

# **CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY**

## **LANGUAGE OF THE MIND**

### **The Marine Advisor**

**Preparation for Duty Overseas**



### **Motivational Comparison**

### **U.S. Marine Advisors vs. Arab Muslims**

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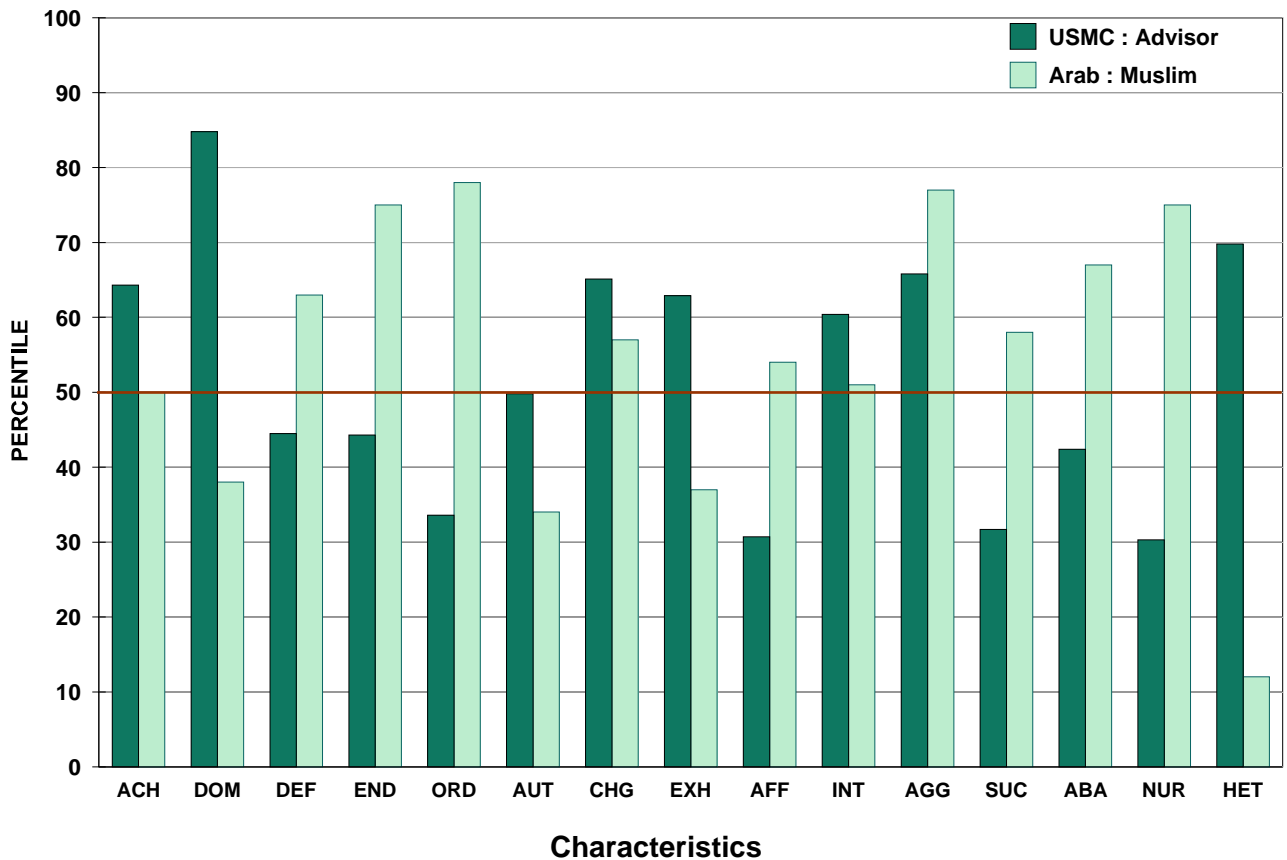
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**Insight**

Insight is the first, and perhaps the most important, prerequisite in preparation for assignment as an advisor. What does the individual bring to the counter culture? How will his own motivational characteristics, his strivings, and his needs impact, not only on the new environment, but his counterpart as well? And, how will the cultural milieu influence his own character? In order to develop cross-cultural expertise, the advisor must understand himself, and himself in relation to his counterpart. A better understanding of this interpersonal relationship will reduce the time to build rapport, establish trust and confidence, and gain the insight necessary to promote adaptation.

