

## Appendix: Interview with a Middle Easterner

### Objectives

At the end of this unit, you will

### Be aware of the following

- Applications to reduce cultural misunderstandings when training with allies from the Middle East
- Care to be taken when critiquing work of Middle Eastern allies
- Tact, gentleness, rapport and politeness required in training with Middle East trainees
  - Implications of failed coursework for a Middle East trainee

### Identify

- Principles to apply when training Middle East allies
- Indirectness, direct orders, drill, reprimand
- Public reprimand
- Rote memory
  - Loss of face

### Realize

- Steps to take when dealing with Middle East trainee mistakes
- Importance of memorization as a teaching strategy in much of the Middle East
- Importance of "I" messages when dealing with Middle East Allies
- Differing American/Middle Eastern perspectives on personal responsibility
  - Respect given instructors in Middle East circles

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The student from the Middle East who has trained with U.S. technicians has proven extremely apt at mechanics and extremely quick. His intelligence and attitude are a credit to his country. There have been times, however, when American instructors have had difficulty understanding the different ways of doing things in the Middle East and the Americans have unintentionally offended their guests, or the reverse.



Usually the misunderstandings occur because the people involved are unaware of the differences between the cultures. What may not insult an American student might offend a Middle Easterner.

To reduce some of these areas of misunderstanding, the following questions were asked of a Middle Easterner pinpointing the situations which most commonly occur. This is not meant as a criticism of either Americans or Middle Easterners, but simply an explanation of situations where one side or the other misunderstands what is happening because of the different ways of life.



This indirectness is also tied somewhat to the question of taking orders. There is a feeling of uncertainty, sometimes resentment, between cultures. Obviously the Muslim, like all believers, feels his religion and his culture is better than anyone else's.

Yet, on the other hand he is in the West learning technology. So when a Westerner comes and gives him a direct order it seems a put down, a superior saying you are

inferior, even when it is not intended so. Between equals, you ask.

Q: I can see the similarity to our military structure where the ideal leader needs only to ask, the order underlying it is understood by both parties, but it's crude to say, "I order you to do that."

A: *Very similar, yes. There are different ways to do the same thing.*



Q: Are there any other implications to giving a direct order?

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A: *Yes, when you add to it the implications of direct orders during their experience with colonialism...there is an emotional reaction. Give direct orders, instead of suggestions, and he is not going to take it and like it. He is not going to accept it, which blocks his learning. It reminds him of the days when everything "Western" was a superior to inferior relationship.*

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Q: So, in more than one way, a direct order, a direct criticism, or a direct accusation is a put down.

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A: *Definitely. And when a person reacts emotionally to the way you treat him, his learning ability is upset. My suggestion is to try to find an indirect way of suggesting what you want your student to do. Eventually, by the way, this becomes second nature. And never reprimand him in public--I can't stress this enough.*

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*Take him aside over a soda, coffee, or what have you and gradually lead up to the subject. Put him at ease and then indirectly make your point. "Okay, I understand..for instance..that your button wasn't functioning and that is why you didn't push it. So, next time before we fly, why don't we check it?" or try, "Keep looking at it as you fly..or work..to make sure it doesn't malfunction again." Give him an out..he understands what you mean.*

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Q: But what if the student or trainee makes the same mistake again and again?

A: *If he keeps doing it and it is a critical procedure, then I think you face a dilemma. Possibly the man shouldn't be a pilot or a technician. Then, you can go to his superior and say, "Somehow I don't seem able to teach..(blame yourself)..so-and-so," and his superior will understand what you mean. Or you can go to your own superior and let him handle it at his level... "One of my instructors doesn't seem to be able to teach so-and-so.."*

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*But if you go to the student's superior, you say, "You know, I've been training Mohammed and I just don't seem to be able to train him. I don't know what I am doing wrong, but I just don't seem to be able to get him to follow my instructions. So perhaps you should remove me or we should find another instructor." His superior will quickly understand the problem is not with you but with the student and will take the appropriate steps.*

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Q: Are the American methods of teaching compatible to the Middle East?

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*A: Here again, we have to remember that we teach students in the United States to understand things. In the Middle East, as in many places in the world, they teach by rote memorization. If your student forgets once, twice, three times, you have to keep repeating in different ways until he gets it down pat.*

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Q: Until he has memorized it almost mechanically, step-by-step.

