



Ethical Leadership Case Study

'In the Shadow of the Sword'

Emir Abdelkader: *Rumors in Damascus, 1860*

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Emir Abd el-Kader

Rumors in Damascus (A)

The rumors circulating in the ancient city of Damascus in March 1860 were ugly. There were few details, but when Emir Abd el-Kader heard threats of impending violence toward the Christian community, he was horrified. The local Christians were going to be collectively punished by the Ottoman authorities for refusing to pay taxes.

Four years earlier, European powers imposed reforms on the Ottoman Sultan as the price for restraining Russia's expansionist appetites in the Balkans, at the end of the Crimean War. Among these reforms, the elimination of the *dhimmi* system was the one Ottoman authorities resented the most. The system restricted access of non-Muslim minorities to certain government positions, including serving in the Ottoman-Turkish army. For being relieved of this obligation, non-Muslims had to pay an annual ten-shilling head tax. Ignoring the edict, local Ottoman authorities continued to demand payment from Christians.

An ancient crossroads, Damascus was the capital of Greater Syria—a province of the decaying Ottoman Empire that included today's Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, Jordan and parts of Iraq, Turkey and Iran. The Empire was known in diplomatic circles as the "Sick Man of Europe," and was rife with discontented minorities. Some believed that the "Sick Man's" demise was imminent, including many members of the Christian community.

Local authorities viewed the refusal to pay the head tax as evidence that Christians represented a fifth column whose loyalties were suspect. Governor Ahmed Pasha resolved to "correct" their insolence. He called a meeting of Druze leaders and local notables, including the *mufti* of Damascus. Abd el-Kader's informants reported that the agenda for the meeting was to counter the European-imposed reforms with intimidation.

Concerned, Abd el-Kader called on Michel Lanusse, the French consul and Arabist, who admired and trusted the Emir's sources enough to convene a meeting of fellow consuls about the rumors. They decided to ask for an audience with Ahmed Pasha. He received them graciously and assured them there was no basis for concern. However, in May 1860, the same rumors circulated again; this time, the reports came directly from Algerians loyal to Abd el-Kader who had followed him into exile. The plotters approached some of them to join in the scheme and the Emir told his people to play along. A second meeting took place, but again, Ahmed Pasha reassured the diplomats that there would be no violence.

Unlike the European diplomats, Abd el-Kader was not persuaded. Twenty thousand Christians were at risk of being harmed. After learning that villages outside of Damascus had been pillaged, the Emir wrote a letter directly to the Druze leaders implicated in the plot, urging caution and counseling "... *the wise calculate the consequences of their actions*

before taking the first step.”¹ The Emir also sent letters to the local *ulema* (Muslim legal scholars) and Damascus notables, reminding them of their obligation under Islamic law to protect minorities, especially People of the Book.



*Emir Abd el-Kader 1865,
photograph by French
Journalist Étienne Carjat*

At the end of May, the Emir again went to Lanusse, this time with precise details of the violent plot soon to break out. The French consul’s fellow diplomats would not visit the governor a third time. At the Emir’s request Lanusse did something unusual, permissible only in emergencies: he used special embassy funds for the Emir to purchase weapons. Abd el-Kader’s quiet life of teaching, scholarship, and reflection would soon come to an end.

The Making of a Scholar and a Warrior

In 1807, a grey-eyed baby was born in a goatskin tent in Oran, nominally part of the Ottoman Regency of Algiers. Greeted by cries, chants, and incantations, he would be named Abd el-Kader, “servant of the Almighty.” From the beginning, Abd el-Kader was understood to have an exceptional destiny, one predicted by his grandmother and guided by his parents, Lalla Zohra and Muhi al-Din.

From Lalla Zohra, Abd el-Kader learned to read Qur’an, to write, and to make his own clothes. She taught him the daily ablutions that precede prayer five times a day, but instructed that ritual purity is half of faith—both symbol and reminder of the harder half—to purify one’s inner self. To be a good Muslim, she explained, he had to be free of egotistical desires and unruly passions. In a hierarchical world, she taught, submission needed to be practiced—first to God, then to one other, according to rank.

At the age of eight, Lalla Zohra turned her son’s education over to his scholarly father, Muhi al-Din. The young boy’s days were divided between religious instruction and horsemanship. From the hunt, he learned the arts of war: to shoot accurately at full gallop, find water, load a mule, identify the tents and birds of prey used by hostile as well as friendly tribes, and to eat and drink little.



