

Unit 1: Cultural Awareness

Objectives

At the end of this module, you will

Be aware of the following

- Broad implications of culture
- Reasons cultural awareness is important for military intelligence linguists
- Cultural awareness advantages possessed by military personnel
- American and Arab values expressed through proverbs
- Contrasting Arab and American values
- Differing perceptions (American/Middle Eastern) of time
- Steps to build cultural sensitivity
- Barriers to cultural understanding
 - Treatment plan for cultural shock

Identify

- Generals Khaled Bin Sultan, H. Norman Schwarzkopf, and Gus Pagonis
- Culture
- Peace Operations
- Proverbs
- Monochronic and polychronic time
- Creative generalizations
- Perceptions
 - Ethnocentrism, Prejudice, Stereotypes, Culture Shock

Realize

- Ease in making cultural misperceptions
- Continuous learning required for cultural awareness
- Cultural variety experienced in American society
- Interconnectedness of religion and culture
- Information glut as a barrier to understanding
- Manifestations of culture shock

Unit 1: Cultural Awareness

"The new military needs soldiers [sailors, airmen, marines] who can deal with a diversity of peoples and cultures, who can tolerate ambiguity, take initiative, and ask questions."

-- Alvin and Heidi Toffler, War and Anti-War, p. 74.

I. Culture--What is it?

"The values, beliefs and attitudes influencing behavior and relationships within a given group."
(Richard Mead, International Management, p. 6.)

That which guides people in their thinking, acting and feeling. Language, values, customary behaviors; ideas, beliefs and patterns of thinking; these attributes describe social characteristics of a people.

This total way of life of a group--passed on from generation to generation--is the shared culture of that populace.

II. Why is Cultural Awareness Important for Military Linguists?

1. Peace Operations Historically, military strategists often viewed cultural factors on the battlefield as insignificant. Recent peace operations and combined United Nations/multinational ventures however, illustrate the importance of these considerations.

"Population distribution, ethnic backgrounds, languages, religious beliefs, and political loyalties of civilian personnel all emerge as significant components of successful intelligence collection."
(FM 100-23, Peace Operations, p. 46.)

2. Intelligence Including the cultural dimension enables a more complete intelligence picture. In a recent Parameters article, Dr. Paul Bellutowski, of the U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College, wrote...



"Understanding culture may help to answer important military and civil questions such as the will of the enemy to fight, the determination of resistance groups to persevere, or the willingness of the populace to support insurgents or warlords."
(Parameters, Spring 96, p. 34.)

On the strategic level, this dimension influences directions of campaigns and coalition partnerships. On a tactical level, cultural awareness promotes fuller understanding of sources, and the worldviews from which intelligence data arises.

3. Allies Awareness of distinct practices and ways facilitates harmonious interaction with Allied counterparts.

When perceptions become rigid, negative attitudes (stereotypes) set in. Communication falters, animosities fester and suspicions arise.

Cultural awareness, on the other hand, of one's own and another's culture, enhances communication and facilitates positive interaction between peoples.

Desert Storm/Shield accentuated the need for cultural sensitivity. General H. Norman Schwarzkopf's knowledge of Saudi Arabian ways enabled him to adjust to customs of the Arabian Peninsula.

Though General Khalid Bin Sultan, the Saudi Arabian Joint Forces Commander of Desert Sheild/Storm/

Unit 1: Cultural Awareness

Farewell, may have appreciated a more extensive knowledge of Arab culture by General Schwarzkopf, even so, the U.S. commander still observed many Arab manners and customs.

Guidelines for U.S. Army staff included sensitivity to traditional practices, acceptance of the situation, and patience. Writes General Schwarzkopf, *"I'm not known for being patient, but to do the job there [Saudi Arabia], that's just what I was. Decisions that would require fifteen minutes in Tampa or Washington would often consume three hours in Riyadh, as we sipped coffee, told stories and philosophized."* (It Doesn't Take a Hero, p. 334.)

For Desert Storm/Shield/Farewell chief of logistics Lt. Gen. Gus Pagonis, the total experience was one of continuous learning. Recognition of the importance of religion, non-verbal communication patterns, gender issues and nuances of gestures and taboos played a big role.

Displaying calmness and self-control in all settings became foremost.

"I am a blunt person, and I'm not known as a paragon of patience. But I soon learned that in the Middle East, you have to go slow to go fast. And so we did." (Moving Mountains, p. 107.)

III. Cultural Awareness Advantages Possessed by Military Personnel

1. Diversity The United States military is the largest, most diverse organization in our nation. Ethnic, racial, and regional diversity is built in to the force structure.



There is much variety in our country, even though a common culture centered in the Constitution binds all Americans together. Consider the differences displayed depending on whether one comes from an urban/rural, suburb/inner city setting.

