

LESSONS FROM AN ARAB
(Abdelkader's Legacy of Empathy and Obedience, 1808-1883)
by John Kiser

Introduction



I owe my interest in Emir Abdelkader to a community of French Trappist monks living in the Atlas Mountains, south of Algiers. The story of their kidnapping in 1996 and eventual death became the subject of a book, *The Monks of Tibhirine : Faith, Love and Terror in Algeria*. Seven years later, an award-winning French film, *Of Men and Gods*, was produced based in large measure on the book. Brought to the more God-fearing United States by Sony Classics, it became *Of Gods and Men*.

By a coincidence of history, their monastery of Notre Dame of the Atlas was located below a cliff face called Abdelkader Rock. Curious about the name, I learned from the monks that Abdelkader had once directed a battle against the French from the top of the cliff and is considered by Algerians to be their version of George Washington. Abdelkader was the first Arab leader to unify tribes, however briefly, into a proto-Arab state to resist a French occupation that began with the sack of Algiers in 1830. As it turned out, the emir's struggle was but the first phase of a "long war" for independence and dignity that lasted until 1962.

As I read more about him, I also noted his resemblance to other Americans--- Robert E. Lee and John Winthrop. Like Lee, he was deeply religious, gracious, unwilling to prolong senseless suffering and in defeat, promoted reconciliation. Like Winthrop, Abdelkader believed that good governance required submission to Divine Law: God's wisdom as revealed through the prophets in the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospels and the Koran— interpreted through the actions and sayings of the Prophet Mohammad, known as the Sunna.

A devout practitioner of his faith, Abdelkader learned from his mother that ritual purification is but half of faith, and a reminder of the harder half ---to purify one's

inner self of unruly passions and egotistical desires. From his scholarly father, Muhi al Din, he learned the complexities of interpreting God's word, the importance of context, the different levels of understanding, and different forms of behavior that are also righteous. The most brilliant of his father's four sons, Abdelkader acquired a sense of mission to renew an Islamic culture degraded by years of greed and misrule by the provincial Ottoman beys. His tools were deep knowledge and curiosity, keen and open intellect, chivalrous behavior, genuine piety, and moral courage. *Commander of the Faithful: Life and Times of Emir Abdelkader (story of true jihad)* became a spiritual sequel to the monks.

One day while visiting the Catholic cultural center in Algiers, a Benedictine sister sought me out. She had learned of my interest in writing a book about the emir and excitedly brought me a copy of an excerpt from the emir's spiritual writings which she especially appreciated, and thought I should have. His words resonated.

... If you think God is what the different communities believe---the Muslims, the Christians, the Jews , Zoroastrians, polytheists and others—he is that, but also more...None of His creatures worships Him in his entirety. No one is an infidel in all the ways relating to God. No one knows all God's facets. Each of His creatures worships and knows Him in a certain way and is ignorant of Him in others. Error does not exist in this world except in a relative manner.

No wonder this Catholic sister admired him. Abdelkader had enunciated the spirit of Vatican II one hundred years before Pope John the XXIII wrestled revolutionary declarations from the leaders of the Church: The kingdom of God is bigger than the Church; salvation is ultimately a mystery. No religion owned God. The finite can't grasp the infinite.

Abdelkader's way of thinking inspired me. It was rational, humble, inclusive. I could see that the superior of the monks, Christian de Chergé, and Abdelkader shared similar big tent views of their faiths, followed similar rituals and even dressed alike. Like the writings of Christian, the emir's words also resonated. I wanted to learn more about this Arab warrior- scholar- saint who, throughout much of the 19th century had been honored and admired from Missouri to Moscow to Mecca: First as a wily and resilient warrior- statesman opposing the French

occupiers and their native allies(1832-1847); later as an unbending and stoic prisoner in France (1848-52), and finally in honorable exile (1852-83) where he reached the summit of his fame after rescuing thousands of Christians during a rampage in Damascus.

