

Afghanistan in Perspective

An Orientation Guide



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Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, a Central Asian country of rugged terrain and a harsh climate, sits at the heart of historical trade and invasion routes. The country borders Pakistan along its southern and eastern border, Iran to the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to the north, and China along the short Wakhan Corridor to the east. Completely landlocked, the nearest coast lies along the Arabian Sea, about 482 km (300 mi) to the south, beyond Pakistan. Afghanistan, approximately the size of Texas,¹ extends approximately 1,240 km (770 mi) from east to west, and 1,000 km (630 mi) from north to south. This country of 28 million people contains desert plains, rocky ranges, and snow-covered peaks that are an extension of the western Himalayas.



© Victoria Villalobos
Afghan children

Due to its central location, Afghanistan was destined to become a place where imperial ambitions would clash. Persia and India sparred over control of Afghanistan in the 16th and 17th centuries, while the British and Russian Empires fought for dominance during the 19th century until the country gained independence in 1919. From its founding in 1747, Afghanistan was a kingdom until the communist takeover in 1973. After the Russian invasion and occupation of 1979–1989 and the years of civil war and Taliban rule that followed, building a viable government has proven challenging. The United States became involved in Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks and invaded the country in 2001 to oust al-Qaeda, who had been given a safe haven in the country by the Taliban based there.

A UN-sponsored conference in 2001 established a process for political reconstruction that included the adoption of a new constitution and presidential National Assembly elections. Thirty years of war dispersed power to tribes and regions, and the government has been striving to reverse this process. Because the government still has limited authority in areas outside of Kabul, the Taliban has returned in the south and other parts of the country. 2009 featured record numbers of deaths for foreign troops and civilians. After 8 years, Afghanistan's president, Hamid Karzai, and the international community are reassessing their approach to the war. The recent international conference on Afghanistan was to begin to develop a plan for security and better governance and to encourage Afghanistan's neighbors to be more engaged in securing a stable region.

¹ Federal Research Division. Library of Congress. "Afghanistan Country Study." No date. <http://www.country-studies.com/afghanistan/geography.html>

Chapter 1 Geography

Area

Completely landlocked, Afghanistan's nearest coast lies along the Arabian Sea, about 482 km (300 mi) to the south, beyond Pakistan. Shaped like an irregular leaf with the Wakhan Corridor as its stem, the country is about 647,500 sq km (250,000 sq mi), or about the size of Texas.² Extending approximately 1,240 km (770 mi) from west to east, and 1,000 km (630 mi) from north to south, much of the country is sparsely populated.



© Brian Griffith
Hindu Kush

Of the total land area, roughly half lies above 2,000 m (6,562 ft).³ The Hindu Kush, the dominant mountain system, runs through the middle of the country in a northeast-to-southwest direction. It sharply divides Afghanistan into northern and southern border regions. Between these lie interior plateaus and sweeping deserts. The northern border is formed by the Amu Darya River—the river Oxus of antiquity—and its tributary, the Panj. On its eastern and southern borders lies Pakistan, and to the west is Iran. Afghanistan also shares a 76-km (47-mi) border with China in the northeast, along the Wakhan Corridor.

Climate

Afghanistan experiences extremes of climate and weather. Typical of a semi-arid steppe climate, winters are bitterly cold, with heavy snow in the mountains, and summers are hot and dry. In July, temperatures can reach 51°C (124°F) in exposed areas of the southwest. January temperatures may drop to as low as -46°C (-51°F) in the highest mountain areas.⁴

Nevertheless, some regional variations exist. The northeast mountain regions enjoy a sub-arctic climate with dry, cold winters. In contrast, the mountainous regions on the Pakistani border bring maritime tropical air masses along with humidity and rain into the central and southern regions.

Topographical Features

Mountains with little or no vegetation, typical of desert terrain, dominate Afghanistan's topography. The Hindu Kush range bisects the country and isolates the northern region from the rest of Afghanistan. This range dominates the eastern and central regions but gives way to grasslands and plateaus. The north is Afghanistan's "bread basket," while land fertility in the south and east is constrained by lack of water.

² Federal Research Division. Library of Congress. "Afghanistan Country Study." No date.
<http://www.country-studies.com/afghanistan/geography.html>

³ Paul V. Galvin Library. Illinois Institute of Technology. Government Publications Access. 14 January 2002. "Afghanistan Country Study."
<http://www.gl.iit.edu/govdocs/afghanistan/TheNaturalEnvironment.html>

⁴ National Climatic Data Center. "Climate of Afghanistan." No date.
<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/climate//afghan/afghan-narrative.html>

Geographic Divisions

Afghanistan can be divided into three distinct geographic regions: the Central Highlands, the Southern Plateau, and the Northern Plains.⁵ The Central Highlands, part of the Himalayan mountain system, include the Hindu Kush mountain range. It is the most mountainous area in Afghanistan, with deep, narrow valleys, deserts, and some meadows. Of great strategic importance in this area are the high mountain passes. They include the Shebar Pass, northwest of the capital, Kabul, and the Khyber Pass, which leads to the Indian subcontinent.

The Southern Plateau contains a variety of deserts: salt flats and steppe, stony deserts, and the sandy Registan Desert bordering Pakistan. The southwestern low-lying plateau is known as the Sistan Depression or Basin. The soil in the Southern Plateau region is infertile, except for the river deltas of the Sistan Basin. The Northern Plains are mostly flat, but there are some fertile foothills, where most of the country's food is grown. Vast amounts of mineral deposits and natural gas deposits are also found here.⁶

Major Cities

Kabul

Having one of the highest capital cities in the world, with an elevation of 1,800 m (5,900 ft) above sea level, Afghan history has demonstrated that while control of Kabul does not necessarily equal to control of the country, no government has been able to rule without holding the city.⁷ Its proximity to the Khyber Pass, which allows passage between Afghanistan and Pakistan, makes it central. Kabul fell to the Taliban in 1996 but was liberated in 2001 after the U.S. invasion. Since then, the city has seen a significant increase in population as it struggles with limited resources and public services. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), and other institutions are part of the reconstruction effort and give the city a strong international presence while providing some security and stability. Kabul is the cultural and economic capital of Afghanistan, where tall buildings abut traditional markets. (Population: 3.4 million)⁸



Kandahar

Founded by Alexander the Great in the 4th century B.C.E. and once capital of the Durrani Empire, control of Kandahar was historically contested by India and Persia, both of which were aware of the value of a city situated on the major Central Asian trade route. There are numerous bazaars as well as mosques, one of which is said to house Prophet

⁵ Paul V. Galvin Library. Illinois Institute of Technology. Government Publications Access. 14 January 2002. "Afghanistan Country Study."

<http://www.gl.iit.edu/govdocs/afghanistan/TheNaturalEnvironment.html>

⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Afghanistan." 2009. <http://www.britannica.com/nations/Afghanistan>

⁷ *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban*. Tanner, Stephen. "Introduction: Crossroads of Empires [p. 4]." 2002. New York: De Capo Press.

⁸ USAID. "Afghanistan." 16 November 2009. <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/Province.14.aspx>

Muhammad's cloak. Along with Peshawar in neighboring Pakistan, it is the urban cultural center of the Pashtun tribe. Kandahar's agriculture-based economy was dependent on fruit cultivation⁹ until poppies became more profitable. Kandahar was a Taliban stronghold and remained so after that government was toppled in 2001. Still, the Taliban have re-emerged despite the approximately 35,000-strong ISAF efforts originating from the military base stationed there.¹⁰ Reconstruction developments include a major highway linking Kandahar and Kabul. (Population: 1 million)

Herat

Herat is the only city whose origins are tied to medieval Khorasan (present-day eastern Iran) that remains a thriving urban center. It was controlled by a succession of conquerors including Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, and Tamerlane. As a result, it was a place where the peoples of Central Asia mingled, and it linked Afghanistan's tribal groups to the cosmopolitan Persian culture of neighboring Iran.¹¹ Today, Herat enjoys considerable funding from Iran, particularly for electricity, paved roads, and a railway linking it with Iran.¹² The Kandahar-Herat highway was completed recently through international aid. Herat functions as a trading center for farmers in the surrounding area and is a major source of customs revenue for the Afghan government.¹³ (Population: 1.6 million)¹⁴



© Jim Kelly
Herat skyline

Mazar-e Sharif

Mazar-e Sharif ("Tomb of the Chosen One"), a Shi'a cultural center in Afghanistan, is named for its principal attraction, the Shrine of Hazrat Ali, who was Mohammed's son-in-law and cousin, as well as founder of the Shi'a school of Islam. He eventually became the fourth Caliph. His regency, however, was marred by acrimony and Ali was assassinated in 658 C.E. In accordance with tradition, he was buried in Najaf, Iraq.¹⁵ Afghans, however, believe that the Caliph's body was secretly spirited away on a camel and that he was buried where the animal dropped dead.¹⁶ Whatever the truth, the mausoleum is venerated by all Muslims, especially the Shi'a. The tomb itself was buried in dirt to spare it the destruction which Genghis Khan's invading army inflicted on the

⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kandahar." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9044534>

¹⁰ ISAF. "ISAF Troops in Numbers (Placemat)." 2 October 2009. <http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/placemat.html>

¹¹ Ms Magazine. Rubin, Alissa. "Trouble in Herat: Women's Rights Assailed Anew." Spring 2003. <http://www.msmagazine.com/mar03/rubin.asp>

¹² Time. Motlagh, Jason. "Iran's Spending Spree in Afghanistan." 20 May 2009. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1900013,00.html>

¹³ BBC News. "Bomb Blast Hits West Afghan City." 3 August 2009. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8180832.stm

¹⁴ USAID. "Afghanistan." 16 November 2009. <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/Province.12.aspx>

¹⁵ Walter Chapin Simpson Center for Humanities. University of Washington. Silk Road Seattle. Harold, Frank. "Balkh and Mazar-e-Sharif." 2006. <http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/cities/afghanistan/balkh.html>

¹⁶ Tales of Asia. Sharpless, Gordon. "Mazar-i-Sharif." 1998–2006. <http://www.talesofasia.com/afghanistan-mazar.htm>

places he conquered in the 13th century. It wasn't until the late 15th century that the tomb was uncovered. In 2004, ancient and rare Hellenistic artifacts were also found, which, upon preservation, toured the world for over a year. (Population: 1.1 million)¹⁷

Bodies of Water

There are five major rivers in Afghanistan: the Amu Darya, Helmand, Hari Rud, Farah, and Kabul. The Amu Darya was known as the Oxus in ancient times. It is one of the longest rivers in Central Asia, flowing for 2,540 km (1,580 mi).¹⁸ It rises from the northeastern Pamir Mountains, runs generally east along the northern border with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and flows into Turkmenistan.¹⁹



© Carl Montgomery
Lake Band-e Amir

Flooding along the Amu Darya often displaces residents and causes damage to agriculture.²⁰ The Helmand River is 1,150 km (715 mi) and provides irrigation. It rises from the central Hindu Kush Mountains west of Kabul and flows into Iran.²¹ The Hari Rud also originates in the Hindu Kush Mountains, with a length of 1,130 km (700 mi). It flows west to Iran, turns to form part of the Iranian border, and continues north into Turkmenistan.²² The Farah River originates from central Afghanistan and flows southwest into Iran after a course of 560 km (350 mi).²³ The Kabul River rises in northeastern Afghanistan. It is 700 km (435 mi) long, of which 560 km (350 mi) are in Afghanistan, and passes through the major cities of Kabul and Jalalabad.²⁴ Most rivers in Afghanistan end in inland seas, swamps, or salt flats, with the exception of the Kabul River, which flows into the Indus River in Pakistan.

