

The Sunni Shia Split: Perplexing and Deadly International Intercultural Conflict

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Abstract

The divide of the Islamic faith into Sunni and Shia sects, is a serious intercultural conflict that must be addressed. Islamic history can help provide answers to questions in politics and life in the Arab world today. Along with the divide in the Islamic faith, topics will focus on understanding the cultural cohesion provided by the religion of Islam, the Arabic language, and Arab history. In addition to culture, examination of how the Sunni-Shia conflict emerged and how it has persisted throughout history will be evaluated. This historical conflict is a major influence in the rise of Islamic Terrorism and oppression by political leaders in the region today. An examination of these topics will help explain the culture in the Middle East, interaction between Arabs, interaction between the sects of Islam, and how cultural divisions influence those interactions today.

Key words: Prophet Muhammad, Sunni, Shia, Islam, Abu Bakr, Ali, Terrorism, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Intercultural Conflict, Khalifate

Introduction

With the rampant and violent turmoil in the Middle East, a deeper understanding of this region is extremely important for United States policy makers. It is important for Europe and the United States to better understand the history, religion, and culture in order to improve political interactions. Since the 1970s with oil embargos from the Arab countries, hijackings of airlines, attacks in the 1990s on American Embassies, the attack on the USS Cole, the first World Trade Center bombing, and the most the infamous attacks on September 11, 2001, understanding Islam and the Middle East is essential now more than ever.

The attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon forced the United States and its citizens to come up close and personal with the Arab world, its politics, and Islam. Prior to these attacks, most American citizens knew little of the Middle East. Their lack of knowledge was based on a notion that the land was sandy and oil was drilled there. American citizens and the United States government were now faced with a new challenge.

Since September 11, 2001, the United States and the United States Military have been in a constant state of military operations against Islamic terrorism. In the years 2014 and 2015, the rise of the Sunni Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its brutality has caused confusion in Western societies. Westerners are confused by the Arab culture, history, and actions. Why is the Middle East in constant violent conflict? Why can such barbaric acts committed by ISIS be somewhat tolerated and supported by members of the Arab world? What inspires individuals to join them? Opposite of ISIS is the Iranian Shia regime which aspires to obtain nuclear

capabilities. Understanding the culture, history, and language of the Arab world will help give the West insight into this mysterious culture, and hopefully improve its approach in interacting with Arab nations.

Pre-Islam and Its Beginnings

“*Iqra!*” as the Angel Gabriel appeared before Muhammad atop Mount Hira, “Recite in the name of the Lord who created all things, who created man from clots of blood, *iqra* (recite), for the Lord is most generous!”¹ Muhammad’s vision, which he received in 610 A.D., would lead to one of the most widely practiced religions of today.² The vision began on a mountain near the city of Mecca, a center for culture and commerce on the Arab Peninsula.³ The Arabs, under the religion and leadership of Muhammad, would play an important role in history for centuries to come.

The Arab lifestyle prior to the influence of Islam was traditionally a nomadic tribal society.⁴ These nomads would journey between oases and grasslands within their territory building alliances with other tribes.⁵ Oral language would be used by these tribes to retell their tribe’s lineage and successes; these accounts would be told by tribal poets.⁶ These poets had the charisma to bring together separate tribes, igniting feasts and gatherings which led to improving the reputation of both tribes.⁷

These poets would communicate in the Arabic language.⁸ This language would be considered a symbol of the Arab culture as described in Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov’s Onion Model of culture.⁹ The Onion Model incorporates symbols, heroes, rituals, and values that make up a culture, in this case the Arab peoples.¹⁰ In reference to the Arabic language in John Laffin’s *The Arab Mind* that “the richness of Arabic has (an) almost bewitching effect upon those whom it is the native language.”¹¹ For example, the Arabic language, with the practice of poets and story tellers, would play a major role in the spread of Islam. Laffin points out that the Quran, the holy book of Islam, was written in Arabic and thus allowed it to be shared across tribal lines creating unity and contributed to the spreading of Islam.¹² Muhammad’s vision was specifically an Arab vision; as anyone who speaks Arabic as their first language, regardless of

¹ Lewis, Bernard. *Islam and the Arab World*. London. Thames and Hudson Lt, 1976 p.11

² Robinson, C., Cook, M. (Ed.). *The New Cambridge History of Islam*. (Vol. 1). New York. Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.xxiii

³ Lewis, Bernard. *Islam and the Arab World*. London. Thames and Hudson Lt, 1976 p.11

⁴ Robinson, C., Cook, M. (Ed.). *The New Cambridge History of Islam*. (Vol. 1). New York. Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.153

⁵ Lewis, Bernard. *Islam and the Arab World*. London. Thames and Hudson Lt, 1976 p.11

⁶ Laffin, J. *The Arab Mind*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. 1975, p. 64

⁷ Laffin, J. *The Arab Mind*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. 1975, p. 63

⁸ Laffin, J. *The Arab Mind*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. 1975, p. 64

⁹ Hofstede, G. Hofstede, G. Minkov, M. *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2010, p.8

¹⁰ Hofstede, G. Hofstede, G. Minkov, M. *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2010, p.8

¹¹ Laffin, J. *The Arab Mind*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. 1975, p. 68

¹² Laffin, J. *The Arab Mind*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. 1975, p. 63

race is considered an Arab.¹³ Laffin concludes the Arabic language gave the Arabs a connection with God that other races and languages had already encountered.¹⁴

Prior to the spread of Islam, the religions in the region consisted of Judeo-Christian tribes. However, some tribes in the region practiced a polytheistic religion.¹⁵ This religion has roots in an ancient Semitic religion.¹⁶ This belief has three lesser gods who report to the supreme God, Allah.¹⁷ This common understanding of a one supreme God helped influence the Arab people in accepting Islam as well as help in its expansion.