A: *Right! That is the way he learned in school and he is used to learning that way. If you expect him to learn in our pattern, react the way you react, then you are making a mistake. You have to presume that you must repeat yourself many times. You have to keep insisting*

*on a point and go over it with him every time before you operate the machine or fly the plane.*

*Say, "Hey, let's look at this now. What do we have to do?" Not just him. "We have to take off, and upon take-off we have to..." But time and time again until he does it almost by reflex.*

Q: I know of one group of instructor pilots who have set up a system where they debrief as a group, saying something like, "The formation could have been better and needs more effort." But they don't point out anyone in particular, even if only one student was primarily at fault. Then they add, "Such-and-such a part was very good." After this the instructor takes his student aside and privately discusses his performance.

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*A: Again, never give direct criticism. Find a way, I would insist..and certainly not in front of anyone else..never in front of their superiors or inferiors.*

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Q: So you would never say, "Hey, you didn't..."

A: I would not. You turn him off. And when you turn him off, his learning drops and your effectiveness drops. It puts a barrier between you. There are gentle ways of saying it. I mean, even in this country when we are talking to a superior we say, "Well, I'm sure you know.." or "As you know.." It's a tactful way of telling the boss he really doesn't know or should have known and you are going to tell him.

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*You're being tactful, gentle. It's the same with the Middle Easterner..only it's his whole way of life. An indirect way is honestly the best approach.*

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Q: Can you ever be somewhat direct?

A: *If you develop a really close friend that you feel is open, and you are having a soda together, no one else is around, then you can tell him, "Hey, Mohammed, I think you forgot to do such-and-such!" You say this on the side during the conversation, then add, "It would be nice to do next time."*

*But again, NEVER IN PUBLIC, NEVER in front of anyone else, including officers of higher or lower rank in his service.*



Q: *Suppose you are recommending a proposal to someone. I understand that if you say, "What do you think of my idea or plan?" or "I put this together, what do you think?" you will usually get a polite reply, "Everything is fine," even if your plan or idea is a disaster.*

A: *The required, polite answer is that it's great! Otherwise you would be criticizing someone personally or implying the instructor or advisor doesn't know what he is doing.*

Q: *Then how do you present a proposal, and get a critique?*

A: *I think first you have to find out if the man knows the subject area. If you give him something he knows nothing or little about he cannot judge from his experience, he will give you a polite answer and tell you it is good.*

*Secondly, I think rather than say it is your plan or proposal, because he doesn't want to be rude or criticize you, you should say something like, "You know I have this proposal I came across and find it interesting. I'm thinking of using it and could you*

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*give me your opinion on it? It's not mine I just came across it.."*

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*This way if he wants to criticize you, it doesn't appear he is doing it directly. He is criticizing some other fellow who wrote it or thought of it and he knows you won't be offended. He will probably adjust the plan rather than say, "Such-and-such is wrong." Of course he knows what is really happening..but it's a game you must play. Again, don't tell him you want criticism.*

Q: What do you tell him?

A: *"What's your opinion?" or "Give me your ideas." or "How can this be improved?" or all of these. Generally I would approach with, "How can this be improved?"*

Q: Suppose he comes back to you with a suggestion which you believe, based on your technical knowledge, just won't work.

A: *I'd never tell him, that. I would say, "Ah, this is very interesting. I didn't think about that. Let me see how I can rearrange this."*

Q: How about, "This is very interesting. Let me see if there's anything I might add?"

A: *Right. Take his idea if you must and rephrase it. Then take the paper to him and say, "Here it is. I put your idea right in here." He will accept that you "rephrased" it because you are the expert. He won't mind when you say, "I've reworded it because, you know, it's English and not Arabic or Farsi" or something like that. "But here is your idea and here is where I put it in."*



Q: Another area where I have noticed instructors having difficulty is when they say to a student, "Mohammed, can you tell him what you do in close formation?" or "Can you see the other aircraft from the back seat in fingertip formation?" The answer should be, "No, I can't see from the back seat." But Mohammed

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hedges around and finally says, "Yes, I can see." How do you correct him according to his code of courtesy?

