

The American public's opinion of Islam has worsened significantly since 2005 and FBI hate crimes statistics show that anti-Muslim hate crimes are at high levels. In 2010, a Pew Research Survey found that 70% of the general American public held either an unfavorable or neutral view of Islam, with 33% holding a positive view. More alarming, this survey shows that around 10% of people were unable to articulate a view on Islam in 2005 to not being able to articulate a view on Islam in 2010. One major facet of CAIR's work is to document, manage, and resolve civil rights cases involving Muslims in the U.S. CAIR also provides legal assistance to Muslims and has filed 12 media lawsuits, particularly print newspapers, have a unique position of influence over their readers' perception of people and events. For example, with technical assistance from CAIR, the Washington Post and other news outlets have often become more objective in their reporting on the issues described. It can also shift the readers' opinion towards fear and hatred of the groups involved. This report analyzes The Seattle Times' print articles during the past year for accuracy, proper contextualization, objectivity, and general informative qualities that help readers accurately understand the issues being described. The Seattle Times aims to "serve the community through quality journalism," and we believe this should include a focus on ensuring that its content helps maintain a vibrant democracy through an informed populace. Proper terminology, contextualization, and angle of reporting can help readers understand issues thoroughly and if not properly done, can actually become an obstacle to readers' understanding of issues. Inaccurate reporting can mislead and confuse readers

# AN ANALYSIS OF

# *The Seattle Times'*

# COVERAGE OF

# Islam & Muslims

# IN

# 2012

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The American public's opinion of Islam has worsened significantly since 2005 and FBI statistics show that anti-Muslim hate crimes still remain at high levels, making it more important now than ever for media outlets to strive toward journalistic ideals of providing information in an accurate, comprehensive, timely and understandable manner, which helps the American public be well informed to make decisions regarding their lives, and their local and national communities. The best news coverage allows readers to form their conclusions based on factual information, compelling stories and appropriate context.

This report is organized in a user-friendly manner with important observations highlighted throughout the report for readers to quickly find important 'takeaways' from each section. Toward the beginning of this report, on pages 3 & 4, you will find our overall recommendations to The Seattle Times executives, editors and reporters.

In each section of this report, we clearly document trends we observed in our analysis of The Seattle Times' reporting in 2012. We provide recommendations based on the findings in that section, to help provide research-based lessons in reporting on Islam and Muslims.

## ▶ TO SUMMARIZE OUR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ◀

**1** We are encouraged by the number of Representative articles and urge The Seattle Times to expand on these examples of representative reporting. These stories serve to realistically portray mainstream Muslim thought and Muslims' lives.

**2** We found a small number of Informative articles that provide appropriate, deep context around complex issues. We recommend The Seattle Times provide more articles providing historical, cultural, political context to complex issues.

**3** We flagged a number of articles for Labeling Disparities. We provided case studies to illustrate the apparently subjective use of labels such as "terrorism" and its variants. In coverage of the 2011 killings in Arizona in which Rep. Gabrielle Giffords was critically injured, we did not even once find 'terror(ism)' or 'terrorist' in the coverage, as compared to coverage of comparable attacks by Muslim persons where this label was heavily used. We also noted disparities in contextualization of attackers' backgrounds in a number of cases and noted that several mitigating factors were introduced in backgrounds of mass killers who were non-Muslim while there was a pattern of heavy focus on ethnic and religious backgrounds when killers were Muslim. We recommend The Seattle Times be more

accurate in its labeling and contextualization. To avoid perpetuating false stereotypes and unintentionally fueling prejudice and hate, reporters must accurately describe the background and reasoning for violent extremism.

**4** We found over 500 mentions of words such as "Islamist", "jihadist" and their variants. Imprecise terminology can fuel prejudice and hate in readers' minds and becomes an obstacle in their understanding of issues. We recommend The Seattle Times use accurate, fact-based descriptions and cease using labels such as 'Jihadist', 'Islamist' and their variants, to avoid misleading readers into associating Islam and Muslims with violence, and to provide readers with an accurate, fact-based understanding of issues.

**5** We found a limited number of articles that we flagged under Inflammatory and False Information. In one, the author described Islam as a "primitive, misogynist religion". We noted that a similarly defamatory attack on a minority religion, such as Judaism, or a culture, such as African American culture, would not be considered fit to print. We recommend that The Seattle Times editors exercise care in distinguishing between opposing viewpoints and hostile, defamatory rhetoric, which can grossly misinform the public, and fuel prejudice and hate.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

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The following are our overall recommendations, based on our findings in this report, in addition to those specific recommendations provided at the end of many sections of this report. With these, our goal is to empower journalists in providing readers, viewers and listeners with information that will help them gain an accurate, representative and fact-based understanding of events involving Islam and Muslims and of Muslims' lives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA OUTLETS

- There continues to be a need for columnists to distinguish between opposing viewpoints on Islam and Muslims and defamatory rhetoric that fuels prejudice and discrimination. While defamatory comments may be newsworthy and in some cases express the writers' sincere opinions, they should no longer be used simply to provide a 'balance' in opinions.
- In an era with American Muslims' lives increasingly intersect with mainstream media coverage of family, faith, the economy, health care, politics, sports, entertainment and many other issues, we at CAIR-WA, and CAIR chapters nationwide, are committed to providing timely and accurate resources for journalists.
- Unfortunately, anti-Muslim individuals and organizations continue to see their incendiary rhetoric and inaccurate, sensationalistic distortions of Islamic teachings and Muslims' lives legitimized through stories, features and profiles. Such inclusion, despite the best efforts of reporters striving for fair and accurate coverage, devalues the quality of journalism and results in readers receiving a distorted, unrepresentative image of Islam and Muslims.

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***CAIR-WA, and CAIR chapters nationwide, are committed to providing timely and accurate resources for journalists.***

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- The Seattle Times, as a customer of other media outlets and buyer of syndicated articles, should work with larger news organizations to improve their coverage of Muslims in order to serve their constituency with helpful, informative journalism
- The Seattle Times should use accurate, fact-based descriptions and cease using labels such as 'Jihad' or 'Jihadist' and other variants, to avoid giving extremists legitimacy, avoid misleading readers into associating Islam and Muslims with violence, which can fuel prejudice and hate, and to provide readers with an accurate, representative fact-based understanding of issues.

### **ALLY INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS**

- We encourage organizations throughout the country to use this report to track and monitor the news in their respective regions.
- We also find that a report covering national newspapers would be extremely helpful, given the nature of the newspaper business today.
- We encourage active citizens to use this report to engage with their local media to provide realistic and representative coverage of Muslims in the press.

#### **WRITE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR TO:**

- • Emphasize and praise excellent reporting and coverage
- • Note an error; suggest a correction
- • Highlight weak coverage of an important issue

#### **COMMENT ON ONLINE ARTICLES TO:**

- • Provide links to in-depth and factually correct articles on the web

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# ▶ Introduction

## • • • • • WHO WE ARE

CAIR-Washington State (CAIR-WA), a non-profit 501(c)(3), grass-roots civil rights and advocacy organization, is the local chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). CAIR is America’s largest Muslim civil liberties organization, with about 33 regional offices nationwide.

The Washington State chapter started in 2002, when a group of dedicated volunteers in the Seattle area saw a need for a unique kind of Muslim organization—an organization that would work to uphold civil rights of American Muslims, fight bigotry, empower American Muslims to fully contribute to the broader society, and foster a fact-based understanding of Islam and Muslims.

The chapter has grown tremendously since then, deepening its base in the Washington State Muslim community. It has become a reliable resource and partner for media, public officials and policy makers, advocacy groups, and interfaith communities.

## • • • • • WHY WRITE THIS REPORT?

The American public’s opinion of Islam has worsened significantly since 2005 and FBI hate crimes statistics show that anti-Muslim hate crimes still remain at high levels. In 2010, a Pew Research Survey found that a 70% of the general American public held either an unfavorable or unsure view of the religion, compared to the 30% that held a positive view. Perhaps even more alarming, this survey shows that around 10% of people went from having a positive view of Islam in 2005 to not being able to articulate a view on Islam in 2010.<sup>1</sup>

One major facet of CAIR’s work is to document, manage, and resolve civil rights cases involving Muslims in America. CAIR has noticed an increase in discrimination and hate crimes against the American Muslim community throughout 2012.<sup>2</sup> Media outlets,

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center. (2010). Public Remains Conflicted over Islam. Retrieved from Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life website: <http://www.people-press.org/2010/08/24/public-remains-conflicted-over-islam/>

<sup>2</sup> CAIR-WA Staff. (2012, November 27). Reporting on the rise: CAIR-WA caseload surpasses 2012 count. Retrieved from <http://www.cairseattle.org/civil-rights-center/reporting-on-the-rise-cair-wa-caseload-surpasses-2012-count>

**“The American public’s opinion of Islam has worsened significantly since 2005 and FBI stats show that anti-Muslim hate crimes still remain at high levels.”**

particularly print newspapers, have a unique position of influence on their readers’ perception of people and events. Reporting with ethnically or religiously loaded or incorrect labels can mislead and confuse readers, often becoming an obstacle to their understanding of issues described. It can also shift readers’ opinions towards fear and hatred of the groups involved.

*According to The Society of Professional Journalists,*

“To ensure that the concept of self-government outlined by the U.S. Constitution remains a reality into future centuries, the American people must be well informed in order to make decisions regarding their lives, and their local and national communities. It is the role of journalists to provide this information in an accurate, comprehensive, timely and understandable manner.”<sup>3</sup>

This report analyzes The Seattle Times’ print articles during the year 2012 for accuracy, proper contextualization, descriptiveness, and general informative qualities that help readers accurately understand the issues being described. The Seattle Times aims to “serve the community through quality journalism,”<sup>4</sup> and we believe this should include a focus on ensuring that its content helps maintain a vibrant democracy through an informed populace. Proper terminology, contextualization, and angle of reporting can help readers understand issues thoroughly and if not properly done, can actually become an obstacle to readers’ understanding of issues. Inaccurate reporting can mislead and confuse readers and can also shift public opinion towards fear and hatred of the groups involved. Informative, accurate, fact-based, and inclusive coverage can play an important role in expanding public awareness and understanding of Islam and of Muslims’ lives.

## WHY THE SEATTLE TIMES? . . . . .

We focus on The Seattle Times because it is the largest daily newspaper in Washington State, and maintains the largest Sunday circulation in the Pacific Northwest region.<sup>5</sup> It is a

<sup>3</sup> Society of Professional Journalists. Our mission. Retrieved from <http://www.spj.org/mission.asp>

<sup>4</sup> The Seattle Times Company. Overview of The Seattle Times. Retrieved from <http://www.seattletimescompany.com/communication/overview.htm>

<sup>5</sup> See Citation 4

*Proper terminology, contextualization, and angle of reporting can help readers understand issues thoroughly and if not properly done, can actually become an obstacle to readers' understanding of issues.*

regionally-renowned and widely-circulated newspaper. *Many of the recommendations in this report may be applicable to many other media outlets.*

The findings and recommendations in this report are based entirely on our reading and analysis of the print version of The Seattle Times during the year 2012, and aim to promote constructive discourse leading to excellence in The Seattle Times' reporting of Islam and Muslims. Through this report our aim is to provide research-based lessons in reporting on Islam and Muslims.

## Methodology

In this section, we will detail our methodology for reading and analyzing articles, as well as writing this report.

During the year 2012, the authors of this report read a daily hard copy of The Seattle Times and discussed relevant articles. We catalogued a broad range of articles covering various topic areas and case studies into a database. Then, we flagged articles into different sections such as Representative, Misleading Terminology, and Labeling Disparity, among others. We then analyzed our database, concentrating on flagged articles, to find any trends and articles of interest. After we prepared a list of flagged articles and trends, we began to write this report.

In each section of this report, we clearly document trends we observed in our analysis of The Seattle Times' reporting in 2012. In our analysis we did not make a distinction between articles written by Seattle Times staff and syndicated articles from other newspapers and wire services because The Seattle Times staff has control over what content is published in its newspaper. After we summarize our findings in each section, we provide a recommendation based on the findings in that section. These recommendations are designed to help provide research-based lessons in reporting on Islam and Muslims.



“Articles representing the views, aspirations and lives of mainstream Muslims provide readers with a realistic and accurate understanding of Islam and Muslim life.”

For our citation format, we choose to use American Psychological Association (APA) style footnotes to allow the reader to glance at the bottom of each page and quickly understand which articles are being discussed and when they were published. All external research sources, such as web pages and journal articles, are also in APA style footnotes.

## ‘Representative’ Reporting

Articles representing the views, aspirations and lives of mainstream Muslims provide readers with a realistic and accurate understanding of Islam and Muslim life. This as opposed to inaccurate or improperly contextualized coverage, which misleads and confuses readers, often becoming an obstacle to their understanding of issues described, and shifts public opinion towards fear and hatred of the groups involved.

Articles and photos showcasing realistic examples representative of the lives, accomplishments and aspirations of everyday Muslims add greatly to the civil discourse and helps broaden readers understanding beyond stereotypes.

Articles flagged as ‘Representative’ came from almost every section of the newspaper - national news, world news, photos, editorials, special columns, etc. - and fell across a broad range of topics. These articles provided accurate representations of the vast majority of Muslims and their aspirations. In some articles the authors focused on people engaged in everyday activities and in areas of the world often associated with violence. For example: a concert review of Afghan musicians<sup>6</sup> and an article about Valentine’s Day<sup>7</sup> in Baghdad provided another perspective into the lives of people in Afghanistan and Iraq.

<sup>6</sup> Connell, C. (2012, April 26). Beautiful, mesmerizing traditional Afghan music. The Seattle Times, p. B2.

<sup>7</sup> Juhi, B. (2012, February 14). Baghdad’s romance grows with Valentine’s day. The Seattle Times, p. B2.

*The Seattle Times' inclusion of columns by life-long Seattle resident Aziz Junejo in the 'Faith & Values' section of the newspaper is a tremendous service to its readers.*

In another article the author covers the “Quran verse ‘Olympics’” in which young Muslims from all over the world compete by reciting the Quran in front of a panel of senior judges.<sup>8</sup> The article follows a young teenager from Kampala, Uganda that wants to buy a house with the prize money. These articles, among others, allowed readers to see how Muslims from in different parts of the world interact and view their faith.

Two articles about immigrants gaining U.S. citizenship featured Seattle area Muslims, many of them smiling with joy, becoming American citizens. The articles included pictures of women wearing headscarves<sup>9</sup> and helped show American Muslims as Americans, quoting one Muslim man, who was born in Ethiopia, saying that he now wishes to register to vote, “like an American.”<sup>10</sup> The photos of joyful smiles help give the reader a realistic, representative glimpse into the lives, accomplishments and aspirations of everyday American Muslims. The Seattle Times’ inclusion of columns by life-long Seattle resident Aziz Junejo in the ‘Faith & Values’ section of the newspaper is a tremendous service to its readers. The articles by Junejo, featured about every 4-5 weeks, consistently offer glimpses into different aspects of the lives of a mainstream Muslim family in North America. Examples include articles by Junejo that detail how Thomas Jefferson studied the Quran<sup>11</sup>, how proactive interfaith initiatives by Muslim communities are combating Islamophobia<sup>12</sup> and reflections on why Ramadan is important to Muslims.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, as we noted in our 2011 Seattle Times Article Analysis Report, these columns offer valuable insights into everyday Muslim life and thought as consistently found by nationally representative surveys of American Muslims such as those by the Gallup Poll and Pew Research Center.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Erdbrink, T. (2012, June 27). Quran verse ‘Olympics’ crowns champ chanter. The Seattle Times, p. A13.