The polytheistic religion, at the time of Muhammad, required a pilgrimage to a black stone building known as the Ka'ba, in order to worship their gods, and the supreme God, Allah.¹⁸ The Ka'ba was located in the city of Mecca where it still stands today.¹⁹ The city of Mecca, controlled by the Quraysh tribe used this shrine to their advantage. The Quraysh used the Ka'ba as a source of income by taxing access to the Ka'ba during the pilgrimage.²⁰ The Quraysh also used this important location to their advantage by taxing merchants trading in the city.²¹

The Quraysh tribe attempted to assassinate Muhammad in the early days of his teachings.²² This attempt resulted in Muhammad escaping to the City of Medina, known as the flight or *Hijra*, which marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. Due to Muhammad's expulsion from Mecca, years of conflict and war engulfed both Muhammad and the Quraysh. Muhammad returned to Mecca upon the Quraysh's willingness to accept Islam and Allah as the one true God. With the Quraysh's acceptance, Muhammad rededicated the Ka'ba as a holy site of Islam.²³ Muhammad rededicated the Ka'ba in order to properly return the holiness of the site to the one true God, Allah, as it was originally claimed to be built by Abraham and his sons.²⁴

The conflict between Muhammad and the Quraysh lasted more than eight years; eight years of war most likely put extreme fiscal restraints on the Quraysh and their city.²⁵ The Quraysh's accepted Islam, as a means to end the conflict with Muhammad.²⁶ Additionally, the Quraysh could have been politically and financially motivated to accept Islam due to Muhammad and Islam's rise to power.²⁷

This embrace of Islam by the Meccans would be known as the "opening" or *Fatah*.²⁸ With the opening of Mecca and the rededication of the Ka'ba, Muhammad would require all Muslims to embark on a pilgrimage to Mecca.²⁹ This pilgrimage known as the *Hajj*, would

¹³ Laffin, J. *The Arab Mind*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. 1975, p. 32

¹⁴ Laffin, J. *The Arab Mind*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. 1975, p. 29

¹⁵ Laffin, J. *The Arab Mind*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. 1975, p. 29

¹⁶ Laffin, J. *The Arab Mind*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. 1975, p. 29

¹⁷ Laffin, J. *The Arab Mind*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. 1975, p. 29

¹⁸ Kirk, G. *A Short History of the Middle East*. Washington D.C. Public Affairs Press, 1949, p.12

¹⁹ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.13-14

²⁰ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.14

²¹ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.14

²² Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.15

²³ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.15

²⁴ Kirk, G. *A Short History of the Middle East*. Washington D.C. Public Affairs Press, 1949 p.13

²⁵ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.15

²⁶ Kirk, G. *A Short History of the Middle East*. Washington D.C. Public Affairs Press, 1949 p.14

²⁷ Kirk, G. *A Short History of the Middle East*. Washington D.C. Public Affairs Press, 1949 p.14

²⁸ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.15

²⁹ Endress, Gerhard. *An Introduction to Islam*, Edinburgh University Press & Carole Hillenbrand, 1988 p.30-31

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mimic the pilgrimage of the polytheistic religions that once traveled there.³⁰ This continued practice would maintain the city as a religious center as well as a hub for trade.

The *Fatah* and its events can be examined and explained when evaluating it with the Hofstede's Onion Model of culture.³¹ The Onion Model, as discussed earlier incorporates symbols, heroes, and rituals. The Ka'ba, the Arabic language, the *Hajj*, and the Prophet Abraham are the major components of the Arab Onion Model. The Ka'ba and Arabic language fall within the symbol category. These symbols are iconic to Arab life and are vital to the culture.³² The *Hajj*, a ritual pilgrimage, similar to the previous pilgrimages, reserved cultural norms and maintained certain aspects of culture and merged them into Islam.³³ The hero element of the Onion Model is easily seen in the actions of Muhammad, who was calculated in declaring that the Ka'ba was built by Abraham and his sons, for the one true God, Allah.³⁴ The Arabs viewed these individuals as blessed, therefore incorporated them into the hero aspect of the Onion Model.³⁵ With Muhammad keeping the prior Arab cultural aspects of the Onion, it helped assimilate Arabs into the new religion of Islam. This absorbance of cultural norms contributed to the spread and acceptance of Islam by the Arab peoples.