The emir's story is about many things, but mainly it's about struggle. He struggled against French invaders, struggled with betrayal, humiliation and depression in France, and struggled to live as a good Muslim throughout his tribulations by not allowing the destructive passions of despair, hatred or revenge to dominate his emotions. I thought I could learn something from his life, and if I could, perhaps others could too. The qualities that made him admired by both ordinary people and leaders of nations are in short supply today: Subtle, searching intellect, self-control, moral courage, excellent manners and spirit of reconciliation towards all. He never burnt his bridges. Rather than demonize, he would shame his enemies.

"What is this Thing Called Love?"

Two years ago, The Fetzer Institute in Kalamazoo, Michigan, asked me to write a White Paper. I was to explain who Abdelkader was, and to relate his life to the institute's mission of fostering awareness of the power of love and forgiveness in governance, and the world. But what is love, really ?

Crooner Cole Porter's meaning of the love he found so perplexing was an emotion, a sentiment, a feeling. As unpredictable as a bird, it flies in and then flies out. Such love has nothing to do with Christian love, I was told years ago by a French priest who tutored a rather secular John Kiser in understanding scripture during a year of study on the Cote d' Azur. Father Antoine Costa was the doyen of six parishes and noted for having one of the few churches in France that was full every Sunday.

Why should I "love" my neighbor? I asked him. That seemed much too strong an emotion for any old neighbor, given the difficulty I often had of loving properly the people I am supposed to love—spouse, children, close friends. That's when I realized I had been "Hollywoodized."

“Love thy neighbor,” he explained, is not about a sentiment; rather about respecting the dignity of another person, good will, justice, patience, self control, empathy. Among these overlapping, worldly attributes of love, I rank empathy of the highest importance in the case of Abdelkader --- his ability and willingness to imagine himself in the shoes of others; treating others as he would have wanted to be treated. Love is Matthew 25—being compassionate toward the hungry, the poor, the sick and even the stranger. Or, according to a Hadith, “ No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.”

The Lord’s Prayer tells us we will be forgiven in the same measure as we forgive others. Goethe tells us that to understand is to forgive. Forgiveness is aided by humility, and by love, when love seeks understanding and asks, “What if I were in a similar situation?” I would propose, most importantly, that forgiveness is about self cleansing, healing wounds, moving on. Without forgiveness, we can poison ourselves with prolonged emotions of anger, hatred and revenge--- powerful toxins that may activate great exertion, but not likely to be righteous exertion. Despite the horrors of war, and betrayals by Arabs and French alike, the emir controlled these demons, giving him a weapon for which the French generals had no counter: his humanity. As a believer, the emir liked to say that all genuine religions share the same mandate: To love God and be compassionate toward His creatures --including French prisoners.

Justice, empathy, forgiveness and courage marked Abdelkader as a leader. These qualities reflected a character molded by learned, demanding, and caring parents as well as a tribal culture that expected from their leaders wisdom, generosity and patience --- traits reinforced by a well of religious teachings and morality that was thoroughly internalized under his parents’ guidance.

Abdelkader And The Art Governance

Abdelkader’s “governance” took two forms: creating a caliphate by federating independent-minded tribes under the Law, and governing his “community” of over one hundred family and loyal followers while in prison for five years. His ability to

command respect was ultimately rooted in a third form of governance---his “self-governance,” or self mastery, composed of a powerful intellect, a clear moral compass and an attitude of servanthip.

When asked in prison by Col. Eugene Daumas, his minder from the War Ministry, what advice he had for the French on how to govern the Arabs, the emir held up the Koran. It was his constitution. Unlike many of today’s professed theocrats, the emir’s knowledge of his “constitution” was both broad and deep, and guided by a spirit of humility and always subject to the higher wisdom of the ulema. Above all, he would have honored the Koranic teaching which warns : “There shall be no compulsion in religion.” (S 2:256)

Abdelkader grew up in a Sufi and tribal world. From his Sufi tradition, the writings of Ibn Arabi that celebrated the spirit of universal love loomed large in his thinking. To acquire the religious authority that his father knew his son needed in order to tame the tribes, Abdelkader learned to recite the Koran perfectly in order to mimic the spirit that God breathed into man and capture the divine energy that organized the chaos. The human spirit was like an army in battle, his father taught, and constantly exposed to disorganizing forces that are countered only by the discipline of good order and rituals rightly performed.