A: Don't say, "That's wrong!" Rather, give him a hint first while he's hedging. Obviously, he is not sure of himself. He is in training, and if you ask him a question like this, he starts to hedge. He doesn't want to appear as if he didn't know...especially if you ask in front of other people.



Before he replies, then, and while he is still hedging, you step in and say something like, "Normally, I have problems seeing from the back seat and in some cases I cannot see at all. What has been your experience, Mohammed, or Lt. Kadafi?"

Then he will realize you cannot see from the back seat and it is not bad for him to say, "I can't see from the back seat." But if you come up with a situation which is fairly new or not totally learned yet and say, "Can you see?" he doesn't want to admit he doesn't know. He may not be able to see, but he may think others can see and worries about admitting it for it would reflect badly against him. So he hedges. "Maybe.. sometimes..not really." and watches you for clues.

Q: In a sense you are still teaching your point but in a different way.

A: Yes.

Q: Sometimes, also, the teacher will say to the student, "Mohammed, we are taking off at such-and-such a time. Let's go through what we're going to do. When we take off we call the tower and say..what?" Normally, we do not feed the students the answers step-by-step. If he hesitates, is there a way we can slide the information in to remind him without "putting him down" as he would see it?

A: Use a joint approach and do it privately. Take him aside and say, "We fly this morning..or tomorrow..what do we need to do? I'll do this and you do that" might be the first approach. Then, "Now, if you want to do it all by yourself, fine! I'll go along for the ride. After all, you're the pilot."

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*If you know he is not quite ready, you suggest, "Okay, I'll do this and you do that." This is one way of going over a checklist. "Is that okay?" you ask. He may say, "I think I'd like to do this, instead." Then you say, "Fine!" and repeat what you are agreeing with.*



*Gradually, until you can develop a close rapport, you do it this way...but never in front of others. And never appear to be giving orders.*

**Q:** Student pilots are taught to brief as part of the technical system they are here to learn. This means a lieutenant must brief a flight which will include his senior officers. Can this procedure be effectively taught when their rules are more strict between the ranks?

**A:** *If he has to brief I think it creates greater cooperation and friendship if the instructor takes him aside and says, "I know you are going to do a great job. Don't be afraid. You're a hot shot pilot. Let me tell you how we do it here (in the U.S.), how I do it for my superiors."*

*This way you are telling him by describing the way you do it, how he can conduct his briefing. Then he is much more secure. "My instructor tells me this and therefore it's okay to do. You'll find he adopts ideas this way."*

*But first reassure him. He needs a lot of reassurance as he absorbs all the new things while his superiors are looking at him. If you go to him first, when the new procedure or checkout comes up, and say,*

*"You are doing a great job. You are a good pilot.  
There's nothing to worry about..but let me tell you a*

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bit about how we do it here." This is how I would do it. I'm sure there are other ways, but don't forget repetition.

Q: In the U.S. there is almost a code of roughness in training, a pride in "taking" rough treatment- especially in basic training programs. I can see how that would turn off people who emphasize courtesy first.



A: *It is very hard for those outside the U.S. to understand your system. I cannot emphasize too much the consequences of "loss of face."*



*If you put a student in a position where he can "lose face" it means he loses power to influence those below him in rank, looks the fool to his friends, his superiors are less apt to help him, and it damages the whole network of human relationships he depends on to survive in his world.*

*So, please, never put him in any situation where he looks ignorant or foolish or is criticized or give him a direct order which evokes the implication that he is inferior...don't do it publicly or even privately.*

Q: What about in an emergency?

A: *If lives depend on it, do it! If it is an emergency. But don't go tell his superiors or speak of it where any of his fellow officers or friends can hear.*



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Q: You mentioned the different way of learning in the Mid-East. One implication I get is when it comes to something like flight safety procedures, don't worry about rationales, just simply say, "These procedures MUST be done with an aircraft if you want it to perform well." Then teach the procedure by rote.

A: *Right. And continually check your student and repeat until he's learned. You'll find the Middle Eastern student is very intelligent.*



Q: What about time? When you tell a student he should be in a certain place within one minute of time and then he goes along and misses it by three minutes and seems unconcerned, what do you do? This is very important for them to learn if they are going to have the kind of air force they want. How do you impress the importance of minutes, even seconds, for technology when they are used to looser time frames?

