BACKGROUND BRIEF

The Arab World:

An Introduction To Cultural Appreciation

January 2007

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Preface

This assessment of Arab culture is intended as a guide to MoD and other government personnel who may visit Arab countries. The report concentrates on historical, social and cultural themes.

The precise geographical area which actually constitutes the Arab world is a matter of dispute. This study covers Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestinian territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen. Sometimes Djbouti, Somalia and the Comoros Islands are also defined as Arab countries, but they are not considered here. The study places emphasis on the Arab countries of the Middle East, particularly the Gulf.

The study is not intended to be exhaustive; rather, themes have been selected as the focus of the study on the basis that they are common to most Arab countries and their populations. It should be remembered, however, that the Arab world is a vast area encompassing many diverse cultural phenomena, and readers are advised to consult reference books on individual countries of interest to supplement the more generic information contained here.

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SECTION ONE
ARAB HISTORY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

"It was not for Paradise thou did'st the nomad life forsake. Rather it was thy yearning after bread and dates. " -The Arab View of History (from 7th century Arab poem commenting on the Islamic conquests).

Before Muhammad, the Arabs were a peripheral people inhabiting the Arabian peninsula and its fringes, many of whom were nomadic tribesmen. All this changed in the early 7th century CE, when they burst out of the desert to create the largest land empire in history. In the 14th century, Ibn Khaldun, a famous Muslim historian, wrote that political history consisted of a cycle of conquests by nomadic tribesmen, who took over sedentary states and governed them until they were in turn defeated by other nomads. This model of the Middle East - true or not - has had enormous impact on Arab perceptions. But the familiar stereotype of the Bedouin elite (camels, tents, blood-feuds etc, typified by the Gulf monarchies and frequently portrayed in film and literature) is only a small part of Arab history. The majority of Arabs are the inheritors of the world's oldest urban civilisations; the term "The Street", used throughout the Middle East to describe popular opinion, reflects this inheritance.

In spite of their commanders' attempts to segregate them, the Arab armies soon assimilated with their new subjects, particularly through intermarriage. The children of such unions were brought up as Arabs, and since each Arab could have up to four wives (and numerous concubines), the population was rapidly Arabised. The only partial exceptions were in North Africa, Central Asia and Spain. In North Africa the indigenous Berbers, who converted half-heartedly to Islam, successfully resisted Arabisation for several centuries, but were gradually worn down. Berber nationalism survives in the Maghreb, but is expressed through language and culture rather than politics. The inhabitants of Central Asia, mostly Turkic, became enthusiastic Muslims, but successfully resisted Arabisation. The Arabs and Berbers who conquered Spain in the 8th century CE were driven out by the indigenous inhabitants

over the next thousand years; the last vestiges of Islam were purged in the late 16th century CE. The loss of Spain is still a source of regret for the Arabs (one reason why Al-Qaida shows a close interest); *al-Andalus* (Andalusia) remains a popular place name in Arab cities.

The fruits of conquest soon diluted religious zeal and Arab material and political culture assimilated with that of the regions they conquered. The imperial elite lived in cities, grew rich on trade, industry and agriculture, and was supported by an extensive bureaucracy. Art and science were encouraged, and the preservation of Greco-Roman classical learning during Europe's so-called "Dark Ages" is still a source of Arab pride. The empire (or caliphate, after its leader, the caliph) was also fairly tolerant, at least of Jews and Christians, many of whom achieved senior rank in the bureaucracy. Reconciling the doctrine of Islam - first set down in the context of a nomadic society - with a sophisticated urban civilisation has been a cause of tension among the Arabs ever since.

The Arab empire declined from the eighth century to the sixteenth century CE; Islamic fundamentalists preferring to date the end of the "Golden Age" much earlier than secular, nationalist Arabs. The Turks were the primary external cause, starting from their employment as mercenaries by the Abbasid caliphate in the 9th century CE. By the 11th century the Near East was dominated by Turkic military dynasties who had usurped power from their former masters and who, although Arabised in culture, retained their ethnic identity. In the 13th century CE the region was faced by a new threat from the Mongols, who destroyed the caliphate. Egypt successfully led the resistance against the Mongols (and the Crusades, which began in 1096CE), securing its leadership of the Arab world under the Mamluk dynasty. But the central Asians finally won out in the 16th century CE, when the Ottoman Turks defeated the Mamluks and occupied all of North Africa, confirming the demise of Arab regional hegemony.

The Arab Nation never recovered from Ottoman conquest. The latter's demise in 1922, after its defeat by the Allies in 1918, freed the Arabs from

Turkish rule. Although the League of Nations Mandates by which the Allies ruled the Middle East imposed a much lighter burden than had the Ottomans, Arabs are generally much more critical of this period of "imperialism" than they are of the Turks. But Ottoman rule had been generally inefficient in any case, and N Africa, which had been under notional Turkish suzereinty, had already been conquered by the French and British. The critical factors in defining Arab attitudes were religion (the Turks had at least been Muslims), the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, the historical memory of the Crusades and - to some extent - the retrenchment of tribal monarchy by the British. Although the Crusades had never been a significant threat to the region (compared to the Turks or the Mongols), they provided a historical focus for "anti-colonialism". At the same time, Arab nationalism was infected by some of the political ideals which had developed in Europe over the previous two hundred years, particularly secularism and socialism. The monarchies in Egypt and Iraq, through which the British had ruled (or, latterly, "exercised influence") were overthrown and replaced by military elites, and the crisis in Arab nationalism was exacerbated by the creation of Israel in 1947, and its subsequent defeat of all the neighbouring Arab armies in 1948 (*Al-Naqba* - "the Catastrophe").

Egypt's Nasser personified the new secular nationalism, but catastrophic defeat in the 1967 war with Israel, which he instigated, began the discrediting of secularism, culminating in the rise of Islamism. The 1973 Yom Kippur/Ramadan War was the last gasp of secular Arab nationalism as a military force, and restored some degree of honour, particularly among the Egyptians (enabling the latter's peace treaty with Israel). But subsequent wars against the Israelis, Iranians, and lately the Americans and British, confirmed its demise. Arab history had returned to the nadir of Ibn Khaldun's cycle; moribund indigenous elites ruling impoverished - but restless - populations. The once wealthy, sophisticated and powerful empire had withered, and the last 50 years of Arab history have been an attempt to identify and recover those attributes which had once made the Nation great - and the leadership to make it happen. It is hardly surprising that the underlying promise of Islamic extremism - to restore the spiritual foundation

of greatness - has such invidious appeal. The success of Lebanese resistance to the 1982 Israeli invasion (in which religion played an essential role) offered hope for Arab pride, and subsequently developed into the standard model of resistance. Hezbollah's conflict with Israel in 2006 has similarly resonated around the Arab World. But the "yearning for bread and dates" remains equally powerful, albeit frustratingly less attainable than Paradise.

SECTION TWO
ARAB CULTURAL VALUES: A GUIDE TO INTERACTION

Notions of Honour and Shame

Honour (*sharaf or 'ird*) and shame (*hashama*) are two of the most fundamental principles governing social organisation and interaction in Arab (and indeed all Muslim) societies. They are invoked in almost every social context, from a casual interaction between friends on a street corner to blood feuds between families. Numerous aspects of social behaviour can be traced to a universal need to uphold the honour of the individual and his or her family, the preservation of which is considered a basic duty of all. Honour is the collective property of a family, and, once lost, is difficult to regain.

Honour determines social status, forms the basis of social etiquette, underpins relations between families, lineages and tribes, and can often mean the difference between life or death. The concept is at once a central element in the value system of the society, a method of regulating social relations, an organising principle for social behaviour, and a means of social control.

The socio-psychological need to avoid a loss of face or be subject to shame, and a consequent diminution in social status in the eyes of society, to a large extent underpins social behaviour and interaction between Arabs, at least in public. It also has ramifications for the marriage possibilities of an individual and their siblings.

Honour among Arabs is often described as being "more important than facts". "Face" refers to the outward appearance of honour, and Arabs describe the face as being "blackened" when honour is undermined. (Conversely, the face is said to have been "whitened" when honour is restored). A loss of face may occur when someone refuses someone else's hospitality, ignores their authority, behaves disrespectfully towards them, places themselves in a position of possible sexual compromise or in some other way transgresses a behavioural code. In order to regain honour, an individual or a family may have to resort to drastic restorative measures, including blood-letting in some cases.

There are a number of different aspects of the code of honour in Arabic societies, some of which are listed below.

Virility. A man is said to be honourable if he can prove his virility by having many children, especially sons.

Work. Certain jobs, such as those associated with sedentary agriculture or artisanship, are regarded as falling outside the traditional Arab value system by sections of Arab societies, and therefore dishonourable. Likewise, many tasks are believed to undermine a man's honour because they are viewed as being the preserve of women. Examples are the preparation of food, the performing of domestic duties or responsibilities associated with child-care.

Blood-purity. Honour is derived in part from the purity of one's Arab blood-line, on both the paternal and maternal sides, something which obviously applies to kin groups and tribes as well. Certain Arab tribes are regarded as being more "authentically Arab" than others, through their claimed descendence from a heroic Arabic figure of the past, for example, and/or because they are of Bedouin origin.

Bravery. A man's honour depends on his ability to prove his bravery and to protect his family from its enemies. Blood-feuding (*al-tar*) is strongly related to this aspect of honour, since a man has a duty to take revenge on anyone who has tarnished his own or his family's honour in some way.

Hospitality. The basic values of hospitality and generosity must be upheld in order to preserve one's honour, which becomes seriously compromised by any displays of inhospitality. Likewise, the refusal of hospitality without good reason will result in a loss of face for the host, since, by so doing, the guest is implying that their host is not good enough for them.