From his tribal world, he learned a sense of hierarchy, obedience to higher authority, beginning with God, and then to each other according to rank. Tribal chieftains were chosen by the elders for their generosity, patience and ability to render justice and give wise counsel to petitioners. It is a world which emphasizes social cohesion and harmony within the tribe, lubricated with an encompassing etiquette (*adab*) governing relations between people.

In the emir’s Bedouin tradition, society is a living organism knit together by structured relationships. Man is a social animal who survives by cooperating with others. If those relationships are good, the parts work together in harmony. If the relationships are bad, the parts war with each other. Politics is the art of leading people to live in harmony. No knowledge is more important than that needed for understanding the elements of healthy community life and guiding human behavior

in a just and righteous way. For this to occur, politics should be governed not by ambition and love of power, but by generosity and care--- the hormones that build unity and closeness. And where does that knowledge come from?

Higher knowledge requires a healthy mind and spirit (*aqil*) that is attuned to nature and the Divine wisdom revealed by His prophets. The Torah, the Psalms, the Gospels and the Koran are all repositories of prophetic knowledge. But knowing the Law is not enough.

Only through obedience to Divine Will can moral progress be attained. But obedience alone is also not enough. It requires possessing the four virtues, known in the Christian tradition as the “cardinal virtues”: *intellect* which includes common sense , good judgment, the ability to make fine distinctions, discernment, memory; *courage*, a quality of the spirit that directs or restrains anger in order to do what is right. Courage has companion qualities of generosity, endurance, firmness, compassion and spirit of sacrifice; *self mastery*, the requirement to hold in check unruly passions, known to catholics as the seven deadly sins, that lead us astray and finally; *justice* or equitable behavior which must be free from the unruly passions --- anger, envy, greed and impatience.

Empathy (Love) and Forgiveness

When Robert McNamara, in the self-revealing documentary film, *The Fog of War*, was asked the most important lesson he learned from Vietnam, he answered: “Empathize with the enemy.” He could not imagine the strength of the North Vietnamese will to resist and willingness to absorb pain in order to achieve unification. Further, he lamented in his book, *In Retrospect...* “ Our misjudgment of friend and foe alike reflected our profound ignorance of the history, culture and politics of the people in the area...”

Empathy can help counter ignorance. By simply asking ourselves when America wields the hammer of military or economic power, “How would Americans react if the same was done to us by a foreign power?” Ron Paul was the only presidential candidate who had the courage to empathize with Iraqi resistance to the American presence by asking his audiences how Americans would react to an occupying

power that was destroying homes, killing people and disrupting life. For such empathy, he was roundly booed. In an earlier age, President John Kennedy made news when he boldly declared that Russians, like Americans, love their children and parents, have hopes and dreams and aren't interested in nuclear suicide.

Looking empathetically at the outside world and the policies of other nations, especially those we regard as "enemy" is not a habit Americans engage in often. Yet it is the oldest form of wisdom, honored (but rarely followed) in all military history courses by the obligatory study of the centuries-old wisdom of Sun Tzu: get inside the enemy's head. Know your enemy; more importantly, know yourself--- your prejudices and blind spots.

If America's leaders followed such ancient wisdom, they might be better able to predict the consequences of our adventures abroad. What if "Do unto others ..." became a foreign policy guideline, an item on the check list---whether out of moral conviction (not likely) or as a calculation for anticipating consequences? When pressuring the Pakistani military to be more aggressive against its own people, what if our government itself asked how American soldiers would react in an analogous situation?

The emir's life is full of examples that show how his ability to empathize, or act justly under trying conditions, led to wise decisions. Yet, these actions are connected to a character that sought always to act honorably, intelligently and in accordance with the moral teaching of the Law.

Forgiveness vs Empathy

--- **1830**. When the Turkish Bey Hassan of Oran loses the protection of powerful tribes because of his failure to put up resistance to the French, he asks Abdelkader's much respected father, Muhi al-Din, head of the Hachem tribe, for his *aman*, or protection. Once a tribe pledges its *aman*, there is a sacred obligation to not allow that person to be harmed. The young twenty- three- year old Abdelkader sits in as a junior, and by custom, a silent member of his father's council when they discuss the request of the Bey.

