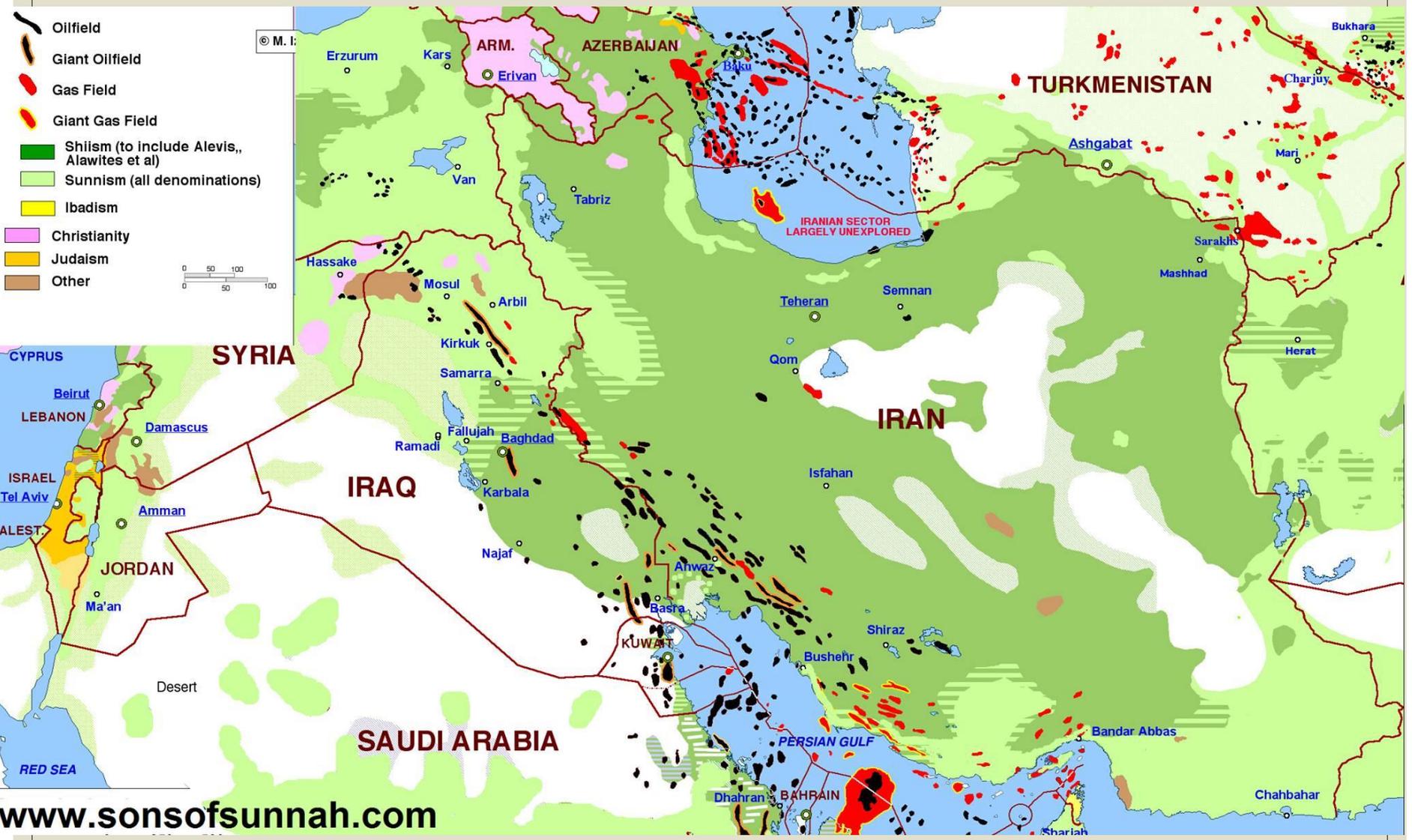
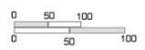
Sunni – Shia Split

- The Sunni-Shiite split traces back to the founding days of Islam, 7th century AD, when the newly founded Muslim community decided leadership after the Prophet Muhammad's death at 63, 632 A.D.
- Ali's supporters—known as the "Shi'at Ali," hence Shi'ite—persuaded his son Hussein to take control of the caliphate. But an army led by the reigning caliph killed him in Najaf in 661, and Hussein in Karbala, both in modern-day Iraq—thus creating the definitive trauma of Shi'ism.
- The centuries since that rupture, the minority Shi'ites who comprise about 10% of global Islam, usually bear the brunt of exclusion and persecution.
 - *The Wall Street Journal*, Daniel Benjamin, June 27, 2016.

