Expeditionary Culture Field Guide

AFGHANISTAN

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of 2 parts:

Part 1 introduces "Culture General," the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment, particularly the Middle East.

Part 2 presents "Culture Specific" Afghanistan, focusing on unique cultural features of Afghanistan society and is designed to complement other pre-deployment training. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location.

For additional information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ or contact the AFCLC's Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, representing the importance Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize these behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems among others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the ways different cultures define family or kinship, a deployed military member can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors Across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of

unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

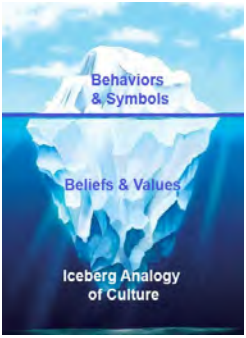
One of our basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different according to our cultural standard. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Consequently, we assume that individuals falling into the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview– how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for our actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is physical evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central facet of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have help shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.



Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend

judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout the Middle East, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common among most African countries. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

The people occupying eastern Iran, Afghanistan, and western Pakistan share a common history anchored in the mutual exchange of trade, warfare, and territory. The boundaries dividing the three countries dissect kin groups that oftentimes have little regard for their respective national heritages. This mutual disinterest is especially true for the Pashtuns residing on either side of the Durand Line, which is the border established in 1893 between Afghanistan and Pakistan. They tend to align with their shared ethnic heritage rather than their national identity and do not recognize their border because it segregates what they view as their traditional tribal lands. For example, it is common for village elders to have extensive knowledge spanning hundreds of years of a tribal group's existence, yet know little about their national history.

Also, despite a harsh physical environment and social unrest, there are few obstacles to the flow of people and resources between the two countries (see *Political & Social Relations*).

Similarly, Afghan cities such as Jalalabad and Kandahar share more commonality with Pakistani cities within close proximity, such a Peshawar and Quetta, than they do with other Afghan cities. This factor is primarily due to shared ethnic (Pashtun) and religious (Muslim) traditions.

Positioned on strategic ancient trade routes connecting east and west; Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran have been heavily influenced by neighboring civilizations such as the Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Mongols, and Europeans. Consequently, the inhabitants of this tri-nation region are accustomed to (although sometimes resentful of) foreign presence on their territory. Of note, perhaps the most significant external influence on the region is Islam (see *Religion & Spirituality*).

Afghanistan

The land of contemporary Afghanistan was once part of several empires. Traditionally, Dari speakers have comprised Afghanistan's educated upper-class, although the Pashtuns (who mostly speak Urdu) have maintained social predominance. With the decline of foreign influence in the 19th century, Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan promoted a fusion of their ethnic and national identities with the name "Afghanistan" synonymous to Pashtun dominance within the country.

In the late 19th century Afghanistan successfully combated colonial powers through three wars, only to later become a buffer between Russia and British India; however, Afghanistan failed to establish internal cohesion among its various ethnic populations, both rural and urban. Continuing into the 20th century, this ethnic disharmony led to an attempted coup by Afghan Communists and a Soviet invasion in 1979.

The ensuing war between Communist forces and anti-communist Mujahedin rebels lasted for a decade, with the Soviet Union eventually withdrawing from Afghanistan in 1989. Soon afterwards, the Pakistani-sponsored Taliban assumed

control of Afghanistan, although it was later dismantled in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks on the US when Coalition forces invaded Afghanistan in Operation Enduring Freedom. Plagued by continuing internal instability and conflict, today Afghanistan remains a fledgling attempt to achieve democracy.

2. Political and Social Relations

Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran collectively represent power-sharing societies where traditional kin-based political systems coexist with modern post-colonial centralized governments. Consequently, tension and occasional conflict are known to occur between these two ruling authorities. In Iran, for example, the relationship between ethnic groups, such as the northeastern Kurds and the southwestern Baluchis, and the central government is best described as “a strained peace.” Kurdish herders tend to resist state control of their activities. Similarly, differing religious affiliations further intensify this somewhat adversarial relationship, often resulting in further divisions within the governing systems themselves (see *Religion & Spirituality*).

In Afghanistan, the national government has been unsuccessful in its attempts to impose centralized rule on citizens who have been occupying outlying rural area since the mid-19th century. Consequently, the Afghan central government is confined to the vicinity of Kabul. Many of these rural tribes associate much of their identity with their traditional homeland areas. For example, the Pashtuns, who comprise the largest Afghan ethnic group, live in the southern and eastern portions of the country, with smaller numbers living in urban areas (primarily Kandahar, Jalalabad, and Kabul, among others).

One of Afghanistan’s greatest political challenges is the fact it adjoins two very influential world powers – Iran and Pakistan – both of which have their own geopolitical ambitions for partnering with Afghanistan. Consequently, Afghanistan’s

relationship with each neighbor is both unique and complicated at best. Pakistan's influence on Afghan politics is primarily ethnic-based and economic in nature (see *History & Myth*). While Iran's interests are also economic, they are largely based on Iran's geopolitical ambition to become a regional power by first dismantling Western (primarily American) interests in the region.

Iranian influence is most prevalent in the western Afghan city of Herat where it has invested in a variety of construction projects particularly those that facilitate trade between the two nations. Similarly, this presence helps extend Iran's political control in the area.

3. Religion and Spirituality

More than 96% of the region's inhabitants are Muslim, with Shi'a Islam dominant in Iran and Sunni Islam practiced by the majority of Afghans and Pakistanis. The Muslim belief system is characterized by a variety of ethnic traditions which have a much more significant influence on human beliefs and behavior than a set of stereotypical generalizations about Muslims.

It is noteworthy that prior to the arrival of Islam the most influential rulers were Buddhist. Buddhism was actually introduced into Afghanistan during the mid-3rd century BC during the reign of Emperor Asoka of India. In time, Afghanistan became a center of Buddhist learning and the arts. During the early 16th century India's Mughal Emperor Babur made Kabul his government center for a number of years. Mahayana Buddhism, the dominant form of the religion practiced throughout most of northern Asia (including China, the Korean Peninsula, and Japan) originated in Afghanistan, although in contemporary society, few Buddhists remain in the country.

Similarly, prior to the arrival of Islam in the 7th and 8th centuries, a variety of traditional indigenous religions existed throughout the region. Some of these religions had a profound

cultural impact that continued after the introduction of Islam. In some instances, traditional religions and Islam remained separate institutions; however, in other situations, a blending of the two approaches rendered a modified Muslim methodology unlike those found in the Arabian Peninsula and other regions. For example, the belief in superstitions, omens, and charms is common among Afghans, Iranians, and Pakistanis particularly in rural areas and also among many Muslim societies in other parts of the world.

While Islam is the official religion of all three countries in the region, religion has the greatest influence in Iran where theocracy or governance by religious leaders is the preferred approach. Consequently, the Guardian Council – a body composed of Shi'a religious scholars – is the decision-making authority. Likewise, criminal judges decide cases according to religious law. Conversely, in Afghanistan and Pakistan the religious establishment does not administer government authority. While both countries have religious courts that oversee certain matters, most civil and criminal cases are heard in secular courts influenced by Western legal traditions.

Religion is also a central component for social institutions. Muslims, as well as a smaller minority of religious practitioners, traditionally acknowledge rite-of-passage milestones such as birth, adulthood, marriage, and death with religious and ceremonial reverence. Even in larger cities where Western and secular influences are predominant, people rarely abandon all religious tradition. Iranians, Afghans, and Pakistanis alike are proud of their religious institutions and worldviews.

4. Family and Kinship

The family is perhaps the most fundamental institution across Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran. In Iran, the basic family unit is defined by the members who share mealtimes. Similarly, Afghan and Pakistani households typically consist of parents, male sons and their families, unmarried daughters, and usually

grandparents. The patriarch is the formal authority within the extended family, although mothers and wives through their positions of honor within the family unit tend to wield a sizeable amount of informal power. Descent and inheritance follows the male lineage.

Marriage is one of a few institutions in which women share in the family decision-making, particularly in arranging marriage partners for family offspring – a practice common in Iran. Similarly, in Afghanistan women commonly initiate the initial negotiations for marriage partner selection. However, a woman generally has little if any influence on choosing her own marriage partner. Marriage among members of a kin group is common. For example, cousin marriages remain customary in all three countries. Traditionally, marriage serves a variety of purposes. It provides for procreation and ensures the continuation of family heritage. Similarly, it promotes family solidarity by keeping and sharing wealth within a kin group.

With Western influence, marriages based on romantic attraction are gaining popularity in urban areas. Polygyny (the practice of a husband having more than one wife) is acceptable in many Muslim societies, although incidences of this practice are infrequent. Islamic law dictates that all wives must be treated and supported equally, which is oftentimes a cost-prohibitive proposition in contemporary society.

5. Sex and Gender

Strict gender segregation is the norm in rural areas of Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, although rules for social behavior also differ between women and men in urban areas. In Afghanistan women do not frequently appear in public, particularly in rural areas, nor do the two genders interact in public places. In urban areas, particularly in Iran and Pakistan, the situation is slightly different with men and women interacting more freely in public spaces.

In all three countries, the role of women in society differs widely by social class. Historically, educated upper-class women typically have pursued white-collar professions such as doctors, lawyers, judges, teachers, and professors. In Iran, the number of women serving in these positions declined following the 1979 revolution which brought the Ayatollah Khomeini to power and instituted strict Islamic law into the government and daily life. The number of women in professional positions nearly disappeared in Afghanistan under Taliban rule.

In Pakistan, there remains a notable distinction between upper and lower class women with those from wealthy families often obtaining secondary and even college educations. Pakistan is also the only one of the three countries to have had a female head-of-state.

Gender roles in all three countries are more segregated among the rural lower classes. Similarly, in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of western Pakistan, Taliban influence tends to constrain a woman's mobility to include limited access to healthcare and education and little if any choice regarding her marriage partner. The situation is similar throughout Afghanistan where women have little control over their lives.

6. Language and Communication

The region comprising Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan is one of the world's most linguistically diverse areas, a factor that has made it difficult to build strong national identities – particularly in Iran and Pakistan. Of note, the Persian language family is dominant throughout Iran, much of Afghanistan, and in many surrounding countries. Iranian Persian is known as Farsi and is Iran's national language. Similarly, the Afghan version is known as Dari and spoken by over 75% of the Afghan population to include the educated elite. Pashto is the

dominant language of the Afghan government and the military. Pakistan's official language is Urdu, which is virtually identical to Hindi (a language widely spoken in India), although Urdu is written using the Arabic rather than the Latin alphabet.

7. Learning and Knowledge

The quality and availability of education varies remarkably throughout Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Ancient Persia was known as a world center for advanced learning with an Iranian tradition of excellence in mathematics and the sciences dating to over 1,000 years ago. Having a highly centralized contemporary educational system, Iran's primary and secondary education is directed by the Ministry of Education and tertiary education by the Ministry of Science and Technology.

While the 1979 Revolution did little to alter Iran's educational system, fundamentalist Islam did influence the curricula content and institutional processes. Primary and secondary education in Iran provides a mix of natural and social sciences, humanities and the arts, with Islamic values mediating most subjects. Higher education in Iran features a majority (60%) female student population.

In contrast, the contemporary formal educational systems found in Afghanistan and Pakistan suffer from ethnic and religious conflict, sanctions, underdevelopment, and economic stagnation. Roughly 71% Pakistani children complete primary school with urban children having a better opportunity of completing the 5th grade. University graduates represent only 6% of the population.

In Afghanistan, education suffers from a number of factors such as inadequate funding and institutional oversight. Similarly, Taliban influence has resulted in restricted formal education for women; therefore, only about 36% of females have access to schools in Afghanistan with that number declining sharply at the secondary and university levels.

8. Time and Space

In many kin-based societies, the local people typically have a relaxed view of time compared to Westerners, and therefore to not value strict time management and punctuality. Conversely, they are more concerned about human interactions and relationship-building and are known to be patient and tolerant.

In Afghanistan attentiveness to time carries little significance largely because the country remains predominantly rural and isolated, having virtually no advanced technology and industry. Meetings generally begin when everyone arrives and end when all agenda items are discussed. It is usual practice for trivial family matters to abruptly interrupt a meeting, a practice that most Westerners are not accustomed to.

Similarly, these predominantly agrarian societies typically measure time by the number of days or months required for a major crop to grow or how much time has passed since the last major rainfall. In rural Afghanistan, for example, it is not uncommon for citizens to have only a general idea of their age, as many of them do not possess a birth record.

Regarding spatial relations, many Afghans, especially those in rural areas, tend to identify more with their village, town, or valley than with a large-scale sense of Afghan nationality. In larger cities, such as Kabul and Kandahar, people are more likely connected through their “Afghan” identity; however, ethnic factors such as language, clan, and family history tend to promote differences. These factors tend to have a much greater impact in daily living than less immediate notions of Afghan nationalism.