Muhi al Din presents his case for granting the *aman* to his council. He acknowledges that Hassan had been an oppressive ruler, had shown no compassion toward overtaxed tribes in the beylik, held him and his son under house arrest for a year for suspected treason, and was widely hated. Nevertheless, he counsels they should show forgiveness. It was better to return evil with good; showing hospitality is an obligation of the faith and Hassan was a fellow Muslim. This might also enhance the tribe's prestige by demonstrating its devotion to hospitality, but for the bey it would be humiliating. To not show hospitality might be a stain on his tribe's reputation.

After the other members of the tribe indicate their agreement, Abdelkader apologetically speaks up. He asks his father's forgiveness, but he must disagree. He reminds the council that there is anarchy in the land and hatred of the bey is widespread. There is a high risk that he will be attacked or insulted. This will only bring dishonor on those who have promised his protection and shown themselves incapable of doing so. Finally, Abdelkader argues that such a gesture could be interpreted as a tacit pardon by those tribes who have been badly treated by Hassan and risks making themselves enemies of all the other tribes in the beylik. After a long silence, the father and elders acknowledge the wisdom of the son's argument. They refuse granting their *aman* to the bey.

Empathy for those who have been badly treated and the emir's hardheaded reasoning overcome an excess of compassion tinged with his father's pride in being a "good Muslim." Polite and humble in speech, Abdelkader's argument is accepted by the elders.

Compassion and Empathy as a Weapon

---**1842**. Total war has been declared by General Thomas Bugeaud. He has persuaded the French parliament that they can't go on waging "demi-war." Total war is the new policy. Only through occupation of the entire country, (no exit strategy) and scorched earth tactics against tribes that side with the emir, can France win. In the midst of this, the bishop of Algiers, Antoine Adolph Dupuch sends his vicar to the emir's camp. His mission is to intercede on behalf of a desperate

woman with a young infant who had beseeched the bishop to help get her husband released from captivity. After receiving Dupuch's request, the emir asks the vicar why the bishop asks that only one of the French prisoners be released. Why not all of them? And in return, release the Arab prisoners held by the French?

Dupuch is amazed and happy. A hero. The local population is delirious with joy, and Bugeaud is caught unawares. He is upset with the bishop for initiating these humanitarian actions without his knowledge and is embarrassed by the emir's graciousness and humanity. The emir thanks the bishop by sending him a flock of sheep. More dangerous are the reports from the French prisoners that the emir treated them respectfully. Prisoners rations were no different from his regular troops. This is dangerous information the generals must control, for the troops fight believing that captivity will be worse than death.

Abdelkader decrees an unpopular code of conduct forbidding taking the heads of captured prisoners (it's permitted in battle)—an age old custom that governs the share of the booty that goes with victory. In the face of strenuous protests, he gets affirmation from the ulema in Morocco that this is Islamically correct. He then offers a monetary bounty to his fighters for each prisoner brought to camp unharmed, but a severe punishment (beatings on the soles of their feet) of those who are reported for mistreatment.

When the emir was held a prisoner in France, his former French prisoners were among his most ardent lobbyists for his release. Dupuch submits a brief to Emperor Louis Napoleon testifying to the emir's good character and trustworthiness despite the popular view that he was a barbarian, propagated by the press and the need to demonize their enemy.

Surrender: Empathy and Divine Will Converge

--1847. For fifteen years, the emir has been rallying and exhorting the tribes to stay in the fight. Every victory on the battlefield had seen tribes flock to him, every defeat brought defections. After 1842, the defeats became more frequent and victories fewer. The emir's ability to protect tribes that were loyal became impossible as Bugeaud adopted tactics that mimicked the Arabs—tactics of mobility

and constant harassment in the field, without fixed locations and heavy baggage trains. Speed above all. Live from the land. By the end of 1847, all but a few tribes in the Sahara had gone over to the French and his ability to punish the defectors was nil.