Afghanistan's lakes are small in size and number. The two most important are Saberi, in the southwest, and the saline Lake Istadeh-ye Moqor, in the southeast.²⁵ The lakes most popular with tourists are the group called Band-e-Amir in the Bamiyan Valley. High in the Hindu Kush Mountains at 3,000 m (9,000 ft), its turquoise waters, red limestone cliffs, and dams have made it a major tourist attraction. Band-e-Amir became Afghanistan's first national park in April 2009. Prior to becoming a park, it had suffered from habitat destruction and lost most of its wildlife. The Wildlife Conservation Society

¹⁷ USAID. "Afghanistan." 16 November 2009. <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/province.4.aspx>

¹⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Amu Darya: River Course and Basin." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-283832>

¹⁹ Encyclopædia of Earth. Saundry, Peter. "Afghanistan." 14 January 2009. <http://eearth.org/article/Afghanistan>

²⁰ IRIN News. "Flooding Amu River Displaces Hundreds of People." 4 October 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=86424>

²¹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Helmand River." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9039917>

²² Environmental News Service. "Asian Development Bank Prepares Afghanistan for New Dam." 4 November 2004. <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/nov2004/2004-11-05-02.asp>

²³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Farah River." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9033723>

²⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Kabul River." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9044258>

²⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Afghanistan: Drainage." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-21416>

(WCS), along with the government of Afghanistan, has developed a park management plan and the 222-square-mile park is now also an established protected area.²⁶

Wildlife

Decades of conflict and environmental threats have taken a toll not only on the human population of Afghanistan, but its wildlife as well. With 80% of Afghans dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods,²⁷ wildlife in Afghanistan suffers from loss of habitat, poaching, excessive hunting, and illegal fur trade.²⁸ In July 2009, Afghanistan's National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA)



© Tambako The Jaguar
Snow leopards

released the country's first list of 33 endangered species, including birds, plants, and mammals, such as the snow leopard and ibex.²⁹ The list of species banned from hunting, trading, or harvest is estimated to reach 70 by the end of 2009.³⁰ Afghanistan's unique location at the crossroads of subtropical and temperate zones has made it home to a diverse species of animals. Among Afghanistan's wildlife are nine species of wildcats (including the lynx, wild cat, and leopard cat), the Asiatic black bear and brown bear, the Marco Polo and Urial sheep, the Markhor goat, red and sand foxes, Afghan hedgehogs, Siberian cranes, goitered gazelles, wild boars, striped hyenas, bats, deer, ducks, wolves, jackals, and flamingos.

NEPA is working together with the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) to monitor animals and to protect the environment. To accomplish these goals, six protected areas are already established: Band-e-Amir National Park and Ajar Wildlife Reserve (both in Bamiyan Province), Dashte-Nawar Waterfowl Sanctuary and Ab-i-Estada (both in Ghazni Province), Kole Hashmat Khan Waterfowl Sanctuary (in Kabul Province), and Pamir-i-Buzurg (in Badakhshan Province). Nine other protected areas are proposed in various provinces throughout the country.³¹

²⁶ Wildlife Conservation Society. "Afghanistan's First National Park." 2009.

<http://www.wcs.org/conservation-challenges/local-livelihoods/recovering-from-conflict-and-disaster/afghanistan-first-national-park.aspx>

²⁷ UNEP. Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch. "UNEP in Afghanistan: Laying the Foundations for Sustainable Development. [p. 3]." January 2009.

http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/UNEP_in_Afghanistan.pdf

²⁸ USAID. "Afghanistan: National Environmental Protection Agency Declares Afghanistan's First Protected Species List." 3 June 2009. <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/Article.673.aspx>

²⁹ Wildlife Conservation Society. "New Rights for Afghan Wildlife." 3 June 2009. <http://www.wcs.org/new-and-noteworthy/new-rights-for-afghan-wildlife.aspx>

³⁰ Wildlife Conservation Society. "New Rights for Afghan Wildlife." 3 June 2009. <http://www.wcs.org/new-and-noteworthy/new-rights-for-afghan-wildlife.aspx>

³¹ United Nations Environmental Programme. GRID. Maps and Graphics. No date. http://www.grid.unep.ch/product/map/images/afghanistan_protectedareab.gif

Natural Hazards

The wars and conflicts of the last three decades have left Afghanistan increasingly vulnerable to natural disasters. In addition, due to a lack of proper management of natural resources and environmental damage, disaster response has been limited to mostly immediate humanitarian relief rather than long-term preparedness. However, the suffering and vulnerability are being minimized through



© Remko Tanis
Flooding in Uruzgan Province

environmental awareness, warning systems, and proper management of natural resources. To this end, the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) is mandated to manage and coordinate emergency response to natural disasters as well as to develop post-disaster recovery plans and management policy. Their goal is to have an effective disaster preparedness and response system by the year 2010. However, they are limited by their budget, equipment, lack of proper coordination, technology, and personnel.³² This is a serious concern in a country where natural disasters are very common.

Deforestation over the past decades not only contributes to soil erosion but also increases the destruction caused by landslides and flooding. Floods and mudslides are common in the north, northeast, and west, particularly when the snow begins to melt in the spring. Avalanches are ongoing in mountainous regions. Avalanches or floods combined with landmines are particularly deadly.³³ Floods, mudslides, and avalanches are often triggered by earthquakes, which average around 50 a year. Stronger earthquakes occur in the Hindu Kush Mountains, which lie near a major fault line. In this region, an average of four earthquakes, measuring 5.0 or higher on the Richter scale, occur each year.³⁴ One of the strongest, measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale, occurred in 2002.³⁵

Forceful winds blow almost daily in the southwest during the summer. Known as the “wind of 120 days,” it is usually accompanied by intense heat, drought, and sandstorms.³⁶ These winds cause much hardship to the people of the desert and steppes. In 2003, dust and sand buried villages, filled waterways, destroyed crops, and killed livestock.³⁷ Whirlwinds of dust also frequently occur during the summer months on the flats in the southern part of the country. Rising at midday or in the early afternoon, they advance at

³² Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authorities. “ANDMA Achievements and Future Goals.” 2008. <http://www.andma.gov.af/froot.aspx?info=336>

³³ United Nations Environmental Programme. *The Environment Times*. Caas, Francis, Yoko Hagiwara and David Jensen. “Afghanistan on the Brink of Natural Disaster.” January 2005. <http://www.grida.no/publications/et/ep3/page/2611.aspx>

³⁴ BBC News. Fraser, Simon. “Hindu Kush: High-risk Quake Zone” 26 March 2002. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/1894867.stm>

³⁵ USGS. “Earthquake Hazards Program. Magnitude 7.4 Hindu Kush Region, Afghanistan. “Phase Data.” 3 March 2002. http://neic.usgs.gov/neis/eq_depot/2002/eq_020303/P0203031208.html

³⁶ Federal Research Division. Library of Congress. Country Studies. “Afghanistan.” No date. <http://www.country-studies.com/afghanistan/climate.html>

³⁷ NASA Earth Observatory. “Dust Storm over Afghanistan and Pakistan.” 15 September 2003. http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/NaturalHazards/natural_hazards_v2.php3?img_id=11719

velocities of up to 177 km/h (110 mi/h).³⁸ Afghanistan's prolonged drought of the past 10 years almost destroyed the winter grain crop of 2008. The crops, saved by the rains, are expected to be 127% higher in 2009 than in 2008.³⁹

Natural disasters such as droughts, floods, avalanches, and earthquakes affect about 400,000 people in Afghanistan every year.⁴⁰ In the spring of 2009, thousands of Afghans were affected by two weeks of earthquakes, mudslides, and flash floods in different parts of the country. In addition to leaving people homeless and damaging homes and injuring people, this series of disasters also left hundreds of livestock dead. At least 15 people died and more than a dozen were injured in the floods that took place in Herat, Parwan, Badakhshan, and Faryab Provinces.⁴¹

Environmental Concerns

Afghanistan's environmental issues were recognized during the 1970s, but it was only after the Loya Jirga of 2002 that a mandate for environmental management was established.⁴² Since then, Afghanistan's National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) has been working together with international organizations to meet their environmental challenges in three phases. During Phase 1 (2002–2003), NEPA conducted an environmental assessment and developed an action plan to address key issues. Phase 2 (2003–2007) focused on creating the necessary institutional, legal, and human resource base within NEPA. Phase 3, ending in 2010, has seen the implementation of natural resource management and recovery.⁴³



© Ground Report
Firewood

Many factors created Afghanistan's current environmental condition. War, poverty, drought, and a population increase from displaced persons and returning refugees are the major factors. With over 70% of the Afghans' livelihoods dependent on land that is only 12% arable, depletion and degradation of natural resources damage the population and the economy differently.⁴⁴

³⁸ Federal Research Division. Library of Congress. Country Studies. "Afghanistan." No date. <http://www.country-studies.com/afghanistan/climate.html>

³⁹ NASA Earth Observatory. "Afghanistan's Crop Recovery." 8 May 2009. <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/NaturalHazards/view.php?id=38920>

⁴⁰ IRIN News. "Afghanistan: Floods Wreak Havoc in Eastern Provinces of Laghman, Nangarhar." 3 September 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=85988>

⁴¹ IRIN News. "Afghanistan: Thousands Affected by Floods, Landslides, and Earthquakes." 29 April 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=84155>

⁴² UNEP. Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch. "Afghanistan's Environmental Recovery [p.2]." August 2006. http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/UNEP_afghanistan_lr.pdf

⁴³ United Nations Environment Programme. "Afghanistan." No date. <http://www.unep.org/conflictsanddisasters/UNEPintheRegions/CurrentActivities/Afghanistan/tabid/287/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

⁴⁴ United Nations Development Programme. "Afghanistan." No date. <http://www.undp.org.af/WhatWeDo/ee.htm>

Ongoing and widespread deforestation is one threat to Afghanistan's already fragile environment. Trees, found primarily in the east and on the southern slopes of the Hindu Kush,⁴⁵ are felled for fuel and building material.⁴⁶ Illegal commercial logging is also a threat.⁴⁷ Estimates indicate that 1.3% (about 3 million acres) of the land has forest cover.⁴⁸ This, as well as overgrazing and excessive farming, is contributing to soil erosion from wind and rain and flash floods.⁴⁹ Returning refugee populations strip the land of even more trees, as they use them for firewood, creating even more erosion.⁵⁰ On the other hand, marginal land forces people to leave their homes in search of food and work in urban areas. Households with disabled family members, and tenant farmers, or those farming on rain-fed land suffer the most.

Shortage of fresh water is another major environmental and health problem. Poor management of water resources, drought, and low precipitation is causing a water shortage in an already arid landscape. Centuries ago, Afghans created an intricate system of underground tunnels to transport water from the mountains to the drier basins. These aqueducts (*karez*) supplied the population with fresh water.⁵¹ The wars of the last century destroyed nearly all of the aqueducts and a growing population's use of groundwater is depleting remaining water tables and aquifers.⁵² Today, less than 24% of the population has access to fresh drinking water: 43% in urban areas and 18% in rural areas.⁵³ As a result, the mortality rate due to water-borne disease is one of the highest in the world.⁵⁴



© Spangleddrongo / flickr.com
Water tower in lake near Kabul

Decimated landscapes without trees or clean water have created thousands of "environmental refugees" who flock to urban areas. These new populations overburden cities' already limited services and infrastructure and create unhealthy conditions from domestic and industrial waste.⁵⁵ Sanitation is better in rural areas where the focus is on

⁴⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "Hindu Kush: Plant Life." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-47887>

⁴⁶ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. "Hindu Kush: Economy: Resources." 2009.

<http://search.eb.com/eb/article-47891>

⁴⁷ UNDP. "Ensure Environmental Sustainability." No date. <http://www.undp.org.af/MDGs/goal7.htm>

⁴⁸ UNDATA. "Afghanistan." 2009.

