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Middle Eastern mindset: Operational analysis and implications

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MIDDLE EASTERN MINDSET : OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

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Effective counterintelligence (CI) activity requires a thorough understanding of the adversary. Knowing tactical capabilities is obviously important, but insight into "mindset" can also have great strategic and tactical value. Mindset, in this context, refers to the frame of reference or "lens" of attitudes and experiences through which an individual sees and interprets events. Although certain elements of this frame may be unique to the individual, many aspects will have been learned through cultural assimilation.

Culture strongly affects the way individuals behave and accounts for many observed differences between groups. Carbaugh (1990) defines culture as "a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people." Every global society propagates its own array of beliefs, values and customs. These attributes combine to form cultures that influence how people think, behave and interact. Underlying these traditions are often many assumptions about how the world works. It is important for CI personnel to understand these institutional influences, particularly when interacting with individuals from different cultures, whether at home or abroad.

Without understanding an adversary's culture and mindset, CI personnel may be inclined to use their own frame of reference as a model to form estimates and analyses of others. This is a fundamental error in intelligence analysis, known as "mirror imaging."

Mirror imaging—projecting your thought process or value system onto someone else—is one of the greatest threats to objective intelligence analysis. Not everyone is alike, and cultural, ethnic, religious, and political differences *do* matter. Just because something seems like the logical conclusion or course of action to you

does not mean that the person or group you are analyzing will see it that way, particularly when differences in values and thought processes come into play (Watanabe, 1997).

Instead, the CI operator or analyst should use cultural knowledge to her or his strategic advantage. As Belbutowski (1996) has noted: "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" (p.34).

What is needed for the day to day operations of investigators and counterintelligence personnel is a practical "meta-framework"...

Cultural influences, while important, can be deep and complex. Some have suggested that to understand a culture, one must understand a multitude of dimensions, including: its general world view, assumptions about the natural world, religious beliefs and customs, holiday customs, values, child rearing beliefs and practices, self concept, social relationships, work ethic, concepts of leadership, personal space and fairness, rules of social etiquette, fashion, foods and eating habits, importance of time, notions of modesty, facial expressions and gestures, and concepts of beauty, including art, music, and literature. All CI personnel cannot be specialists in every country and culture. What is needed to support the day to day operations of investigators and counterintelligence personnel is a practical "meta-framework"; a limited number of operationally-relevant

behavioral domains, with general propositions that characterize a particular culture.

Heuristic cultural frameworks have been developed and applied in other disciplines. Perhaps the most prominent example is that of Dutch psychologist Geert Hofstede (2001). His model, intended to help facilitate effective cross-cultural communication in the business sector, is based on a series of five factors that often are referred to as Hofstede's dimensions:

- *Power Distance*: focuses on the degree of equality, or inequality, between people in the country's society.
- *Individualism*: focuses on the degree to which the society reinforces individual or collective achievement and interpersonal relationships.
- *Masculinity*: focuses on the degree the society reinforces, or does not reinforce, the traditional masculine work role model of male achievement, control, and power.
- *Uncertainty Avoidance*: focuses on the level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity within the society - i.e. unstructured situations.
- *Long-Term Orientation*: focuses on the degree the society embraces, or does not embrace, long-term devotion to traditional, forward thinking values (Hofstede, 2001).

In the nursing profession, Giger and Davidhizar (2002) created the "Transcultural Assessment Model" to facilitate "culturally competent care." They suggest that individuals be assessed according to six cultural phenomena: communication; space; social organization; time; environmental control; and biological variations. Perhaps not surprisingly, the Peace Corps also invests heavily in cross-cultural training for its volunteers. The Peace Corps' "Culture Matters" training program emphasizes the following five dimensions to conceptualize key cultural differences: Concept of self; personal vs. societal obligations; styles of communication; concept of time; and locus of control.

Operators and analysts ... need a practical and useful way to identify and assess cross-cultural behavior.

Operators and analysts engaged in CI activity also need a practical and useful way to identify and assess cross-cultural behavior. Existing heuristics developed for business or healthcare can inform that effort, but the issues arguably should be framed and labeled so that their operational relevance is more readily apparent. While there are many aspects of culture, this heuristic should focus on a limited set

of key propositions that shape thinking and allow personnel to understand their own behavior as well as others' within the differing cultural paradigms. Taking into account this limited set of variables will assist the investigator or operator in interpreting others' actions and in shaping their own, to produce desired outcomes. We propose, here, a preliminary CI-based heuristic framework for cross-cultural understanding, and then analyze Middle Eastern culture through the lens of the model.