The U.S. Marine profile displayed in Figure 1 was developed from a sample of Marine advisors during training for duty in the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> The Arab Muslim comparison group comes from a sample of Arab college men located in Jordan.<sup>2</sup> The line through the middle of the figure (50<sup>th</sup> percentile) represents the U.S. Male Standard.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1  
Comparison of Motivational Characteristics**



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Compared to the Marine advisor sample, Arabs are not as *achievement* oriented. Their need to excel or to accomplish may be seen by the Marines as somewhat lacking. This differential is most likely more severe in a non-college Arab population, where emphasis on fate rather than self determination is more pronounced. Marines, therefore, have to be reasonable with regard to setting goals, and tolerant of their counterpart's willingness to accept failure as the will of Allah. Positive reinforcement of any accomplishment will reap the best rewards for Arab advancement.

Arabs, as well as Iraqis, are not as motivated as their Marine advisors to assume a *leadership* role, take charge, or make decisions. They may seem hesitant and uninspired with regard to assuming command. However, in general, this sample of Arabs is much more willing to take orders (*deference*), and to seek guidance from the Marines.<sup>4</sup> Again, this is a general pattern, and variation within the population should enable the Marines to easily identify those who are more disposed toward leading others.

Another contrast between the Marines and their Arab counterparts is the latter's strong need for *order*, i.e., to maintain the status quo, retain a proper sequence of events. Marines are much more flexible in this regard. Marines are trained to function within a more confused environment, and adapt more readily to changing events. By comparison, the "fog of war" may bewilder the Arab soldier.

On the social side, Arabs are much more inclined to be friendly, and to participate more often in social activities. The Marine sample is not necessarily indifferent socially, yet they are not as gregarious as the average American male standard. As a result, Marines may appear somewhat aloof and unfriendly by Arab standards.

The characteristics of *nurturance*, *succorance*, and *abasement* are needs that are primarily associated with females in U.S. society. Understanding and kindness toward others, especially those less fortunate is a fundamental Islamic principle, a core value of the "Five Pillars of Islam." Arab self respect is tied to the display of generosity and sympathy. Conversely, seeking sympathetic indulgence from others is the reverse side of this characteristic.

Marines may be favorably impressed with Arab warmth and expression of tenderness, but at the same time, consider outward display of these characteristics distasteful for males to exhibit. For example, Marines report an aversion to "man kissing" as a sign of affection and acceptance by Arab males.<sup>5</sup>

Arab *abasement* stems primarily from a strong sense of Islamic fatalism, evoking feelings of hopelessness, and perhaps self-blame, especially when things go wrong. Marines, on the other hand, are unaccustomed to such affect, especially within a military population. The Marine advisor may view his counterpart with disdain at this display of what may be considered a weakness, akin to defeatism. Understanding that this affect is ingrained in the national culture and willingness to accept the difference, the Marine advisor can temper his reaction, or perhaps indulge this trait for the sake of mission accomplishment. Invoking "Allah's will" judiciously as a motivating incentive may, in fact, induce initiative.

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On the more positive side, Arabs are disposed toward learning from their American trainers. They are open to gaining new skills and willing to accept *change*, so long as it does not conflict with or corrupt Islamic principles. Arabs realize that acceptance of some Western principles is essential in order to regain preeminence.

Arab curiosity and inclination toward learning is reinforced by their high *endurance* score. Perseverance and persistence of the Arab mind are often mentioned in the literature. This characteristic should be of value to Marine advisors as they prepare the way for Iraqi self-sustainment.

Both Arabs and Marines in this sample manifest an interest in understanding differences between themselves and others. This is a very favorable characteristic to possess in situations of interaction between cultures. It signals a more open personality; willingness to interpret cultural nuance in a less judgmental manner.

*Aggressiveness*, as defined by the scale of measure, is high for both the Arabs and Marines. However, the operational difference between the two groups, again, may be a matter of expression. The Arab male culture is well known for its argumentative nature, verbal intemperance, and inclination toward threats. Marines, on the other hand, are perhaps more inclined toward physical competitiveness.

Finally, there is a highly significant difference between the Marine advisor and the Arab male with regard to the manifestation or expression of *heterosexual* interest. It is well documented that Arab societies repress heterosexual expression and involvement early in development, with a lasting effect into adulthood. Much of anti-Western sentiment is associated with a concern that Arab mores will be corrupted by American values. And, Western display of opposite moral codes within an Arab community has been used by Anti-Coalition Forces to recruit insurgent reaction. Marines, therefore, must be aware of the extreme differential and moderate their behavior accordingly.