<sup>9</sup> Turner, L. (2012, March 11). Seattle center ceremony welcomes new citizens. The Seattle Times, p. B1.

<sup>10</sup> Vinh, T. (2012, July 05). 525 sworn in as new U.S. citizens. The Seattle Times, p. B1.

<sup>11</sup> Junejo, A. (2012, February 18). Leadership can come from ordinary people, not just presidents. The Seattle Times, p. B2.

<sup>12</sup> Junejo, A. (2012, September 15). Islamophobia stems from misunderstanding. The Seattle Times, p. B2.

<sup>13</sup> Junejo, A. (2012, July 21). Ramadan: A yearly gift of faith, fasting and self-assessment. The Seattle Times, p. B2.

<sup>14</sup> Pew Research. Global Attitudes Project, (2012). Most Muslims want democracy, personal freedoms, and Islam in political life. Retrieved from Pew Research Center website: <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2012/07/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Project-Arab-Spring-Report-FINAL-Tuesday-July-10-2012.pdf>

*Just as articles that portray mainstream Muslims help to counter crude stereotypes, so do representative photo images of mainstream Muslims in America and abroad.*

There were at least two missed opportunities to provide more educational opportunities to readers. We noted two particular articles in which authors describing positive actions by Muslims did not note their faith. This informative representation could have further given readers a comprehensive view of Islam and Muslims and counter harmful stereotypes reinforced by labeling disparities, terminology issues and inaccurate coverage we note later in the report. One article on Muhammad Ali’s fight against Parkinson’s disease makes no mention of his Muslim faith when describing his background,<sup>15</sup> despite the fact that his faith played a very important role in both his public and private life. In another article which documents a new Chobani yogurt plant successfully expanding and bringing jobs to Idaho,<sup>16</sup> no mention is made of the founder and chief executive’s Islamic faith.

**REPRESENTATIVE PHOTOS . . . . .**

Just as articles that portray mainstream Muslims help to counter crude stereotypes, so do representative photo images of mainstream Muslims in America and abroad. In our analysis of The Seattle Times we documented photos that were representative of Muslim life in the U.S. and around the world. These pictures help give readers realistic portrayals of Muslims and each photo makes a small yet important contribution toward dispelling crude stereotypes.

Several Seattle Times stories about the Somali-American community in Washington State included pictures of Somali-American women, who were easily identifiable as Muslim by their hijabs. A photo by Seattle Times staff photographer Erika Schultz on April 29, 2012 showed Somali-American women playing bingo to help in learning English.<sup>17</sup> Another picture published in the February 27, 2012 newspaper showed Washington State high school student Mumina Jimaale in a fashion show highlighting Somali formal wear.<sup>18</sup> Both of these pictures draw attention to the Washington Somali-American population as valuable members of the community, sharing their unique cultural traditions with wider society.

<sup>15</sup> Dahlberg, T. (2012, January 17). Ali remains upbeat in parkinson’s fight. The Seattle Times, p. C1.  
<sup>16</sup> New York Times. (2012, December 16). Chobani’s new Idaho yogurt plant will employ 300. The Seattle Times, p. A6.  
<sup>17</sup> Schultz, E. (April 29, 2012). Somali classes. The Seattle Times [Photo]  
<sup>18</sup> Dickin, R. (February 29, 2012). Somali fashion in spotlight. The Seattle Times [Photo]

An image by Associated Press photographer Matt Kryger published on September 26, 2012 focuses on three Muslim Burmese girls waiting to hear from the Myanmar's pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Indiana.<sup>19</sup> The political situation in Myanmar has been rapidly deteriorating and the largely Muslim Rohingya ethnic group has faced government-supported ethnic cleansing.<sup>20</sup> The inclusion of a picture of Burmese Muslims by The Seattle Times in this situation informs the reader of the diversity in Myanmar and puts a relatable human face on Muslims being killed because of their faith.

Several additional pictures depict Islamic practices and traditions in a representative manner. An image included in the Newline section on the second page of The Seattle Times on July 21, 2012 shows Indonesian women praying as the month of Ramadan begins,<sup>21</sup> and an image by Seattle Times staff photographer Erika Schultz published on August 14, 2012 depicts a local Seattle area Muslim woman, Ghazala Awan, praying at the Muslim Association of Puget Sound (MAPS) in Redmond, WA, as Ramadan draws to an end.<sup>22</sup> Several Newline pictures portrayed the city of Mecca during the time of *haji*, and a photo from January 13, 2012, shows the world's biggest copy of the Quran.<sup>23</sup> Images such as these provide visual examples of Muslims around the world engaging in central aspects of their faith and help the reader understand and feel connected with these communities.

Finally, one of the most significant examples of representative journalism came from the September 2, 2012 edition of the Pacific NW magazine, published by The Seattle Times.<sup>24</sup> This edition had a cover that featured a Sikh woman wearing a head covering and focused attention on the many religious groups in which women cover their heads, and some who also wear face veils, as part of their religious observance. This article included photos, by Seattle Times staff photographer Erika Schultz, of local Sikhs, Anabaptist Christians, Hasidic

<sup>19</sup> Kryger, M. (September 26, 2012). The Seattle Times [Photo]

<sup>20</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2013). "All You Can Do is Pray" crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing of Rohingya Muslims in Burma's Arakan state . Retrieved from [http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/burma0413webwcover\\_o.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/burma0413webwcover_o.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Alangkara, D. (July 21, 2012). Ramadan Begins. The Seattle Times [Photo]

<sup>22</sup> Schultz, E. (August 14, 2012). Ramadan nears end. The Seattle Times [Photo]

<sup>23</sup> Sadeq, M. (January 13, 2012). Quran Larger than Life. The Seattle Times [Photo]

<sup>24</sup> Schultz, E. (Photographer), & Turnbull, L. (Writer). (September 2, 2012). Covered: Women of faith keep heads held high

Jews, and Muslims, and explained reasons these women choose to cover themselves. This comprehensive and thoughtful feature made an important contribution toward normalizing public expressions of religious observance for the highlighted communities and helps readers to better understand these women and their religions.

..... **RECOMMENDATIONS** ◀

*The Seattle Times should continue to expand the number of representative articles and photos. These stories serve to realistically portray mainstream Muslim thought and Muslims' lives. They are critical in combating false stereotypes about Muslims caused by labeling disparities, inaccurate terminology, and contextualization issues.*

## 'Informative' Articles ◀

The vast majority of articles concerning topics related to this report were simply noted in our database. Of these thousands of articles, we have selected a few on the basis of their informative nature. We hope that The Seattle Times can expand the number of informative articles that provide appropriate context around complex issues, in order to provide quality journalism in service to its readers.

Any print newspaper has a finite amount of print space. However, acclaimed newspapers like The Seattle Times have a duty to maintain a commitment to a dynamic assortment of articles that explain root causes of the events we see today. This will help provide readers with an informed view of events that occur in their own backyard as well as those half a world away.

Being an informed citizen is not only critical to a vibrant democracy as a whole, but for many local readers it is a personal issue as well. The Puget Sound area is unique because it hosts, among many other military bases, the Joint Base Lewis-McChord, the nation's sixth largest military base which has over 30,000 active duty troops.<sup>25</sup> It is important that citizens

<sup>25</sup> Bernton, H. (2013, June 26). Lewis- McChord base will lose one Stryker Brigade. The Seattle Times. B2

throughout the Puget Sound, due to their close connections with those serving our nation overseas, be informed of the root causes and drivers behind many of the conflicts America is involved with overseas. The Seattle area is also an important business hub and investors and business persons benefit from an understanding of root causes of current events overseas. Lastly, the Seattle area is a very diverse part of the country with a large number of residents from a vast array of racial and ethnic backgrounds. The following articles were selected for their deeply informative content and for the absence of inaccurate labels and crude, misleading descriptors.

• • • • • **COVERAGE OF ISRAEL AND PALESTINE**

A series of articles on the United Nations vote to confirm Palestine as a state with observer status helped readers understand the intricacies of the situation. In late November, 2012, an article contained details of how the international community voted on the issue, Israel’s concerns, Hamas’ complicated position on the U.N. vote, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas’ reasoning for forcing the vote and the U.S. position.<sup>26</sup> Another article on the same day clarified why the negotiations have continually stalled between Israel and Palestine.<sup>27</sup> It details how negotiations for a two-state solution are stalled due to Palestinians’ demand for a settlement freeze, how Israel is threatening punitive measures, and how law professors and international bodies view the legality of Israeli settlements under the Geneva Conventions.

Later in December another article detailed the effects of the Palestinian movement for statehood and the Israeli response, once again addressing the issue of Israeli occupation and settlements.<sup>28</sup> By examining how this issue affects relations among many different countries and international organizations, these articles ensure the reader has a multi-faceted grasp of the many obstacles to a negotiated peace deal.

<sup>26</sup> Richter, P. (2012, November 30). Palestinians: “We are a state”. The Seattle Times. p. A1/A14  
<sup>27</sup> Isabel, K. (2012, November 30). After U.N. vote, stalemate remains. The Seattle Times. p. A3.  
<sup>28</sup> Rudoren, J. (2012, December 01). Israel to add settlements. The Seattle Times, p. A2.

## SECTARIAN VIOLENCE IN IRAQ . . . . .

Some of the informative pieces in the paper focused on examining the deep causes of political rifts and events in the Middle East. In coverage of Iraq, we found a number of stories that were more informative than typical reporting on sectarian violence in that country. These informative articles helped illustrate the complex nature of internal conflicts.

An article in January notes the ongoing Iraqi political crisis and helps the reader understand the connection between political problems and sectarian violence.<sup>29</sup> The article also reports that the blasts occurred during the run-up to Arbæen, a Shia religious observance, and gives cultural background on why this event is important. In the article, the author helps readers understand the cycle of sectarian violence and retaliation between militias and violent extremists. By providing further details of the current political crisis and how “a separate entity was trying to exploit political tensions to return the country to sectarian strife,” readers gain a broader understanding of these conflicts. Later in January, 2012, The Seattle Times reported on another bombing targeting Shia pilgrims and goes into even more detail describing the pilgrimage process and why the event is sacred to Shia Muslims.<sup>30</sup>

Another story in May, 2012 describes Iraqi president Jalal Talabani’s efforts to resolve the political problems facing his country. The author explains how deep political rifts have become entwined with religious divisions in Iraq’s politics, as seen in the struggles between Sunni and Shia politicians in higher levels of government and the resulting deadlock, as well as the complex issue of Iraq’s semi-autonomous Kurdish north.<sup>31</sup>

In a June, 2012 article the author reports on another series of bombings and does an excellent job of helping the reader understand the political drivers behind the conflict. It describes how “insurgents will continue to use the political situation as an impetus for more attacks” and gives cultural background on the Shia annual pilgrimage that has been targeted. Rather

<sup>29</sup> Zavis, A., & Salman, R. (2012, January 06). Scores killed as Shiites targeted in Iraq. The Seattle Times, p. A4.

<sup>30</sup> Schreck, A., & Al-Jurani, S. (2012, January 15). Blast kills Iraqi pilgrims. The Seattle Times, p. A4.

<sup>31</sup> Associated Press. (2012, May 27). Iraqi president calls for talks to resolve crisis. The Seattle Times, p. A6.

than simply describing the bombings as religious violence, the author examines the complex mixture of politics, religion and ethnicity that has created this situation.<sup>32</sup>

• • • • • **COVERAGE OF AFGHANISTAN**

Many Americans still remember the infamous “they hate our freedom”<sup>33</sup> speech given by President George W. Bush after 9/11. In the speech, President Bush repeatedly told Americans that those who opposed us were determined to fight us because they hate our way of life, and the idea that “We must engage these people in Afghanistan, Iraq, and around the world, so we do not have to face them here at home” ran throughout his speeches.<sup>34</sup> This narrative has continually permeated the American consciousness and often times readers assume that those fighting us do so because “they hate our freedoms” or out of jealousy. However, in coverage of the Taliban and attacks on Americans by Afghan military forces also known as ‘insider attacks,’ we found some examples of informative articles in which the authors detail reasons behind the fighting in Afghanistan.

In one article the author chronicling efforts of U.S. military forces to work with Afghan villagers to combat improvised explosive devices (IEDs), one of the most common weapons used by the Taliban. The reporter asks U.S. soldiers why Afghans are willing to work with the Taliban.<sup>35</sup> Rather just vaguely state “they are the enemy” the report focuses on a variety of reasons, including working for the insurgent groups to help feed their families and survive the winter, and some who feared that their families will be killed if they do not help the Taliban.

The author helps the reader understand the multiple perspectives in the war in Afghanistan by detailing a village meeting between U.S. forces and Afghan villagers to discuss IEDs. The

<sup>32</sup> Arango, T. (2012, June 14). Scores die in attacks on Iraqi Shiite targets. *The Seattle Times*, p. A8.  
<sup>33</sup> Bush, George W. (2001, September 20) Address to the Nation. Given at Washington, DC. Retrieved from: <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/09.20.01.html>  
<sup>34</sup> Bush, George W. (2004, July 9). Defending the War. Given at Kutztown, PA. Retrieved from: <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/07.09.04.html>  
<sup>35</sup> Brenton, H. (2012, October 15). On patrol in Afghanistan. *The Seattle Times*, p. A1.



report illustrates the difficult back-and-forth between the US military and Afghans, describing how Afghan villagers are worried that they will be mistaken for insurgents and shot by helicopters while American patrol leaders are concerned about locals planting IEDs to attack U.S. patrols.

Two more articles focus on attempts to increase cultural understanding among Americans and avoid dangerous misunderstandings that can lead to violence. In one, a Washington State University presentation aims to provide soldiers with information about local Afghan crops because when soldiers unknowingly damage crops they can take away a family's only source of income.<sup>36</sup> Another article details a pamphlet created by the Afghan government designed to help Afghan soldiers with cultural misunderstandings.<sup>37</sup> These articles are important because they give the reader insight into a few of the factors that lead to resentment towards American forces.

Another article we found to be informative was one that included an explanation of why the Quran, Islam's revealed text, is sacred to Muslims and why burning it can be considered extremely offensive by Muslims.<sup>38</sup> Some articles that reported the Quran burning by U.S. troops, and the public demonstrations that followed, did not explain why many Afghans, already frustrated by the war, expressed shock and outrage over the event.<sup>39,40,41,42</sup> This particular article helps place the burning in context, and quotes several prominent Islamic scholars detailing the normal customs of disposing of the Quran and why burning them caused protests. By providing these important details, the author helps readers understand why these protests are happening and why so many Afghans had been angered.