We begin with the proposition that CI personnel wish not only to "understand" cross-cultural dimensions of behavior, but also to apply them to functional questions about how those factors are likely to influence decision-making and communication. To that end, we propose the following five domains:

1. *Perceptual Style*: The emphasis here is on cultural "filters" or learned patterns that can affect how people identify, recognize and interpret events. This information is useful for helping to anticipate how others are likely to react to a particular action or circumstance, to interpret and record the event in their memory and to communicate (or relate) it back to someone else. Two key aspects of perception style are *Time Orientation* (including an appraisal along the monochronic-polychronic dimension) and *Thought Process* (including an appraisal along the linear-associative dimension).
2. *Self-Concept*: This domain portrays the effect of culture on how people define, value and view themselves (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Self concept may include self-esteem, but is not limited to self esteem. It comprises those features that are most important or salient to an individual in defining his or her identity. Because people tend to behave - or at least *wish* to behave - in ways that are consistent with their self-concept, this information can provide a window into how someone is likely to act (or react) or why they acted (or reacted) as they did in a particular circumstance. Two key aspects of self-concept, from an inter-cultural perspective, are the continuum of *individualism vs. collectivism* and perceived *Locus of Control* (i.e., internal vs. external).
3. *Motivation*: Psychologists sometimes regard the field of "motivation" as the study of goal-directed behavior. In a broad sense, motivation can be seen as a psychological impetus (e.g., need, want, interest, or desire) that arouses or impels a person toward a particular action or goal. Knowing what motivates an individual to act is useful to CI personnel because it is a significant factor in interpersonal influence (e.g., influencing people to provide information, to adopt a point of view, or to engage in a particular

CIFA's Cultural Thumbnail Sketch

Perceptual Style

Monochronic

Time Orientation



Polychronic

Linear

Thought Process



Associative

Self-Concept

Individualistic

Individualism



Collectivistic

Internal

Locus of Control



External

Motivation

Approach Factors

Avoidance Factors

Guilt

Ethics/Constraints



Shame

Communication Patterns

Direct

Directness



Indirect

Low-context

Contextuality



High-context

behavior). Two key aspects of motivation are *Approach Factors* (desired outcomes we seek actively to obtain) and *Avoidance Factors* (undesirable outcomes we seek actively to avoid, e.g. dishonor).

4. *Ethics/Constraints*: Motivation and desire cannot be the sole determinants of behavior in a civilized society. There must be rules and mores that designate appropriate ("right") and inappropriate ("wrong") goals and means of achieving them. In other words, some force must act to keep people from doing whatever they want, to get whatever they want, whenever they want it. Often this guidance comes from a sense of morality, a shared "social contract", or a set of religious tenets. In any case, understanding a person's moral code or what constrains their behavior can help CI personnel in discerning, for example, the likelihood that certain tactics may or may not be used, or whether certain targets may or may not be deemed legitimate. A central aspect of this dimension is the extent to which moral behavior is governed through *guilt* (internal distress) or *shame* (social sanction).
5. *Communication patterns*: Communicating effectively requires knowing more than the fact that a sender transmits a message to a recipient. Verbal and nonverbal nuances can affect the *meaning* of a message, even more than the words themselves. In CI activity, understanding the intended message of an adversary's communication (whether delivered directly or intercepted) is absolutely essential, as is the ability to deliver a message that is "heard" in the way it was intended. In addition to culturally-learned patterns of verbal and non-verbal behavior (which can be critical), two key aspects of Communication Patterns are the extent to which communication tends to be *direct vs indirect* and the whether it tend to be *low-context or high-context* (the amount of implicit meaning carried by words and messages).

Individuals in the field need to view these generalizations not as absolute truths, but as hypotheses or working assumptions...

Having outlined the basic model, we proceed in the next section to apply these dimensions to describe Middle Eastern/ Arab culture, with particular attention given to their implications for CI activity. These descriptions are, of course, generalizations. The individual in the field needs to view these generalizations not as absolute truths, but as hypotheses or working assumptions that can be tested in specific situations. These propositions may be set aside if they are not useful in developing and maintaining relationships and acquiring information.

Middle Eastern Culture and Mindset

The region known as the Middle East, and the culture of its Arab inhabitants, are steeped in history and tradition (Barakat, 1993; Cleveland, 1999). The people of the Arabian Peninsula proudly trace their origins to the nomadic Bedouins, who founded much of the traditional Arab culture and values on concepts such as courage, hospitality, honor, generosity, and self-respect (Hourani, 1992; Patai, 2002). Notable differences do exist both among and between different Arab countries; however, Arabs, generally, do tend to be more homogenous than Americans in their outlook on life and they do tend to adhere to their cultural identity. They are demonstrative, emotional, generous and hospitable, while maintaining the rules and expectations to which they are bound. Their cultural system has developed over centuries and provides an accepted behavioral repertoire that guides and dominates their daily life. Their social attitudes, for example, have remained relatively stable due, in part, to the fact that Arab society is static and highly values tradition. Moreover, many of their basic beliefs and values are strongly influenced by the centuries-old religion of Islam. (Nydell, 2002)

Perception Style

As we noted, *Time Orientation* and *Thought Process* are two significant factors affecting a perceptual style. If you asked a typical Westerner to recount for you a particular event, he or she would most likely begin the narrative about the time of the event's onset, relay relevant factual elements in the order in which they occurred, and then describe how the event concluded. The informant may or may not spontaneously include an explicit time estimate of the story, but he or she could readily do so. This reflects a characteristic Western perceptual style that tends to be monochronic and linear. A monochronic style sees time as a constant and a primary frame of reference. An event is, in part, defined and bounded by when it began and ended (Whitrow, 2003). People adjust their behavior to a schedule and to the demands of time. Time, therefore, is a key measure. A linear style is one that perceives, interprets and stores information in a logical, sequential order (e.g., first, this happened, then she said that, and finally, it was over) (Dahl, 2001). Persons from the Middle East would likely neither perceive nor relay events in the same way.