Conversely, many urban Iranians and Pakistanis have access to telecommunications and commerce and therefore tend to have a more advanced concept of time management. However, even their more global cities have a more relaxed perspective of time than many Westerners.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

As in most contemporary societies, sport is a source of national identity throughout Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Different societies are known for a particular type of sport and method of play which usually represents a society's culture. In Iran where notions of strength and bravery are valued, weight-lifting, wrestling and Taekwando are popular sporting events. Iranian athletes participating in these three sports have won medals in every Summer Olympics since 1848, with the exception of 1980 and 1984, which they boycotted for political reasons.

Soccer is also popular in Iran, and prior to the 1979 revolution, Iran won several Asian championships and qualified for the World Cup in 1978. With the change in government following the revolution, a national religious fervor tended to overshadow sport for a time; however, it soon made a revival in popularity.

For Northern Afghanistan, horsemanship has been prized for centuries, and games involving a horse and rider are still very popular. Horse racing, polo, and the traditional Afghan sport of buzkhasi represent the traditional subsistence patterns and lifestyles among people who continue to rely on horses for their daily existence. Similar to polo, buzkhasi is often referred to as the Afghan national sport.

Field hockey and cricket are national pastimes in Pakistan. Due to British influence, the national teams for both sports are internationally recognized and successful in world and Olympic competitions.

10. Sustenance and Health

Healthcare across the region reflects commonalities featured in many developing countries around the world. A distinct difference in healthcare and accessibility to its facilities marks the divide between urban and rural populations in Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

In Pakistan a history of conflict with India has significantly degraded the healthcare system and all but destroyed its access in Afghanistan. High mortality rates are a result of widespread malnourishment and diseases such as pneumonia in Pakistan and tuberculosis and infectious diseases in Afghanistan – all consequences of conflict and poverty. Similarly, poor sanitation and contaminated water supplies further perpetuate diseases, while a serious shortage of adequately trained healthcare providers further amplifies the situation.

Conversely, Iran's post-revolution constitution guarantees basic healthcare plus subsidized pharmaceuticals and vaccinations. Similarly, Iran has levied profits from oil exports to institute a nation-wide "primary healthcare network." While there remains a distinct deficiency in healthcare availability to rural populations, their overall infant and under-age-five mortality rates have dropped.

A common trend seen in all three nations is the rising drug abuse rate. With a history of both cultivation and exportation of opium, Pakistan has the largest heroin-consumer market in all of southwest Asia. Similarly, three decades of conflict-related trauma has stimulated a popular public appeal for affordable narcotics, and with little access to treatment programs, 11-12% of the Afghan population suffers from drug addiction.

For Iran, its porous border with Afghanistan has become an important route for drug trafficking with drug addiction currently one of Iran's major health issues. About 2-4% of Iran's population is addicted to opium, with almost 33% of all opium produced in Afghanistan entering Iran before being exported worldwide.

11. Economics and Resources

There are disproportional levels of economic development among Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. All three countries have major cities tied into the global economy to varying

degrees. For example Kabul, Afghanistan transfers a large volume of foreign aid into the country's smaller cities and rural areas, while Karachi, Pakistan's financial center is an economic hub for South Asian trade. Similarly, Iran's capital, Tehran, benefits from global trade in the petroleum industry and is a center for goods and services exportation throughout the Middle East and Asia. For the most part, however, all of these countries consist predominantly of rural areas having little or no connection to the outside world.

While these countries generally are not wealthy by Western standards, Iran and Pakistan generally fare better than war-torn and underdeveloped Afghanistan, which has suffered from more than 30 years of almost constant conflict (see *History & Myth*). As with social and political relations, the economic life of Afghans primarily centers on kinship networks with the national government having little if any regulatory control.

There were virtually no tax revenues collected in Afghanistan between 1980 and 2005, and even today tax collection is sporadic in cities and almost non-existent in rural areas. The national government's primary source of income has been foreign aid, making Afghanistan vulnerable to global markets. The international community is currently pressuring the Afghan government to offset its dependency on foreign money through a reliable tax collection program; however, this effort has proven difficult in an environment characterized by increasing corruption and a general breakdown of government institutions following Soviet occupation and Taliban rule.

Iran has the most diversified and centralized economy in the region to include massive oil reserves and a robust industrial base. Iranian products exist throughout the region and are popular in Afghanistan (especially in the western region). The economy of the Afghan city of Herat is geographically tied to Iran, and in recent years Tehran's economic influence in Kabul has become significant.

12. Technology and Material

As with economics, technological development varies across the region. Many of Iran's urban areas are advanced technological industrial bases, while many rural areas are accessible through external satellite networks. Afghanistan also has some emerging technology connecting rural and urban areas, although this connectivity is limited and hampered by rough terrain and generally dysfunctional infrastructure networks. Most urban areas in all three countries have cellular phone coverage, computer networks, access to the internet, and connectivity. In rural areas, villagers still rely on manual techniques to draw ground water from wells and irrigate crops. Consequently, it is common for 21st- and 12th-century technology to coexist.

Non-renewable resources such as oil and natural gas, and other rare minerals such as gold, copper, iron ore, and lithium are plentiful across the region. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, these resources remain largely untapped due to the effects of conflict and underdevelopment, although the Chinese are mining in Afghanistan. Iran is the global lead for extracting its valuable oil and natural gas reserves, although the country still falls short of self-sufficiency and relies on import goods to sustain its population. Recently, Iran has increased its domestic manufacturing capabilities and exports a variety of products to other countries, such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan, decades of conflict have all but destroyed its existing domestic manufacturing capability. Of note, the opium trade accounts for a significant percentage of the country's Gross Domestic Product. Similarly, Pakistan is struggling to develop a viable manufacturing capability. Formerly an agriculturally-based society, Pakistan now features a vibrant service sector, with textiles and apparel as the major export products. Overall, industrialization is sketch throughout both countries, where increasing rates of corruption continue to stifle economic growth. Additionally, Pakistan has become a nuclear power, and Iran allegedly is pursuing a nuclear capability.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Historical Overview

The Arab conquest of Kabul by the Syrian Umayyads in the 7th century produced a legacy of shared faith with the countries of North Africa and the Middle East. This invasion and occupation introduced Islam to the region, and Islam eventually became the predominant religion. In the 8th century, the Persians (Iranians) replaced Arab rule, but they were subsequently replaced by the Turkic Ghaznavids in the 10th century. This Ghaznavid conquest consolidated the Afghan Kingdom and established a great cultural center and base for military operations in India. In the late 14th century, Afghanistan fell under the relatively peaceful and prosperous rule of the Turkic ruler Timur (Tamerlane). In the early 15th century, a descendant of Tamerlane, Babur, rose to power in Kabul and extended his authority to the east. His descendants established the Mughal Empire in greater India.

Durrani Dynasty

A Pashtun named Ahmad Shah Abdali unified the Pashtun tribes and founded the Durrani Dynasty in Afghanistan in 1747. The country served as a buffer between the British and Russian empires until it won independence from notional British control in 1919. The colonial period had a lasting impact on the country's borders and Afghan attitudes toward foreigners.

Soviet Invasion

A brief experiment in democracy ended in a 1973 coup and a 1978 Communist counter-coup. The Soviet Union invaded in 1979 to support the tottering Afghan Communist regime, touching off a long and destructive war. The USSR withdrew in 1989 under relentless pressure by internationally supported

anti-Communist Mujahedin rebels. After the fall of the Communist regime, various political groups agreed to a power-sharing agreement, known as the Peshawar Accords, which created the Islamic State of Afghanistan and appointed an interim government. Concurrently, Saudi Arabia and Iran, who were competitors for regional hegemony, each supported hostile Afghan militias.

Conflict between these militias resulted in a series of subsequent civil wars and Kabul's ultimate fall in 1996 to the Taliban, a hard-line Pakistani-sponsored movement that emerged in 1994 to end the country's civil war and anarchy. During its reign, the Taliban imposed one of the strictest interpretations of Islamic law seen in the Muslim world, becoming internationally notorious for violently enforcing extreme standards governing women living in purdah (seclusion from public life).

Islamist Militant Groups

The Mujahedin, Taliban, and Al Qaeda are Islamist extremist militant groups who share similar doctrinal philosophies and practices although each group is distinctive.

Mujahedin: The term Mujahedin stems from *jihad* (personal strife) and *mujahid* (one who strives). Initially, the Mujahedin formed to fight against the pro-soviet Afghan government in the late 1970s and have since subscribed to militant Islamic ideologies. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the Mujahedin emerged as anti-Taliban armed fighters who provided an Afghan Northern Front in support of the US-led war against terrorism.

The Taliban: Having derived its name from the term "talib" which means "student," the Taliban like the Mujahedin operates predominantly in Afghanistan where it was founded and led by Mullah Mohammed Omar (pictured, courtesy of Wikimedia), the country's Taliban head-of-state from 1996-2001. The Taliban initially consisted of conservative religious students, known as the Students of Islamic Knowledge Movement. They are

predominantly of Pashtun ethnicity whose faith was grounded in a blending of shar'ia (Islamic) law and Pashtun tribal codes, particularly Pashtunwali (see *Political & Social Relations*). The group eventually assumed an extremist posture, employing terrorism as a favored tactic used to further its ideological and political ambitions. Major Taliban organizations include the Quetta Shura and the Haqqani Network, among others.

Al Qaeda: The formation of Al Qaeda (which means "the base or foundation") is credited to Osama bin Laden (pictured below, courtesy of Wikimedia), who in concert with his Al Qaeda operatives masterminded the 2001 attacks on the US among other numerous international terrorist acts. The group is composed of Sunni Muslims (see *Religion & Spirituality*) who practice Wahabism, which is an extreme form of Islam.

Al Qaeda's basic ideology is to establish an Islamic state and to dismantle socialism and nationalism, which they consider as counter to Muslim doctrine. While the Taliban's and Mujahedin's political interests for the most part are limited to a particular country or region, Al Qaeda operates on an international scale. Bin Laden was known to have established training camps and safe havens in parts of Africa such as Sudan and the Middle East. He was expelled from Sudan in 1996, fleeing to Afghanistan and then to Pakistan, where he remained in hiding until killed by US Special Operations Forces in May 2011. Both Libya and the US had issued criminal charges against bin Laden for his terrorist activities. Despite multiple indictments and requests for his extradition, the Taliban, who was sheltering bin Laden, refused to cooperate.

The Taliban Toppled

Following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City, Washington DC, and Pennsylvania, a coalition

military operation consisting of US, Allied, and anti-Taliban Northern Alliance forces deposed the Taliban. Following its overthrow, much of the Taliban fled to neighboring Pakistan where it regrouped as an insurgency movement to counter the newly formed Afghan government. Taliban leader Mohammed Omar went into hiding. In July 2015, the Afghan government reported that Omar had died in 2013 in the Pakistani city of Karachi.

Political Reconstruction

The UN-sponsored Bonn Conference in 2001 established a process for political reconstruction that included the adoption of a new constitution, a presidential election in 2004, and National Assembly elections in 2005. In December 2004, Hamid Karzai (pictured) became Afghanistan's first democratically elected President (succeeded by Ashraf Ghani in 2014) and the National Assembly was inaugurated the following December. The Afghan central government operates primarily in Kabul, with ethnic warlords having the primary authority in their tribal areas of the country. Despite gains toward building a stable central government, a resurgent Taliban, political corruption, and continuing provincial instability – particularly in the South and the East – remain serious challenges for the Afghan Government.

Folklore in Afghanistan

In ancient times prior to the emergence of written languages, history and wisdom were preserved across generations and ethnic boundaries through oral folk legends or myths. Some oral literature was narrated as history and others as fiction. Many of these verbal traditions remain today and have even been integrated with other media to preserve their cultural significance. Oral folklore is expressed in a variety of genre – from proverbs, songs, and oral narratives to poetry and folk tales. While oftentimes used to entertain, folklore is used also to reinforce values and perpetuate traditions (see *Aesthetics & Recreation*).

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Political Borders

- Pakistan: 1,510 miles
- Iran: 582 miles
- Turkmenistan: 462 miles
- Uzbekistan: 85 miles
- Tajikistan: 749 miles
- China: 47 miles

Having a population of nearly 36.6 million (2020 estimate), Afghanistan is a completely landlocked country bordering China to the northeast, Pakistan to the east and south, Iran to the west, and Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to the north. About the size of Texas, Afghanistan covers 250,000 square miles and is divided by the Hindu Kush mountain system into northern and southern border regions.

Flag

Centered on the flag is a Mosque with Mehrab (pulpit & stairs) and flags on either side, with numerals below for the year of Afghan independence from the UK (1919 in Western calendar/1298 in Islamic calendar). It is circled by a border of sheaves of wheat on the left and right. An Arabic inscription of the Shahada (Muslim creed) is in the upper-center. Below the Shahada are rays of the rising sun over the Arabic expression “Allahu Akhbar,” meaning "God is great.” A scroll bearing the name Afghanistan is in the bottom center.

