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Defense Intelligence Agency

Background Declaration – Names, Aliases, Kuryas and Variants
Defense Intelligence Agency

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The Defense Intelligence Agency produced the following document for the Department of Defense Office of the General Counsel to utilize in federal court litigation.

1. 3 [Redacted] pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746, hereby declare under penalty of perjury that the following is true and correct to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief.

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(U) Worldwide: Using Names, Aliases, Kuryas and Variants

Arab migration and the spread of Islam around the world intermixed with local ethno-linguistic traditions and cultural practices produce regional variations in the way Arabic names are constructed, pronounced and spelled. These variations, along with differences in standards for the transliteration of foreign names by U.S. military, intelligence and law enforcement organizations, present challenges for the collection, reporting, and analysis of intelligence. The lack of a direct correlation between Arabic and Latin alphabets, combined with these complexities, is of particular importance to analysts while in today's Counterterrorism environment. While using aliases and other forms of multiple identities is not unique to these groups, this declaration will limit itself to providing a basic primer on Arabic-related issues to address the detainee population at Guantanamo.

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(U) Elements of Arabic Names

(U) Traditionally Arabic names are comprised of five elements: ism, kunya, nasab, laqab, and nisba. This naming convention is widely used by Muslim populations and in countries with significant Muslim influence around the world, although varying depending on the country or region.

- (U) **Ism**- The ism is the proper name given at birth. This part of the name is considered the most personal of the elements. In some areas, it is impolite to call an elder by their ism, yet in other areas, it is common to call people by their ism.
- (U) **Kunya**- The kunya is traditionally an honorific, which denotes that the person is either a mother or father, and is constructed using the name of the first-born son or eldest daughter if the person has no sons. The kunya for a man is Abu, meaning father of, plus the name of the first-born; while Umm is used for women, meaning mother of, with the name of the first-born. For example, Abu Ibrahim means father of Ibrahim. Addressing someone by his or her kunya is a sign of respect.
- (U) In addition, there are several nicknames that use an "Abu" construction, that are not true kunyas. Much like the name Jack is used as a nickname for John, many commonly used kunyas are used as nicknames that do not bear direct resemblance to the given name. For example, Abu Sadeq is a nickname for Jafar, and Abu Ali is a nickname for Hassan.
- (U) Insurgents, radicals and terrorists commonly use kunyas as assumed names or pseudonyms. Kunyas used in this manner are often chosen, or given, without regard to the children's names or regard to whether the individual has children. In this case, using the kunya conceals the individual's identity. Further, it is often used as a security, denial and deception measure. The reasons for an insurgent choosing a certain kunya varies widely. It could be the region they are from such as Zarqawi (from Zarqa), Suri (the Syrian), or al-Masri (the Egyptian). It can be derived from the early heroes of Islamic conquest, like Abu Ubaydah, one of three who led expeditions against Byzantium. It can be derived from past historical or Militant Islamist leaders like Abu Azzam, named after the spiritual founder of al-Qaida Abdullah Azzam.
- (U) **Nasab**- The nasab is a pedigree, which denotes the family lineage on the father's side, and can go back several generations. In many countries ibn or bin, is used for males (the son of) and bint for females (the daughter of), while in other countries the names are simply listed in sequence. For example, Hasan ibn Faraj, would mean, Hasan, son of Faraj. Another example using multiple generations would be Hasan ibn Faraj ibn Ahmed ibn Mohammad, meaning Hasan, son of Faraj, who is the son of Ahmed, who is the son of Mohammad. In some regions, that same name may appear as Hasan Faraj Ahmed. A true name usually consists of the ism, nasab and the nisba.

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- (U) **Laqab**- The laqab is a combination of words that describe some religious or admirable quality of the person and is used as a secondary name. In some cases, it is used in place of the ism. A common laqab includes one of the 99 names of God and "Abd." or servant of, for example, Abd al Rahman, or servant of the Merciful. There is no such name as "Abdul" in Arabic, even though we commonly see this in English. This is a mis-translation of "Abd," which is followed by the article "al." Laqab can also connote a person's profession like Samir al-Haddad, which means Samir whose family members at one time were blacksmiths. Another popular laqab of course is Hajj or Haji, meaning the person has made their pilgrimage to Mecca, like Hajj Amin al-Hussein.
- (U) **Nisba**- The nisba is another secondary name that describes the occupation, descent, tribe or residence of the person. It can be used in combination with any of the above elements, but will always be the last part of the name. For example, Mohammad al Masri, means Mohammad from Egypt, or using several elements, Mohammad al Husayn ibn Harun al Qahtani means Mohammad the beautiful, son of Aaron, from the Qahtani tribe. The nisba can tell you much of the persons ancestry and geographic origins, for instance al-Zawahiri although from Egypt, comes from the Zawahir clan of the Hejaz region of Saudi Arabia. Ayman al-Zawahiri attempts to bolster his Arab lineage by making these connections.
- (U) The following example uses a title and all five elements of the naming convention: Mullah Mohammad Abu Nasar Abd al Rahman, bin Ibrahim bin Hasan al Makki; Mullah (title) Mohammad (ism) Abu Nasar (kunya) Abd al Rahman (laqab) bin Ibrahim bin Hasan (nasab, 2 generations) al Makki (nisba). This name would translate to the teacher Mohammad, father of Nasar, servant of the Merciful, son of Ibrahim, grandson of Hasan, from Mecca.