More typical of the Arab or Middle Eastern mindset is a perceptual style that is polychronic and associative. In a polychronic style, time is neither fixed, nor is it of central importance. It is, rather a tool to be used and adjusted to meet the needs of people. Time (or schedule) does not drive people's behavior, but rather people *use* time to meet their needs. Time is used to enhance relationships. The willingness to spend time in seemingly unproductive manner is a measure of how the relationship is valued. The speed and directness so valued in American culture can significantly inhibit the

development of relationships in the Middle East that lead to trust and information-sharing. For Middle Easterners, time is viewed as plentiful, not as limited or precious.

Related to a looser conception of time is a more general pattern of associative thinking. While the traditional Western, linear style is grounded in logic, rationality, and cause and effect connections, an associative style is guided by intuitive or perceived connections or relationships between ideas, people or events (Norenzayan, Smith, Jun Kim, & Nisbett, 2002). It is less concrete and more abstract – so much so that it is difficult even to characterize an “associative” style in “linear” terms. For Westerners, associative processes are to be used primarily for creative endeavors, not for problem solving and communication. For Arabs, associations (..and that reminds me of...), rather than time, are the underlying structure of experience.

Thinking tends to be guided by a network of symbolic, internal representations of people, ideas, and events that provide meaning to what is being perceived, processed, or remembered. Associative thinking, therefore, triggers not only memories or thoughts about a discrete event, but also all possible associated memories, ideas, and feelings that are networked to the event. As a result, information is not necessarily valued or retrieved according to its placement in a timeline, but rather by its associations with other nodes in the individual’s life experience and in the cultural history (Zebian & Denny, 2001).

To the extent that CI personnel communicate or interact with Middle Easterners, understanding their perceptual style will be essential. When eliciting information, time cues will be less helpful than associative cues. Determining what kind of associative cues work best for a given individual may take some time and active listening in non-goal-directed conversation.

Understanding associative thinking patterns can also help CI personnel to develop reasonable expectations for listening and to make more appropriate attributions and interpretations of a person’s story. Imagine, for example, that an individual whose identity is in question is captured in enemy battlespace. During an initial debriefing, a HUMINT collector asks the detainee to explain how he came to be there. The detainee begins talking about the land his family has proudly farmed for seven generations. He tells about several relatives who were good and trusted men. He even tells a couple of “side stories” about them. When the interviewer attempts to focus and redirect the responses to information about how he came to be at the place where he was captured, the detainee agrees to provide the information and continues the discussion of the land and his family.

The interviewer may conclude that the detainee is being evasive, that he is nervous and rambling, or that he is being

defensive and resistant. For a Westerner, the responses may seem inappropriate. For the Middle Easterner, this may not be a ploy, but a genuine attempt to provide information to the interviewer that will help establish the detainee’s *bona fides*. Associational thinkers often will bring into a conversation everything that, in their mind, has some connection to the content. Their telling of a story or an event may seem to double back on itself and repeat. Stories with variations and exaggeration may be prominent (Patai, 2002). The detainee in the example may be trying to be responsive, although – technically – he is not answering the question in the way the interviewer intended. To the American, though, such chatter may seem undirected and irrelevant.

CI personnel acculturated to think in a linear way, will need to apply the art of active listening and learn to monitor multiple themes that are interwoven in any single conversation. Middle Easterners may not convey information in discrete units, with each following a single theme. The associations are what, to them, give meaning to the event. They would find it difficult to relay meaningful information without slogging through the cognitive, emotional, and relational “bunny trails.” It will be up to the listener to discern and organize any relevant information according to his own needs. The listener, not the speaker must adapt. What seems like a tangent or irrelevant detail may actually be the key to understanding the event, the individual and the message he is communicating.

...cultural assumptions that underlie the meaning of time and its relationship to other issues, dramatically affect human behavior...