A: *By rote..rote..rote. Drilling. A method used in many places in the world. I've heard even the U.S. is returning to it in the schools.*

Q: You would also say privately, over soft drinks later, "It looks like something went wrong because the aircraft reached point X three minutes late," or "because the machine wasn't oiled on the last check up."

A: *Yes. Don't blame him.*

Q: And then something like, "We've got to check this next time."





A: Right. Remember too, that with safety and many other ideas, despite your saying, "This can save your life," there is an undercurrent in him that tells him, "If my number is up, it's up!" Or as we say in the Middle East, "If the oil is finished, my lamp will go out."

Any reasoning which runs against this doesn't make much of an impression. Ultimately, you don't have to do a thing and anything you do is not significant because God will determine in the end whether you will survive or not.. "Thy will be done."

This is why they won't pay as much attention to safety devices as an American who believes he has some input in life, some cause and effect impact. The Muslim believes that while the human being can do anything, if God decides he is going to live, he will-- if not he won't.

Q: What about the sense of personal responsibility?

A: There is none in the sense an American learns it. That's why if you say to the Middle Eastern student, "You broke it," he will say, "I didn't." Partly to protect himself from your accusation and partly because if it broke it was meant to break, but he, personally, did not "cause" it to happen.

Q: I recall a close friend of mine who gave up quickly on a project and said, "It must be Buddha's will." In private, and in a teasing way, I replied, "Let's not assume we know what Buddha wants. Let's try everything we can think of and if it still won't work, then it must be Buddha's will."

A: Not a bad approach if you have that close camaraderie, that close friendship. Once you become friends you can light-heartedly comment like that. You didn't come down strong with, "Dammit! What do you

*mean Buddha! All the time it's Buddha!" If you did  
that you*

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would lose your student. But if you tease lightly and say, "Come on now, let's not test Buddha or assume we know his will," in private, it may work. Never in public though. In public you have to say and do certain things regardless of your opinions.

Q: How can the American instructor tell he has been "turned off" by his student?

A: A very stiff formal thing comes between the instructor and student. You'll find his frozen smile and nothing else. No more touching. The Middle Easterner is one of many cultures where touch is very big...body language...touching a friend, someone he likes...that disappears.



Q: He won't touch you at all then?

A: No more touching. No more, "Come on, let's smoke a cigarette together." No invitations for a soda or coffee. No invitations to lunch or dinner. He avoids you as much as he can.

Q: That reminds me, I've heard that if you are smoking and you take out cigarettes you should offer them around or leave them out, not put them back in your pocket as we do when we're informal.

A: Offer everyone there a cigarette. Leave them out of your pocket.

Q: And if they offer you one and you smoke, take it.

A: Yes...otherwise you are not making contact.

Q: Our instructors report that often when they come in from a flight the student will go and get soft drinks for the instructor and himself. If the student doesn't have enough money to get drinks for everyone, he won't get any. Suppose the instructor notices his student always buys the drinks, does the student feel it's his

place to do it or can they switch back and forth in buying?

A: *The student feels he should. At first he wants to do it to thank you, to get on your good side, to get your friendship and avoid criticism.*

Q: Can the instructor buy?

A: *Definitely. But you should choose a day when the student has done something perfect and say, "We had such a great flight...I'm so pleased...happy...would you allow me to buy you a soft drink?" That cements the rapport. You have promoted him in the eyes of his people, he's done a great thing, and you returned the gesture. It's a good thing to do.*



Q: Suppose you get a turn-off signal, what do you do? You may not even know why he is upset or angry.

A: *I would ignore the turn-off. Even if you are not sure, continue as before, keeping in mind the body touching, the smiling, putting your arm around his shoulders, reducing your criticism for a while, and maybe sometimes increase your praise, say how great he did in front of his fellow officers, reinforce him and he'll come back. Then he will realize, "Now, he really didn't mean it that way last time."*

*Don't react formally, too, for the minute you do, you allow that barrier to stay and you lose him.*

Q: How about using first names?

A: *Generally the military is very formal. Sir...Captain this...Lt. Even in the business world until you know someone well.*