

The Arab Mind by Raphael Patai. Book review by Lloyd F. Jordan

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THE ARAB MIND. By *Raphael Patai*. (Charles Scribners and Sons, New York, 1973.)

The major objectives of social science research involving the topics of "national character" or "personality and culture" are: (1) the prediction of the type of character that a given society is likely to produce, based upon the sum total of its culture and social structure and (2) the demonstration of how character or personality, in turn, impacts upon the very culture and social structure which has shaped it.

Raphael Patai's recent book, *The Arab Mind*, is a significant scholarly contribution to the field of national character research in general and, more specifically, to the understanding of Arab culture and national character. Further, the book implicitly suggests the relevance of national character research to intelligence analysis. It seems, therefore, both appropriate and useful to assess Patai's book in the following contexts: (1) its contribution to the literature on the Arabs, (2) its status in terms of the evolutionary development of national character research as a field, and (3) both its relevance and that of national character research in general to intelligence analysis.

Patai's book is clearly the product of a profound knowledge of Arab

civilization. The book is well organized and, for a scholarly study, especially interestingly and elegantly written. The author does a masterful job of integrating his knowledge of the many facets of the culture, such as the language, the arts and literature, and child-rearing practices, and then delineating the ways that these cultural variables influence personality development. In this respect, it is appropriate to compare Patai's book with Sania Hamady's *The Temperament and Character of the Arabs*, published in 1960, since the objective of both authors was the same — the delineation of Arab national character. While Hamady and Patai reach many of the same conclusions about the Arabs, Patai's analysis and explanation of the "why" of their behavior places his study on a considerably higher analytical plane than that of Hamady. The specialist on the Arabs may not discover anything startlingly new about Arab character or world view in Patai's book, but he will probably acquire a better appreciation of the cultural and psychological wellsprings of Arab behavior. It is in this latter respect that *The Arab Mind* is an important contribution to the scholarly literature on the Arabs.

Where does Patai's book stand in the evolution of national character research to date? To make such an assessment, it is necessary to review briefly the development of this genre of research.

The intellectual roots of national character research can be traced to cultural anthropology as early as the 1920's. During World War II, those methods employed earlier in the academic community in this field of research were brought to bear upon a variety of problems connected with the war effort.

It was precisely the inaccessibility of the target country and the availability of only fragmentary information about it that made national character research relevant to intelligence analysis during the war. The cultural anthropologists had long been developing models of former and disappearing cultures from fragmentary materials. The anthropologists, joined by the psychiatrists, combined the use of psychoanalytic theory, interaction theory, child development theory, and learning theory with standard anthropological research methods to construct models of the contemporary cultures of wartime enemy countries, Japan and Germany. Indeed, Ruth Benedict's classic study *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* is an example of this multidisciplinary approach to national character research which evolved in the World War II period.

Since the appearance of Ruth Benedict's book in 1946, national character studies have fallen into two broad categories despite some differences in terms of approach, focus, and explicitness of conceptual framework. Until the late 1950's, national character studies tended to be focused on the modal personality (i.e., the statistically most significant personality construct in the group studied, and not necessarily that of the majority) of a group or a nation. The research findings derived from the application of psychological, sociological, and psychoanalytical theories were combined with other materials, such as autobiographical literature and folklore, to produce a general description of the modal personality. The studies of this period tended to be more descriptive than analytical, and the modal personality construct tended to be related to the total culture, or at least, its salient features.

In the late 1950's, a new line of research emerged alongside the earlier type of national character study. The later studies tended to be narrower in focus than their predecessors, in that they concentrated on the relationship of personality traits to subsets of a given society or a given category of roles of that society, rather than on the identification of relationships between personality and the social structure as a whole. In addition, a number of comparative studies appeared such as Francis L. K. Hsu's *Americans and Chinese and Almond and Verba's Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. A greater effort was also made to use more precise measurement techniques. Large samples of given populations, the projective psychological test, and public opinion polling techniques were increasingly employed. Richard Solomon's *Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture* is a good example of a recent attempt to integrate the use of a number of these techniques.

Viewed against these two general categories of national character research, *The Arab Mind* belongs more to the earlier than the later tradition of research in this field. Patai's approach is very similar to that employed, for example, in the Benedict and Hamady studies already cited, and by Dinko Tomasic in *Personality and Culture in Eastern European Politics*. In these studies the authors used information derived from formal and informal interviews, personal observations, and a knowledge of the history, arts, and religion of the society. These types of data were all integrated by means of concepts in linguistics, psychoanalytical theory, and child-learning theory to produce the national character construct. While Patai used three surveys carried out by others, there is no evidence that he employed polling techniques, large population samples, or psychological projective tests in his research. He cannot be

criticized for not having used the psychological projection tests because, despite the fact that such tests have been used in a number of national character research works, their validity in such research remains controversial.