For the CI operator, the Middle Easterner’s associative style also means that specific data, such as exact dates and times of incidents, are unlikely to be stored chronologically, but instead, locating the incident in time will require that they associate them to people, actions, and events (Zebian & Denny, 2001). For example, the time of occurrence may be related to habitual behavior or the lack of such behavior (e.g., “I remember that it was on the day the he did not come to the market as is his habit and that was because a sand storm was blowing, so it was on a day last month when the sand storm was blowing hard enough that he did not come to the market as was his habit...”). Time points may also be determined by associated characteristics of the physical environment (e.g., “It occurred just after the rising of the full moon.” *What time was that?* “I don’t know but I clearly remember the moon had just risen and I thought how beautiful the moon is tonight and how light the night will be. I shall be able to see my way home without any other light just as when I was a child and ...”).

The cultural assumptions that underlie the meaning of time and its relationship to other issues, dramatically affects human behavior (Whitrow, 2003). The associative style extends also to the way many Middle Easterners think about time in historical perspective. Westerners gauge history by dates. Arabs are more likely to mark time periods by events. For most Arabs, historical context is essential to making sense of a current situation. They view within history a series of challenges with successful or failed solutions that can be applied to current challenges. For most Americans, history is linear. It is the forward marching of time, punctuated by discrete events (Whitrow, 1988; 2003). Cultures in other areas of the world, including the Middle East, view the course of history as a cyclic with events flowing together. Because Middle Easterners tend to believe fate accounts for where one's life has been placed in the cycle, they are continuously looking back to what has happened before and how others handled the challenges that are similar to those they now face.

Self Concept

The relative emphasis placed on individualism vs. collectivism and the determinants of control over one's life differ markedly between American/Western and Middle Eastern cultures (Triandis, 1990, 1995). In defining their identity – who they are - Americans place a high value on autonomy and individuality. They tend to pride themselves most in the attributes that are unique or that set them apart from others. The cultural influence is strongly oriented toward individualism (Bochner, 1994).

Arabs and other Middle Easterners tend to define their self-concept and identity, not by what sets them apart, but primarily in terms of their connection and sense of belonging to a larger group. Historically, the larger group has been the tribe or the clan. While each human life may have unique value to close relatives; the contribution to the collective or larger group determines the ultimate value and meaning of life. Identity is found in the interactive meaning of the tribe or the clan, unlike the American search for meaning which resides in the individual (Buda & Elsayed-Elkhouly, 1998). The loss of any individual, while always important to the family, is important to the collective because of its affect on the group's goals (Yeh & Hwang, 2000). The individual finds full meaning in making whatever sacrifice is necessary for the good of the collective group, to include loss of one's own life (Triandis, 1995). The Middle Eastern culture is strongly oriented toward collectivism, but this does not necessarily mean Middle Easterners are necessarily more altruistic. Their devotion to the collective really applies only to a narrow social field – an ingroup. Those beyond the ingroup can fend for themselves.

The other key cultural aspect of self-concept is what psychologists call "locus of control" (Rotter, 1966). The term

technically refers to the extent to which people believe that they control whether they are reinforced for their behavior. It is conceptualized as a continuous dimension of belief that an individual is either largely responsible for what happens to him or her in life (internal) or that his or her experiences and lot in life is determined mainly by other people or forces, such as luck (external). People with an internal locus of control believe that "life is what I do." Those with an external locus of control believe "life is what happens to me." Although there is individual variation, different cultures also tend to predispose one's perceptions in one direction or the other (Abraham, 1983).

People with an internal locus of control believe that "life is what I do."

American culture emphasizes an internal locus of control (Lefcourt, 1982). Indeed, self-determination is arguably a central tenet of the American Dream – that if you work hard and obey the rules, you can advance your lot in life and be accomplished anything you wish. Parents labor to impart to their children a strong sense of responsibility and admonish them to "make good choices." Even the American legal system is based on the presumption that individuals have free will and are justly accountable for the consequences of their actions. Notions of fate and luck tend to have little weight for Americans in understanding behavior or events. Blaming others is seen as irresponsible and immature.

In Middle Eastern/Arab culture, the course of one's life and experiences is believed to be predetermined and driven largely by fate and by the will of Allah. Their cultural predisposition is toward an *external locus of control*. If one is born into poverty or to a particular class, it is because Allah willed it. The individual should be motivated to follow, rather than defy, God's will (Welton, Adkins, Ingle, & Dixon, 1996). A Middle Easterner might say of his future: "Much of my fate was fixed at birth, depending upon to whom I was born and whether my parents had wealth, privilege, or status. Allah exercised his greatest impact on my destiny when He created the circumstances of my birth."

This fatalistic view is plainly evident in the expression "*Inshallah*" (or "God willing"), which is used liberally in the Middle East whenever one refers to a future event. For example, as two friends are leaving each other, one may say "I will see you next week Brother, Inshallah." What he means is that he hopes or intends to see his friend next week, unless in the divine plan of Allah – the merciful, the compassionate – he is fated to fall off a cliff and be washed out to sea or befall

some similarly catastrophic end, in which case, he won't make the meeting.