Building up his military and political power, Muhammad established the community of followers. This community or *umma*, conveyed to Muslims a sense of belonging.³⁶ The sense of wanting to be involved in a group is not uncommon to the Arab people. This can be determined by evaluating Hofstede's study on individualism within cultures.³⁷ Hofstede scores Middle Eastern countries between 46 and 38 based on the "Individual Index Value"³⁸; the higher the score the more individualistic that culture will be.³⁹ With scores below 50, Hofstede categorizes the Arabs as a collectivist culture.⁴⁰

Along with Hofstede's evaluation of collectivism, Ting-Toomey and Oetzel define the *umma* as an "in group".⁴¹ Ting-Toomey and Oetzel explains that individuals in the "in group" are those who share a common fate, attributes, and whose members are willing to help other

³⁰ Lewis, Bernard. *Islam and the Arab World*. London. Thames and Hudson Lt, 1976 p.26-27

³¹ Hofstede, G. Hofstede, G. Minkov, M. *Cultrues and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2010, p.9-10

³² Hofstede, G. Hofstede, G. Minkov, M. *Cultrues and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2010, p.9-10

³³ Hofstede, G. Hofstede, G. Minkov, M. *Cultrues and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2010, p.9-10

³⁴ Hofstede, G. Hofstede, G. Minkov, M. *Cultrues and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2010, p.9-10

³⁵ Hofstede, G. Hofstede, G. Minkov, M. *Cultrues and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2010, p.9-10

³⁶ Robinson, C., Cook, M. (Ed.). *The New Cambridge History of Islam*. (Vol. 1). New York. Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.189

³⁷ Hofstede, G. Hofstede, G. Minkov, M. *Cultrues and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2010, p.96

³⁸ Hofstede, G. Hofstede, G. Minkov, M. *Cultrues and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2010, p.96

³⁹ Hofstede, G. Hofstede, G. Minkov, M. *Cultrues and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2010, p.94

⁴⁰ Hofstede, G. Hofstede, G. Minkov, M. *Cultrues and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2010, p.94

⁴¹ Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.38

individuals without reciprocation.⁴² This “in-group” mentality would contribute to the spread and popularity of Islam.

The *umma* would not have been possible if it had not been for Muhammad’s first followers in his faith. Ali, a relative, was the first to accept Muhammad’s teachings.⁴³ As the first follower, Ali’s acceptance of Muhammad as the messenger of Allah was significant. Ali was a cousin of Muhammad, and when directed by the angel Gabriel, Muhammad betrothed his daughter, Fatima, to Ali.⁴⁴ Fatima was the daughter of Khadija, Muhammad’s first wife; and Muhammad was her stepfather.⁴⁵ Fatima and Ali brought into the world two sons and two daughters.⁴⁶ Their sons were Hassan and Hussain.⁴⁷ Ali and Fatima’s sons, the grandsons of the Prophet, would later play a major role in the future of Islam.

As Muhammad’s influence grew, he gained more followers, including Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr accompanied Muhammad during his fearful escape from Mecca to Medina on the *Hijra*.⁴⁸ This deep friendship resulted in Abu Bakr allowing one of his daughters, Aisha, to marry Muhammad.⁴⁹ Aisha became one of Muhammad’s many wives after the death of his first wife, Khadija.⁵⁰ Aisha would hold great power and influence within the Islamic *umma*.⁵¹ However, Aisha often came to disagreements between Muhammad’s son-in-law Ali and his wife Fatima.⁵² This family feud would one day result in violence and it haunts the Muslim community to this day. Because of Aisha’s importance within Islamic history, today the two sects have very different opinions of her. The characterization of Aisha by the Sunni is “*Al-Mubra’a*, the Exonerated” and the Shia regard her as “*Al-Fahisha*, the Whore”.⁵³

Aisha, Abu Bakr, Ali, Hassan, and Hussain would shape the future in Islam in the years after Muhammad’s death. The choice of who would follow the Prophet in leadership was not determined prior to his death. Muhammad had not selected his *Khalifa*, or successor, to lead the Islamic State or *Khalifate*.⁵⁴ This failure to select a successor would lead to centuries of strife in the Islamic community that continues to this day.

⁴² Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.38

⁴³ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.32

⁴⁴ Kashani-Sabet, F. Who is Fatima? Gender, Culture, and Representation In Islam. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 1(2). (2005) p.7

⁴⁵ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.12

⁴⁶ Kashani-Sabet, F. Who is Fatima? Gender, Culture, and Representation In Islam. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 1(2). (2005) p.2

⁴⁷ Kashani-Sabet, F. Who is Fatima? Gender, Culture, and Representation In Islam. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 1(2). (2005) p.

⁴⁸ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.27

⁴⁹ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.27

⁵⁰ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.10

⁵¹ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.27

⁵² Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.17,38

⁵³ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.44

⁵⁴ Kirk, G. *A Short History of the Middle East*. Washington D.C. Public Affairs Press, 1949 p.15

The Sunni and Shia Split

At the death of Muhammad in 632 A.D, Muhammad had not selected a successor or *Khalifa* to lead the Islamic empire.⁵⁵ This put the religion and political state into confusion. Who would lead? Muhammad had no sons to claim leadership, but he did have a son-in-law, Ali, who had married his stepdaughter Fatima and gave Muhammad grandchildren.⁵⁶ Opposite of Ali was Abu Bakr, who was one of Muhammad's closest trusted companions.⁵⁷ Whoever would be selected would be the *Khalifa*; and would be the acting ruler of religious and political affairs of the new Islamic State.⁵⁸ Determining the successor would lead to the division of Islam and the future sects of Sunni and Shia Muslims.

