

AN INTRODUCTION TO ARAB CULTURE: *A Brief Synopsis for US Soldiers*

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For centuries our nation's military leaders have studied the ways of our adversaries. Professional Soldiers understand that knowledge of one's adversary is essential to success on the battlefield. For conventional conflicts this may consist of studying the enemy's tactics, doctrine, and equipment capabilities. In a counterinsurgency, however, the populace is the key terrain; servicemen must study the people and their culture to succeed. According to William D. Wunderle in his book *Through the Lens of Cultural Awareness: A Primer for U.S. Armed Forces Deploying to Arab and Middle Eastern Cultures*, an in-depth understanding of a people's culture improves a unit's ability to conduct counterinsurgency operations by providing servicemen insight into the intent of individuals and groups in their area.

Although the United States has been fighting in Iraq for over six years, the average serviceman still lacks the appropriate level of cultural awareness necessary for conducting counterinsurgency operations in the Middle East. This lack of cultural understanding by U.S. servicemen often leads to animosity and hostility among Arabs and contributes to a negative image of the American military. This low level of understanding can often be attributed to inadequate training prior to deployment. Often servicemen are lectured on the "do's and don'ts." "Shake hands with your right hand." "Don't use the left hand for contact with others." "Don't point with a finger." "Don't debate religious issues." These basic behavioral guidelines lack the appropriate context for cultural understanding.

Wunderle wrote that in order to develop the critical thinking skills necessary to understand how Arab culture might influence an operation, a serviceman must have a firm understanding of Arabs' thought processes, motivating factors, and other issues. There are literally volumes of books dedicated to this subject, and leaders should



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A Soldier talks with a Sons of Iraq leader during a mission in Baghdad.

read as many as possible prior to deployment. As T.E. Lawrence wrote in his *27 Articles*, "The beginning and ending of the secret of handling Arabs is unremitting study of them." Not all servicemen have the time or motivation to conduct such a thorough study, however. This article is designed for them. While nothing can substitute a dedicated study of Arab culture, this article will attempt to bridge the gap between simple graphic training aid (GTA) cards with lists of "do's and don'ts" and the volumes of books dedicated to the study of Arabs.

The Islamic Faith

While it is neither true that all Arabs are Muslims nor are all Muslims devout, there is no greater influencing factor on the Arab way of life than that of Islam. In Arab countries, there is no separation between church and state. As a result, Islam plays a critical role in nearly every aspect of daily life in the Middle East. Because Islam plays such a significant role within Arab society, it is important that U.S. servicemen have a

basic understanding of the faith and the beliefs behind it.

Islam originated during the early seventh century BC in the city of Mecca, in modern day Saudi Arabia. It derives from the teachings of the final prophet Mohammad. While an ordinary man, Mohammad was believed to be a witness to the word of God, or "Allah." He taught his followers to submit themselves to the will of God; thus people that practice this faith are known as Muslims, or "one who submits to God." Today, Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world. If it continues to grow at its current rate, it will be the most widely practiced religion in the world by the year 2020.

The text of the Islamic faith is known as the Qur'an (sometimes printed Koran). The Qur'an is considered to be a self-authenticating and closed text, meaning nothing may be added or taken away. It is divided into 114 units known as "suras," which are similar to the chapters of the Bible. Suras are not organized chronologically; instead they are organized according to

length with the longest first. Overall, the Qur'an is a relatively short religious text in comparison to the Bible. This short length allows dedicated Muslims to memorize the entire work. A Muslim's Qur'an is of great religious importance to them. It occupies a place of honor within an Arab's household and is often wrapped in cloth. Servicemen should be aware of this when conducting searches in Muslim homes and avoid handling the Qur'an unless absolutely necessary. Under no circumstances should a serviceman deface or otherwise dishonor the Qur'an as such an act may generate strategic repercussions.

The five pillars of Islam represent the faith's basic tenants. They are the obligations by which Muslims strive to abide by. The five pillars are Shahada, Zakat, Salat, Sawm, and the Hajj. The Shahada and Zakat are fairly straight forward. The Shahada is the belief that there is no God but Allah and Mohammad is his messenger. The Zakat is the giving of alms to the poor; this normally consists of two and a half percent of a Muslim's annual income. The other pillars are slightly more complex.