<sup>36</sup> Geranios, N. (2012, June 11). WSU advice: Don't stomp on Afghan grapes. *The Seattle Times*, p. B2.

<sup>37</sup> Sieff, K. (2012, September 29). To stop "insider" attacks, Afghan pamphlet tries to explain allies. *The Seattle Times*, p. A6.

<sup>38</sup> Deeb, S. (2012, February 25). To Muslims, burning Quran defiles god's sacred words. *The Seattle Times*, p. A3.

<sup>39</sup> Whitlock, C. (2012, August 28). U.S. says troops tried to destroy 500 Qurans. *The Seattle Times*, p. A2.

<sup>40</sup> Sieff, S. (2012, February 23). Protests over Quran burning turn deadly. *The Seattle Times*, p. A4.

<sup>41</sup> Quinn, P. (2012, March 4). Conflicting accounts over Afghan Quran burnings. *The Seattle Times*, p. A6.

<sup>42</sup> Riechmann, D. (2012, March 2). 2 more U.S. troops killed by Afghan partners. *The Seattle Times*, p. A4.

“Differences in labeling and contextualization can fuel prejudice and hate against a people group by giving a false impression that members of that community are somehow a threat to society.”

..... **ALMOST-INFORMATIVE ARTICLE  
BUT FOR OFFENSIVE TERMINOLOGY**

Along the same lines, another informative article sheds light on the confusion surrounding the incorporation of Islamic principles into constitutional law in Egypt. There is no set definition of what ‘Sharia’ entails as the term ‘Sharia’ refers to Islamic jurisprudence, interpreted often varyingly by individual scholars.<sup>43</sup> The article explained this and the larger debate over the interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence. A major issue with this article is the author’s use of the term ‘Islamist.’ If the author had used a more accurate descriptor, this article would have been one of the highlights of the informative section. Later in our terminology section we will explore why the word ‘Islamist’, in addition to being a slur commonly used by anti-Muslim extremists, creates confusion, reinforces crude stereotypes, and is considered highly offensive by Muslims.

▷ **RECOMMENDATIONS** .....

*The Seattle Times should continue to provide more examples of informative articles that give historical, cultural and political context to issues critical to the reader’s understanding of issues. By emphasizing coverage that examines issues from a variety of angles, The Seattle Times can engage readers with deep and accurate analysis of issues that shape their world and affect their lives.*

▶ **Labeling & Contextualization Disparities**

The ‘Labeling Disparity’ flag was created to examine differences we observed in how Islam and Muslims are described and characterized in comparison to other faiths and their members. Differences in labeling and contextualization can fuel prejudice and hate against a people group by giving a false impression that members of that community are somehow a threat to society. In this section we will discuss a variety of issues, starting with the use of the word ‘terrorism,’ and its variants, which are discussed in depth later in the report.<sup>44</sup> We will examine some articles covering acts of violent extremism, and will focus on contextualization disparities and the results of these disparities.

<sup>43</sup> “Islamic law divides Egyptian leaders,” Amina Ismail, McClatchy Newspapers, 21 December, 2012.  
<sup>44</sup> See page XX

Then, we will compare coverage of the Lord’s Resistance Army to coverage of Boko Haram. We will end this section with a discussion of labeling disparities in coverage of theological debates with an emphasis on the differences in use of the label ‘radical’, and another case study on coverage of the extremist actions by Florida Pastor Terry Jones whose actions have helped incite anti-American violence.

## **LABELING VIOLENT EXTREMISM . . . . .**

A search for a definition of the word ‘terrorism’ produces hundreds of different definitions with varied problems and flaws. As shown in Appendix 1 of this report, there is no agreed-upon definition among U.S. government agencies. In the terminology section of this report, on the use of the word ‘terrorism’ and its variants, we showcase the confusion over its definition and the usage of the term as a political weapon. In this section we simply aim to illustrate the labeling disparity in articles that did or did not contain the word ‘terrorism’.

## **JARED LEE LOUGHNER . . . . .**

One labeling disparity we saw throughout the year was the case of Jared Lee Loughner, a non-Muslim, who killed six people and almost killed US Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords and many others, on January 8, 2011 in Tucson, Arizona. The dead included a nine year old girl and a federal judge. A report published by the Anti-Defamation League analyzes Loughner’s state of mind and motives and finds that he “repeatedly returns to certain topics” such as “distrust of the government” and “conspiracy theories.”<sup>45</sup> In a video he produced and posted on YouTube titled “America: Your last memory in a terrorist country!” Loughner showed a figure burning in a American flag and discussed his conspiracy theories.<sup>46</sup>

However we did not find any discussions in our analysis of The Seattle Times’ coverage of this anti-America hate expressed by Loughner while we often see discussions of such hate

<sup>45</sup> Anti-Defamation League. (2011, January 10). The mindset of Jared Lee Loughner. Retrieved from <http://www.adl.org/combating-hate/domestic-extremism-terrorism/c/the-mindset-of-jared-lee-loughner.html>

<sup>46</sup> MSNBC. (2011, January 9). Profile of suspect Jared Loughner. Retrieved from [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/40980334/ns/us\\_news-crime\\_and\\_courts/t/profile-suspect-jared-loughner-i-cant-trust-current-government/](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/40980334/ns/us_news-crime_and_courts/t/profile-suspect-jared-loughner-i-cant-trust-current-government/)

“...we did not find even a single mention of the word ‘terror,’ ‘terrorism’ or ‘terrorist,’ or any debate over Loughner’s political motives despite the very political nature of his murderous attack.”

when it is mentioned by other violent extremist individuals who are Muslim, and Muslim majority groups such as Al-Qaida. In the series of articles reporting on his case in 2012, the focus was on Loughner’s deteriorating mental state and on Congresswoman Gifford’s recovery. In our reading of the articles in The Seattle Times relating to this story during 2012, we did not find even a single mention of the word ‘terror,’ ‘terrorism’ or ‘terrorist,’ or any debate over Loughner’s political motives despite the very political nature of his murderous attack.<sup>47, 48, 49,50,51</sup>

..... **BOMBINGS AND PLOTS**

This notable trend of The Seattle Times labeling only certain groups and actions as “terrorism”, while not using it at all for others, again surfaced in two separate articles from May 2, 2012. One details five non-Muslim men who attempted to blow up a bridge in Ohio with fake explosives given to them by an FBI agent after they planted and attempted to detonate the fake explosives. The only instances where the word ‘terror’ or a variation of it is mentioned in the article is the portion of the article which states, “the Cleveland group was not connected to any international terrorist group”, and that the group was arrested by the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Taskforce. *The group is instead labeled as “anarchists” and the label ‘terrorist’ is never used, despite the clear detailing of the group’s willingness to engage in violent bombings, with the potential to cause heavy destruction and numerous deaths, for a political motive.*<sup>52</sup>



In contrast, the headline for a Newsline article on the same day reads “Subway terror plot”. The article details an attempt to bomb a New York City subway station by a Bosnian American claiming a desire to fight for the Taliban.<sup>53</sup> Another article about the incident contains a sensational quote from U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder calling the subway plot “one of the

<sup>47</sup> Freking, K. (2012, January 8). One year later, Giffords on road to recovery. The Seattle Times, p. A2.  
<sup>48</sup> Mascaro L. (2012, January 25). Giffords returns to chamber for speech, farewell. The Seattle Times. p. A9  
<sup>49</sup> Newsline. (2012, August 5). Tucson rampage. The Seattle Times. p. A3.  
<sup>50</sup> Massey B. (2012, August 6). Possible Loughner plea of guilty “thrills” victim. The Seattle Times. p.A4.  
<sup>51</sup> Serrano, R. (2012, August 8). Guilty plea in Tucson rampage; life sentence likely. The Seattle Times, p. A3.  
<sup>52</sup> Muskal, M. (2012, May 2). 5 men charged in May day plot to bomb Ohio bridge. The Seattle Times, p. A7.  
<sup>53</sup> Newsline. (2012, May 2). Subway terror plot. The Seattle Times, p. A2.

*Despite Breivik committing terrible atrocities for a clear, coherent religious and political cause, headlines in The Seattle Times almost never used the word ‘terror’ or any variation of it. In fact we only saw the word ‘terror’ mentioned once in a headline during all 2012 coverage related to the attacks.*

most serious terrorist threats (to the US)” despite the subject still only being in the planning stages rather than actively carrying out the attack.<sup>54</sup>

Other cases concerning plots by Muslims typically include the ‘terror’ label, in addition to heavily religiously and ethnically loaded language. For example headlines such as “Four California men charged with terror plot” who had a “radical and violent Islamic doctrine”<sup>55</sup> and on the next day the author uses the headline “details emerge in terrorism plot” noting the plotters’ status as “alleged aspiring terrorists” that “liked each other’s jihadist Facebook posting.”<sup>56</sup> This labeling trend continues in an article titled “Terrorism suspects” in which a preacher is “charged in multiple terror plots.”<sup>57</sup> Yet another example is an article on Ulegbek Kodirov, who pleaded guilty to attempting to kill President Obama. The article contains a line about Kodirov’s motivation, stating he “knew this what he was supposed to do for Islam.”<sup>58</sup>

The language used in these articles showcases the labeling disparity between violent plots by persons labeled “anarchists” on one hand and “terrorism suspects” on the other hand. Despite the fact that the Cleveland group went as far to organize themselves and attempt to use the fake explosives to destroy a bridge in the name of their cause, they are described as unconnected fringe persons versus the cases of Californian men and other Muslims who were labeled as “jihadists” (another common slur used by anti-Muslim extremists, to be discussed later in this report) described as carrying out a mission for Islam.

## ANDERS BREIVIK . . . . .

In 2011, Anders Breivik killed over 70 civilians, through a well-planned spree that included an armed attack on youth at a leadership retreat in Norway, and bombings of government buildings. Articles covering this event provide another example of the vast disparity in the

<sup>54</sup> Susman, T. (2012, November 17). Immigrant sentenced to life for subway bomb plot. The Seattle Times, p. A3.

<sup>55</sup> Lopez, R. (2012, November 20). Four California men charged in terror plot life sentence likely. The Seattle Times, p. A2.

<sup>56</sup> Los Angeles Times., & Associated Press. (2012, November 21). Details emerge in terrorism plot. The Seattle Times. p. A6.

<sup>57</sup> Newsline. (2012, October 27). Terrorism suspects. The Seattle Times, p. A2

<sup>58</sup> Reeves, J. (2012, February 11). Uzbek man pleads guilty in plot to kill Obama. The Seattle Times, p. A2.

“Other cases concerning plots by Muslims almost always included the ‘terror’ label, in addition to heavily religiously and ethnically loaded language.”

use of the word ‘terrorism.’ As noted in our 2011 Seattle Times report and seen in continuing 2012 coverage related to the attacks, the words ‘terrorist,’ ‘terrorism’ or ‘terror’ were very rarely used. Instead he is described as an “anti-Muslim extremist”<sup>59</sup> Despite Breivik committing terrible atrocities for a clear, coherent religious and political cause, headlines in The Seattle Times almost never used the word ‘terror’ or any variation of it. In fact we only saw the word ‘terror’ mentioned once in a headline during all 2012 coverage related to the attacks. We noted headlines such as “Mass killer goes on trial”<sup>60</sup>, “Killer complains of prison life”<sup>61</sup> and “Courtroom stunned as Norway gunman describes massacre.”<sup>62</sup>

Additionally, out of the 14 articles, Newline items and other descriptions we analyzed in The Seattle Times during the year 2012 on Anders Breivik, only 2 contain any mention of the terms ‘terror,’ ‘terrorist’ or ‘terrorism.’

Additionally, while we noted frequent mention of Islam as the killer’s justification for carrying out acts of violence in cases where the perpetrators were Muslim, we saw little reporting on Breivik’s religious motivations and those who inspired him. In his manifesto on his motivations, “Breivik quotes figures such as anti-Muslim extremist Pamela Geller” who, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, “rose to prominence for her vitriolic opposition to the Park51 mosque.”<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, “among those inspiring Breivik, none seem to have been as influential as Robert Spencer” who is the co-founder of Stop Islamization of America and administrator of Jihad Watch, an Internet portal that “attacks Muslims under the banner of news and analysis.”<sup>64</sup> In total, Breivik cited Robert Spencer more than 50 times in his manifesto and endorsed Spencer as an “excellent choice for the Nobel Peace Prize.”<sup>65</sup> In our

<sup>59</sup> Newline. (2012, January 31). Norway terror case. The Seattle Times. p. A2.

<sup>60</sup> Junge, H. (2012, April 17). Mass killer goes on trial. The Seattle Times. p. A4.

<sup>61</sup> Sayare, Scott. (2012, November 10). Killer complains of prison life. The Seattle Times. p. A3.

<sup>62</sup> Ritter K, Gronneyet J. (2012, April 21). Courtroom stunned as Norway gunman describes massacre. The Seattle Times. p. A3.

<sup>63</sup> Lenz, R. (2011). Christian crusader. Southern Poverty Law Center Intelligence Report, (143). Retrieved from <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2011/fall/christian-crusader>

<sup>64</sup> See previous citation

<sup>65</sup> Daily Mail Reporter. (2011, July 27). ‘We could have another Timothy McVeigh’: U.S. authorities warned against anti-Islamic terrorism after Norway shooter ‘inspired’ by Robert Spencer and Unabomber. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2018976/Norway-shooting-Anders-Behring-Breivik-inspired-Robert-Spencer-Unabomber.html>

“ In our analysis we did not find even one mention of Robert Spencer or Pamela Geller in The Seattle Times’ reporting on Breivik in 2012, despite Breivik’s extensive statements that Spencer and Geller provided inspiration for his murderous attacks. ”

analysis we did not find even one mention of Robert Spencer or Pamela Geller in The Seattle Times’ reporting on Breivik in 2012, despite Breivik’s extensive statements that Spencer and Geller provided inspiration for his murderous attacks.

We noted numerous examples of articles in which the author places an emphasis on the killer or plotter’s motives and religious and ethnic identity when the perpetrator is Muslim, but not when he/she is non-Muslim. Based on this, we believe there exists a clear disparity in labeling and contextualization between reporting of violent plots or attacks by non-Muslims and those by Muslims. It is worth mentioning again that differences in labeling and contextualization can fuel prejudice and hate against a certain group by giving the false impression that members of that particular group are somehow a threat to society.

..... **RECOMMENDATION** ◀  
*The Seattle Times should give readers informative coverage of violent extremism and extremists by using accurate descriptors and describe the perpetrator’s motives for committing acts of politically or ideologically motivated violence.*

**CONTEXTUALIZATION: .....**  
**REASONING FOR THE KILLING**

Another trend we have observed during our analysis of The Seattle Times articles in 2012 has been a difference in the contextualization of several mass killings. For our comparisons we will start with analysis of The Seattle Times’ coverage of several violent attacks. In each case of non-Muslim killers, we will note how exactly the killer is described and the reasoning given for his actions. We will then examine the contextualization of a local Muslim, Abu Khalid Abdul-Latif, who attempted to carry out an armed attack on a South Seattle military recruiting post and will note the differences in how the events were covered.

