



Beyond the Headlines Event

Featuring Eliza Griswold

Moderator:

Warren Hoge, Vice President for External Relations

Speaker:

Eliza Griswold, author, *The Tenth Parallel*

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Warren Hoge:

Good evening. I'm Warren Hoge, IPI's vice president for external relations, and I'm happy to welcome you tonight to this Beyond the Headlines event featuring Eliza Griswold and her book, *The Tenth Parallel, Dispatches From the Fault Line Between Christianity and Islam*.

The book stems from seven years of Eliza's journeying continually along a geographical band of the world, spanning Africa and Asia, where populations are growing, weather is mutating, colonial settlement patterns are under challenge, the ecology is imperiled, nationalism is becoming entrenched, and religions are undergoing revival. In both Islam and Christianity, religion has become a means of political emancipation, especially in the conflicted space that Eliza explored between the 10th parallel and the equator.

In her reporting, Eliza found that the clashes are not just between the two religions, but often within them. Both religions believe that increasing their numbers increases their power, that in spreading the faith, procreation works as well as conversion. And speaking of conversion, proselytizing can create competition between two expansionist religions, and that competition sometimes becomes deadly.

In this impoverished zone where government is dysfunctional, if it exists at all, it is often religion that is the provider of services, and while the clashes are frequently about things like land and water and oil and demography, they are also about the right to worship and about religious practice and religious myth.

Eliza is no stranger to religion. She is the daughter of the former Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Frank Griswold, and she recalls in the book, *The Consecration Ceremony*, when she was 12, and he became bishop of Chicago. He had to lie face down on the floor on the cathedral with his legs and arms stretched out in the shape of a cross. She writes that she had difficulty reconciling her father's commitment to these articles of faith with a man of critical intelligence and progressive views that she knew him to be.

Eliza graduated from Princeton in 1995, and let me just break in to tell you that, when I was downstairs earlier coming up here, I said to one of my colleagues at IPI that I could insult half of this room and three quarters of the people that I work with if I said, you know, for 37 years old, she's really a very smart woman!

She graduated from Princeton in 1995 with a degree in literature, and in 2007, she published her first book, and it was a book of poetry. You are reminded repeatedly throughout *The 10th Parallel* that Eliza is a poet. In short, she is a wonderful writer. And let me break in one more time to say there are books for sale outside, and Eliza will stay afterwards and would be happy to sign those books and chat with you.

And as a reporter--that's Eliza as a writer--as a reporter, she takes enormous risks. Only a few hours after meeting then Prime Minister Ali Mohammed Gedi of Somalia in a downtown Mogadishu office, a suicide bomber crashes a truck through the office gates killing six people in the parking lot and injuring ten others. Three weeks after she visits a chief in southern Sudan in his beleaguered village, that village is completely wiped out in an attack. She accompanies a terrorist leader back to a town in the turbulent Sumatran territory of Aceh that he had once helped burn to the ground. She leaves the city of Jakarta in Indonesia, bound for Malaysia on the very day that an earthquake strikes the area, leaving more than 5,000 people dead, tens of thousands injured, and over one million homeless.

In the end, she develops no neat theory to explain why people fight over religion, but in examining the customs of others, she discovers things about herself. Just quoting from the book, "Meeting believers along the 10th parallel," she writes, "I tried to parse their distinct identities as Muslims or Christians, northerners or southerners. But like them, I suddenly understood I was a compound of multiple identities, observer and questioner and believer all in one."

Finally, as a former foreign correspondent myself, I am indebted to Eliza for puncturing the myth of the glamorous life of the peripatetic reporter abroad. On one of her final pages, she writes, "I am dragging myself along the 10th parallel in Nigeria, and I am nearly asleep on my sore, crusty feet. One village has begun to bleed into another, thanks to the steep angle of the light, a grueling gray light that is the same from here to Sudan to Indonesia to the Philippines. The air is so humid it's impossible to tell where the moisture ends and my neck's sweat begins. The crickets drone, a tone lower than that of the endless trudge of our feet, as we go to meet people who do not want to be met, people who have left the road behind on purpose."

Eliza, as an admirer of your book, I'm glad you made that grueling journey, and I'm very glad you journeyed here to tell us all about it tonight. The floor is yours.

Eliza Griswold:

Warren, thank you so much for having me this evening. I'm very grateful to be here, and I'm very grateful that I have family in the audience, my great aunt Janie Hotchkiss is here, along with other wonderful members of the family, and I'm very grateful for that. I'm grateful to be able to share some of this. Probably not the most dangerous parts--that sort of gets skipped when there's family around, but anyway...

So it is really a delight to be here, and I think, given where we are, and given the piece that you set up, I will let people into this book given my background.

So I became a reporter in 2000, and the first story that I traveled abroad to do was this story of honor killings, women who are killed by their families for crimes against their families' honor, whether that's some kind of... whether it's adultery, or more frequently rape, and I traveled to speak to women who were, who chose to go to prison rather than be in their family's care, because they were quite certain, should they stay with their family, they would then be killed.