Salat is the ritual prayer performed by Muslims. Muslims execute five salats a day. There is no set time for these prayers but typically they occur early in the morning, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and evening. Prayers vary in length from two cycles in the morning to four cycles in the afternoon and evening. In some circumstances the second and third salats are combined, as well as the fourth and fifth, bringing the number of salats a day from five to three. Muslims may make up missed salats by praying in private. Additional prayers, or salats, are required for religious festivals, funerals, and other special occasions.

Muslims prefer to conduct their salats in the presence of other Muslims. They often pray in neighborhood mosques throughout the week and at larger communal mosques on Fridays. While mosque architecture may vary widely from region to region, there are a few common characteristics. First, there is a minaret from which prayer call, or "adhan," is voiced to the local community. Second, one wall will always face Mecca. This wall is known as the "qibla" and is the direction to which Muslims will face during prayer. Within the mosque, prayer is led by an "imam." These religious leaders possess a great deal of influence within their communities and can prove an invaluable ally when conducting counterinsurgency operations.

Sawm is the daytime fast during the month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar. During Ramadan Muslims cut themselves off from worldly distractions in order to become attuned to God as the only ultimate reality. From dusk till dawn they are not permitted to eat, drink, smoke, or have sexual relations. They also make an extra effort to avoid sins such as lying, slandering, and committing acts of anger. During Ramadan one may expect Arab Muslims to be more irritable than normal due to their physical state. Servicemen should show respect by not eating, drinking, or smoking in front of Arabs or offering them such.

The final pillar is the pilgrimage to Mecca, or the Hajj. Only about 10 percent of Muslims make the trip into modern day Saudi Arabia to visit the historic city during their lifetime. Those that make the trip take great pride in the experience and earn the title of "Hajji" (Hajja for women). The pinnacle of the experience is said to be the circling of the Ka'ba. The Ka'ba is a black cube believed to be a replica of the house of God in the seventh level of heaven. Pilgrims circle the Ka'ba counterclockwise seven times; this

represents that God is at the center of their lives. During the annual pilgrimage, the Hajj can be a significant issue for servicemen in the Middle East. Problems generated from large numbers of Muslim pilgrims traveling through a unit's area of operations must be foreseen, planned for, and overcome.

Muslims often enjoy discussing religion with non-Muslim westerners. Many are curious of western culture and feel a sense of duty to share information on Islam. Religious discussion may even lead to a suggestion to convert to Islam. Servicemen must be prepared to politely reject the invitation to convert. Servicemen may state they cannot consider conversion because it would offend their family; Arabs will tend not to argue against this as family is an essential part of their culture, according to Margaret K. Nydell in her book *Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Modern Times*. Most Arabs will also understand the rejection if a servicemen is a devout Christian or Jew, as both are viewed as "people of the book."

Arabic Language and Communication

While multiple languages exist within Arab culture, Arabic is the written and spoken language of more than 150 million inhabitants of the Arab world. Arabic is the language of Islam. It is the language which the Qur'an was originally transcribed; therefore, Muslims view it as superior to all other languages. According to Wunderle, Arabic ranks only second to Japanese in terms of its sensitivity to context, meaning that one word may have several conflicting meanings depending on the context of its use. This means one could have several native speakers translate an Arabic document and result in as many different translations. This should be kept in mind when relying on linguists to translate written or recorded materials. Important materials should be translated by multiple linguists and their products compared to verify the content of the piece.

Communication with Arabic speakers requires the ability to "read" beyond what is being said and relies heavily on the understanding of nonverbal cues. Body language takes on extra significance in Arab culture. Arabs tend to be very melodramatic. One must pay special attention to the hand gestures, eye movements, touching, and emotions of Arabs during conversation. They may raise their voices or pound their fist on the table during dialogue. They are not normally as angry as they appear, however.



Brian Tierce

A 1st Infantry Division Soldier watches as an Iraqi Army soldier speaks with a civilian during a combined patrol in northwest Baghdad.

The use of emotion simply demonstrates deep and sincere concern for the subject of the discussion.

While Arabic tends to be a difficult language for Americans to learn, every effort should be made by American servicemen to learn the basics. This cannot be emphasized enough for counterinsurgency operations where the populace is the key terrain. Simple greetings and pleasantries can easily be learned by our servicemen and pay huge dividends when communicating with Arabs. While the knowledge of key phrases will not allow for in-depth conversations with Arabs, it demonstrates the serviceman's respect and willingness to learn about Arab culture and language. Such a gesture will not go unnoticed by a host country national.