Government Type

The Afghanistan government is an Islamic republic with 3 separate executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

Executive Branch

The Executive Branch is led by the President (currently Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai as of 2014, seated right) who is the Chief-of-State and Head-of-Government, and a Prime Minister (Abdullah Abdullah since 2014, seated left) who acts as Chief Executive Officer. There are also 2 Vice Presidents (First Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostam and Second Vice President Sarwar Danesh both since 2014). The President appoints and the National Assembly approves a cabinet of 25 ministers.

Legislative Branch

A National Assembly consists of two chambers: the House of People (Wolesi Jirga) contains no more than 250 seats whose members are directly elected to 5-year terms; similarly, the House of Elders (Meshrano Jirga) consists of 102 seats with 1/3 elected from provincial councils for 4-year terms, another 1/3 elected from local district councils for 3-year terms, and the remaining 1/3 nominated by the president for 5-year terms. On rare occasions, the government may convene a Grand Council (Loya Jirga) on issues of independence, national sovereignty, and territorial integrity. It can amend the provisions of the constitution and prosecute the president; it is made up of members of the National Assembly and chairpersons of the provincial and district councils.

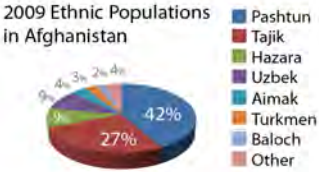
Judicial Branch

The constitution establishes a nine-member Supreme Court (Stera Mahkama). Justices are appointed for 10-year terms by the president with approval of the House of the People,

subordinate high courts and appeals courts. There is also a minister of justice. A separate Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission established by the Bonn Agreement is charged with investigating human rights abuses and war crimes.

Tribes and Tribal Allegiance

Afghanistan is a nation composed of tribes, and most tribes contain smaller, less formal bands. Most tribes are kinship-based, containing clans and cross-cutting lineages. Not until the middle of the 20th century was the central government arguably strong enough to govern through national institutions. Prior to the 20th century, Afghanistan was traditionally controlled by clans, family bands, and tribes, with matters of defense left to militias formed by tribal recruits. For many Afghans, loyalty to their kin group and village takes priority over national loyalty.



ETHNICITY

In general, it is difficult to acquire an accurate population census, primarily because many Afghan kin groups do not maintain birth records. Therefore, existing statistics are relatively irregular estimates.

Pashtuns

Pashtuns comprise 42% of Afghanistan's population and are its largest single ethnic group. Since the foundation of the modern Afghan state in 1747 by Ahmed Shah Durrani, Pashtuns have been the country's dominant political group. Pashtuns control the Taliban and comprise its majority. More Pashtuns actually live in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) than in Afghanistan, although they comprise only 8% of Pakistan's total population.

Pashtuns have generally proven themselves adept at warfare and conquest. They are well known from the British Raj tales of Rudyard Kipling in which they are depicted as good and hardy fighters. Among the many tribes of Pashtun, two tribal confederations dominate southern and eastern Afghanistan: the Ghilzais and the Durranis. The majority of Afghan leaders have come from the Durranis. The Ghilzais largely reside in the eastern mountainous region of the country, and the Durranis are generally found in the southern region centered on Kandahar. Additional pockets of Pashtuns live in northern Afghanistan. Others, particularly those in and around urban areas, are frequently referred to as "detribalized Pashtuns" because they have lost much of their individual tribal identification.

Pashtun Cultural Mindeset: Pashtunwali

Key aspects of Pashtun culture are derived from a code of conduct known as *Pashtunwali.* The word Pashtun means honorable and Pashtunwali means the rule or code of honor. The main elements include honor, following through on promises, revenge, personal independence, and hospitality. *Pashtunwali* practices are most closely identified with Pashtuns, though they tend to be reflected throughout the country's ethnic groups, particularly in regard to the idea of honor and the duty to extend hospitality. It is no exaggeration to claim that even the poorest Afghan refugee may offer a stranger his last bit of bread and tea and feel proud to do so.

Pashtun Religion

Pashtuns are generally Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi School, while a very small number (5 percent) are Shi'a, residing mostly in the Kandahar area (see *Religion & Spirituality*).

Tajiks

The Tajiks, often regarded as "Persian-speaking Sunni Muslims," comprise about 27% of Afghanistan's population. They are most numerous in the densely-populated north, as

well as in the cities of Kabul and Herat. Like most Afghans, the Tajiks derive the bulk of their livelihood from agricultural pursuits. In urban areas, the Tajiks have become known for success in commerce and finance, and have also served as the backbone of the educated administrative elite. Historically, the Tajiks lay claim to the rich tradition of Persian literature.

In addition, Tajik areas of Afghanistan contain most of the emerald and lapis lazuli mines. Twice in Afghanistan's history, Tajiks have held the top government post, with Amir Habibullah Kalakani in 1929, and with Burhanuddin Rabbani from 1992-1996. Since the 1980s, Tajiks have become well known for having the most effective resistance organizations against both the Soviets and later the Taliban. Their best-known leaders are Ismail Khan, currently the governor of Herat province, and the late Ahmed Shah Massoud, a former defense minister in the Rabbani government, who was assassinated by Al Qaida on 9 Sept 2001. It is common to see admiring images Massoud across Afghanistan, even in the Pashtun areas of the south.

Tajik Cultural Mindset

The Tajiks' inclination toward resistance predates the 1900s and the British incursions into Afghanistan. The Tajiks claim to have been unfairly portrayed by the British, whom they fault for a legacy of favoritism toward Pashtuns. Additionally, Tajiks tend to feel betrayed by the global fundamentalist Muslim community for the aid given to the Pashtun Taliban.

Tajik Religion

Tajiks are primarily Sunni Muslims, of the same Hanafi legal tradition as the Pashtuns (see *Religion & Spirituality*).

Hazaras

The Hazaras comprise about 9% of Afghanistan’s population. Their name means "thousand" in Farsi, and refers to their descent from the soldiers of Genghis Khan who invaded Afghanistan in the 13th century. Modern-day Hazaras still resemble their Mongol forebears, though much intermixing with the indigenous Afghan population has occurred since. Their

homeland is in central Afghanistan, and is known as the "Hazarajat." Previous Afghan administrations weakened the Hazaras' political strength by dividing this region into several provinces to dilute the Hazaras' strength. Hazaras are also in urban areas like Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-e-Sharif.

Hazara Cultural Mindset

The combination of their distinctive facial features, minority Muslim Shi'ite religion, and the generally poor quality of the land they occupy has placed Hazaras at the bottom of the Afghan social scale. They were enslaved under successive Pashtun monarchies, and were not emancipated until the reign of the reformist King Amanullah (1919-29), who was later overthrown for his liberalism. Even today in urban areas Hazaras generally perform the most menial tasks and Pashtuns tend to have negative views of Hazaras, whom they treat like second-class Afghans. Nevertheless, the Hazaras have proven to be tough and capable resistance fighters against both the Soviets and the Taliban.

Hazara Religion

About 20% are Sunni Muslims, while most Hazaras are Shi'a Muslims of the “twelver” branch (see *Religion & Spirituality*).

Uzbeks

Afghanistan's Uzbeks make up about 9% of the population. The Uzbeks of Afghanistan are found throughout northern Afghanistan, particularly in provinces near the country of Uzbekistan. The Uzbeks' most prominent leader, General Abdul Rashid Dostam, rose to distinction as a militia leader in support of the Soviet-backed Afghan regime. With the fall of that government in 1992, Dostam refashioned himself as a "secularist," in opposition to the Islamic Taliban government.

Uzbek Cultural Mindset

Uzbek culture gives greater priority to stability over freedom. This is a product of enduring repeated waves of conquest. It is sustained by appropriating the legacy of successful military

leaders from ages past, such as Amir Timur, known in the West as Tamarlane. The rough game of struggle by horsemen over a goat carcass called “buz-kashi” is very popular among Uzbeks, although Tajiks and Pashtuns also compete to a lesser degree. Uzbek culture emphasizes a hierarchy of individual relationships over institution relationships; therefore, agreements represent relations between individuals. Uzbek political culture is pragmatic, and permits shifting alliances, and glorification of the winner.

Uzbek Religion

Most Afghan Uzbeks are practicing Sunni Muslims (see *Religion & Spirituality*).

Aimak

The Aimak consist of four major groups, often called Chahr-Aimak, using the Persian word for “four”. Aimak comprise about 4% of Afghanistan’s population and are found primarily in the western part of Afghanistan’s central mountain region. They are partially nomadic, and have facial features that suggest a Turkic/Mongol heritage. The Aimak speak Dari and are Sunni Muslims.

Turkmen

Turkmen comprise approximately 3% of the Afghan population and share much of the same cultural heritage as do the Uzbeks, with many of their ancestors having fought against the Russians and Soviets in the 19th and 20th centuries. They are primarily concentrated in the northwestern area of the country near the border with the country of Turkmenistan, and are renowned for their carpet weaving.

Turkmen Religion

Afghanistan’s Turkmen are Sunni Muslims (see *Religion & Spirituality*).

Baloch

The Baloch people comprise about 2% of Afghanistan's population and inhabit the region of Balochistan, which includes parts of Iran, Pakistan, and southern Afghanistan. The Baloch are organized in tribal groups that tend to be hierarchical. The Baloch are often nomadic and engage in agriculture or herding. They were helpful in securing a foothold for the anti-Taliban resistance in southern Afghanistan. The Baloch are known for their independence and typically do not want anything to do with the state or outside authority or organizations. The Baloch are Sunni Muslims and speak Balochi, a language in the same Iranian family as Dari and Pashto.

Nuristani

The Nuristanis are a small and ancient collection of 15 tribes in northeast Afghanistan in the provinces along the Afghan-Pakistan border. The Nuristanis are independent-minded and typically do not identify with other tribal groups. In general, they feel no fondness for either the Afghans or Pakistanis. Although the Nuristani tribes share similar customs and traditions, they speak five different languages.

The Nuristani group was known for centuries among other Muslim Afghans by the term *Kafirs* (infidels), due to their historical refusal to convert to Islam. The Nuristanis historically practiced their own religion, which is a Indo-Iranian polytheistic belief system resembling Hinduism. Between 1893-96 King Abdul Rahman of Afghanistan formally incorporated Nuristan (Kafirstan) into Afghanistan, forcibly converting the Nuristanis to Islam and officially naming the region Nuristan, which means "Land of Light." Some remnants of the ancient Nuristani religion endure today as folk customs.

Qizilbash

The Qizilbash are Shi'a Dari speakers who number less than 100,000 in Afghanistan. Because they are Shi'a, they face some discrimination. They live primarily in the Kabul and Kandahar regions, and are descended from Turkic troops sent by the Persian King Nadir (depicted) to serve as guards when Afghanistan was part of the Persian Empire in the early 18th century. The Qizilbash have continued in this occupation. The name Qizilbash was a reference to the red hats which the original soldiers wore (*qizil* meaning red in Turkish, and *bash* meaning headed or topped). The Qizilbash today tend to be well-educated and highly urbanized.

Hindus and Sikhs

Hindus and Sikhs number several thousand and are located primarily in the major cities, particularly in the capital, Kabul. Many of these can date their entry into Afghanistan from the time of the British *Raj* (the "Reign" of the British empire on the Indian subcontinent between 1858 and 1947), though a number, especially Sikhs, came to Afghanistan to escape the violence of the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. Both Sikhs and Hindus are usually employed either as tradesmen or money lenders; their numbers have greatly diminished in recent decades.

SOCIAL RELATIONS

Group Identity versus Individualism

Instead of asserting their separateness and privacy as independent individuals, Afghans tend to interact as members of a group. Within this culture, the group takes precedence over the individual. Don't expect Afghans to simply act as individuals - the group is usually more important.

The proper title for a citizen of Afghanistan is
"Afghan."
***Afghani* is the term for Afghan currency.**

Local Area Social Leaders
Local area social leaders, typically male elders, discuss and address neighborhood concerns and mediate between parties regarding issues that affect only the local area. Such leaders include:

Mullahs
Some of them may be only partially literate and have minimal formal Islamic training, although they teach Islamic law, lead prayers, deliver sermons and teach in *madrassas* (religious schools). Socially, they have varying degrees of influence, tend to be involved in politics, and are consulted in family disputes.

Umdahs (or Maliks)
Influential village mayors or clan heads, who also may be landowners and tribal leaders. Although Umdahs and Maliks are village or clan leaders, they tend to consult heavily with village and clan elders in most matters.

Muhafidh
Town civil representatives

Mirabs
Masters of water distribution, landowners, and tribal leaders

Khans
A Khan discusses and addresses neighborhood concerns and mediates between parties regarding issues that affect only the local area.

Pirs (Sheikhs)
These are teachers within a Sufi (from the Arabic *Tasawuf*) brotherhood whose members are devoted to mysticism and ritualistic prayer. Although the word *Pir* is Persian for an older

person, the word is often used for the teacher or *Murshid* within a Sufi brotherhood. These relationships are often secret, meaning you may encounter people in ordinary jobs who have extraordinary authority over a large number of people.