Facing a choice between fleeing into the desert or voluntarily laying down arms to General Lamoricière whose reputation with Arabs for fairness and firmness made him a trustworthy negotiating partner, the Abdelkader reviews the situation with his lieutenants. Lamoricière has 3000 cavalry twelve hours away. Remaining in the emir's camp are 1200 cavalry and 200 hardened infantry. All the emir's caliphs have submitted to France. His mobile camp (*deira*) contains their families and the wounded. The animals were starving and the wives and children were suffering from fatigue, hunger and sickness. Nevertheless, several of his most aggressive lieutenants want to attack. They could get past Lamoricière and reach the desert where the still friendly Beni Sassen tribes would welcome them. They could continue resisting and make trouble. Never give up, they argued, even if it means sacrificing family. Surrender is dishonorable.

The emir thinks otherwise. He reviews the mutual vows they had made eight years earlier after the Tafna treaty was violated---to struggle and endure no matter how great the suffering and danger. Had he not honored that vow? No one disagreed. The emir points out that his own brothers had submitted to France. Muslims were now killing each other. The situation was hopeless. The Moroccan Sultan had betrayed them and massacred their ally, the Beni Amer tribe. His caliph, Ben Salem, had surrendered voluntarily in return for exile in a Muslim country, and the French kept their word and sent him to Egypt. To continue to fight, he argued, would only create useless suffering. We must accept the judgment of God who in His infinite wisdom wants the land to be ruled by Christians. Are we to oppose His will?

In return for laying down their arms, the emir asked Lamoricière to have his family taken to the Middle East, as well as the families of his lieutenants who wanted to come with him. He gave his word to never return to Algeria. After fifteen years of experience in the field, the general knows the emir's word is good. In return,

Lamoricière and the Duke d'Aumale (King Louis Philippe's son and governor general) agree in writing to assure that the emir, his family and followers will be taken by boat to the Middle East. However, the promise must be ratified in Paris by the parliament.

Facts on the ground, the emir's aversion to futile suffering and compassion for the families that would suffer most combines with a sense that God has another plan for him, and for Algeria. The respect with which he is held is sufficient to overcome his lieutenants' desire to die with their boots on. God does have a new role for him, though Abdelkader doesn't know it .

Forgiveness and Unity

--**1848-1852**. The emir's surrender takes France and the world by surprise. There are no preparations in Paris for fulfilling the agreement made with Lamoricière. The French have to find out if the Sultan or Khedive of Egypt will take him. Shortly after the deal is struck and the Louis-Philippe's government is seeking a destination for the emir, the popular revolution of February 1848 breaks out.

The king abdicates, a Second Republic is formed but the new governing committee doesn't honor the agreement made by the monarchy. Emir Abdelkader's family and his followers' families number over one hundred. For five years they languish in royal prisons—Chateau Pau and Chateau Amboise waiting for the political stars to get properly aligned for his liberation.

The French public at large holds the emir responsible for the killing of three hundred French prisoners in 1846, when his situation had become desperate. The act had occurred when the prisoners were under the charge of Moustafa Ben Thami, his brother-in-law, while he was hundreds of miles away making a last futile effort to reignite the spirit of jihad in the tribes. There was little food for prisoners and troops alike and a threat of an attack by the Moroccans whom the French had pressured into turning against Abdelkader. French propaganda declared that the massacre was the emir's responsibility. Weak interim French governments were unwilling to risk the public's wrath by freeing the man it considered a barbarian and butcher.

Yet, the emir's handler while in prison, Col. Daumas, writes to Bishop Dupuch on the eve of a fraternal visit to the emir in Pau:

"So, you are going to see our illustrious prisoner in Pau. You will certainly not regret taking such a trip. You knew Abd el-Kader in prosperity, when practically all Algeria recognized his authority and now you will find him even greater in adversity than prosperity..."

"You will find him friendly, simple, affectionate, modest and stoically resigned. He never complains for himself, though he is determined to hold France to its word. He forgives his enemies, even those who can still make him suffer and he will not allow anyone to speak ill of them in his presence. Whether they are Muslims or Christians who are the subject of his complaints, he has forgiven them. As to the former, he excuses their treachery by the force of circumstances. As to the latter, their conduct is explained by the flag under which they fought, for its safety and honor—though he considers nationalism yet another false idol. By going to comfort this noble character, you will be adding another charitable act to all the others that have already distinguished your life."