Shia – Sunni Populations



-  Oilfield
-  Giant Oilfield
-  Gas Field
-  Giant Gas Field
-  Shiism (to include Alevis, Alawites et al)
-  Sunnism (all denominations)
-  Ibadism
-  Christianity
-  Judaism
-  Other



Shia 'Crescent'



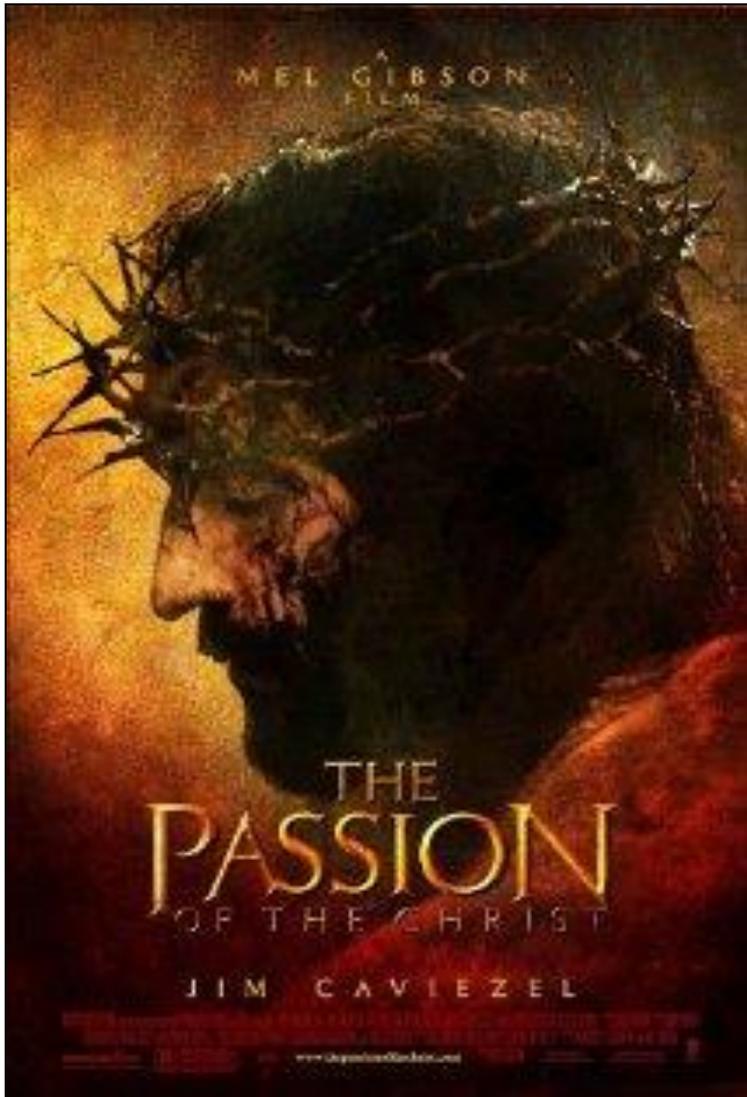
Shi'a Ashura

The Day of Ashura (عاشوراء) is on the 10th day of Muharram and marks the climax of the Remembrance of Muharram.

It is commemorated by Shi'a Muslims as a day of mourning for the martyrdom of Hussein ibn Ali, grandson of Prophet Muhammad, at the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD.



The Passion of the Christ



Actor portraying Jesus on the cross during the *Pagtatal* in, Philippines, April 2017

Jihad



- **Jihad:** An Arabic word, means “exertion” and/or “struggle”.
- **Jihad for Individual:** Self purification. (*Qur’an 29:6*)
- **Social Jihad:** Charity and sharing truth. (*Qur’an 9:15*)
- **Jihad in War:** The inevitable lesser evil, not holy. (*Qur’an 2:26*)
- **Jihad in Battlefield:** Defense and liberation. (*Qur’an 60:8-9*)
- The term “**Holy War**” is not found anywhere in the Qur’an.

The Salafist Interpretation of Islam

- Traditional Muslim teaching stresses those passages in the Qur'an which affirm the Christian Gospel and Hebrew Torah as valid revelations of God and paths to salvation.
- But a harsher, Saudi-influenced view insists that since Prophet Mohamed delivered the final revelation, Christianity and Judaism have lost their power to save.
- Saudi Arabia bans non-Islamic worship. And even though Mohamed married a Christian, Miriam; and a Jew, Safiyya bint Huyayy, a noblewoman of the Jewish tribe Banu Nadir; Saudis will not allow the Bible or Torah to be distributed; and attempts to convert Muslims to another religion is a criminal offense there.