The *Khalifa* would be decided by a *shura*.⁵⁹ A *shura* is defined as a gathering of tribal leaders to voice opinions and settle important decisions.⁶⁰ The *shura's* importance is significant still in modern day. It is the name of the high council of ISIS under the leadership of *Khalifa* Abu Bakr Al-Bagdadi.⁶¹ The *shura* would be a lengthy process, but in the end a *Khalifa* was selected. Abu Bakr was selected to lead the Islamic community.⁶² The selection of Abu Bakr as *Khalifa* caused disagreements between the followers of Islam. However, numerous of Muhammad's followers during this time believed the true successor to be Ali.⁶³

Heinz Halm explains the root of the term Shia as *Shi'at Ali*, or the party of Ali.⁶⁴ The Shia was a small group of followers that supported Ali in his rightful heir to *Khalifa* with the belief that the true successor should be within Muhammad's family line.⁶⁵ The Sunnis on the other hand believed the selection of Abu Bakr to be legitimate. This was concluded based on the idea of the Islamic community or *umma*.⁶⁶ The Sunni believe this agreement was "the perfect example of wisdom and consensus of a [Islamic] community".⁶⁷ The Sunnis use this quote for the selection of Abu Bakr as *Khalifa* as justification.⁶⁸

Under Abu Bakr's rule, the new Islamic State would advance out of the Arabian Peninsula and begin its reach north towards Turkey, west to Africa and east to Persia.⁶⁹ Abu Bakr would maintain the state's integrity by leading the fight against Islamic rebels who refused to associate with the state, after the death of Muhammad. These clashes with rebels were known as the *Ridda* Wars, or Wars of Apostasy.⁷⁰ These rebel apostates, though Muslims, were chastised as going against Islam. Therefore these apostates were no longer to be considered

⁵⁵ Lewis, Bernard. *Islam and the Arab World*. London. Thames and Hudson Lt, 1976 p.12

⁵⁶ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.37

⁵⁷ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.27

⁵⁸ Endress, Gerhard. *An Introduction to Islam*, Edinburgh University Press & Carole Hillenbrand, 1988 p.35

⁵⁹ Endress, Gerhard. *An Introduction to Islam*, Edinburgh University Press & Carole Hollenbrand, 1988 p.35

⁶⁰ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.58

⁶¹ Shubert, A. "How ISIS controls life, from birth to foosball." *The Cable News Network*. 2015, April 21
Retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/21/middleeast/isis-documents/index.html>

⁶² Kirk, G. *A Short History of the Middle East*. Washington D.C. Public Affairs Press, 1949,

⁶³ Halm, H. *Shi'ism Second Edition*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2004, p.1

⁶⁴ Halm, H. *Shi'ism Second Edition*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2004, p.1

⁶⁵ Khaleel, M. "The roots of the Sunni-Shiite divide." *National Post*. February 5, 2005

⁶⁶ Khaleel, M. "The roots of the Sunni-Shiite divide." *National Post*. February 5, 2005

⁶⁷ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.61

⁶⁸ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.61

⁶⁹ Robinson, C., Cook, M. (Ed.). *The New Cambridge History of Islam*. (Vol. 1). New York. Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.196

⁷⁰ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.77

Muslims.⁷¹ In this case of rebellion, failure of these rebels to stay aligned with the new *Khalifa* is therefore apostasy. Muhammad preached killing fellow Muslims was prohibited however the killing of apostates was not.⁷² These fellow Muslims, now considered apostates, gave Abu Bakr reason to war against the rebels.⁷³

As apostates, these Muslim rebels would be considered what Ting-Toomey and Oetzel call the “out group.” “Out groups” are considered to be threatening or unequal, and go against the “in groups” values.⁷⁴ This division between the “in groups” and “out group” would justify Abu Bakr’s actions. This first civil war with fellow Muslims would not be the last, fighting or killing fellow Muslims is known as *fitna*.⁷⁵ To Muslims, *fitna* is the “ultimate threat to Islam”.⁷⁶

Abu Bakr would eventually die, but before his death he appointed Omar as the next *Khalifa*. Omar was also an early follower of Muhammad and played a major role in the Islamic military.⁷⁷ Omar increased the size of the Islamic State during his reign as *Khalifa*, but his reign was short lived.⁷⁸ He would be murdered by one of his slaves resulting in another *shura* to select a third *Khalifa*.⁷⁹ That third *Khalifa* resulted in the selection of Othman.⁸⁰ Othman was a Quraysh from the Umayyad clan.⁸¹ Othman’s Umayyad decent created strife within the Islamic community due to the Umayyad’s resistance to Islam in its beginning.⁸² While in power, Othman practiced corruption and nepotism; accepting bribes and appointed undeserving friends and family to positions of leadership.⁸³ Early followers and family members of Muhammad were disgruntled by this, and son-in-law Ali, seized this opportunity to take back the Islamic State.⁸⁴ In the attempt to take back the *Khalifa*, Othman was assassinated, in 656 A.D., by Ali and his supporters.⁸⁵ Ali would now take his rightful place, as believed by the Shias, as the leader of Islam.⁸⁶

Though Ali would become the Fourth *Khalifa*, he would not be a stranger to violence. Ali’s reign was marked by infighting within the Islamic community. Ali, upon his rise to power, would move the location of the Islamic capital from Mecca to Kufa, Iraq.⁸⁷ Aisha, a widow of

⁷¹ Laffin, J. *The Arab Mind*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. 1975, p. 31

⁷² Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.76-77

⁷³ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.44

⁷⁴ Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.38

⁷⁵ Robinson, C., Cook, M. (Ed.). *The New Cambridge History of Islam*. (Vol. 1). New York. Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.202,203

⁷⁶ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.108

⁷⁷ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.37

⁷⁸ Kirk, G. *A Short History of the Middle East*. Washington D.C. Public Affairs Press, 1949, p.15

⁷⁹ Kirk, G. *A Short History of the Middle East*. Washington D.C. Public Affairs Press, 1949, p.19