Most communication between U.S. servicemen and Arabs will be done through interpreters, either American linguists or foreign nationals. Interpreters should be positioned to the side and spoken through, not spoken to. This means servicemen should maintain eye contact with the Arab they are trying to communicate with rather than looking to the interpreter when speaking. Servicemen should also remember the importance of using emotion in Arab culture; Americans are often viewed as being "coldhearted" by Arabs for their lack of emotion, according to Nydell. Linguists should mirror their serviceman's tone and attitude in order to help convey the desired sentiment. Servicemen should speak with poise and repeat important points for emphasis. If statements are soft spoken and made only once, Arabs will question a serviceman's convictions. While the use of emotion is important in communicating one's sincerity, servicemen must avoid swearing and obscenities that may be offensive in Arab culture, most notably blasphemous phrases such as "God damn it." Servicemen should also avoid sarcasm and dry humor as it does not translate well through an intermediary and may create confusion or misunderstanding when speaking with Arabs.

The Arab Family

The family is the base of Arab culture and society. Nothing matters more to an Arab than the protection and honor of his family. Family takes priority over an Arab's village, tribe, and country. It is every Arab's responsibility to look out for the welfare and integrity of their family. This loyalty

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influences all aspects of an Arab's life. Arabs will often put the welfare of their family before their own, as the group takes precedence over the individual in Arab culture. Arab families are patriarchal and hierarchal, meaning that fathers and elders dominate control over the family. The larger the family the better, as large families provide possible economic benefits, especially in regards to sons who will be responsible for caring for their parents in their old age. The larger the family and the more sons an Arab has, the more prestige and power his family earns.

Being that the family is such a source of pride for Arabs, servicemen should be encouraged to talk about each other's families when conversing with Arabs. This has proven to be an excellent means of breaking the ice and building relationships with Arabs. Servicemen should remember only to speak positively of their families. If a serviceman's parents came from humble or disadvantaged upbringings or the serviceman dislikes his parents or relatives, he should keep such information private, according to Nydell. When talking about children, servicemen must keep in mind that most Arabs will not understand the concept of planned families. Servicemen should not say they do not want more children or that children are too expensive, as comments of this nature may be misconstrued by Arabs.

Arab Marriage and Women

Marriage in Arab society is essential to maintaining strong families. Muslim women are not permitted to marry non-Muslim men, whereas Muslim men may marry women of any faith. This is to ensure that the children grow up in a Muslim household. Males normally marry in their late teens, with females being the same age or several years younger. In many Arab circles a dowry must be paid to the woman's family in order to validate the marriage. As many as one-third

of marriages are arranged between cousins; Arabs feel this helps maintain strong family ties. As a result, genetic problems result in nearly 10 percent of these marriages, according to Nydell. While many westerners associate Muslim Arabs with polygamy, the practice has become less common in modern times. Muslim polygamy was originally approved by Mohammad during the seventh century A.D. after early Muslim battles left many families without providers or breadwinners. While this custom is still practiced in rural areas of the Middle East, polygamy amongst Arabs is far less common than most westerners like to believe.

The rights of Arab women are often a topic of discussion by international human rights activists. Arabs claim Muslim women are separate but equal. In reality, their treatment varies largely from country to country. Some things remain relatively the same across the board in regards to Arab women. They must remain in separate parts of mosques and cannot lead a congregation in prayer when men are present. They receive only half the inheritance of a son; this is justified by the fact that daughters will marry and have a husband to support them. Due to the fact sons take care of their parents in old age, boys are preferred to girls in Arab society. While men can bring honor to an Arab family, women, by nature, can only bring dishonor and shame.

While Arab society values men more so than women, U.S. servicemen should not underestimate the influence and power of Arab women. Arab women control many aspects of the household. They manage household expenditures, raise and educate the children, and sometimes arrange marriages. Arab men show great respect for their mothers and must make every effort to obey their wishes. So while it appears that men make all of the decisions within an Arab society, they are undoubtedly influenced by the women in their lives, especially their mothers. For this reason, U.S. servicemen should treat Arab women, especially female elders, with the utmost respect as it may help to influence Arab men.