The degree of responsibility a person takes (or perceives) for his life is a major factor in self-concept. If an individual is only a pawn living out a predestined life, adhering to laws created primarily to protect and regulate behavior may seem unnecessary. The individual is not to blame for transgressions; life happens according to God's will. If it is Allah's will, it will happen. Conversely, if it is not Allah's will, it won't. Fate balances the positive and the negative in one's life. Some may even become fearful if too many good things happen to them because it may portend an onslaught of bad luck (Cohen-Mor, 2001; Early, 1997). Many Middle Easterners do not see or subscribe to the cause and effect conceptualization that is so easily accepted in American society.

Understanding self-concept will be important to formulating an effective strategy to communicate with, influence, or direct another's behavior.

CI personnel should understand how Middle Easterners may see the world differently. Americans in the law enforcement and intelligence community have become accustomed to influencing others by appealing to people's self interest and presenting them scenarios and choices within which they can determine their fate. These strategies may be much less effective with Arabs and Middle Easterners.

People, generally, are motivated to behave – and to appear to others to behave – in ways that are consistent with their fundamental attitudes and self-concept (Festinger, 1957). Understanding self-concept will be important to formulating an effective strategy to communicate with, influence, or direct another's behavior. With persons acculturated in the Middle East, appeals to the interests of *significant* others (those in an "ingroup" e.g., family, fellow Muslims) may be more persuasive than appeals to self-interest. Reinforcing a benefit to the ingroup collective, may resonate more strongly than flattering or praising a person's individual qualities. Attempting to "empower" or entice a person to act in a particular way so as to cause a specific outcome may be unpersuasive or confusing, for those who believe that events or consequences only occur *Inshallah*.

Ethics/Constraints

A third category of culturally-influenced behavior is ethics. Ethics reflect the moral distinctions people makes between good and evil, or between right and wrong. People

within and between cultures typically subscribe to some "code of conduct" that guides and – importantly – constrains their behavior. The idea of conscience is essentially an operating, internalization of this code. Violating that code, among Westerners, typically precipitates guilt. Anticipating guilt, therefore, constrains their behavior. Experiencing guilt leads to negative thoughts and feelings. American law enforcement and intelligence personnel often use this predictable reaction to create dissonance (i.e., internal conflict between what we do and what we should do) and anxiety that may break down defenses or lead to a confession. These strategies are unlikely to carry the same power with Middle Easterners.

Shame, rather than guilt, seems to be the major constraining emotional force among Middle Easterners (Patai, 2002). Shame and guilt operate differently. Shame is a negative emotion that results from the dishonor of being discovered in improper circumstances, situation or activities – violating the code of conduct. Guilt is an internal (intrapsychic) response that retains potency independent of its social context. Shame is a social phenomenon that loses potency outside a social realm. While guilt is self-inflicted, shame is caused by others passing judgment (Emde & Oppenheim, 1995). The important practical implication of this is that guilt responses can occur when only the individual knows he has broken the rule. They operate internally. Shame responses can occur only if *others* know about the rule breaking behavior (Patai, 2002). If given the chance to circumvent rules without the possibility of detection, individuals will likely do so (Rosen, 2005).

In shame-based cultures, the individual is encouraged to devote more psychological energy to understanding and predicting the response of others if and when a transgression is discovered. The use of excuses, alternative explanations and the transfer of responsibility of action to others, including Allah, are prominent features in the Middle Eastern culture. This is clearly different than in American culture where the acts of confession, acceptance of responsibility and repentance bring respect and closure to the difficulties arising between individuals. Bringing up the transgression in a Middle Eastern culture results only in loss of face, potential shaming of the other and heightened risk of conflict (Tangney, 1995). Lacking a concept of forgiveness, Middle Eastern culture focuses on revenge to remedy shame when it occurs.

While investigators and case officers may be accustomed to working toward and gaining a "confession" from a subject of interest, this may not be the appropriate angle or approach to take with a Middle Eastern subject. There is no "relief" to be had from "getting it off one's chest." Instead, there is only shame from this disclosure of wrongdoing and anger at the person who brought about the shame (i.e., the interviewer for making it known). Even if you have them "dead to rights", a person acculturated in the Middle East is highly unlikely to

relent and say: "I did it." This is so, not only because the subject may be trying to avoid personal responsibility, but also because in their cultural frame of the reference they didn't "do it" out of personal drive but it was *done* (notice even the shift in tense) because *Allah*, who predestined all things - has willed it. Within a framework where *Allah* determines all actions, the individual becomes only an *instrument*, not the *cause*.

What might an investigator or interviewer expect, then, when gathering information from a subject about his or her own wrongdoing? Middle Easterners, in their own nonlinear way, will often provide the *elements* of the event just not the final admission that "I did it." One may admit to you that he has feathers, that he eats grain, that he flies, and that he goes quack (the elements of the events). If you ask directly, however, if he is a duck, the answer will likely be an exasperated: "No." He will be frustrated that the interviewer did not understand he was telling him he did the act, without saying: "I did it" (Chen & Starosta, 1998). For the Middle Easterner, the whole purpose of the communication was to give the elements of the action within their associative context so the interviewer *understands*. The interviewer is told what he needs to know while still maintaining the relationship.