⁸⁰ Kirk, G. *A Short History of the Middle East*. Washington D.C. Public Affairs Press, 1949, p.15

⁸¹ Robinson, C., Cook, M. (Ed.). *The New Cambridge History of Islam*. (Vol. 1). New York. Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.169

⁸² Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.64

⁸³ Robinson, C., Cook, M. (Ed.). *The New Cambridge History of Islam*. (Vol. 1). New York. Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.204

⁸⁴ Robinson, C., Cook, M. (Ed.). *The New Cambridge History of Islam*. (Vol. 1). New York. Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.204

⁸⁵ Lewis, Bernard. *Islam and the Arab World*. London. Thames and Hudson Lt, 1976 p.13

⁸⁶ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.98

⁸⁷ Endress, Gerhard. *An Introduction to Islam*, Edinburgh University Press & Carole Hollenbrand, 1988 p.36-37

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Muhammad, did not approve of this rise to command and she challenged Ali.⁸⁸ She gathered an army and set out to Basra, Iraq to fight Ali's forces where *fitna* was inevitable.⁸⁹ This conflict was named the Battle of the Camel, after Aisha's arrival to the battle atop an armored camel from where she issued commands.⁹⁰ Hundreds of Muslim soldiers were killed and Aisha's army was destroyed. Ali remained *Khalifa* but he would soon be challenged by another looking to usurp his leadership.

Ali would be challenged, again by Muawiya, the governor of Syria and a relative of the assassinated Othman.⁹¹ Ali and Muawiya's forces would meet at the Plains of Siffin where a battle ensued.⁹² After some combat, Ali and Muawiya would enter into mediation, as demanded by Ali's troops, in hopes to end the *fitna*.⁹³ No agreement was met and Ali peacefully returned to Iraq.

Those who questioned Ali's decision to not destroy Muawiya were led by a man named Abdullah Ibn Wahb.⁹⁴ Wahb formed the *Khawarij*, the rejectionists or those who seceded, in order to return to the fundamentals of Islam.⁹⁵ The *Kharwajj*, were rejecting the perceived corruption that had entered into Islam since Muhammad's death. Wahb's fundamentalist ideology later influenced the father of present-day Wahhabism.⁹⁶ Muhammad Ibn Abdul Al-Wahhab, rejuvenated this fundamentalism in the eighteenth century.⁹⁷ Since then, this fundamentalist theology of Islam has massively influenced the culture and politics in Saudi Arabia; additionally it is linked to Sunni Jihadist today.⁹⁸

Ali fought with this sect and although victorious, he was eventually assassinated by a *Kharijite* in 661 A.D.; leaving the *Khalifate* open.⁹⁹ This was Muawiya's chance to become *Khalifa* and lead the Islamic State.¹⁰⁰ The assassination of Ali and his burial at modern day Najaf, Iraq would end the reign of what Muslims consider to be the *Rashidun*, or the Rightly Guided Ones.¹⁰¹

At this point in Islamic history, Ali's sons Hassan and Hussain were left as possible successors to the *Khalifate*. Hassan, the eldest son of Ali, would forfeit the right of *Khalifa* to Muawiya.¹⁰² Muawiya would eventually die and appoint his son, Yazid as the next *Khalifa*.¹⁰³ The Muslims in Iraq, specifically those who were Shia, or followers of Ali, pledged their allegiance to Hussain.¹⁰⁴

⁸⁸ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.102

⁸⁹ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.104

⁹⁰ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.113

⁹¹ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.127

⁹² Endress, Gerhard. *An Introduction to Islam*, Edinburgh University Press & Carole Hollenbrand, 1988 p.37

⁹³ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.140

⁹⁴ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.141

⁹⁵ Kirk, G. *A Short History of the Middle East*. Washington D.C. Public Affairs Press, 1949, p.19

⁹⁶ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.141

⁹⁷ Lewis, B. *The Crisis of Islam*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2003 p.120

⁹⁸ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.133

⁹⁹ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.151

¹⁰⁰ Endress, Gerhard. *An Introduction to Islam*, Edinburgh University Press & Carole Hollenbrand, 1988 p.37

¹⁰¹ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.152

¹⁰² Halm, H. *The Shite: A Short History*. Princeton, New Jersey, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007 p.8

¹⁰³ Halm, H. *The Shite: A Short History*. Princeton, New Jersey, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007 p.8

¹⁰⁴ Halm, H. *The Shite: A Short History*. Princeton, New Jersey, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007 p.9

The conflict between the Shia of Iraq and the *Khalifa*, Yazid, can be analyzed using Bartos and Wehr's examination of conflict.¹⁰⁵ Bartos and Wehr indicate that conflict progresses out of grievances.¹⁰⁶ The Shia of Iraq, were being persecuted by *Khalifa* Yazid due to their belief that Ali was the true successor of Muhammad. This persecution provided the Shia with legitimate grievances. According to Bartos and Wehr, this oppression would have allowed the Shia to gain group solidarity due to their common struggle.¹⁰⁷ This solidarity allowed the Shia to gain an "in group" mentality that Ting-Toomey and Oetzel discuss in regards to intercultural conflict. With the "in group" mentality and group solidarity, the Shia amassed personnel and materiel resources needed for military action.¹⁰⁸ This materiel and personnel according to Bartos and Wehr would be equivalent to their conflict resources, which are needed to engage in open conflict.¹⁰⁹ With group solidarity, "in group" mentality, grievances, and conflict resources, the Shia made the steps necessary to challenge the Islamic State in open conflict.

