

Arab World Manners and Customs

A Compilation of Selected Department of Defense Arab World Culture and Religion Materials

**Units 1-10
Appendix**

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**Defense Language Institute
Foreign Language Center**

Acknowledgments

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Jandora, John W., LtCol, USMCR. Cultural Behavior Handbook: Saudi Arabia (edited by Defense Attache Unit 0166, Naval Air Facility, Washington, D. C. 20390, Oct 1990 [Defense Intelligence Agency, DDA-2600-6337-90, Oct 1990])

Middle East Orientation Course (AD00020t0), United State Special Operations School, United States Air Force, Maxwell Air Base, (no date given.)

Saudi-Arabic Headstart (AN 00505), Cultural Notes, Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, Presidio of Monterey, Sep 1980.

Wilson, Richard A. (MAJ, U.S. Army), Robert G. Glass, (CPT, USAR), Egerhard Gasper, (CW3, USA, Ret.), Samuel R. Rizzo, (SSG, USA), and Curtis C. Edsall, (SSG, USA). Arab Customs and Culture (MI Company, 5th Special Forces Group (ABN), Ft. Bragg, North Carolina 28307, 2D Edition, March 1983.)

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Preface

This preface outlines objectives for Arab World Manners and Customs. 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. DLIFLC students, in their language classroom settings, can observe and practice portions of the guidance contained herein.
- **Saudi Arabian Focus** Much of the included material draws from experience in Saudi Arabia. Observing manners and customs practice followed in this, one of the most conservative of the Middle Eastern societies, enables intelligence personnel to make application in most any Arab country. Though dated (early 1980s), applying to military attaches, and incorporating a tendency to "we-they" thinking, the materials enclosed transcend many constraints of time.

Each unit begins with overall objectives of that section of study. Included are review quizzes, designed to enhance learning of unit objectives. A brief bibliography, answer key, glossary and pronunciation guide are then listed.



Readers select and choose as appropriate to their specific area.



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

Introduction

I. Intent The intent of this cultural/religious overview of the Arab World is to

1. 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. Gender Issues

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.

2. Facilitate Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center students This volume is in direct response to student inquiries. It addresses cultural topics in which students have the most initial interest.

At a minimum, this tool will serve students awaiting entry into Middle East I and II Arabic language (Headstart and casual status students).



II. Objectives

Each unit includes the following objectives. Readers will grow in their understanding of...

Unit 1. Overview

- Impact of Islam throughout the Middle East
 - Contrasting views of time: American and Middle Eastern

Unit 2. Religion

- All pervasive nature of the Sharia
 - Major Muslim practices and observances

Unit 3. Arab Society

- Importance of clan and family in the Middle East
 - Male/female roles

Unit 4. Status

- Importance of context, status and prestige
 - "Face"

Unit 5. Hospitality and Friendship

- Overarching importance of hospitality in Middle Eastern circles
 - American/Middle East friendship perceptions

Unit 6. Gestures

- Common gestures
- Dos and taboos
 - The "evil eye"

Unit 7. Concept of Time/Conversation Guidelines

- Differing American/Middle Eastern perspectives to time
- Sensitivities to observe in conversations with Middle Easterners

Unit 8. Nuances of Thought

- Importance of context, clan and family in the Middle East
- Respect for aesthetic pursuits within Saudi Arabian culture

Unit 9. Work and Training Guidelines

- Perspectives on criticism, competition and comparisons
- Work perceptions and practices
 - Importance of relationships

Unit 10. Community and Homelife

- Practical considerations when living in Saudi Arabia
- Religious morality police
 - Guidelines for family members, especially women

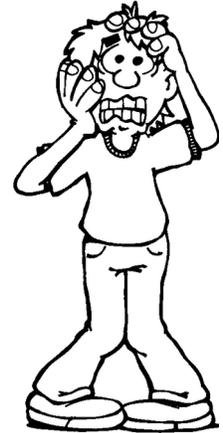
Appendix: Interview with a Middle Easterner

- Practical applications of manners and customs applied to the training environment
- Importance of repetition and rote memory in Middle East circles

III. Selected Aspects of Policy--Religion in the Classroom

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 twenty-first 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

d. Guidance Concerning Religion in the Classroom, CPT William Koon, Administrative Law, Staff Judge Advocate, DLIFLC, 23 December 1996

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