In Middle Eastern history rules and laws have primarily functioned as tools of oppression by those in power.

In much of the Middle East, the culturally-shared code of conduct is grounded in Islamic religious doctrine. Teachings from the *Qu'ran*, *Sharia*, *Hadiiths* and *Sumna* specifically are the primary source of authority and provide guidance on penalties for transgressors. God's law is regarded as absolute and unchanging. Laws that come from political rulers, particularly secular ones, carry much less weight. This is so, in part, because transgressing against God's law brings greater shame than transgressing against man's law. Also, though, in Middle Eastern history rules and laws have primarily functioned as tools of oppression by those in power. Governmental law has never been seen as a force for protecting individuals or their rights. Laws have been selectively enforced to punish political and religious opponents and to enrich and consolidate the power of those in control (Hourani, 1992; Rosen, 2005; Sullivan, 2003). Therefore, when power changes occur, interpretation and enforcement of laws by subgroups are expected to change (Lamb, 1987).

A hypothetical Middle Easterner might articulate his approach to secular rules, laws and authority in the following way:

Governments are not here to help me but to keep me from gaining all I could gain if they were not in power.

I do not expect them to treat all people equally. Perhaps the oppressed can sometimes wrestle rewards from those who would otherwise oppress them, but this - as all things - happens only according to the will of Allah, who does as he wishes. Life is full of indirect routes that my brothers and I can use to circumvent rules designed to oppress me and give advantage to others. Why would I follow a rule of man that was not to my advantage? I would not. Because Allah's will always shall prevail, it really does not even matter whether I follow the rules or not. If, for example, I run this traffic light and it is not Allah's will for me to be killed or have an accident, I shall be fine. If it is Allah's will for me to die, it doesn't matter how closely I follow the traffic laws, someone will hit me and I shall die.

While secular laws are malleable and often disregarded, sacred law is immutable and not only transcends rulers, it applies to rulers (Glazov, 2005). The common person in the Muslim world believes that adherence to *Sharia* and Islamic law, which is incorruptible, presents their only hope of ever being treated fairly. Interpretations of Islamic law fall within the purview of the religious class, which theoretically, though not always practically, should provide some balance against oppressive rulers. Westerners tend to believe that laws and rules should be applied equally to everyone. This is the foundation of "fairness."

Middle Eastern culture, however, has a more *particularist* orientation. Fairness is not expected. The way in which rules, laws, and rewards are dispensed depends on the circumstances and the people involved. What Americans might see as "cronyism" in handling power would be expected and accepted in the Middle East. Those not in power know they would behave the same way if they had it. Therefore, the laws of men have little binding force and individuals more routinely circumvent, break or subvert those laws. Working around worldly rules becomes an art form in the Middle East.

The collectivist orientation of Middle Eastern culture also brings a social dimension for ethical/moral reasoning. Americans often orient their moral compasses by asking themselves: "What is best for me in this situation?" Effects on others, if considered at all, would be secondary. The emphasis on self-fulfillment comes often at a cost to family, children, and other social structures, which in the Middle Eastern culture would be seen as more important. Their collectivist orientation toward the "greater good" of their ingroup weighs more heavily in their decision-making. Not to do so could result in actions more likely to bring shame (Bellah, 1986; Yankelovich, 1998).

Middle Eastern culture can also affect ethical and moral decision making in more subtle, but no less important ways. In an earlier section we discussed how, in collectivist societies,

an individual's social value is determined primarily by his or her contribution to the collective. American culture tends to pride itself on its egalitarian posture, exemplified in the constitutional proposition that "all men are created equal." A corollary notion is that all people should be treated with equal respect. In Middle Eastern culture, however, there is a more prominent and pervasive division among classes of people and between those with and without power. This is similar to Hofstede's (2001) concept of "power distance." To the Middle Easterner, ignoring or dismissing a person of lower status is not seen as a social transgression. The differential value is culturally embedded.

Investigators and intelligence analysts are somewhat accustomed to thinking about how a person's ethical or moral code might be used to assess or influence their behavior. Intelligence threat assessments will often consider the nature and strength of an adversary's attitudes toward a target group when forecasting whether they might be likely to attack and if so, with what means. With regard to terrorism specifically, some commentators have noted, for example, that religiously based justifications for violence may carry greater weight in impelling action than secular/social justifications (Borum, 2004; Hoffman, 1998). For CI operational personnel, knowing an adversary's ethical code of conduct, sources of moral authority, and moral constraints (e.g., guilt or shame) can help to understand and, in some cases, forecast their behavior.

Motivation

Motivation is the central issue in what drives human behavior. Although many specific motivational theories exist, broadly conceived, people are motivated to behave in ways that increase the chance of rewards and desirable outcomes (which psychologists call approach factors) and decrease the chance of negative results and consequences (which psychologists call avoidance factors) (Dollard & Miller, 1950). What constitutes a desirable or undesirable outcome, however, is in part culturally determined. Rewards are assessed according to whether outcomes help meet our needs, goals, values, and interests – all of which have a strong cultural element.