Village Leaders

Village elders have historically made key decisions and been vital in settling disputes. During Feudal times, when the central government had little influence in remote areas, the village elder was the local authority and the chief of the tribe. After administrative reforms in the second half of the 20th century, this authority was gradually transferred to the central government. Although the role of the village elder has faded in recent decades, in rural villages it is still important to get permission and cooperation from village elders before you begin a project.

Patronage System

As in any culture, who you know is sometimes more important than what you know. The patronage system in Afghanistan is highly influential. It is based on who knows whom, with extended family members benefitting first and foremost, and then friends. It is more emotional than logical, and punishes individuals as well as offering rewards. Often, it results in poor quality of work and creates corruption.

Extensive Influence of Close Friendships

The concept of close friendships is highly revered, and close friends have great influence on situational outcomes – more so than in the US. The close friend in essence becomes part of the family. Such friends are considered absolutely trustworthy. You will often see close male friends walking hand-in-hand.

Jirgas and Shuras

Afghans tend to be most comfortable with a relatively democratic style of bottom-up consensus decision making. A strict "one man, one vote," style of governing is rare for Afghans;

traditionally, most decisions have been made through consensus, as in the Pashtun *Loya Jirga* tribal council. Although the *Loya Jirga* historically existed at a local village level, its format has been reproduced at a regional and national level to validate decisions. While the distinction between Jirgas and Shuras can be difficult to distinguish, both are formal meetings between political, tribal, clan, and/or local leaders. Jirgas tend to deal primarily with secular issues and Shuras may lean towards more traditional religious issues.

Attending Jirgas

- If you attend a Jirga, make every effort to compliment the leader of the Jirga or minimize events that may reflect poorly upon his honor.
- Make sure to end the Jirga positively and ensure the leader or elder has the final word.
- Ideally the Jirga will end with an agreement to meet again in the future.

Decentralization

Throughout most of its history, Afghan rulers have allowed for a large degree of decentralization of authority. The ethnic diversity and the character of most Afghan ethnic groups make Afghans respond very negatively to centralized power. Historically, regimes that tried to implement a greater degree of central control over the population were able to do so only by applying brute force by gaining allegiance with the expenditure of substantial sums of money. Historically, regimes that tried to implement a greater degree of central control over the population were able to do so only by applying brute force by gaining allegiance with the expenditure of substantial sums of money.

Attitude towards Foreign Military Powers

Afghanistan has a “Siege Mentality” and “Survival Instinct” as it has been at the crossroads of many foreign invaders over the centuries. In essence, because Afghanistan is under siege, individuals will do whatever they must to survive. For example,

Afghans may view it as normal to take from the invaders whatever they can. They may view the outsider's materials "whatever you bring here is for us." This may conflict with American views of "corruption" and "manipulating."

Unconventional Approach to Warfighting

Afghan guerilla tactics draw heavily from experience fighting conventional military forces, such as the British in the 1900s, and the Soviet Union during the 1980s. Afghans are adept at waging irregular warfare. Their country's rough terrain and harsh conditions have made such tactics necessary. Afghan cultural organization, such as decentralized clan-based loyalties, and cultural values, such as valor and physical fitness, make Afghans ideally suited for guerilla warfare. The Afghans believe warfare is a contest of endurance over time. They do not think in terms of an integrated military campaign, but rather fight in ebbs and flows. During low points in a conflict, Afghan fighters may conduct negotiations with the other side. There is no social stigma in Afghanistan against switching sides or surrendering in a conflict, although this practice has been known to create potential enemies.

Don't be Surprised at Male-Male PDA

- It is normal for male Afghans to hold hands while they walk together.
- It is normal for Afghans of the same sex to kiss each other on the cheeks when greeting.
- These gestures signal friendship, not physical attraction.
- Never back away from such PDA if an Afghan graciously extends it to you – you'll cause offense.

Afghanistan National Air Corps

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Afghanistan's population is primarily Muslim (80-85% Sunni and 10-15% Shi'a). While a minority of Afghans may profess other beliefs (<1% - Christian, Hindu and Sikh), Islam has the greatest influence on Afghan culture.

The Basics of Islam

Islam means "submission to the will of God" and the acceptance of His wisdom. Muslim is the term for a follower of Islam.

Islam is a Monotheistic Religion, which means its adherents worship one "God" – the Arabic translation is "Allah." God is all powerful and nothing shares divinity with Him. He controls all events - past, present, and future. The Arabic saying, "Inshallah" means "God willing" (or everything occurs according to God's Will, particularly future events).

The existence of angels, the devil, and the afterlife is a foundational aspect of Islamic doctrine. Islamic instruction teaches that two angels accompany every human into the spiritual domain and record their deeds for Judgment Day. Similarly, the devil (*Iblis*) is a spirit known as a Genie (or *Jinn*), and not a fallen angel as many Christian adherents believe. In the afterlife, the righteous are rewarded in Paradise and those who do not accept God's Will and guidance will be punished in Hell.

Abraham

Muslims trace their lineage back to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam. However, unlike Christians and Jews (who trace their line back to Abraham and his wife Sarah, through their son Isaac), Muslims descend from Abraham and the Egyptian bondswoman, Hagar through their son Ismail. According to Muslim tradition, Abraham's wife Sarah feared Ismail would overshadow her son Isaac, so Abraham took Hagar and Ismail

to Mecca, where he left them to fend for themselves. Abraham later returned and built the Ka'aba with Ismail as the first shrine to the one true God. It was here that Abraham was to sacrifice his son, Ismail, as a test of faith, before God permitted him to sacrifice a ram instead (in contrast to Judeo-Christian tradition, where Isaac was to be sacrificed).

Muhammad

In Islam, Muhammad is God's final prophet, and is known as the "Seal of the Prophets" because his message completes the "revelations" attributed to earlier prophets. Muhammad has no divinity and is not worshipped.

The *Qur'an* (Holy Book)

Muslims uphold the Qur'an as the eternal, direct word of God, as revealed to Muhammad through the Archangel Gabriel (*Jibril*) over a 23-year period, between the years 610 and 632 AD. These revelations and teachings were recorded in Arabic as the basis of Islam, thus "true" Qur'ans, as well as all prayers, are in Arabic. Of note, anyone desiring to touch the Qur'an should do so with utmost respect.

Arabic Qur'ans should not be handled by non-Muslims.

Shari'a

Shari'a is Islamic law whose core is the Qur'an, supplemented with reports about the sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad (*Hadith*). It sets rules and guidance for all aspects of life (prayer, economics, behavior, etc.).

Diet

Muslims are socially prohibited from consuming pork and alcohol. This prohibition is known as "*Haram*" or forbidden (see *Sustenance & Health*).

Prayer

Muslims pray five times daily. The practice of multiple daily prayers was adapted from earlier Arab tribal religions. Shi'a practice permits combining prayers into three daily prayer times.

Prayer times

Prayers are spaced fairly evenly throughout the day, so one is constantly reminded of God. The call to prayer is heard at pre-dawn, noon, late afternoon, sunset, and evening. Muslims wash their hands, elbows, face, ears, feet, and wet their hair to cleanse their bodies prior to prayer (ablution).

Proper Prayer Protocol

- Remember to be courteous.
  - Do not walk in front of people while they are praying because they are facing in the direction of Mecca.
  - Never speak to, interrupt, or photograph people while they pray.

Friday Prayer (*Jummah*)

Muslims gather at mosques for Friday's communal prayer. These prayers are led by an imam.

Holy cities

The Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, is the site of the Hajj. Medina, Saudi Arabia is revered as the burial site of Muhammad. Jerusalem is also holy, as Muslims believe Muhammad made his ascent to heaven from Jerusalem. Jerusalem is also the site of the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Other Islamic Concepts

Birth Rite of Passage

Many important rites of passage in Afghan society are derived from Islam. When a baby is born, the father whispers the call to

worship in the baby's ear. Sugar, or a piece of date, is then placed in the baby's mouth so that the first thing the baby tastes is sweet. The baby's head is shaved on the seventh day to symbolize service to Allah. The family weighs the hair and donates an equal amount of gold or silver to charity. Boys are also circumcised soon after birth, with family members gathering to celebrate this rite-of-passage or formal transition into childhood. On the seventh day, the child is named, with praises extended to Allah for his blessings.

Death Rite of Passage

Before a Muslim dies, the call to prayer is whispered in the person's ear, just as it was at birth. Immediately after death, the body is washed and rubbed with perfumes and spices. It is then wrapped in white cloth and buried without a casket, facing the Ka'aba (pictured) in Mecca. The family of the deceased will receive condolences for three days, again on the fortieth day and on the one-year anniversary of a death. The entire family mourns during this period. It is important to understand that non-Muslims may not touch a deceased Muslim. Doing so is extremely offense and considered *haram* (forbidden).

View of Death

Muslims believe that the time of death, like birth, is determined by Allah. Thus old age, illness, or accident are not considered the real causes of death. While people grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death itself as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven.

Jihad

Jihad is a fundamental element within Islam. It is not a Pillar of Islam. Traditionally, it applies to an inner striving (Greater Jihad) to elevate the principled, more civilized and moral elements of one's self and the pursuit of God's Will, to lead a

virtuous life. The concept of external struggle (Lesser Jihad) is a struggle in defense of Islam. During the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979-1989), many Islamic leaders called for a Jihad against the atheist Soviets, prompting an influx of Mujaheddin (warriors) from other countries. Do not confuse the concept of Jihad with the radicalized violence mislabeled as Jihad by religious extremists.

Islamic Holy Days

The Islamic Calendar

A year in the Islamic Calendar is 11 days shorter than in the Western Calendar. As a result, Islamic holidays fall eleven days earlier on the Western calendar than the previous year (see *Time & Space*).

Lailat ul-Qadr

The Night of Power commemorates Muhammad receiving the first verses of the Qur'an. This is observed during Ramadan (or Ramazan).

Eid-al-Adha

The Festival of Sacrifice commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael, as proof of his loyalty to God. It is celebrated the same day the Hajj ends.

Eid-al-Fitr: The 3-day Festival of Fast-Breaking celebrates the end of Ramadan.

Visiting a Mosque

- To enter a mosque, you should be invited and remove your shoes before entering.
  - If you are a female, cover your head with a scarf and wear a long sleeve shirt or blouse. Some mosques may provide scarves for women.
  - Women worship separately, and often worship at home so that they may care for their children. They are also excused from prayers during their monthly cycle.

Five Pillars of Islam

There are five basic principles of the Islamic faith that all Muslims accept and follow; these are commonly known as “The Five Pillars of Islam.”

Profession of Faith (*Shahada*)

“There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His Messenger” (*La ilaha illa illah wa-Muhammad rasul Allah).* This statement expresses the total commitment to the message of God.

Prayer (*Salat*)

Pray five times a day. During each of the five daily prayers, the worshipper faces toward the Ka’aba in Mecca as he/she prays. The direction of prayer is called the *Qibla*.

Alms (*Zakat*)

This is an obligatory tithe used to provide relief for the poor and other charitable donations. Afghans consider the ability to provide *zakat* not only a Holy duty but also an honor. Doing so confers upon the giver major social status.

Fasting (*Sawm*)

Muslims will abstain from food, drink, and intercourse from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of **Ramadan** (30 days). It is a time for inner reflection, self-control, and reading the Qur’an. The object of Ramadan is to subdue life’s passions and draw one’s self nearer to God by purifying one’s body through denial of life’s pleasures (Photo: Afghan men praying during Ramadan). By tradition, all able-bodied adult Muslims who are not traveling participate in *Sawm*. Because the Islamic calendar is based on the appearance of the moon, Ramadan occurs at a different date each year on the Western calendar. When Ramadan falls during the summer, keeping Ramadan requires great focus and endurance because people will not drink anything for up to 18 hours, despite the heat. It is common for Muslims to break their fast (called *iftar)* at sunset with a light meal followed by sunset

prayer and then dinner. To be invited to an *iftar* dinner is a great honor. Be sure to bring sweets, fruits, or nuts for the host to share.

The *Hajj*

The Hajj is an annual pilgrimage to Mecca, which every adult Muslim who is physically and financially able is expected to perform at least once in his or her lifetime. Its purpose is to demonstrate the Muslim people's solidarity and their submission to Allah. The Hajj involves a series of religious rites that take place annually over several days at the Grand Mosque in Mecca, and surrounding areas. The focus of the pilgrimage is the Ka'aba ("the cube" in Arabic), the Sacred House located inside the Grand Mosque in Mecca, in which the sacred black stone is embedded. The Ka'aba is covered with a *kiswah*, a black silk cloth which is embroidered in gold with verses from the Qur'an. Muslim tradition teaches that the black stone was given to Abraham by the Archangel Gabriel and thus is a symbol of God's covenant with Ismail and, by extension, the Muslim community. The Hajj is a highly spiritual experience during which one nurtures the kinship with fellow Muslims. Afghan males who perform the Hajj carry the honored lifetime title of "Hajji."

