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Lawrence of Iraq

The Brits, we are often told, do foreign affairs better. Centuries of colonialism taught them lessons in exercising power over other societies, taking advantage of local customs and institutions, to make acceptable the foreign domination. The Brits ruled vast India with a comparative handful of troops this way.

Now, we learn of an American soldier rediscovering the same lesson on his own. Army Staff Sgt. Dale L. Horn is known in 37 villages and towns in Iraq as the American sheik. According to the [AP](#):

Horn, 25, a native of Fort Walton Beach, Fla., acknowledges he had little interest in the region before coming here. But a local sheik friendly to U.S. forces, Dr. Mohammed Ismail Ahmed, explained the inner workings of rural Iraqi society on one of Horn's first Humvee patrols.

Horn says he was intrigued, and started making a point of stopping by all the villages, all but one dominated by Sunni Arabs, to talk to people about their life and security problems.

Moreover, he pressed for development projects in the area: he now boasts that he helped funnel \$136,000 worth of aid into the area. Part of that paid for delivery of clean water to 30 villages during the broiling summer months.

Having influence to get things done, and passing on money work in practically every major culture to establish you as a leader.

"They saw that we were interested in them, instead of just taking care of the bases," Horn said.

Mohammed, Horn's mentor and known for his dry sense of humor, eventually suggested during a meeting of village leaders that Horn be named a sheik. The sheiks approved by voice vote, Horn said.

It was a daring suggestion, so being able to cloak it in the guise of a joke by someone with a "dry wit" was a useful insurance policy. But once they agreed to give it a try, it became something real: an American soldier as sheik. By understanding how to adapt his appearance and title to the role of sheik, Sgt. Horn makes his presence acceptable, even palatable.

Some sheiks later gave him five sheep and a postage stamp of land, fulfilling some of the requirements for sheikdom. Others encouraged him to start looking for a second wife, which Horn's spouse back in Florida immediately vetoed.

But what may have originally started as a joke among crusty village elders has sprouted into something serious enough for 100 to 200 village leaders to meet with Horn each month to discuss security issues.

And Horn doesn't take his responsibilities lightly. He lately has been prodding the Iraqi Education Ministry to pay local teachers, and he closely follows a water pipeline project that he hopes will ensure the steady flow of clean water to his villages.

"Ninety percent of the people in my area are shepherds or simple townspeople," said Horn. "They simply want to find a decent job to make enough money to provide food and a stable place for their people to live."

To Horn's commanders, his success justifies his unorthodox approach: no rockets have hit their base in the last half year.

"He has developed a great relationship with local leaders," said Lt. Col. Bradley Becker, who commands the 2nd Battalion, 8th Field Artillery Regiment. "They love him. They're not going to let anyone shoot at Sheik Horn."

He has even won occasional exemption from the military dress code — villagers provide a changing room where he can change from desert camouflage to robes upon arrival.

I don't quite know what kind of medal Sgt. Horn deserves, but I do know that he has a valuable lesson for our military. His success should be made known throughout the ranks, and the US Forces should try to encourage other areas to follow the same practice.

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