**MASS KILLINGS: HOW ARE THEY DESCRIBED? .....**

One of the most glaring examples of this is coverage of the July 20, 2012 mass killing at the midnight premiere of the movie The Dark Knight Rises in Aurora, Colorado. James Holmes killed 12 people and wounded 58 others. A headline shortly after the attack described “a bril-

*The overall effect of this coverage on the reader is to defend the killers, if they are non-Muslim, by introducing a number of questionable mitigating factors. Instead of focusing on the killer's responsibility for the killing, they are viewed as otherwise good persons...*

liant student who began to struggle,<sup>66</sup> painting the picture of a good person who succumbed to mental health issues. The debate that followed in articles we analyzed from The Seattle Times focused on gun control<sup>67</sup> and Holmes' mental health issues.<sup>68</sup>

We noted similar issues and causes in the case of the Sandy Hook attacks in which Adam Lanza killed 27 people, including 20 children, school officials and his mother. Coverage after the killing focused on an extended debate about gun control,<sup>69</sup> the link between videogames and violence<sup>70</sup>, and mental health.<sup>71</sup> In particular, we noted coverage detailing reports that Lanza had Asperger syndrome, a variant of autism, and on the effects these reports have on people stereotyping those with autism as violent killers.<sup>72</sup>

This trend continues in an article about a clinic shooting in Pennsylvania, the headline reads, "Clinic shooter was gifted, troubled."<sup>73</sup> The article focuses on speculation about the killer's mental history. Another article from September 1, 2012 describes an ex-Marine opening fire at a supermarket. The article includes descriptions from the family describing the killer as "depressed" and quotes the family as saying they "have no idea what would compel him to do this."<sup>74</sup> The overall effect of this coverage on the reader is to defend the killers, if they are non-Muslim, by introducing a number of questionable mitigating factors. Instead of focusing on the killer's responsibility for the killing, they are viewed as otherwise good persons who had a mental disorder or perhaps anger issues and easy access to guns.

An interesting comparison is the case of Abu Khalid Abdul-Latif, who gave a guilty plea on December 6, 2012, in a plot to attack a Seattle military processing center.<sup>75</sup> Abdul-Latif had

<sup>66</sup> Elliot D., Blood M. (2012, July 7). Colorado suspect was a brilliant science student. The Seattle Times.

<sup>67</sup> Goode, E. (2012, December 17). Popular rifle used in recent mass killings. The Seattle Times.

<sup>68</sup> Banda, Solomon. (2012, August 10). Lawyers: Colo. Suspect mentally ill. The Seattle Times. p. A6.

<sup>69</sup> Large, J. (2012, December 20). Tragedy may loosen our grip on guns. The Seattle Times. p. B1.

<sup>70</sup> Zak, D. (2012, December 23). Video-games-violence link dismissed. The Seattle Times, p. A15.

<sup>71</sup> Sullivan, J., Miletech, S., & Clarridge, C. (2012, December 22). NRA: For safe schools, 'good guy with gun'. The Seattle Times, p. A1.

<sup>72</sup> Harmon, Amy. (2012, December 19). For people with autism, shooting brings unfair stigma. The Seattle Times. p. A1.

<sup>73</sup> Begos, Kevin. (2012, March 11). Clinic shooter was gifted, troubled. The Seattle Times. p. A13.

<sup>74</sup> Zezima, Katie; Katz, Alex. (2012, September 11). Shooter kills 2 co-workers, then himself. The Seattle Times. p. A2.

<sup>75</sup> Durkan, D. U.S. Department of Justice, Attorney's Office. (2012). Seattle man pleads guilty in plot to attack Seattle military processing center. Retrieved: <http://www.justice.gov/usao/waw/press/2012/December/latif.html>



planned to carry out an attack with an accomplice using automatic guns and grenades. In most of the articles we analyzed in *The Seattle Times*, we found a heavy emphasis placed on Abdul-Latif's extremist political and religious views being the sole motivation for his attempted attack.<sup>76</sup> Other reporting by *The Seattle Times* on Latif in 2012 focused on the intricacies of the case, the informant who turned him over and FBI involvement. Only in one article was it mentioned that he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and fetal alcohol syndrome.<sup>77</sup> While many are familiar with PTSD, fetal alcohol syndrome is the most common form of developmental disability in the Western world. Effects include negatively affecting the brain's ability to reason and mental health disorders such as "depression and suicidal ideation."<sup>78</sup>

*The Seattle Times* did not report on Abdul-Latif's history of "drug use and credit problems" as well as financial problems, having to "file for bankruptcy last year."<sup>79</sup> Given the predominance that mental issues and strife play in coverage of killers mentioned above who are non-Muslim, we question the heavy, consistent emphasis placed on Abdul-Latif's conversion to Islam and on his religious beliefs as the primary motivator for his plan.

We would also like to draw attention to preventive measures debated after each of the incidents. We found that the debate over gun control and mental health research were typically seen as the best solution in response to attacks by non-Muslims while we did not see them discussed in Abdul-Latif's case. As we saw in each case, except for the Abdul-Latif case, stronger gun control policies and mental diagnoses were typically mentioned as the best solutions to prevent further killings. However, as we saw in Abdul-Latif's case, these measures or solutions are rarely discussed when a killer is Muslim or seen to have used Islam as a justification for violence.

<sup>76</sup> *Seattle Times* Staff. (2012, May 30). Guilty plea in attack on marines. *Seattle Times*, p. B3.

<sup>77</sup> "Defense challenges informant's credibility in terror-plot case" Mike Carter, *Seattle Times*, July 16th 2012.

<sup>78</sup> Gibbard, W., & Clarke, M. (2003). Overview of fetal alcohol spectrum disorders for mental health professionals. *Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 12(3), 57-63. doi: PMC2582751. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2582751/>

<sup>79</sup> Anti-defamation league. (2011, June 11). The Seattle terror plot & the online messages of Abu Khalid Abdul-Latif. Retrieved from <http://www.adl.org/combating-hate/international-extremism-terrorism/c/abdul-latif-seattle-plot.html>

“ These groups belong to a nationwide militant movement that engages in “paramilitary training” and “warn[s] of the need for a coming revolution” against the government of United States. Yet we saw no mention of any possibility of more violence against Americans by these heavily armed violent extremist groups, which creates a false image in the mind of the reader of this event as an isolated plot.”

• • • • • **F.E.A.R. AND MILITIA VIOLENCE**

We also noted disparities when it came to other serious violent plots, which were planned but didn't actually materialize, to take violent action for political and/or religious motives. In this section we will again use the example of Abdul-Latif, this time contrasting the descriptions of his motives for turning to violence with those provided for another prominent planned violent attack and double homicide case.

In late August, four non-Muslim men in Georgia were charged with plotting a range of heavily destructive attacks on American soil, “including bombing a dam in Washington and poisoning the state’s apple crop” and were planning to “take over Fort Stewart (Georgia) by seizing its ammunition-control point.”<sup>80</sup> Members of this militant group, calling themselves F.E.A.R. (Forever Enduring Always Ready), were serious enough in their goals that when the leader felt threatened, they murdered a group member and his girlfriend. The group also had plans to assassinate President Obama and overthrow the U.S. government.<sup>81,82</sup> Despite the scale and gravity of the group’s plans and double murder charges, the article notes that “federal authorities have not said publicly whether they considered Aguigui [the group’s leader] and his associates a serious threat.”<sup>83</sup>

Once again the case of Abdul-Latif serves as an interesting parallel, although for slightly different reasons. As described in the above section, Abdul-Latif was arrested after acquiring inoperative guns and other weapons from the FBI sold through an accomplice who became an FBI informant. In descriptions of Abdul-Latif in *The Seattle Times*, a heavy, consistent emphasis is placed on his religious identity and belief, calling him an “a self-radicalized convert to Islam”<sup>84</sup> and a “self-radicalized Muslim.”<sup>85</sup>

In comparing these two cases, a clear disparity emerges in the articles we analyzed reporting on the two events. Both cases involved the accumulation of guns and other weapons - though

<sup>80</sup> Associated Press; *Seattle Times* Staff. (2012, August 28). 4 soldiers linked to terror plot against U.S. *The Seattle Times*. p. A1.

<sup>81</sup> *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and Associated Press. (2012, August 31). Death penalty sought in slayings. *The Seattle Times*. p. B1.

<sup>82</sup> Robbin, J. (2012, September 5). Court told of suspects recruiting game. *The Seattle Times*. p. B2.

<sup>83</sup> Bynum R. (2012, August 30). Accused militia leader untested in Army. *The Seattle Times*. p. B9.

<sup>84</sup> Carter, Mike. (2012, September 22). SPD deleted texts; now terror-plot defendant wants case dropped. *The Seattle Times*. p. B1.

<sup>85</sup> *Seattle Times* Staff. (2012, September 7). Around the Northwest-Ruling favors terrorism probes. *The Seattle Times*. p. B2.

Abdul-Latif bought close to \$800 worth of machine guns,<sup>86</sup> while Aguigui “accumulated nearly \$70,000 worth of ‘military-grade assault rifles and other weaponry and accessories.” Aguigui succeeded in actually killing two individuals who threatened his plan, while Abdul-Latif did not commit any violent actions as part of, or result of, his planning, and has a long history of serious mental illness and financial troubles.

We would like to draw attention to this contextualization disparity. Strong focus is given to the prosecutor’s claim that Abdul-Latif is “self-radicalized” and to the religious justifications Abdul-Latif gave for his plot. In the articles we analyzed concerning the FEAR plot, The Seattle Times failed to put the plot into the larger context of the recently resurgent ‘Patriot’ movement. A report by the Southern Poverty Law Center helps us understand how much this movement has increased since President Obama’s 2012 re-election. The report notes, “the SPLC identified 1,274 antigovernment Patriot groups that were active the prior year. Of these groups, 334 were militias.”<sup>87</sup> These groups belong to a nationwide militant movement that engages in “paramilitary training” and “warn[s] of the need for a coming revolution” against the government of United States.<sup>88</sup> Yet we saw no mention of any possibility of more violence against Americans by these heavily armed violent extremist groups, which creates a false image in the mind of the reader of this event as an isolated plot.

This contextualization goes further than simply failing to place the FEAR plot in this wider context. *The choice of the undefined “self-radicalized” label to describe Abdul-Latif and the heavy emphasis on his status as a convert to Islam cements in the mind of the reader a false stereotype of Islam as a religion linked to violence and of converts to Islam as prone to violence. Whereas, the lack of any mention at all of the ‘Patriot’ movement in the articles on FEAR serves to misinform the reader by distancing this movement from any connection to the rising trend of*

<sup>86</sup> Kelleher, S., & Miletich, S. (2011, June 24). Suspect married, broke, had history of trouble. The Seattle Times, p. A1.

<sup>87</sup> Terry, D. (2012). Soldiers at Georgia army base charged in deadly antigovernment plot. Southern Poverty Law Center Intelligence Report, Winter 2012(148), Retrieved from <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2012/winter/conspiracy-in-georgia>

<sup>88</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center. (2013). Patriot movement. Retrieved from <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-files/ideology/patriot-movement>

*several violent killings of Americans and other politically motivated attacks on American soil, by anti-government ‘Patriot’ groups.*

**▷ RECOMMENDATION . . . . .**

*The Seattle Times should give readers a proper, informative contextualization of mass killings and violent politically motivated plots by providing information about the reasoning and larger trends surrounding each case, regardless of the religion of the perpetrator.*

**. . . . . SIKHS, VIOLENCE AND MUSLIMS**

One event that was clearly labeled in many cases as “domestic terrorism” was the attack on a Sikh temple in Wisconsin in August, 2012<sup>89</sup>. The killer was described as a white supremacist and Neo-Nazi<sup>90</sup> by the author in one article and in another his “interest in the white-power movement” and “active in at least two neo-Nazi organizations”<sup>91</sup> is noted. Coverage in The Seattle Times brought attention to the confusion and association of Sikhs with Muslims noted in another August 7, 2012 article<sup>92</sup>. Coverage in this case focuses on providing information about Sikhs and their beliefs and information about the killer.

Another article later in the year continued this trend: “Since Sept. 11, 2001, Sikhs, who wear long beards and turbans to cover their uncut hair, and other South Asians, have been the victims of mistaken identity, starting just four days after the World Trade Center attack when a Sikh gas-station owner in Mesa, Ariz. was taken for an Arab Muslim and killed.”<sup>93</sup> The reporter chooses to focus on how discrimination of Sikhs has increased since 9/11 because they are mistaken for Muslims. It failed to address the larger issue of the sharp surge in violent hate crimes against Muslims nationwide, especially during Ramadan in 2012, when there was a sharp spike in hate attacks targeting actual and perceived Muslim individuals and Islamic places of worship nationwide. In thirteen days in August, Islamic places of worship

<sup>89</sup> Seattle Times Staff. (2012, August 6). 7 dead in attack at Wis. Sikh temple. The Seattle Times. p. A1.  
<sup>90</sup> Bauer S, & Richmond, T. (2012, August 7). Sikh temple gunman was white supremacist. The Seattle Times. p. A3.  
<sup>91</sup> Hubbard A, & Hennessey-Fiske M. (2012, August 9). “Gunman’s ex-girlfriend: Concentrate on ‘heroes.’” The Seattle Times. p. A2  
<sup>92</sup> Seattle Times Staff. (2012, August 7). Sikhs here say faith still widely misunderstood. The Seattle Times. p. A3.  
<sup>93</sup> Magnier, M. (2012, August 6). India outraged over Sikh killings. The Seattle Times. p.A3.

“ We investigated if other articles in *The Seattle Times* in 2012 similarly track attacks by minorities other than Muslims and label attacks as “the worst attack committed by [that minority group].” Our analysis of *The Seattle Times* did not show any such religiously, ethnically or racially loaded labeling used in attempts to draw a supposed pattern of violence by members of any other minority group. ”

where reported to be targeted 8 times according to a report by CAIR’s National office.<sup>94</sup> The nationwide surge in attacks on Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim, continued until the end of 2012, and included the killing of a Hindu man in a New York subway station, among more than a hundred reported hate attacks nationwide including over a dozen right here in the Northwest.

What was not noted in these articles was the larger trend of violence and hate by white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups. Page was considered a prominent player in several well-known white power groups and used this to raise his profile in extremist circles. In late 2011, he became a “fully patched” member of a chapter of Hammerskin Nation, which is considered one of “the most violent and dominant skinhead groups in the U.S.”<sup>95</sup> In a report prepared by the Southern Poverty Law Center, criminologist Pete Simi, who personally knew Page, discusses how in his opinion “if you told me some of the others went on a shooting rampage, I wouldn’t be surprised at all. Wade was pretty mellow compared to the others in that skinhead, white supremacist culture. Many of them are far more violent.”