*Emir Abd el-Kader
Horace Vernet,
Zoummeroff
Collection*

At age eighteen, his father took him on a two-year pilgrimage. They traveled through Tunis, Alexandria, Cairo, Sinai, Mecca, Damascus, and Baghdad. He met Jews in Cairo quite different from those at home and was surprised to encounter Arab Christians. In the Sinai, they talked for hours with monks about the unity of God and the diversity of religious paths. He learned about the Druze in Damascus who shared a belief in the Prophet Muhammad but diverged in some of their practices.

¹ As Emir Abd el-Kader told to biographer C.H. Churchill and recounted in Charles Henry Churchill, *Emir Abd-el-Kader, ex sultan of Algeria*, (Chapman & Hall, 1867); and Churchill found in Kiser, John W. *Commander of the Faithful, the Life and Times of Emir Abd el-Kader*, Monkfish Book Publishing Co., 2008.



Arab Cavalry in Battle, Eugène Delacroix 1832, Musée Fabre, Montpellier.

The French invaded Algiers in 1830, when Abd el-Kader was twenty-two. His family, like others unhappy with Ottoman-Turkish rule, initially viewed the French occupiers as liberators. The invasion force consisted of 300 ships and 30,000 soldiers and quickly alienated the local population with their conduct. The troops desecrated mosques and raped women, violating the promises made by General Bourmont as part of the capitulation agreement. Two years after the French arrived, tribes in the province of Oran elected Abd el-Kader's father, Muhi al-Din, to lead the struggle. His first act of leadership was to abdicate in favor of his son.

Under his father's guidance, Abd el-Kader acquired a mission: not only to fight the French, but to renew an Islamic culture he believed had been degraded by years of greed and misrule by the provincial *beys* of the Ottoman Empire. Over the next fifteen years, Abd el-Kader consulted the Sunnah (practices of the Prophet) and Hadiths (sayings of the Prophet) on matters such as the treatment of prisoners. He found affirmation of his instincts in the actions of the Prophet who scolded his son-in law, Ali, for decapitating prisoners after they surrendered. Accustomed to the traditional head count to allocate booty taken on the battlefield, the Emir offered his fighters both carrot and stick: a monetary reward of eight *douros* for each French prisoner brought back to camp; and soldiers guilty of mistreating prisoners would receive punishment of twenty-five strokes on the bottom of their feet with a cane.

By 1846, Abd el-Kader was worn down by French tactics of continuous pursuit and punishment of all tribes who supported him. After one last 2,100-mile attempt to rally wavering tribes, despair hung over his camp in Morocco. The chiefs could not be convinced to support him. "You are like a fly that torments a bull," they told him. "After you anger it and disappear, we are the ones who get gored."²

Faced with a decision to fight or flee to avoid entrapment, several of his battle-hardened lieutenants urged flight into the desert in order to continue harassing the enemy. The Emir disagreed. He believed that further resistance to French forces would only cause futile suffering. They might escape, but the wounded and their own families would be taken prisoner. The Arab population would be afflicted as well. It was time to end the struggle. He knew the Qur'an condemns vain and useless suffering, and the facts on the ground no longer supported his belief that he was serving God's will.

On December 21, 1847, Abd el-Kader offered an unexpected truce proposal to General Lamoricière, which was accepted by King Louis Philippe's son, the governor of Algeria. In exchange for ceasing hostilities, he demanded that France send him into exile to another Muslim country. In return, Abd el-Kader promised never to return to Algeria for any reason. Known and respected in the field as a man who considered his word sacred, the Emir's promise was believed. The die-hards in his council submitted to the Emir's judgment and their seventeen-year struggle ended.

² Ibid

In France

The offer of a truce from Abd el-Kader was a surprise. The French Parliament was not prepared for the news or for the negotiated terms. Generals saw vindication of their relentless pursuit strategy following years of being mocked in the French press for their ineptitude in capturing the Emir. When the French monarchy fell shortly thereafter, a new republican government renounced the agreement. The War Ministry tried seducing the Emir into remaining in France as an honorary citizen where he and his extended family would enjoy horses, harems, baths, chateaus, and cultivated fields—a virtual mini-state. Not tempted by these offers, Abd el-Kader insisted France keep its word. If necessary, he was willing to die in prison.



