

**TASK:** Arab Culture – Diversity Awareness for Pre-Deployment and Area of Operation Readiness

**CONDITION:** In a small group environment for discussion

**STANDARD:** All participants will be able to discuss leadership issues impacting Soldiers deployed to Iraq.

**TIME OF INSTRUCTION:** 2 hours.

**INSTRUCTOR GUIDANCE:**

- A. Involvement of all Soldiers is helpful to the effectiveness of this lesson.
- B. The ultimate goal of this training is to promote cultural awareness to enhance team building and cross-cultural relationships.

**LEAD IN:** *General Peter J. Schoomaker in his first speech as Chief of Staff of the Army, on 1 Aug 03, stated, “We are, have been, and will remain in a values based institution. Our values will not change and they are non-negotiable. Our Soldiers are Warriors of Character. They exemplify these values everyday and are the epitome of our American spirit.” This means that daily we live the Army values and we do the right things and make the right choices. As Soldiers we set the example, protect freedom, and serve with honor, dignity and respect.*

*During your deployment to Iraq as a member of 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division’s Warrior Team you should be aware of the unique customs and courtesies of the Iraqi and Arab people. As warriors from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division you play a vital role in the continued peace effort and are pivotal to the re-establishment of a free, democratic Iraq. As a Soldier of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division “Second to None”, you are a Soldier first and a Warrior always; combined with your warrior ethos, a thorough understanding of your environment is a major combat multiplier that makes you all the more lethal on the front lines in the war on terrorism. Every encounter with an Iraqi civilian is an opportunity to develop respect and trust in us as professionals.*

**DISCUSSION:**

1. In order for 2ID to continue to exist as a successful organization and remain battle-focused, 2ID leaders and Soldiers must continue to learn how to work along with local Iraqi nationals. A better understanding of the culture will enhance 2ID’s ability to succeed in its warrior fight mission.

Iraq has a population that is a little over 24.5 million. The majority of Iraqis are Arabs, though there is a sizable Kurdish minority that comprises 20% of the population. Algeria,

Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen comprise Arabian countries.

**Discussion Question:** What are some of the major concerns or problems an individual might face in a culturally diverse area of operation like Iraq?

2. US Soldiers hold rigid stereotypes and perceptions about Iraqis and other Arabs, which further create barriers to communication. The need to communicate is universal; however, the way US Soldiers communicate isn't universal. Although many barriers to communication exist, the most prevalent barrier other than language is the difference in culture. The best way to learn about a culture is to observe. Understanding assists in bridging the distance between our differences, key to being good will ambassadors in a foreign land. It is considered a sign of arrogance and a closed mind in the Arab culture to be aware of the differences and choose not to utilize that knowledge.

3. Like language, attitudes and behaviors are also an outgrowth of culture.

a. Webster defines attitude as a state of mind or feeling with regard to some matter, or disposition. An attitude is one's tendency to evaluate some symbol, object, or aspect of our world in a favorable or unfavorable manner.

b. Behavior is a result of one's reaction to a situation group, or person. Each person may see the same situation differently. Such differences are expressed in attitudes.

4. Perceptions Arabs have of Americans come from the depictions in the different sources of media, and the same goes for American perceptions of Arabs. Television and newspaper depictions of the US only show images mostly filled with violence, earthquakes, other natural disasters—newsworthy events like disasters, wars, and violence. When people have the same sources of news, most likely they might have the same conclusions about that culture or region.

**Discussion Question:** Have you ever heard on the news that things today are going smooth and there are no problems?

5. Most misunderstandings among Soldiers and Arabs result from cross-cultural experiences and do not necessarily occur from only one episode or misunderstanding. Sometimes Soldiers and Arabs involved in a cross-cultural exchange will become emotionally fixated on one or two components and miss the meaning or purpose of communication. Just like American customs, Arab customs are rooted deep in tradition. Many Arab values affect how Arabs communicate with each other and non-Arabs.

**Discussion Question:** What are some perceptions about the Arab culture that may contribute to or prevent misunderstandings between you and Arabs? What are some things you've learned about the Arab culture that could benefit other Soldiers in the area of operation?

6. At the heart of the Arab culture lies an understanding that one's life mission is to be unselfish, unattached to the material life, and devoted to family. The Arab culture encourages people to have sincere enjoyment in serving and helping others and the true reward one is seeking is to be loved, appreciated, and considered reputable by all. Arabs are encouraged to live by the following values: **being generous, honest, respectful, and loyal.**

7. An Arab worldview is based upon the following six concepts:

**a. Atomism.** Arabs tend to see the world and events as isolated incidents, snapshots, and particular moments in time. While Westerners look for unifying concepts Arabs focus on parts, rather than on the whole. They do, however, maintain a long-term memory over actions and events. It is important to point out that it is memory, not necessarily history that is important.