While servicemen should be respectful to Arab women, they must strike a delicate balance. Servicemen should refrain from showing too much interest in an Arab's female family members. They should not ask an Arab man about the well-being of his wife, sister, daughter, or mother; instead

servicemen should ask, "How is your family?" Males should refrain from touching or talking to Arab women if possible, instead using female service members to communicate. If servicemen must address Arab females, they must do so in a respectful manner. Older women should be addressed as "Hijjiya." This is similar to "ma'am" but shows even more respect in Arab society. Younger women should be addressed as "uKhtee," which means "my sister" and is similar to saying "miss" or "ma'am." It is important that servicemen treat Arab women properly to prevent negative exposure within the populace and to avoid possible repercussions taken against Arab women by their male relatives to maintain family honor.

Business Meetings

Arab culture is extremely relationship focused. Success often relies on who you know and the strength of relationships you have developed. Nydell wrote, "A good personal relationship is the most important single factor in doing business successfully with Arabs." When conducting a business meeting with Arabs, servicemen should not rush into matters of business. Arabs mistrust people who do not appear to have an interest in their personal well-being and will likely reject any business proposals if they feel hurried or pressured into them by U.S. servicemen. Instead, time should be spent drinking chia and exchanging pleasantries in order to build rapport and demonstrate an interest in the Arab. Servicemen may find it helpful to keep notes on important and influential Arabs they interact with on a regular basis. Notes should include number and age of children, family origins, and other family information that can be plugged into conversations in order to demonstrate the serviceman's sincerity and help build stronger relationships. While pleasantries may go on for longer than desired, it is important for servicemen to avoid looking at their watch during meetings with Arabs. Doing so may suggest to an Arab that you consider them unworthy of your time. Wait until a lull in the conversation before bringing up the true purpose of your visit.

Arab Hospitality and Guest Etiquette

Servicemen must know how to behave and what to expect when a guest to important Arab social, political, or military leaders. In Arab culture, generosity and hospitality are essential to a good reputation. The most important components of hospitality are formally welcoming a guest, offering the guest a seat, and offering something to drink. When offered a drink by Arabs, servicemen should accept at least a small amount to show esteem and respect to the host. The drink most often served is Arab tea, called chai.

Meals in Arab countries tend to take place later than Americans are used to. In many Middle Eastern countries, Arabs have a large midday meal around 1400 or 1500 and a late dinner around 2200 or 2300. It is important to note that guests will often arrive up to two hours early, as most conversation and business is conducted prior to the meal. Sometimes this leads to confusion when servicemen are invited to meals; some Arabs understand western culture and will take this into account when telling servicemen the time. It is



SSG Brendan Stephens

U.S. Soldiers and members of the Iraqi security forces enjoy a meal together.

important to clarify through an interpreter as to what time the servicemen should actually arrive. In Arab culture, it is a polite gesture to bring a small gift when invited to a meal. Many Arab military leaders will enjoy items that most U.S. servicemen take for granted, such as American candies, soft drinks, and tobacco.

Arab meals tend to vary from area to area. In rural areas, meals may consist of a single course eaten by hand. In urban areas, the meal may consist of several different courses eaten with utensils. Servicemen should follow the lead of the host, using his right hand to eat whether using utensils or not as the left hand is viewed as unclean. Servicemen should expect to be offered second and even third helpings of food and should politely accept at least one additional helping. Those more comfortable with Arab culture may begin by refusing additional helpings, only to allow themselves to be won over by the host's hospitality. This is known as a ritual refusal and is the custom in Arab culture. While taking an additional helping is polite, servicemen should not eat so much as to suggest there was not enough food prepared; this can be embarrassing to the host. After the meal, when preparing to leave, a host will often invite you to stay longer. This is simply proper etiquette and should not be taken literally. A serviceman may stay a few additional minutes but should not over stay his welcome.

When servicemen invite Arabs to a meal or social gathering they must keep these rules of hospitality in mind. Foods must be Halal, which means lawful according to Islam. Haram, or unlawful foods and drinks such as pork and alcohol, should not be present, whether meant for Arab guests or not. When planning a meal for Arabs, do not plan the amount of food needed too thoroughly. An over abundance of food should be presented as a show of hospitality and generosity. Leftovers can always be consumed later.

Favors and Requests for Help

Servicemen confronted by Arabs making requests for favors or help are often placed in a difficult predicament. On one hand, servicemen should realize that in a counterinsurgency the populace

is the key terrain and everything possible should be done to win their hearts and minds. On the other hand, as in the case of Iraq, we must work to make the Arabs autonomous and capable of operating without our assistance. To assist servicemen placed in this kind of predicament, it is important to understand the Arab etiquette for such a request.