During the emir's years in Pau and Amboise, he maintained a regular routine with his extended family of over one hundred men, women and children. Like the zawyiya of his youth, his daily rhythms were structured around prayer five times a day, reading and study, meals and spending time with his family. He read voraciously, engaged in lively conversation with the many well-wishers wanting to meet this Arab Tecumsah, noble opponent of France. He was curious about everything: French agricultural methods, Napoleon (to whom he was often compared by admirers) mathematics, theology, French politics, and reading the Old and New Testament, he became reacquainted with Abraham—the Beloved of God.*

Plagued by sickness, depression and the deaths of twenty-five members of his extended family, the emir railed in private to his handlers but continued to address himself publically to the good and honorable instincts of France. He witnessed the love and care of the Dominican Sisters who cared for the women in his entourage, and the good will of hundreds of Frenchmen who became a powerful lobby of

*In the Emir's lexicon, Abraham is the Beloved of God, Moses the Interpreter, Jesus the Goodness of God and Mohammad the Unity of God. All the prophets are equal and authentic channels of divine wisdom.

clerics, aristocrats, military men, especially Daumas and Dupuch. He would shame France into keeping its word as Europe watched. Yet he came to understand that France was a house on fire in the 1840s, deeply divided over the role of God and religion in society and had bigger problems to worry about than the fate of a former Arab enemy.

In Amboise, Abdelkader has a vision of Abraham and of himself as one of his children. He calls this his "blessing of Abraham." This blessing gives him a mission--to be a sign of the oneness of God. And the oneness of His creation. Neither Jew nor Christian, Abraham was a true believer who submitted to God, the first muslim (one who submits).

Years later, in the fall of 1860 an exiled Abdelkader had been honored around the world for his rescue of thousands of Christians during a politically inspired rampage in Damascus. Asked by a French journalist why he risked his life to save Christians, the emir replied, "I was simply an instrument. Sing your praises to him who directed me—your Sultan as well as mine." Responding to a congratulatory letter from Emir Shamil (himself captive in Moscow) for honoring his faith, Abdelkader wrote: "What I did was merely obedience to our sacred law and to the precepts of humanity....Vice is condemned in all religions and to be led by vice is to swallow a poison that contaminates your body..."

Relevance Today

--Abdelkader's relevance arises precisely because he's the kind of Muslim our secular, foreign policy establishment should be engaging.... conservative, committed to his faith, not perceived as "Westernized," respected by his own for his religious authority and intellect. Sadly, today Abdelkader would likely be dismissed in the West as a dangerous Islamist if he were opposing America in Afghanistan or elsewhere. (Yet, it was English and French admirers who have been most

instrumental in preserving the story of his extraordinary life-- so extraordinary that a new settlement was named after him in 1846 by a frontier lawyer from Dubuque. He called it Elkader, and later became the county seat of Clayton County, Iowa.)

--He was a unifier, not a divider. He believed no religion “gets” God. No one is an infidel in all the ways of God. God is greater than whatever his finite creatures can grasp. All creation is sacred. However, we all live in a perceptual bubble that inhibits our seeing other people or cultures accurately. The emir’s cultural bubble made it difficult to imagine that an agreement signed by the son of the king of France would not be honored, or that the powerful French monarchy that he had fought against would disappear overnight.

--He was “local” and “universal” at the same time. Deeply and authentically Muslim, his faith was not a safety belt for holding his identity together. Rather, it was a platform for seeking the oneness of God in the diversity of his creation. As a believer and humanist, Abdelkader’s example of openness offers a potential bridge between the secular and religious communities around the world.

-- Abdelkader was a modernist. He saw no conflict between religion, politics and science. All should work together to serve the same end of glorifying God. He embraced modernity and technology if it made life better for people, provided that that modernity, be it in the form of “technology,” “democracy” or “capitalism,” not be transformed into idols and demanding loyalty from cultures that choose to be different.

Whither America?

Is America’s civilian and military leadership about to commit on a much larger scale, the same mistakes made in Vietnam, enumerated ruefully by Robert MacNamara. Is America caught in the idolatry trap the emir warned of—by making an idol of democracy, believing that only The American Way can save the world, despite the obvious malfunctioning of its own house. George Washington’s advice

offered in his farewell address of 1789 seems to be long forgotten... “Observe good faith and justice toward all nations....Religion and morality enjoin this conduct...”