**b. Deep belief in God.** Arabs usually believe that many, if not all, things in life are controlled by the will of God (fate) rather than by human beings. What might appear as fatalism at first is more deeply a belief in God's power, sovereignty, active participation in the life of the believer, and authority over all things (i.e. business transactions, relationships, world events, etc)

**c. Wish versus reality.** Arabs, much more so than Westerners, express emotion in a forceful, animated and exaggerated fashion. Their desire for modernity is contradicted by a desire for tradition.

**d. Importance of justice and equality.** Arabs value justice and equality more than anything else. All actions taken by US forces will constantly be weighed in comparison to tradition and religious standards.

**e. Paranoia.** Arabs may seem to be paranoid by Western standards. Suspicion of US intent in their land and a cautious approach to American forces is a primary example. Some Arabs view all Westerners as either against the government or spies. Mistrust of Westerners runs deep.

**f. Family versus self.** Arabic communities are tight-knit groups made up of even tighter family groups and most often, a part of tribes. Most Westerners pride themselves on personal accomplishments versus that of the typical Arab whose focus is on family pride and honor.

8. All Arabs share basic beliefs and values that cross national and social class boundaries. It is important for Soldiers to be able to identify and distinguish these cultural patterns.

**a. Verbal communication:**

1) Avoid use of slang when talking to them; emphasis should be on speaking simple, clear English without slang. Some Arabs have high educational degrees from the US, Britain, France and other countries, and are very fluent in a second or third language; however, assume that they are not fluent in your native language.

2) Avoid talking to them about politics, religion, history and culture. Discussions should center on the family; however, not on a personal level that requires intimate details.

3) Avoid discussions about sex. This subject is considered very private and only talked or joked about among long time friends of the same gender. It is never discussed in a mixed gender setting.

4) Criticism is also a private matter to an individual in their culture. It is always done one on one, not in the presence of others. "Save Face" concept exists in their culture. The Arabian culture is a non-confrontational one which seeks the least conflict possible. A concept called "save face" is a way to solve conflicts and avoid embarrassing or discomfoting the parties involved. Saving someone's face or dignity involves using maneuvers or holding one's reactions to give the other party a way to exit the situation with minimal discomfort or harm to their dignity. It involves compromise, patience, and sometimes looking the other way to allow things time to get back to normal. The "save face" concept is looked at as a behavior of high quality ethics and manners.

**b. Greetings:** When greeting each other they take their time. This tradition is intended to show sincere interest in you as a human being; it is an expression of brotherhood and friendship. It is considered rude and could appear that you are not interested in gaining the person's respect if the greeting process is interrupted. During the greeting process Arabs will inquire about the following events: how things are going; if everything is well; and usually about the status of what you spoke about the last time.

**c. Nonverbal communication:** This refers to body movement and positions. In their culture as with written and verbal communication, nonverbal communication can be used to convey respect, honor, and friendliness, among other things.

1) Men greet each other with a handshake coupled with a kiss or two on both sides of the cheeks.

2) If one of them is an older man and they have family ties, or if the younger man has a great deal of respect for the older man, the younger man might kiss the forehead or the tip of the nose of the older man instead of his cheeks. The reason is because these are the highest points on the face and kissing them represents high respect and

esteem. If you aren't Arabic this form of greeting doesn't apply, a handshake is appropriate.

**d. Right hand rule:** When handshaking, eating, giving and receiving always use the right hand. It is also a sign of respect and an old part of their culture.

1) Never use the left hand unless, of course, the item you are handling is heavy.

2) When handing over papers and money it is transferred from hand to hand; avoid placing it or throwing it on a table.

**e. Touching:** Touching as a sign of closeness and friendship. Men in the Arabian world show closeness and friendship to each other by sometimes holding hands for a brief time when they are talking, walking, or escorting each other. They also pat each other on the back to express the same message.

**f. Positions of respect:** When standing or sitting Arabs try to avoid turning their back to anyone as a sign of respect. The soles of your feet should not point directly toward someone else. Do not allow the exposed sole of your foot/shoe to face a person, it is interpreted as a grievous insult, and considered extremely bad manners.

**Discussion Question:** What are some significant ways Soldiers can demonstrate their understanding and respect of the Arab culture while on the local economy or area of operation? Whose responsibility is it to know the basic customs and courtesies of the other group?

**CLOSING REMARKS:** The people in Iraq will be cautious towards Americans and other Soldiers of the coalition who overthrew Saddam Hussein. Most Iraqis see themselves as a persecuted people and hold the Coalition Forces, as the occupying power responsible for resolving all personal and national problems. It is beneficial to show tangible benefits or immediate positive impacts in exchange for cooperation. Due to this fragile relationship, US Soldiers need to respect Iraqi customs and culture and treat all civilians with dignity and respect. Remember, you are a representative of the United States while in Iraq. It will be important to use good judgment, tact, and diplomacy in any dealings you may have with the Iraqis. Learn about the culture as much as possible, try to know what is appreciated and what is disliked in their culture in terms of habits and traditions. Most Iraqis will be looking for any sign to reinforce their fears of American mistreatment.