And this, in 2000, was my introduction to what Islamic law is, and what it is not, because it didn't take me long into this story to realize and to speak to Islamic leaders, both here and abroad, about the very liberal social codes that the prophet Muhammad had set down in the 7th century, the first to protect women's rights when it came to not killing one's girl babies, female infanticide, or a woman's right to divorce or to hold property, and it was in that discovery of the complexity of human rights and religion and the relationship between them that I thought, aha, this is really where I would like to focus as a reporter, and then months later, I ended up giving that story to the *London Sunday Times*, and months later, when 9/11 happened, I was here in New York, and I called the *London Sunday Times* and asked them if they needed a stringer, somebody to work day by day for them, and they did, so they commissioned me to go down and spend time at the World Trade Centers, and then I was on the ground in Pakistan about two weeks later with those sneakers on, and the dust of the towers, but in the refugee camps where the Taliban began, and it was from that point... and I really have not had the chance, as have many of my colleagues who came of age in this particular era, to look back, and given... it became very clear to me very early on that we were missing the most essential component of our times in a lot of the contemporary debate that was going on in political and economic centers in the States--whether that's New York or Washington or Boston, especially on the East Coast, certainly in California as well--that we were approaching what was essentially... we were approaching belief, the matter of belief from a secular context, and thinking that we could explain it away through questions of political economy, and in so doing, were not truly engaging with the people over the issues of our time.

So I decided that I would take up that task, and I started with the statistic that 4 out of 5 of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims are not Arabs. They don't live in the Middle East. They live in Africa, and they live in Asia. And I wanted to go to travel along the line where this community, this Islamic community meets with nearly half of the world's 2 billion Christians, and for reasons of wind and geography, centuries of human migration, that encounter across Africa and through Southeast Asia, so across 9,000 miles, takes place largely between the equator and the line of latitude 700 miles to the north of it --the 10th parallel.

So in this bandwidth, across cultures and continents, these two religions meet, and I wanted to see what happened on the ground when they actually did, because I wanted to puncture an overly simplified clash of civilizations narrative, and I wanted to look at megaslums. I wanted to see elections, fighting over land, oil, water, and in Indonesia, chocolate. Cacao, the principal ingredient in chocolate, when global chocolate prices spiked, so, too, had fighting between Christians and Muslims who lived on this land that became very valuable.

And so as I traveled, I was looking less for conclusions than for simply realities, and the way in which I wrote this book... I realized very early on that I was not interested, nor was I capable of explaining away anyone's belief or just putting a context on who was who. So what I decided to do is try to bring those stories back whole cloth, and let believers on both sides of this divide people who had perpetrated great acts of violence in the name of their religion, people who had

given their lives to build peace around their religion to spend time telling their stories as they told them to me. So this, the book is essentially a collection of stories that moves along this fault line, along the 10th parallel, from Nigeria to Sudan to Somalia and Ethiopia and on over the ocean into Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

So in Africa, this encounter between Christianity and Islam... so Africa's roughly 400 million Muslims live largely to the north of this fault line, to the north of the 10th parallel, and they do so because of geography, first and foremost, because the northern-most third of Africa is desert. It's dry, and as Islam spread up through the 1800s, the Muslim traders and missionaries who carried the faith south got as far south as the 10th parallel, and it was here that the jungle began. And where the dry north ended and the wet south began, so did tsetse flies, and tsetse flies carried sleeping sickness. So across inland Africa--because the patterns are different on the coast--the traders and missionaries, the Islamic traders and missionaries could travel no further, and they had to stop because their camels were killed, and everybody died off, and this, for the most part, is where Islam stopped.

European colonial powers, the scramble for Africa, the Berlin conference we're vaguely aware of, 1885, they start drawing lines on the map, carving up the pie of Africa. And with the arrival of European colonial powers, missionaries, Christian missionaries, came and did a lot of the heavy lifting of colonialism, as we're all aware. Some of them explicitly wanted to stop Islam from winning Africa. It's language we hear today. Reading through this archival evangelical literature was essentially like reading our newspapers today. I mean, just the echo of this language of us vs. them, good vs. evil, salvation vs. damnation was very, very interesting.

So Christianity, now along that fault line... this has become an even sharper divide, because before Christianity arrived, many of the people who lived along this fault line had been largely enslaved by the Muslim majority to the north. This is the word Sudan, Bilad-al-Sudan means "Land of the Blacks." This is essentially where people believe the "true" Africa began, and many of the people who lived along this fault line had historically, because they were non-Muslims, had been put into slavery, and so they were eager, they eagerly embraced Christianity, because here was a rival worldview and a different kind of ideological backbone. Here was a shared identity that gave them a way, and today, quite violently so, in many countries along this fault line, to battle back against what they saw as oppression.

So when we cross the ocean over into Asia, the patterns are different. I mean here, essentially in Africa, where dry and wet land meet, dry and wet wind meet in Asia. This the trade winds. This is where the trade winds carry Christian and Muslim, traders and missionaries, by ship as the trade winds had carried Hindus and Buddhists before. So, Christians and Muslims ended up vying for the same beaches and ports and certainly trade routes. I mean, this is the spice trade. This is the fight over who's going to get cloves and other rare commodities, and religion played a very large part, and so where one used to see fights over cloves, quite clearly you can see fights over things like chocolate or local elections now, and if I have time, I'll get into a little bit later about how that geography works. Essentially, Islam had won the coasts. By the time that Christians, in their various nationalities, arrived in Southeast Asia, Islam was thriving, and Muslim traders and missionaries had taken over the coasts, which were valuable, and you could do trade from them, and the missionaries saw that, and especially the Dutch, essentially targeted the people who lived away from

the coasts, the people who lived inland. And why? Well in part because the people who lived inland ate wild boar. They ate pig, and that staple protein was forbidden under Islam, but the Muslims could eat fish, because they lived on the coast, so the Dutch said, let's bushwhack up these hills and into these ridges and make these people Christians, because they're already going to be conducive to our faith by virtue of what they eat.