Education. Arab cultures place great value on education and literacy, and both are intimately connected with the status of an individual and his or her family. It is considered demeaning, even shameful, to engage in occupations for which one is considered to be overqualified.

Authority. The honour of a family patriarch, lineage head or tribal shaykh depends in large part on the extent to which he is able to impose his will on members of the group. This, in turn, is a product of the level of respect he engenders among them. It is notable that one of the terms used for honour, '*asabiyya*, also means 'family' or 'kinship spirit/loyalty'.

Sexual honour (*'ird*). The honour of a family is inextricably bound up with the sexual honour of its female members. Any violation of the strict prohibitions surrounding female sexual conduct will automatically have a severely detrimental impact upon the honour of the family. Homosexuality is officially illegal in most Arab countries.

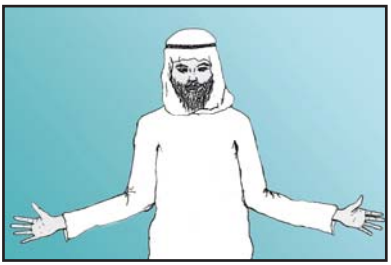
Body Language and Social Etiquette

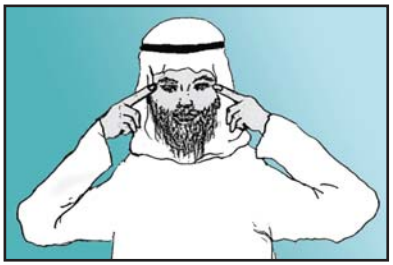
Public manners are extremely important in the Arab world. Social etiquette and body language therefore govern the interaction between people and their relationships to a greater degree than is the case in the west.

Gesturing. Body language represents a highly developed form of communication in Arab cultures, and a multitude of gestures are commonly used in everyday interaction. Men tend to use gestures more than women, and the following list applies largely to men. (It should be noted that not all of these apply universally to all countries: there are significant local variations and the populations of some countries and regions use additional gestures as well.)

- A single, downward nod is the most common expression for "yes".

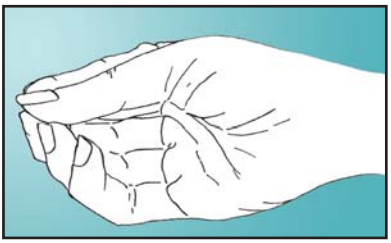
- Extending both open palms towards a person indicates enthusiasm or "excellent".





- Touching the outer edges of the eyes with the fingertips signifies assent or "O. K. "

- Holding the right palm out with the palm upward, with the tips of the thumb and fingers touching and the palm moving up and down means "calm down", "more slowly" or "be patient".



- Patting the heart repeatedly means "I've had enough" (usually used at mealtimes).

- Beckoning is usually made either through a right hand movement with the palm facing downwards and the fingers extended, or by holding the right hand out with the palm upward and repeatedly opening and closing it. It is often considered impolite to wave with the left hand.

- Western gestures to avoid in Arab countries include the thumbs up sign and the "O. K. " sign (forming a circle with the index finger and thumb of one hand, which is widely understood to signify the "evil eye"). Both are considered obscene in many parts of the Arab world. Pointing with the index finder can also cause offence - one should use the whole hand.

Greetings. Hand-shaking is the most usual form of greeting, and tends to be far more prolonged and intimate than its western counterpart, often being accompanied by embracing and kissing on both cheeks. Failure to shake someone's hand when meeting them or bidding them goodbye is considered offensive, although Arabs will often be more restrained with westerners than amongst each other. These rules apply only to people of the same sex; it is considered disrespectful for a man to offer his hand to a woman unless she extends it first - and obviously women should never be kissed.

Touching the right hand to the heart as a form of greeting indicates respect or sincerity; women will often make this gesture after serving food.

Food and drink. Food and drinks should always be accepted and held in the right hand, as the left hand is considered unclean to Arabs. It is especially important to observe this rule when taking food from communal dishes. Traditionally, the left hand is left hidden within the folds of ones clothes/robes during meals.

The eating of pork or any item of food that may have come into contact with swine products is strictly taboo for all Muslims. There are also taboos surrounding other animals - dogs, for example, are considered unclean and defiling. Arabs do, however, keep pets, particularly cats, birds and fish.

Country	Legal position on alcohol	Comments
Saudi Arabia	Illegal to all.	Anyone found in possession of alcohol can expect to be severely punished, regardless of their religion.
Kuwait, Libya, Qatar	Illegal to all.	Severe punishments for Kuwaitis; less severe for foreigners. Available in some hotels in Doha.
Yemen	Illegal for Yemeni citizens; illegal to buy for Yemeni citizen.	Available to foreigners in handful of hotels in San'a and Aden.
UAE	Illegal for UAE citizens; illegal to buy for UAE citizen; illegal to drink alcohol in public; illegal to all in Sharjah.	Only available in hotel bars and selected restaurants, with exception of Sharjah.
Bahrain, Oman	Legal, but consumption by Muslims strongly discouraged; illegal for Muslims to drink alcohol during Ramadan.	Foreigners must obtain a license to drink alcohol at home in Oman.
Iraq	Legal, but consumption by Muslims strongly discouraged; illegal for Muslims to drink alcohol during Ramadan.	Previously available in large Baghdadi hotels and from a small number of shops, most alcohol sellers have been forced to cease trading since 2003 under pressure from militant Islamic groups.
Syria	Legal, but consumption discouraged; illegal to drink alcohol in public during daylight hours during Ramadan.	Available in bars and restaurants in Syrian cities.
Algeria	Legal. Algerian parliament banned alcohol importation in 2003-4, under influence of Islamist parties. Government has pledged to overturn this.	Alcohol available in hotel bars and more expensive restaurants.
Egypt	Legal, but consumption discouraged. Legal drinking age of 21.	Available in certain bars and hotels in major cities.
Tunisia	Legal. Legal drinking age of 21.	Available in certain bars, restaurants and hotels.
Jordan	Legal. Legal drinking age of 21. Illegal for Muslims to consume alcohol during Ramadan.	Available in most restaurants and many bars.
Lebanon	Legal, but consumption by Muslims discouraged. Alcohol drunk largely by Christians (40-45% of population).	Widely available in hotels, restaurants, bars and from some larger supermarkets.
Morocco	Legal. Legal drinking age of 21. Illegal for Muslims to buy alcohol during Ramadan.	Widely available in shops and supermarkets as well as restaurants, bars and hotels.

Table 1. Legal Position on alcohol in Arab countries

Alcohol. Alcohol is expressly forbidden by Islamic law. However, attitudes towards it vary throughout the region, partly due to the influence of non-Muslim minorities in certain countries, along with westernisation (see box).

Hospitality. As alluded to earlier, Arabs place great emphasis on the values of hospitality and generosity. The amount of food served at communal meals tends to be very generous by western standards, and the western custom of serving food in individual portions on plates is virtually unknown in the Arab world. When offered second helpings, one should always accept. Likewise, it is important not to refuse a second cup when offered tea or coffee. In Qatar, it is considered impolite to accept more than three cups, however.

Photography. It is considered extremely rude to photograph someone without first asking their permission. Photographing women is, in any case, taboo in Arab countries. Photographing people at prayer is also considered offensive.

Smoking. Many Arab men and women smoke, although the latter rarely do so in public. One is obliged, when lighting-up at a public gathering, to pass around cigarettes to all those present. In the presence of senior older men, it is sometimes considered rude to smoke, and there are restrictions on smoking in certain public places (e. g. taxis, shops) in some countries.

Social interaction. Arabs and westerners have entirely different notions as to what constitutes acceptable personal space; between Arabs of the same sex, there is essentially no such thing. Arab culture stresses the need to 'share the breath' of one's companion, and conversations are conducted between individuals of the same sex at a distance which in western societies would be considered invasive, or at least highly intimate. Similarly, it is common for Arabs of the same sex to touch each other repeatedly while talking to emphasise particular points, and, in some countries, they may sometimes hold each other's hands when walking together. Arabs also maintain prolonged eye contact when talking to each other; to break-off eye contact when holding a conversation with an individual of the same sex is

regarded as disrespectful. However, for a male to deliberately maintain eye contact with a female is considered offensive in all social contexts.

Interaction between individuals of the opposite sex is a very different matter, and public displays of intimacy between men and women, even when they are married, are strictly taboo in virtually all Arab countries. Even holding hands, particularly between young people, is considered embarrassing and offensive. In Saudi Arabia, these mores are especially severe - and are applied to westerners in the same way as they are to locals. Thus, in one reported case, a western woman who happened to have been observed kissing her male colleague on the cheek in public was deported, whilst her colleague was sent to prison.

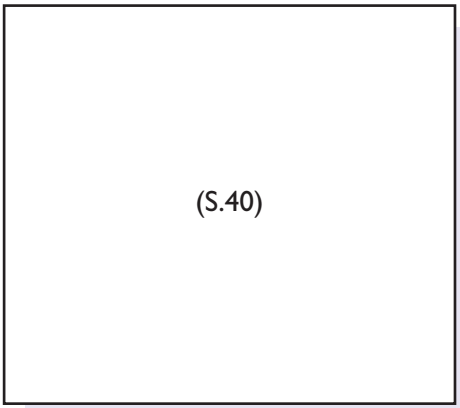
Conversation and Meetings. There are certain rules surrounding what subjects are acceptable for everyday conversation. Men should always avoid questioning other men about women in their family. In certain countries, political discussion is also taboo, for obvious reasons. When attending a meeting, it is accepted practice to allow the host to initiate and direct the discussion.