Regional contrasts--from the Eastern establishment to the South, Southern California to the Mid West--make for distinct ways of looking at the world. Ethnic backgrounds, whether Native American, Hispanic, African American, Caucasian, Asian American--tend to influence one's overall perspective.

Responses to social/political issues also express this variety. Think of reactions to the following topics:

- The federal deficit
- Gun control
- Ordination of women
- Gays/lesbians in military
- Abortion
- Home schooling
- Women in combat
- Priests and marriage
 - Pay for professional athletes

With many of these topics, responses vary. Emotions simmer. Discussions often become so heated that rational dialogue leaves the picture. When we realize the volatile nature of disagreements to issues within our own land, then we can more readily empathize with differences expressed by individuals within other countries.

2. Basic Training Basic training instills values which contribute to successful handling of new, culturally sensitive settings.

3. DLIFLC In the laboratory of the classroom, we're privileged to observe manners, customs and folkways of instructors who come from many different countries and cultures.

4. Joint Operations The joint environment within our Armed Forces promotes respect and mannerliness which can easily be adapted to new settings.

5. Being American Living daily with the variety possessed by our own society constitutes a real cultural awareness advantage.



IV. Values

1. Values Expressed Through Proverbs Proverbs-- short, pithy sayings commonplace within a culture-- also describe basic values of a people. Customary sayings of Americans include:

- A penny saved is a penny earned.
- Time is money.
- Early to bed, early to rise, makes a person healthy, wealthy, and wise.
- God helps those who help themselves.
- No rest for the wicked.
- You've made your bed, now go sleep in it.
- The squeaky wheel gets the grease.
- A stitch in time saves nine.
- If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.
- Laugh and the world laughs with you; weep and you weep alone.
- Never let them see you sweat.

Contrasting Arab proverbs, adapted from Understanding Arabs by Margaret Nydell, consist of:

- Support your Muslim brother, whether he is the tyrant or the tyrannized.
- The knife of the family does not cut.
- The hand of God is with the group.
- Older than you by a day, wiser than you by a year.
- The world is changeable, one day honey and the next day onions.
- Every sun has to set.
- It's all fate and chance.
- If a rich man ate a snake, they would say it was because of his wisdom; if a poor man ate it, they would say it was because of his stupidity.
- Your tongue is like a horse--if you take care of it, it takes care of you; if you treat it badly, it treats you badly.
- Patience is beautiful.
- Haste is from the devil and patience is from Allah.
- A concealed sin is two-thirds forgiven.

2. American Values In his book entitled American Ways, author Gary Althen identifies the following common American values and assumptions.

- Individualism and privacy



Unit 1: Cultural Awareness

Seeing ourselves as separate individuals, responsible for our own lives and destinies, is perhaps our most common characteristic as a people.

- **Equality** Overall, we have a deep faith in the fundamental way all people are equal, with no one born superior to anyone else.
- **Informality** Speech, dress, posture and casualness all indicate the general unpretentious manner in which we approach life.
- **Future, change, progress** The future, rather than history and tradition, is our most pressing concern. Prospects for growth and development become primary considerations.
- **Goodness of humanity** We tend to see people as basically good.



The widespread emphasis on education, training, and self-improvement--where individuals through effort can better themselves--demonstrates this value.

- **Time**

We place efficiency, organization and disciplined use of time as a high priority. The "immediate instant," becomes the focus.

Because our "daily life is among the fastest on earth...Time horizons are truncated... (We have a hard time empathizing) with the feelings of warring Arabs and Israelis who defend their positions by citing 2,000 year old claims." (Toffler, War and Anti-War, p. 248.)

- **Achievement, action, work, materialism** Someone who gets the job done is highly valued. Motivated achievers become valued associates. Successful, action oriented, on-the-go individuals who make something of themselves receive high regard.
- **Directness and assertiveness**

We practice a frank, open and direct way of communicating. "Laying all the cards on the table" and "getting to the point" speak to this straightforward manner practiced by many Americans.

3. Middle East Values In her book entitled Understanding Arabs, linguist Margaret Nydell identifies the following values basic to Arab peoples:

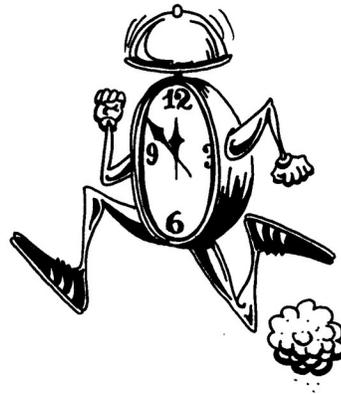
- **Status** Family background and social class determine one's status within society. Individual achievements and qualities take a distant second in establishing importance.
- **Impressions** Making a good impression upon others is the standard of behavior at all times.
- **Family** Personal obligations take second place to family needs. Loyalty ties to the family are uppermost.
- **Personal honor** An individual family's reputation, dignity and sense of honor is supreme.