So these are some of the inner woven patterns of quite literally food, food, and religion, and conquest, and history, and politics, and weather, and migration that have come to create this particular fault line as we see it today. And I--certainly in the course of reporting, and quite early on--realized that we certainly are seeing in this time, at this moment, although it's been going on for quite a while, the death of objectivity in journalism, and I realized quite early on that the best that I was going to be able to do in telling these disparate and often sensational stories, because, you know, a lot of the people I spent time with are killers, to put it quite simply. I realized that the way that I would need to do that was through constantly owning my own subjectivity, who I was in relation to what I was seeing. And so what I am going to read to you now is that lens where I come from, which should give a sense of how that shapes the book, although the first person... I don't appear very much, and it's certainly not a book about... it's a journey, but it's a journey of other people's lives more than my own.

So in 2003 when I began reporting the book, I traveled with Billy Graham's son, a man named Franklin Graham, and head of about a half billion dollar evangelical empire, to Sudan. And Franklin Graham was going. Franklin Graham was very well known at the time. He was in the news a lot for saying that Islam was a wicked and evil religion, and at this time, he's in the news again for saying that our President, Barack Obama, may not be a true Christian. But the particular, "wicked and evil," which his employees called the W&E comments, the "wicked and evil" comments were all over the news, and he was traveling to Sudan to meet with a man he really considers akin to the devil, a man he has called just as evil as Saddam Hussein, and this is today's President of Sudan, President Bashir. And he called Bashir, he believes Bashir to be his enemy principally because Bashir has used Islam as a tactic in a very complicated and long, entrenched war in Sudan. We are familiar with Bashir because he currently is the only standing president who's been indicted by the International Criminal Court and is still a president, for his actions in Darfur. Long before Darfur, he waged the modern world's bloodiest jihad against Christians and Muslims alike in his own country.

And so when I learned that Franklin Graham was going to sit down with Bashir for the first time in history, I asked if I could go along, and Franklin took me, which was very generous on his part, and I was working for that bastion of religious sentiment, *Vanity Fair* magazine, so that's how I paid for most of the book, would be to do these disparate pieces and kind of weave them together with the freelancer's sticky little eager fingers and fast feet.

So Franklin Graham and Bashir sit down to meet. Each tries to convert the other to his respective faith. That did not go terribly well, and then Franklin moved on to... he remembered in the pocket of his wool blue blazer -- he was wearing handmade ostrich skin boots also, which was a nice touch -- but he had a George W. Bush 2004 re-election pin, and he had taken it from the desk of Karl Rove's secretary. He reached into his pocket and gave it to Bashir, and he said, Mr. President, I understand you'll be speaking with my President later today. Why don't you tell him you're his first voter here in the Sudan. And so what did that mean? Essentially that meant, watch out, I'm very close with the

administration. Here I am, as a de facto representative of the United States. And for me, this was hugely informative, because for those 4 out of 5 of the world's Muslims living outside of the Arab world, we need to understand quite more profoundly how it is that they understand the West to be Christian. Well why do they think the Christian West, everybody Christian? We're so much more! We're secular! Encounters like this are profoundly important. There was a lot of protest from the people, the Muslim people of Northern Sudan about this visit. This was a big sticking point.

So after the meeting, Graham went back to his guest house, and I went along with him with the rest of his entourage, and he held a prayer meeting for Christian leaders, the Christian leaders in Sudan, and he said... we gathered in a prayer circle, and I was standing to the side with my notebook, and he said, "Let us pray," and I lowered my head without thinking, as I had probably been raised to do without thinking about it too much, and this provoked a very curious question that I was not... that I as an objective reporter did not think was particularly relevant, but essentially I was called on the Persian carpet of the government of Sudan, so I'm going to read you a little bit of that, which hopefully it will locate a bit of the book.

So in the hallway, a few minutes after the prayer meeting, Ken Isaacs, Graham's second in command, a tall, hard-jawed North Carolinian who would go on to head the office of U.S. foreign disaster assistance under President Bush, approached me and asked, "What's your background?"

"Originally, I came from Philadelphia," I told him.

"That's not what I meant," he said. Was I a believer or not? Salvation was absolute. Saved or damned. There was no in between. Which was I? To me, the question required a more complex answer. I was raised as the daughter of an Episcopal priest, and I grew up in a rectory in suburban Philadelphia during the '70s and '80s, a particularly progressive moment for the church. Worship included Passover Seders, Jesus Christ Superstar, and doing the Crop Hunger Walk as well as gathering an altar and eating homemade organic wheat bread at the Eucharist. This was the bustling glamorous world of public religion. Talking and listening to God involved a quiet conversation, and words I was sure were the way to reach his ear. For me, as a six-year-old girl, going out to play often meant sneaking next door to the dark, cool church. I learned to read by standing at the pulpit and practicing the Bible's cadences out over the empty pews. I saw the Bible sitting open on the brass lectern, a red satin ribbon marking the page as a book of spells, one whose extravagant metaphors, whose terrible and powerful parables were ways to call God down to Earth.

In college, 15 years later, I read the work of the 20th century Romanian historian and theologian, Mircea Eliade. When I came across his concept of hierophany, the spaces where the sacred and secular worlds meet, and people's attempt to create them through ceremony, I understood what I had been up to as a child. At Sunday school, a boy my age once asked me if my father was God. No, he's God's best friend, I replied. I saw my loving, distant, distractible father caught between two worlds. One was a

place of worldly decisions and unexpected telephone calls. Once I watched him rip the rectory's black rotary phone right off the wall. The other was a sacred realm in which he was a servant, not a leader.