When communicating with people, it is considered disrespectful not to sit upright, and hands must always be removed from pockets. Crossing one's legs is also inappropriate, as it is an insult to display the soles of one's shoes or feet to another person. Similarly, shoes should always be removed when entering any holy place, as they are objects of defilement.

At the beginning of a meeting, it is accepted practice to remain standing until invited by the host to sit down. When a senior man enters or leaves a room, all those present are expected to stand. Men should also stand when a woman enters or leaves a room, and should also offer their seat to a woman if there are no other places to sit. Women should always be allowed to leave a room first.

Concepts of time. Arabs have a different attitude to time-keeping than westerners. Appointments, for example, are regarded with rather more lassitude than in western countries, and pre-arranged meetings will rarely have designated times by which they must be completed. Although adoption of western-style business practises is altering attitudes in some countries, Arabs do not expect to receive or give an apology if they or those whom they are meeting have been kept waiting; rather, the usual response is benign resignation, encapsulated in the term *ma'alish* ("never mind" or "it doesn't matter").

SECTION THREE
THE ARAB FAMILY



The family represents the most fundamental institution in Arab societies. It is by far the most significant focus of allegiance for all individuals, and is instrumental to the regulation of all major events in the life-cycle. Despite an increasing trend towards nuclearisation in family structures, the extended family remains very important in all Arab countries. Whilst it is rare for three or more generations to live together in the same household, a common pattern in many Arab cities is for several related nuclear families to live in proximity to one another in the same neighbourhood or apartment block. Most individuals are close to relatives outside their immediate family (such as their cousins, aunts and uncles) and remain so for the whole of their lives. A sharp distinction is made between blood and marital kin, and some anthropologists have claimed that many Arabs feel more affinity to their siblings than they do to their husbands or wives.

Loyalty to one's kin group often takes precedence over personal needs and desires, and the individual must be careful to subordinate their own interests to those of their family as far as possible. To a large extent, the family is responsible for governing many aspects of social and economic life that in western societies tend to be the preserve of bureaucratic, political

or economic bodies. Whilst social relationships in the Arab world are often formed around extra-familial business, geographic or religious associations, particularly in urban areas, it is the kin group to which the individual turns in times of need, or when other forms of identity unravel.

Individuals must always be careful to uphold the honour of the extended family, as any transgression will reflect badly on the whole kin group. In the case of serious violations - particularly those of a moral or sexual nature - there are likely to be practical ramifications for family members, including a loss of social status and a narrowing of future marriage opportunities.

Ultimate responsibility in an Arab family rests upon the senior male, whose opinion in all matters must be deferred to by other family members. In reality, however, decisions are made on the basis of consensus, with the voice of senior females given equal weight to that of the men. Women have particular influence in matters relating to the marriages of their children or grandchildren. They also control the family finances in many countries. Status tends to be directly related to age, and children are taught to display absolute obedience to their parents until well into adulthood - "teenage rebellion" is highly uncommon in Arab societies. Moreover, it is incumbent on children to care for their parents when they enter old age. Most Arabs find the western concept of the "nursing home" shocking, even abhorrent, and there is no Arab equivalent.

Marriage

The usual preference in Arab countries is for family-arranged marriages. Traditional Arab culture holds that marriage is such an important institution that it cannot be left to a couple acting on the basis of emotion or notions of romance, feelings which may be transitory or mistaken. The institution is supported by the public segregation of the sexes after puberty, which makes it difficult for individuals to meet prospective partners or engage in acts of courtship. In the past, an early age of marriage eased the social tensions which segregation necessarily causes. As the average age of marriage has risen, however, traditional mores surrounding sexual relationships have

begun to be eroded in a number of countries, and it is now more common for individuals to have had a number of fiancées prior to marriage. In Egypt, temporary or "contract" marriages are commonly used, allowing unmarried couples to stay in the same hotel room overnight, for example, after which the contract is annulled. The observance of pre-marital chastity for girls remains extremely important, however, especially in the Gulf states.

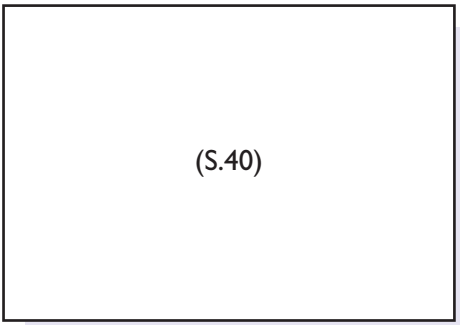
Preference is for marriages with first or second paternal parallel cousins (marriage with the father's brother's daughter is preferred, although often not possible), which remain remarkably prevalent throughout the region, particularly in rural areas. Averages for cousin marriages of between three and 20% have been recorded in countrywide studies during the past four decades, with much higher figures common within traditional or isolated communities. The two advantages of cousin marriages are that, firstly, wealth remains within the family, and, secondly, that the social tensions caused by the divided loyalties of the bride between her father's and her husband's kin groups are minimised. In those countries which have been more subject to western influence - especially those in Francophone North Africa - "love" marriages are becoming increasingly common, but even here, members of the respective families will usually consult extensively with each other before sanctioning the union. Parents, usually the father, also have ultimate say over whether to allow a marriage to take place - and will often refuse should a potential spouse be deemed to belong to family of lower status or reputation that their own.

Couples entering into marriage have the opportunity to become acquainted beforehand, and, under Islamic law, may also reject their prospective partner. Upon marriage, it is usual for a marriage contract to be drawn up, stipulating the amount of dowries that the two parties will bring to the union, the bride's inheritance rights and those of the children, and - increasingly - arrangements for financial compensation should the marriage be annulled at any point. (These rules do not usually apply to marriages between non-Muslim couples.)

Polygyny is legal under Shari'a law, with men permitted up to four wives as long as they can provide for them all and treat them equally. In practice, the custom is rare, however, largely being confined to wealthy shaykhs in some Gulf countries and some nomadic Bedouin groups. In Tunisia, polygyny is outlawed; in Morocco, it is officially discouraged and regarded as grounds for divorce.

Islamic law discourages divorce, but it is not illegal in Arab countries. Under traditional arrangements, a man can divorce his wife simply by stating "I divorce you" three times in the presence of competent witnesses. Women have far more difficulty in divorcing their husbands, and it is practically impossible for them to do so in the more conservative countries such as Saudi Arabia. In other countries, childlessness, desertion or neglect are usually sufficient grounds for a woman to obtain a divorce. However, a woman faces an uncertain future - both socially and economically - if she is divorced by her husband.

SECTION FOUR
TRIBES AND THE KINSHIP SYSTEM



Generally associated with the Bedouin and other nomadic groups, 'tribal societies' have long been regarded by western observers as representing the essence of Arab culture, the world of Lawrence and Bell, warriorhood, nobility and romanticism. However, the traditional Bedouin way of life has all but died out in the Arab world (and had little significance in certain areas anyway, such as the Maghreb), and there are few places today in which the tribe represents the most important social reference-point for individuals; in most places, forms of identity based on religion, ethnicity, occupation, geography and nationalism are far more important. Moreover, although the majority of the population in the region would be able to identify themselves with a specific named clan or tribe, this does not mean that they will utilise this allegiance for social action - or indeed that the association has any salience for them at all.

However, although it is tempting to view tribal allegiances as 'antimodern' and opposed to more novel forms of social organisation, the *values* that surround tribalism remain important in much of the Arab world. In one sense, the tribal system of nomadic groups in the Arab world occupies one end in a spectrum of different forms of social organisation, with the urban nuclear family occupying the opposite end and sedentary farmers located somewhere in between. The cohesion of individuals through kinship ties

remains a central element in Arab culture, and the term used to denote this, '*asabiyya*, has its origins in tribal society. Furthermore, tribes do still have social and political significance in some countries, most notably Libya, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, where state policies have allowed them a surprising degree of autonomy. Finally, the basic Arab social structure may be described in terms of a nested hierarchy of kin-based groupings, of which the tribe forms a distinctive part.

Essentially, Arab kinship structures are composed of five principal elements: the extended family, the lineage, the clan, the tribe itself and the confederation. These are described in detail below.

The Extended Family (*bayt* or *ahl* or '*aila*)

Traditionally, the household unit comprised a man, his wife, their unmarried sons and daughters, their married sons and wives, and any of the latter's unmarried offspring. Although this pattern only really prevails in rural areas and among nomadic groups, it is this group to which most individuals in the region owes their immediate obligations and allegiances, and from which they derive their social status and life-chances. Women marry into the group and, upon marriage, are expected to minimise their ties with their father's family and transfer their loyalty to their husband's. Although nuclear families (*usra*) are increasingly the norm, particularly in urban areas, the continued importance of the extended family in Arab societies should not be underestimated. Extended family members tend to reside in the same area, often share economic resources and usually act collectively in disputes with other families.

The Lineage (*fakhdh*)

The lineage is made up of a number of extended families related through a common male ancestor, and represents the primary political entity operating at local levels in Arab tribal society. Members of a lineage traditionally lived in the same village and worked a shared area of land, as well as acting collectively as political (and military) units. Leadership is generally hereditary

and held by a single senior male of a family who holds the rights to leadership of the lineage. Their semi-autonomous and enduring nature means that rivalry is common between co-resident lineages, in urban as well as rural areas, which can sometimes lead to feuding.