An interesting comparison to this case is the coverage of Mohamed Merah, who killed seven people in France over a long term spree of shootings. Reporting on Merah concerns how he was “inspired by radical Islam and trained in Afghanistan” and how “France will not be the same after Mohamed Merah, whose deeds and death Thursday could change how authorities track terrorists, determine whether French Muslims face new stigmas and influence who becomes the next French president.”<sup>96</sup> In another article shortly after the shooting, the author discusses how the event has “stunned the country and refocused attention of the threat of radical Muslim militants.”<sup>97</sup> Rather than describe the incident as simple “domestic terrorism” as in Page’s article, *Merah’s attack is described as “France’s worst Islamist terrorist violence since a wave of attacks in the 1990s by Algerian extremists”*. This disparity in contextualization

<sup>94</sup> Council on American Islamic Relations. (2012, February 15). A preliminary examination of anti-Muslim incidents following the oak creek massacre. Retrieved from <http://cair.com/islamophobia/14-islamophobia/11732-thirteen-days-in-ramadan-2012.html>

<sup>95</sup> Elias, M. (2012). Sikh temple killer wade Michael Page radicalized in army. Southern Poverty Law Center Intelligence Report, Winter 2012(148),

<sup>96</sup> Dilorenzo, S., & Decorse, J. (2012, March 23). French gunman shot, killed after leaping from window. *The Seattle Times*, p. A4.

<sup>97</sup> Satter, R., & Decorse, J. (2012, March 23). French police now focus on brother of gunman. *The Seattle Times*, p. A4.

can lead the reader to believe that Muslims are a threat to society, fueling prejudice and hate toward those who are Muslim or perceived as such. We investigated if other articles in *The Seattle Times* in 2012 similarly track attacks by minorities other than Muslims and label attacks as “the worst attack committed by [that minority group].” Our analysis of *The Seattle Times* did not show any such religiously, ethnically or racially loaded labeling used in attempts to draw a supposed pattern of violence by members of any other minority group.

In both cases, of Page and Merah, a gunman murdered several innocents. Page clearly comes from a very violent and organized movement; however his killing spree seemed to have little impact besides encouraging *The Seattle Times* to examine the difference between Sikhs and Muslims. Page’s connection to a greater violent movement and the possibility of further violence is rarely noted while Merah is framed as another killer in a supposed trend of violence by Muslims.

• • • • • **ROBERT BALES**

*The Seattle Times*’ coverage of Robert Bales’ murderous rampage in Afghanistan serves as a particularly interesting point of comparison for these issues. During his killing spree, Bales killed 16 civilians, including nine children, after leaving his base twice to make two trips to enter their homes at night, and burned their corpses afterwards. From the beginning, multiple excuses for Bales’ attacks were listed in coverage of the attacks. Bales is portrayed in many stories as someone who had been struggling after multiple tours in Afghanistan, with one article describing a life of “pride and pain” that had earned “respect but not key promotion.”<sup>98</sup> Other articles speculate on the effects of multiple deployments and injuries sustained while serving in Iraq as possible causes for the attack. These articles examine Bales’ reason for the massacre with reasons including faulty army PTSD testing to economic troubles at home to a head injury given as the reason for the killing.<sup>99,100,101</sup> Additionally, Bales drinking is covered in many of the articles, yet none of the articles we mentioned discuss the well-researched

<sup>98</sup> Seattle Times Staff. (2012, March 18). Soldier’s life: Pride and pain. *The Seattle Times*. p. A3.  
<sup>99</sup> Kamb, L. (2012, March 19). Were multiple deployments key in attack on civilians. *The Seattle Times*. p. A6.  
<sup>100</sup> O’Hagan, M. (2012, March 24). Blow to head behind mass killing? *The Seattle Times*. p. A7.  
<sup>101</sup> Bernton, H. (2012, March 13). Rampage shines new light on multiple war-zone tours. *The Seattle Times*. p. A1.

“Despite it being a very violent group seeking to establish a ‘Christian’ government in Uganda based on its leader’s interpretation of the biblical Ten Commandments, *The Seattle Times* never uses religious labels or descriptors to describe the Lord’s Resistance Army or Joseph Kony. Instead, in the articles we analyzed, *The Seattle Times* typically describes the LRA as a ‘rebel group’ or a ‘cult.’”

linkage<sup>102,103</sup> between uses of alcohol and hate crimes or discuss if this could have been a hate crime itself or other motives for Bales carrying out a murderous attack of this magnitude on a civilian family.

Our initial observation was that coverage following the incident would be one-sided and the victims’ families’ narrative was being ignored, however this was later dispelled by a series of articles on the victims’ reaction and testimony.<sup>104,105</sup> In these articles the author tells the victims’ stories, such as that of a 7 year old girl who was shot in the head and recovered to testify<sup>106</sup> and details how opinions are split between seeing Bales as a “methodical, deliberate killer” and an “unhinged solider.”<sup>107</sup>

## LABELING VIOLENT RELIGIOUS GROUPS . . . . .

Many readers are familiar with Joseph Kony and his Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) which operates in parts of central Africa. Since its inception during the Ugandan civil war in 1987, *the LRA has killed over sixty thousand people and kidnapped tens of thousands of children.*<sup>108</sup> Although in recent years these numbers have decreased, the group continues to attract international attention due to its brutality and extensive use of child soldiers. After a short video by the organization, Invisible Children, catapulted Kony to international fame, many media outlets scrambled to provide additional coverage and information about the Lord’s Resistance Army.<sup>109</sup>

Despite it being a very violent group seeking to establish a ‘Christian’ government in Uganda based on its leader’s interpretation of the biblical Ten Commandments,<sup>110</sup> *The Seattle Times* never uses religious labels or descriptors to describe the Lord’s Resistance Army or Joseph

<sup>102</sup> Mark, H. (1994). *American skinheads: The criminology and control of hate crime*. Praeger.  
<sup>103</sup> Franklin, K. (1997). Hate crime or rite of passage? Assailant motivations in antigay violence. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 57(12-B).  
<sup>104</sup> Johnson, G. (2012, November 10). Hearing focuses on Afghan victims. *The Seattle Times*. p. B1.  
<sup>105</sup> Bernton, H. (2012, November 11). Bales’ alleged victim: “He just started shooting me.” *The Seattle Times*. p. B1.  
<sup>106</sup> Bernton, H. (2012, November 12). Moment of hope in Bales’ hearing. *The Seattle Times*. p. B1.  
<sup>107</sup> Bernton, H. (2012, November 14). Methodical killer, or unhinged solider? *The Seattle Time*. p. A1.  
<sup>108</sup> Ploughshares (2011, January ). Uganda (1987- 2010). Retrieved from [http://ploughshares.ca/pl\\_armedconflict/uganda-1987-2010/](http://ploughshares.ca/pl_armedconflict/uganda-1987-2010/)  
<sup>109</sup> Carbone, N. (2012, December 04). Kony 2012. Retrieved from <http://entertainment.time.com/2012/12/04/top-10-arts-lists/slide/kony-2012/>  
<sup>110</sup> Human Rights Watch (2012, March 21). Q&A on Joseph Kony and the lord’s resistance army. Retrieved from <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/21/qa-joseph-kony-and-lords-resistance-army>

Kony. Instead, in the articles we analyzed, The Seattle Times typically describes the LRA as a ‘rebel group’ or a ‘cult.’ In the articles we analyzed, the group’s Christian ideology is only referenced twice. In one article the goal of using the Ten Commandments is only mentioned once, in passing<sup>111</sup> and in another, Kony is simply shown quoting from the Bible to provide justification for his violent extremist actions<sup>112</sup> and there are no further explanations of how his religious ideology informs the violent killings of tens of thousands. Kony’s spiritual eccentricities are often noted such as dressing up in costumes and pretending to be “possessed by spirits” or his status as a “supernatural being.”<sup>113</sup>

A strong comparison can be drawn between the Nigerian group Boko Haram and the Lord’s Resistance Army. Boko Haram is a group operating in northern Nigeria and seeks to establish a government based on its own interpretation of Islam and carries out bombings, kidnappings and assassinations.

Boko Haram is consistently labeled using many other religiously loaded terms and qualifiers including “Islamist” or “radical sect” among many other loaded labels, in nearly every one of articles describing the group. For example, a Newline article in January labels the group a “radical Islamist sect”<sup>114</sup> and draws attention to the group’s “campaign to implement strict Shariah Law” while another Newline article in October labels the group an “Islamist insurgent militia.”<sup>115</sup> In a June article the group is cited as fueling the sectarian bloodshed and described as a “radical Islamist sect”<sup>116</sup> and this exact same label is used again in November.<sup>117</sup>

➔ The constant mention of Islam in coverage of Boko Haram and the lack of mention of Christianity in coverage of the Lord’s Resistance Army is a clear labeling disparity. This further cements the false and dangerous impressions in readers’ minds that Islam is linked

<sup>111</sup> New York Times, & Washington Post. (2012, April 30). Endgame tricky on trail of fugitive rebel leader. The Seattle Times. p. A6.

<sup>112</sup> Boswell, A. (2012, March 9). Warlord Joseph Kony: 2 rare, firsthand views. The Seattle Times. p. A4.

<sup>113</sup> Gerson, M. (2012, January 30). Stopping the author of nightmares. The Seattle Times. p. A12.

<sup>114</sup> Newline. (2012, October 29). Nigeria suicide attack. The Seattle Times. p. A2.

<sup>115</sup> Gambrell, J. (2012, January 22). Extremists’ attacks kill 143 in Nigeria. The Seattle Times. p. A4.

<sup>116</sup> Gambrell, J& Ibukun Y. (2012, June 4). At least 150 killed when plane crashes in Nigeria. The Seattle Times. p. A2.

<sup>117</sup> Newline. (2012, November 26). Church bombed. The Seattle Times. p. A2.



“However, as we saw in our analysis, Boko Haram is consistently labeled with a religiously loaded ‘ism’ while there is no explanation of Christianity, or religious labeling in reporting about the LRA despite the substantial length and detail of the articles about the LRA.”

to violence and Muslims somehow pose a threat to society, and that there is no link between Christianity and violence in the LRA’s case.

In both cases, insurgent groups seek to unseat a country’s government, gain power, and impose their version of their religion. Both groups use religious reasons to justify their heinous, violent crimes. Both have also garnered international attention, the Lord’s Resistance Army due to not only its child abductions but also its murderous attacks, and Boko Haram due to its violent attacks. *However, as we saw in our analysis, Boko Haram is consistently labeled with a religiously loaded ‘ism’ while there is no explanation of Christianity, or religious labeling in reporting about the LRA despite the substantial length and detail of the articles about the LRA.*

## THEOLOGY AND ‘RADICALS’ . . . . .

In our final section on disparities, we will discuss the difference we saw in the use of the label ‘radicals’ and the contextualization of debates happening within Christianity and within Islam. We will start by showing how these debates are characterized in the Catholic Church and how the label ‘radical’ is applied to religious figures in the Church. Then we will discuss labels used for Terry Jones.

We noted disparities in descriptions of debates in the Catholic Church during 2012. Throughout the year, there were several stories about an association of nuns, and their perceived split from traditional Catholic doctrine.<sup>118</sup> The stories detail debates over the role of women in the church, the role of tradition in the faith and the compatibility of feminist themes in Catholicism.

In particular we would like to draw attention to how the label ‘radical’ was used and quoted in The Seattle Times. The first instance was in accusations by the Vatican that American nuns were espousing “radical feminist themes.”<sup>119</sup> However one of the nuns’ leaders then

<sup>118</sup> Zoll, R. (2012, April 19). Sartain to lead overhaul of U.S. nun association. The Seattle Times, p. B10.

<sup>119</sup> Goodstein, L. (2012, August 11). “Radical” U.S. nuns plan talks with Vatican liaison. The Seattle Times, p. A5.

“Despite his consistent, deliberate, inflammatory rhetoric and actions which incited anti-American violence, we found no instances in our analysis of *The Seattle Times* labeling Jones as anything except a “Florida pastor” or “Reverend.” Jones was never once labeled a ‘radical’ in *The Seattle Times* in 2012.””

describes herself as “one of those radical feminist nuns.” The column continues to provide a narrative from the ‘radicals’ point of view, citing their frustration in dealing with the “boys in Rome.”<sup>120</sup>

Many theological debates among Muslims around the world center on the same topics such as the role of tradition and culture in a modern day faith.<sup>121</sup> While these theological debates about the Catholic Church or other faiths are shown in *The Seattle Times*, we often see a different framing of Islamic debates and an almost polar opposite meaning of the term ‘radical.’ In nearly every instance of articles we analyzed, when ‘radical’ was used in connection to Muslims it denoted violence or dangerous extremism.

For example we see Anwar Awlaki, who is a U.S. citizen editing Al-Qaeda’s Inspire magazine, frequently described as a “radical Muslim cleric.”<sup>122</sup> It is noted that he “specialized in reaching disaffected Muslims in the U.S. and elsewhere” and helped inspire “radical and violent Islamic doctrine”.<sup>123</sup> Or Abu Hamza al-Masri, a cleric who praised 9/11 and attempted to set up a training camp, and is described as a “radical Muslim”.<sup>124</sup>

Another article describes the plight of Iraqi orphans, who suffer from a variety of economic, political and emotional pressures. As the author speculates, perhaps exposing his own bigotry and biases, they “could be tomorrow’s suicide bombers and anti-American jihadists. Most of them are ripe targets for recruitment by radical, anti-Western forces.”<sup>125</sup> Yet another article on the French intervention in Mali notes that France is engaged in “combat with Islamic radicals in the region, including those aligned with Al-Qaida.”<sup>126</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Brodeur, N. (2012, April 27). Sisters of compassion need a hand. *The Seattle Times*, p. B1.

<sup>121</sup> See Informative Section Citations on religious debates in Egypt

<sup>122</sup> CNN Wire Staff. (2012, July 1). Al-Qaeda launches English language magazine. Retrieved from <http://www.webcitation.org/query?url=http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/meast/07/01/al.qaeda.magazine/?fbid=CE2WtvsOhMG&date=2010-07-04>

<sup>123</sup> Lopez, R. (2012, November 20). Four California men charged in terror plot. *The Seattle Times*. p. A2.

<sup>124</sup> Chu, H. (2012, September 25). Britain to extradite radical Muslim cleric to U.S. *The Seattle Times*. p. A6.

<sup>125</sup> Webb, J. (2012, January 4). Iraqi orphans need a surge of love. *The Seattle Times*. p. B2.

<sup>126</sup> Lynch, C. (2012, December 21). U.N Oks military mission in Mali. *The Seattle Times*. p. A2

*...improper labels and contextualization can be defamatory, can mislead readers and fuel prejudice and hatred of Islam and Muslims.*

Our goal with this section of the report is to draw attention to the skewed understanding that results in the reader's mind about Islam and other faiths. This produces a context that encourages the reader to view Christians or other non-Muslims labeled 'radicals' as progressive and agreeable, while Muslims labeled 'radicals' as violent and otherwise harmful to society. This further cements false stereotypes in readers' minds and can fuel anti-Muslim prejudice and hate.