*General Lamoricière.
Location: Chateau de
Chillon, Switzerland*

Throughout his tribulations, Abd el-Kader's intellectual curiosity, stoicism, and willingness to address the French with respect won a wide circle of admirers. A lobby developed around him—*Kaderians*—of Catholic clerics, bankers, diplomats, military officers, poets, political figures, society women, and former French prisoners whom the Emir had treated with unexpected humanity. In October 1852, a sympathetic President Louis-Napoleon liberated the Emir from imprisonment at Chateau Amboise where during four years, twenty-five members of his extended family of loyalists had died from pneumonia, tuberculosis, and depression.

In Exile

Under the sponsorship of the French government, Abd el-Kader moved to Damascus with his family, together with loyal Algerian war veterans. He settled into a life of study, reflection and teaching in the great Umayyad Mosque. His home was a two story, thirty-room Tudor mansion on the Nakib Allée with a tiled interior courtyard, alabaster fountain and rich history: it was once the residence of the great 12th century philosopher of universal love, Ibn Arabi.

However, on July 9, 1860, the relative peace of Abd el-Kader's home in exile was shattered. The rumored plans to attack Christians proved true. Abd el-Kader's appeal for arms to Michel Lanusse at the French embassy succeeded. He and his Algerian fighters were equipped to face the onslaught. He first ordered the rescue of French, Dutch, American, and Russian diplomats; and then with the help of his sons, he led thousands to the safety of his mansion, transferring them under guard, one hundred at a time, to the citadel of Damascus. After hoisting the French flag on the roof of his villa, he and a handful of Algerians had rushed into the cobblestone streets of the Christian quarter to rescue the Franciscans and Lazarists, as well as other Christians who were being pillaged, raped, forcibly circumcised and slaughtered in their homes.

Two days after the riots began, Abd el-Kader's home was besieged by an enraged mob of Arabs, Kurds, and Druze shouting for the Emir to hand over the Christians.

“Give us the Christians”

“Keep the diplomats but give us the Christians!”

“They attacked your country... why are you protecting them?”

“Hand over those you are protecting or you will be punished the same as those you are protecting!”

“You killed Christians yourself. How can you oppose us for avenging their insults?”

“You are like the infidels yourself—hand over those you are protecting or you will suffer the same fate as those you are hiding.”³

³ Ibid



Rumors in Damascus (B)

On the morning of July 11, 1860, a mob was now banging on the door of Abd el-Kader's residence in Damascus. Confronting the crowd, Emir Abd el-Kader barely paused before he spoke:

My brothers, your behavior violates the law of God. What makes you think you can go around killing innocent people? Have you sunk so low that you are slaughtering innocent women and children? Didn't God say in our holy book, whoever kills a man who has never committed murder or created disorder in the land will be regarded as a killer of all humanity?

You are fools and idiots. The Christians I killed were invaders and occupiers and were ravaging our country... If you will not listen to me then God did not provide you with reason—you are like animals who are aroused only by the sight of grass and water.

As long as my soldiers are still standing you will not touch them. They are my guests. Murderers of women and children, you sons of sin, try to take on of these Christians and you will learn how well my soldiers fight.⁴

Abd el-Kader was credited with saving five to ten thousand lives. His first biographer, Charles Henry Churchill later wrote, "Abd el-Kader alone stood between the living and the dead ... To say the Turks took no measures to stay the deluge of massacre and fire would be superfluous. They the connived in it, they instigated it; they shared in it."⁵

Abd el-Kader's most valued accolade was a letter from Emir Shamil, a Chechen freedom fighter imprisoned in Moscow, who praised him for his courage to do what his faith required: *You have put into practice the words of the Prophet and set yourself apart from those who reject his example... I was stupefied by the blindness of the functionaries who committed these excesses.⁶*

To a congratulatory letter from French Bishop Pavy of Algiers, the Emir responded:

That which we did for the Christians we did to be faithful to Islamic law and out of respect for human rights... All the religions of the book rest on two principals—to praise God and to be compassionate toward his creatures. Those who belong to the religion of Mohammad have corrupted it, which is why they are like lost sheep. Thank you for your prayers and good will toward me.⁷

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 303.

⁷ Kiser, John W. *Commander of the Faithful, the Life and Times of Emir Abd el-Kader*. (Monkfish Book Publishing Co., 2008), p. 302.

Teaching and Discussion Guide

Emir Abd el-Kader: *Rumors in Damascus*

Pedagogical Objectives of *Rumors in Damascus*

Emir Abd el-Kader’s decisions and the impact of those decisions, provide the framework for dialogue in the classroom and among civic and religious groups. Our intention is to introduce an important Muslim historical figure whose legacy of moral courage and leadership is not widely known. The case does not attempt to provide answers or conclusions, but rather, an opportunity for students and citizens to consider decision-making under conditions of uncertainty.