The Clan or Sub-Tribe (*shabba* or *hamula* or *far'*)

Clans comprise of a group of lineages, again related through a common male ancestor. The importance of the clan politically and militarily appears to vary considerably between different areas in the Arab world. In some areas, clans appear to supersede the lineage as a collective unit; in others, clans do not seem to act collectively or have any overt political role. The nature of clan leadership also varies. The term clan is often used interchangeably (and incorrectly) with 'lineage' and 'tribe'; it is, however, a separate entity in kinship terms.

The Tribe (*ashira* or *qabila*)

Tribes are formed from groups of clans, and can vary in size from a few hundred individuals to many thousands. Tribes are usually named after a founding ancestor, who may, in reality, be a fictitious figure, but whose existence is affirmed to confer prestige to the tribe. Traditionally, tribal leadership was hereditary, with particular clans or lineages holding designated leadership rights. There are however, no strict inheritance rights within families themselves, and, upon the death of a shaykh, the tribal council (*majlis*) will decide which of the shaykh's sons or close male relatives are most suited to take his place. The appointment may not always be in accordance with the wishes of the former shaykh.

Tribal leaders are expected to represent the tribe to higher level bodies, to act as arbiters between disputing parties, to give consent to marriages and divorces and to generally act in the tribe's best interests. In the case of tribes which have been co-opted by the particular government, they are also local representatives of the state, in the sense that they often have the responsibility for tax collection and liasing with government authorities. This

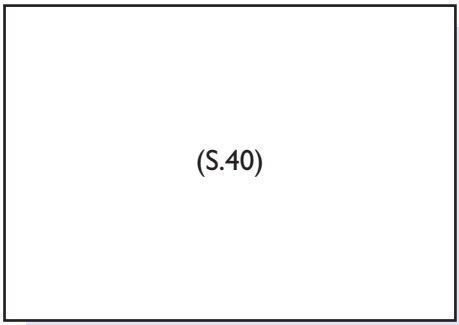
was the situation in Iraq under the Ba'ath and continues to be important in Libya, Yemen and Saudi Arabia. In this way, the traditional role of some tribal leaders as opponents of national authority has been compromised by their close relationship to government. Nevertheless, it remains the case that tribal authority represents a bulwark against the centralising forces of the state.

It should be noted that tribal leaders govern their members not through coercion but by engendering respect. It is by acting in the interests of the tribe and ensuring that his conduct does not antagonise important factions within it that the shaykh is able to retain authority. He must also uphold the main facets of tribal values, surrounding honour (*'ird* or *sharaf*), hospitality (*karama*), warriorhood (*shahama*) and revenge (*tha'ar*). In addition, a shaykh has to project an image of strength, primarily by maintaining the tribe's status in respect to neighbouring and potentially hostile tribes around it.

The Confederation (*sillif* or *ittihad*)

Confederations are looser collectivities, consisting of groups of tribes related to each other by shared geographic residence, historical ties, fictive kinship, ethnicity (less commonly), or some other factor or combination of factors. Their significance is confined largely to the Gulf States. Unlike the other elements within the tribal structure, they are not based on kinship ties, although some confederations identify themselves with a specific historical ancestor from whom their members claim shared descent. The constituent tribes which make up confederations are by no means fixed, and often tribes will transfer their allegiance from one confederation to another according to prevailing political circumstances. Most confederations make extensive use of patronage as a glue to bind tribes together. They sometimes incorporate both Sunni and Shi'a tribes within them (in Iraq, for example) and, in the case of certain larger groupings, may have constituent branches in neighbouring countries. Although they are usually led by a paramount shaykh, which is generally a hereditary position, some confederations have no overall leader. The degree of internal cohesion - and therefore the extent to which they are able to mobilise collectively - also varies widely between confederations.

SECTION FIVE
GENDER RELATIONS AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN



The traditional view of the position of women in the Arab world, especially from a western perspective, is one characterised by discrimination and repression. From veiling in public to androcentric legal systems, Arab societies are generally thought to be the most patriarchal in the world, and have long been the focus for reformist and feminist movements both in the west and in the countries themselves.

There are five principal aspects of Arab culture which, it is held, discriminate against women.

- **Veiling and seclusion.** The confinement of women to the private sphere of society and the controls exerted on their appearance and behaviour in public are often cited as representing the fulcrum of their oppression.

- T**he division of labour.** Although women are increasingly important in the workforce in many Arab countries, there remain significant disparities between male and female employment patterns in the region as a whole. Moreover, traditional views of the role of females surround duties associated with the domestic sphere, and professional careers available to females in some countries often represent an extension of these, viz. nursing, midwifery, child-care and teaching.

- **Legal codes.** Laws surrounding marriage, divorce and inheritance tend to be biased in favour of males. Women are in a similarly weaker position in most countries should they wish their marriage to end. Their behaviour within marriage is also more strictly controlled, and legal sanctions resulting from the transgression of behavioural norms (such as the observance of obedience and fidelity towards their spouse) are more severe than those for men. The legal system in many countries reflects the Islamic law that women are only allowed to inherit half the amount of that of their male siblings.

- **Cultural norms.** Arab cultural norms are held to discriminate against women because of the denigration of female attributes. This is said to be reinforced through religious ideology, some aspects of which considers women to be inherently inferior to men and a source of social anarchy and disorder unless their behaviour is tightly controlled.

- **Physical abuse.** Certain socially-sanctioned activities against women may be considered abusive, whether they are legal or not. Examples include domestic violence, 'honour crimes', clitoridectomy and other forms of genital mutilation, and the criminalisation of public 'transgressions', such as being seen with an unmarried male or without suitable veiling.

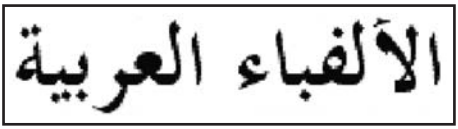
The reality surrounding the position of women in Arab societies is rather more complex than suggested by the above account, however. Not only does female status vary significantly between countries, but women also have far more power within the private sphere of society than is indicated by their often restricted public roles. Generally-speaking, women are the dominant partner in domestic matters, and husbands will usually defer to their wives over decisions concerning the household, such as their children's schooling or marriage arrangements. Moreover, the bond between mothers and their children represents the central relationship in the Arab family. Since men defer the responsibilities over child-rearing to their wives to a far greater degree than is the case in the west, intrafamilial emotional attachments between parents and children are skewed in favour of the

mother, and also tend to be stronger and more enduring. Most men will remain close to their mother for most of their lives, and be deferential to their wishes even if this leads to conflict with their own spouse.

Veiling is almost universal in the more conservative countries such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar and the UAE. It is also widespread in Libya, Morocco, Algeria and Iraq. In Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, many women do not cover their hair in public, and in Tunisia, veiling is outlawed. In parallel with the increasing Islamification of the region, however, the custom is on the increase in most Arab countries. This fact - along with the observation that veiling is more common among the more educated and affluent - suggests that dress codes have complex political and social ramifications for many women, something which detracts from the view that they are simply a manifestation of their secondary status. Indeed, the fact that veiling allows women to engage in public life suggests that it may actually be viewed as part of a feminist drive in the Arab world. Veils have assumed the status of fashion accessories in many countries, produced in different colours and styles and paraded at fashion shows.

Types of veils include the *hijab*, a scarf or large piece of cloth which covers the hair, neck and sometimes shoulders; the *nikab*, a piece of cloth which covers the face below the upper cheeks and the bridge of the nose (although this is now used as a general term to cover all forms of veil); and the *burqa*, a complete body-covering which usually only leaves a small slit for the eyes and nose.

SECTION SIX
THE IMPORTANCE OF ARABIC



There are few pan-national identities in which language plays such an intrinsic part as it does in the case of the Arab identity. Arabic is the essence of Arabism, and, for its 250 million speakers, is imbued with an almost mystic quality, which far transcends its role as a mode of communication. Connecting the peoples of 18 countries where it is the national language, it serves to unite a multitude of different ethnic groups, religious communities, nationalisms and historical traditions.

Indeed, it is this very diversity which underpins the role of Arabic as a core symbol within the socio-political concept of the 'Arab nation'. Pan-Arab nationalism is founded on the basic premise that those who speak the same language also belong to the same nation. This is encapsulated in the oft-heard Arabic phrase "my language is my nation". It therefore subjugates all other facets of nationalism, such as those based on geography, ethnicity, religion, political sovereignty etc., in favour of the primacy of Arabic as a supra-national, unifying force. This has instilled the philosophy of Arab nationalism with a markedly secular character. But it must also be remembered that, for Muslims, Arabic primarily represents the language of God (see below).

Arabic and Nationhood

The invention of the printing press in the mid-sixteenth century in western Europe is often cited as a formative event in the rise of the modern nation state. In consolidating and (for the first time) textualising the major vernacular languages (primarily German, French and English) across defined territorial boundaries, the advent of mass printing conveyed a new sense of

shared community and national belonging between their speakers. The centripetal effect which this technology brought had a similar impact in the Arab world - albeit much later and on a pan-national level - fuelling a nineteenth century literary revival initiated as a response to the increasing Turkification of the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the 'sense of tradition' which print technology donated to European languages became a 'stamp of modernity' in an Arab context, in that it directly led to the codification and simplification of the various forms of the language then in existence, just as the Qur'an and the invention of calligraphy had done in the previous millennium.