If asked a favor, Arabs will generally try to help. If the request appears unreasonable, illegal or too difficult, an Arab will often hear out the request and offer to help. This offer is often an empty promise, however, and later the Arab will express his regrets and try to make up for it by offering to do something different for the requester in the future. It would be bad form for an Arab to openly refuse a favor when asked. Instead, an oral promise, even without intent of being carried out, has its own value within Arab culture. This means that U.S. servicemen should not take Arab responses to such requests at face value. When Arabs say “Yes” to your request, they are not necessarily saying that the action will be carried out; they may just be exercising good Arab etiquette. That “Yes” could simply mean, “Yes, I understand you,” rather than “Yes, I will.”

While Arab etiquette may require an oral promise to help when asked a favor, U.S. servicemembers must be particularly careful not to commit when put in this situation.

While we should not turn our backs on all requests for help made by Arabs, servicemen must thoroughly examine the potential impact of their commitments. Servicemen should never make promises which cannot be fulfilled. While servicemen should remember they are there to help the Arabs, they are not there to do their work for them. The best way for the U.S. to help Arabs, as in the case of Iraq, is to train them to use their own government channels and resources. This will lessen their dependence on U.S. forces and prepare them for life without American influence.

Constructive Criticism and Confrontation of Facts

When working with Arabs, it may be necessary for servicemen to offer criticism and advice from time to time. This is especially the case with the various types of U.S. transition teams currently embedded within Iraqi military and police forces. Much care must be taken when offering Arabs criticism. Constructive criticism does not translate into Arabic. Arabs often feel that criticism is a personal attack on them. Criticism should always be conducted in private and never in front of an Arab’s subordinates. To offer criticism to an Arab in a tactful manner, a serviceman should always start by pointing out the Arab’s accomplishments and positive attributes.

Praise at least part of their plan, then offer suggestions on how to improve it in a tactful manner, giving the appearance that changes are a simple modification to their plan. As T.E. Lawrence suggested, “Always approve them (their plans), and after praise modify them insensibly, causing the suggestions to come from him, until they are in accord with your own opinion.”

While providing constructive criticism to Arabs can prove difficult, confronting them about errors or mistakes can be even more frustrating. One must remember that to Arabs, honor is more important than facts. Arabs will rarely admit to errors openly if doing so will cause them to lose face. Even when faced with contradictory facts, many Arabs will deny having made a mistake and will begin to talk in circles in an attempt to shift blame for the mistake or deny it was ever made in the first place. This can be extremely frustrating to U.S. servicemen as they try to establish facts. While there is no easy way around this cultural trait, it is best circumvented by confronting the Arab in private, presenting contradictory facts in a non-hostile manner, and in such a way which allows him to save face.

Fatalism and Time Hacks

Fatalism is the belief that humans cannot control all events; some things depend on “God’s will,” or fate. While fatalism is more prevalent among traditional Arabs, it remains a serious issue for U.S. servicemen when working with Arabs. To Arabs, fatalism is a means of absolving themselves of responsibility and maintaining their honor while Americans often see it as a catchall scapegoat for poor performance or failure. When something goes wrong Arabs often state, “Inshallah” or “God wills it.” By stating this, they are claiming it was out of their hands and the outcome was the will of God, thus absolving them of all responsibility. Servicemen must do their best to demonstrate that Arabs have more control over their fates than previously thought, without undermining the Islamic faith or the power of God.

Fatalism also leads to a tendency to accept current circumstances as they are and wait for them to change by the power of God. This school of thought can be extremely meddling during reconstruction, as in the case of Iraq. Rather than take on the challenges faced by political and social reconstruction, many may stand idly by and



SRA Daniel Owen, USAF

Iraqi soldiers show a Soldier with the 6th Iraqi Army Military Transition Team the hand signals for a closed door entry during training in Iraq March 2.

wait for the country's situation to change, by what they believe to be the power of God. Such a lack of desire to help the situation can be extremely frustrating to U.S. servicemen as they work to stabilize an Arab country.

Where U.S. servicemen will encounter fatalism most frequently is in regards to time. Arabs do not view time as fixed and rigidly segmented as we do in the United States. When planning a meeting with Arabs, do not expect them to arrive on time. To most Arabs there is no such thing as hard times. Times serve more as general guidelines as to when a meeting is to take place. They will not rush themselves to arrive on time; if they are late, it is attributed to the will of God. This often results in Arabs being what we would consider fashionably late. Moreover, setting a specific time to meet an Arab does not necessarily constitute an appointment. Often no disrespect is meant by the Arab's failure to show; it simply means that "God willed something different," according to Wunderle.