### **'RADICAL' CLERIC TERRY JONES? . . . . .**

The above is not the only case in which we saw a clear labeling disparity when it came to the use of the label 'radical'. In this section we will provide a case study of reporting on Terry Jones and examine the labels and contextualization of his actions.

Since 2010, Reverend Terry Jones of Gainesville, Florida has focused on inflammatory and hateful rhetoric that incites protests and draws media attention. He was ejected from a church in Cologne, Germany by its congregation members for being a "Christian fundamentalist."<sup>127</sup> In 2010, Jones vowed to burn copies of the Quran on the anniversary of the 9/11. After being persuaded by government officials, including US Army General David Petraeus,<sup>128</sup> and private citizens that his actions endangered the lives of American military personal and civilians abroad, Jones stopped the planned burning. However in April 2011<sup>129</sup> and again in 2012 Jones burned copies of the Quran to protest President Obama's endorsement of same-sex marriage and what Jones called President Obama's "appeasing of radical Islam".<sup>130</sup> These acts directly incited violence in some parts of the world where protesters were "enflamed by outrage over the burning of a Quran by Florida pastor Terry Jones."<sup>131</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Daily Mail Reporter. (2010, September 10). How Pastor Terry Jones was expelled from a church in Germany for creating. Retrieved from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1310602/Koran-burning-pastor-Terry-Jones-expelled-German-church.html>  
<sup>128</sup> Raddatz, M. (2012, September 7). General Petraeus: Burn a Quran day could 'endanger troops'. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/WN/Afghanistan/burn-quran-day-sparks-protests-afghanistan-petraeus-endanger/story?id=11569820>  
<sup>129</sup> Sieff, K. (2011, April 02). Florida pastor terry jones's Koran burning has far-reaching effect. Retrieved from [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-04-02/local/35229731\\_1\\_dove-world-outreach-center-florida-pastor-koran](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-04-02/local/35229731_1_dove-world-outreach-center-florida-pastor-koran)  
<sup>130</sup> Jauregui, A. (2012, June 8). Terry jones, Quran-burning pastor, hangs Barack Obama effigy outside Florida church. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/08/obama-effigy-hanged-outside-church\\_n\\_1581272.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/08/obama-effigy-hanged-outside-church_n_1581272.html)  
<sup>131</sup> Schifrin, N. (2012, April 2). Afghan violence spreads over terry jones' quran burning. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/International/afghan-violence-spreads-terry-jones-quran-burning/story?id=13281689>

Despite his consistent, deliberate, inflammatory rhetoric and actions which incited anti-American violence, we found no instances in our analysis of The Seattle Times labeling Jones as anything except a “Florida pastor” or “Reverend.”<sup>132,133</sup>

A September article detailing the storming of the U.S. Consulate in Benghazi, Libya, is particularly irresponsible because it quotes Jones’ bigoted views on Islam without giving the reader any clear context about Jones’ fringe status thereby securing him in the reader’s mind as a credible source for a quote. He is quoted as saying the killing of Ambassador Stevens shows the “destructive ideology of Islam” and that the video which sparked the outrage “further reveals in a satirical fashion the life of Muhammad.”<sup>134</sup> The only hint toward Jones’ character and history of inciting violence and hate is given when it is noted that he proclaimed Sept. 11 as “International Judge Muhammad Day”.

In the previous section we found Muslim groups and individuals who were labeled ‘radical’ repeatedly and consistently linked to violence. *In spite of Terry Jones’ numerous incitements to violence and extremist religious views, Jones was never once labeled a ‘radical’ in The Seattle Times in 2012.* This is another clear labeling disparity.

**▷ RECOMMENDATION . . . . .**

*We urge The Seattle Times to be cautious and judicious in its portrayal of those who commit violent crimes, and to be aware of how improper labels and contextualization can be defamatory, can mislead readers and fuel prejudice and hatred of Islam and Muslims. To get beyond this, reporters must consider background information for all those who commit violent crimes, taking into account the root causes of what led the individuals to commit these crimes, instead of allowing only a few this privilege.*

<sup>132</sup> Deeb, S. (2012, November 29). Egypt convicts 8 over anti-Islam Web film. The Seattle Times. p. A7. “Egypt convicts 8 over anti-Islam Web Film” Sarah El Deeb  
<sup>133</sup> Youssef, N & Ismail, A. (2012, November 16). Call to a reporter sets off outrage. The Seattle Times. p. 16.  
<sup>134</sup> “U.S. envoy killed in Libya protest over film” David Kirkpatrick, 9.12.2012

*The term ‘Islamist’ is considered very offensive by Muslims and is frequently used by anti-Muslim extremists as a religious and ethnic slur to attack Muslim individuals and organizations.*

*The Seattle Times must be more accurate in its portrayal and labeling of individuals and groups. To avoid perpetuating false stereotypes and unintentionally fuel prejudice and hate, reporters must accurately describe the background and reasoning for violent extremism. The Seattle Times must seize opportunities to provide informative coverage and help readers properly understand larger trends based on facts and empirical data.*

## **Inaccurate, Imprecise & Misleading Terminology**

In this section we detail several terms that were used in an incorrect, imprecise or misleading manner. In our 2011 Seattle Times Analysis we noted a number of serious terminology issues such as the word ‘Islamist’, variants of the term ‘jihadist’, and the use of the terms ‘terrorism’ or ‘terrorist.’ Anytime these terms appeared in articles during our 2012 reading of The Seattle Times the articles, they were flagged in our database. We have devoted a full sub-section to each of these terms. In each sub-section we detail our observations on the use of the terminology, reasons why more informative descriptions are needed and a set of examples of more accurate terminology.

### **USE OF THE TERM ‘ISLAMIST’ . . . . .**

The term ‘Islamist’ emerged as one of the most problematic terms we encountered in our analysis of The Seattle Times’ coverage of Muslims and Islam. It is considered very offensive by Muslims and is frequently used by anti-Muslim extremists as a religious and ethnic slur to attack Muslim individuals and organizations. Further, the word ‘Islamist’ as defined by the AP, covers such a broad range of Muslims that almost any adherent to the faith can be labeled as such. The problematic AP definition of ‘Islamist’ from 2012 is:

“ The results we found were striking: in the 388 mentions we found of the term ‘Islamist’, the majority of times it was used it had an overtly negative connotation and frequently was directly connected to violence. ”

“Islamist: Supporter of government in accord with the laws of Islam. Those who view the Quran as a political model encompass a wide range of Muslims, from mainstream politicians to militants known as jihadi” (*AP Stylebook, 2012*).

There are other problems in this definition, such as use of the word “Jihadi”, another very offensive term, also often used as a religious and ethnic slur, which we discuss in the next section. Another issue is that, according to this definition the word ‘Islamist’ covers such a broad range of Muslims that almost any adherent to the faith can be labeled as such. This leaves readers confused and misled into accepting false stereotypes of Islam and Muslims.

To help put this usage of ‘Islamist’ in context, imagine if the same definition were to be applied by creating the term ‘Christianists’ and attempting to describe them.<sup>135</sup> If we follow the AP definition, this label would encompass most every US President, most members of the Democratic, Republican and other political parties, any church organization that endorses an elected official, and a vast number of extremist groups who derive their ideologies at least in part from Christianity, such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Nations.<sup>136</sup> As you can imagine, if one were unfamiliar with US politics, this label would be an obstacle to readers’ understanding of these groups’ motivations, focus, members, activities, and much more. In the course of our analysis we also examined the effect of the pattern of use of the term ‘Islamist’ has on the reader. Is the term ‘Islamist’ used to describe positive attributes or is it used in a negative context that leads readers to associate the term, and consequently Islam and Muslims, with violence and extremism?

*Our categorization method used contextual language and other descriptive terms surrounding the word ‘Islamist’ to gauge if the term was being used in a negative context. The ‘overtly negative’ category included the additional use of words such as “militants,” “dominated,” “extremist,”*

<sup>135</sup> This term has seen usage before to draw attention to use of Islamist labeling. See: Hudson, J. (2012, April 05). If I can call a Muslim an “Islamist,” can I call a Christian a “Christianist?”. Retrieved from [http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/04/05/if\\_you\\_can\\_call\\_a\\_muslim\\_an\\_islamist\\_can\\_you\\_call\\_a\\_christian\\_a\\_christianist](http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/04/05/if_you_can_call_a_muslim_an_islamist_can_you_call_a_christian_a_christianist)

<sup>136</sup> Anti-defamation league. (2013). About the Ku Klux Klan. Retrieved from [http://archive.adl.org/learn/ext\\_us/kkk/default.asp?LEARN\\_Cat=Extremism&LEARN\\_SubCat=Extremism\\_in\\_America&xpicked=4&item=kkk](http://archive.adl.org/learn/ext_us/kkk/default.asp?LEARN_Cat=Extremism&LEARN_SubCat=Extremism_in_America&xpicked=4&item=kkk)

and “hard-line” as descriptors of Islamist (e.g. “hard-line Islamists in parliament”). Included in the ‘not overtly negative’ category are uses of the term in ways such as “democratically elected Islamist President” or “Islamists campaigned.” The results we found were striking: in the 388 mentions we recorded of the term ‘Islamist’, the majority of times it was used it had an overtly negative connotation and frequently was directly connected to violence.<sup>137</sup>

As we looked at examples of the usage of ‘Islamist’, we noted not only the negative stigma typically associated with the term, but also the very confusing terminology and inaccurate coverage. For example, two articles about Libya contained frequent uses of the term ‘Islamist,’ and exemplify the confusion and negativity surrounding the word. In another article published in July, the author chronicled Libya’s elections as a “setback for the Islamists” and used the term a total of 11 times in that article. In this article, the term “Islamist” was apparently used to reference all Muslim or Islamic religious-leaning political parties (“beating Islamist parties”), and even to summarize the entire spirit of Libyan politics (“Libyan Islamist politics”). Later, the author used the term to describe armed rebels, noting that one of the party’s founders was a “former leader of an armed Islamist insurgency.”<sup>138</sup> This single article is another exhibit to show the varying uses of ‘Islamist’ as a word with a dizzying array of possible definitions that serves to confuse the reader.

Two months later, the same author published an article describing the attack on the American Consulate in Benghazi, Libya. In this article, every use of term “Islamist” was not just in a very negative context, but also directly connected the term to violence. The author described that the “assault was led by a brigade of Islamist fighters” and was carried out by “Islamist militants,” and that a “bomb [was] said to be planted by another Islamist group.”<sup>139</sup> These articles spotlight the disparity in how ‘Islamist’ is applied. On one hand the reader might see “Islamists” describing democratic parties, and in the next we see it describing armed extremist militias, among many more uses.

<sup>137</sup> See Table at <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/ccc?key=0Aq09f97QofDdGxfSGpxUUhRSGNDU3NKZ2RyY2FTVEE#gid=0>

<sup>138</sup> Kirkpatrick, D. (2012, July 9). Setback for Islamists in Libya. *The Seattle Times*, p. A3.

<sup>139</sup> Kirkpatrick, D., & Myers, S. (2012, September 13). Consulate attackers were well-armed. *The Seattle Times*, p. A1.

In multiple articles published in December, 2012, reporters' use of 'Islamist' once again created confusing coverage as it was used to describe everything from democratically elected politicians to militant action. Two articles, one published on December 8th and the next on December 9th, both referred to Hamas as an "Islamist militant group"<sup>140,141</sup> showcasing the use of "Islamist" to refer to an armed political group. The next day, in an article on Egypt, the author first used the term "Islamist" to refer to all protesters on the Egyptian streets, then to describe any person wanting the election of a religious-leaning candidate, and finally to describe any member of the then-ruling party, the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>142</sup> In another article published the same day, the author used 'Islamist' in yet another way: to describe Pakistan as a "notorious hub of Islamist militancy."<sup>143</sup> In this instance, "Islamist" is used as an adjective to describe armed militias in Pakistan, adding more confusion and increasing the reader's negative associations with any group or person The Seattle Times labels as 'Islamist.'

Another trend we noted in the use of 'Islamist' was its association with groups carrying out attacks against American interests. For example, in one article published in September, the author described protesters in Pakistan as "hard-line Islamists who benefit from stoking anger at the U.S."<sup>144</sup> Another article published on the same day noted that a "hard-line Islamist militia that has been linked to the attack on the U.S. Consulate".<sup>145</sup> Later in the month, one author wrote that "Islamists from the Ansar Al-Sharia Militia" carried out the killing of Ambassador Chris Stevens in Libya.<sup>146</sup>

Once again, this use of "Islamist" in a negative manner describing violent anti-American groups attached negative connotation to almost every use of the term in subsequent publications. When such articles are followed by ones in which the author repeatedly describes Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi as an "Islamist President," the reader is left

<sup>140</sup> Sanders, E. (2012, December 8). Visit to Gaza like a rebirth, exiled Hamas leader says. The Seattle Times, p. A4.

<sup>141</sup> Greenberg, J. (2012, December 9). Exiled Hamas chief at Gaza city rally. The Seattle Times, p. A6.

<sup>142</sup> New York Times, & Los Angeles Times, (2012, December 10). Morsi's move fails to quiet crowds. The Seattle Times, p. A7.

<sup>143</sup> The New York Times . (2012, December 10). U.S. drone strike kills al-Qaida commander. The Seattle Times, p. A6.

<sup>144</sup> Abbot, S. (2012, September 22). Deadly riots in Pakistan over anti-Muslim film. The Seattle Times, p. A3.

<sup>145</sup> Zway, S, & Fahim , K. (2012, September 22). Libyan protesters call for militias to disarm. The Seattle Times, p. A4.

<sup>146</sup> Frykberg, M. (2012, September 24). Libyan militias resist bid to control them. The Seattle Times, p. A4.



*The Seattle Times should use accurate, informative descriptions of the subject and cease using the label 'Islamist' and its variants in its reporting.*

confused and misled to believe that these elected leaders are involved in, and committed to, the same extremist violence.<sup>147,148,149</sup> Given the recent upheavals and changes in Egyptian politics, associating a newly-elected President with violent extremists does a disservice to readers because it confuses readers and deprives them of basic information about the ideology, goals, and activities of each of these vastly different groups and individuals.

The purpose of this quantitative and qualitative examination of the use of 'Islamist' is not to have The Seattle Times try to use this term in what may be thought of as a more 'neutral' or informative sense. *We have demonstrated that the term has no clear definition, an extremely negative connotation and most importantly becomes an obstacle in readers' understanding of important issues and events. It can also fuel prejudice and hate against Islam and Muslims and anything or anyone associated with Islam or Muslims. Also, as discussed above, the term is considered highly offensive by Muslims and is commonly used as a religious and ethnic slur by anti-Muslim extremists. The Seattle Times should use accurate, informative descriptions of the subject and cease using the label 'Islamist' and its variants in its reporting.*

**ATTEMPTS AT PROGRESS FALL SHORT . . . . .**

In April 2013, the Associated Press tried (but failed) to address some of the above-mentioned issues when it updated its definition of 'Islamist' in the Stylebook. The new definition reads as follows:

"An advocate or supporter of a political movement that favors reordering government and society in accordance with laws prescribed by Islam. Do not use as a synonym for Islamic fighters, militants, extremists or radicals, who may or may not be Islamists. Where possible, be specific and use the name of militant affiliations: al-Qaida-linked, Hezbollah, Taliban, etc. Those who view the Quran as a political model encompass a wide range of Muslims, from mainstream politicians to militants known as jihadi." *AP Stylebook, April 2013.*

<sup>147</sup> Batrawy, A, & Keath, L. (2012, December 12). Egypt's Morsi warns unrest threatens rebuilding priority. The Seattle Times, p. A4.  
<sup>148</sup> The World. (2012, July 12). Egyptian visits Saudis. The Seattle Times, p. A2.  
<sup>149</sup> Youssef, N. (2012, November 27). Morsi's power decree prevails. The Seattle Times, p. A4.