European nationalist movements usually draw from 'folk' symbols and traditions as the primary inspiration for the creation of national cultures. Almost all western nationalisms have sought to create a romantic parallel between the rural past and a sense of national belonging, a vision in which the cyclical, unchanging world of the 'peasant' is imbued with the inherent 'spirit' of the nation and thus represents the core vehicle for national propagation and continuity. There is no equivalent tradition in the case of Arab nationalism, a movement in which folk culture has been largely ignored in favour of 'high' culture, the culture of the elite. In Arabic literature and art, the 'peasant' (*fallah*) is often the subject of contempt and ridicule, echoing the lowly status attributed to any form of agricultural occupation in the popular Arabic imagination. Whilst the beauty of the natural world is a recurring theme in poetry, long considered the primary Arabic art form, this is only rarely coupled with any consideration of humanity's place within it.

These observations are reflected in the status ascribed to the various forms of the language itself. Oral literature and dialetical versions of Arabic are considered degenerative deviations from classical Arabic - the language of the Qur'an - which is always accorded the highest status in the linguistic hierarchy. There have been few attempts to seriously study (or even record) dialetical variations of Arabic, in the way that folklorists, anthropologists and linguists have done in the case of western languages, and in some countries (notably Jordan and Palestine), speakers of 'rural' varieties of Arabic have reportedly been stigmatised and discriminated against by the urban elite and those consider to speak more 'classical' forms

of the language. In recent years, the rise in importance of the pan-Arabic media has also had a homogenising effect among the educated classes, in linguistic terms.

Mode of Arabic	Context
Classical	Qur'anic text and verse
Modern standard	Print and broadcast media, literature, formal conversation (e. g. at a conference).
Colloquial	Everyday speech, some poetry, cartoons, plays
Slang	Varies with dialect

Table 2. The Arabic Linguistic Hierarchy

Arabic and Religion

For Muslims, who make up the vast majority of its speakers, Arabic is first and foremost the language of God, the Prophet and the Qur'an, and thus a vehicle for religious expression and enlightenment. Unlike the Bible, which represents a translation of divine communication, the Qur'an is regarded as a verbatim transcription of the word of God and is therefore considered by many scholars to be inherently untranslatable. The various initiatives to simplify and modernise the New Testament in recent years would be unthinkable were they to be applied to the Qur'an.

The Qur'an contains a number of passages which explicitly elevates Arabic above other languages. Other passages state that those who seek to falsify and denigrate the messages of the Qur'an are necessarily the speakers of other languages. In the associated Hadith literature (which collects together the sayings of the Prophet), Arabic is described as the "master of speech" and the "language of heaven". Thus a knowledge of Arabic grammar is still regarded as an obligation for Muslim scholars, regardless of what language they speak.

The mysticism which surrounds the language not only derives from its divine connotations. During the nineteenth century, the emergence of modern Arab nationalism was accompanied by exhortations on the part its (Muslim) leaders for Christian Arabs to study the Qur'an for its literary merit. These aesthetic connotations are reflected in the claim that Arabic has an objectively superior communicative power in comparison to other languages.

To many Arab nationalists, the significance of the Qur'an therefore lies in its role in the spread of the language, rather than in its intrinsic theological message (although this is obviously very important too). From this perspective, Islam should not be considered, in itself, as a focus for nationalist sentiment; its relevance derives more from the fact that it was the principal vehicle through which the Arabisation of the Middle East and North Africa occurred. Indeed, in the philosophy of 'Sati al-Husri (1880-1968), whose writings have perhaps had the most influence on pan-Arabic political thinking, the status of Christianity is accorded almost as much significance as Islam in the building of the Arab nation. Along with the translation of the Bible into Arabic by Protestant missionaries in Lebanon, he emphasises the formative role played by Levantine Christian Arabs in the literary revival of the nineteenth century as being crucial to the creation of a pan-Arabic national consciousness.

Regional Variations

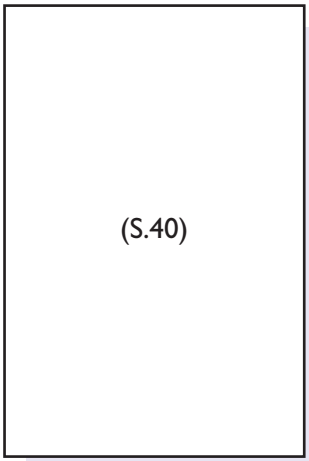
There are significant regional variations of Arabic, which can be broadly divided into five geographical categories. Within each category, there are also a number of dialects particular to each country. These are set out in table 3.

Category	Dialects
North African (Western Arabic)	Moroccan/Maghrebi
	Algerian
	Tunisian
	Libyan
	Mauritanian
Egyptian/Sudanese	Egyptian
	Saidi
	Sudanese
Levantine	Lebanese
	Syrian
	Jordanian
	Palestinian
Arabian Peninsula & Iraqi	Najdi
	Yemeni
	Kuwaiti
	Gulf
	Omani
	Mesopotamian Arabic
	North Mesopotamian Arabic (or Syro-Mesopotamian Arabic or Moslawi)

Table 3. Arabic categories and dialects

Egyptian/Sudanese, Levantine and Arabian Arabic are relatively similar, and there are few difficulties of mutual comprehension between their respective speakers. There are, however, significant differences in both grammar and vocabulary between North African, Gulf and Iraqi Arabic dialects. The term used for the phrase "*how are you?*", for example, is *keefak?* in Lebanese, *izzayyak?* in Egyptian, *shlownak?* in Iraqi and *shniyya hwalak?* in Tunisian Arabic.

SECTION SEVEN
RELIGIOUS LIFE



Islam is the predominant religion among Arabs, and is practised by around 210 million people in the Arab world, 90% of its population. The proportions of Muslims in different countries range from around 60% in Sudan to almost 100% in Oman and Qatar. Many countries have significant Christian minorities, particularly Sudan, Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. Prior to 1948, Morocco, Egypt, Yemen and Iraq also had significant Arabic-speaking Jewish populations.

Although there are regional variations in Islamic interpretation and there exist a multitude of different orthodoxies among Arabs (which will be dealt with below), this section will begin with a brief overview of the fundamental tenets of Islam which apply to all groups.

Islam in the Arab World

Islam permeates almost every aspect of life in the Arab world. People practise their religion ostentatiously, exemplified in the Islamic symbols

which people use to decorate their homes and cars, jewellery and pendants inscribed with Qur'anic verses and the miniature Qur'ans which people carry with them. When describing a future event, most Muslims will add the term *inshallah* or *al hamdulallal*, meaning "if God wills". (This phrase is used by Muslims and Christians alike.) Similarly, when making a speech or writing a letter, it is common Arabic practice to preface one's remarks with the term "In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate" (*Bismillah Ar-Rahman Ar-Rahim*). This is also recited prior to embarking a journey or undertaking a difficult or dangerous task. In most Arab countries, Islam regulates the political and legal spheres, influencing the law on marriage and divorce, the penal system, laws on inheritance and many aspects of commerce and banking. In this respect, there is little separation between mosque and state in the Arab world.

The fundamental tenets of Islam are enshrined in the "five pillars". These are:

- Reciting the Declaration of Faith (*Shahada*): "There is no God but God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God". Anyone can convert to the Islamic faith by reciting this statement with true conviction and in the presence of two male Muslim witnesses.

- Praying five times per day, at dawn, midday, in the afternoon, at dusk and at night (*Salat*). Mosques issue calls to prayer at these times by repeatedly broadcasting the following phrases: "God is Great"/ "I testify that there is no God but God"/ "I testify that Muhammad is God's messenger"/ "Come to prayer"/ "Come to success". All Muslims must pray facing in the direction of Mecca, and the act of praying should be accompanied by ritual cleansing. Anyone passing someone else who is engaged in the act of prayer is expected to pass behind, not in front of them. Communal prayers are held on a Friday, and these include a sermon from a cleric (imam) at the mosque. Although women are not prohibited from Friday prayers, only men attend in most Arab countries.

- Giving alms to the needy (*Zakat*). All Muslims are expected to hand over two and half percent of their net annual income in the form of a religious

tax, which is used for the welfare of the community. This is not observed universally in the Arab world, however, and in some places the practice has died out altogether.

- Fasting during the month of Ramadan (*Sawn*). Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. During the month, Muslims are expected to refrain from eating, drinking or smoking between sunrise and sunset. Work hours are usually changed during the month, with most activities carried out either in the early morning or at night. Ramadan is also seen as a time of celebration as families and friends gather together to break their fast each evening. The end of Ramadan is marked by the most important festival in the Muslim calendar, *Id al-Fitr*, a week of feasting and celebration. The dates of Ramadan vary each year according to the sighting of the new moon.

- Performing the Hajj at least once in one's lifetime, if means and health permit. The pilgrimage to Mecca, the Hajj, is the supreme religious experience for all Muslims. It takes place in the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar and lasts six days. Except in Saudi Arabia, those who have performed the Hajj often have the term added as a title to their names (Hajja in the case of women).

The Shari'a

The system of Islamic law is called the Shari'a, an all-encompassing set of legal injunctions, regulations and prohibitions which govern almost every type of human activity. It is at once a legal institution and a code of ethics and behaviour to guide individuals through their lives. As well as setting down the legal basis for all public rituals, such as births, weddings, funerals, prayer times and fasting, the Shari'a also covers most aspects of an individual's private life, such as the correct way to perform everyday tasks such as washing, the regulation of relationships within the family and even the use of different forms of birth control.

The Shari'a, meaning "path" or "way", is considered to be the set of laws revealed by God, and was established by various scholars during the second and third centuries of the Islamic era. It is not a "book of laws" in the way that westerners would understand the term, rather it is a "discussion" on the duties of Muslims based on the philosophy laid out in the Qur'an and the Hadith literature, which communicate the teachings of the Prophet, his early followers and, in the case of Shi'ism, the Twelve Imams. (An explanation of the differences between Sunni and Shi'ism is provided below.)

