Culture of the Arab World
Headstart/First Semester Middle East Schools

Volume II
Selected Aspects of Middle East Religion/Culture
Unit 13--Answer Sheets--Glossary

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Preface

This preface outlines objectives for Culture of the Arab World. Throughout this study, readers should recognize the following:

- **Importance of Area** Underlying all discussion is the premise that the Middle East is important to vital national interests of the United States.

- **Sensitivity** In dealing with the region, military intelligence linguists must demonstrate discretion, tactfulness, and grace.

- **Variety** Though bound by common, uniting principles and beliefs, cultures and religions of the Middle East possess great variety.

- **Resources Available** Listed at the conclusion of each module are resources, many of which are readily available, that provide deeper insight and awareness.

Each unit begins with overall objectives of that section of study. A vocabulary list follows every narrative. Included are review quizzes, designed to enhance learning of unit objectives. Sources used in the narrative and resources for further study are then stated.

Maps are a part of the text. Hopefully, students will use these tools to familiarize themselves with the Middle East, providing a context for their Arabic language study.

Highlighted portions offer readers an opportunity to skim and capture extremely important information at a quick glance.

The text is in two volumes. Volume I includes Units 1-12. Volume II is made of Unit 13, an Answer Key and Glossary. Pronunciation guides are located on the inside back cover of each volume.

Introduction

I. The intent of this cultural/religious overview of the Middle East is to

1. Provide a context, a schema, a broad knowledge of the Middle East world. The projected audience is Arabic students and the faculty who instruct these students.

2. Address content Final Learning Objectives (FLOs) This work treats the basic, commonly understood themes of the following FLOs:

a. Holidays/Observances
b. Customs
c. Religious Groups
d. Ethnic/Racial Groups
e. Gender Issues
f. Conflicts

The goal is establishment of a "level playing field" where students and faculty can possess competency in a common cultural literacy for the Middle East. In addition, this project introduces entry level military intelligence personnel to critical elements of the Middle East intelligence picture.

3. Facilitate Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center instruction. The finished product of this study is an interactive, computerized, programmed instruction text. Hopefully, language department chairs and team leaders in the Middle East I and II Schools (SMA, SMB) will integrate this study into their first semester culture content portions of Arabic instruction. At a minimum, this tool will serve students awaiting entry into Arabic (Headstart and casual status students) and new instructors.

II. The content is not free of bias. Five underlying principles guide presentations.

1. Islam's fusion with the majority of Middle East cultures

To understand the Middle East--whether economy, politics, military, customs, or whatever--one must understand Islam. The variety inherent in Middle East culture expresses the variety of practice found within Islam.

2. Context

Students and faculty cannot adequately understand specific aspects of one country or ethnic group without awareness of broader links to the whole Middle East world. This study makes a step in providing such linkage.

3. Respect

The treatment of Islam, Judaism and Orthodox Eastern Christianity (commonly known as the Eastern Orthodox Church) found within this text seeks to be positive, affirming, and peace enhancing. The goal is to get inside of and see the world through the eyes of those who practice the given religion. An objective, somewhat detached treatment of Middle East religions is the aim. The author stays away from apologetic, polemical stances concerning the faiths presented.

4. Perspective

This text draws upon printed, academic and popular accounts as sources of information. Much material is from secondary rather than primary Arabic language texts. Thus, the perspective may be skewed, treating Middle East culture and religion from a more refined, educated light. Thus, the "soil and blood," passionate, firsthand, emotionally-earnest, ground level views of issues treated may not be present.

5. Resources

Through use of this guide, students and faculty have a spring board to further personal/group study and analysis. The aim is discernment in use of the huge amounts of material available on the subject of Middle East culture/religion.

III. Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF)

BLUFs--the underlying objectives for each module--follow. Readers will grow in their understanding of...