Shi'a and Sunni

The Sunni-Shi'a division of Islam began as a succession dispute shortly after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 AD. Muhammad died without a male heir and without naming a successor. After Muhammad's death, prominent Muslims assembled and chose Abu Bakr as Muhammad's successor and gave him the title of khalif (caliph), which means "successor" to the Prophet Muhammad and thus leader of the Islamic community or *Ummah*. Some Muslims believe the successor should have been Ali, the

Prophet's cousin, who had married the Prophet's daughter, Fatima. This belief became the starting point for the doctrine of the Shi'a, or "supporters of Ali." In 656 AD Ali became the fourth Caliph, but Muslims were still divided over how the Caliph should be chosen. The Shi'a reject the first three caliphs and believes in following a bloodline succession, descending from Ali and Fatima, and the Sunni believe the community of believers should elect the successor.

Sunni Muslims

The invasion of Afghanistan by Arabs around 1000 AD consolidated Sunni Islam as the majority religion in Afghanistan. The Arabic word Sunnah means "path" or "example," and refers to the examples of the Prophet Muhammad as found in the Hadith, a collection of reports about the Prophet's life, and to the Qur'an. Sunnis are those "who follow the example of the prophet." They believe that the caliph is fully human and should be an elected ruler. Sunni Islam is often wrongly referred to as Orthodox, or mainstream, Islam. The majority of the world's 1.2 billion Muslims are Sunni.

Hanafi Sunni Muslims

There are four schools of interpretation of Shari'a Law in Sunni Islam: *Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i*, and *Hanbali*. These schools accept the same general principles of faith, but differ on details of practice, and on intellectual and theological issues. Most Afghans belong to the Hanafi School, which is known for tolerance. In the 1980s, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, a significant number of Afghans, mainly Pashtuns, became fundamentalist, probably due to the increased contact with foreign Muslim fighters. The Taliban represent the extreme example of this trend.

Shi'a Muslims

The Shi'a sect believes the proper successor of the Prophet Muhammad was Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law, and that first three Caliphs (Abu Baker, Omar, and Uthman) were not legitimate. "Shi'a" means partisan or faction of Ali, and is short for "Shi'at Ali". Ali was elected the fourth caliph, but was later

overthrown and assassinated. Following a nearly 30 year dispute, in 661 AD the governor of Syria, named himself Caliph and made the caliphate hereditary in his own family, the Umayyads. The Shi'a rejected this as unjustly taking the caliphate from Ali and his sons. Shi'a attempts to challenge the Umayyad leaders resulted in the death of Ali's son, Husayn, at the Battle of Karbala in Iraq in 680. Shi'a now refer to the Caliph as the Imam, or spiritual leader, and he is the head of the global Shi'a community. No person alive today is recognized as the Imam.

You may distinguish a Shi'a area from a Sunni area due to the Shi'a depiction of human images in their art, particularly Ali, Husayn, and the 12th Imam. Sunni generally avoid depicting human images out of concern this may lead to idolatry.

In Afghanistan, the largest Shi'a community is among the Hazara ethnic group. Two important Shi'a communities in Afghanistan are the *Imami,* also known as "Twelvers," and the Ismailis, also known as "Seveners."

Distinguishing Sunni & Shi'a by How They Pray

Shiites begin by standing up straight with their arms and hands straight down against their sides

Sunnis begin by standing up Straight while placing their hands on their abdomen.

Imami “Twelvers”

In the 8th century, succession became confused when the Imam, Jafar, first named his eldest son, Ismail, his successor, then changed his mind and named a younger son, Musa. Ismail died before his father and thus never had an opportunity to assert his claim. When Jafar died in 765, the imamate transferred to Musa. Those Shi’a who followed Musa are known as Imami or “Twelver” Shi’as. The name "Twelver" derives from the disappearance of the 12th imam, Muhammad al Muntazar (the Hidden Imam), in about 874. He was a child, and after his disappearance he became known as a messianic figure, the Mahdi, who never died but remains to this day hidden from view. The “Twelver” Shi’a believe his return will usher in a golden era.

Ismailis “Seveners”

The part of the Shi’a community that refused to acknowledge Musa's legitimacy and insisted on Ismail's son's right to rule as imam became known as Ismailis. Several hundred thousand Afghan Ismailis live in the northeastern province of Badakhshan as well as the Kayyan valley of Baghlan province. They speak Dari, as well as diverse local dialects, such as Ishkasim, Vakhi, Rushani, etc. The Ismailis advocate the legitimacy of only seven imams. The Ismailis consider their current spiritual leader to be the Agha Khan.

Ashura Ceremony

The death of Ali’s son, Husayn, at the Battle of Karbala is commemorated annually in the Ashura ceremony, and is seen as a symbol of the persecution and oppression experienced by the Shi’a. Male participants beat their chests and chant. Some use swords to lacerate their heads to symbolize the beheading of Husayn, or use chains to beat their backs to evoke the suffering of Husayn.

Comparisons

Jesus

One of the main differences between Islam and Christianity is the view of Jesus (*Isa*). In Islam, Jesus is held as a prophet,

but one who was merely a man; not the son of God and not divine. Muslims do not accept the concept of the Trinity because only God is divine and has no family or equal (Photo: earliest known depiction of the Trinity dating 350 AD and displayed in the Vatican City Museums).

Sin

Muslims do not believe in Original Sin. Adam and Eve's disobedience was forgiven and the resultant guilt was not passed down to mankind. God's prophets were free of sin: Noah did not drink, Lot did not commit incest, and David did not commit adultery. Consequently, there is no Baptism in Islam.

Judaism

Muslims do not believe God has a "chosen people." Allah has no favorites and anyone can become one of His people through living a virtuous life and believing in God. Islam also does not accept YHWH (or *Jehovah*) as a name for God.

Scriptures

Muslims regard Christians and Jews as "People of the Book" In fact, the Qur'an contains teachings and stories similar to those found in the Torah (Old Testament) and Muslims recognize many characters from the Torah and Gospels as prophets (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus). Muslims believe that Christians and Jews ultimately worship the same one God they do, but that Christians and Jews altered God's word over time; thus God revealed his final revelations to Muhammad, through Archangel Gabriel in order to affirm earlier scriptures and to correct these alterations, particularly the divinity of Jesus.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Importance of Family

Across all tribal and ethnic boundaries, the family remains the single most important institution in Afghanistan. A man's first loyalty is to his extended family followed by his tribe, then his ethnic group, his village, and finally to his nation. Extended families usually live near each other, sometimes together in a large compound often resulting in little individual privacy. A single compound will sometimes house up to four generations of relatives.

Male Authority

Throughout Afghanistan, authority is vested in male elders, and inheritance occurs through the male line.

Motherhood Reverence

There is great reverence of motherhood, and eagerness for children, especially sons.

Senior Citizens

All elder Afghans, both male and female, are treated with tremendous respect and honor. Typically, they remain with the eldest son's family, regardless of their age and health. A wife will honor her husband's elder family members and also serve them. In addition, elders heavily influence most family decisions.

Children

Boys and girls are treated equally until age 9 or 10. Mothers typically encourage sons to be dominant within the household. Sons are expected to help their fathers in the field, and learn to ride, shoot, hunt, and herd. A boy is considered a man between the ages of 10 to 12. Girls are protected from public view after 11 or 12, if not earlier, and taught household responsibilities from a young age (see *Language & Communication).*

Afghanistan Housing

The most common dwelling is a mud-brick structure consisting of several rooms and surrounded by high mud walls designed to provide security from enemies, seclusion for women, and a pen for animals. The rooms are arranged around an open courtyard having one entrance from the outside. Visitors enter the courtyard and proceed to the greeting room and then to an adjacent large area separated from the women's quarters where male guests can talk. Among the other rooms is a kitchen, or oven room, where bread is baked in an earthen oven; the family gathers there to keep warm on cold winter days. In Kabul and other large cities, there are also Western-style dwellings. Nomadic groups such as Turkmen, Kyrgyz, and Balochi live in tents or tent-like structures called Yurts.

Dating and Marriage

The sexes are segregated at puberty. The concept of dating does not exist, and premarital and extramarital sexual relations are strictly forbidden and may be grounds for severe punishment, including death. Girls often marry as young as 14 or 15 years old (and as young as 12 in many rural areas). Families usually arrange the marriage of their children. Older females often play a prominent role in the decision. Afghans evaluate prospective marriage ties based on the tribe and status of the other family. Afghans typically use arranged marriages to secure strong family connections, because property remains within the extended family. Marriages between cousins are common for these reasons. Matchmakers may engage in lengthy negotiations over the bridewealth paid by the groom's family to the bride's and/or dowry that the bride brings to the marriage. The bridewealth guarantees the woman financial survival in cases of divorce, which respresents shameful rejection. Among urban or westernized families, the prospective bride and groom may be permitted to meet or view each other and approve/reject the union

Wedding Rituals

Marriage and engagement rituals are numerous, varied, and complex. Traditionally, wedding festivities extend for 3 days occurring in the homes of both families. Most activities occur with the sexes segregated, but all gather for the contract signing and Qur'an recitation. Divorce is simple (the man need only announce it in public 3 times) but rare. A man may have as many as 4 wives but must care for each one equally both intimately and materially. This requirement tends to limit most men to one wife. If a husband dies, it is traditional for one of his brothers to marry his widow to sustain the family lineage.

Women's Traditional Family Role and Status

To Afghans, women are the physical representation of family honor, and therefore are jealously guarded from outsiders. Within the family and at home, women carry significant responsibility and influence. The status and power of a girl increases as she moves from child to bride to mother to grandmother, with the eldest female typically wielding the most power. A successful marriage with many sons is the principal goal of many Afghan women and wholeheartedly shared by Afghan men. Women's nurturing roles are also considered crucial. Afghan folklore tales reinforce this gender role (see *Learning and Knowledge*).

Building Rapport through Family Values

- Sharing in the Afghan reverence of family is a great way to gain respect and acceptance. Expressing reverence for the family unit (especially elders) and love for your own family will help elevate your status, and bring you closer to your Afghan counterparts.
- Consider bringing pictures of your wedding or last big family reunion to share.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Gender Relations

Men

Males usually work in the fields or family business and handle most contacts with the outside world. Men are expected to be disciplinarians and providers for aged parents. While elder women are highly influential within the extended family, it is ultimately the elder men who make final decisions.

Women

Household tasks are divided by gender, age, and experience. In general, women do all the cooking, washing, and cleaning. However, women's work varies among ethnic and tribal groups. Among most settled rural families, women participate in agricultural work only during light harvesting periods, and they are responsible for the production of milk products. Some specialize in handicrafts such as carpet and felt making. In contrast, Nuristani women plow the fields while the men herd the flocks and process the dairy products. Nomadic women care for young lambs and kids and make a wide variety of dairy products, for sale as well as family use. They also spin the wool

Mixing of the Sexes in the Workplace

- Males and females may be co-workers, but are nevertheless cautious to maintain each other's honor.
- Men should carefully maintain professionalism and avoid the perception of untoward interest. Such perceptions dishonor the woman and her family.

sheared by men and weave the fabric from which their dwellings are made. When on the move, it is the women who put up and take down the tents.

Proper Interaction with Afghan Women

- Dating is not acceptable in Afghanistan. Normally a couple should not be seen alone in public unless legally married.
- Making a pass or staring at a female in Afghanistan could bring serious consequences for all parties involved since a female in Afghanistan is considered the honor of all male family members.
- Sex between unmarried people is forbidden in Islam and punishable by law. Females involved also have to contend with the family wrath, which in some instances could result in death.

Women Symbolize Honor

Afghan society regards women as symbolizing the honor of family, community and the Afghan nation, consequently, it is considered necessary to protect women to maintain their moral purity. Respect for women is a notable characteristic, and few wish to destroy this view of women's valued status. It is a guiding reality that a family's social position depends on the public behavior of its female members.

Social Separation of Women

The sexes are separated at puberty. Women are sometimes required to spend their lives in *purdah* seclusion. (*Purdah* is a Persian word literally meaning curtain). Veiling is the most visible sign of this attitude. It also

means that women are not seen by males who are not close family members. Social visiting is also segregated by gender; in home social visits, expect to see males and females socializing in separate areas.

Emerging Women's Rights

In the late 19th century and through the middle of the 20th century, Afghan women gained the right to work outside the home, seek an education, and determine whether to veil or not. Before the Taliban took over Kabul, women totaled about half of the working population. Under the Taliban rule, women's rights were severely restricted. Since the defeat of the Taliban, women's right to work outside the home, including political activity, is receiving increased acceptance. The 2004 constitution makes a commitment to the advancement of women and to gender equality. As a result, 25% of the seats in the lower house of the National Assembly are designated for women.

Proper Interaction of Women with Afghan Men

- Female Airmen must maintain a professional demeanor and demand that Afghan males honor their status as Airmen rather than females.
- Avoid joking around, touching or familiarity. You can only relax around Afghan females.
- Afghan women can be valuable sources of information and local understanding. Always expect that you will separate from the men and go with the women. Never be alone with Afghan males, as there have been a number of instances where Afghan men have sexually assaulted US female personnel. US female members should request Afghan female translators or male colleagues to accompany them in social settings.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Pashtun Language

Pashtuns speak Pashto (also pronounced Pashtu or Pakhtu), a language written using the Arabic script. Pashtun leaders have promoted the Pashtu language as a symbol of Pashtun political domination in Afghanistan, even though many Pashtuns may not speak the language as their mother tongue. Instead, many Pashtuns speak Dari, the Afghan version of Iranian (also called Farsi), as their first language. Pashto and Dari remain the two official languages of Afghanistan.