Most Arabs interpret the Shari'a as dividing all human activity into five categories. (It should be noted that in other parts of the Muslim world, seven or more categories are recognised.)

- Compulsory acts, which pertain either to the individual (termed *fard ayn*), such as attending Friday prayers, or the community as a whole (*fard kifaya*), such as alms-giving.

- Acts that are not strictly obligatory but recommended (*mandub* or *mustahab*), such as the provision of hospitality.

- Acts which God has not pronounced upon (*mutlaq, mubah* or *jaiz*). An example often cited in this category is human behaviour towards animals.

- Acts which God considers to be objectionable but are not officially proscribed (*makruh*), such as divorce.

- Acts which are expressly forbidden (*haram*), such as theft or murder.

For practical purposes, the relevant statements contained in the Qur'an and Hadith have been further codified through the application of the science of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). This process is the responsibility of the *Ulama*, a community of religious scholars, who are charged with the interpretation of divine laws on behalf of the people. Although much of the legal coding took place in the early years of Islam, social change has necessitated the periodic

revision of the Shari'a; laws which were drawn up in a previous era may no longer be appropriate to modern society, for example. In cases where the Prophet's teachings contain no guidance or are ambiguous about certain issues or activities, a number of additional principles are applied:

- analytical reasoning (*qiyas*), which relies on analogy;
- consensus (*ijma*) between the Ulama;
- discretionary approval (*istihsan*);
- approval on the basis of human welfare (*istislah*);
- the personal opinion of the jurist (*rai*);
- the custom of a particular society (*'urf*).

The operation of these principles means that, in practice, the Shari'a is open to many differing interpretations.

In the formative years of Islam, a number of distinct schools of Islamic jurisprudence were created, focused around the teachings of influential scholars and jurists. Since the Shi'a also draw on the teachings of the Twelve Imams (particularly those of the sixth Imam, Jafir al-Sadiq), there are also separate Sunni and Shi'a legal schools. These remain extant today and are summarised in table 4.

The fact that the Shari'a and its legal variations affect so many aspects of life serves partly to explain the cultural differences between the more conservative and more liberal parts of the Arab world. In Saudi Arabia, Libya and Sudan, the Shari'a is interpreted strictly and encompasses all aspects of domestic and civil law; in other countries, particularly in the Maghreb, the Shari'a is applied more loosely and has been significantly modified through the introduction of legal codes imported from the west.

Sect	School (founder)	Main countries
Sunni	Hanafi (Abu Hanifa d. 767))	Iraq, Lower Egypt, Pakistan
	Shafiai (Muhammad Idris al-Shafiai (d. 820))	India, Malaysia, Indonesia, Syria, Lower Yemen
	Malaki (Malik Ibn Abas (d. 795))	North and West Africa, Upper Egypt, Sudan
	Hanbali (Ahmed Ibn Hanbal (d. 855))	Oman, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Upper Yemen
Shi'a	Ja'fari	Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, E. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain
	Zaydi	Yemen
	Zahiri	India, Malaysia, Yemen

Table 4. Sunni and Shi'a Legal Schools

The Principal Sects: Sunnism and Shi'ism

Most Arabs belong to one of the two major Islamic sects, Sunnism and Shi'ism. Of the two, Sunnism has the most adherents, with approximately 850 million followers world-wide, and represents the major religion in all Arab countries with the exception of Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain. In these three countries, Shi'ism dominates. The latter is followed by an estimated 110 million Muslims globally, with (non-Arab) Iran containing the largest Shi'a population. There are also two other Islamic sects, namely Kharijite, which is followed by almost a million people in East and North Africa and Oman, and various Heterodox creeds, which encompasses minorities residing largely outside the Arab world, primarily in Iran, Syria, Kurdistan, India, Sudan and Nigeria.

Within both sects there are significant religious sub-divisions. These are set out in table 5 and figure 1. The differences in belief between the two sects are described in Annex One.

	Shia (A)									Sunni (B)	Ibadi (C)	Christian (D)	Other (E)	Total (A+B+C+D+E)
			Ismalili											
	Total	Imani - 12ers	Mainstream Ismailis - 7ers	Bohras	Druze	Nizaris	Alevis	Zaydi - 5ers	Alawis					
Afghan	19	16.5	2	-	-	0.5	-	-	-	80	-	<1	1	100
Algeria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	98	1	1	<1	100
Azer	65	63	2	-	-	-	<1	-	-	30	-	5	<1	100
Bahrain	63	63	<1	-	-	-	-	-	-	24	-	5	8	100
Egypt	1	1	<1	-	-	-	-	-	-	92	-	6	1	100
India	4	2	1.5	0.5	-	<1	-	-	-	9	<1	2	85	100
Israel	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	-	2	83	100
Iran	89	88	<1	-	-	-	-	<1	-	9	-	1	<1	100
Iraq	62	61	<1	-	-	-	-	<1	-	36	-	2	<1	100
Jordan	2	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	94	-	4	-	100
Kuwait	25	25	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	60	-	4	11	100
Lebanon	37	29	<1	-	6	-	-	-	1.5	23	-	38	2	100
Libya	<1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	97	1	<1	1	100
Morocco	<1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	98	-	1	1	100
Oman	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	19	75	1	1	100
Pak	21	21	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	76	-	2	<1	100
PT	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	73	-	6	19	100
Qatar	5	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	85	-	1	4	100
Saudi Arabia	10	9	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	89	-	<1	<1	100
Syria	14	-	1	-	<1	-	-	-	12	74	-	10	<1	100
Tajikistan	5	-	5	-	-	-0.5	-	-	-	87	-	4	3.5	100
Tunisia	<1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	98	<1	1	1	100
Turkey	20	5	-	-	-	-	14	-	1	78	-	1	1	100
UAE	16	15	1	-	<1	-	-	-	-	80	-	1	3	100
Yemen	47	11	2	-	-	-	-	34	-	52	-	1	<1	100

Notes:
1. All figures are best estimates based on a variety of sources. They should be treated with caution.
2. <1 indicates that the confessional grouping is known to have a very small representation in the particular country.
3. A dash indicates that the population is absent, or is so negligible that it can be considered to be absent.

Table 5. Shi'a and Sunni populations (%) in Arab countries and selected other states

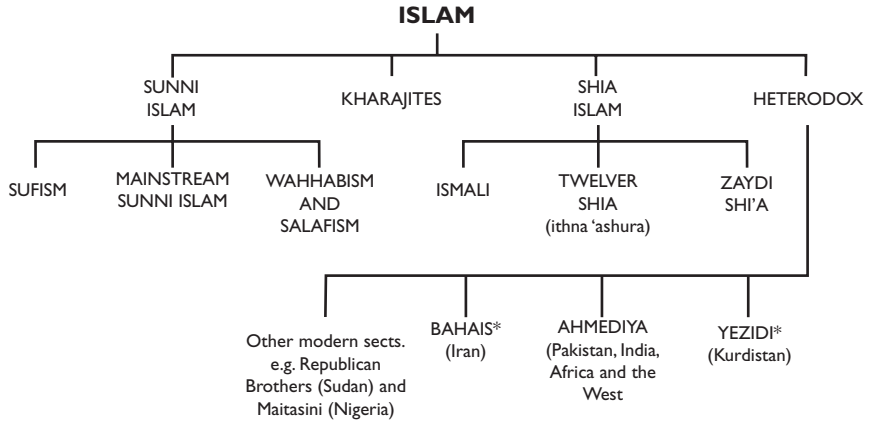


Figure 1. The major Muslim sects

**Note: Bahais and Yezidis consider their religions as separate to Islam*

Shi'ism

The majority of Shi'as follow the "Twelver Shi'ism" (*ithna 'ashura*) school, which holds that were twelve rightful descendants (the twelve Imams) of the Prophet. The last of these, known as the Hidden Imam, is believed not to have died but to have entered a state of occultation, a metaphysical existence from which he will emerge at some point in the future to lead humanity into a new era of peace. Twelver Shi'as follow the Jafari legal school.

The two other main Shi'a branches are Ismaili Shi'ism, which recognises only seven Imams, and Zaydi Shi'ism, who follow Zayd Ibn 'Ali, the grandson of the third Shi'a Imam, Husayn, and acknowledge only five of the Prophet's descendants. These branches follow the Imami and Zaydi schools respectively.

The principal Shi'a holy places are:

- Najaf (Iraq) - burial place of Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in- law.
- Kerbala (Iraq) - location of Hussayn's (Ali's son; Prophet's grandson) martydom.
- Samarra (Iraq) - tombs of the tenth and eleventh Imams.
- Kazimayn (Iraq) - tombs of the seventh and ninth Imams.
- Mashad (Iran) - tomb of eighth Imam.
- Qom (Iran) - tombs of numerous Shi'a saints, including Fatima, the sister of the eighth Imam.
- Medina (Saudi Arabia) - tombs of the second, fourth, fifth and sixth Imams.

Wahhabism

Wahhabism is the dominant creed in Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and is founded on the revivalist teachings of Muhammad Ibn Abdul Wahhab, whose descendants helped unify the Kingdom in 1932. Wahhab believed that Islamic society had degenerated from its original theosophy and ideals, and preached that it should be renewed through a return to the practices extolled by the Prophet. Saudis themselves do not generally use the term "Wahhabi", preferring to describe themselves as "Unitarians" (Muwahhhidun), believers in one indivisible deity. Indeed, the term Wahhabi is used as a form of abuse in some parts of the Arab world, particularly in Iraq.