When I was 12, he was elected the Episcopal Bishop of Chicago, so we moved from a Philadelphia suburb to the urban shore of Lake Michigan. At his consecration, the rite in which a person formally offers himself or herself to God as a bishop, my father, following long tradition, lay face down on the cathedral floor with his legs extended and his arms outstretched, his body forming the shape of a cross. There was something about this act of utter surrender that terrified and angered me. What right had God and the several thousand Midwestern strangers in the pews to demand my father's life? When are they going to let dad up, I asked my mother? Although I feared for my father, I also feared for myself. What did God want from us, anyway?

As a teenager, I grew petrified of God's will. What if he were to swoop down and ask me to submit also? What could faith cost me? It could cost me myself, I concluded. Frankly, I was afraid God would ask me to be a nun, something my father always threatened us with. My father's uncompromising commitment to the articles of his faith proved difficult for me to reconcile with his progressive values and his critical intelligence. I spent those years wondering how to reconcile faith with intellect.

When I traveled with Franklin Graham to Sudan 16 years later, my father was serving as the presiding bishop. The consecration of Jane V. Robinson, an open homosexual, had just taken place, upsetting not only African bishops, but also conservative American evangelicals. With the blessing it obviously conferred on homosexuality, this was evidence to them of the lethal moral lassitude of the West, where whole churches were bent on denying God's will as revealed by scripture. For Graham, the contemporary confrontation with Islam was sharpening the Christian faith, giving it moral fortitude. Western sinfulness and moral slackness were weakening the faith worldwide, and Christianity needed the west to shape up if it was going to win the fight. But for Graham, as for others, the consecration of Jane Robinson as the bishop of New Hampshire was not just a sign of weakness, it was a full on repudiation of sexual moralities. As such, it marked a divide among Protestants worldwide over what it meant to be a Christian, over whether progressives or conservatives had the right to speak in the name of God. The Reverend Franklin Graham and presiding Bishop Frank Griswold stood on opposite sides of this divide, and the gap between them was widening, and I was the presiding bishop's daughter!

"You have 30 seconds to tell Franklin that," Isaac said. Graham was in the dining room eating a lunch of ox tail soup with 12 members of his entourage. In the doorway, I hesitated.

"Thirteen seconds," Isaac said, standing behind me.

I sat down at the table and told Graham who my father was. Graham listened, then looked at me and flashed a smile. Not the familiar high watt public beam, but a private and mischievous grin. He and I were kin, for although we were raised with very different understandings of what it meant to be a Christian, we were also fellow PK's, or preachers' kids. Modeled sheep who had grown up caught between religious parents and private rebellion.

But that's where our similarity ended. As far as he was concerned, the fact that I had not accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior meant I was going to hell. There is no middle ground. Salvation is black and white, Graham told me. He had made this choice for Christ himself. Why hadn't I?

I asked him to clarify. What did he mean by praying to Jesus? How was that different from praying to God? The clatter of soup spoons ceased. Graham looked at me and said, "Jesus is the only one who died for our sins. Mohammed didn't do that. Buddha died still searching for truth." He quoted what I later learned was the Gospel according to John, chapter 14, verse 6: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' There was only one way to be saved and assured a place in heaven through faith in Jesus Christ.

"If your plane crashes tomorrow," he asked me, "are you absolutely sure you'll go to heaven?"

I thought for a moment and answered him, "No."

"Would you be willing to pray with me now?"

So that gives you a little bit of a sense of where I come from, and the lens through which I was looking, and it certainly points to what the principal takeaway of the book, which is that for all this talk and actual violence that does exist between Christians and Muslims, the most important and overlooked religious struggles of our time are those inside of religions, not between them. They're the struggles between liberals and conservatives over who is a true believer and who's not. They're the struggles inside Islam between different sectarian beliefs of Sunni, Shia, Sufi, as well as questions between liberals and conservatives over what contemporary transpositions, what it means to be a Muslim in the 21st century and how one lives that faith.

And those are the questions that we really need to contend with a bit more seriously, certainly in reporting on them and understanding them, because that is what's shaping religion more than anything else. Certainly, we see that at Ground Zero. We see that on the steps of the Lincoln memorial. And we need to take into account that those kind of culture wars, those... when a lunatic stands up and says he's going to burn the Qu'ran, and the media goes crazy, and in fact, he ends up saying that he's really fighting against political correctness as well. I mean, I have sat in many audiences here in this country with those who believe they are actively engaged in a war with Islam, quite literally as Christian soldiers, and within five minutes, once that rhetoric is scraped away--it's only a fingernail deep--one begins to hear quite another enemy, and that's the enemy of the liberal elite, right? Which we're familiar with that. So these are the questions, internal questions, that we need to be seriously grappling with.

And you know, in one of the most exciting expressions of this is certainly in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim country, 240 million people, 9 out of 10 of its people Muslims, and diverse, vibrant. When people ask me, is Islam truly compatible with democracy, I just say look at Indonesia. Indonesia is a Muslim democracy, and it's functioning and flourishing. Its democracy's quite flawed, but as a country, it's functioning and flourishing, and what we've seen there is the so-called silent majority push back against radicals. Essentially, they've had their Colbert moment, Jon Stewart/Colbert marches, but in the guise of liberal Islam, saying you know what, we are believers too. We are taking back this social construct from these radicals who say there's only one way to believe in God.