Origins of Extremist Interpretations

- “Throughout history, the sacred scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have been used and abused, interpreted and misinterpreted, to justify resistance and liberation struggles, extremism and terrorism, holy and unholy wars.
- “Terrorists go beyond classical Islam's criteria for a just jihad and recognize no limits but their own, employing any weapons or means.
- “They reject Islamic law's regulations regarding the goals and legitimate means for a valid jihad.
- “Today, individuals and groups, religious and lay, seize the right to declare and legitimate unholy wars of terrorism in the name of Islam.

What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam, John Esposito, Oxford University Press

Why Do People Join ISIS?

- The Quantum researchers (March 2015 report) grouped the fighters into nine categories, based on the reasons they gave for joining ISIS. They are:
- **Status seekers:** Intent on improving “their social standing” these people are driven primarily by money “and a certain recognition by others around them.”
- **Identity seekers:** Prone to feeling isolated or alienated, these individuals “often feel like outsiders in their initial unfamiliar/unintelligible environment and seek to identify with another group.” Islam, for many of these provides “a pre-packaged transnational identity.”
- **Revenge seekers:** They consider themselves part of a group that is being repressed by the West or someone else.
- **Redemption seekers:** They joined ISIS because they believe it vindicates them, or ameliorates previous sinfulness.
- **Responsibility seekers:** Basically, people who have joined or support ISIS because it provides some material or financial support for their family.
- **Thrill seekers:** Joined ISIS for adventure.
- **Ideology seekers:** These want to impose their view of Islam on others.
- **Justice seekers:** They respond to what they perceive as injustice. The justice seekers’ ‘raison d’être’ ceases to exist once the perceived injustice stops,” the report says.
- **Death seekers:** These people “have most probably suffered from a significant trauma/loss in their lives and consider death as the only way out with a reputation of martyr instead of someone who has committed suicide.”

Overcoming ISIS

- These trends indicate that the fight to overcome ISIS will be a long one:
- **The Muslim world is replete with uneducated young people for whom religion is their life's organizing principle and a substitute for education or opportunity.**
- **Illiteracy in Afghanistan is greater than 60%; in Syria and Iraq, the education system has collapsed as a result of the conflict there and hundreds of thousands of children have no schools to attend.**
- **With each passing year of war, shuttered schools and collapsed governance manufacture a new class of these susceptible youngsters. Uneducated 13- to 15-year-olds are the perfect recruiting pool for the likes of Islamic State. They are easily brainwashed, obedient and vulnerable to influence through social media.**

Muslim Scholars Meticulously Blast ISIS Ideology

- More than 120 Muslim scholars from around the world joined an open letter to the “fighters and followers” of the Islamic State, denouncing them as un-Islamic by using the most Islamic of terms.
- Leaders said its aim is to offer a comprehensive Islamic refutation, “point-by-point,” to Islamic State ideology and the violence it has perpetrated. The letter’s authors include well-known religious and scholarly figures in the Muslim world, including the grand mufti of Egypt, and the mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine.
- A translated 24-point summary of the letter includes the following: “It is forbidden in Islam to torture”; “It is forbidden in Islam to attribute evil acts to God”; “It is forbidden in Islam to kill the innocent”; and “It is forbidden in Islam to declare people non-Muslims until he (or she) openly declares disbelief.”
- This is not the first time Muslim leaders have condemned the Islamic State.
 - *September 2014*

Muslim Scholars Blast ISIS Ideology

- **Here is the executive summary of their letter:**
- It is forbidden in Islam to issue fatwas without all the necessary learning requirements. Even then fatwas must follow Islamic legal theory as defined in the Classical texts. **It is also forbidden to cite a portion of a verse from the Qur'an—or part of a verse—to derive a ruling without looking at everything that the Qur'an and Hadith teach related to that matter.** In other words, there are strict subjective and objective prerequisites for fatwas, and **one cannot 'cherry-pick' Qur'anic verses** for legal arguments without considering the entire Qur'an and Hadith.
- It is forbidden in Islam to issue legal rulings about anything without mastery of the Arabic language.
- It is forbidden in Islam to oversimplify Shari'ah matters and ignore established Islamic sciences.
- It is permissible in Islam [for scholars] to differ on any matter, except those fundamentals of religion that all Muslims must know.
- It is **forbidden in Islam to ignore** the reality of contemporary times when deriving **legal rulings**.
- It is **forbidden in Islam to kill the innocent.**
- It is **forbidden in Islam to kill emissaries, ambassadors, and diplomats; hence it is forbidden to kill journalists and aid workers.**
- Jihad in Islam is defensive war. It is not permissible without the right cause, the right purpose and without the right rules of conduct.
- It is forbidden in Islam to declare people non-Muslim unless he (or she) openly declares disbelief.
- It is **forbidden in Islam to harm or mistreat—in any way—Christians, Jews or any 'People of the Scripture'.**