The profile comparison described above reveals significant differences and similarities that identify critical stress points for an advisor, and signal the need for adaptive response. The results substantiate, for the most part, what is already known about the Arab culture from a Western perspective. The Marine advisor profile sharpens the picture and details the contrast. However, the primary benefit derived from this method occurs when the individual Marine gains insight into his own strengths and weaknesses relative to the Arab culture. This insight opens the door for individual adjustment toward more effective behavior.

The Marine profile represents a group of men selected for duty in the Middle East. The advisor standard reveals differences that can be considered personal assets in Western culture, but may cause conflict when dealing with an opposite culture. While the Marine standard appears to fit expectations, there are significant variations within the sample. The United States in general and the Marine Corps in particular represent very diverse populations. What the individual Marine brings to the opposite cultural group will determine how effective he will be, given the circumstances of his involvement.

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Marine advisors returning from Iraq report two types of dysfunctional behavior displayed by men in the field. Some "go native," align themselves with their counterpart group, assimilate their characteristics, and thereby are rendered ineffective. Others display a "bad ass" character. This is an overreaction to the trainees, manifested in tone, gestures, and attitude.<sup>6</sup>

These descriptions are symptoms of the phenomenon called *culture shock*.<sup>7</sup> Going "native," becoming one with the culture, is usually associated with lengthy assignment in isolated areas. Harsh treatment and rejection of trainees often occurs after long periods of non-accomplishment, or no visual gain. The fact that these symptoms have emerged among the Marine advisors indicates that some may already be predisposed prior to assignment. In other words, an individual profile that mirrors the population may be prone to "go native." And, an individual with considerable differences in character (severe pressure points) may tend to react in a more derogatory manner. All such behavior, however, is contingent upon the situation and the preparation of the Marine.

Can this profile technique be used for selection of advisors? Perhaps, but implementation would require a comprehensive, controlled, and valid selection process.<sup>8</sup> Further, there are ethical standards and legal constraints that govern the use of such techniques.<sup>9</sup> Selection out of an assignment would leave an indelible mark on an otherwise exceptional Marine record. The threat of a derogatory comment in one's service record book could also produce "gaming" of the system that would compromise the technique and render the method useless.<sup>10</sup>

Selection criteria have not yet been established for military advisors. Such criteria would require considerable field research, and consideration of other factors necessary for effectiveness, e.g., professional and technical competence, language capability, knowledge of and experience with the culture are all essential advisor characteristics, not to mention intelligence and maturity. Finally, if criteria were established, could the Marine Corps meet the demand, given the number of advisors needed in the current global environment?<sup>11,12</sup>

At this point, much can be gained from individual insight, and counterpart comparison. Armed with his profile, the advisor is more capable of monitoring his behavior and correcting his course accordingly. Moreover, enlightened leadership will become more capable of identifying dysfunctional behavior that may require adjustment or reassignment.

Displaying his profile, one Marine Master Sergeant asked whether or not he would "make it" as an advisor. The profile revealed extreme variation in *dominance* and *aggression* when compared to the Arab sample. He was informed that the expression of concern on his part was a catalyst to motivate him to temper his approach to the situation. The characteristics that make him an effective leader in the Marine Corps will not necessarily render him effective in another culture. And, adaptation to the counter culture will make him a more expansive leader in the future. Understanding his strengths and weaknesses, and allowing himself to adapt or request reassignment, the Marine advisor will be more able to accommodate the stressful situation and avoid adverse career impact.

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Personal insight is just one weapon in the Marine advisor's inventory. It will give the Marine an "edge" to apply along with other skills he brings to the event. Collectively, these skills and abilities can mean the difference between success and failure, or perhaps life and death. The difference between the Gold Medal and 8<sup>th</sup> place in the 2006 Olympic downhill ski race was only 1.29 seconds. Hopefully, the insight edge will help our Marines become "Gold Medal" advisors.

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**References & Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The Marine sample is comprised of 258 advisors from eight training sessions at Quantico, VA and Camp Pendleton, CA from Nov 2004 to Dec 2005. Rank ranged from Sergeant to Colonel.

<sup>2</sup> While the Arab sample does not exactly represent a military group, the profile does conform to empirical descriptions of the Arab culture found in literature, and is reinforced by feedback from Marine advisors recently returned from Iraq. However, the issue remains that an actual profile of Iraqi military and police units should be developed.

Patai, R. *The Arab Mind*. New York: Hatherleigh Press, 2002.