<http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?cname=Afghanistan#Environment>

⁴⁹ Asian Studies Center. Michigan State University. "Windows on Asia: Geography of Afghanistan." No date. http://asianstudies.msu.edu/wbwoa/central_asia/afghanistan/geography.htm

⁵⁰ UNDP. "Ensure Environmental Sustainability." No date. <http://www.undp.org.af/MDGs/goal7.htm>

⁵¹ University of California, Berkeley. "Traditional Aqueducts, Afghanistan." No date.

<http://geoimages.berkeley.edu/GeoImages/Powell/Afghan/092.html>

⁵² IRIN News. "Afghanistan: Groundwater Overuse Could Cause Severe Water Shortage." 14 September 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=80337>

⁵³ UNICEF. "Afghanistan Launches the International Year of Sanitation." 20 March 2008.

http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_43316.html

⁵⁴ World Health Organization. WHO Afghanistan. "Unsafe water is a breeding ground of disease and poverty." 14 March 2001. <http://www.emro.who.int/emrinfo/countrynews/Afg/WWDPPressRelease.htm>

⁵⁵ UNEP. Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch. "Afghanistan's Environmental Recovery. [p.2]." August 2006. http://postconflict.unep.ch/publications/UNEP_afghanistan_lr.pdf

education and latrines. In urban areas, however, poor waste management and lack of sewage systems and modern sanitation pose the highest environmental threats to health.⁵⁶ Afghans are moving to urban areas at a rate of 6% per year, putting a great burden on city services and delivery. Nearly 5 million people, about 75% of the urban population, may be living in slums.⁵⁷ To improve sanitation and increase access to safe drinking water, Afghanistan launched the International Year of Sanitation in 2008. The program is a cooperative effort between policy makers, humanitarian organizations, and local communities.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ UNDP. "Ensure Environmental Sustainability." No date. <http://www.undp.org.af/MDGs/goal7.htm>

⁵⁷ UNDP. "Ensure Environmental Sustainability." No date. <http://www.undp.org.af/MDGs/goal7.htm>

⁵⁸ UNICEF. "Afghanistan Launches the International Year of Sanitation." 20 March 2008. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_43316.html

Chapter 2 History

Introduction

Afghanistan is often called the crossroads of Central Asia. Its strategically important location has made it an ideal trade and invasion route for centuries. As a result, its history has been turbulent. Conquerors from the West passed through this region to reach the Indian subcontinent, and Hindu empires extended their territories from the East through the same routes. The armies of King Darius, Alexander the Great, Kushan King Kanishka, Genghis Khan, the Shahi rulers of India, Muslim rulers, and the British all marched through the area to reach their goals of colonizing these lands and those beyond.



© SnoRke / flickr.com
Wall relief from Persepolis

Modern-day Afghanistan began in 1747 as part of Ahmad Shah Durrani's empire in a monarchy that lasted until 1973. During the 19th century, Afghanistan was the buffer zone between the British and Russian Empires in their "Great Game," but after defeating them in three wars, Afghanistan gained independence from Britain in 1919. Successive Pashtun kings ruled until 1973, when a coup and the beginning of today's civil war first began. The Soviet occupation of 1979–1989 and the U.S. invasion of 2001 brought further instability and insecurity to the region as warring guerrilla factions vied for influence in the power vacuum. The Taliban had brought some semblance of peace to the nation, but as a radical Islamic organization they violated human rights and had an extremist militant agenda of their own. Today, allies in the war against terror are assessing and increasing their efforts to fight the Taliban insurgency.

Early History

Early humans lived in Afghanistan over 100,000 years ago, but archeological evidence indicates more recent human habitation. Scientists discovered skull bones and some primitive tools dated to approximately 28,000 B.C.E in Badakhshan Province in the Pamir Mountains. Caves near Aq Kupruk, close to the Balkh River, provide evidence of an early Neolithic culture based on domesticated animals dating back 8,000–11,000 years ago.⁵⁹

The Vedic Aryans

The Vedic Aryans invaded the Indus Valley from the Iranian plateau and steadily conquered or absorbed prior populations.⁶⁰ It is generally accepted that the Rig Veda, part of a larger collection of poems or hymns, was composed between 1500 and 1200

⁵⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Afghanistan Prehistory." 2008.
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?tocId=21380>

⁶⁰ The Encyclopedia of World History. "South Asia, to 72 B.C.E." 2001.
http://www.credoreference.com/entry/hmencyclwh/south_asia_to_72_b_c_e

B.C.E.⁶¹ These sacred Sanskrit verses tell us about the Aryans, an agricultural, patriarchal society that fought among themselves and with indigenous tribes.⁶²

In time, the Aryans established the Achaemenid Empire, which extended from the Indus River in the east to Greece in the west.⁶³ Zoroaster, whose legendary birthplace was Balkh, in present-day northern Afghanistan,⁶⁴ may have influenced the rise of the Achaemenids. Priests of his religion, Zoroastrianism, had a telling effect on the government when it was the state religion. An early monotheistic faith, its three main tenets are Good Words, Good Thoughts, and Good Deeds.⁶⁵ It still has adherents in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the world.

The Persians

Darius I of the Achaemenid dynasty (522 B.C.E.–486 B.C.E.) was well known for his administrative genius. His famous palaces in Susa and Persepolis are examples of his creativity. He built the Royal Road, which expanded trade towards the East,⁶⁶ and conquered the area of today's Afghanistan. Though he tried to expand the borders of the Empire into Greece, he was unsuccessful.⁶⁷



© Taifighta / flickr.com
Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great

At the age of 22, Alexander, King of Macedonia, peacefully took over Egypt and planned further invasions towards the east. The Persian soldiers fell easily before his well trained and organized army, which conquered Afghanistan and marched undefeated toward the Indus River. Alexander reached India and defeated the Hindu armies as well. Upon returning to Babylon he made it the capital of his huge empire. Alexander encouraged his soldiers to marry women from the conquered territories in order to strengthen his power there. To set an example, Alexander married a Persian princess. His rule over one of the largest empires in history was abruptly terminated by his premature death at the age of 33. Alexander the Great died in Babylon in 323 B.C.E., probably of malaria, although some historians suspect he may have been poisoned.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Veda." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9074939>

⁶² The Encyclopedia of World History. "South Asia, to 72 B.C.E." 2001. http://www.credoreference.com/entry/hmencyclwh/south_asia_to_72_b_c_e

⁶³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Map of the Achaemenid Empire, 6th -5th Century B.C.E." 1994. <http://search.eb.com/eb/art-95281/Egypt-as-part-of-Achaemenid-Empire-6th-5th-century-BC>

⁶⁴ The Houghton Mifflin Dictionary of Geography. "Balkh (Formerly Bactra)." 1997. http://www.credoreference.com/entry/hmgeog/balkh_formerly_bactra

⁶⁵ BBC, Religion and Ethics. "Zoroastrianism." 20 July 2006. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/zoroastrian/beliefs/god.shtml>

⁶⁶ The Hutchinson Chronology of World History. "600 BC–501 BC." 2009. http://www.credoreference.com/entry/heliconcwh/600_bc_501_bc

⁶⁷ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Darius I." 2009. <http://www.search.eb.com/eb/article-9028778>

⁶⁸ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Alexander the Great." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9106078>

Waves of Invaders

After his death, the Mauryan dynasty of India not only recaptured the territory Alexander had taken, but also seized new territories in southern Afghanistan.⁶⁹ At the same time, Bactria in the north managed to become independent. Bactrians were standard-bearers of Greek culture, although they had their own language. The Tajiks of present-day Afghanistan are considered their descendants. The Bactrian Empire lasted until 135 B.C.E., when the Chinese took over and established the foundations for the upcoming Kushan kingdom. Kushan tribes from the north brought Buddhism to the region. The Kushan dynasty thrived for over 300 years, making Peshawar its capital and ruling over vast lands from the Aral Sea to northern India, including most of Afghanistan.⁷⁰



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Bactrian goddess statuettes

In the 3rd century C.E., the Sassanids of Persia overpowered the Kushan Empire. In the centuries that followed, the Hephthalites, or White Huns⁷¹, conquered Afghanistan. Their rule lasted until the beginning of the 6th century.⁷² Their empire ended when the revitalized Sassanids defeated them with the help of the Western Turks.⁷³ In the following centuries, Hinduism and Buddhism regained popularity until Islamic conquerors from the West arrived with a new religion. The Muslim era of Afghanistan was about to begin.

The Muslim Conquest

Just a few years after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, Arab Muslims defeated the Persian Sassanids in the Battles of Qadisiya and Nahawand in 637 and 642 C.E., respectively. Thus began the Islamic expansion into the lands east of Persia. The Muslim conquest was a prolonged struggle in present-day Afghanistan. Herat was captured in 651 C.E. The first raid into Kandahar took place almost 50 years later, in 700. In the following years, the Umayyad caliphs gained more and more power in the region until local Afghan rulers served them.⁷⁴ By the middle of the 8th century, the Abbasids defeated the Umayyads, took full control of the Arab-Islamic Empire, and moved the seat of the Caliphate from Damascus to Baghdad. From there, a more systematic expansion began throughout all of Afghanistan.

By the 9th century, most inhabitants in what is now Afghanistan, Pakistan, the southern areas in and around Russia, and parts of northern India converted to Sunni Islam. It

⁶⁹ J.E.J. *Calliope*. "The Mauryan Dynasty." January 2000.

http://find.galegroup.com/gtx/start.do?prodId=GRCM&userGroupName=cfsc_remote

⁷⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Afghanistan." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9106010>

⁷¹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Hephthalite." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9040081>

⁷² *The Columbia Encyclopedia*. Columbia University Press. "White Huns or Hephthalites." 2008. http://www.credoreference.com/entry/columency/white_huns_or_hephthalites

⁷³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Afghanistan." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-21384>

⁷⁴ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Umayyad Dynasty." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9074193>

replaced Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and the indigenous religions of previous empires.

More Muslim rulers settled in the new territories and established their power there. By the 10th century, Mahmud, the son of a slave, created his own sultanate in the city of Ghazni and became known as a military genius. Mahmud of Ghazni conquered the entire Hindu Kush and reached the Punjab area of India, extending his power to territories north of the Amu Darya River.⁷⁵ With the Indian heirlooms he plundered, Mahmud transformed Ghazni into a cultural center rivaling Baghdad.

The Mongol Invasion

In the 1220s, the Islamic lands of South-Central Asia, including most parts of Afghanistan, were invaded by Mongol forces under the command of Genghis Khan (1155–1227). Although he laid waste to many civilizations and established an empire that stretched from China to the Caspian Sea, he was powerless to confront the spread of Islam. By the end of the 13th century, Genghis Khan's descendants had themselves embraced Islam.



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Genghis Khan

From the death of Genghis Khan in 1227, until the rise of Timur (Tamerlane), descendants of the Mongol rulers could not retain all of their territories. Nevertheless, Tamerlane, from his capital in Samarkand, managed to regain an area that extended from India to Turkey by the late 14th century. By the turn of the 16th century, Tamerlane descendants, the Timurids, were forced to move east, establishing Herat as their western outpost.

Eventually, the Timurids were driven out of Herat. By 1510, they had established their new seat in Kabul. Babur, a descendant of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, moved further east toward India. He conquered Delhi in 1526 and established the Moghul Empire.

The Safavids

The Safavids of Persia had their origins in a Sufi order that flourished in the region of present-day Azerbaijan from the 14th century.⁷⁶ They first conquered Herat in 1510, then Kandahar in 1545, but the Uzbeks, the Moghuls, and the Ghilzai Afghans also fought for control of those cities.⁷⁷ The Safavid hegemony lasted for over 200 years, but their power in the area was always tenuous. In 1716, Herat rebelled against the Safavids and, with the help of the Ghilzai Afghans, forced their retreat. The Afghan fighters pursued the Safavid troops all the way to Isfahan, where they were ultimately vanquished, thus ending the Safavid dynasty.