(U) Spelling Variants

(U) Because Arabic and English have several letters representing sounds that do not correspond directly, several letters or letter combinations are used interchangeably to represent the same sound. This often generates multiple English spellings representing the same word or name in Arabic. Other differences in practice, such as whether to use double or single consonants to express a single sound, further increase variation. It is common to see intelligence reports referencing an individual with several different name spellings. Although, most organizations have established naming standards for common names, this is not consistent throughout the Intelligence Community (IC) and has changed over time.

- (U) Other spelling variables include capitalization, and the use or non-use of dashes, apostrophes and spaces. In some cases, apostrophes replace a letters that do not translate into English, such as the Arabic letter "ayn," which has a distinct sound not used in English. For example, the name Mohammad has over 20 variations and alternate spellings of al-Qaida include al Qaida, al Qu'ida, and al-Qaeda.
- (U) Some commonly interchanged letters include:
 - K, KH, GH, and Q such as: Kandahar, Khadahar, Ghandahar or Qandahar

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- O and U, such as: Mohammad or Muhammad
- A and E, such as: Ahmad, Ahmed
- OO and U, such as: Noor, or Nur

- (U) Some commonly interchanged words and spellings include:
 - Al, Ul and Ur, as in: Mohammad al Rahman, Mohammad ul Rahman or Mohammad ur Rahman
 - ul Din, and Uddin, as in: Nasar ul Din, or Nasaruddin
 - Abd Ul and Abdul, as in: Abd ul Rahman or Abdul Rahamn

(U) Various titles may be added to the beginning of the name, similar to titles used in Western traditions. Although these specific titles are more common in the Arab world, similar titles are used in Afghanistan or Pakistan, from where many fighters are recruited.

- Mullah- Religious leader
- Imam- Religious leader (as in clergy)
- Hajji- Someone who went on a pilgrimage to Mecca
- Shaykh- Title of high respect, usually a leader of some kind (tribal, etc)
- Qari- Someone who can recite the Quran with a specific rhythm
- Qazi/Qadi- Lawyer or judge (on Sharia)
- Ustad- teacher or professor
- Talib- student (Afghan)
- Malim, or Malauwi – religious leader (Afghani)
- Akhund- lawyer (Afghan)

(U) The challenges of spelling and translating the use of Arab and Muslim influenced names is further complicated for individuals originating from countries with conventions based in other cultural traditions, especially when combined with significant differences in pronunciation as well as the use of other local languages and alphabets.

(U) The source of the reporting can also have a significant impact on how names are spelled. Sources may have a regional dialect, which may complicate the transliteration of the name phonetically, or misunderstanding the name completely. Some reporting originates from foreign sources using different letters to represent Arabic sounds. For example, in Spanish, the "h" is often substituted with "j," thus Mohammad would be spelled "Mojammad." In French North Africa, Shertef is Cherief.

(U) Aliases

(U) Aliases can take multiple forms, from part of a true name, to a something completely unrelated to the true name. Like a nickname, some aliases are descriptive of physical traits, such as Nasar al Tawil (Nasar the Tall). Aliases can also be just a single word, such as Tareq. Terrorists do use multiple aliases, often changing them in different locations. Nicknames also provide a degree of "cover" or operational security. In addition to theses aliases, many individuals will use "call signs" for security purposes. A call sign is simply another name that is

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only used during indirect communication. These call signs may change depending on with whom one is communicating, or where they are located.