Being part of a collectivist society, approach and avoidance factors for Middle Easterners tend to have a stronger social component than is typically true for Americans. Wealth and power, for example, might be seen in the West as common external markers of success or measures of a person's worth. Americans may be driven by achievement needs to move toward those approach factors (Abu-Saad, 1998). Conversely, they may seek to *avoid* poverty, discomfort, deprivation, perceived weakness, or loss of self-esteem.

Middle Easterners may also desire to expand their sphere of influence, but this is not accomplished by accumulation of

wealth, but by *wasta*. *Wasta* is an Arabic term that refers to one's network of interpersonal connections (and who is in one's ingroup). Corporate-minded Westerners might use the terms like "pull" or "juice" to refer to a similar phenomenon. *Wasta* is enhanced by building and maintaining important ingroup relationships.

Among the most salient avoidance factors for Middle Easterners is loss of face and the shame associated with it (Tangney, 1995). Face is a publicly acknowledged or perceived sense of respect or dignity (Ting-Toomey, 1990). Losing face, in Middle Eastern culture, is to be avoided at nearly any cost, and – consequently – preserving face takes precedence even over truth (Ho, 1976).

Middle Easterners... see status as an ascribed state...

Americans and Middle Easterners also differ in *how* they seek to meet their needs and goals. Americans, viewing themselves as self-determined, believe status is earned and maintained by merit, and, therefore they endeavor to earn and achieve it (Abu-Saad, 1998). Middle Easterners, believing that fate accounts for most of what happens to them in life, see status as an ascribed state based largely on the family and station into which you were born and who is in your ingroup (Al-Zahrani & Kaplowitz, 1993). Conversely, attempting to avoid bad things from happening is perceived as largely futile, because all things happen according to fate and the will of God (Welton, et al., 1996).

Most CI activity, both at tactical and strategic levels, requires some appraisal of an adversary or target's motivation. In assessing or communicating with persons from Middle Eastern countries, it is useful for CI personnel to understand, from a cultural perspective, what they may be likely to see as a possible and desirable objective or outcome to obtain, as well as what outcomes they wish most to avoid. When developing a plan to recruit a source, a case officer would want to assess and understand the source's motivation, both to be sure the story made sense and to know how best to guide and direct the source's behavior in the future. Operations may fail or be irreparably damaged by working from the assumption that all people or people for all cultures are basically motivated in the same way, and by the same factors.

Communication Patterns

Central both to cultural expression and to relationships of all kinds is the ability to communicate. Communication is a transactive process – meaning that that the sender,

message and receiver all influence each other. What a person *intends* to convey when sending a verbal, nonverbal or written message, may not be the message the receiver takes in. Individual and cultural values, attitudes, and customs can all affect the meaning or interpretation of communication. While we don't address all the nuances here, in this section, we describe for CI personnel several key culturally-influenced dimensions of interpersonal communication as they apply to people from Middle Eastern countries.

The first order consideration for understanding Middle Eastern communication patterns is the fact that interpersonal relationships and impression management are of paramount importance (Cheek & Hogan, 1983). As we noted above, Middle Easterners do not want to lose face with others, but they also do not wish to bring shame on others. The accepted tone of communication is polite and harmonious. To inject disagreements or criticism is to breach the harmony of the relationship and disrespect the other person. The implication of this, of course, is that in a normal, respectful interaction, a Middle Easterner is very unlikely to state a disagreement with the speaker's ideas (even if he has them) or to deny any requests made of him (even if he cannot or will not comply). It would be a major social breach to say "no" to someone directly. Without understanding this pattern, a CI operator and Middle Eastern subject could depart an interaction with a very different perception of what transpired and what actions would be likely to follow.

The norm of polite, harmonious interactions is part of larger cultural pattern/preference for more indirect modes of communication. This contrasts sharply with the typical American style where directness and forthrightness are admired and valued. Conversations beginning with "let me get straight to the point" would likely be perceived as an affront. Even if a meeting is called with the express purpose of discussing a specific issue, a good amount of time will be spent up front exchanging pleasantries and small talk, without discussing any controversial topics. What Americans perceive as the substance of the discussion might occupy no more than ten percent of the total time spent together. Middle Easterners value most, however, the time taken to develop the relationship (Hofstede, 1984).

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When a topic of controversy is broached, or if disagreement is introduced, in Middle Eastern culture it must be done in a very indirect way. If a person was training someone to use a firearm and after several attempts, the trainee continued to pull the trigger with the safety engaged, insisting that the gun

would not work, an impatient instructor might be inclined to say: "It's not broken, you just forgot to turn off the safety again." The culturally-informed instructor, however, might say: "Brother, your stance and elbow position are very impressive. I wonder if, on your next try, the gun might fire better for you with the safety disengaged." Understatement is a commonly used device. For the Middle Easterner, sparing the person's feelings is more important than imparting the instruction (or telling the truth, for that matter).