In one respect, however, Patai's work is an improvement over that of Benedict, Tomasic, and Hamady in that he has made the theoretical underpinnings of his research more explicit than they have. In his chapter, "The Group Aspects of the Mind," his discussion of the relationship of the concepts of national character and modal personality and their utility in the study of highly homogeneous societies as compared to heterogeneous industrialized societies clearly demonstrates his concern with the theoretical framework of his research — a concern which has not received adequate emphasis in this field. Moreover, his adherence to this framework throughout his book is, indeed, impressive.

What, if any, utility does the field of national character research have for intelligence? It appears that the intelligence officer often implicitly incorporates into intelligence assessments certain national character considerations in an unsystematic and, perhaps, unconscious way.* The question is whether or not the collection, organization, and systematic analysis of the types of data that are used in national character studies within a more structured analytical framework would make a significant contribution to a number of fields of intelligence activity.

Despite the relatively primitive level of methodological and conceptual rigor that obtain in the national character research field, it has utility now and considerable potential for intelligence analysis in the future. National character analyses can provide a useful, albeit broad, gauge against which the behavior of elites, governments, and electorates can be assessed in particular situations. Once a national character construct, such as that of the Arabs, has been developed, the next and most difficult task is to attempt to establish linkages between it and a propensity for action. An important intermediate step in this process for intelligence purposes is to focus upon the extent and ways in which elites or other subgroups of a given society vary from the modal personality or national character. In Chapter XII of *The Arab Mind*, Patai has made an interesting beginning in this direction in his discussion of the cultural dichotomy of the elites and the masses. He stops, however, short of any attempt to establish the linkages referred to above.

The foregoing discussion is not intended to suggest that national character analyses per se will enable the analyst to predict the specific acts or decisions of a government, or any other group. But the well-researched national character dimension combined with other relevant variables appears to hold considerable potential for improving the assessment of the propensity of a government, elite, or electorate to act in certain directions.

Much work, of course, remains to be done to improve the scientific basis of national character research. It is important for intelligence purposes, for example, to attempt to improve the techniques for the measurement of the variance of subgroups of the population from the national character construct. Continued experimentation is needed with measurement techniques, such as the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and other means that hold promise for enhancing the empirical verification of national character research results in general. Computer technology offers considerable promise for easing the analytical burdens involved in the coding and manipulation of data acquired from very large population samples by means of the techniques mentioned above. Integration of national character research into various aspects of intelligence activity in a productive way requires a systematic and sustained data collection program and an integrated multidisciplinary staff to analyze the data.

In summation, the work of Patai and others in the national character research field merits serious examination for the contribution it can make to intelligence analysis and possibly other areas of intelligence activity.

Footnotes

*See Lewis, A. M.: "Re-examining Our Perceptions on Vietnam," Studies, XVII/4.

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Looking at other reviews of "The Arab Mind," it appears readers divide into two camps. The first group, for whom ideology matters more than reality, hate this book. The second group, largely military, for whom their lives depend on an accurate perception of reality, love this book. This divergence alone suggests the book is worth reading. "The Arab Mind" was once an obscure book by an obscure man. Between the Arab peoples inhabiting different countries. One of the most interesting aspects of the book is how Patai uses historical Arab sources to buttress his own conclusions, from Ibn Khaldun on forward. So the criticisms are misplaced. In fact, what's apparent is that other authors on this topic who actually spend any time with Arabs, even those who loathe Patai, agree with Patai. The Arab Mind by Raphael Patai. Book review by Lloyd F. Jordan CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM RELEASE IN FULL 2 JULY 96. Unclassified. The arab mind. By Raphael Patai. (Charles Scribners and Sons, New York, 1973.) The major objectives of social science research involving the topics of "national character" or "personality and culture" are: (1) the prediction of the type of character that a given society is likely to produce, based upon the sum total of its culture and social structure and (2) the demonstration of how character or personality, in turn, impacts upon the very The Amazon Book Review Book recommendations, author interviews, editors' picks, and more. Read it now. Enter your mobile number or email address below and we'll send you a link to download the free Kindle App. This item: The Arab Mind by Raphael Patai Paperback \$18.95. Available to ship in 1-2 days. Ships from and sold by Amazon.com. Raphael Patai was a prolific cultural anthropologist, folklorist, historian, and Biblical scholar. He published more than 600 articles and thirty books, including The Arab Mind, The Jewish Mind, Arab Folktales from Palestine and Israel, and Jadid al-Islam: The Jewish "New Muslims" of Meshed (the latter two published posthumously). Dr. Patai began studying Arabic at the age of eighteen in his native Hungary. The book in question is called The Arab Mind, and is by Raphael Patai, a cultural anthropologist who taught at several US universities, including Columbia and Princeton. I must admit that, despite having spent some years studying Arabic language and culture, I had not heard of this alleged masterpiece until last week, when the investigative journalist Seymour Hersh mentioned it in an article for New Yorker magazine.