Unit 1. Cultural Awareness

- **Importance of sensitivity by military intelligence linguists to cultures of the Middle East**
- **Cultural awareness advantages inherently possessed by military personnel**

Unit 2. Historical Overview

- **Long-lasting effects of over 3,500 years of history within the Middle East region**
- **Close historical ties between Judaism, Christianity (Orthodox Eastern), and Islam**
- **Muslim perspectives on Muhammad and the Qur'an**

Unit 3. Foundational Beliefs

- **Distinguishing tenets of Judaism, Christianity (Orthodox Eastern) and Islam**
- **Lesser and Greater Jihad**

Unit 4. Gestures and Taboos

- **Foundational principles to apply when interacting with a new culture**
- **Importance of manner and customs to cultural understanding**

Unit 5. Holidays and Observances

- **Distinctive Middle East religious/cultural holidays and observances**
- **Significance of holidays and observances for tactical, operational and strategic military missions**

Unit 6. Religion and Internal Middle East Politics

- Variety and complexity of Middle East Muslim perspectives concerning religion and politics
  - Diversity of Sharia (Islamic law) found within Middle East societies

Unit 7. U.S. Relations--Middle East Cultures

- Principles of United States foreign policy within the Middle East
- Recognition that Islam, per se, is not a determining factor in U.S. foreign policy. Rather, the practical doings of Middle East governments and peoples are the focus.

Unit 8. Fundamentalisms

- Emotion-laden connotations and manifestations of the term "fundamentalism"
  - Recognition that extremist fanatical Islamists do not speak for all Muslims

Unit 9. Selected Middle East Ethnic Groups

- Variety of ethnic groups throughout the Middle East
  - Lasting impact of Bedouin/Muslim culture on the whole region

Unit 10. Religious Texts--Societal Implications

- Ethical practices and views toward violence within Middle East religions
  - Importance of internal motivation within Islam

Unit 11. Gender Issues

- Variety of women's concerns within the Middle East
  - Close ties between family honor and gender issues

Unit 12. Resources

- **Book, periodical, audio-visual, and electronic (World Wide Web) resources available for further study**
- **Necessity of discernment in dealing with the overwhelming amount of information available on Middle East culture/religion**

Unit 13. Country Area Studies

- **Overview of (1) North African, (2) Levant (Israel, Lebanon, Syria--lands bordering the eastern shores of the Mediterranean), (3) Persian Gulf and (4) Turkish and Afghanistan influences upon the region**
- **Distinctive Muslim, Jewish and Orthodox Eastern Christian practices within the region**
- **Country locations**
- **General and commonly understood treatment of the following Final Learning Objectives (FLOs) for each country:**

  1. **Holidays/Observances**
  2. **Customs**
  3. **Religious Groups**
  4. **Ethnic/Racial Groups**
  5. **Gender Issues**
  6. **Conflicts**

1. Introduction

Few subjects engender more controversy than does religion. In the laboratory of the DLIFLC classroom, this is also the case. Objective treatment of our own or another's religious point of view is inhibited due, in part, to the following.

a. Professional-personal dichotomy. Many of us feel our expressed religious views must be included in all that we do. The intensely personal nature of religious thought and practice cannot be excluded from "who we are." How can we divorce from us that which is dearest, namely our religious belief and practice? In the structured environment of the classroom, we feel we cannot exclude our personal perspectives, assumptions and understandings. Yet, impartiality and fairness is often impeded by such a perspective.

b. Personal histories. Many of us come from backgrounds where our "personal stories" include instances of harassment, persecution, and ill-treatment, all because of one religious persuasion or another. It is difficult to be somewhat objective when we possess such heritages.

c. Faith traditions. Some of us come from aggressive, assertive, and zealous faiths wherein evangelism is a central tenant of our practice. Consequently, it may be hard to maintain sensitivity to other points of view.

d. Perceptions of America. We may think freedom of religion entitles us to brandish our beliefs to whomever we can. Difficulties in church/state understandings can muddle our views.