Abdelkader viewed the diversity of cultures as mimicking the diversity of nature. To a God fearing man like the emir, it was obvious that God liked diversity—in nature, in religious practice and in culture. His Holy Book says so. “ God created different nations and tribes so they could learn from each other and compete in good works.” His contemporary, Alexis de Tocqueville understood all governments were but reflections of the traditions and circumstances that gave rise to it. As circumstances change, so do forms of governance. Most important is wise governance, not abstract ideas about governance.

Instead of clinging to a simplistic binary good- guy, bad-guy view of the world, imagine if our political leaders tried exercising empathetic understanding , and adopted a “Do unto others” approach; evaluating policies by putting themselves in the other’s shoes. Imagining a different cultural context?

The emir’s ability to empathize and forgive, enabled him to avoid becoming a slave to bitterness and anger, becoming instead a reconciler who turned enemies into friends. Empathy can serve negative or positive ends. It can be used to destroy the enemy as Sun Tzu recommended (and Osama bin Laden masterfully applied) by getting into the heads of the enemy. It can be used to anticipate the consequences of actions. Or, it can be used to reconcile and make an enduring peace as George Marshall and Douglas Mac Arthur did. Both men brought enlightened dictate, mixed with significant measures of empathy, sensitivity to cultural differences and the need to let locals handle the details in their way.

A more recent military figure who, in the face of great opposition, applied empathy and cultural intelligence to his job is General Douglas Stone, USMC (Ret). In 2008, he spoke to a packed audience at the US Institute for Peace in Washington D.C. about lessons learned from his transformation of the environment in two internment camps in Iraq which held 23,000 prisoners. Before taking command in 2007, camps Bucca and Cropper were cesspools of fear and violence. Seventy eight Marine guards had been killed in periodic outbreaks of rioting which had resulted in the firing of 17,000 non lethal rounds to keep order. *

Within six months of Gen. Stone's arrival, violence and attempted escapes had disappeared. Like the emir, the general's weapon was a policy of respectful treatment of the detainees. His first step required identification and separation of some 1000 prisoners who had been classified as "enduring threats." A voluntary educational program was provided with twenty one categories of job training, plus civics, reading, writing, religious literacy, Iraqi history and finally a family visitation program that was considered an essential pillar in the reintegration process of detainees. The environment became so good, detainees started to invite their relatives and friends to join them in prison.

Stone emphasized to his audience the distinction between "war fighting" and "war winning." War fighting in the wrong way against wrongly defined enemies prevents war winning. He asserted that greatest roadblock to success in this kind of war is Americans' ethnocentric perspective. The American Way mentality makes it almost impossible to engage successfully with a people and faith-based culture that values collective identity over individual identity.

Iraqi Vice President Tariq al Hashimi reportedly said to Stone, "America could win the war if they just applied the same process to the rest of the nation that you're putting into the detention camps."

Notwithstanding our blind spots, empathy is possible when we are jerked into appreciating the wisdom of exercising it. Even in our respective cultural wrappings, most human beings share the need for dignity, love, security, stability, self expression, purpose, and the desire to avoid pain and suffering.

The emir became a tolerant open-minded Muslim universalist and humanist through observation, study and understanding that "the forms of worship may differ yet the Master is one." Though he suffered psychologically in French prisons, Abdelkader learned to appreciate the goodness of the Christians. Christian nuns and clerics were among his closest friends and ardent admirers. Stone read the Koran, prayed with Muslims. "No one," he told the audience, "has greater regard for Islam than I do....Ignorance of Islam is massive and the fundamentalist classification of violent Islam is wrong.... I have fundamentalist friends."

No doubt, General Stone would have gotten along just fine with Emir Abdelkader, and counted him among his fundamentalist friends.

When the emir was dying from kidney failure in 1883, *The New York Times* anticipating his passing with an eight hundred word obituary, called him “...One of the few great men of the century.”

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* references

More on Stone, see ch 15, *Religion, Terror and Error, US Foreign Policy and the Challenge of Spiritual Engagement*, by Douglas M Johnston, Praeger 2011

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