⁷⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Mahmud." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9050135>

⁷⁶ Sufism is a mystical practice with its own set of unique rituals that guide practitioners to a direct encounter with God. Its followers consider it an intrinsically Islamic practice. See Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Sufism." 2009. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9105856>

⁷⁷ The Ghilzai is one of the two largest Pashtun tribes.

The Beginnings of Afghan Independence

Afghan independence gained ground in the early 18th century with the defeat of the Safavids. But by the 1730s, internal fighting had weakened the Afghan Kingdom, and Persian forces were once again poised to take over.

In 1732, Nadir Beg, who later became Nadir Shah of Persia, took Herat, Ghazni, and Kabul. By 1739, his empire extended into India, occupying Delhi. Nadir's troops pillaged Hindu palaces, and his war trophies included the Koh-i-Noor (Mountain of Light) diamond and the Peacock Throne. Nadir Shah was assassinated in 1747, and his death triggered the collapse of his empire.

Ahmad Khan, the commander of Nadir Shah's bodyguards, emerged shortly thereafter as the next ruler. He proclaimed himself Ahmad Shah Durrani and extended his control into a vast area from the Arabian Sea to Delhi. The Durrani dynasty lasted into the 19th century, by which time the British wanted to expand their land holdings beyond what they had acquired through the East India Company.

The Anglo-Afghan Wars

"The Great Game," the struggle for Empire in Central Asia, began at the beginning of the 19th century. It involved the Russians, the French, the British, and the local empires, all competing to control territories there.

Shah Shoja, who ruled Afghanistan from 1803 until 1809, lost the throne over internal struggles; this weakened the Afghan state and undermined its fiscal base of power. The goal of the British during the First Anglo-Afghan War (1839–1842) was to establish a pro-British government in Afghanistan through Shah Shoja to prevent the Russians from encroaching on their Indian colonial territory. The British succeeded in putting Shah Shoja back in power, but were soon forced to retreat due to constant attacks. Afghan fighters, who knew the terrain better and were adjusted to its harshness, decimated the retreating British troops. Shah Shoja was subsequently assassinated.



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Ahmad Shah Durrani

The British consider their defeat in the First Anglo-Afghan War one of their biggest losses in history. Rudyard Kipling's poem, "The Young British Soldier," depicts some of the horrors of that war.

The Second Anglo-Afghan War

To stop the encroaching Russian influence in Afghanistan, the British started the Second Anglo-Afghan War in 1879. To end the war and prevent further incursion by British troops, King Ya'qub Khan ceded control of Afghan foreign policy to the British. The British presence was not welcome in Afghanistan, however, and the occupation soon ended. Ya'qub Khan abdicated the throne in 1880, and Abdur Rahman Khan took power. He established a centralized government by persuading the different tribes and ethnic groups to unite and accept him as ruler. Abdur Rahman Khan is thus considered to be the

founder of modern Afghanistan. In 1893, a buffer zone between British India and Tsarist Russia, called the Durand Line, was established.⁷⁸

Later, Abdur Rahman Khan's son, Habibullah, succeeded him and continued the modernization of Afghanistan that his father had begun. He embraced Western influence in government and society, which eventually led to his demise. He was murdered in Kabul in 1919 by anti-British groups.



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Ameer Abdurrahman Khan

The Third Anglo-Afghan War

Habibullah's son, Amanullah, inherited the throne. He fought hard for Afghan independence. In 1919, the Afghan government signed a treaty with the newly established Soviet Union (USSR), which became one of the first countries to recognize the new regime. The Soviet-Afghan relationship remained undisturbed until the Soviet invasion 60 years later.

In 1919, shortly after coming to power, Amanullah launched the month-long Third Anglo-Afghan War. It soon ended with the Treaty of Rawalpindi, which granted Afghanistan control of its foreign affairs. 19 August is celebrated as Afghan Independence Day.

Turbulent Years Post WWI

The country remained an absolute monarchy until 1922, when a state assembly and legislature were established and ministers appointed to a cabinet. Yet Amanullah's use of scarce resources for development, rather than maintaining an army, rendered him vulnerable to revolt, and his government disintegrated after a decade. His cousin, Nadir Shah, ascended to the throne with British assistance. He introduced further changes in the political structure and, in 1931, crafted a new constitution. Under his leadership, the government reunified Afghanistan before opponents assassinated him in 1933. Eventually his son, 19-year-old Zahir, took over power in Afghanistan. Zahir Shah began a 40-year reign, by far the longest in Afghanistan's modern history.

Zahir Shah

During Zahir Shah's rule, the Pashtun Question became the center of international focus. After India was granted independence and the state of Pakistan was created, tensions immediately flared. Zahir's government insisted that, since Pakistan was a new state and not a successor to colonial India, all border agreements drawn up by the British (including the Durand Line) were nullified. Kabul wanted self-determination for the tribal territories that spanned both sides of the existing border. Border skirmishes, supported by both Kabul and Islamabad, proliferated. Since Pakistan aligned itself with the U.S., Afghanistan sought military training assistance from the USSR. Nonetheless,

⁷⁸ Defense Technical Information Center. Mahmood, Tariq. "The Durand Line: South Asia's New Hot Spot" (Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, 2005). Abstract. <http://stinet.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA435574>

Afghanistan maintained an official policy of non-alignment during the early decades of the Cold War.

The political climate became even more liberal during Zahir Shah's reign. From 1946 to 1952, the liberal-leaning parliament under Prime Minister Shah Mahmud sanctioned greater political pluralism. In 1953, religious leaders and conservatives backed Lieutenant General Mohammed Daoud Khan's successful efforts to become prime minister. In 1964, a new constitution was drafted. It specified free elections and universal suffrage.⁷⁹ Competitive multi-party elections were held and journalists were given wide latitude to write on political developments. The reforms, however, put Zahir Shah at odds with religious leaders and conservatives.



Courtesy of Wikipedia
King Zahir Shah

In a surprising move, after becoming prime minister, Daoud approached the Soviet Union for support. The Soviets, looking to extend their influence toward the southeast, became a major trading partner in the ensuing years. Social and educational changes were introduced, but the political climate remained rigid.

Mohammed Daoud–The Afghan Republic

Further problems developed along the Pakistani border in subsequent years, leading to Daoud's resignation in 1963. The position of prime minister changed hands repeatedly over the next 10 years, reflecting an increasingly unstable political environment.

In 1973, Mohammed Daoud Khan seized an opportunity to stage a bloodless coup and regained power. He founded the Afghanistan Republic and named himself prime minister. Daoud sought support from the Soviets, consulting Moscow until it became evident that the USSR's help came with concessions. In 1977, a visit to Moscow ended abruptly after he told Brezhnev: "...we will never allow you to dictate to us how to run our country and whom to employ in Afghanistan. ...Afghanistan shall remain poor, if necessary, but free in its acts and decisions."⁸⁰ Daoud's life and Afghanistan's freedom did not last long. Afghan communists, who began to emerge 10 years earlier, were opposed to Daoud and his policies. In 1978, Daoud was assassinated in a communist coup, and the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) took control of the country. The communist era had begun.

⁷⁹ BBC News. "Profile: Ex-King Shah Zahir." 1 October 2001.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1573181.stm

⁸⁰ *The Fall of Afghanistan: An Insider's Account* [pp. 178–180]. Ghaus, Samad. 1988. UK: Brassey's Ltd.

The Communist Era in Afghanistan

The PDPA named Soviet-supported Nur Mohammed Taraki, President of the Revolutionary Council and Prime Minister of the new Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. Rivalries between Afghan communist party factions, Taraki's death, and more importantly, resistance among the Afghan people paved the way for the Soviet occupation. In a move to support the Afghan communists, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December 1979. Within days they had placed Soviet-controlled PDPA leader Babrak Karmal as head of Afghanistan's government.



© Mikhail Evstafiev
Soviet Army headquarters in Kabul, 1987

Tribal insurgencies started soon after the Soviets entered the country. Over six million Afghans took refuge in neighboring countries. There were heavy losses in produce and livestock. The Soviets deployed more than 10 million landmines in Afghan territories. The loss of 70% of all paved roads led to further economic hardships in Afghanistan.⁹

Moscow grossly underestimated the domestic cost of invasion and occupation, both economically and politically. The Karmal government never controlled much beyond Kabul, forcing the Soviets to shoulder the costs for security and administration. Moscow also met with strong international opposition to the occupation from the West and the Islamic world. By 1987, the Afghan rebel fighters (*mujahideen*) had fought the Soviet forces to a stalemate. Moreover, the USSR had been unable to install a government in Kabul that could elicit strong support from the Afghan people.⁸¹ Those factors, coupled with Pakistani support for both U.S. interests and the Afghan resistance ultimately brought the Soviets to the bargaining table in Geneva. In 1989, the USSR withdrew its troops from Afghanistan.

The Taliban Movement

The Islamic movement grew in strength and number during the Soviet occupation. The U.S. and other Western governments, hoping to weaken Soviet influence from the east, supported the movement's *mujahideen* rebel fighters.⁸² From Pakistan, the *mujahideen* recruited large numbers of fighters from the refugee camps and acquired better weapons.

Soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, various Islamic groups fought for power within Afghanistan. Rebel fighters forced President Mohammad Najibullah from office. Further internal struggle, fighting, and a lawless state emerged in the aftermath. Warlords and militia leaders, who profited from the sale of illegal drugs, took over the countryside and parts of the larger cities.

⁸¹ U.S. Department of State Bulletin. "Afghanistan: Soviet Occupation and Withdrawal—Report of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research—Transcript." March 1989.
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1079/is_n2144_v89/ai_7537775

⁸² The word *mujahideen* is Arabic for "those who engage in *jihad*." They are Muslim guerilla fighters.

In the fall of 1994, a new Islamic group emerged: the Taliban. The Taliban's basic ideology enforced a purist way of life based on their fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. As such, they received support from groups in the Middle East and Pakistan. The only opposition within Afghanistan was the Northern Alliance, which fought hard to establish and expand control over territories, mainly in northern Afghanistan. Despite resistance, the Taliban managed to extend their power to over 90% of the country by 1996.

Al Qaeda and the Taliban

Out of the Afghan resistance movement of the 1980s evolved an Islamic terrorist organization that would eventually come to be known as Al Qaeda (The Base). Its founder was Osama bin Laden.⁸³ He came to Afghanistan to join the *mujahideen*'s fight against the Soviets. Backed by his family's fortune, bin Laden founded the Maktab al Khidmat (MAK), or "Afghan Bureau" resistance organization with a Jordanian Palestinian partner.⁸⁴ The MAK channeled funds and equipment from a variety of sources into training *mujahideen* across the Middle East and transporting them to Afghanistan.



© WFP/Nina Bergman
Woman wearing burka

Toward the end of Soviet occupation, bin Laden formed an independent group – Al Qaeda – with the intent of expanding resistance operations from an anti-Soviet *jihad* to a global Muslim crusade.⁸⁵ In 1989, MAK's support of pro-Western Northern Alliance leader Massoud prompted bin Laden to break off from the organization completely.

Al Qaeda strengthened its ties to other radical Islamic organizations. Until approximately 1991, Al Qaeda was based in Afghanistan and Peshawar, Pakistan. It then relocated to Sudan where it remained for approximately five years until bin Laden and other top leaders returned to Afghanistan.⁸⁶

In 1996, Osama bin Laden established ties with the Taliban, which shared his anti-Western views. To strengthen his influence in Afghanistan, bin Laden provided the Taliban with USD 100 million and some of Al Qaeda's most committed assault forces.⁸⁷

⁸³ CBC News Indepth. "Who is Osama bin Laden?" 19 January 2006.
<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/osamabinladen/>

⁸⁴ Center for Defense Information. Terrorism Project. "In the Spotlight: Al Qaeda (The Base)." 30 December 2002. <http://www.cdi.org/terrorism/alqaeda.cfm>

⁸⁵ *Jihad* is an Islamic term which refers to "struggle." This can include the inner struggle to achieve complete spiritual self-awareness. However, in the contemporary context, it generally refers to armed struggle mounted in defense of Islam.