- **Religious attitudes** Dr. Nydell also describes basic religious attitudes held by Arabs, one of the chief of these attitudes being that everyone has an affiliation with religion, believes in God, and sees Him as powerful within the arena of human affairs.

4. Perceptions of Time

Another way to contrast Americans and many other peoples of the world is to analyze the patterns of time as described by Edward T. Hall in his book Understanding Cultural Differences. **Monochronic** (one thing at a time) tends to describe many Americans.

Polychronic (involved with many things at once) people comprise most of the non-European countries of the world.





Monochronic People:

- Do one thing at a time.
- Concentrate on the job.
- Take time commitments seriously (deadlines, schedules).
- Are committed to the job.
- Adhere religiously to plans.
- Are concerned about not disturbing others; follow rules of privacy and consideration.
- Show great respect for private property; seldom borrow or lend.
- Emphasize promptness.
- Are accustomed to short-term relationships.



Polychronic People:

- Do many things at once.
- Are highly distractible and subject to interruptions.
- Consider time commitments an objective to be achieved, if possible.
- Are committed to people and human relationships.
- Change plans often and easily.
- Are more concerned with those to whom they are closely related than with privacy.
- Borrow and lend things often and easily.
- Base promptness on the relationship.
- Have a strong tendency to build lifetime relationships.

V. Developing Cultural Sensitivity

How can we effectively build our own cultural sensitivities? Certainly abilities acquired throughout basic training help. The joint military service environment promotes sensitivity. Even observing language instructors can assist. Wholehearted dedication is necessary. But what attitudes promote positive interaction with those from another culture? Can we develop cultural awareness "templates" to enhance our intelligence-gathering capabilities?

1. Maintain Creativity When Using Generalizations

Given the great diversity found in many of the world's regions and cultures, it is difficult to accurately make broad, conclusive statements about others. Cultures and peoples are multi-layered, complex entities. With care, we can discern commonalities and differences between cultures.

Put another way, *"In some ways, all people are alike. In some ways, groups of people resemble each other. In some ways, every person is unique"* (Althen, *American Ways*, p. xii.)

Richard Mead, in his work entitled International Management, describes the use of generalizations. Overgeneralizing leads easily to stereotypes and prejudices. Sweeping statements routinely introduce incorrect conclusions. Yet...



Creative generalizations, concepts tempered with care, refinement, always subject to modification and open to change--enable us to operate efficiently. When kept dynamic, flexible and tentative, this reasoning enables us to make intelligible statements about others.

2. Practice Civility Seeing other people as individuals like ourselves, whose way of life has meaning and continuity, promotes understanding.

Treating ideas, manners and customs with respect deepens our capacity to appreciate another's culture. Being civil--courteous, considerate and polite--opens doors for dialogue and discovery.

3. Realize the Interconnectedness of Religion and Culture. Our American society respects the division between church and state. The Constitution guarantees the free exercise of religion for all United States citizens. A spiritual/civil division often exists. Many other countries recognize no such differentiation.

In many areas of the world, politics, economics and government are not divorced from religious belief.

As a modernization process occurs across many parts of the globe, religion--rather than decreasing in importance--actually becomes a force for political and societal renewal. Religious persuasion runs deep. It permeates many societies. Our recognition of, and appreciation for, this intensity of religious expression enhances sensitivity to others.

VI. Barriers to Cultural Understanding

Many obstacles check our full appreciation of other cultures/religions. The glut of information available--library circulations, Internet contacts, television newscasts and documentaries, newspapers and magazines--can overwhelm with their images and data. Uncomplicated, simple presentations fail to account for subtle, nuanced distinctions of interpretation and meaning.



Our own "spiritual blinders" may inhibit an objective, accurate appraisal of other religious/cultural systems.

Unit 1: Cultural Awareness

Take a moment and consider the following terms. Ask yourself: What associations come to mind? Are the thoughts negative or positive? What difficulties arise when we categorize persons in such ways?

- Nerd
- Raghead
- Bubba
- Bimbo
- Charlie
- Commie
- Fundamentalist
 - Dirtbag

Perceptions--our mental grasp of others and their ideas of us--differ, especially in cross-cultural settings. Recognition of our own and others unique perceptions clarifies and deepens understanding.