Khoobyrian, Milt. *Unraveling Iraq: Roots of Instability*. Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2002.

Affourtit, TD. *Communion in Conflict: The Marine Advisor in the Middle East*. Technical Report 0306. Fairfax, VA: Interaction Research Institute, Inc., March 2006.

<sup>3</sup> The assessment technique, based on the theoretical formulation of H.A. Murray, yields a profile of relatively independent *normal* personality variables. Validity has been established by over fifty years of research.

OSS Assessment Staff. *Assessment of Men*. New York: Rinehart, 1948.

Buros, O.K. *The Eighth Mental Measurement Yearbook, Volume I*. Lincoln: NE: Buros Institute of Mental Measurements, 1978.

<sup>4</sup> This finding is in sharp contrast to a Vietnamese military sample. They were also disinclined to assume leadership, but were relatively unwilling to follow direct orders, leading American advisors to judge their counterparts as stubborn and resistant to authority.

Affourtit, T.D. *Analysis of a Culture in Conflict: Comparative Personality Determinants Between U.S. Marine Advisors & Vietnamese Soldiers*. Technical Report 79-2. Fairfax, VA: Interaction Research Institute, February 1979.

Affourtit, T.D. *Communion in Conflict: The Marine Advisor in Vietnam. Volume II*. Fairfax, VA: Interaction Research Institute, December, 1975.

<sup>5</sup> While the Marine standard shows an opposite trend overall, some Marines in this sample are inclined toward the same characteristics that are common in the Arab population. It is not unusual for U.S. males oriented toward the medical or other helping professions to embrace these same traits. However, it is the manner in which these inclinations are expressed in other cultures that brings into question one's masculinity.

<sup>6</sup> Milburn, A.R. & Lombard, M.C. "Marine Foreign Military Advisors: The Road Ahead," *Marine Corps Gazette*, Quantico, VA, April 2006.

Captain T. Debrief. Interviews and Debriefs, USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL). Available at <[http://www.tecom.usmc.mil/caocl/oif/Interviews\\_and\\_Debriefs/oif\\_iad.asp](http://www.tecom.usmc.mil/caocl/oif/Interviews_and_Debriefs/oif_iad.asp)>.

Affourtit, T.D. *Communion in Conflict: The Marine Advisor in the Middle East*. Technical Report 0306. Fairfax, VA: Interaction Research Institute, Inc., March 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Sheraev, Eric. *Cross-Cultural Psychology*. New York : McGraw Hill, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> Affourtit, T.D. *A Standard Screening/Training Plan for Cross-Cultural Operations*. Presentation, U.S. Marine Corps Command & Staff College, Quantico, VA, 1992.

<sup>9</sup> Administration of the motivational profile was *voluntary* and *anonymous*, in keeping with the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association, and legal constraints governing the use of such techniques.

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American Psychological Association, Inc. *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct*. APA Council of Representatives. Washington, D.C., November 1992.

American Education and Research Association. *Standards for Educational and Psychological Tests and Manuals*. American Psychological Association. Washington, D.C., 1999.

<sup>10</sup> The CIA and the FBI use a battery of well developed assessment techniques and interviews administered within a "controlled" environment to select personnel for assignment as undercover agents. FBI agents are usually withdrawn from their assignment twice a year for reassessment to assure that he or she does not fall victim to culture shock .

*Personal Communication*. D.C. Sheehan, Behavior Science Unit, FBI Academy, Quantico, VA, June 1996.

<sup>11</sup> The most extensive study of selection methods for overseas assignment was conducted by the U.S. Civil Service Commission. After years of research, criteria were established to identify the ideal foreign area officer. The project was terminated when the standards established screened out more applicants than position requirements.

*Research Project on Selection Methods for Overseas Employees*. M.M. Mendell, U.S. Civil Service Commission, Washington, DC, August 1953.

<sup>12</sup> While the use of a single technique for U.S. Advisor selection is not feasible, the instrument can be applied to identify leadership potential within a counterpart culture.

Affourtit, T.D. *The Feasibility of a Selection/Evaluation Program for Vietnamese Technical Supervisors*. Technical Report TNG 0301-572, Fairfax VA: Interaction Research Institute, Inc., May 1972.

### **Upcoming Segments**

The next segment, *Knowledge*, will focus on the biological, neurological, and environmental determinants of behavior that compare and contrast Arab and American cultures.

The final segment, *Wisdom*, will present a framework for assessing cultural evolution. How various cultures bring meaning to experience will provide the premise for effective communication and persuasion.