And so I began the book with the question, does fundamentalism inherently lead to violence because it is posited on this "us vs. them," more than rhetoric, understanding? If there's one and only way to reach God, and every other way is sinful at best, enemies at worst, what does that mean when it practically plays out on the ground? And to answer that question, I'm afraid I will ask you to read the book. So thank you very much.

Warren Hoge:

Eliza, when we were together, the only time I've ever seen you before was at the Carnegie Council, where you spoke about a month ago. And a questioner asked you a question that would be a very likely question from this audience, and certainly from this community, and it was asked with a good deal of feeling, and I was struck by your answer. A woman there asked you to give your opinion of what you thought of interfaith dialogue. Interfaith dialogue's a pretty good phrase in this community, and you said, I wrote it down –

Eliza Griswold:

Oh, no!

Warren Hoge:

"Interfaith dialogue is largely a waste of time!" Explain, please.

Eliza Griswold:

So, when interfaith dialogue... thank you, Warren, first of all, for bringing that contentious point into this room as well! So, when interfaith dialogue consists of a conference held in Kuala Lumpur by like-minded individuals who fly there at vast expense to sit down and say, I believe this, really? I believe that. And that's the extent of what that dialogue means in practical terms, I think it's a waste of time, and I say that with respect, having attended many of those conferences, and having watched not-so-successful, or not-so-meaningful, with all due respect to my own faith tradition and my upbringing, not seeing the full fruits of what interfaith dialogue can mean until it involves community building, essential, very simple, community organizing principles that bring in mutually beneficial buy-ins, for lack of another word, that get everyone on board in the same project, and are frequently secular in nature.

On that occasion, I talked about a pastor and an imam in northern Nigeria who are both self-avowed fundamentalists. Each believes the other is going to hell today. And yet, and the pastor has one arm! Why, because the imam's boys, the imam's army, when they were fighting 15 years ago, lopped off the other with a machete. And yet, the two men work together to do some of the most effective interfaith work I've ever seen done on the ground. And the way they do that is largely targeting women, because women are just, in practical terms, more invested in the future than men are. Why? Because they have children. Women are also less likely to have picked up weapons and been actors in conflict. So when you bring women to the peace table, you're less likely to have some unfortunate face-off where two combatants recognize each other.

So they targeted women, and they said, one of the things that Christians and Muslims fight over in northern Nigeria is firewood. The north has been largely deforested, and one of the results is that... and we hear this in... just to put this in practical, how do we, what does that mean, we hear this in refugee contexts all over the world, right? Because vast numbers of people show up somewhere new, and you know, we hear all about people fleeing to urban, urbanization, rural people are going to the cities. They're not just going to the cities. Displaced people go to other rural areas, and they find other people who were there first, and these very... water, land, wood, these elements that are intrinsic, essential to survival, become contested.

And so in Nigeria, the pastor and the imam set up a group called Green Women. Actually, the group set itself up, but it's Christian and Muslim women, and it costs your average Nigerian woman a dollar a day to fuel her stove, and the way in which that works, women are the principal breadwinners, and usually, they'll sell a little... it's like an informal restaurant. You'll sell a little bit of food, you have extra, you'll sell it by the side of the road, so it's a way to make a little bit of money. So the stoves cost \$100, and the pastor and the imam know they can't pay for them, and so they established a program through which the Christian and Muslim women had to work together to, in practical terms, to buy these stoves, which they have found mutually ensured survival is the most effective form of interfaith dialogue I've seen to take practical form.

Warren Hoge:

Eliza, I want to ask you, sort of a two-part question that goes right to what your book is about. You mentioned at the outset that it's common belief, particularly among Americans, that basically most Muslims live in the Middle East, and of course, the answer is 4/5 live elsewhere, and your book is so much about that entire band that circumnavigates the world, and you spend half the time in the book out in Asia. The two part question is, first of all, the people you talk to in a place like Indonesia or Malaysia, when you mention to them Muslims in the Middle East, you have built up a certain kinship in the book, but do they feel that kinship? What is their attitude about each other, and the second part of that same question is, you do speculate in the book that Muslims who are brought up along the border, and by that I mean mainly in Asia, but also maybe in Africa, probably can confront the difficulties of life better than Muslims who are born and raised in the heartland of the Arabian peninsula, so if you could take, it's sort of two questions in one, but they're both about these two parts of the world of Islam.

Eliza Griswold:

Sure. So, one of the... okay, so I'm going to answer the second part first. So one of the thinkers, I mentioned him before, an Islamic scholar at Emory University, Abdullahi An-Na'im, has done quite a bit of writing about what he calls the peripheries of the Muslim world, and essentially, he's talking about Indonesia more about any other country, more than any other single country, and what he says is, given the demographics, given the vast population growth, given the more porous and sort of open interpretations of Islam, the more diverse interpretations of Islam, one might call him syncretic, mixed with local traditions, mixed with Hinduism and Buddhism, one sees playing out along these peripheral communities that the future of the Muslim world, just given the numbers, is going to be dragged toward... the future of belief is going to be dragged towards this more porous understanding, diversity, given Indonesia. And he's Sudanese himself, and you know, he is a liberal, he's a scholar of liberal Islam, and I've heard conservative Christians make the exact same argument in conservative terms about the vast numbers of Christians growing in the same, not in Indonesia, but on that same bandwidth, along the 10th parallel, in Nigeria, saying, look, Christianity's growing more conservative, because look at where the demographic locus is now. It's firmly located in Muslim northern Nigeria, so

Christianity is growing more conservative. So you have... basically people can use numbers to make any ideological argument they want, right? So... unclear what direction one would say either faith is going in, in a large way.