Places	Words and Concepts
Oran, Algiers (present day Algeria)	Qur’an - central (revealed) religious text of Islam
France	Sunnah – the acts and sayings of the Prophet Mohammed
Damascus (present day Syria)	Hadith – saying of the Prophet
	Dhimmi – historical term for a non-Muslim ‘protected’ citizen of a Muslim state
People	Emir – commander, general, or prince
Prophet Mohammed PBUH	Kurds – ethnic group belonging to Kurdistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Syria
Lalla Zohra and Muhi al Din	Exile – forced resettlement or deportation from one’s homeland
Ibn Arabi	Druze – “the People of Monotheism;” a branch of Shi’a Islam
General Lamoricière	Colonialism - the policy or practice of full or partial political control over another country, occupying it and exploiting it economically
Michel Lanusse	Ottoman Empire – in power from 1299 until after WWI

Select Themes

You may differ on different components of this case-study narrative to be relevant; however, there are some key issues these cases aim to raise, without resorting to easy answers:

- **Moral/Religious Courage and Risky Decision-Making**
 - After Abd el-Kader’s 17-year battle with Christian French imperial powers in Algeria, why does he decide to save Christians in Damascus? This is the essence of the case. Debate what Abd el-Kader did and why.
 - How did Abd el-Kader understand the risks of saving – or not saving -- the Christians?
 - What teachings did Abd el-Kader access?
 - Some criticize Abd el-Kader for surrendering to the French in Algeria. Why not “give up” the Christians as well?
 - Do you think he had doubts about his commitments?

Religious and National Identities

- In parts of the U.S. and around the world, religious boundaries seem to be thick and impermeable. This case opens up issues about the borders of religious and national identities, particularly with regard to Islam. Discussants of this case may consider:
 - What are the boundaries of *my* religion *and my* nation?
 - What responsibilities might derive from permeable boundaries?
- **Jihad**
 - The narrative arc of Abd el-Kader's story offers the opportunity to engage in a conversation that remains perplexing. The word *Jihad* is used and misused in common parlance, in the media, and in propagandistic materials. To tease out its meaning in this case, Abd el-Kader's Jihad includes the struggle:
 - For knowledge and truth
 - Against French colonialists
 - With local tribes and Arabs who rejected his leadership
 - Against anger, hatred and despair in French prisons
 - To live in submission to God's will
 - For self-mastery
 - For justice.
 - What is "holy war"?
 - Among some young Algerians today, Abd el-Kader's reputation is tarnished. They asked, "What are you telling us ... to give up?" He didn't fight to the death. Discuss tension between obedience and agency in this story.

Relevance for today

- Are there lessons in Abd el-Kader for Muslims and non-Muslims alike?
- Are there lessons for the U.S. in Iraq, Afghanistan?
- What are the resonances of this story for today's interfaith relations?
- The French Revolution and European Colonialism are two dominant themes of the 19th century. In what ways are they still alive today?
- How might we understand the colonial legacies in Damascus 2016, as the civil war persists in Syria?

Abd el-Kader's Legacy

While Abd el-Kader fought the French:

- An American lawyer, Timothy Davis, established Elkader, Iowa USA in 1846
- Citizens of Bordeaux, place his name on the French presidential ballot while he was still prisoner of the French government
- A racehorse named "Little Ab" wins British National Steeple Chase in 1851
- Abd el-Kader co-authors with Gen. Eugene Daumas, Horses of the Sahara (a must-read classic for equestrians)
- British poet William Thackeray dedicated his poem *The Caged Hawk* to Abd el-Kader.
- British military attaché, Charles Henry Churchill, seeks out Abd el-Kader to write his biography.

After Abd el-Kader's intervention in Damascus:

- Legion of Honor award by France
- Gift by President Lincoln of rare Colt pistols
- Medals of recognition from Pope Pius IX and European heads of state
- Invitation to French Masonic Lodge Henry IV, joining Franklin, Lafayette, Laplace, Monge, Talleyrand
- Invitation to opening of Suez Canal in 1869, after Abd el-Kader assisted in getting Arab support for the project, a short-lived symbol of East-West cooperation
- *As they confer, they understand each other swiftly; each respects the other. If opportunity allowed, they would prefer each other's society and desert their former companions. Enemies would become affectionate. Hector and Achilles, Richard and Saladin, Wellington and Soult, General Daumas and Abdel-Kader, become aware that they are nearer and more alike than any other two, and if their nation and circumstance did not keep them apart, they would run into each other's arms."* Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Society and Solitude, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1870. p. 271.
- A ship -- *The Abd el-Kader* -- launched in Newburyport MA.
- February 1883, The New York Times posted an eight-hundred word obituary of the Emir concluding, "He was one of the few great men of the century."
- Another town called Elkader, Kansas, USA. Estab. 1887 (no longer inhabited).