⁸⁶ FBI. Congressional Testimony of J.T. Caruso, Acting Assistant Director, Counterterrorism Division, FBI Before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Terrorism, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate. "Al-Qaeda International." 18 December 2001.
<http://www.fbi.gov/congress/congress01/caruso121801.htm>

⁸⁷ Washington Post. Woodward, Bob. "Bin Laden Said to 'Own' The Taliban." 11 October 2001.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&contentId=A40211-2001Oct10¬Found=true>

In return, the Taliban provided shelter for Al Qaeda and refused subsequent U.S. requests for bin Laden's extradition.

Ahmed Shah Massoud

Known as the "Lion of Panjshir" for his success in resisting Soviet efforts to seize this strategic stronghold, Ahmed Shah Massoud was appointed Minister of Defense in the first government formed after the withdrawal of Soviet forces.



© Erwin Franzen
Three mujahideen in Asmar, 1985

He subsequently led the Northern Alliance in its fight against the Taliban. His group was the only one taken seriously as a fighting force by Western observers. He also became a hero in his own country where his portrait adorned cafes and tea houses.⁸⁸ On 9 September 2001, two Al Qaeda members posing as Algerian journalists managed to get permission to meet Massoud face-to-face for an interview. The bomb which ended Massoud's life was hidden in their camera.

September 11, 2001

By 2001, Al Qaeda had 5,000 trained militants and cells in 50 countries. The organization functioned much like a corporation or a combination of strategic partnerships.⁸⁹ Al Qaeda was suspected of carrying out the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon (2001), the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania (1998), and the attack on the USS Cole (2000). It is believed that the target selection, preparation, and planning was confined to bin Laden (the "contractor") and a handful of Al Qaeda leaders.⁹⁰

After the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, Washington focused its attention on Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda. In October 2001, coalition forces invaded Afghanistan as part of their "War on Terror" campaign. The aim was to target Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network, as well as the Taliban government. In November of that year, with the help of allied troops, the Northern Alliance advanced on Kabul and overthrew the Taliban government. By December, the Taliban's authority collapsed. Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar, however, escaped.

⁸⁸ Telegraph. "Ahmad Shah Massoud." 22 November 2001.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2001/09/17/db01.xml>

⁸⁹ CNN. "Al Qaeda Has Complex Terrorist Networks." 5 October 2001.

<http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/10/02/inv.binladen.friends/>

⁹⁰ Asia Times. Chaulia, Sreeram. "Review of *Osama's Universe: Inside Al Qaeda, Global Network of Terror*." 12 October 2002. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/DJ12Ak03.html

Democratic Elections and the Future

In late 2004, Hamid Karzai was elected president in Afghanistan's first democratic elections. Within a few months, he had appointed his cabinet, and the 502-member *Loya Jirga* (Grand Council) passed the 160-article Afghan Constitution. These milestones were widely lauded as indicative of a stable future that would facilitate economic development in a war-ravaged land.



© Jawad Jalali (UNAMA)
Kabul elections

The September 2005 parliamentary elections were envisioned as another step toward creating a government that answered to its citizens. Much was made of the number of women who registered to vote and how their political participation would open the door to gender equality, particularly since 68 seats in the National Assembly were set aside for women.⁹¹ Yet outsiders also expressed skepticism. Among other concerns was the fact that warlords remained in control of much of the countryside and could use the elections to legitimize their hold on power.

The security situation in Afghanistan deteriorated after the 2005 elections.⁹² Coalition forces and the Afghan army and police faltered. As a result, violence and casualties increased. A resurgent Taliban controls much of the east and south-east, where suicide bombings have become a regular occurrence. Karzai is still unable to exert much influence beyond Kabul and with his fraud-marred re-election in October 2009, his legitimacy and partnership with the U.S. is in question. Washington's new approach to Afghanistan involves Pakistan. In this regional approach to Afghanistan, with international assistance, the U.S. aims to defeat Al-Qaeda and its havens in Pakistan and prevent them from returning to Afghanistan. To regain legitimacy and continue receiving international support, President Karzai will need to change the way he and his government officials govern.

⁹¹ Council on Foreign Relations. Pan, Esther. "Afghan Parliamentary Elections." 16 September 2005. http://www.cfr.org/publication/8867/afghan_parliamentary_elections.html

⁹² Washington Post. Witte, Griff. "Afghans Confront Surge in Violence." 28 November 2005. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/27/AR2005112700831.html>

As was the case with its predecessors, the Karzai government is unable to meet its budgetary requirements through taxation and remains heavily dependent on outside financial sources.⁹³ At the same time, public confidence has eroded owing to the government's slow delivery of promised services, particularly to rural communities.⁹⁴ Yet because security has deteriorated, money earmarked for development projects remains unspent.



DoD image / Master Sgt Jerry Morrison
President Hamid Karzai

Corruption, lack of proper government oversight of aid, the cost of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as their inefficiencies, also account for lost money that could be used for aid and development. High rates of unemployment fuel the conflict and make opium poppy cultivation more attractive to farmers. Indeed, the drug economy is booming; it dwarfs all other sectors, an unwelcome development over which the Afghan government has little power to effect change.

⁹³ Foreign Affairs. Rubin, Barnett. "Saving Afghanistan." January/February 2007.

<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20070101faessay86105-p10/barnett-r-rubin/saving-afghanistan.html>

⁹⁴ Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars. "Linking Security and Development in State Building: Recent Lessons from Afghanistan" (forum in the WWIC Series "What Really Works in Preventing and Rebuilding Fragile States?"). 27 February 2007.

http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?event_id=224650&fuseaction=events.event_summary

Timeline

ca.1500–1200 B.C.E. The Vedic Aryans cross the Kubha (Kabul) River from India and settle in the area of present-day Afghanistan.

550–500 B.C.E. Cyrus II (the Great) extends the Persian Empire into Afghanistan; Darius I (the Great) consolidates Persian power.

327 B.C.E. Alexander the Great defeats Darius the III and conquers new territories including present-day Afghanistan.

150–240 C.E. Buddhist colonies flourish in the Bamiyan area. Enormous statues of Buddha are carved into the mountainsides.

600 Persian Sassanids take control of Afghanistan.

637 Arab Muslims overthrow the Persian Sassanid rulers in the battle of Qadisiya. They introduce Islam to the area.

962 A former Turkic slave, Alptigin, seizes Ghazni and establishes the Ghaznavid dynasty, the first Muslim dynasty in Afghanistan.

1221 Genghis Khan launches a devastating attack against Afghanistan.

1361–1405 Tamerlane, the last great emperor of the area, rules from India through Turkey. He leaves the kingdom to Babur.

1483 Babur, a descendant of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, establishes the Moghul dynasty.

1560 Persian Safavids take western Afghanistan while the Indian Moghuls take the eastern part. The native Pashtuns hold their growing territories south of the Hindu Kush.

1747 Ahmad Shah Durrani succeeds Nadir Shah and establishes the modern state of Afghanistan. He extends control from the Arabian Sea to Delhi.

1803 Shah Shoja's rule as king of Afghanistan begins.

1809 Shah Shoja signs a Treaty of Friendship with the British. Local tribes force him out of power.

1838 Shah Shoja asks for British help to take back the throne of Afghanistan. British accept to secure their position against the Russians (The Great Game).

- 1839** The First Anglo-Afghan War, often called “Auckland’s Folly,” begins. Shah Shoja is placed back in control of the country.
- 1842** The British are forced to retreat. Afghans attacks cause the most bitter loss in British military history. Shah Shoja is assassinated soon afterwards.
- 1880** The British withdraw, but retain the right to control Afghanistan’s foreign affairs.
- 1887** During Amir Abdur Rahman’s rule, the British and Russians agree on the Northern Boundary, at the Amu Darya.
- 1893** The British and Russians establish the Durand Line separating Afghanistan from the Indian Empire. (With Pashtuns on both sides, the area remains contested.)
- 1901** King Habibullah succeeds his father, Amir Abdur Rahman, and keeps Afghanistan neutral in the First World War.
- 1907** Russians and British sign the convention of St. Petersburg, in which Afghanistan is declared outside the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence.
- 1919** **The Third Anglo-Afghan War, after which the British relinquish control of Afghan foreign affairs. August 19 becomes Afghan Independence Day. Habibullah is assassinated.**
- 1929** King Amanullah abdicates due to civil unrest over his modernization plans.
- 1933** King Zahir Shah ascends the throne and introduces a constitutional democracy in Afghanistan that lasts for 40 years.
- 1953** General Mohammed Daoud Khan becomes prime minister and introduces social reforms, looking to the Soviet Union for economic and military assistance.
- 1964** Zahir Shah’s interim government creates a new Afghan constitution providing for free elections, civil rights, female emancipation and universal suffrage.
- 1965** The People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a communist party, emerges. The PDPA has two factions, the radical Khalq and the moderate Parcham.
- 1973** Mohammed Daoud Khan seizes power in a bloodless military coup. Daoud declares a republic and proclaims himself president of the PDPA.
- 1978** Internal strife within the PDPA causes the Soviet Union to intervene. Conservative Islamic leaders revolt against the Soviet-backed government in the countryside.

1979 Soviet forces invade Afghanistan, killing Prime Minister Amin and installing Babrak Karmal as Prime Minister. The *mujahideen* fight against Soviet forces.

1982 The *mujahideen* gain control of rural areas as nearly 4.5 million Afghans flee the war to neighboring Pakistan and Iran.

1988 Afghanistan, the U.S., and Pakistan sign a peace deal. The Soviet Union begins to remove troops from Afghanistan.

1989 The last of the Soviet troops withdraw from Afghanistan but civil war continues as different factions within the guerrilla movement vie for power.

1990 The *mujahideen* freedom fighters attack the Soviet-backed Afghan leaders.

1992 The Afghan communist rule crumbles as the *mujahideen* take the capital and remove Najibullah from power.

1994 The Taliban, a new radical Islamic religious group, forms within the guerrilla movement.

1996 The Taliban take Kabul and enforce a regime of militant Islam based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam that rules the state..

1997 Pakistan and Saudi Arabia recognize the Taliban's legitimacy.

1998 The Taliban controls two-thirds of Afghanistan. Al Qaeda bombs American embassies in Africa. U.S. cruise missiles attack Al Qaeda's training camps in Afghanistan but miss the leaders.

2000 The U.S. asks the Taliban to extradite bin Laden, leader of Al Qaeda, but they refuse. The United Nations places additional sanctions on trade and economic development.

2001 9 September Ahmad Shah Massood, commander of the Northern Alliance dies at the hands of "false journalists."

2001 11 September Al-Qaeda attacks the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the U.S.

2001 7 October American and British forces attack Afghanistan after the Taliban refuse to hand over bin Laden.

2001 November With the help of allied troops, opposition forces take Mazar-e Sharif, Kabul, and other major cities. The Taliban retreat south towards Kandahar.

2001 4 December Afghan leaders meet in Bonn, Germany, and agree that Hamid Karzai, a Durrani Pashtun, will lead the interim Afghan government.

2001 9 December The last Taliban stronghold surrenders in Zabol province, near the Pakistani border, but Al-Qaeda fighters still hide in mountain caves on the border of Pakistan.

2001 22 December Hamid Karzai is sworn in as head of a 30-member interim government at U.N. conference.

2002 Allied forces, including troops from Canada, Germany, Denmark, France, Norway, and Australia, carry out Operation Anaconda, attacking Al-Qaeda strongholds in the mountains.