But Professor An-Na'im would certainly argue that Indonesian Muslims, Nigerian Muslims, Sufi North Africans are in a much better place to negotiate the modern world than those who have been taught more strictly to adhere to a 7th century actualization of their faith. That's what he would argue.

To the first part of that question, the divisions inside of Islam geographically, what does that mean, is there a kinship, are there tensions, and I would say there are both, but some of.... if we want to just look at the tensions for a moment. So, in my reporting, it's essential to understand that all Muslims--I hate using the word "all" ever--but Muslims understand themselves to be part of a global community. That's certainly true. A large umbrella. There are certainly hardliners within Islam who tend to come from...well, they come, these days, they come from Detroit as much as they come from anywhere else, who posit that truer believers are Arab believers, and in truth, that's racism. You see a racism... like, for example, one of the men I spent quite a bit of time with in Indonesia is linked to al-Qaeda, he's a member of Jemaah Islamiah, which is an al-Qaeda linked group, this guy went to Afghanistan, he studied at the feet of Abdullah Azzam, Osama bin Laden's spiritual teacher, and then he came back to Indonesia, and he took the seeds of global jihad. He was really a fighter. He's not a teacher. He's a pretty simple guy. Especially quite now, he's been tortured quite badly and he's lost most of his memory, but he brought this global jihadi ideology local, and he taught local Muslims how to fight. He was very interesting, and he brought up a point with me that, that, to be honest, the U.S. intelligence community loves to exploit, maybe too much, but it's not quite true, that Arab members of al-Qaeda treat non-Arabs terribly. So this man, as an Indonesian, was like, you know, Arabs think they're better than we are, they are not, and that's one of the reasons I've sort of moved away from violence, and that's certainly an argument that the CIA tries to exploit, to say, better watch out, those guys aren't going to treat you so well. They sure don't believe that you're fellow Muslims. So hopefully that answered that a bit.

Warren Hoge:

Okay. I'm going to ask you one last thing, and then we'll go to the floor. This book, as Eliza said, is, and as I can confirm, is a book of stories, stories about people. That's particularly appealing to a journalist, and she gets at larger truths by individual stories, and one of them that I loved in the book that was very moving is, and a phrase came out of this story that Eliza says in the book haunted her for days and weeks afterwards, and that phrase was 2,000 babies in the trees. Could you tell that story?

Eliza Griswold:

This is a tiny Muslim community. It's an emirate, so it's a town, it's a little city, and it's called Wasai, and it's in Nigeria, and you, honestly, arriving there would feel, I certainly felt like I was Lawrence of Arabia. I've never seen anything like this... well, in some of the tribal areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan.. you'd see this, but not many places. Walled. It's a walled city. It's mud crenellations, mud fortifications, and the emir wears a turban, I tried to think of a different way to say it, but it has massive bunny ears on the top of it, and it goes under his nose, it's gauze, and he holds a Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh, so, I mean, just one of those globalized moments. But I was there to talk with him once, because this has been a site of a lot of fighting between Christians and Muslims over a particular stretch of flood plain along the river where both wanted to use... the Muslims wanted to use it for cattle and the Christians wanted to farm there, and they fought a very violent war.

The next year, I was nearby, and I heard about a terrible flood, and I went back, and the bridge to Wasai, which it's the only way to travel in and out of this place, had been washed out, and so to reach... and there's no aid workers coming any time soon down this... no one's coming here. So I got on some old rusted oil barrels with a photographer I travel with a lot, an Irishman, who, to this day, likes to send me pictures of this odyssey, saying I was actually torturing young children by hanging on to them too heavily to get over the river, but anyway. So we rode these rusted oil barrels to get to Wasai, and when we got there... the way that this boils down is that at the edge of many small Islamic cities along this fault line, Christians live at the very, very edge, because it's an Islamic city, and the Christians cannot live within sacred area, essentially. So, in this case, the Christians lived in the flood zone, because they lived right at the edge of the river, and the places where I stopped first were villages, were Christian villages where... the flood had been a flash flood, and it was largely a result... I mean, one can... it's climate change rising, this is getting worse and worse along this band. The environmental catastrophe, also a flash flood, because people use the land, it's overused right up to the edge.

Anyway, a massive flash flood had hit, people hadn't seen the water coming, and 13 villages that lived along the water had to scramble to put their children up into trees—babies—and they averaged 2,000, they thought they had together put about 2,000 babies and small children up into the trees, because there was nowhere else to put them for the 24 hours to survive the flood. And they had just come out of the trees when I got there, the water had just receded. And people had nothing. I mean, the woman who told me this story, Fakcit Alexander is her name, she didn't have shoes. The shoes had been washed away. And she had 13 children, and as a result of the flood, now 13 of them had malaria, including, she had a little one on her back whose name was Cheldon, which means, "I'm pleading for more from the creator, from God." So that's the story –

Warren Hoge: 2,000 babies survived.

Eliza Griswold: They all survived. I mean, they all... and you know, they all survived, and the local Red Cross man had one of these cuckoo turbans on because he worked for the emir, who the photographer called bunny ears, but I didn't call him that in the book, not terribly respectful. Anyway, the local Red Cross worker just went around with a clipboard saying, you know, these people told me that their son was washed into the water. There's no rhyme or reason. His count was 47 dead. And actually, interestingly enough, that's what started me on my next book, which I'm just starting this weekend, which is about America's failing infrastructure, because our bridges are not in too much better shape than that. So, anyway...