“Furthermore, due to the use of the term as an anti-Muslim slur by anti-Muslim extremists and the years of confusing usage by *The Seattle Times* (and likely other media that follow the AP Stylebook), the label is highly offensive and continues to mislead readers”

This updated definition is unhelpful as it still contains misleading and offensive terms and keeps intact the all-encompassing statement that identifies a huge number of vastly different groups as ‘Islamists’. The suggestion to “be specific” and not use the term as a religiously and ethnically loaded synonym for violent persons and groups who identify as Muslims is not sufficiently helpful. The definition remained the same while the recommendations for use by journalists changed. Such a change indicates that ‘Islamist’ has been on a pejorative slide, and the AP appears to have recognized this and is attempting to neutralize the term in an attempt to address the confusion the use of the term ‘Islamist’ causes to readers. Additionally it should be noted that the term ‘jihadi’ and ‘jihadist’ are frequently used by anti-Muslim extremists as religious and ethnic slurs.

This attempt to improve the use of the term is simply not enough due to the fact that the all-encompassing definition still equates any politician who believes in using the Quran as a model for law to any extremist militant who twists Islamic teaching to provide a justification for crime. Furthermore, due to the use of the term as an anti-Muslim slur by anti-Muslim extremists and the years of confusing usage by *The Seattle Times* (and likely other media that follow the AP Stylebook), the label is highly offensive and continues to mislead readers into linking peaceful religious organizations, or elected officials, to officially designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations, and creates a dangerous connection and further confusion among readers.

In an attempt to address this labeling disparity issue, we have developed a set of descriptors we believe would better inform the reader than heavily loaded, offensive and inaccurate labels. While the best solution will be to describe these groups or people in a more accurate, fact-based and case by case basis, we have tried to provide examples to addresses issues we consistently saw.

**INACCURATE LABEL:**

“hard-line Islamist”

**POSSIBLY MORE ACCURATE LABEL:**

“conservative  
(insert specific description)”

**EXPLANATION:** The use of this inaccurate label is an obstacle to giving readers useful information that they can use to understand the groups’ activities. Instead, the group or person should be clearly described to help inform the reader the motivations and activities of these groups.

**INACCURATE LABEL:**

“Islamist politicians”

**POSSIBLY MORE ACCURATE LABEL:**

“Religious-leaning politicians”

**EXPLANATION:** As we saw in the analysis above, the term ‘Islamist’ is overwhelmingly used in connection with violence. Labeling politicians with ‘Islamist’ implies to readers that they could be involved in this violence or oppression which further connects Islam to violence and only creates confusion as to their political platform and ideology.

**INACCURATE LABEL:**

“Islamist terrorists”

**POSSIBLY MORE ACCURATE LABEL:**

“violent extremists”

**EXPLANATION:** Connecting Islam and Muslims to ‘terrorism’ serves to promote false stereotypes. In our analysis we found that the religion of terror groups is, in almost all cases, only mentioned when members of the group are Muslim. Using this inaccurate label not only does a disservice to the reader, but also legitimizes these groups by equating them with democratically elected leaders and peaceful citizens.

..... **RECOMMENDATION** ◀

*The Seattle Times should provide clear, fact-based descriptions of groups and individuals in order to give the reader an understanding of their political platforms, motivations, scope, and activities. The continued use of the term ‘Islamist’ only serves to deprive readers of critical information, creates confusion and cements false stereotypes that fuel prejudice and hate. The Seattle Times cannot continue to use ‘Islamist’ if it wishes to provide readers with informative reporting.*

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*The continued use of the term ‘Islamist’ only serves to deprive readers of critical information, creates confusion and cements false stereotypes that fuel prejudice and hate.*

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..... **‘JIHAD’, ‘JIHADIS’ AND ‘JIHADISTS’  
WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?**

Another terminology issue we encountered in our analysis of The Seattle Times in 2012 was the uses of the term ‘Jihad’ and its variations. As we note in our 2011 Seattle Times Analysis, the Islamic theological definition of Jihad is to ‘struggle in the way of God’ and there are two common definitions of meaning. The first is the ‘greater jihad’ or the inner struggle against one’s own evil impulses such as greed, anger and malice and to do good works and charity in accordance with the will of God. The second is ‘lesser jihad’ or physical struggle against injustice in the world both violent and non-violent.<sup>150</sup>

*It is important to note that this is not just a scholarly definition; this is how the majority of Muslims worldwide understand jihad. A Gallup poll that surveyed a cross section of the world’s 1.2 billion Muslims asked what “jihad” meant to them. A minority included some reference to fighting while the most frequently articulated descriptions described “duty toward God” or “worship of God” with “no militaristic connotation.” Other frequent definitions included “a commitment to hard work,” “living in the principals of Islam” and “promoting peace, harmony, or cooperation and assisting others” directly contradicting how we found ‘Jihad’ to be normally described in our analysis of The Seattle Times’ reporting.<sup>151</sup>*

In nearly every instance it was mentioned in The Seattle Times the term ‘jihad’ and its variants were used to denote violence by Muslims. This trend of labeling Muslims who commit violence with ‘Jihad’ misleads the reader, gives them false information about Islam and gives the actions of violent extremists the religious credibility they so desperately seek.

In our analysis of the use of the term ‘Jihad’ and its variants we saw a number of instances in which the term was used not only grossly incorrectly but also caused confusion. For example one article about chemical weapons in Syria describes concerns about “al-Qaida and other Jihadist groups.”<sup>152</sup> Another article two months later also notes that the U.S. government’s

<sup>150</sup> Morgan, D. (2009). Essential Islam: A comprehensive guide to belief and practice. Praeger.

<sup>151</sup> Burkholder, R. (2002, December 03). Jihad -- ‘holy war’, or internal spiritual struggle?. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/7333/jihad-holy-war-internal-spiritual-struggle.aspx>

<sup>152</sup> Parsons, C., & Richter, P. (2012, August 21). Obama: Syria weapons a “red line” . The Seattle Times. p. A4

“In nearly every instance it was mentioned in *The Seattle Times* we analyzed, the term ‘jihad’ and its variants were used to denote violence by Muslims... the term was used not only used in a grossly incorrect manner but also caused confusion.”

“largest concern is Jihadist actors getting their hands on chemical weapons munitions and using them.”<sup>153</sup> ‘Jihad’ and its variants are continually used to label any violent action in the name of Islam. We see “Jihadists on al-Qaida websites”<sup>154</sup> post on things like “Jihadist forums”<sup>155</sup> while trying to recruit “aspiring Jihadis.”<sup>156</sup> Anything related to violence and Muslims seems to be given this label. Again in France a reporter notes “that the gunman acted with the guidance of his brother, an Islamic radical who reportedly has ties to at least one jihadist network.”<sup>157</sup> This trend continues in an article on how “al-Qaida calls on jihadists to fight Syrian president” and discusses “jihadist communications.”<sup>158</sup>

One article we note in the labeling disparity even goes as far to note how several men plotting to travel to Afghanistan from the U.S. and fight “liked each other’s jihadist Facebook posting” and details their “bumps on the road to martyrdom.”<sup>159</sup> Another article notes U.S. government attempts to counter these “jihadi postings” and twice notes “Somalia’s best known American jihadi, Omar Hammami.”<sup>160</sup> Even though according to empirical research by the Gallup Poll most Muslims reject a violent definition of ‘Jihad,’ *The Seattle Times* continues to directly connect the term to violence and extremism, noting in October “an Israeli strike on a prominent al-Qaida-inspired jihadi.”<sup>161</sup>

Using ‘Jihad’ in this context does more than just confuse a reader over Islamic faith. By describing the actions of these violent extremist groups as ‘Jihad,’ *The Seattle Times* is implicitly granting violent extremists the religious credibility they desperately seek. Doing so also builds prejudice and hate in minds of readers when they see the term consistently associated with violence, and gives credit to extremists by letting extremists’ actions be labeled in the way they find most favorable.

<sup>153</sup> Laub, K. (2012, October 14). Syria’s chemical arsenal poses troubling problem. *The Seattle Times*, p. A6.

<sup>154</sup> Dozier, K. (2012, August 30). Bin Laden book differs from official accounts of raid. *The Seattle Times*, p. A2.

<sup>155</sup> Leiby, R. (2012, May 8). Hostage U.S. aid worker makes appeal in video. *The Seattle Times*, p. A2.

<sup>156</sup> Miller, G. (2012, May 10). Al-Qaida affiliate in Yemen took bait. *The Seattle Times*, p. A5.

<sup>157</sup> Newline. (2012, March 26). Brother charged. *The Seattle Times*, p. A2.

<sup>158</sup> Arango T., Adnan D. (2012, February 13). Conflict in Syria threatens to widen. *The Seattle Times*, p. A4.

<sup>159</sup> Los Angeles Times., & Associated Press. (2012, November 21). Details emerge in terrorism plot. *The Seattle Times*, p. A6.

<sup>160</sup> Straziuso, J. (2012, November 14). U.S. military creates African news websites to counter jihadi postings. *The Seattle Times*, p. A2.

<sup>161</sup> Hadid, D. (2012, October 21). Israeli navy intercepts Gaza-bound boat. *The Seattle Times*, p. A6.

“Based on our observations, we believe that ‘terrorism’ and its variants are increasingly being used as political weapons to discredit one’s opponents.”

Due to the overwhelming linkage we observed between ‘Jihad’ and violence, we believe that The Seattle Times should use accurate, fact-based language to describe violent persons groups and their actions. Combined with the lack of coverage using the correct definition of ‘Jihad’, further use of the term only serves to corrupt a major Islamic tenet, further validates extremists’ justifications for carrying out violent action, builds prejudice against Islam and Muslim people, and becomes an obstacle in readers’ understanding of issues and events.

▷ **RECOMMENDATION** . . . . .

*The Seattle Times should use accurate, fact-based descriptions and cease using labels such as ‘Jihad’ or ‘Jihadist’ and other variants, to avoid giving extremists legitimacy, avoid misleading readers into associating Islam and Muslims with violence, and to provide readers with an accurate, fact-based understanding of issues.*

. . . . . **‘TERRORISM’ AS A LABEL**

As we note in our 2011 report, “terrorism has taken on a life its own, transcending any one definition.”<sup>162</sup> Due to our analysis and other events in 2012, we will show in this section why we believe ‘terrorism’ and its variants have become political labels, used to discredit one’s opponents, rather than a statement of fact. In our analysis we of The Seattle Times use of the term ‘terrorist’ and its variants, we noted a number of labeling issues, however issues surrounding the use of ‘terrorism’ go beyond a simple labeling disparity.

Based on our observations, we believe that the term ‘terrorism’ and its variants are increasingly being used as political weapons to discredit one’s opponents. In this section we will cover how the myriad definitions of the word ‘terrorism,’ the US State Department Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) list, how Mujahideen-e Khalq removed itself from this list in 2012, how coverage by The Seattle Times reflected this political use of ‘terrorist’ and its variants. We ask that The Seattle Times exercise care to avoid using others’ political

<sup>162</sup> Council on American Islamic Relations Washington. (2012, July 30). 2011 Seattle Times Article Analysis Report. Retrieved from <http://www.cairseattle.org/seattletimes>

*There is no clear international consensus over the use of the term ‘terrorism’, and the academic debate over ‘terrorism’ is equally as convoluted. Each U.S. government agency dealing with security uses a different definition of ‘terrorism’*

descriptors rather than a statement of fact. In order to provide clear reporting The Seattle Times, if the term must be used, it must always be clearly stated who is describing the person or group as a ‘terrorist’ entity, and a critical examination of why.

**DIFFERING DEFINITIONS . . . . .**

In our 2011 Seattle Times analysis report,<sup>163</sup> we draw attention to how terrorism, in the past, has been considered more of a tactic than descriptor for a group or person, and how this has changed since 9/11. There is no clear international consensus over the use of the term ‘terrorism’, and the academic debate over ‘terrorism’<sup>164</sup> is equally as convoluted.<sup>165</sup> Each U.S. government agency dealing with security uses a different definition of ‘terrorism’ in their regulations. In our appendix to this report, we list several of these different definitions from government agencies.

**FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS, . . . . .  
A STATEMENT OF FACT?**

The U.S. State Department maintains an up to date list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs). Organizations are added to list if they engage in terrorist activity or “retain the capability and intent to engage in terrorist activity.”<sup>166</sup> Once an organizations is added to the list, a variety of ramifications apply, the most important of which prevents U.S. citizens from providing any kind of support to FTOs. In our analysis of The Seattle Times, we initially believed that the FTO label was applied based on uniform, objectively applied guidelines, however an interesting case in 2012 involving the MEK showed that the FTO designation is very subjective.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>164</sup> Setty, S. (2011). What’s in a name? How nations define terrorism ten years after 9/11. 33(1), 1-65. Retrieved from <https://www.law.upenn.edu/journals/jil/issuesVol33.php>  
<sup>165</sup> Ganor, B. (2002). Defining terrorism: Is one man’s terrorist another man’s freedom fighter. Police Practice and Research, 3(4), 287-304.  
<sup>166</sup> U.S. Department of State. (2012, September 28). Foreign Terrorist Organizations. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>

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*The goal of this section is not to discuss the MEK, but by doing so, show how politically driven and subjective the process to label an organization as a Foreign Terrorist Organization has shown to be.*

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• • • • • **THE MEK LOBBYISTS**

Enter the Mujahideen-e Khalq or MEK for short. Formed as a revolutionary organization against the Shah of Iran in the 1970's, the MEK carried out numerous violent assassinations against Iranian officials including the killing of U.S. Air Force colonels Jack Turner and Paul Shaffer.<sup>167</sup> After the Iranian revolution, the new Iranian regime purged groups that challenged its leadership leading to a brutal fight with MEK. This battle ended with the MEK sorely losing and becoming an exile group in Iraq with ties to Saddam Hussein. After the Iraq war of 2003, the MEK disarmed and began heavily lobbying the U.S. to recognize it as the legitimate opposition of the Iranian regime.<sup>168</sup>

A 2009 report by RAND,<sup>169</sup> a think tank created to provide analysis for U.S. armed forces, classified the MEK as a cult whose members underwent “intense ideological exploitation and isolation, sexual control and emotional isolation.” The report went to warn of “attempts to build political support from the West through a multifaceted public-relations campaign,” further noting “the Mek’s fundraising activities have been proven to be fraudulent” and “The Mek has also been linked with a range of money-laundering activities”.