2002 June Karzai is elected president by the Afghan grand council, *Loya Jirga*.

2002 December Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan sign a U.S.-backed gas pipeline deal that would take gas through Afghanistan to Pakistan.

2003 NATO assumes leadership of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

2004 3 November **Hamid Karzai wins Afghanistan's first democratic elections, receiving 55.4% of the votes.**

2005 4 January The 502 members of the *Loya Jirga* (Grand Council) pass the 160-article Afghan Constitution.

2005 May President Karzai and President Bush sign a joint Declaration of the United States-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership. Allegations of prisoner abuse at detention centers.

2005 September First parliamentary elections in three decades held.

2007 Surge in suicide bombings responsible for upswing in violence. Opium production reaches record high.

2008 More than \$15 billion in foreign aid is pledged to Afghanistan. President Hamid Karzai pledges to fight against corruption and the drug trade.

2009 March Using a regional approach and international assistance, the U.S. aims to defeat Al-Qaeda and its havens in Pakistan and prevent them from returning to Afghanistan.

2009 November Due to security concerns, U.N. temporarily locates half its staff in Afghanistan to more secure areas inside and outside the country.

Chapter 3 Economy

Overview

After decades of war Afghanistan's economy is growing, albeit from a very low base. Since the Afghan-Soviet war began in 1979, loss of capital and labor, and breakdowns in trade, transport, and security have made Afghanistan one of the poorest countries in the world. Its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2008 was estimated at USD 22.32 billion⁹⁵, compared to 2.71 billion in 2000⁹⁶. The GDP is now heavily dependent on agriculture, trade with regional countries, and foreign aid. Indeed, about 90% of the Afghan government budget comes from international donors. The donations are a fraction of the aid pledged and even less reaches the poorest in the country. Millions of Afghans are unable to meet basic needs such as employment, food, medical care, electricity, and safe drinking water. A lack of security, weak governance, corruption, and drought have also hampered economic growth. Nevertheless, with international assistance and national resolve, significant progress has been made in a variety of sectors such as energy, transport, public administration, infrastructure, and finance through foreign aid and investment.



DoD Image: TSgt. F. Govea II
Rural transportation

Sources of Income

Until the Soviet invasion, farming had sustained the Afghan population and agriculture was the foundation of its economy. Afghanistan was a major producer of grain, barley, almonds, grapes, and melons. It was the world's largest exporter of raisins, which, together with other dried fruit, made up 30% of its legal exports.⁹⁷ War laid waste to farmland and the once widespread irrigation systems were damaged or fell into disrepair, thus providing little relief from the droughts that battered the country from 1999 to 2008. Since then, rain-fed agriculture has become the mainstay of the rural economy. Although less than 6% of the land is cultivated today, agriculture, excluding opium production, accounts for 31% the GDP. Agricultural products include wheat, fruits and nuts, corn, barley, rice, wool, almonds, pistachios, and pomegranates. A decline in agricultural production due to drought decelerated the GDP in 2008/2009.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ CIA World Factbook. "Afghanistan." 30 November 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

⁹⁶ PBS. "Afghanistan and the War on Terror." 3 October 2006.

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth_coverage/asia/afghanistan/economic.html

⁹⁷ Asian Development Bank. "Report and Recommendation of the President to the Board of Directors on a Proposed Loan and Technical Assistance Grant to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the Agriculture Sector Program." April 2004. http://www.adb.org/Documents/RRPs/AFG/rrp_afg_37046.pdf

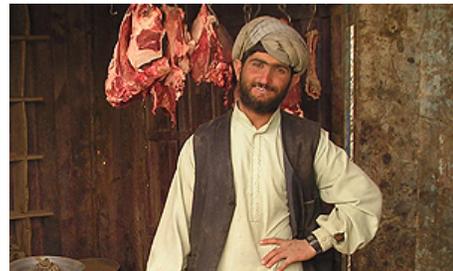
⁹⁸ The World Bank. "Afghanistan Country Overview." October 2009.

[http://www.worldbank.org.af/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/AFGHANISTANE XTN/0,,contentMDK:20154015~menuPK:305992~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:305985,00.h tml](http://www.worldbank.org.af/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/AFGHANISTANE%20XTN/0,,contentMDK:20154015~menuPK:305992~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:305985,00.html)

Light industry makes up 26% of GDP. This includes construction, machinery and metal, pharmacy, printing, food, and light industries. Industry growth increased in 2008/2009.⁹⁹ Small-scale manufacturers produce textiles, fertilizer, cement, and processed agricultural goods. Raising livestock also plays an important role in the economy.¹⁰⁰ The service sector makes up 43% of the GDP including retail, telecommunications, and transport. Major exports include opium, wheat, fruits and nuts, hand-woven carpets, wool, cotton, and gemstones to markets in Central Asia, the United States, Pakistan, India, and Russia. In 2008, about 56% of exports went to India, Pakistan, and the U.S., while about 20% went to the Netherlands and Tajikistan.¹⁰¹

Economic Indicators

Afghanistan has experienced a reasonable level of economic growth since 2002. Due to low agricultural production in 2008–2009, Afghanistan’s GDP growth contracted to 2.3% from its double-digit growth the year before.¹⁰² With 80% of the population working in agriculture, unemployment was also high—40% in 2008.¹⁰³ Skilled labor is critically lacking due to war, damage to schools, and a lack of training facilities.¹⁰⁴ In 2007, despite the limited number of laborers, technicians, managers, and professionals available, Afghanistan’s economy grew by 13.5%, representing one of the fastest growing economies in the world.¹⁰⁵ Macroeconomic indicators were stable in 2008/2009 despite the global economic crisis and national political and security issues.¹⁰⁶ And the GDP is expected to rise for 2009–2010 due to historic harvest yields. Excluding opium production, GDP composition per sector for 2008 was 31% agriculture, 26% industry, and 43% service related.¹⁰⁷



© Michael Smith
Butcher in his shop

⁹⁹ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Central Statistics Office. “Economic Statistics.” No date.

<http://www.cso.gov.af/economics/industries.html>

¹⁰⁰ Encyclopedia Britannica Online. “Islam and the West.” No date. <http://www.britannica.com>

¹⁰¹ CIA World Factbook. “Afghanistan.” 30 November 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

¹⁰² The World Bank. “2009 Afghanistan Economic Update.” 2 November 2009.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/AFGHANISTANEXTN/Resources/305984-1237085035526/AfghanistanEconomicUpdateOct2009.pdf>

¹⁰³ CIA World Factbook. “Afghanistan.” 30 November 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

¹⁰⁴ US Department of State. “2009 Investment Climate Statement-Afghanistan.” February 2009.

<http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/2009/117835.htm>

¹⁰⁵ International Trade Administration. “Afghanistan: Business Opportunities.” No date.

http://trade.gov/afghanistan/doc_afghanistan_marketops.asp

¹⁰⁶ The World Bank. “2009 Afghanistan Economic Update.” September 2009.

<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/AFGHANISTANEXTN/Resources/305984-1237085035526/AfghanistanEconomicUpdateOct2009.pdf>

¹⁰⁷ CIA World Factbook. “Afghanistan.” 30 November 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

Opium Production

The largest obstacle to Afghanistan's development is the country's dependence on opium. In addition to farmers and drug traffickers, district officials tax (*ushr*) the crop to fill local government coffers.

Cultivation of the opium poppy increased rapidly since the fall of the Taliban in 2001.¹⁰⁸ Record-high levels of opium poppies at harvest time in April were reported in 2006 and 2007, making

Afghanistan the largest source of narcotics in the world.¹⁰⁹ Outpacing foreign aid, drug profits have become the main source of funds for reconstruction and have fueled corruption at the highest levels of government.

"The fight against drugs is the fight for Afghanistan," President Karzai has declared. Currently, the market is worth USD 65 billion for the 375 tons of heroin and 900 tons of opium that leave Afghanistan. Worldwide it creates 15 million addicts and causes 100,000 deaths per year, as well as spreading HIV.¹¹⁰ Nearly 40% of the heroin from Afghanistan is trafficked through the porous border into Pakistan, approximately 30% into Iran, and 25% into Central Asia¹¹¹ as it makes its way to European and U.S. markets.



Photo by ISAF Public Affairs
Poppy field in Farah Province

In the absence of a viable alternative livelihood, it is difficult for farmers to stop growing opium poppies. Depending on the year, growing poppies can yield an income that has been as much as 10 times that of wheat cultivation.¹¹² Indeed, the plant stock is drought and disease resistant and, for subsistence farmers and sharecroppers, offers a survival strategy. Britain, designated in 2002 as the G-8 leader to eradicate opium production in Afghanistan, began working with the Afghan government in 2004 in efforts to crack down on traffickers, destroy drug labs and opium crops, and encourage farmers to abandon poppy cultivation. USAID's Alternative Development Program facilitates economic development in legal crops such as grapes and pomegranates. Such efforts have resulted in 20 opium free provinces in 2009. Despite opium cultivation and production decreases of 22% and 10%, respectively, from 2008, production continues to surge in eight southern and western provinces: Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Day Kundi, Zabul, Farah, and Badghis.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ NATO. "Afghanistan Report 2009. 2009.

http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2009_03/20090331_090331_afghanistan_report_2009.pdf

¹⁰⁹ United Nations Information Service. "Record Opium Cultivation in Afghanistan is a Threat to Central Asia and CIS Countries," 25 November 2004.

<http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/pressrels/2004/unisnar869.html>

¹¹⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. "UNODC Reveals Devastating Impact of Afghan Opium." 21 October 2009.

<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2009/October/unodc-reveals-devastating-impact-of-afghan-opium.html>

¹¹¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. "UNODC Reveals Devastating Impact of Afghan Opium." 21 October 2009.

<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2009/October/unodc-reveals-devastating-impact-of-afghan-opium.html>

¹¹² International Relations and Security Network. "Opium Production Compounds Karzai's Woes," 31 March 2005. <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/news/sw/details.cfm?ID=11023>

¹¹³ Relief Web. "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009 - Summary Findings." 2 September 2009.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/EGUA-7VHKVW?OpenDocument>

Trade

Trade in Afghanistan is hampered by transportation and infrastructural limitations, weak business capacity, fees imposed by local authorities, and complex custom clearances.¹¹⁴ Informal trade conducted by people traveling back and forth to Iran and Pakistan is still a large part of the Afghan economy. Formal export of agricultural products, gemstones, and carpets made Afghanistan one of the fastest growing economies in South Asia¹¹⁵ with



© Munir Squires
Carpet vendor in Kabul

exports estimated at hundreds of millions of dollars.¹¹⁶ Afghanistan's trade is unusual because the value of illicit narcotic exports may be higher than total legal exports. In addition there is a black market for goods being re-exported into the protected markets of neighboring countries such as Pakistan.¹¹⁷ There has been a recent resurgence in demand for the silky fur of newborn Karakul lambs. This legal export, which fetches a high price on the international market, was made famous by President Karzai's Karakul hat. The Karakul trade is a way out of poverty for many farmers in the North. Afghan carpets, known for their quality and craftsmanship, represent a major source of export earnings. Other light industries include leather and leather processing, precious and semi-precious stones, and marble. For Afghanistan's economy to grow, it needs to expand and diversify its legal exports.¹¹⁸

Despite the successes of exports, Afghanistan is still highly dependent on the import of basic goods such as medicines, construction materials, machinery and equipment, textiles, petroleum products, and food, all supplied mainly through aid and drug profits.¹¹⁹ Afghanistan has trade and transit agreements with regional and international countries. Of these, Pakistan is Afghanistan's largest trading partner. Other principal

¹¹⁴ World Bank. "Afghanistan: Trade Policy and Integration." No date.
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/EXTSARREGTOPINTECOTRA/0,,contentMDK:20592515~menuPK:579454~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:579448,00.html>

¹¹⁵ International Trade Administration. "Afghanistan: Business Opportunities." No date.
http://trade.gov/afghanistan/doc_afghanistan_marketops.asp

¹¹⁶ World Bank. "Afghanistan: Trade Policy and Integration." No date.
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/EXTSARREGTOPINTECOTRA/0,,contentMDK:20592515~menuPK:579454~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:579448,00.html>

¹¹⁷ World Bank. "Afghanistan: Trade Policy and Integration." No date.
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/EXTSARREGTOPINTECOTRA/0,,contentMDK:20592515~menuPK:579454~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:579448,00.html>

¹¹⁸ World Bank. "Afghanistan: Trade Policy and Integration." No date.
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/EXTSARREGTOPINTECOTRA/0,,contentMDK:20592515~menuPK:579454~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:579448,00.html>

¹¹⁹ World Bank. "Afghanistan: Trade Policy and Integration." No date.
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/EXTSARREGTOPINTECOTRA/0,,contentMDK:20592515~menuPK:579454~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:579448,00.html>

trading partners are the U.S., India, South Korea, Germany, the United Arab Emirates, and Japan. The U.S., European Union, Japan, and India all extended Generalized System of Preference-type trade privileges to Afghanistan in 2003. In addition, Afghanistan concluded two trilateral transit and trade agreements (Afghanistan–Iran–India, and Afghanistan–Iran–Tajikistan) and four bilateral transit and trade agreements (with Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and India). Trade with other neighboring countries, including Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China, is growing slowly. Afghanistan initiated the accession process for World Trade Organization membership in 2004.

