

Towards the end of last semester, my foreign-service fraternity, Delta Phi Epsilon, was allowed the esteemed privilege of absorbing the thoughts and ideas of two passionate academics on the subject of insurgencies abroad. The speakers delved deeply into the larger political and cultural themes that were inherent to movements such as Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda. The speakers challenged many preconceived notions about the historical realities of these groups and their relationships to certain states, particularly in the Middle East. These scholars were certainly astute in their knowledge of the undisputed facts and statistics, pieces of the intellectual puzzle that were most identifiable and easy to connect to one another.

Furthermore, each professor was sharp and articulate in their critiques of the ways in which western bastions such as the United States and Europe have failed to reconcile their foreign policy with cultural and political sensitivities that are consistent across the Middle East. However, I was disappointed to discover that these scholars were less invested in the resolution and problem solving process than the critical analysis process. In a personal conversation after the presentation, the lecturers were quick to dismiss my questions about policy improvements and even quicker to point out that their role was confined to critiquing rather than creation. I found this to be particularly disturbing, and indicative of some of the larger deficiencies in the modern dialogue that occur daily between individuals who have the tools to challenge their ideas further.

I hope to be as well versed and experienced as scholars such as the ones I described, yet I will take pride in the versatility of my knowledge, in the spheres of analysis, dialogue, and policy. The Ibrahim Leadership program will provide and foster the kind of intellectual apparatus that can blaze a trail towards a multi-dimensional approach to discussion and debate surrounding issues concerning governance and conflict in the Middle East. I believe that I can translate this into real results and change throughout my campus, considering the kind of platform that is provided for me through my professional foreign-service fraternity and leadership role within it. I look around my university, a place that is founded upon the egalitarian concept of a public education, and see the same kind of divisiveness and aversion from discussion that occurs in turbulent areas around the world. The Ibrahim program can give me the tools to inspire the kind of radical change that needs to take place during the formative years of our intellectual molding, and I would be greatly honored to have the chance to seize that opportunity.

Robert Wickers