Arab tardiness and disregard for time is unacceptable for military operations however. U.S. servicemen working with Arab military or police units must demand that time hacks be met. Servicemen should never take "Inshallah" for an answer when planning timelines. While demanding of precise times may appear unreasonably impatient to some Arabs, it is essential for successful military operations. To teach Arabs the importance of time hacks and keeping to a timeline, servicemen must sometimes use "tough love." Request an Air Weapons Team (AWT) for an operation with the Arabs. When the Arabs fall behind their timeline due to "God's will," send the aircraft back. When asked where the aircraft are, explain to them if they had kept to the timeline they would have had aircraft, but due to their tardiness, they were sent elsewhere. This will result in more timely execution for future operations.

Classes within Arab Culture

Most Arab countries have three distinct social classes. The lower class consists of the urban poor, peasants, and low-ranking soldiers. The middle class consists of moderately prosperous merchants, landowners, teachers, government employees, and military officers. The upper class is made up of royalty and large influential families. While conducting counterinsurgency operations, servicemen will regularly interact with Arabs of each social class.

Undoubtedly influenced by their fatalist beliefs, Arabs accept the social class to which they were born and make little effort to rise from one class to another. There is an old Arab proverb which states, "The eye cannot rise above the eyebrow," which means the eye cannot change its position in life, nor can an Arab. In the United States and other western societies, people strive to improve their station in life, but the same cannot be said for most lower class Arabs. Arabs generally accept their station in life and the inequality associated with it. Even in the rare occurrence an Arab is able to move up the social ladder, there is little respect for the "self-made man" in Arab culture. It will take several generations for a family which has improved its station in life to gain the respect of its new social class.

Upper class Arabs are not unlike the upper classes of western society. They are often well educated, demand respect from others, and are elitist in nature. While many servicemen view Arabs as uneducated and unintelligent, this is not the case. Many upper class Arabs have degrees from prestigious universities, including Ivy League schools in the United States. For this reason, servicemen should never underestimate an Arab's education or his ability to

As the U.S. military will undoubtedly continue to operate in the Middle East for the next several years, we must learn to treat Arabs with honor and respect. When we increase an Arab's honor, we gain a valuable ally in the fight for the local populace — the key terrain in any counterinsurgency.

speaking English. When working with upper class Arabs, it is important to show respect for their hierarchy and rank within society as they can bear a great deal of influence.

It is important to address Arab social classes in regards to the Iraqi military. In the days of Saddam, the Iraqi military was very top heavy. Officers came from the middle and upper classes and personally took charge of everything, giving little trust or responsibility to NCOs or the enlisted men which came from the lower classes. Today, undertones of this still exist as the United States helps to rebuild the Iraqi military. Rather than viewing NCOs as the backbone of the military, many Iraqi officers still view enlisted men as being members of the lower class and incapable of responsibility. To help defeat this attitude, U.S. officers should reinforce the importance of NCOs. Whenever an officer meets with an Iraqi military counterpart, he should bring one of his NCOs and suggest the Iraqi officer does the same. The U.S. servicemen should work to get the Iraqi NCO involved in the conversation, asking for his input on the topic of discussion. This, in conjunction with the exchange of information and ideas between American officers and NCOs as viewed by the Iraqis, should help to reinforce the importance of the NCO within the Iraqi military.

Arab Honor

Arabs live in an honor-shame based culture. They take their honor extremely seriously and will kill to defend it. The significance of Arab honor outdates their religion and has served as their culture's defense mechanism for several centuries. Infringements of honor are not easily forgotten. Even today, families in the Middle East wage personal wars on one another for wrong doings committed decades earlier. In many instances, the only way an Arab man can restore his honor is to shed the blood of his enemy.

As the U.S. military will undoubtedly continue to operate in the Middle East for the next several years, we must learn to treat Arabs with honor and respect. When we increase an Arab's honor, we gain a valuable ally in the fight for the local populace — the key terrain in any counterinsurgency. This can only be achieved through an in-depth understanding of Arab culture. While this article provides a brief cultural overview, it only scratches the surface of a much more comprehensive subject. Leaders must be meticulous with their study and share their knowledge with their subordinates rather than relying on pocket-size GTA cards with their lists of "do's" and "don'ts."

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A list of references for this article are on file and available through *Infantry Magazine*.