Warren Hoge: We'll bring you back in a year or two. John Hirsch, question?

John Hirsch: First of all, thank you very much. It's just wonderful to hear your account. I wanted to ask you to say something about the impact of proselytization from outside, and I wanted to give you two examples to think about. One was this book, *King Leopold's Ghost* from a number of years ago, many of you read it, probably, where Leopold went, who never visited Africa in his life, spoke about civilization and Christianity, but it was really about ivory and rubber. And then just to go to the other side, I lived in Somalia for a number of years in the '80s, and when I went back in the '90s, things had changed, and part of the change... so Somalia, as you obviously know, and everybody here probably is 100% Muslim, but it was a very kind of tolerant Islam. Women worked, women had businesses,

schools were really not just about the Qu'ran. When I went back in '93, this had all changed, and the Iranians had come in and others, and it had become much more narrow, much more repressive. I remember meeting these four Somali women from the University who were beside themselves about what happened, how the education was going down, so there's another example of some external intervention for some nominal religious objective. So there are kind of two sides: Christianity from outside, and some version of Islam from somewhere else. I wonder if you could just comment, not necessarily on those two examples, but whether you think that these religions in this area that you're talking about are changing by virtue of external forces? I hope that's kind of clear.

Eliza Griswold:

Yeah, absolutely clear. Certainly the answer is yes, and one of the points in history which I tried to restore to our understanding in the book is, you know, that until very recently, most of people's encounters, most of the Muslim world's encounters with westerners were with missionaries, because the UN, you know, OXFAM, Human Rights Watch, secular human rights organizations -- that's a new concept. Until 30 years ago, give or take, human rights, this was a Christian endeavor, and so people saw Christianity as very much western and very much at the hands of social change, for good and for ill. And you know, I didn't know until I did the research for this book that Hassan al-Banna, one of the founders of the Muslim Brotherhood, one of the precursors of the Muslim Brotherhood, was the Young Men's Muslim Association. That is modeled directly on the Young Men's Christian Association. Health, Hygiene, and the Qu'ran, right? Because to battle back explicitly against the presence of Christian missionaries in Egypt. So these roots... we shape each other, and we have, historically, in points of coexistence and in points of conflict, for centuries. So that's certainly true.

Proselytization these days can get us into trouble. The 10th parallel is the southern edge of something called the 10/40 window. I'm going to touch on this very briefly, and if you're interested in it, see the book, but you can also google it. The 10/40 window is the most recent, since the late '90s, it's been the most energetic push for what one would call global salvation, for reaching the last of the unreached people with the word of the Christian gospel. This area lies between the 10th parallel and the 40th parallel, which is southern Europe, it's Rome, it's also New Jersey. So the 10/40 window, it was dreamed up by a man named Luis Bush, who is a former Arthur Andersen guy, now a Brazilian Evangelist, crunched some numbers, UN statistics -- not his own, not even evangelical statistics -- and came up with a map that showed that where the world's poorest people, people who lived on less than \$500 a year, and where those spiritually poorest of the poor, those who had not heard the gospel, lived was within this 10/40 zone, and this has become very, very popular among evangelical Christians in the idea of spreading the gospel. It is primarily the Muslim world. It is also Hindus and Buddhists. It is hugely controversial in places where proselytization is illegal at best. And I spent some time in the book with some undercover missionaries, who call themselves "creative access missionaries," not legally allowed to be in Northern Sudan, but they're there on business visas running an aerobics studio. So it's a diverse movement.

Warren Hoge:

Please, here on the aisle. Neil, just wait for the microphone, and if you would identify yourself. I know who he is!

Neil MacFarquhar:

My name is Neil MacFarquhar and I work for *The New York Times*. I have a question, just in terms of... you made a statement, you said that the, in Indonesia, they sort of have pushed back in a way that they haven't in other countries in terms of saying who they are. I'm just wondering, because they do have other traditions nearby. You touched on this a little bit in terms of

Buddhism, so they, you know, the “other” is familiar to them, but you also hear of Indonesians when they go on the hajj to Saudi Arabia, that they’re often told, you know, you’re going to go to hell because you don’t pray the right way, and you are misinterpreting Islam. So where does the balance lie between sort of getting a chip on their shoulders that they’re not right, and so that might drive them toward extremism, sort of prove their bonafides and saying, wait, our tradition is different, and we accept our traditions, and we want, you know, to assert the tradition of Islam in Indonesia.

Eliza Griswold:

That’s a really, I mean, that is an essential question, and it’s true within... I mean, if one stepped back a little bit and said, what’s essentially... how can, in this era... there are two factors there. There’s the race issue, right, which is, it is true that to some extent, you know, certainly, let’s just limit... because I was talking about al-Qaeda and sort of the racist divisions within it, I’m just going to stick with that, for answering that question, that it is true. Like, it’s not just that the intelligence community says there are divisions within al-Qaeda that Arabs believe they’re better. That’s actually how it played out, and you know, Farihin Ibnu Ahmad came home and he was never allowed to advance in this organization because he wasn’t seen as a true Muslim. Why? Because he’s Indonesian. We hear that all the time, that the Pakistanis are at the edge of this organization because they’re not clean enough, they’re not pure enough, and that’s... the essential question, again, it’s a question of interwoven factors: race, just put race right out there, because it definitely is true.