America is governed however, by the rule of law, the written word, the Constitution. This standard entitles all United States citizens to freely exercise their own faith and practice. It requires sensitivity and impartiality to instruct within the confines of the Department of Defense classroom.

e. Student views. Often due to immaturity, restricted background or rigidity in mindset, students project misconceptions, prejudices, stereotypes and insensitivities into the classroom. Remaining courteous and civil in the face of such inaccuracies can become burdensome.

f. 2/2/2 pressures. We do not want to take time away from the ultimate goal, producing trained linguists in our target languages. Some see treatments of culture/religion as detracting from this overall objective.

g. "Safe" position. Due to all the controversy engendered by religion, some think the best position is to ignore its consideration altogether. Such treatment does a disservice to our students. In most cultures of the world, religion is fused with culture, language and world view.

h. Curriculum. Dated texts, seemingly inaccurate or incomplete treatments of religions of an area cause agitation and upset. If we try to create our own culture content presentations, sorting through the huge amounts of religious information available creates understanding barriers.

2. Policy As mandated by the National Security Agency and Defense Intelligence Agency, Final Learning Objectives (FLOs) for DLIFLC students include areas pertaining to culture as affected by religion. Due however, to the potentially controversial nature of religion/culture, the easiest course of action often is to ignore or neglect these critical areas. Such disregard does disservice to our students.

As we embark upon the 21st century, the religious dimensions of culture are crucial to understanding the geopolitical framework in which DLIFLC students perform their mission. The following policy clarifies and implements guidance when dealing with the potentially controversial subject of the religious dimensions of culture.

a. Caution and Care Instructors and curriculum developers must utilize caution and care when handling the religious dimensions of culture as applied to target language instruction. The goal is a balanced, fair treatment of the religious dimensions of the culture studied. Treating all sides justly; showing no more favor to one side than another; taking steps to curtail views promoting selfish personal advantage; and not being swayed by personal or cultural biases describe traits instructors and staff personnel must possess when handling the religious dimensions of culture as applied to language learning.

b. Audio-Visual Aids Training materials used in the classroom must be selected, reviewed and handled with prudence and responsibility.

c. Objectivity Instructors and curriculum developers strive for accurate, objective, factual, and unbiased presentations of the often many sided issues of religion/culture. Departments must exercise painstaking care, which focuses upon developing sensitivity, when treating the multifaceted dimensions of culture/religion.

d. Teach, not Preach Instructors and curriculum developers are educators. Understanding of the other's point of view, rather than conversion to a differing religious viewpoint, is the aim.

In the classroom, proselytizing activity easily leads to harassment, unfair treatment of another's beliefs, and a denial of equal opportunity for all. Slanderous, demeaning, disparaging remarks and attitudes have no place. Demonizing techniques, displaying stereotyped, prejudicial notions are uncalled for. Advocating conspiratorial schemes of religious/political movements is improper. Promoting harmful untruths about another's religious point of view often creates a climate of bigotry and unrest.

e. Specific Applications Within the structured classroom, the following counsel, gleaned from guidance of the DLIFLC Staff Judge Advocate, applies.

(1) Objectivity The general rule concerning religion in the classroom is NO proselytizing, NO evangelizing and NO personal opinions. All that should happen in a structured classroom environment is objective instruction of the religious aspects of whatever culture is studied.

(2) Impartiality Instructors must neither editorialize when discussing religion nor communicate opinions non-verbally (rolling eyes, shaking head.) Students should come away from the class having no idea what the instructor personally thinks about the religious practices of the culture studied.

(3) Neutrality If somehow a student makes known his or her personal beliefs, the instructor should steer the discussion away from these personal beliefs and attitudes. Educators must do everything in their power to ensure the student does not feel as if his or her personal beliefs were criticized, discouraged, encouraged or applauded.

f. Student Responsibility Students as well have a responsibility in ensuring that a wholesome climate for learning exists. Prejudiced views, biased questioning, belittling attitudes and stereotyped treatments of the religious persuasions of others have no place--whether by students or faculty--within the DLIFLC classroom setting.

3. References

a. Potentially Controversial Topics in the DLI Foreign Language Curriculum, DLIFLC Command Policy 5-93, 20 APR 1993

b. Professional Code of Ethics, Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center

c. Joint Ethics Regulation, Code of Ethics for Government Services, DoD 5500.7-R, Sections 3-7

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