With this knowledge of solidarity and support, Hussain would leave Mecca in 680 A.D. to return to Iraq and begin his quest to reclaim the *Khalifate*.¹¹⁰ Hussain however, would not be supported by his followers in Iraq, as the governor of the region learned of this mutinous plan.¹¹¹ Hussain supporters were executed and a sizable military force was sent out to interdict Hussain's advancement.¹¹² With the eradication of Hussain's Shia supporters, he no longer had the necessary resources to engage in open conflict.¹¹³

Hussain was stopped at Karbala, Iraq where his small army of followers was surrounded by *Khalifa* Yazid's military.¹¹⁴ Here at Karbala, Yazid's military laid siege to Hussain's forces.¹¹⁵ This cordon lasted ten days, and would later become the Ten Days of Ashura where the Shias celebrate Hussain's sacrifice.¹¹⁶ Hussain and his followers were killed, however, Hussain's son, Ali Zayn Al-Abidin, survived.¹¹⁷ Al-Abidin would become what the Shia call, the Fourth *Imam*.¹¹⁸

The Shia believes the true leaders of Islam are those in the blood line of Muhammad.¹¹⁹ These leaders are called *Imam* or leader of the community.¹²⁰ This view is opposite of the Sunni's elected *Khalifa*.¹²¹ The *Imam* has great significance in the Shia faith; the Shia believe

¹⁰⁵ Bartos, O., & Wehr, P. *Using Conflict Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.81

¹⁰⁶ Bartos, O., & Wehr, P. *Using Conflict Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.73

¹⁰⁷ Bartos, O., & Wehr, P. *Using Conflict Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.76

¹⁰⁸ Bartos, O., & Wehr, P. *Using Conflict Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.78

¹⁰⁹ Bartos, O., & Wehr, P. *Using Conflict Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.78

¹¹⁰ Halm, H. *The Shīte: A Short History*. Princeton, New Jersey, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007 p.9

¹¹¹ Pinault, D. *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community*. New York. St. Martin's Press., 1992, p.5

¹¹² Pinault, D. *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community*. New York. St. Martin's Press., 1992, p.5

¹¹³ Bartos, O., & Wehr, P. *Using Conflict Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.78

¹¹⁴ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.184

¹¹⁵ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.184

¹¹⁶ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.189

¹¹⁷ Halm, H. *The Shīte: A Short History*. Princeton, New Jersey, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007 p.15

¹¹⁸ Halm, H. *The Shīte: A Short History*. Princeton, New Jersey, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007 p.15

¹¹⁹ Khaleel, M. "The roots of the Sunni-Shiite divide." *National Post*. February 5, 2005

¹²⁰ Halm, H. *The Shīte: A Short History*. Princeton, New Jersey, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007 p.3

¹²¹ Kirk, G. *A Short History of the Middle East*. Washington D.C. Public Affairs Press, 1949, p.21

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that there have been eleven *Imams* of the Muhammad blood line, that were rightful leaders to the Islamic world and that Shia are awaiting the return of the twelfth Imam, or *Mahdi*.¹²²

Today, the return of the Twelfth Imam is one of the most important aspects of the Shia belief.¹²³ The *Mahdi*, currently hidden away from civilization, will bring about the Day of Judgment and destroy the Shia's enemies.¹²⁴ The *Mahdi* is defined in many ways, he "is the restorer of good"¹²⁵, "the rightly guided one"¹²⁶, and "the one who guides divinely".¹²⁷

The Twelfth Imam even makes its way into politics. The Shia Islamic Republic of Iran declares the *Mahdi* as the "true head of state" and that Article 5 of the Iranian constitution declares "May God speed his return".¹²⁸ The *Mahdi* is believed to be hiding within a cave below the Askariya shrine in Iraq, where he will emerge from the cave during end times.¹²⁹

Current Divisions

The division today between the Shia and the majority Sunni Muslims can be better understood by evaluating the early *Khalifate*, observing Islamic history, and analyzing the characteristics of the split. The Sunni-Shia split is just as alive today as it was in 680 AD.¹³⁰ The Sunni still believe that the Shia are apostates for going against the early establishment of the *Khalifate*, and the Shia hold the same view for the Sunnis, as they continue to go against the bloodline of Muhammad.¹³¹ This mind set of each group, places the opposing people into the "out group" that Ting-Toomey and Oetzel discuss in their evaluation of intercultural conflict, causing continual strife.¹³²

During the 2005-2006 years of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Iraq was divided by Sunni and Shia tribes, with attacks on one another occurring daily.¹³³ A reporter at the time, James Hinder spoke with a Sunni doctor who described his experience with Shia security forces, "They took us from homes and interrogated us like we were real terrorists. The only reason was because we pray at the local Sunni mosque".¹³⁴ The doctor also described how the security forces "cursed the first Sunni *Khalifas* that preceded the Prophet Muhammad".¹³⁵

It isn't just the Shia who is guilty of terroristic acts; the Sunni are guilty as well. The atrocities caused by the Sunnis during this time were conducted by Al-Qaida in Iraq lead by Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi.¹³⁶ Al-Zarqawi's view of the Shia can be understood by examining a letter written to one of his followers "[the Shia are] the insurmountable obstacle, the lurking snake, the

¹²² Halm, H. *The Shite: A Short History*. Princeton, New Jersey, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007 p.34

¹²³ Halm, H. *The Shite: A Short History*. Princeton, New Jersey, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007 p.34