Dari Language

Tajiks generally speak Dari; however, there are considerable variations among isolated valleys and mountain villages. Dari is a classical form of Persian. Dari differs from the Tajik language spoken in the country of Tajikistan. Dari (like Pashto) is written using the Arabic script. For Westerners, Dari tends to be much easier to learn than Pashto, having a less complicated case and gender system.

Hazara Language

The Hazaras speak a form of Farsi known as Hazaragi, which is differentiated from Dari by its words of Mongol origin.

Eloquence

How a person expresses himself is every bit as important as what he has to say. Afghans tend to avoid direct, simple speech; they view it as the talk of the fool. Instead, they admire poetry, allusion, and eloquence of speech. They greatly admire “flowery language,” viewing it as a sign of intelligence and refinement.

Greetings

In Afghan culture, a friendly and warm greeting plays an important role in conveying honesty and initiating successful discussion. Smile politely and make eye contact with the men you are greeting. In

a group of men, be sure to greet everyone individually. A warm greeting helps develop rapport. Try to keep that attitude as you conduct your mission. Also keep in mind that you cannot make eye contact effectively if you are wearing sunglasses. When greeting and conversing with Afghans, remove your sunglasses! Failure to do so demonstrates rudeness or weakness (the wearer is too weak to handle the intense Afghan sunshine). Arabic greetings are accepted throughout Afghanistan. *Assalaam alaikum* (Peace be upon you) is replied to with *Waalaikum assalaam* (And peace also upon you).

Address Afghans Appropriately

- In formal situations, using an academic or professional title is essential.
- When introducing yourself for the first time to an Afghan, you should use your rank and both your first and last name. Thereafter you can refer to yourself by rank and first name, which is traditional in Afghan society.
- For example, it is appropriate to use “Sergeant John” versus rank and last name (Sergeant Smith). Pay attention to how your Afghan counterpart introduces himself and address him properly, using his first name and rank if he so indicates.
- The title *Haji* (pilgrim) is reserved for those who have made a pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia.
- Parents are often called by their first-born child's name, such as *Umm* (mother of) *Muhammad* or *Abu* (father of) *Alam*. Friends use given names and nicknames among themselves.

When greeting someone who is not familiar to you, expect to shake hands (with the right hand) and then bring your open hand up to your heart. When greeting someone who is more familiar to you, expect to shake hands and then kiss on the

cheek 3 times, first to the right, then to the left, and then back to the right. If you don't know which of these greetings to use, pay attention to the Afghan's body language for cues, and then follow the leader.

Greeting Children

When you enter an Afghan village it is likely that children will be the first contacts you will experience. The adults will watch how you converse with the children and assess you based on your behavior. Most children will be excited to see you enter their village. They may run up to you, try to get close to you, and even attempt to speak English to you. If you avoid the children and do not socialize with them, adults may think you are unfriendly and will be less likely to assist you. If you converse with the children in a friendly manner, adults will be more likely to talk to you. Even small acts like handing out portions of an MRE will give the children a great story to tell for years to come.

Generally speaking, women are expected to show more affection to children than men. Americans should be careful not to be overly affectionate with children of the opposite sex. Also, take care not to praise the beauty of a child; while compliments like "He's so cute!" are common in America, praising an Afghan child's physical appearance is altogether inappropriate. A popular Afghan superstition holds that harm will befall a child who is complimented.

Greeting Women

In traditional Afghan culture women do not usually interact with men in social settings. Similarly, an Afghan man will shake hands with a woman only if she first offers her hand, although in Muslim cultures, members of the opposite sex do not

normally shake hands. Furthermore, a man would talk to a woman only after being introduced to her. It is also common for Afghan women to greet each other with several kisses on the cheek while placing their arms slightly around each other.

Dear Uncle

In Afghan culture, it is common to refer to others in the community using family terms, even when blood relationship does not exists. Terms like “brother” and “uncle” are a friendly way of addressing others, functioning as informal versions of “ma’am” and “sir” for people within the community. Children may call their elders “uncle,” and men may call other men “brother.”

God Bless

“Naa-me khu-daa” is a very common expression essential to Afghan daily life. It literally means “name of God,” but translates roughly to “God bless.” Used after a positive announcement, it indicates the speaker’s desire that the positive thing continue, by the grace of God. It is especially important to say “naa-me khu-daa” after paying someone a complement to demonstrate one’s best wishes for sustained benefit. The use of “naa-me khu-daa” is a must when talking about children. When someone first tells you about their children, you should say “naa-me khu-daa” to indicate your desire that the children grow up healthy and safe. Not using the expression may be interpreted as disinterest in the children’s well-being and could possibly impede the rapport you hope to establish with your counterpart.

Saying Goodbye to Women

If a husband has introduced you to his wife or female relative, you can assume that he is not very conservative. In this case, when you are saying goodbye to the people in the room, you can say “goodbye” to her, while placing your right hand over your heart, bowing slightly, and lowering your gaze. It is best to avoid additional comments or attempting to make conversation; a simple goodbye is sufficient. If you are in the house of a very conservative man, chances are the women in his household

will not answer the door, and will stay in another room while you are conversing. In this case, you will not be introduced, and you should not say goodbye.

Politeness with Women

Traditionally, Afghan men generally avoid eye contact with females, although Afghan men have become more aggressive toward US women. Conversely, if a US male's demeanor in the presence of an Afghan woman is interpreted as curiosity or interest in her personally, that perception could damage the US male's relationship with his Afghan male counterparts and perhaps hamper pre-established trust. Therefore, it is important for men to lower their gaze when dealing with women.

How to Politely Decline an Invitation

- You should first thank the host enthusiastically for the invitation and his gracious hospitality.
- A valid excuse would be that you have an official engagement that conflicts with the invitation.
- End the exchange by expressing hope to accept the invitation another time.

Honor, Shame, and Criticism

Maintaining appearances and preserving the public honor of one's family and oneself is a top priority in Afghan society. Preservation of honor is so important that historically it has resulted in bloodshed when a person's honor has been violated. Afghans are very sensitive to public "loss of face," even in many situations, such as giving constructive criticism publicly, where Westerners would not be affected.

Criticism and Humiliation

- Humiliating someone in public, even if unintentional, can be fatal to a relationship you are striving to cultivate.
- Constructive criticism as a concept does not exist in Afghanistan.
- Avoid issuing public criticism: if you must approach an issue critically, try to do so in a way that avoids assigning blame to any one person.
- Any criticism of an individual made in the presence of his peers will result in a loss of face, one of the gravest insults to Afghans.
    - When providing critique, it is best to do so privately.
- It is socially imperative to avoid chastising an individual in the presence of his peers.
- When discussing a problem, it is best to avoid naming individuals and making eye contact with the person at fault.
    - It is also proper to avoid confrontation by taking an indirect approach. For example, it is wise not to state “This is wrong.” Instead, “We have tried that approach before and determined there is a better way.”

How to Emphasize a Point

In order to emphasize a point or get a person’s attention during a conversation, Afghans will grasp hold of a person’s hand or place their hand on another’s hand or shoulder. In addition, Afghans will use an open hand gesture to emphasize opinions. Similarly, they will lower their voice and speak softly to emphasize points and make the dialogue more effective versus the American way of speaking louder to emphasize points.

Social Visits and Hospitality

Afghan hosts delight in receiving guests and will prepare their finest tea (*chai*) and most delicious food to serve to them, even if it is beyond their means. Afghans are also culturally required to offer food or drink to others around them, and provide food and shelter for anyone who needs it. When visiting an Afghan family's home, it is proper to remove your shoes at the door. Men and women usually will socialize in separate rooms. Guests are expected to have at least three cups of tea, and perhaps something to eat. If guests eat with a host, a few loud belches are considered polite at the end of the meal and a sign that the meal was enjoyed. Any business discussions occur after refreshments.

Giving Appropriate Gifts

- If invited to a dinner, fruit, sweets, chocolates, and pastries are always appropriate gifts.
- The gift should be inexpensive and wrapped.
- In the office environment, gifts such as pens, baseball caps, military unit coins and unit trinkets are also appropriate.
- Refrain from gifts of alcohol or other items that may offend Muslims.

Giving Gifts

Take care when giving a gift that it not be too elaborate, as this may offend the recipient. You may be perceived as arrogant or as someone trying to impress others with your wealth. However, a carefully selected modest, practical gift may enhance rapport and begin a positive relationship.

Building Rapport

- Ways to build rapport include placing the right hand over the heart and slightly bowing one's head following a handshake to show respect, standing when the leader or elder enters the room, and always allowing the leader to provide input in the decision-making process.
- Maintaining composure is critical, as swearing, shouting, displaying anger, and abruptness are viewed as a lack of self control, disrespect, and indicators that you are not from a good family.

Interacting with High Status Individuals

Status is very important to Afghans, and people of high status expect to be shown deference and treated with great respect. Don't expect high status individuals to meet or deal with lower status people. When requesting cooperation, you can gain trust by showing that you are humble. Allow anyone of high status to enter a room first and sit down first. If possible, take notes when someone of high status is speaking to you as a sign of respect, furthermore, lowering your gaze intermittently while speaking also signals respect.

Conducting Meetings

During the initial business meeting, it is best not to anticipate reaching conclusions. Afghans typically use the first few meetings to get acquainted and forge relationships. Simple greeting and phrases in Pashto and Dari at the start and end of a meeting help build rapport. Afghans are often impressed when someone takes the time to learn some of their language; therefore, they are more likely to take that person seriously. Relationships that are strong will facilitate the

outcome of the meeting. Thus, the most important aspect of meetings is establishing a strong relationship with everyone who is influential in deciding future goals.

Meals

Business talk is not usually conducted over a meal. You may be invited into an Afghan's home to talk business, but normally the meal will be served first followed by business afterwards. Consider the invitation an opportunity to get to know your counterpart on a personal basis, allowing you to build a trusting and solid relationship with him.

Making Agreements & Keeping Your Word

- The notion of commitment is of high value in Afghan culture. To express the importance of a promise or agreement, Afghans will shake hands.
- If you make a promise, particularly one sealed by a handshake, do it with care.
- Avoid making commitments which you are not sure you can keep, otherwise, you risk damaging your own reputation and the image of US forces in the region.
- Broken agreements will result in a breach of trust between you and your counterpart. In fact, any unfulfilled promise will be perceived as a slight against an Afghan's honor.
- It is advisable to document discussion topics to demonstrate that you consider requests important.

Written Contracts

Afghans are usually hesitant to engage in formal, written contracts due to the possibility that events outside their control may prevent them from fulfilling the contractual obligations. In addition, Afghans may consider it insulting when asked to make a written contract, which suggests their verbal word is

considered questionable. This notion relates to the importance of honor and integrity of one's word. To fail to follow through would disgrace one's family honor.

Don't Forget Prayer Time

Muslims take time during the working day for prayers. When scheduling business appointments, you should avoid overlapping with prayer times.

Talking About Family

- Afghans normally will not ask for details about individual family members of the opposite sex.
- It is appropriate to ask about someone's family as a unit or discuss family members of the same sex.
- It is offensive for a man to discuss someone's wife, daughter, or sister in a casual way.
- The same applies to women: it is not proper to inquire about male relatives in a casual way.
- It is considered appropriate to inquired about a family member of the opposite sex when the situation is grave such as a medical emergency.
- Your Afghan counterparts may inquire about your family, in which case similar rules apply. It is okay to mention that you have daughters, and give their names. It is best to avoid specific details, particularly about their appearance.
- Most Afghans prefer to do business with people with whom they have an established relationship.
    - It is crucial that you get to know contacts as friends, and asking about their family is common way of doing so, therefore, try to build a solid friendship with your Afghan contact.

Red Crescent

One of the signs you may see in Afghanistan is the Red Crescent, which is the Islamic version of the Red Cross and signifies a medical facility.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Non-Verbal Etiquette

Respecting a few common Muslim customs and courtesies will enable you to establish rapport with Afghan counterparts and host nationals.

Left Hand

- The left hand is reserved for hygiene and considered unclean.
- Try to refrain from touching or passing items to people with the left hand.
- An exception is the two-handed handshake, which is not offensive, but rather warm and friendly.

Common Gestures

Distant Greeting: A simple smile and a shallow bow at the waist suggest appreciation, thanks, or respect and serve as an acceptable greeting if you are at a distance.

Finished Eating: This gesture is conveyed by the person grasping his imaginary beard with the right hand and pulling softly downward two - three times. This gesture is used by all Afghans (male or female) to show thanks to God for the food.

How Much? To gesture "how much?" Afghans rub their thumb against their other fingers.