In legal terms, Wahhabism is closest to the Hanbali school. It should be recognised that there are a number of different theological streams within Wahhabism, of which that practised in Saudi Arabia is only one. Central to Wahhabi doctrine is the concept of *tawheed*, loosely translated as the Unity of God. A strict interpretation of this concept holds that other religions - including non-Wahhabi Sunni creeds - violate *tawheed* and may therefore be legitimately persecuted. Particular vehemence is reserved for Shi'ism. The latter is sometimes viewed as a "Jewish conspiracy" from a radical Wahhabi perspective, its followers branded as apostates.

Salafism

Salafism, sometimes termed neo-Wahhabism, was founded in the late nineteenth century by a number of Muslim reformers who, like the Wahhabis, believed that Islam should return to what they perceived as its "Golden Age", the time of the Prophet and the Caliphs. Its origins lie in the teachings of earlier Islamic scholars, particularly Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328). The sixth Caliph, Mu'awiya, represents the most important figure for Salafists, after the Prophet.

The mainstay of Salafist thought is the conviction that the Golden Age of Islam can return only in the context of an Islamic state, guided by the

Shari'a. Later thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), whose book *Milestones* had a major impact on the development of Salafist thought, added that any government that does not abide by the Shari'a must be fought and resisted. Salafism does not follow any particular legal schools, its followers holding that such divisions are un-Islamic as they contradict the unity of Islam. As such, Salafis reject the authority of the Ulama and maintain their own system of jurisprudence.

Sufism

Sufism is usually described as a mystical form of Islam which has traditionally stood apart from orthodox Sunnism, although it is considered to be a Sunnite branch today. It is concerned with the direct spiritual relationship of the individual with God, and many of its followers engage in practices frowned upon by orthodox Sunnis. These include the use of music and dancing during religious services, regarded as heretical by most other Islamic sects.

Sufism incorporates a strong anti-statist ethic, and one of its concerns is with imbuing a community with mechanisms of social support which, it is held, are inadequately provided by the institutions of the state. Sufi theosophy has also historically been opposed to the rigid teachings of the Ulama, emphasising instead what is allowed in Islam rather than what is prohibited, and the relationship between Islamic jurisprudence and Sufism has therefore been an uneasy one. Because Sufi leaders (termed *talibs*) also tended to be drawn from the lower classes, the rhetoric of Sufism has traditionally embraced a significant political dimension. There are notable links between certain fundamentalist movements and Sufism - the Muslim Brotherhood has many Sufi adherents, for example.

Sufism is regarded as fundamentally incompatible with Shi'ism. The notion of giving absolute obedience to the Sufi talib is directly opposed to the Shi'a stipulation of devotion to the Hidden Imam. There are, however, a small number of Shi'a-orientated Sufi orders, located in non-Arab countries

(mostly in Iran, Kashmir, Turkey and Azerbaijan). Wahhabis and Salafis also regard Sufis as deviants from the true path of Islam.

Christians in the Arab world

The Arab world contains many well-established Christian communities, some of which pre-date the Islamic conquests. The Christian population is estimated to be between 12 and 16 million, representing five to seven percent of the total population of the region, and is located largely in Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Sudan, the Palestinian territories, Jordan and Iraq. The Coptic church is the most important Christian denomination in the Middle East, with over seven million members residing largely in Egypt. It should be noted that a significant minority of Christians do not consider themselves to be Arabs. A summary of the principal denominations which are represented in the region are given in table 6 below.

Christian denomination	Main Arab countries
Armenian Apostolic	Palestinian Territories, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria
Assyrian Church of the East (Nestorian)	Syria, Iraq
Catholic Church of the Latin Rite	Lebanon, Jordan, Palestinian Territories
Chaldean	Iraq
Coptic Catholic	Egypt
Coptic Orthodox	Egypt
Greek Orthodox	Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestinian Territories, Kuwait
Maronite	Lebanon
Melkite (Greek Catholic)	Syria, Lebanon, Jordan
Syrian Catholic	Syria

Table 6. Christian Denominations in the Arab World

SECTION EIGHT
ATTITUDES TO THE WEST

Although it is difficult to generalise about Arabic attitudes to the West, it is possible to make some high-level observations which apply to most of the countries of the region.

Arab Culture. As suggested in section one, the peoples of the Arab world are the inheritors of an extremely rich and diverse cultural heritage, which at one stage in history cohered in a true global empire. In one sense, then, the "clash of civilisations" thesis often invoked in the West to describe the relationship between the West and the Orient has a greater salience in the Arab world, in the way this relationship is popularly imagined. Prior to the Iraq war in 2003, for example, the Iraqi and pan-Arab media continually emphasised the cultural history of the country, and particularly the achievements of the population in the arts and sciences. Iraq as the "cradle of civilisation", responsible for the invention of urbanism, writing and literature, represented the principal theme underpinning this discourse.

The growing penetration of western cultural symbols and values in the Arab world has generated significant social tensions between conservative and secular sectors of society. To many in the religious establishment, western culture is perceived as a threat to traditional Islamic mores, particularly in those areas which directly contradict Qur'anic teaching - such as attitudes to relations between the sexes, alcohol and consumerism - and they have become increasingly concerned in recent years by the apparent attraction of some western values to many young Arab people. These fears are echoed among some within the younger generations themselves, who are disproportionately affected by the region's underdevelopment in most countries, and therefore susceptible to radicalisation from leaders who offer them something more than that offered by their own governments. Obvious examples here are the leaders of Islamist groups in north Africa and the Palestinian rejectionist groups. Westerners are often perceived as culturally arrogant, regarding their culture as inherently superior to that of

the Arabs, and reports of the alleged discrimination suffered by Arab people in the a number of western states have compounded these feelings.

The recent history of the Arab world has therefore been painful for many, with the what they perceive as the subjugation, even emasculation, of the Arab 'nation' at the hands of the West a source of resentment for both political and religious leaders and their citizens alike.

The Colonial Legacy. Many in the Arab world blame western nations, most notably the UK and France, for creating 'artificial' states in the region whose borders have been sources of contention between neighbours ever since. The political problems faced by a number of countries over the past fifty or so years are also viewed as emerging as a direct product of colonial policy. Thus the seeds of the Islamist insurgency in Algeria, the rise of Ba'athism in Iraq, the Lebanese civil war, the Palestinian intifadas and the ongoing conflict in Sudan are all attributed in some quarters as having been sown by the erstwhile colonial masters of these countries in the early years of the twentieth century.

The Israeli/Palestinian Conflict. Opinion polls and the discourse of the Arab media suggest that Israel's policies towards the Palestinians represents the key political issue for most people across the region. It is regarded as absolutely central in directing the relationship between the Arab world and the West, as well as shaping the prevailing opinions which Arabs hold towards such issues as the invasion of Iraq, the global campaign against terrorism and the balance between secularist and Islamist strands in Arab polities and culture. The support of the US (and, to a lesser extent, the UK) for Israel represents for many Arabs evidence of the West's doublestandards. For example, western pronouncements against the human rights record of Arab governments, notably that of the Ba'ath regime prior to the Iraq war in 2003, ring hollow for many in the region when held up against what are perceived to be the gross human rights abuses committed against the Palestinian population, apparently with the sanction of western governments. US policy towards the region is regarded by many as being

entirely influenced by the "Zionist lobby", something which colours their interpretation of all western initiatives in the Arab world.

The "War Against Terror". Western policy in the aftermath of the attacks of September 11th 2001 in New York and Washington has led to a feeling among many Arabs that the US in cohort with a number of European governments is pursuing a hidden agenda under the guise of the global "war against terrorism". Many Arabs simply are unable to believe claims by western politicians that they have no designs to control Middle Eastern oil supplies, for example, or maintain a long-term military occupation of Iraq. Controversy over Iraqi development contracts, alleged incidents of prisoner abuse in that country at the hands of western soldiers and the continued detention of suspects at Guantanamo Bay, among other issues, have fuelled a general feeling on the Arab street that the war on terror is, in fact, a war against Muslims in general. Indeed, the backlash against Coalition actions in Afghanistan and Iraq has been articulated in some parts of the Arab world in *cultural*, not geopolitical, terms, as an attack on Islam itself.

Conclusion. Along with the effect of the exportation of western values through globalisation, particularly that of the mass media, one can conclude that Arab culture is undergoing profound changes at the present time. Commentators argue that this has led to an Arab 'identity crisis', focused around the paradox created by, on the one hand, a desire on the part of many in the Arab world to study and work in the west, and the threat to traditional Arab and Islamic values which many conservatives view western culture as representing, on the other.

Over the course of the next few decades, it is clear that the exposure of Arab populations to western cultural values will continue to deepen as globalisation accelerates, but this does not mean that Arab culture will itself wither and disappear in response. Indeed, anthropologists and psychologists have often argued that cultures become more resilient when their members perceive them to be under threat. In this way, the negative opinion which much of the Arab population currently holds towards the West, particularly

the US, may be viewed as attempt to defend their own culture from the penetration of what remains a highly alien world-view. However, processes of syncretism are also likely to occur, as new cultural forms are assimilated into traditional value systems and unwelcome aspects of western culture are jettisoned. This process is already occurring in the shopping malls of Kuwait City and the bazaars of Cairo, for example, and is heralding changes which will, one hopes, lead to a period of renewed understanding between the western and Arab worlds. However, much will depend on the successful resolution of the problems which currently beset the region, most importantly continuing underdevelopment and the Israeli/Palestinian crisis; and in addressing such issues, the West will necessarily be at the forefront, whether it or the Arab world likes it or not.

ANNEX ONE
SUNNI AND SHI'A DOCTRINE

Perhaps the most critical difference between the Sunni and Shi'a theosophies is in the way the relationship between an individual and God is conceived. The origins of this difference lie in the events that occurred in the first few decades after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, which themselves led directly to the schism among his followers and the formation of the two divergent sects.