¹²⁴ Halm, H. *The Shite: A Short History*. Princeton, New Jersey, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007 p.37

¹²⁵ Lewis, Bernard. *Islam and the Arab World*. London. Thames and Hudson Lt, 1976 p.125

¹²⁶ Halm, H. *The Shite: A Short History*. Princeton, New Jersey, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007 p.34

¹²⁷ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.201

¹²⁸ Halm, H. *The Shite: A Short History*. Princeton, New Jersey, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007 p.34,43

¹²⁹ Hazelton, L. *After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam*. New York. Doubleday. 2009 p.205

¹³⁰ Hinder, J. "A civil war in all but name as Sunni and Shia fight to the death." *The Times*. April 30, 2005

¹³¹ Hinder, J. "A civil war in all but name as Sunni and Shia fight to the death." *The Times*. April 30, 2005

¹³² Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.38

¹³³ Hinder, J. "A civil war in all but name as Sunni and Shia fight to the death." *The Times*. April 30, 2005

¹³⁴ Hinder, J. "A civil war in all but name as Sunni and Shia fight to the death." *The Times*. April 30, 2005

¹³⁵ Hinder, J. "A civil war in all but name as Sunni and Shia fight to the death." *The Times*. April 30, 2005

¹³⁶ Weiss, Michael, Hassan, Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015 p. 28

crafty and malicious scorpion, the spying enemy, and the penetrating venom”.¹³⁷ Al-Zarqawi continued “the hurried observer and inquiring onlooker will realize that Shi’ism is the looming danger and the true challenge”.¹³⁸ Al-Zarqawi’s Al-Qaida in Iraq would carry out their vision of fighting the Shia “apostates” through murder, kidnappings, torture, and beheadings.¹³⁹ Al-Zarqawi’s reign of terror ended when he was killed in a joint coalition attack led by U.S forces in 2006.¹⁴⁰

This barbarism and slaughter can be seen today as Sunni ISIS continues to carry out the same tactics as Al-Zarqawi promoted. In one report, ISIS rounded up surrendered Iraqi soldiers and separated the Shia Muslims from the group and executed them.¹⁴¹ ISIS claimed to have executed seventeen hundred, but other reports estimate it to be around seven hundred.¹⁴² In addition to this mass execution, ISIS also went to an Iraqi prison and executed the Shia prisoners who were incarcerated there.¹⁴³ These attacks conducted by both Sunni and Shia in the land of Iraq are mimicking the early *fitna* battles of Islam, specifically The Battle of the Camel, The Plains of Siffin, and Hussain’s stand at Karbala.

With the Shia of Iraq being targeted by ISIS terrorists, the Iraqi government has turned to its neighboring Shia majority state of Iran for help. The Iranian military, specifically the Revolutionary Guard, has been deployed along with the Iranian Air Force to destroy ISIS forces that threaten Iraqi sovereignty.¹⁴⁴ This confident Shia Iran is causing the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which is predominantly Sunni, to be concerned. Toby Matthiesen quoted in Aryn Baker’s 2015 article on this strain, addresses the Saudi’s dislike, “basically the Saudis are trying to blame Iran for everything that goes wrong in the region.”¹⁴⁵ This blame, along with fighting between the Sunni and Shia, is causing the two groups to form conflict solidarity against one another.¹⁴⁶ With Iran seeking nuclear capabilities, the Saudi’s fear is understandable.¹⁴⁷

Ting-Toomey and Oetzel address conflict in interpersonal relationships, as either being positive or negative, depending on how the conflict is managed.¹⁴⁸ Ting-Toomey and Oetzel concludes that if conflict can be managed properly, it can lead to a positive outcome and improve the relationship between the two parties.¹⁴⁹ If not done properly, it can affect the mental and

¹³⁷ Weiss, Michael, Hassan, Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015 p.28-29

¹³⁸ Weiss, Michael, Hassan, Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015 p.28-29

¹³⁹ Weiss, Michael, Hassan, Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015 p.30,34,57

¹⁴⁰ Weiss, Michael, Hassan, Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015 p. 61

¹⁴¹ Weiss, Michael, Hassan, Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015 p.29-30

¹⁴² Weiss, Michael, Hassan, Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015 p.29-30

¹⁴³ Weiss, Michael, Hassan, Hassan. *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror*. New York, Regan Arts, 2015 p.29-30

¹⁴⁴ Bazzi, M. “Iran will do what it takes to fight ISIS.” The Cable News Network. January 3, 2015. Retrieved from: <http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/03/opinion/bazzi-iran-iraq/>

¹⁴⁵ Baker, A. “Saudi Arabia fears Iran’s meddling in Arab states as much as its nuclear ambitions.” Time. March 31, 2015. Retrieved from: <http://time.com/3765045/saudi-arabia-iran-nuclear-deal/>

¹⁴⁶ Bartos, O., & Wehr, P. *Using Conflict Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.73

¹⁴⁷ Baker, A. “Saudi Arabia fears Iran’s meddling in Arab states as much as its nuclear ambitions.” Time. March 31, 2015. Retrieved from: <http://time.com/3765045/saudi-arabia-iran-nuclear-deal/>

¹⁴⁸ Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.3

¹⁴⁹ Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.3

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physical health of those involved.¹⁵⁰ This stress on mental and physical health can lead to anger, defensiveness, hypertension, and ulcers.¹⁵¹

Ting-Toomey and Oetzel's view of conflict in interpersonal relationships could be applied to the relationship between the Shia and Sunni on a larger level. The Sunni and Shia have developed anger between each other since their division due to their fundamental incompatibility of values, norms, and goals that are described by Ting-Toomey and Oetzel as the source for intercultural conflict.¹⁵² This past and current anger and disagreement, has led to violent interaction between the two causing physical damage to the Muslim *umma* and cultural body of Islam.