Get Someone's Attention: In Afghanistan, you raise your hand to get someone's attention by raising only your index finger. The standard American gesture of raising the entire hand has no merit.

Afghan "Poker Face": Afghans are usually masterful at not showing their emotions or "revealing their hand" when it comes to goals and intentions. However, Afghans are quite accomplished in "reading" foreigners, a skill which they undoubtedly developed over the country's turbulent history suffering through and surviving foreign invasions.

Recognizing Status: An Afghan shows respect when greeting a person of rank or status, such as an elder, by kissing the dignified person's hands. It is courteous to stand when elders enter a room and to greet the elderly men first.

Please, I Beg You: When begging or imploring someone for help, Afghans grasp the chin with the tips of their right fingers.

Control Your Temper

- Losing your temper is viewed as a sign of weakness. Your words will have more positive influence if you maintain control of your emotions.

Gestures to Avoid

Yelling at someone is unacceptable behavior.

When speaking to an Afghan, it is proper to keep your hands in view. Hands behind the back or in pockets may communicate disrespect, or that the person is attempting to hide something.

Pointing with your index finger is considered rude – use your whole hand.

Sticking out your tongue or spitting either on the ground or at someone is also rude. Indeed, among Pashtuns, spitting at or in the direction of another person is considered flagrantly disrespectful.

You should remove your sunglasses when you speak to an Afghan – showing your eyes is a sign of sincerity.

Blowing your nose in public is considered rude.

Winking is usually viewed as an expression of sexual desire or flirting, which is unacceptable behavior.

Sitting with legs stretched in front of others, especially the elderly, is also considered rude. The soles should remain anchored to a surface or tucked underneath the legs when sitting on the floor or ground.

Conversational Taboos Concerning Religion

- Criticizing Islam or making fun of its practices.
- Using the name of God (In English or in Islamic "Allah") or the Prophet Muhammad in a profane expression.
- Using the name "Jesus Christ" in profanity, as Muslims regard Jesus as a great prophet.

Useful Translations

ENGLISH	PASHTO	DARI
Do you speak English?	Ta pe inglisee khabaree kawaley shee?	Ingleesee yead daaree?
Can someone assist you?	Tsok zamun sara marasta kawaley shee?	Kee maara kumak metonaa
Hello (Peace be upon you)	As-salaamu 'alaykum	As Salaam aalaikum
Response:	Waalaikum As salaam	Waalaikum As salaam
Thank You	Deyra manana	Tashakur
Welcome	Kha raaghlaast	Khosh ahmadeen
Yes/No	Ho/Na	Baley/Ney
Maybe	Shaayed	Shaayad
God willing	Inshallah	Inshallah
What is your name?	Staa num tsa deh?	Naam-e- shoma chee ast?

My name is…	Zama num ___ deh	Naam-e- man ……. Ast
I'm pleased to meet you	Za Khoshala yem chela tasee sara gorum	Aaz deedaane shumaa Khoosh shudum
Good-bye	Da Khoday pa amaan	Kho-do hafaz
Please	Mehrabaanee	Lut-fan
Who?	Tsoak?	Kee?
What?	Tso shey?	Chee?
When?	Kill-leh?	Chee waqt? / kai?
Where?	Cheeree?	Kujaa?
Why?	Walee?	Chiraa?
Yesterday	Parun	Deeroz
Today	Non	Emroz
Tomorrow	Sabaa	Sabaa
Morning	Sahaar	Subh
Evening	Mahaam	Shaw
Noon	Gharma	Chaasht
Midnight	Nima shpa	Nesfey shaw
Now	Wos	Haale
Later	Wrusta	Pasaan tar
Day	Woraz	Roz
Night	Shpah	Shaw
Week	Hafta	Haftaa
Month	Miyaasht	Maa
Year	Kaal	Saal
Sunday	Yakshamba	Yak shambey
Monday	Do shamba	Doo shambey
Tuesday	Se shamba	Sey shambey
Wednesday	Chaar Shamba	Chaar shambey
Thursday	Punj Shamba	Panj shambey
Friday	Jumaa	Jum'aa
Saturday	Shamba	Shambey
OK	Sama da	Durust
Excuse me / I am sorry	BaKhana ghwaarom	Mey baKhshee
Right/Wrong	Sahee/Ghalat	Durust/Ghalat
Here/There	Delta/Halta	Eenja/Oonja

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy: Age 15 and over who can read and write

- Total population: 45%
- Male: 55.5%
- Female: 29.8% (2018 est.)
- Literacy rates tend to be much higher in urban centers than in rural areas

Traditional Learning Style

Learning through oral history is a traditional way of education in Afghanistan. In the past, communities across Afghanistan cherished the age-old tradition of reading poetry, books of wisdom, history, and other important subjects during gatherings in homes or tea houses. Today, much learning still takes place through oral literature, oral history, philosophy, folk tales and poetry.

Importance of Folklore Tales to Gender Behavior

Within the vast store of Afghan folktales covering religion, history and moral values, many reinforce the values governing male and female behavior. They illustrate what can or cannot be done, describe rewards and punishments, and define ideal personality types. Thus they serve to perpetuate the existing gender order and through example make it psychologically satisfying.

Education System

Two parallel educational systems function in Afghanistan: traditional and modern. Traditional Islamic religious schools are known as *madrassa.* They are typically found in towns and villages and serve to teach children basic moral values and religious knowledge through the study of the Holy Qur'an, the *Hadith* (Sayings of the Prophet Mohammad), and popular edited religious texts. Some madrassas also teach basic literacy and numeracy. Higher level madrassas located in Herat, Kunduz, Ghazni, Kandahar and Kabul were long known as important learning centers.

The modern educational system was introduced at the end of the nineteenth century by the government which used it as a

means to convince traditionalists of the compatibility of Islam with modernization.

This system was subsequently expanded with the continued assistance of France, Germany, Turkey, India, Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union. After 1978, however, a steady decline all but demolished the educational infrastructure, resulting in Afghanistan's extremely low literacy rate. However, since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, more than 10.5 million children have returned to school, despite attacks on schools and a shortage of teachers and materials. Girls comprised 38% of the school population in 2019, the percentage represents a huge increase even compared to the years before the Taliban rule.

Mega-*Madrassas* (*Dar al-Aloum*)

- Each province has seen the establishment of at least one large *madrassa*, which is the traditional Islamic religious educational institution.
  - As many as 6,000 students may attend each school.
- Curriculum combines Islamic tradition with contemporary studies.
  - Curriculum entails 40% religious instruction, 40% math and science, and 20% English and computer studies.
- Purpose is to modernize the educational system and prevent students from leaving Afghanistan to study at *madrassas* in Pakistan.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Concept of Time

Having a relaxed view of time compared to Westerners, Afghans generally disregard time management and punctuality. Conversely, they are more concerned about human interactions and relationship-building and are known to be infinitely patient and tolerant. For example, because punctuality is less important, Afghans may be late for meetings – very late in some cases.

Afghan Work Ethic

Often, the length of time a task will take is of little (if any) importance to Afghans. Understand that they tend to be more concerned with ensuring that the task is accomplished eventually. In this regard, Afghans can seem infinitely patient.

Because of their relaxed view of time, an Afghan is not as concerned with meeting an official suspense as his US counterpart or supervisor. In this manner, an Afghan may take advantage of the opportunity to allow the US military member to accomplish the Afghan's assigned duties for him in order to ensure the mission is accomplished in the required timeframe.

Timelines and the Dari Future Tense

- If a Dari speaker tells you something "is being done," it doesn't necessarily mean they are working on it right now.
- Speakers normally use the continuous present-tense verb for activities in a future context. The Dari language has a future tense, however, only educated people use it (*Man Khaham Kard*). Villagers commonly use the continuous present, "I am doing" (*Man Mekonam*). Listen carefully for adverbs which denote time such as "*Sabaa*" (tomorrow) to avoid confusion.
- Keep this in mind when discussing timelines for projects.

Due in large part to their relatively relaxed view of time, Afghans tend not to be as concerned as Americans with meeting official suspense dates or times. Consequently, certain Afghan partners may take advantage of US military members who are responsible for meeting deadlines (i.e. US partners doing the work in order to keep on schedule).

Afghan Work Week

The Afghan work week begins on Saturday and ends early on Thursday. Weekends begin on Friday, which is the Islamic holy day. It is not uncommon for some businesses to close on Thursday.

The Islamic Calendar

The Islamic calendar is used to determine the proper day to celebrate religious holidays and festivals. It is a lunar calendar and contains 12 months, although it is 11 days shorter than the Western or Gregorian calendar. As a result, from one year to the next, Islamic holidays fall 11days earlier on the Western calendar than the previous year.

Concept of Personal Space

"Talking distance" between Afghans is normally much closer than most Americans are accustomed to. Afghans of the same gender typically interact with less personal space between them and are known to touch often while conversing. To stand back from someone indicates a desire not to interact with the person and may be perceived as offensive.

Proximity as a Sign of Sentiment

Afghans often use proximity (physical nearness) to convey sentiment. For example, they will place individuals close to them who share alliances, friendships, and bonds. Be mindful of who you place close to you at meetings, meals, and events, as this proximity signals alliances much more than in US culture. Pay attention to and learn from public displays of affection between Afghans. In tribal culture, the public display tells everyone, particularly members of the same tribe, that you are a friend and confidant.

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Dress

Men's Clothing: Nearly all Afghan men wear a knee-length shirt worn over baggy trousers pulled tight with a drawstring. During the winter, men wear a sheepskin coat, a short-sleeved white raw wool vest, or long cloak draped over the shoulders.

Headgear

Afghans wear caps or turbans (*lungi)*. Caps are round, conical or peaked and made of decorative material unique to each ethnic group. Young boys usually wear caps until they are circumcised – they then wear turbans. Turbans are characteristic of the Pashtun.

Women's Clothing

Women's traditional dress includes a two-piece outfit consisting of loose trousers worn under a tunic with a high neck and long sleeves. Many women also wear a long scarf draped across the shoulders. Some women wear a long colorful dress with a short jacket, long coat, or shawl. Many children wear a tawiz (amulet) to protect them against evil.

Chadiri/Burka

Under the Taliban regime, women always wore the *Chadiri*, a head-to-toe covering, when they were in public. The *Chadiri* is not unique to the Taliban era and will likely continue to be worn.

Sports and Games

Afghans have a love for sports, particularly wrestling and soccer. The game of cricket is also popular, as it migrated into Afghanistan from Pakistan. Typically, only men may play sports.

Buzkashi, a precursor of polo, is a traditional Afghan game played on horseback, in which riders seek to grab a headless calf and swing it onto their saddle and ride with the calf carcass around a track to score a goal. Only truly superb horsemen are able to master the game. Buzkashi is portrayed in the movie "Rambo III" and in the 1971 movie "The Horsemen" with Omar Sharif and Jack Palance.

Kite Fighting

This is also popular sport in Afghanistan and there are no official rules. Everyone puts up his kite, and the fighter usually has an assistant to help with the line and spool. There can be over 25 kites in the air at any given time, all fighting. These large kites have quite a pull to them when up in the air, but most of the fighting is done with release cutting which requires a lot of patience. Young children on the ground have a great time trying to capture the cut kites, and can compile quite a collection by the end of the day. Kite fighting is portrayed in the movie "The Kite Runner".

Teahouses

Tea is a popular drink among the men, and they will gather here to talk, listen to music, and drink there tea (*chai*).

Gambling: Men gamble on animal (usually roosters) fighting.

Music

Traditional music follows regional and ethnic divisions. All groups play music using stringed instruments such as the *rebab* (pictured next page), the *tambur* (a long, multi-stringed lute), the *dutar* (a two-stringed lute), and drums. Many Afghans consider the banjo-type, skin-covered rebab as the national instrument. It is noteworthy that when the Taliban took control

of Afghanistan's capital city Kabul in 1996, they banned music and kite flying along with a number of other favored pastimes.

Attan

Afghans usually dance alone or in circles. Pashtuns perform the *attan*, a dance in the open air that was originally the Pashtun's national ethnic dance, but which has become a part of Afghan cultural life.

Arts

Carpet-weaving, copper utensils, gold and silver jewelry, and embroidery are traditional Afghan arts. Buddhist, Hindu, and other pre-Islamic religious statues and other works of religious art were destroyed under Taliban rule.

Modern writers have focused on themes of Islam and freedom. Proverbs, poetry, and riddles are popular, and folktales are a key form of teaching and entertainment (see *History & Myth*).One of the first great literary works in Dari was *Shah Namah* (*Book of the Kings*), completed in 1010 AD by Ferdosi. Also respected are the *munajat* (prayer verses) written by Kwaja Abdullah Ansarai.