*The lobbying efforts were successful, and in September 2012 Secretary of State Clinton removed the MEK’s FTO designation.<sup>170</sup> In total three top Washington, DC lobby firms had, by 2011, been paid \$1.5 million to lobby for removal of this designation.<sup>171</sup> Between December 2010 and July 2011 at least 33 prominent U.S. officials spoke at MEK conferences, everyone from Rudolph Giuliani to a former White House Chief Staff and a number of former directors of intelligence agencies and military generals.<sup>172</sup> Each person took home speaker fees ranging from \$20,000 to \$40,000. This trend continued in 2012, with appearances by politicians*

<sup>167</sup> Goulka, J., Hansell, L., Wilke, E., & Larson, J. Office of the Secretary of Defense, RAND National Defense Research Institute. (2009). Mujahedin-e Khalq in Iraq. Retrieved from RAND Corporation website: [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND\\_MG871.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG871.pdf)

<sup>168</sup> Shane, S. (2012, September 21). Iranian dissidents convince U.S. to drop terror label. New York Times. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/22/world/middleeast/iranian-opposition-group-mek-wins-removal-from-us-terrorist-list.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/22/world/middleeast/iranian-opposition-group-mek-wins-removal-from-us-terrorist-list.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

<sup>169</sup> Goulka, J., Hansell, L., Wilke, E., & Larson, J. Office of the Secretary of Defense, RAND National Defense Research Institute. (2009). Mujahedin-e Khalq in Iraq. Retrieved from RAND Corporation website: [http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND\\_MG871.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG871.pdf)

<sup>170</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/22/world/middleeast/iranian-opposition-group-mek-wins-removal-from-us-terrorist-list.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>171</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/sep/21/iran-mek-group-removed-us-terrorism-list>

<sup>172</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/08/mek-lobbying\\_n\\_913233.html?page=1](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/08/mek-lobbying_n_913233.html?page=1)



““ This internal debate among Newsweek staff, originally never intended for publication, helps showcase the staff’s divergent opinions on how they view use of the term ‘terrorist’ in media coverage.””

such as former House Speaker Newt Gingrich.<sup>173</sup> By receiving the speaker’s fees through third party booking agencies, politicians could get around the issues associated with aiding a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization.

You might ask, what does the MEK have to do with reporting by The Seattle Times? The goal of this section is not to discuss the MEK, but by doing so, show how politically driven and subjective the process to label an organization as a Foreign Terrorist Organization has shown to be.

We saw another example of terrorism being used as a political weapon in coverage on the Syrian conflict. It is common for the Assad regime to describe its opposition as ‘terrorists’ in official statements. An article by The Seattle Times notes after quoting an official Syrian press release that “the Syrian regime frequently refers to those who oppose it as ‘terrorists’ and places the term in quotes.”<sup>174</sup> Another article quoting the Syrian Foreign ministry notes that it describes rebel forces as “terrorist groups” and again places quotes around the term “terrorist,” instead choosing to describe the opposition groups as “rebel forces.”<sup>175</sup> Yet another example of this trend is an article covering a bombing in Damascus. When discussing who could be responsible, the author notes that “the government blamed ‘terrorists’” with the word ‘terrorists’ in quotes in the article.<sup>176</sup>

It is important to note that often times the reporters are questioning the government’s claim that it was the opposition who carried out the attack. Opposition groups typically accuse the government of carrying out the bombings to boost support, as was noted in the article on the January Damascus bombing. However, when it comes to question the Syrian government’s use of the “terrorist groups” label, the consistent distrust implies that it is not correct to label Syrian opposition groups ‘terrorists’” This trend is reinforced in an article in the Close Up

<sup>173</sup> [http://tpmmuckraker.talkingpointsmemo.com/2012/07/gingrich\\_speaks\\_at\\_mek\\_rally\\_in\\_france.php](http://tpmmuckraker.talkingpointsmemo.com/2012/07/gingrich_speaks_at_mek_rally_in_france.php)

<sup>174</sup> Karam, Z., & Heilprin, J. (2012, November 10). Up to 11,000 people flee Syria in 24-hour period. The Seattle Times, p. A3.

<sup>175</sup> Brinbaum, M. (2012, December 14). Russia positions itself for probable fall of Syrian regime. The Seattle Times

<sup>176</sup> Associated Press. (2012, January 7). Bomb in Damascus leaves 25 dead. The Seattle Times, p. A3.

“As we saw in a number of ‘lone wolf’ cases such as Jared Lee Loughner, Wade Page, Abdul-Latif and Mohammed Merah, the term ‘terrorism’ is by far more often being used to denote violence by Muslims.”

section describing the different opposition groups. The article does not use the term “terrorist.” Instead, the terms “rebel” and “fighters” are used throughout the article to describe these armed groups.<sup>177</sup>

• • • • • **DEBATE ON USE OF ‘TERRORISM’  
AMONG NEWSWEEK EDITORS**

In 2010, Newsweek magazine publicly released an extended email conversation among their editors debating whether Joseph Stack, who crashed a plane into IRS building in Austin, Texas to protest U.S. tax policies is a ‘terrorist.’ This internal debate among Newsweek staff, originally never intended for publication, helps showcase the staff’s divergent opinions on how they view use of the term ‘terrorist’ in media coverage. The Newsweek staff discusses the labeling disparity between Stack and Umar Abdulmatallab, the ‘underwear bomber’ who attempted to blow up a plane with plastic explosives.<sup>178</sup> The second email gives an editor’s opinion of how media outlets label “Lone wolfish American attacker who sees gov’t as threat to personal freedom: bomber, tax protester, survivalist” and “foreign groups or foreign individuals bombing/shooting to protest American gov’t: terrorists.” Others responded to the e-mail, expressing disagreement and noting “if it’s indiscriminate killing of clearly innocent people, you’re a terrorist.”

The prevailing opinion in these e-mail exchanges seems to be that ‘terrorist’ is connected to foreigners, mostly Muslim. One editor notes “Abdulmatallab’s actions fit into a much larger terrorism narrative that has stretched out for years” and when it comes to Stack “*One thing that could’ve stretched out this Austin Wacko story out quite a bit longer is if the mainstream media had been bolder about connecting it to the larger anti-tax political phenomenon in this country today: the Tea Party. But most of us weren’t willing to go there.*”

<sup>177</sup> Enders, D. (2012, June 8). Syrian rebels carve out safe haven - close up. The Seattle Times, p. A3.

<sup>178</sup> Newsweek. (2012, February 20). Should joseph stack be called a terrorist?. Retrieved from <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2010/02/20/should-joseph-stack-be-called-a-terrorist.html>

...we note the substantial difference between how violent extremism by Muslims was labeled and contextualized, compared to labeling and contextualization of violent extremism by others,

## DOMESTIC

We observed the effect of the confusion on whom to label as ‘terrorists’ in reporting by The Seattle Times. In the labeling disparity section of this report, we note the substantial difference between how violent extremism by Muslims was labeled and contextualized, compared to labeling and contextualization of violent extremism by others, and the effect that these disparities have on the reader’s perception of what constitutes a ‘terrorist’ and to which religious, ethnic, or racial group most ‘terrorists’ belong. *As we saw in a number of ‘lone wolf’ cases such as Jared Lee Loughner, Wade Page, Abdul-Latif and Mohammed Merah, the term ‘terrorism’ is being used almost exclusively to denote violence by Muslim persons.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

*The Seattle Times should avoid use of the term ‘terrorist’ and its variants, and instead use accurate fact-based language to describe groups, persons and events at hand. If a short hand is absolutely needed then the descriptor ‘violent extremist’ or ‘violent extremism’ can be used, but with care to ensure this descriptor is applied uniformly and objectively to individuals and groups of all faiths and backgrounds.*

# Inflammatory & False Information

In this section we will discuss articles we found using false or inflammatory language in their reporting. While some of these articles are part of larger trends in other sections, we have singled out these articles because they are highly offensive, defamatory, blatantly attack Islam or Muslims, use derogatory language and provide the reader with blatantly misleading information that fuels prejudice and hate.

An opinion article in August, 2012 by Kathleen Parker describes the challenges of Tahmina Kohistani, an Afghan woman running to qualify in the 2012 Summer Olympics. While showing the problems Kohistani faces, the article describes Afghanistan as “a nation and

“The columnist appears to describe Islam as a whole as a “primitive, misogynist religion” that is “armed and dangerous towards women” . . . A similarly defamatory attack on a minority religion, such as Judaism, or a culture, such as African American culture, would not be considered fit to print.”

a culture that “these problems” are violence against humanity.” The author continues to describe Kohistani, saying “Imagine that by wanting to run, you are essentially instructing a primitive, misogynist religion – armed and dangerous towards women – that they, the Taliban and its ilk, are the bad ones.”<sup>179</sup>

The columnist appears to describe Islam as a whole as a “primitive, misogynist religion” that is “armed and dangerous towards women” and then goes further to imply that the Taliban’s extremist interpretation is widely accepted as mainstream Islam. *A similarly defamatory attack on a minority religion, such as Judaism, or a culture, such as African American culture, would not be considered fit to print.* This is not only the most inflammatory article we saw in our analysis on Islam and Muslims, it was also the only blatant attack in our analysis on a minority group represented in America.

In another article in which the author reports on the killing of Ambassador Stevens the author describes Egyptian protesters, who vandalized the U.S. embassy in Cairo, Egypt. It describes their actions in the following words, “deface U.S. flags and hoist the black flags favored by Islamic ultraconservatives and labeled with Islam’s most basic expression of faith, “There is no god but God and Muhammad is his prophet.”<sup>180</sup>

This expression of faith “There is god but God and Muhammad is his prophet” is the Shaha-da and is the first of the Five Pillars of Islam and constitutes one of the basic Islamic beliefs. It is one of the most important phrases in Islamic belief system and is phrase repeated by many Muslims to affirm their faith on a daily basis. Attributing this phrase to one “favored by Islamic ultraconservatives” casts this fundamental pillar of Islam as something that only ultraconservatives use. It also implicitly creates a violent depiction of religiously conservative Muslims, instantly maligning a basic everyday religious phrase by associating it with the actions of an activist group. This further cements a distorted, negative image in readers’ minds of Islam and Muslims and fuels hate and prejudice.

<sup>179</sup> Parker, K. (2012, August 08). Running for their lives. The Seattle Times, p. B2.

<sup>180</sup> Kirkpatrick, D., & Myers, S. (2012, September 08). Consulate attackers were well-armed. The Seattle Times, p. A1.

# APPENDIX I . . . . .

## LACK OF CONSENSUS IN DEFINITIONS OF ‘TERRORISM’ USED BY VARIOUS U.S. AGENCIES AND DEPARTMENTS.

**FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION:** “Terrorism is defined in the Code of Federal Regulations as ‘the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives’ (28 C.F.R. Section 0.85).”

(<http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/terrorism-2002-2005>)

**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY:** “The Intelligence Community is guided by the definition of terrorism contained in Title 22 of the US Code, Section 2656f(d):

- • • The term ‘terrorism’ means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents.
- • • The term ‘international terrorism’ means terrorism involving the territory or the citizens of more than one country.
- • • The term ‘terrorist group’ means any group that practices, or has significant subgroups that practice, international terrorism.”<sup>181</sup>

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, JOINT TASK FORCE, 1998:** “The term ‘terrorism’ is defined as the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological.”<sup>182</sup>

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, JOINT TASK FORCE, 2010:** “Terrorism: The unlawful use of violence or threat of violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies. Terrorism is often motivated by religious, political, or other ideological beliefs and committed in the pursuit of goals that are usually political.”<sup>183</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (2013, April 19). Terrorism FAQs, Retrieved from <https://www.cia.gov/news-information/cia-the-war-on-terrorism/terrorism-faqs.html>

<sup>182</sup> Federation of American Scientists. Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff. (1998). Joint tactics, techniques, and procedures for antiterrorism (Joint Pub 3-07.2). Retrieved from website: [http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3\\_07\\_2.pdf](http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3_07_2.pdf)

<sup>183</sup> Federation of American Scientists. Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff. (2010). Antiterrorism (Joint Publication 3-07.2). Retrieved from website: [http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/others/jp-doctrine/JP3\\_07\\_2\(10\).pdf](http://www.bits.de/NRANEU/others/jp-doctrine/JP3_07_2(10).pdf)

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# NOTES

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 25 horizontal lines. Each line is a solid black horizontal line, with a gap between each line. The lines span the width of the page.



# ABOUT CAIR-WA

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CAIR-Washington State (CAIR-WA), a non-profit 501(c)(3), grass-roots civil rights and advocacy organization, is the local chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil liberties organization, with about 33 regional offices nationwide.

**The Washington State chapter started in 2002, when a group of dedicated volunteers in the Seattle area saw a need for a unique kind of Muslim organization—an organization that would work to uphold civil rights of American Muslims, fight bigotry, empower American Muslims to fully contribute to the broader society, and foster a fact-based understanding of Islam and Muslims.**

**The chapter has grown tremendously since then, deepening its base in the Washington State Muslim community. It has become a reliable resource and partner for media, public officials and policy makers, advocacy groups, and interfaith communities.**

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Questions about this report can be directed to

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Samuel Shugart is a Communications Intern at CAIR-WA. He is a junior at Lewis and Clark College, where he studies International Affairs. Sam enjoys reading a variety of International Relations news sites and blogs, as well as studying developmental aid and community building. In the summer of 2012, Sam participated in Northwestern University's Global Engagement Studies Institute. The program consisted of a developmental aid training course, after which he spent two months working in Jinja, Uganda with the Ugandan Health Ministry. At Lewis and Clark, Sam is the co-President of the Model United Nations Club and helps run the Lewis & Clark Politics Club. After graduation, he hopes to find a career that will allow him to pursue his love for International Relations. Sam is particularly interested in community organizing, civil rights and economic development. He also volunteers with community organizations, including Rebuilding Together Seattle.



## Jessy Hampton

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Jessy Hampton is a Communications Intern at CAIR-WA. She is a senior at Seattle Pacific University (SPU), where she studies Global Development and Sociology. Jessy enjoys studying Middle Eastern politics, and actively searches for opportunities to travel to that region of the world. In the fall of 2011, Jessy studied Arabic, Islam, and politics in Israel-Palestine and Turkey, and spent the summer of 2012 studying Arabic in Tunisia. Jessy is involved in advocacy in her university community, where she is the president of the SPU Israel-Palestine Club. After graduation, she hopes to move to the Middle East and work for a non-governmental organization.

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Olivia Johnson is a Communications Intern at CAIR-WA. She is a senior at Seattle University, where she pursues an Honors Sociology degree. As a member of the University Honors program, Olivia has taken an interest in Middle Eastern history and studies, especially after studying Arabic and Islam in Morocco in 2012. She has enjoyed writing for the Seattle University newspaper for four years, and loves following the latest happenings of the world.

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