Mercy or Wrath: The Competing Ideologies of Sufism and Wahhabism in North Africa and the Sahel (Years 2, 3 and 4)

See Attached Final Technical Report
Final Report
ONR Grant N00014-10-1-0104

“Mercy or Wrath: The Competing Ideologies of Sufism and Wahhabism in North Africa and the Sahel”

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General Findings

The research sponsored by this ONR grant examined the issue of whether Sufi Islam, especially when sponsored and encouraged by governments in North Africa and the Sahel, would provide a more pacifist and moderate alternative to Salafi or Wahhabi Islam, which has a more radical and anti-Western orientation.

Research was undertaken principally in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia and secondarily in Mali. Research methods involved the use of surveys, which were originally distributed among the general populace. Later during the research term we decided to focus upon the use of youth surveys because this population was the largest and most dynamic demographic sector. Besides using surveys, researchers employed focus groups and in-depth interviews to elicit information that would elaborate upon the data obtained in our surveys.

Our conclusions based upon our research in Morocco, Mali, Algeria, and Tunisia are that the governmental encouragement of Sufism as a moderate alternative to Salafism and Wahhabism has met with substantial success in Morocco and Mali, with incomplete success in Algeria, and it was irrelevant in Tunisia. To explicate our findings, our combined survey data and historical research led us to conclude that while Sufism could be used by governments to encourage moderate alternatives to Salafism or Wahhabism, such governmental efforts would meet with greater success if there had been a longer experience with Sufi traditions within the country. Sufi practices have been part of a longer religious tradition in Morocco and Mali, which anchors both their practices and their comparatively more moderate outlook throughout society. In Algeria, by contrast, the practice of Sufism was first rendered disreputable by alleged Sufi leader collaboration with the French colonial regime and secondly when Sufism was actively discouraged by Algeria’s first set of postcolonial leaders. While President Bouteflika (the present Algerian president) has actively promoted Sufism as an alternative to Salafism and Wahhabism, his efforts have met with a lukewarm reception by many elements of the populace for whom Sufism now seems an anachronistic practice. Last, our data reveal that Tunisia’s forced experience with secularism under the regimes of Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali seems to have created a post-Arab Spring social and political environment where two irreconcilable religious and ideological trends manifest themselves (secularism versus Salafism/Wahhabism), with little middle ground exiting for the reconciliation of these divergent worldviews.
Articles Published


Articles Pending


Special Edition of a Journal Published

Book Published

"Al-rabia al-arabi: al-intifada, wa’al-islah, wa'l thawra: [The Arab Spring: Revolt, Reform, and Revolution]
With Youssef Sawani.
Al-Maaref. (Beirut)

Book in Production (to be published August 2013)

Revolution, Revolt, and Reform in North Africa: The Arab Spring and Beyond. 
Routledge. (London)

Book Chapter Published

"Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb.”
In Norman Cigar and Stephanie Kramer, eds.
Al-Qaida after Ten Years of War. Marine Corps University Press.

Among the objectives of US government sponsored research is to have that research have an impact in the public sphere. In the pursuit of that objective, I provided public lectures, gave testimony at legislative hearings, and provided briefings for the US government, the European Union, the French government, and the Moroccan government.

Conference Presentations

Demographics, Economics, and Technology: Background to the North African Revolutions.”
Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa. Arlington, VA.

“Demographics, Economics, and Technology: Background to the North African Revolutions.”

“Le Sahel: Les vulnerabilités et les nouveaux facteurs de l’insecurité.”
Marrakech Security Conference. Marrakech, Morocco

“Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: Terrorism and Counterterrorism Initiatives.”
Association for the Study of the Middle East and Africa. Arlington, VA.
“La fragmentation d’Al Qaida au Maghreb Islamique.”
Marrakech Security Conference. Marrakech, Morocco.

20 January 2011

“Tribalism and Ethnicity Research in North and West Africa.”
University of South Florida. St. Petersburg, FL.

7 December 2010

Invited Lectures

“Nation Building and State Building in Africa.”
Army War College. Carlisle, PA.

19 March 2013

“Managing the Crisis in Mali and the Sahel.”
Atlantic Council. Washington, DC

February 2013

“The Nigerian Boko Haram Movement-
Islamism and Ideological Trends.”
George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies,
Garmich-Partenkirchen, Germany

7 September 2012

“The Origins of Boko Haram as a Terrorist Organization.”
Navanti/Interagency Workshop, Washington, DC

17 April 2012

“Boko Haram, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and Al Shabab.”
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security, Washington, DC

30 November 2011

“U.S. Foreign Policy in North Africa
after the Death of Osama bin Laden.”
Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC

3 June 2011

“Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb:
Terrorism and Counterterrorism in the Sahel.”
Marine Corps University. Washington, DC.

26 April 2011

“The Role of Islam and Radicalization in the Trans-Sahel Region.”
United States Army Africa Command. Vicenza, Italy

15 March 2011

“Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb and the Tuareg Tribes.”
National Counterterrorism Center. Maclean, VA.

4 February 2011

“Radical Islam in Nigeria.”
Canadian Security Intelligence Service. Ottawa, CA.

15 June 2010

“Radical Islam in Nigeria.”

18 May 2010
“Political Islam in Africa.”
European Commission. Brussels, Belgium. 17 May 2010