Foreign Aid

After the overthrow of the Taliban regime, foreign assistance was necessary to rebuild Afghanistan’s war-torn economy. Basic facilities, services, and installations have all suffered, leaving the country the world’s poorest outside of sub-Saharan Africa. Today, 90% of government spending comes from foreign aid.¹²⁰ The international donor community provided USD 15 billion by 2008, much lower than its pledge of USD 25 billion. Of the amount



Photo by ISAF Public Affairs
Medical supplies

delivered, about 40% of foreign aid went back to the rich countries in consultant salaries and costs and corporate profits.¹²¹ Total aid shortfall from 2008–2012 is estimated at USD 22 billion, approximately 48% of what is needed.¹²² The Afghan government, however, only manages approximately 20% of the foreign aid. The remainder is dispersed by non-governmental and international organizations.¹²³ About 350 of these organizations maintain offices in Kabul. Given the deteriorating security situation, the cost of stationing an expatriate staffer in-country has risen to around USD 250,000 per year.¹²⁴ Oversight is limited to how the money is spent, and whether the project contributed to the well-being of the community in the way it was intended.¹²⁵ The desire

¹²⁰ Oxfam. “Major Donors Failing Afghanistan Due to \$10bn Aid Shortfall.” 20 March 2008.

http://www.oxfam.org/en/news/2008/pr080325_donors_failing_afghanistan

¹²¹ Oxfam. “Major Donors Failing Afghanistan Due to #10bn Aid Shortfall.” 20 March 2008.

http://www.oxfam.org/en/news/2008/pr080325_donors_failing_afghanistan

¹²² New York Times. Opinion. Ashdown, Paddy and Joseph Ingram. “Falling Short on Afghanistan.” 29 April 2009. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/30/opinion/30iht-edashdown.html?_r=1

¹²³ Rand Corporation. Godges, John. “Afghanistan on the Edge: A World at Risk of Winning the Urban Battle, Losing the Rural War, Abandoning the Regional Solution.” Rand Review Summer 2007.

<http://www.rand.org/publications/randreview/issues/summer2007/afghan2.html>

¹²⁴ Virginia Quarterly Review. Garcia, Malcolm. “All the Country Will Be Shaking.” Winter 2008.

<http://www.vqronline.org/articles/2008/winter/garcia-country-shaking/>

¹²⁵ Chicago Tribune. Eng, Monica. “Down a Black Hole.” 13 July 2003.

<http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/chicagotribune/access/357874831.html?dids=357874831:357874831&FMT=ABS&FMTS=ABS:FT&type=current&date=Jul+13%2C+2003&author=Monica+Eng%2C+Tribune+staff+reporter&pub=Chicago+Tribune&edition=&startpage=12&desc=Down+a+black+hole+%3B+In+1992%2C+an+idealistic+young+American+helped+build+a+preschool+in+Nicaragua.+Today+it%27s+in+ruins.+Why+does+so+much+U.S.+aid+to+poor+countries+go+for+naught%3F>

on the part of contractors to extend projects also provides incentives to cover problems that could cause a donor to pull out.¹²⁶

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank are key players in Afghanistan's reconstruction. As of the end of 2008, ADB had extended Afghanistan a cumulative loan of USD 952 million to boost its economy and reduce poverty by supporting the public administration, financial, energy, and transport sectors.¹²⁷ The World Bank currently has 26 active projects in Afghanistan worth USD 1 billion in the transportation, infrastructure, public administration, and agriculture sectors.¹²⁸ The World Bank also manages the multi-donor Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF),¹²⁹ among many other projects. Donor countries include Britain, the European Union, the Netherlands, the U.S., Canada, and another 19 countries. Funds have gone toward development and reconstruction needs: grants to communities for local government projects, reducing poverty and vulnerability of the displaced and disabled, rehabilitation of power plants, and water supply and sanitation. USAID's civilian assistance program is the biggest bilateral program with USD 5.9 billion spent on development.¹³⁰

Foreign Investment

Private investment in Afghanistan remains limited. After two decades of conflict, the perception of risk by investors is a major obstacle. "The scale of foreign investment has remained very small, largely hampered by the absence of infrastructure, such as roads and electricity, and a lingering legacy of corruption and red-tape," says Karzai. As recently as 2006, a World Bank survey showed Afghanistan at the bottom of the list of countries with whom it is easy to do business.¹³¹ There has been much progress, however, since 2001, as well as institutional reform, to spur investment despite problems the country faces. In 2004, Afghanistan received credit with the World Bank for financing a political risk insurance program to cover up to USD 60 million.¹³² Several commercial laws have been passed governing partnerships, corporations, copyright, arbitration, mediation, patents, and telecommunications, while additional laws are pending. The government's progressive



© Munir Squires
Signs in rural Afghanistan

¹²⁶ International Security. Cooley, Andrew and James Ron. "The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action." Summer 2002.

http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/files/cooley_ron_v27n1.pdf

¹²⁷ Asian Development Bank and Afghanistan. "Factsheet." 31 December 2008.

http://www.adb.org/Documents/Fact_Sheets/AFG.pdf

¹²⁸ International Trade Administration. "Afghanistan: Business Opportunities." No date.

http://trade.gov/afghanistan/doc_afghanistan_marketops.asp

¹²⁹ Asian Development Bank. "\$600 Million in Assistance Earmarked for Afghanistan in Updated ADB Country Program." 1 September 2004. <http://www.adb.org/Documents/News/2004/nr2004097.asp>

¹³⁰ USAID. "USAID/Afghanistan: Country Profile." Fall 2009.

<http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/Page.CountryOverview.aspx>

¹³¹ Global Security. Thomas, Gary. "Afghanistan's Bid for Foreign Investment a Tough Sale." 16 November 2006. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2006/11/mil-061116-voa05.htm>

¹³² Foreign Direct Investment. "Encouraging FDI in Afghanistan." No date.

http://www.fdi.net/investmenthorizons_afghanistan/

reforms in areas of currency, customs tariffs, and tax code have also helped promote investment.¹³³

The Afghan Investment Support Agency licenses both foreign and domestic investments. It reports that 754 companies from 25 countries have investments worth USD 1.3 billion, of which USD 75 million is from 70 U.S. companies.¹³⁴ The largest investors in Afghanistan are Turkey, Germany, India, and Pakistan, respectively. Some major international companies that have invested in Afghanistan include Tourism Promotion Services, the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development, the Overseas Private Investment Corp. (OPIC), Emaar/InterContinental Hotels, Coca Cola, GroupSat, Inc., Alcatel SA, and Hyatt Hotels. Spearheaded by the multinational Roshan and Afghan Wireless, a U.S.–Afghan joint venture, telecommunications now represents the largest source of direct foreign investment in Afghanistan. With severely limited domestic landlines, phone service communication has become a hot market. In fact, until the final years of Taliban rule, Afghans had to travel to Pakistan for international calls.¹³⁵ Today, four telecommunications companies serve all 34 provinces providing mobile services to millions of Afghans¹³⁶

Banking

Most of the Afghan financial system is still in the hands of *hawala* networks. *Hawala* (transfer) is an ancient, informal system of money transfer that existed in South Asia long before Western banking provided an alternative.¹³⁷ Brokers routinely have gold, rather than currency, placed around the world to facilitate fast transfers. Transactions involve *hawala* brokers (*hawaladar*) accepting a client's money and then contacting a counterpart in the area where the client wants the money delivered. The counterpart pays out the sum (minus a small percentage) to the designated recipient. This arrangement is based on mutual trust: brokers and clients are often members of the same family, village, clan, or ethnic group. In short, *hawala* relies on a high degree of social capital among those who use it. It is less expensive than formal bank transfers, which deduct higher transaction fees, and, moreover, leaves no paper trail.¹³⁸ Owing to the possibilities for misuse, either by terrorist



© Olaf Kellerhoff
Kabul National Bank

¹³³ US Department of State. “2009 Investment Climate Statement – Afghanistan.” February 2009. <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/rls/othr/ics/2009/117835.htm>

¹³⁴ The Embassy of Afghanistan, Washington DC. Frequently Asked Questions. “Business and Investment.” No date. <http://www.embassyofafghanistan.org/faqs/faqbusiness.html>

¹³⁵ BBC News. “Afghanistan Joins Mobile Age.” 19 February 2002. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/sci/tech/1827993.stm>

¹³⁶ Ministry of Communication and Information Technology Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. “Mobile Operators.” 2009. <http://www.mcit.gov.af/OurPartners/mobileoperators.asp>

¹³⁷ Other translations of this form of money transfer are: “exchange,” “trust” [Hindi], “reference.” The Arabic root is “change” or “transform.” The system is sometimes referred to as *hawala* / *hundi*. *Hundi* means “bill of exchange” or “promissory note.”

¹³⁸ Interpol. “The Hawala Alternative Remittance System and its Role in Money Laundering.” January 2000. <http://www.interpol.int/Public/FinancialCrime/MoneyLaundering/hawala/default.asp>

groups or those looking to avoid taxes or move illicitly earned money, many governments deem it illegal.¹³⁹

Afghanistan's formal banking system has made considerable advances since 2002. The Central Banking and Commercial Banking laws passed in September 2003 cleared the way for licensing new commercial banks. The Central Bank (DAB, Da Afghanistan Bank) has licensed 17 banks including commercial and foreign branches in Afghanistan¹⁴⁰ such as Standard Chartered (UK), which introduced ATM machines; the First Microfinance Bank of Afghanistan (an Aga Kahn/IFC joint venture), which is also the National Bank of Pakistan; and Afghanistan International Bank. As of January 2009, total deposits were USD 2 billion and outstanding loans were half that amount, with total assets at USD 2.4 billion.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, these institutions have generated several thousand jobs and are needed for capital for the private sector. DAB itself has 75 branches across the country.¹⁴² Credit unions are limited, however, as there are no viable credit bureaus or credit agencies.¹⁴³

All financial institutions have to work around the Muslim prohibition on charging interest. This means banks must come up with other ways to turn a profit in order to stay in business. One way this is done is through leasing. Instead of borrowing money to buy a property and repaying the loans in installments with interest, the transaction is structured so that the bank will assume legal ownership of the property which will be leased to the client. The client in turn can make use of the property in a way that generates a higher rate of income than the leasing payments.¹⁴⁴ Even microfinance organizations, which make loans to the working poor, have come up with a means to extend their services in ways which are compliant with cultural norms.¹⁴⁵ Aside from cultural norms, institutional weakness makes banks vulnerable to illicit finance and money laundering, and a lack of infrastructure and power makes transport and transfer of money challenging.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁹ American University, TED Case Studies. Kleymeyer, Joshua. "Hawala: An Alternative Banking System and Its Connection to Blood Diamonds, Terrorism, and Child Soldiers." July 2003. <http://www.american.edu/TED/hawala.htm>

¹⁴⁰ Forbes. Iacob, Madalina. "Banking on Afghanistan." 18 April 2009.