Buddhist Influence

Buddhism was a major religion in Afghanistan during the pre-Islamic era, which lasted from the 4th-century BC until the 7th-century AD. Consequently, many existing monuments and artifacts testify to Buddhist influence in Afghanistan (Photo: smaller of the two Statues of Buddha in Afghanistan's Bamiyan Valley, courtesy of Wikimedia). Afghanistan's Taliban militia considered Buddhism a pagan religion, and as a result, in 2001 destroyed a number of historical Buddhist monuments. An international effort is currently underway to rebuild the two distinguished Buddhas of the Bamiyan Valley, which are listed among UNESCO's World Heritage Sites.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Diet

Rural Afghans usually eat only breakfast and dinner, though some have a light lunch. Rural Afghans generally eat on a mat on the floor out of a communal dish. All Afghans eat large amounts of flat-loafed bread (*nan*). Diners eat with their right hand, often using the bread as a plate and as a scoop for the food. The left hand is only used if the host has provided utensils.

Meat

Meat forms a large part of the Pashtun diet, with the exception of pork, which Muslims believe is an unclean meat. Meat is often boiled, seasoned, and served mixed into a rice dish. This dish is called *pilau,* and is generally the main dish served at a meal. *Pilau* can also be used to refer to food in general.

Restricted Foods/Drinks for Muslims

- ***Haram* –** of Islamic religious restrictions, Muslims do not eat pork and most do not consume alcohol.
- ***Halal* –** According to Islam, the slaughtering of animals must be performed to certain standards, known as *halal*, covering cleanliness, the training of the slaughterman, the avoidance of suffering, and by repeating certain words while the animal is dispatched.
- Sunni Islam typically allows the consumption of all forms of seafood, but Shi'a practice largely prohibits the consumption of bottom feeders without fins or scales, such as lobsters, crabs, oysters, clams, and catfish. (Shrimp is often permitted). Shi'a do not consume rabbit.

Typical Afghan Dishes

- ***Kabobs:*** Seasoned cubes of beef or lamb on a skewer; roasted over charcoal and usually served with a salad of chopped onions and tomatoes
- ***Kuftah-kabob*:** Roast meatball made with onion
- ***Chilaw:*** A plain rice dish with mutton or chicken in the center
- ***Mantoo:*** Steamed dumplings filled with chopped beef, minced onion, and spices. It is often served with a tangy yogurt sauce on top, sprinkled with lentils
- ***Sabzi* or *Zamarud:*** Rice with spinach
- ***Qabli:*** A lamb and rice dish with raisins, shredded carrots, almonds, and pistachios
- ***Bonjan-i-sia:*** Rice with eggplant
- ***Mashong:*** *R*ice with peas
- ***Landi:*** Rice with dried meat and rice with the head (including the eyeballs)
- ***Reshta:*** Rice with eggs
- ***Naranj:*** Rice with orange peels
- ***Kala-pacheh:*** Feet of sheep, a specialty usually served to an honored guest
- ***Torshi:*** A mixture of pickled vegetables; it is normally served with the *pilau*
- ***Mast:*** Yogurt sometimes served as a side dish or mixed into rice
- ***Panir-chakah:*** Cottage Cheese
- ***Qrut:*** Dried cheese balls
- ***Showra:*** Winter soup
- ***Badrang:*** Summer soup
- ***Faludah:*** Thick dessert made with milk and wheat flour boiled and served with rice syrup
- ***Firni:*** Puddings
- ***Chori:*** A combination of cooked flour, oil, and raw sugar, is distributed to the poor during the month of Prophet Mohammad's death

Accepting and Declining Food

- If offered, most Afghans will reject food or drink once or more, according to their rules of etiquette. If the other person continues to insist, they can then accept. Therefore, if you offer someone tea and they say no, continue to insist several times. They may just be saying no out of politeness, not because they don't want the offering.
- However, if you reject an offering just to be polite, they will probably think you really don't want it and may be offended. As an American, therefore, it's generally safer to accept an Afghans' hospitality. If offered tea, drink at least three cups, sipping it slowly. Eat what you are given, but take care not to eat more than the family can afford to give you. Since guests must eat first, it is possible that you are taking food from the family. Also, leaving food on the table indicates that your host has provided more for you than you can possibly eat, which will make him feel honored.
- If someone appears extraordinarily poor and hungry, and you suspect he is offering purely out of obligation, politely refuse the offering with an appropriate excuse such as orders from your superior force you to be elsewhere but that you hope to enjoy his gracious hospitality another time.

Women and Dining

Families normally eat together, but if a male guest is present, females eat separately. Most Afghans do not eat at restaurants, but some restaurants have booths or a separate dining area for families so women may dine out.

Afghan Dining Etiquette

- During a meal, everyone sits on the floor and eats from a common plate of bread, rice, and a variety of other dishes.
- Hide the bottoms of your feet if you are sitting cross-legged.
- Eat with your right hand if utensils aren't provided.
- See Language and Communication Section, to gesture "finished eating."

Healthcare

Life Expectancy

Total pop: 52.8 years
Male: 51.4 years
Female: 54.4 years
(2020 est.)

Age Structure

0-14 years: 40.62%
15-64 years: 56.71%
65 years and over: 2.68%
(2020est.)

Health Issues

In response to a strategy outlined by the Ministry of Health, the international community is supporting the government in rebuilding the primary health-care system. Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the health sector has seen significant progress in development, with reductions in disease and death. Today, 77% of Afghans have access to basic health services. However, the number of infant deaths after birth is estimated at 10.4% (2020).

Afghan healthcare facilities are not reputable institutions which are sometimes managed by personnel not having government licenses or even medical degrees. Similarly, there is no public agency established to monitor their operations.

Health Precautions

Because of poor sanitation and insufficient potable water supply, infectious and parasitic diseases such as malaria and diarrhea are very common.

Food and Water:
Use bottled, boiled, or treated water and avoid ice and fountain drinks. Wash fruit and vegetables in a disinfectant solution, if possible, and peel or cook them before eating. Avoid dairy products unless you are sure they have been pasteurized. Do not eat food purchased from street vendors. Avoid handling animals or swimming in fresh water.

Recommended Items: Bring insect repellent with DEET, cold and intestinal medicines, saline nasal spray, lip balm, sunscreen, and dry-skin care. If you wear contacts, bring an ample supply of cleaning solution and two pairs of your prescription glasses. The dry, dusty climate can make wearing contacts uncomfortable. If you need prescription medication, bring enough for more than the expected length of your stay, as pharmaceuticals are limited.

Welfare

In the early 2000s, Afghanistan had the highest proportion of widows and orphans in the world, mainly because of protracted military conflict. Large numbers of disabled individuals and former militia's members also lack a means of support. The government has provided very little welfare protection. Most of the welfare activity in the country has been provided by international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Afghan Health and Development Services, Afghan Women's Education Center, and Humanitarian Assistance for the Women and Children of Afghanistan, and by United Nations organizations. NGOs also work with Afghan refugees in other countries, especially Pakistan. Approximately 8 million Afghans were initially displaced as refugees; however, over 6 million have returned since the fall of the Taliban in 2001.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Economic Overview

Afghanistan's economy is recovering from decades of conflict. The economy has improved since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 largely because of the infusion of international assistance, improvement in the agricultural sector, infrastructure and service sector growth. Real gross domestic product growth exceeded 7% in 2008. Despite the progress of the past few years, Afghanistan is extremely poor, landlocked, and highly dependent on foreign aid, agriculture, and trade with neighboring countries. Farmers and nomadic herders comprise three-quarters of the Afghan population.

Much of the population continues to suffer from shortages of food, housing, clean water, electricity, medical care, and jobs. Criminality, insecurity, and the Afghan Government's inability to extend rule of law to all parts of the country pose challenges to future economic growth. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, continue to plague Afghanistan’s population and economy. It will probably take years of continuing donor aid and attention to significantly raise Afghanistan's living standard from its current level, among the lowest in the world.

The international community remains committed to Afghanistan's development, pledging over $83 billion at donors' conferences since 2003. Afghanistan’s infrastructure continues to improve with 14,000 kilometers of new roads. Electric power lines, new schools, hospitals, and other developments are expanding. Nevertheless, Afghanistan will need to overcome a number of challenges, including opium production, budget sustainability, job creation, corruption, removal of landmines, government capacity, and rebuilding war torn infrastructure.

Opium

Afghanistan supplies more than 90% of the world's opium. The drug industry accounts for nearly 2/3 of the country's agricultural production. Expanding poppy cultivation and a growing opium trade generate roughly $68 billion in illicit economic revenue with $3 billion remaining in Afghanistan and looms as one of Afghanistan's most serious policy concerns. Much of this drug money fuels the insurgency and sustains regional warlords and corruption of government officials.

Agricultural Products

Agriculture is a primary source of income in the country. In times past, Afghanistan was a food-exporting country, but now the people are dependent on imported grain. Major food crops produced include corn, rice, barley, wheat, vegetables, fruits, and nuts. The major industrial crops include cotton, tobacco, castor beans, and sugar beets. The Afghan economy continues to be overwhelmingly agricultural, despite the fact that only 12% of its total land area is arable and less than 6% currently is cultivated. Agricultural production is constrained by an almost total dependence on erratic winter snows and spring rains for water, because many irrigation systems were destroyed in war, and what remains is very primitive. Water is generally in short supply. Relatively little use is made of machines, chemical fertilizer, or pesticides.

Other Industries

Other industries in Afghanistan include small-scale production of textiles, soap, furniture, shoes, fertilizer, cement, and hand-woven carpets.

View of Wealth

Traditionally, rural Afghans define wealth as land ownership or

a large family. Urban residents are more likely to view wealth in terms of money or possessions. Nomadic Afghans traditionally defined wealth by the size of their herds.

"*Hawala*" Networks

Much of Afghanistan's financial system is still in the hands of traditional *hawala* networks. Hawala is an ancient, informal system of money transfer that existed in South Asia long before Western banking arrived. Hawala brokers take a client's money and then contact a counterpart in the area where the client wants money delivered. The counterpart then pays out the sum (minus a small percentage.) A particular Hawala network is often used by members of the same village, clan, or ethnic group. This system is reliable and less expensive than formal bank transfers, and is virtually untraceable. Hawala plays an integral role in Afghanistan's drug trade. In the Helmand province alone, $800 million in drug related hawala business takes place.

Negotiations

Plan ahead, know what you want (your position), and identify and prioritize your reasons (interests) and anticipate the other party's position and interests.

When you open discussions, it is wise to allow your opponent to speak first. When he presents a position (a desire), ask for his reasons – his answer should convey his interests. If one of your interests parallels with his, you now have common ground to develop a mutually satisfactory solution.

Unless the situation is dire, it is best not to make demands. Present your ideas and options for their comment. For example, don't say "I think we need to do X"; rather "What do you think of the idea X?" Bottom Line: make your ideas -- theirs.

Additional discussion should outline the advantages and disadvantages for each option. When it comes time to select an option to implement, make sure it meets both parties interest – and seriously consider any option that improves the reputation of your counterpart.

Expect less detail in the agreement than you might want. Risk-averse cultures tend to manage consequences by creating general (not highly detailed) documents. However, with an excellent relationship built on mutual trust, the inevitable issues that arise during execution will be easier to resolve. Preservation of a reputation is of primary importance.

Relationship Building Is Key

- During the initial negotiations, build a relationship; don't work the task at hand (unless the situation is dire) relationship building can focus on discussions about the overall family, sports, geography, history, etc.
- The purpose of relationship building is to develop trust. This trust will be vital in shaping the agreement and resolving issues during execution.

Currency

The Afghani (AFN) is the national currency with one US dollar equaling about 76.45 Afghani as of 2020. The AFN is divided into 100 pul. US dollars are not officially recognized in Afghanistan, although vendors do accept them widely unless the currency is old or damaged. Money can be exchanged at any *bureau de change* (money exchange offices).

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Technology

Technological development in Afghanistan is limited and hampered by inadequate infrastructure, largely in disrepair. The bulk of the labor force is engaged in activities requiring minimal technological advances, such as agriculture and livestock. However, Western oil and gas companies view Afghanistan as an important future conduit for central Asian pipelines and such future ventures may bring increased technological development to Afghanistan.

For Afghanistan to develop its natural resources and boost trade, it will need to be able to transport goods. Transportation is a major obstacle to increased commerce in this landlocked country and is a major element of Afghanistan's reconstruction. Construction of the national or "ring" road is a significant effort.

Environmental Issues

Environmental issues include freshwater supply, agricultural and industrial runoff, land clearing and desertification, overgrazing, soil erosion, and deforestation.

Even though Afghanistan lacks industry that would create air pollutants, smog is common in most urban areas. Afghanistan receives significant amounts of pollution from the Aral sedimentary basin, and from industrial parks in Iran, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Natural Hazards

An average of 50 earthquakes occurs each year in Afghanistan. They are particularly damaging in the Hindu Kush Mountains, which lie near a major fault line. In addition, forceful winds known as the "Wind of 120 days" occur almost daily in the southwest during summer. This is usually accompanied by intense heat, drought, and sandstorms that often bring great hardship to the local people.

Fascination with Technology

- Afghans are usually fascinated by technology
- Common items, such as ballpoint pens, may be objects of interest to rural Afghans
- Build rapport with Afghans by sharing common technological devices when possible
  - o Be careful not to appear to be flaunting your wealth (by Afghan standards)

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