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(U) Confidence Measures for Identification

(U) Intelligence analysts consider all of these factors when making assessments about a specific individual or group. The biggest asset to an analyst is an understanding of the complexities of this particular problem set. Through training, experience, and drawing on the expertise of senior analysts, subject matter experts and linguists at their disposal, analysts learn the many variables they need to take into account. Analysts use many tools and processes to make confident assessments, some of these include:

- (U) Database programs generally include features allowing the user to search on variants to account for different transliterations or reporting conventions. These tools may include wildcard or pattern matching searches, fuzzy word searches, and phonetic matching algorithms. In addition, some databases have macros, which employ a list of name variants based on historical search results. Analysts then use additional known details and other reporting to make confident assessments.
- (U) Through research and analysis of multiple reporting sources, analysts are often able to determine the various names used. Corroboration and collaboration within the IC helps analysts confirm identities.
- (U) Documents and media recovered from the detainee at the time of detention, and from other sources can help confirm identifications and/or provide further avenues of assessment. Some detainees have forged documents, such as fake passports, that allow analysts to determine alternative identities of a detainee.

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- (U) Photographs, taken during the detainee's in-processing and those captured with the detainee, provide an additional resource to determine identity. Analysts show these photos to multiple sources in order to get a consensus on the individual(s) in the photograph. The photo identifications (PID) can verify the identity of the detainee and his associates, as well as validate suspected relationships.

(U) Conclusion

(U) Detainees often use aliases and cover stories to hide their actual activities; however, it is difficult to maintain these cover stories over time. Interrogators note any changes in details in the story, which occur when the topic is reviewed multiple times over a significant time period. Analysts compare these stories against other detainee reporting as well as other sources of intelligence to find inconsistencies and vulnerabilities in the cover story, develop further lines of questioning, as well as to corroborate the reliability and validity of truthful information. The IC mitigates the challenges that foreign language and cultural practices cause in this complex environment. Through advice provided by foreign area specialists, experience, education, and specialized tools, analysts are able to identify—with confidence—persons of interest or concern, including detainees.

I have read this declaration and concur with the findings and conclusion.

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APPENDIX A

Common Country and Tribal Names

Arabic Geographic Adjectives in Names and Equivalents	
Al-Adani	From Aden, Yemen
Al-Afriqi, al-Afriki	The African
Al-Ajami (actually al-'Ajami)	Literally "the foreigner" but almost always pertains to Persians (Iranian, but it could also apply to any Persian speaker—Iranian, Tajik, or Dari-speaking Afghan).
Al-Ajnabi, al-Agnabi	The Foreigner (i.e., not from "here", or "not one of us." NOTE: If "Agnabi" the "g" may imply an Egyptian context.) Al Ajnabi is unlikely to be part of a terrorist nom de guerre, but may be considered an indication that the person so named is considered a "foreigner" or "an outsider" by those using the term.
Al-Almani	The German
Al-Amriki	The American
Al-Andalusi	From Andalusia (southern Spain)
Al-Anfirsi	The man from Antwerp
Al-Ansari	Literally meaning "the supporter" and originally referring to persons in Medina who aided the Prophet Muhammad, al Ansari as now used among jihadists typically means "local jihadist"—as opposed to al-Muhajir, which means "foreign fighter."
Al-Arjantini	The Argentinean
Al-Armini	The Armenian
Al-Asiri (actually al-'Asiri)	From southwest Saudi Arabia
Al-Ayrlandi, al-Irlandi	The Irishman
Al-Badawi	The Bedouin
Al-Baljiki, al-Biljiki, al-Balgiki	The Belgian
Al-Banghali	The man from Bangladesh
Al-Bangladishi	The man from Bangladesh
Al-Baritani, al-Britani	The Brit

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Al-Bedoui	The Bedouin
Al-Brazili	The Brazilian
Al-Britani, al-Baritani.	The Brit
Al-Burtughali	The Portuguese
Al-Danmarki	The Dane
Al-Emirati, al-Imarati	The man from the United Arab Emirates
Al-Englizi, al-Inklizi, al-Ingilizi, al-Injalizi	The Englishman
Al-Faransi, al-Faransawi	The Frenchman
Al-Farsi, al-Farisi	The Persian, the Iranian
Al-Fasi	From Fez, Morocco
Al-Filastini	The Palestinian
Al-Filibini	The Filipino (from the Philippines)
Al-Fiyatnami	The Vietnamese
Al-Ghani	The Ghansian
Al-Gharbi	The Westerner
Al-Hadrani	From the Hadramat region of Yemen
Al-Halabi	From Aleppo, Syria
Al-Hijazu	From western Saudi Arabia
Al-Hindi	The Indian
Al-Hulandi	The Hollander, from The Netherlands
Al-Ifranji, al-Ifrangi	The European
Al-Ighriqi	The Greek
Al-Ilji (actually al- 'Ilji)	Pejorative Iraqi slang for a Westerner
Al-Imarati, al-Emirati	The man from the United Arab Emirates
Al-Injalizi, al-Ingilizi, al-Englizi, al-Inklizi	The Englishman
Al-Inklizi, al-Injalizi.	The Englishman