Common notions of Americans held by many people in other countries include:

- Outgoing, friendly
- Loud, rude, boastful, immature
- Hardworking
- Ignorant of other countries
- Generous
- Wealthy
 - Always in a hurry

Depending on the country, many Americans may view others as:

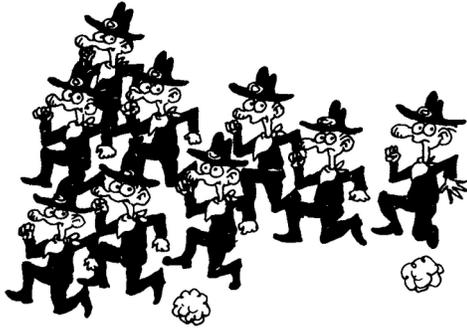
- Meticulous and structured
- Private, suspicious of sharing information
- Authoritarian
- Religious zealots
- Warm and emotional
- Courteous and refined
 - Always late

Specific barriers to understanding of other cultures include...

1. Ethnocentrism Seeing other people's way of life only through one's own "glasses," regarding one's own culture as superior in all ways, can lead to unhealthy, proud attitudes, arrogant self-righteousness, and feelings of haughtiness which can destroy personal relationships.

2. Prejudice Rigid, negative attitudes based on faulty, preconceived, inflexible generalizations, numbs our ability to understand others. Prejudice too readily violates objective standards of fairness, justice, and impartiality.

3. Stereotypes Rigid biases--applied to all peoples of a particular group--demean others.



Perceptions become immune to logic and experience. A stereotyped template skews all incoming information. Depersonalization and dehumanization result. Individuals become caricatured, distorted, and seen too often only in a negative light.

4. American Cultural Barriers Based upon his experiences as a state department official and former hostage during the Iranian crisis, Moorhead Kennedy identifies the following four cultural barriers Americans distinctly possess. These matters especially relate to ethnocentrism and stereotyping.

a. Self-assertiveness Being bullheaded, successful "winners" often inhibits our ability to listen to others. The insensitive military slogan, "When you've got them by the shorts, their hearts and minds are sure to follow," expresses this barrier.

b. Isolationist Too often we see things as we want to see them, overlooking or denying what is really present in another culture.

c. Moralistic Seeing matters with an arrogant, God-given-destiny approach leads to judgmental, critical, insensitive thinking. The tendency is to believe one's standards as superior to those of others, criticizing others on the basis of standards which may not be appropriate for their culture.

d. Religiosity This crusader instinct defines and advocates views concerning secular issues with an absolute religious certainty. Such definitions are more appropriate to the basic tenets of revealed religion. Religiosity goes contrary to the thoughts expressed by Abraham Lincoln, who advocated tolerance and self-criticism. President Lincoln pointed out that...*"the Confederates prayed to the same God as did the North. We must do the 'right,' but we can do that only to the 'limited extent that God gives us to see it."* (See Ayatollah in the Cathedral, pp. 192-202.)

5. Culture Shock



This concept defines the confused feelings one experiences when confronted with a large number of new and unfamiliar people or situations.

Culture shock inhibits accurate understanding of others who are different. Most people undergo the disorientation and upset which comes when traveling to a new country or being placed in a new situation.

Think back to initial encounters with basic training or officer's basic courses. Many students go through disorientation and distress. (Remember your first couple of weeks at the Presidio of Monterey?) Often this sense of frustration and bewilderment is compounded by a move to an overseas duty station. Thankfully, with the passage of time, most often these feelings leave.

Culture shock often follows a predictable pattern. Individuals enter a new setting with high

energy and excitement levels. After the initial
euphoria, a

Unit 1: Cultural Awareness

letdown occurs. Resentment, discouragement, distress, frustration--even hostility and rebellion surface. For linguists and intelligence operatives, becoming entangled in this stage leads to negative, disparaging reactions. Individuals lock themselves in the barracks with videos and drinks. Little sense of appreciation for host-nation culture and peoples occur. Only when a renewed stage of learning takes place--the acquiring of knowledge of a new society and people--can an atmosphere of acceptance and calm resurface.

Robert Kohls, in his book Survival Kit for Overseas Living, outlines an action plan for dealing with culture shock:

a. Gather Information Before leaving for a new location, duty station, or overseas post/base, learn as much about that new setting as possible.



b. Analyze When hit with the letdown stage, look for logical reasons--describe, interpret, and evaluate what is happening to you.



c. Resist Negativity If the temptation comes to disparage the new culture, fight the tendency to fall to negative jokes and comments. Remain positive.



d. Befriend a Host-Nation Counterpart. Talk over your own reactions and feelings with someone who has a sympathetic ear, who can help you understand the new setting.



e. Demonstrate Confidence. Realize that these feelings too shall pass. Focusing on the long-term, positive outcome outlasts emotional reactions often experienced in the present.



Unit 1: Cultural Awareness