20th and 21st Century:

- Abd el-Kader's Book of Stops, commentary on writings of Ibn Arabi.
- April 2006, U.N. sponsored conference in Place of Nations, entitled *Abd el-Kader, forerunner of human rights and champion of interreligious dialogue*. Peter Maurer, president of the Int'l Committee of the Red Cross commented: " Abd el-Kader is the undisputed leader in the codification of modern international humanitarian law."
- Elkader, Iowa and Mascara, Algeria become Sister Cities in 1985. President Boutafilka, in 2008, sent \$150,000 in unsolicited aid to citizens of Elkader recovering from flood damage
- Editor of Pakistani monthly, *Al-Sharia*, Muhammad Khan Nasir, summarizes his view of Abd el-Kader's importance (2007):
... he never was overwhelmed by blind zeal to fight at all costs and was capable of making wise judgments. ... he is guided in his decisions by the legal limitations and moral obligations of Divine Law—he knows when it is permissible to kill Christians and when to risk his own life to save them. ... despite political animosity toward France, he is not blind to what is common between their religion and his own. ... he can put himself in his adversaries' shoes and look into the complexities of the situation ... not only a symbol of resistance and struggle against foreign domination, but the embodiment of true theological, moral and rational ideas taught by Islam." From Nasir's review of Commander of the Faithful: Life and Times of Emir Abdelkader, by John Kiser (Monkfish Books 2008), subsequently translated into Urdu, 2010. M.K. Nasir

- In 2010, author John Kiser launches essay contest in Iowa high schools and colleges. Today, Elkader, Iowa is the headquarters of the Abd el-Kader Education Project, directed by Kathy Garms. www.abdelkaderproject.org



- Kiser's Commander of the Faithful inspired Elsa Marston to write for young adults, The Compassionate Warrior, Wisdom Press, 2012.
- Ahmed Bouyerdene's book Abd el-Kader, Hero and Saint of Islam, 2012, Wisdom Press translated into English from French.
- Feature length screenplay by Algerian Agency for Cultural Influence and Hollywood's American Society for Independent Cinema signed co-production agreement for an epic film. African-American director Charles Burnett began filming began in Algeria, Nov 2013.

Rumors in Damascus

- 2012 Lyon, France. Social justice organization (CLAP) president, Fouad Chergui, proposes to mayor of Lyon and President Hollande to use the Emir's example of moral courage to heal domestic wounds, beginning with an Abdelkader essay contest for students and public annual celebrations similar to MLK day.
- 2013 University of Virginia's Center for Advanced Studies in Culture selects its first Abd el-Kader Memorial Leadership Scholarship recipient, Jeffrey Guhin, whose research is a comparison of catholic school and *madrassa* pedagogies.



Abd el-Kader Monument in Oran, Algeria, from Wikipedia ... the free encyclopedia

- Imam Mohammed Lazzouni (born in Oran) is board chair of *Center for the Study of Jewish-Christian-Muslim Relations*, Merrimack College, an Augustinian institution in N. Andover, MA. Thagaste (now Souk Ahras, Algeria) is birthplace of St. Augustine. Lazzouni: *"The climax of the Abd el-Kader story is the start of something new ... just as everyone now accepts Augustinian teachings as universal. It takes a narrative to appropriate a perspective, and Abd el-Kader offers that possibility."*

- Federal Bureau of Prisons officials are considering using Commander of the Faithful as an aid to rehabilitate inmates in the U.S. federal prison system.
- Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation established an endowed Abd el-Kader Leadership scholarship, in 2013, for college age children of Marines killed or incapacitated. And, Marine Corps University utilizes teachings from Abd el-Kader's campaigns and conduct.
- Islamic Network Group (ING) in San Jose, CA. will launch online lesson plans about Abdelkader's life.
- 2013 Pakistani religious scholar, Mohammed Khan Nasir (editor *al-Sharia*), is under attack by Taliban militants for holding up Abd el-Kader as model Muslim.

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