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al-Ingilizi, al-Englizi	
Al-Irani	The Iranian
Al-Iraqi	The Iraqi
Al-Irlandi, al-Ayriandi	The Irishman
Al-Isbani	The Spaniard
Al-Iskutlandi	The Scot
Al-Islandi	The Icelander
Al-Isra'ili	The Israeli
Al-Janubi	The Southerner
Al-Jawfi	From the Jauf region of Yemen or Saudi Arabia
Al-Jazairi	The Algerian
Al-Kamiruni	From the Cameroons
Al-Kanadi	The Canadian
Al-Karibi	From the Caribbean
Al-Kashmiri	From Kashmir
Al-Khaliji	From the (Persian) Gulf
Al-Khawaga, al-Khawaji, al-Khawagi.	Literally meaning "Sir," or "Mister" (used especially for Christians and Westerners, with or without the name of the person so addressed), khawaga/khawaji has a street slang meaning, especially in Egypt, similar to calling someone a "gringo." "Al-Khawaja" is unlikely to be part of a terrorist <i>nomme-de-guerre</i> , but can be considered a likely indication the reference is to a Christian or Westerner considered to be "foreign" or "an outsider" to those using the term.
Al-Kini	The Kenyan
Al-Kubawi	The Cuban
Al-Kuri	The Korean
Al-Kuwayti	The Kuwaiti
Al-Libi	The Libyan
Al-Libiri	The Liberian
Al-Lubnani	The Lebanese

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Al-Madani	From Medina, Saudi Arabia
Al-Maghribi	The Moroccan
Al-Majari, al-Magari	The Hungarian
Al-Makkawi, al-Makki	From Mecca, Saudi Arabia
Al-Masri, al-Misri	The Egyptian
Al-Miksiki	The Mexican
Al-Muhajir	Literally "the emigrant" and originally referring to a person who fled from Mecca to Medina with the Prophet Muhammad, al Muhajir as now used among jihadists typically means "foreign fighter."
Al-Muritani/Mauritani	From Mauritania
Al-Nablusi	From Nablus, in the West Bank, Palestine
Al-Najdi	From central Saudi Arabia
Al-Nasibi	A pejorative for Sunnis used by Shi'a
Al-Nimsawi	The Austrian
Al-Nubi	The Nubian (from area near border between Egypt and Sudan)
Al-Nurwaji	The Norwegian
Al-Parsi, al-Farsi	The Persian, the Iranian
Al-Qamari	From the Comoros Islands
Al-Qubrusi	The Cypriot; from Cyprus
Al-Qudsi	From Jerusalem
Al-Rafidhi	A pejorative for Shi'a used by Sunnis that literally means "rejectionist"
Al-Romani	The Romanian
Al-Russi	The Russian
Al-Sa'idi	From Upper Egypt (i.e., the upland area of southern Egypt)
Al-Safawi	Pejorative for Persians (typically today meaning Iranian, but it could apply to any Persian-speaker—Iranian, Tajik, or Dari-speaking Afghan).
Al-Samurra'i	From Samarra, Iraq

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Al-Saudi	The Saudi
Al-Shami	The Syrian, or from Damascus; the Northerner (esp. when North Yemen)
Al-Sharqi, al-Sharuqi	The Easterner
Al-Shili	The Chilean
Al-Shimali	The Northerner
Al-Shishani	The Chechen
Al-Sini, al-Sinani	The Chinese
Al-Sinighali	The Senegalese
Al-Skutlandi	The Scot
Al-Sudani	The Sudanese
Al-Sumali	The Somali
Al-Suri	The Syrian
Al-Suwidi	The Swede
Al-Suwisri	From Switzerland, the Swiss
Al-Ta'ifi	From Ta'if, Saudi Arabia
Al-Tabuki	From Tabuk, Saudi Arabia
Al-Tanzani	The Tanzanian
Al-Trabulsi, al-Trabelsi, al-Tarabulsi	From Tripoli, either Libya or Lebanon
Al-Trinidadadi	The Trinidadian
Al-Tshiki	The Czech
Al-Tunsi, al-Tunisi	The Tunisian
Al-Turki	The Turk
Al-Umani (actually al-'Umani)	The Omani
Al-Urduni	The Jordanian
Al-Urubi	The European
Al-Uzbiki, al-Uzbeki	The Uzbek
Al-Yabani	The Japanese

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Al-Yamani	The Yemeni
Al-Yunani	The Greek

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