Muslim Scholars Blast ISIS Ideology

- It is obligatory to consider **Yazidis as People of the Scripture**.
- The re-introduction of slavery is forbidden in Islam. It was abolished by universal consensus.
- It is **forbidden in Islam to force people to convert**.
- It is **forbidden in Islam to deny women their rights**.
- It is **forbidden in Islam to deny children their rights**.
- It is **forbidden in Islam to enact legal punishments** (hudud) without following the correct procedures that **ensure justice and mercy**.
- It is **forbidden in Islam to torture people**.
- It is **forbidden in Islam to disfigure the dead**.
- It is **forbidden in Islam to attribute evil acts to God**.
- It is **forbidden in Islam to destroy the graves and shrines of Prophets and Companions**.
- **Armed insurrection is forbidden** in Islam for any reason other than clear disbelief by the ruler and not allowing people to pray.
- It is **forbidden in Islam to declare a caliphate without consensus from all Muslims**.
- Loyalty to one's nation is permissible in Islam.
- After the death of the Prophet, Islam does not require anyone to emigrate.

President George W. Bush

- “I also want to speak tonight directly to Muslims throughout the world.
- “We respect your faith. It’s practiced freely by many millions of Americans, and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends. Its teachings are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah.
- “The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself. **The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them.**”
- September 20, 2001

Study: “Muslims Hate Terrorism, Too”

- A new Pew Global Attitudes Project found "***concern about Islamic extremism is high among countries with substantial Muslim populations.***"
- The study involved over 14,000 respondents in 14 countries and was conducted before ISIS's grab of Iraq in June 2015.
- This highlights the ***growing fear and anger felt by many in Muslim-majority countries facing militant threats***, from Boko Haram in Nigeria to ISIS to the Taliban in Pakistan.

The Muslim American Community



“It is enormously important to understand that **alienating the Muslim American community** not only threatens our fundamental promise of religious freedom, it also **hurts our efforts to combat terrorism.**”

“**Since 9/11, the largest single source of initial information to authorities about the few Muslim American plots has come from the Muslim American community.**”

The Center for American Progress, Sept 2016

Muslims and Radicalization

- **Quintan Wiktorowicz:** An Islamic expert works at the National Security Council, rejects some of the stereotypes about Muslims and radicalization.
- Now Senior Director for Global Engagement at the NSC, Wiktorowicz *interviewed hundreds of Islamists, and says that — contrary to popular belief — very religious Muslims were in fact the people who ended up being the most resistant to radicalization.*
- Wiktorowicz concluded *people who did not have a good grounding in the religion were most likely to be attracted by radical Islam.*

Islamic World & the Middle East



- Although Islam provides Muslims of the world the foundation of common beliefs, the respective cultures of those countries vary considerably.



Muslim Holidays

- **Ramadan:** Month of fasting from dawn to sunset; May 5 - June 4, 2019*
- **Eid El-Fitr:** Three days post-Ramadan celebration; June 3-4, 2019*
- **Hajj:** Pilgrimage to Mecca; August 9 - 14, 2019*
- **Eid Al-Adha:** Holiday end of Hajj; August 10-12, 2019*
- **Muharram:** Shi'ite pilgrimage; also first month in Islamic calendar, starts August 31, 2019*



**Lunar calendar* dates moves approximately 10 days every year.

Muslim Proverbs

- A Stranger is _____ even if he can see.
- Kind words will _____ iron doors.
- To receive me _____ is better than to invite me to _____.
- A hand is unable to _____ by itself.
- Some days we eat _____ and some we eat _____.
- _____, but tie up your camel.

Conclusion

- *Never thought I'd quote Michael Moore.... but...*

“Let's face it, all religions have their whackos...

...But don't judge whole religions on the actions of their whackos.”

المجتمع
Society



QUESTIONS?

Barbara G.B. Ferguson

Email: BarbaraGBFerguson@gmail.com

Arab News – April 2017