So the question is, then, can progressive religious leaders have as much legitimacy in the global community as conservatives do? And that’s a real question. I mean, when Franklin Graham stands up and says Barack Obama is not a true believer in a Christian context, what is Barack Obama supposed to say back to that? He comes from a more progressive tradition. So Abdullahi An-Na’im would say to you that essentially, it doesn’t matter, right? That the Indonesian Muslim is as well educated, and that time will develop such that he or she... if it would come to, like, Sisters in Islam or one of these progressive Islamic law women’s agencies will have as much gravitas as a conservative. I think that time... I’m not in a position to judge how far that time is off, but I know I see it within Christianity, too. It is scary as a liberal to take on one of these guys who can quote chapter and verse, because you’d better know your stuff! And that’s absolutely true within Islam as well. Did that answer that?

Neil MacFarquhar:

Do they discount criticism from outside and think, you know, that extremism is not ours, we have our own tradition, so we can ignore what the Saudis are saying, because we like our Islam in Indonesia?

Eliza Griswold:

Yeah, they do, and I’m going to also... because they’re always secular factors involved, they understand themselves to be global players now, because they get that they’re middle men, and that it may be in their interest to be very, very vocal, because they’re going to get funding. One of these conferences I’m talking about was an American think tank that funded this conference in liberal Islam, right, and I was with guys I had spent time before with in both Malaysia and Indonesia, and here they were being honored in a whole new way as moderates, as bridge voices. Do I think they can stand up? Yeah. Do I think that they become extremists because there’s a chip on their shoulder? No. Because Somalia would be a great place. That would be the ultimate place to look at that, right, because you have an even more intense race division, which would be the small handful of Sunni hardliners or even members of al-Qaeda coming and saying to black Africans, hey, you guys are black, and you’re not true Muslims either, because you’re Sufis. And al-Qaeda has been notoriously unpopular in Somalia

until very, very recently, until 2006 the U.S. invaded... backed the invasion of the Ethiopians. We were there as well, we created the very enemy we were seeking to destroy. And now Sufis in Somalia are taking that harder line. But it's not because they think they have a chip on their shoulder. It's because... in my... one unlikely character, Mohamed Farrah Aidid, the warlord's son, Hussein Farrah Aidid, former U.S. Marine, also president of Somalia, character, said to me, the thing that's going to get Sufis to fight isn't fear of the Arabs. It's the understanding that you are attacking Islam, and then it's our duty.

Warren Hoge:

Got time for one last question, here in the corner. And just wait for the microphone, identify yourself, please.

Seydina Fall:

My name is Seydina, I'm, was just invited here. I'm not a journalist or anything. I have a question which is... I mean, I'm Muslim, I'm American, I'm also from African origin. I remember about two weeks ago attending Friday prayers at the Islamic Cultural Center, and the imam, after the prayer, was giving his talk, and he said, if I'm not mistaken, that for him there are two types of Muslims: one is scholarly and has the ability to read and understand Arabic and is more focused on scholarly things, let's say. And then the other type of Muslim, which is more enthusiastic, meaning that they get the understanding from, not necessarily from books. In the Qu'ran, one of the first verses, it says [indiscernible], which means God is saying to the prophet, pick up a pen and write. So my question is, I don't know in your travels, this issue of language, and this issue of the ability to be a scholar, you know, where it comes from. From my experience, I'm Muslim, as I said, but not an Arab. I had to learn Arabic, and I did honestly get a different understanding once I was able to, basically, manage the language a little better. Thank you.

Eliza Griswold:

Okay, so the question is, I think, and correct me should I be wrong, but is there a legitimacy in speaking Arabic as a scholar, as a Muslim? Is there a greater legitimacy? I mean, talking about calls for re-contextualizing or bringing the Qu'ran into different communities, there's a group called Sisters in Islam, which is a Malaysian group of women lawyers who work with Sharia. They work with Islamic law, and they say, they also use the beginning of the Qu'ran, and they say "ichrab" [ph] means, you know, recite, it means read, it means engage with your society, and they are not speaking Arabic.

So the Qu'ran in Arabic is the revealed text. The verses that God revealed to the prophet Mohammed were revealed in Arabic and set down after his death. Any other language, when the Qu'ran is translated into another language, it is seen as a translation. It is not seen as the Qu'ran. Therefore, it loses that primary legitimacy, which gets to your question, Neil, a little bit, of what is textual purity, what's the division inside between Arabic and non. So, one of the things that we see in these massive religious revivals, within Christianity and Islam that are both going on, are these global-- and they're not isolated in history, they're cyclical. But they're both about, let's say 3, 4 decades old. Let's say 30 years old in both of these faiths. They are based on a believer's understanding that, well... they're based on the desire for an unmediated relationship with God, and that I can access God because I can access God's word because, guess what? I can read the holy book, and I can tell you what it says. That tends to be conservative, it tends to support conservative traditional morals, it also can be violent, because if you have no scholar telling you what's okay and what's not, and you think you can go off and understand the Qu'ran, I'd be in trouble, myself. And equally so with the Bible, right. So what does revival mean? Where does it potentially get dangerous? I think, and I would not want to speak for the Imam who was giving the sermon, but that could be one of these divisions between the enthusiastic

who don't really know the text, and maybe that was a call to caution. Go out, be a great Muslim, but don't think you know, because you need to rely on a scholar to help you here, and there are legitimate scholars and not legitimate scholars, and part of what we're seeing is globalization writ large and the effect of the internet, and certainly within Islam.

Warren Hoge:

Eliza, thank you so much. I'm going to invite you back to ask the last question, always! That was a great question!