The Shia and Sunni face immense difficulty in improving their relationship. It will be difficult for the two groups to cooperate with one another because of the conflict behaviors they have developed over time.¹⁵³ Ting-Toomey and Oetzel define conflict behavior as learned expectations through the "cultural value, norms, social roles, expectations and scripts that govern (a) conflict episode".¹⁵⁴ Since the beginning of the Sunni and Shia split, the script of conflict interaction has almost always been violent conflict. These norms have been established and can be observed today with Sunni ISIS fighting Iraqi Shia militia men, supported by the Shia Iranian military advisors.¹⁵⁵ On another front are the Houthi Shia rebels in Yemen, backed by Iran, fighting against the Sunni Yemini government allied to Sunni Saudi Arabia.¹⁵⁶

A possible explanation as to why infighting continues is that when one of the groups, either Sunni or Shia, gain power over the other, the group in control gains interaction satisfaction.¹⁵⁷ This interaction experience is based on the concept of validating the identity of the culture or group. In this case, the violence between the Shia and Sunnis will continue as long as either party gains satisfaction over the other when validating their cultural superiority as based upon their ability to subjugate, kill, or imprison the other party.¹⁵⁸ Ting-Toomey and Oetzel highlight this form of conflict satisfaction as detrimental to both conflict parties.¹⁵⁹ Each conflict

¹⁵⁰ Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.3

¹⁵¹ Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.3

¹⁵² Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.10

¹⁵³ Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.11

¹⁵⁴ Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.58

¹⁵⁵ Snyder, C. "Iran maneuvering for greater influence in Iraq's fight against ISIS." Fox News. March 3, 2015 Retrieved from: <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/03/03/iran-maneuvering-for-greater-influence-in-iraqs-fight-against-isis/>

¹⁵⁶ Bayoumy, B. & Ghobari. "Iranian support seen crucial for Yemen's Houthis." *Reuters*. December 14, 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/15/us-yemen-houthis-iran-insight-idUSKBN0JT17A20141215>

¹⁵⁷ Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.59

¹⁵⁸ Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.59

¹⁵⁹ Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.59

party hopes to engage in a win-lose scenario, but more often the conflict results in a lose-lose situation.¹⁶⁰

In order for the Shia and Sunni Muslim conflict to improve, it must involve generating new ideas to solve their issues, and bringing an end to the current script of conflict.¹⁶¹ Both parties need to look to their common characteristics, embrace their similarities, and strive to operate in mutual win-win collaborations, though this seems almost impossible to do in the current Middle East situation.¹⁶²

Conclusion

The Shia and Sunni division is essential in understanding the political environment in the Middle East. Failure for the West or any other outside political entity, to not recognize the difference between the two, could lead to unintended consequences. Reporter Jeff Stein highlights this failure in a 2006 interview with a Federal Bureau of Investigation official.¹⁶³ During Stein's interview of the Chief of National Security Branch, Willie Hulon, Stein probed Chief Hulon on his ability to identify the difference between Shia and Sunni Muslims. Hulon responded that he understood the divisions, but when asked to identify the affiliation of Iran as either Shia or Sunni, he provided the wrong answer, "Sunni".¹⁶⁴

Stein noted this was not the only individual who could not properly identify the differences.¹⁶⁵ In explaining the difference to a United States Representative Terry Everett, Vice Chairman of the House Intelligence Subcommittee on Technical and Tactical Intelligence, Everett replied to Stein, "what occurs to me is that it makes what we're doing over there extremely difficult, not only in Iraq but that whole area".¹⁶⁶ This statement and the misunderstanding by Chief Hulon clearly demonstrate how important it is to understand and identify the differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims.

While researching and uncovering the differences between Shia and Sunni Muslims, it became evident that the key differences were identifiable and understandable. Throughout time, the differences crept deeper into cultures of the Middle East to the point that mass execution based on a disagreement of leadership was deemed to some extent, culturally acceptable.

As the United States continues to engage in communication, military action, and economic endeavors, it is important that the United States and specifically its leaders, understand the difference between Shia and Sunni Muslims. As Stein points out, the ignorance of our leaders about this division, and specifically by those in charge of affairs dealing with the Middle East, is unacceptable. Leaders can become extremely effective by investing research and more analysis into the subject, and looking deeper into the problems than what they present on the surface. This issue is serious and may never be solved. However, with proper understanding of

¹⁶⁰ Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.60-61

¹⁶¹ Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.60-61

¹⁶² Ting-Toomey, S., & Oetzel, *Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001, p.60-61

¹⁶³ Stein, J. "Can you tell a Sunni from a Shiite?" *New York Times*. October 17, 2006

¹⁶⁴ Stein, J. "Can you tell a Sunni from a Shiite?" *New York Times*. October 17, 2006

¹⁶⁵ Stein, J. "Can you tell a Sunni from a Shiite?" *New York Times*. October 17, 2006

¹⁶⁶ Stein, J. "Can you tell a Sunni from a Shiite?" *New York Times*. October 17, 2006

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the differences and how it effects everyday life, more informed decisions can be made leading to more prosperous outcomes.

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