When indirect communication is the order of the day, people must be able to read between the lines. In the lingo of those who study language and culture, this is called *high context communication* (Hall, 1976, 1982, 2000; Hall & Hall, 1990). *Contexting* refers to the amount of communication that is embedded in the words of the explicitly transmitted message. In low context cultures, the words themselves convey most of the intended meaning. In high context cultures, the explicit message (words) carry much less of the meaning. According to Hall (1976), in *high context communication*, "most of the information is either in the physical context or initialized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message." (p. 79). The phrase "*OooRah*", for example, when spoken between two US Marines carries a great deal of embedded meaning. Outside of that context, the meaning would be different. On the other end of the social spectrum, the word "Dude" when spoken between certain teens, can carry a multitude of meanings – including contradictory ones. The *intended* meaning can only be understood in context.

In homogenous, collectivist cultures, like the Middle East, high context communication is the norm (Trandis, 1987). Contextual cues pertaining to time, place, relationship, and situation are necessary to accurately interpret the meaning of a message. If you have ever had a phone conversation in which you were trying to keep the content secret from someone nearby who might be listening (e.g., planning a surprise party, when the "guest" can hear one end of the conversation), you will understand the essence of high context communication. To an outsider, the communication may seem coded or ambiguous. In fact, ambiguity and silence are artfully used rhetorical devices in high context cultures (Donghoon, Yigang, & Park, 1998; Heath, 1983).

CI personnel need to understand, when communicating with Middle Easterners, what you hear is not necessarily what you get. It would be nearly impossible for a Westerner to gather accurate, reliable information from, or communicate meaningfully with, from someone from a Middle Eastern culture without having first invested time in developing a relationship. Relationships and serious discussions evolve fairly slowly. Directness and efficiency are barriers to effective communication. Once the relationship is developed, the Middle Easterner will be motivated to maintain harmony and a cooperative tone, so much so that it becomes more important

than “telling the truth.” They will rarely say “no” to you directly, regardless of the request. They may not intend this to deceive, but rather assume you operate by the same social rules, that you will understand the “context” of the response and read between the lines to discern the real meaning.

Conclusion

CI personnel working in either the operational or analytic spheres routinely acknowledge the importance of knowing one’s adversary. We have argued here that culture - “a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people” (Carbaugh, 1990) – is an important facet of that understanding. Broad-brush descriptions of any given culture are necessarily generalizations and, therefore, should be viewed as hypotheses about the behavior one might anticipate from any given individual.

Broad-brush descriptions of any given culture... should be viewed as hypotheses about the behavior one might anticipate...

Because CI personnel have to *apply* cultural knowledge to specific questions and tasks, they would likely benefit from having a device or framework that focuses on operationally-relevant dimensions of human behavior. We present a heuristic with five behavioral domains: Perceptual Style; Self-Concept; Motivation; Ethics/Constraints; and Communication Patterns, outlining implications of each for CI operators and analysts.

Our substantive focus in the paper, however has been to analyze Middle Eastern/Arabic culture through the lens of this heuristic. We conclude that, for Middle Easterners, time is not limited and scheduled, but it is plentiful. Time is not a marker of events, rather, events are a marker of time. They also tend to think associatively, not in a linear, chronological, “cause and effect” kind of way.

Self-Concept in Middle Eastern culture – as is true in many parts of Asia - tends to emphasize the “collective” (or membership) aspects of a person’s identity, not what makes them unique. Middle Easterners do not perceive that they direct their own fate or future, but that their life has been set by God on a predestined course. They believe their actions and choices have little, if any, effect on what happens to them.

Cultural influences have taught them to seek and build relationships as a platform for influence (*Wasta*), and to avoid shame and loss of face at all costs. These incentives motivate much of their behavior. The implication is that their ethical/

moral framework is much more socially driven than is true for most Westerners.

Finally, communication patterns among Middle Easterners tends to be very indirect, particularly when expressing disagreement, correction, or sensitive topics. Accordingly, it is a very “high-context” culture, where words carry very little of the meaning in any communication. Contextual cues, and the presence of people, time, tone, or circumstances are much more important to discerning a person’s intended meaning.

Being attuned to the nuanced differences in how people from other cultures relate to themselves, others, and their environment can help CI personnel to avoid the “mirror imaging” problem and to more accurately assess and forecast and adversary’s behavior. We appreciate, completely, that operators and analysts cannot all be country/regional specialists, nor can (or should) they be armchair anthropologists. We see the advantage of having a practical, “thumbnail sketch” of a given culture to use for operational purposes. We aspire to apply the five-part heuristic model presented here to other cultures in the future, and with the benefit of feedback from CI field personnel, to refine and improve this effort over time to make practical cultural knowledge more accessible to the counterintelligence community.

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