The majority of the Prophet's followers believed that Muhammad had failed to nominate a rightful heir before he died, and therefore did not wish for the Caliphate (the supreme authority in the global Islamic State, as proscribed in the Qur'an) to be determined progenitorially. His close companions felt that the divine succession should be determined by consensus, and subsequently elected the Prophet's father-in-law, Abu Baqr, to become the first Caliph. Abu Baqr died shortly afterwards, to be succeeded by Omar, then Uthman and then the fourth Caliph, Ali.

Ali was the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, and according to a minority of the Prophet's followers, had been specifically anointed in 632AD by him to be his successor. To these followers - the proto- Shi'ite ('Party of Ali') sect - Ali was therefore Muhammad's only rightful heir. However, the death of Uthman occurred in suspicious circumstances in which Ali himself was implicated, and many of the Prophet's followers refused to recognise Ali as Caliph and turned instead to Uthman's nephew, Mu'awiya, who was then governor of Syria. Mu'awiya pronounced himself as Caliph in direct challenge to Ali, who had already dismissed him from the governorship. The growing rivalry between the two camps cumulated in the Battle of Siffin on the Euphrates in AD656. Although the Syrian forces were out-numbered and out-fought, Ali agreed to arbitrate an end to the battle, accepting the Syrian's argument that God should decide the outcome. The arbitration went against Ali, which led to a defection of some his supporters who eventually murdered him in AD661. Mu'awiya became the

first Caliph of the Umayyid Dynasty, which ruled Syria and much of the Gulf for the following 70 years.

For Ali's remaining followers, Ali's sons (the Prophet's grandsons), Hassan and Hussayn, were the legitimate inheritors of the Caliphate; the Umayyids in Syria, however, declared Mu'awiya's son, Yazid, as the divine successor. In AD680, the two factions fought again at the Battle of Karbala, during which Hussayn was decapitated and his head taken to Damascus by Yazid's army. This event is commemorated every year in one of the most significant Shi'a ceremonies, the Day of Ashur'a, when thousands of pilgrims travel to Karbala and the death of Hussayn is re-enacted through elaborate passion plays and flagellation rituals. The tombs of the 'first martyrs', Ali in Najaf and Hussayn in Karbala, represent the two most significant holy sites for the Shi'a.

Over the intervening centuries, whilst Islam as a whole has fragmented into various competing theosophies and sects, the divergent beliefs of the two main confessional communities concerning the relationship between an individual and God remains the main point of departure for Muslims globally. The fundamental doctrine of Shi'ism is based on the idea of the 'purity' of the Prophet's family and their decedents, who are known as Imams. Ali and his immediate decedents, collectively known as the Twelve Imams, are regarded as infallible, whose teachings should be regarded as the word as God in the same way as those of the Prophet. The cycle of divine revelation through the Imams will only be completed when the 12th Imam, also known as the Expected One (*Mahdi*) or the Hidden Imam, returns to earth to rule in justice and in peace. Until that event occurs, the teachings of the Imams are revealed to senior religious scholars, known as *Mujtahids*, who are effectively viewed as their representatives on earth.

For the Sunnis, however, divine revelation stopped with Muhammad. Although Sunnis recognise the first three Imams - Ali and his two sons - they are not regarded as divine figures in the same way as they viewed in Shi'ism. For Sunnis, the first four Caliphs (including Ali, collectively known as the *Rashidun*) are the 'rightful' Caliphs, and are far more significant than the

Imams. Shi'a Muslims, on the other hand, regard the first three Caliphs as usurpers, and it is very uncommon for children in Shi'a families to be named after them. Indeed, the traditional meaning of the term 'Imam' is different within the two sects; in Sunnism, it is used to refer to any leader of a mosque, whereas in Shi'ism it generally connotes one of the original Twelve Imams. Since the Iranian revolution, it has also come to mean the most senior of the *Mujtahids*, e.g. those based in Najaf and Qom, who claim direct descent from the Prophet (as, traditionally, do the lowerlevel Shi'a clerics, the *Sadah* (pl of *Sayyid*)). Sunni imams are not regarded as decedents of the Prophet, and are chosen by consensus among the religious community rather than through any hereditary principle.

Sunni Islam is therefore less authoritarian and hierarchical than Shi'ism. In the latter, each individual enters a spiritual relationship with their 'source of emulation', a *mujtahid* who usually claims descent from one of the original Imams, whose teachings they follow. (In practice, although most Shi'a profess to respect a particular *mujtahid*, many do not know about their advice or teachings in detail). There is no equivalent stipulation in Sunnism. The theosophical differences between the two sects have sometimes been likened to those that exist between Protestantism and Catholicism, in the way in which the role of the Catholic priest as an intermediary between the individual and God contrasts with the personal, direct relationship with God envisaged in the Protestant church. Similarly, the importance of the Christian family in Catholicism has parallels with the significance donated to Ali and his sons in Shi'ism.

ANNEX TWO
USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES

The Arabic alphabet contains 28 letters. Text is read from right to left, numbers from left to right.

Numbers

0	*sifir*
1	*wahid*
2	*ithnayn*
3	*tala'ata*
4	*arba'a*
5	*khamsa*
6	*sita'a*
7	*saba'a*
8	*tamanya*
9	*tissa'a*
10	*a'ashra*
11	*ihdashr*
12	*itnaysh*
13	*tala'atash*
14	*arba'ata'ash*
20	*ishri'in*
21	*wahid wa'ishri'in*
30	*talathi'in*
40	*arba'ati'in*
50	*khamsi'in*
60	*sitti'in*
70	*saba'i'in*
80	*tamaani'in*
90	*tis'i'in*
100	*miyya*
200	*mittayn*
1,000	*elf*
2,000	*alfayn*
3,000	*tala'athat aalaaf*
1,000,000	*malaayin*

Days of the week

Monday	*Yawm al-Ithnayn*
Tuesday	*Yawm al-Tala'ata*
Wednesday	*Yawm al-Arbaa*
Thursday	*Yawm al-Kamis*
Friday	*Yawm al-Jumba'a*
Saturday	*Yawm al-Ahad*
Sunday	*Yawm al-Sabt*

Food and drink

Bread	*khubz*
Breakfast	*futu'ur*
Cheese	*jibnah*
Chicken	*djaaj*
Coffee	*garwa*
Fish	*samaka*
Fruit	*fa'akiha*
Lamb	*saru'uf*
Pork	*lahm khanziir*
Salad	*salata*
Soup	*behar*
Tea	*chai*
Vegetarian	*nabati*
Water	*my*

Conversation

Hello/welcome	*maharba (or, for formal occassions, sallam alaikum, with the response wa alaikum a'salam)*
Goodbye -	
(to a man)	*ma a'salam*
(to a woman)	*ma asala'meh*
Yes	*na'am (or aywa)*
No	*la*
Please	*min fadlak*
Sorry	*smahini*
Thankyou	*hukran*
You're welcome	*'afwan or hlan wasahlan*
What is your name?	*Ma asmak*
I would like	*min fadlak*
If God wills	*inshallah*
How long (time)?	*gaddaysh*

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ANNEX THREE
KEY DATES IN 2007 AND 2008

Much of the Arab World uses the Islamic (or Hijra) calendar, which is based on the phases of the moon. Like the solar (Gregorian) calendar used in the west, it consists of 12 months, but it is 11 days shorter. The calendar started in AD 622, the year of the Prophet's migration from Mecca to Medina (Hijra). AD 2007 is equivalent to AH 1428 in the Islamic calendar. (AH = Anno Hegirae = Year of the Hijra).

Because the beginning of the month is determined by the sighting of the new moon in the Islamic calendar, all dates are subject to change by (+ or -) one day.

2007:

- 20 January Islamic New Year
- 30 January Ashura Festival (Shi'a)
- 10 March Arbare'en Festival (Shi'a)
- 31 March Milad al-Nabi (Birth of the Prophet Mohammad - Sunni)
- 04 April Milad al-nabi (Birth of the Prophet Mohammad - Shia)
- 28 July Death of the 10th Imam
- 10 August Isra al-Mi'raj (commemorating Prophet's ascension to heaven)
- 29 August Occulation of 12th Imam (Shi'a)
- 13 September - 12 october Ramadan (Holy Month)
- 08 October Laylat U1-Qadr (Night of Power)
- 13 October Eid al-Fitr (Celebrating the end of Ramadan)
- 02 December Birth of the 8th Imam

- 19 December Hajj (Mecca)
- 20 December Eid al-Auda

2008:

- 09 January Islamic New Year
- 19 January Ashura Festival (Shi'a)
- 28 February Arbare'en Festival (Shi'a)
- 20 March Milad al-Nabi (Birth of the Prophet Mohammad - Sunni)
- 25 March (Birth of the Prophet Mohammad - Shi'a)
- 17 July Death of the 10th Imam
- 31 July Isra al-Mi'raj (commemorating Prophet's ascension to Heaven also known as Lailat al-Mi'raj)
- 18 August Occultation of the 12th Imam (Imam Mahdi) - Shia
- 04 August (2 Sha'ban) Anniversary of the Founding of the Ba'ath Party in Syria in 1947
- 02 September - 01 October Ramadan (Holy Month)
- 28 September Laylat Ul-Qadr (Night of Power)
- 02 October Eid al-Fitr (Celebrating the end of Ramadan)
- 21 November Birth of the 8th Imam
- 08 December Hajj (Mecca)
- 09 December Eid al-Auda
- 30 December Islamic New Year

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