<http://www.forbes.com/2009/04/17/afghanistan-banking-business-wall-street-afghanistan.html>

¹⁴¹ Forbes. Iacob, Madalina. "Banking on Afghanistan." 18 April 2009.

<http://www.forbes.com/2009/04/17/afghanistan-banking-business-wall-street-afghanistan.html>

¹⁴² Da Afghanistan Bank. "Branches." 2009. <http://www.centralbank.gov.af/branches.php>

¹⁴³ The Embassy of Afghanistan, Washington DC. In Brief. "Business in Investment in Afghanistan...The Heart of Asia." No date. <http://www.embassyofafghanistan.org/inbrief.html>

¹⁴⁴ Council on Foreign Relations. "Islamic Banking is a Rapidly Growing Industry: Interview with Jawad Ali." 8 June 2007. <http://www.cfr.org/publication/13560>

¹⁴⁵ ReliefWeb. "Islamic banking principles behind new microfinance services in Afghanistan." 5 November 2006. <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/KHII-6VA35U?OpenDocument>

¹⁴⁶ Forbes. "Banking on Afghanistan." 18 April 2009. <http://www.forbes.com/2009/04/17/afghanistan-banking-business-wall-street-afghanistan.html>

Energy

During the years of war, at least 40% of Afghanistan's power lines were destroyed. Today, Afghanistan produces more than one and a half times as many megawatts (MW) of power as it did in 2001.¹⁴⁷ However, power generation, transmission, and distribution remain critical problems. Only 10–12% of Afghans have electricity on a regular basis.¹⁴⁸ Kabul, which has three hydropower stations, has about 39% of the total electricity grid and produces 65% of the country's total energy.¹⁴⁹ The U.S.-funded, 100-MW Tarakhil diesel power plant was opened in Kabul in August 2009 to provide power to about 200,000 residents in the first phase and about half a million in the region by the end of 2009.¹⁵⁰ Three power turbines at the Kajaki Dam in Kandahar provide electricity and irrigation for some 1.5 million Afghans in southern regions.¹⁵¹ In the meantime, Afghanistan is importing increasingly larger volumes of electric power from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Plans to string additional and higher-voltage transmission lines between these countries and Afghanistan could eventually lead to the basis for the creation of a regional power grid.



© thirstycactus / flickr.com
Gasoline vendor in rural Afghanistan

The oil and gas industries were just beginning in the late 1970s and have suffered substantial damage since then. To assess the situation, the U.S. Geological Survey and the government of Afghanistan completed the country's first ever research of undiscovered petroleum resources in March 2006. Its findings for both oil and gas in the northern regions of the Amu Darya basin and the Afghan-Tajik basin were significantly higher than expected. Crude oil is estimated at 1.6 billion barrels, natural gas at 15.7 trillion cubic feet, and natural gas liquids at 562 million barrels.¹⁵² Most of the crude oil lies in the Afghan-Tajik basin while the natural gas reserves lie in the Amu Darya basin. Afghan natural gas fields include Khowaja Gogerdak, Djarquduk, and Yaqtimtaq, all of which are located within 20 miles of Sheberghan. While natural gas holds huge potential for additional power generation in Afghanistan, it is currently only being used on a small scale. A 30-MW power plant near Mazar-e Sharif receives natural gas from a pipeline repaired in 1999.

¹⁴⁷ US Department of State. Background Note: Afghanistan. "Economy." November 2008. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm#econ>

¹⁴⁸ USAID. Afghanistan. "Drilling Equipment Arrives in Shibirghan." 04 April 2009. <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/Article.600.aspx>

¹⁴⁹ NATO. "Afghanistan Report 2009." 2009. http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2009_03/20090331_090331_afghanistan_report_2009.pdf

¹⁵⁰ USAID. Afghanistan. "President Karzai Launches Kabul Power Plant." 5 August 2009. <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/Article.722.aspx>

¹⁵¹ Ministry of Defense. "British Troops Complete Operation to Deliver Vital Power Turbine." 2 September 2008. <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/MilitaryOperations/BritishTroopsCompleteOperationToDeliverVitalPowerTurbine.htm>

¹⁵² US Geological Survey. USGS Newsroom. "USGS Assessment Significantly Increases Afghanistan Petroleum Resource Base." 14 March 2006. <http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=1473>

Coal reserves are substantial—by some estimates 400 million tons—and well distributed throughout Afghanistan with varying degrees of quality depending on location. Research is dangerous but also difficult due to the fact that data, if any, is outdated, and some deposits are buried very deep.¹⁵³ Most of the explored coal areas lie in the north-central region referred to as “North Coal District.”¹⁵⁴ In the past, coal supplied primary fuel for industrial concerns, as well as for heating and cooking. Today coal mines provide fuel for home heating and cooking, but the mines are in disrepair and dangerous. Coal mining is unregulated in Afghanistan, and there are illegal primitive operations in different provinces using child laborers in unsafe conditions.¹⁵⁵ Other sources of energy include wood, which has led to serious deforestation, and diesel imported from Pakistan. A 100-MW diesel power plant launched in August 2009 in Kabul provides power to the city and surrounding areas.¹⁵⁶

Energy Transit Corridor

Due to its location between the oil and natural gas reserves of the Caspian Basin and the Indian Ocean, Afghanistan has long been at the focus of discussion as a potential pipeline route. The pipeline considered would stretch from resource-rich Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan. During the Taliban years, discussions broke down, but in April 2008, India joined the project¹⁵⁷ and planning was revived in March 2009. Called TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) for the countries it would pass through, the USD-7.6-billion project would go through the volatile Kandahar region in Afghanistan and stretch a total of 1,680 km (1,043 mi). It could carry an annual amount of 50 billion cubic meters of gas to different markets.¹⁵⁸ Completion of the pipeline, which the ADB says could generate USD 200 million a year in transit fees, should take almost three years. The Asian Development Bank is the major sponsor of this project.



© Steve Blyskal
Lapis lazuli from Afghanistan

Other Potential Resources

Although there was some mineral production during the 1970s and 1980s, Afghanistan’s abundant mineral wealth is virtually unexploited. According to the Mines and Industry Ministry, “one of the biggest lures for foreign investors is Afghanistan’s 300 types of

¹⁵³ Nature News. Dalton, Rex. “Geology: Mine Games.” 22 October 2007.
<http://www.nature.com/news/2007/071022/full/449968a.html>

¹⁵⁴ US Geological Survey. Hare, Trent M. and Philip A. Davis, Devon Nigh, James A. Skinner, Jr., John R. SanFilipo, Karen S. Bolm, Corey M. Fortezzo, Donna Galuszka, William R. Stettner, Shafiqullah Sultani, Billal Nader. “Large-Scale Digital Geologic Map Databases and Reports of the North Coal District in Afghanistan.” 2008. <http://pubs.usgs.gov/ds/317/>

¹⁵⁵ IRIN News. “Afghanistan: Risking One’s Health for a Pittance.” 26 May 2009.
<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=84551>

¹⁵⁶ USAID. Afghanistan. “President Karzai Launches Kabul Power Plant.” 5 August 2009.
<http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/Article.722.aspx>

¹⁵⁷ Forbes. “India Formally Joins Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan Gas Pipeline Project.” 25 April 2008. <http://www.forbes.com/feeds/afx/2008/04/25/afx4933107.html>

¹⁵⁸ EurasiaNet.org. News Briefs. “Turkmenistan: TAPI Pipeline Discussion Ends on Upbeat Note.” 26 March 2009. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/news/articles/eav032609c.shtml>

mineral deposits, including coal, copper, marble, emeralds,” as well as iron ore, talc, sulfur, gold, nickel, lead, peridot, ruby, and lapis lazuli. Afghanistan also has significant amounts of construction minerals. With abundant deposits and little institutional building capacity, the industry has declined but has been replaced by the illegal production and smuggling of materials. Legal mining activity is limited, though exact data is unavailable. Insecurity, poor infrastructure, and lack of skilled labor impede development and mining.¹⁵⁹ In 2008, in the largest investment in Afghan history, China’s Metallurgical Group Corporation signed a contract for USD 3 billion to extract copper from the Aynak deposit, which is said to contain more than 12 million metric tons of copper¹⁶⁰ valued at up to USD 88 billion.¹⁶¹

Transportation

For Afghanistan to develop its natural resources and boost trade with its neighbors, it needs the ability to transport goods. Lack of a transportation infrastructure is a major obstacle to increased commerce in this landlocked country and is a major element of the reconstruction effort. Roads throughout the country are in poor shape. Pack animals—camels, donkeys, and horses—are still the primary means of transport in most parts of the country. A road and tunnel under the Salang Pass, built in 1964 by the Russians, provides a short, all-weather route between north and south Afghanistan. There are 42,150 km (26,190 mi) of roadway in Afghanistan, only 12,350 km (7,673 mi) of which are paved.¹⁶² Work to improve roadways, as well as border crossings with neighboring countries, has progressed, albeit with delays caused by militant attacks. Construction of the national, or “ring,” road is the main focus of rehabilitation efforts, with only 10% remaining in 2009.¹⁶³



© Rob Bakker
Afghan family on a bicycle

Barges travel along the Amu Darya River, which forms part of Afghanistan’s border with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The few existing railway lines, which were constructed by the Soviets during their occupation of Afghanistan, need improvement as well. Afghanistan will play a major role in the freight transit route and many projects are currently under way. Reconstruction for a 2-km (1.2-mi) Turkmenistan-Afghanistan railway began in 2007.¹⁶⁴ The Uzbekistan-Afghanistan railway across the Friendship

¹⁵⁹ USGS. 2008 Minerals Yearbook. “Afghanistan.” September 2009.

<http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/country/2008/myb3-2008-af.pdf>

¹⁶⁰ USGS. 2008 Minerals Yearbook. “Afghanistan.” September 2009.

<http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/country/2008/myb3-2008-af.pdf>

¹⁶¹ Times Online. Page, Jeremy. “Afghanistan Copper Deposits Worth \$88 Billion Attract Chinese Investors.” 15 May 2008. <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article3941656.ece>

¹⁶² CIA World Factbook. “Afghanistan: Transportation.” 30 November 2009.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

¹⁶³ The Wall Street Journal. Wonacott, Peter. “Afghan Road Project Shows Bump in Drive for Stability.” 17 August 2009. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125046546672735403.html>

¹⁶⁴ Railway Gazette International. “Afghan Rebuild Underway.” 12 July 2007.

<http://www.railwaygazette.com/news/single-view/view//afghan-rebuild-underway.html>

Bridge is less than 10 km (6.2 mi).¹⁶⁵ The Asian Development Bank granted USD 165 million for a 75-km (40-mi) railway linking Hairatan, close to the Uzbekistan border, with Mazar-e Sharif and eventually Herat, Tajikistan, and Pakistan.¹⁶⁶ Construction is set to begin in September 2009 and scheduled to be completed by June 2011. An Iran-Afghanistan standard gauge line to connect Iran with Herat is also underway.¹⁶⁷

There are 51 airports in Afghanistan, of which 16 have paved runways. Only 4 airports have paved runways over 3,047 m (1.89 mi).¹⁶⁸ Kabul Airport was reopened to civilian aircraft in 2002. There are many domestic and foreign airlines operating in Afghanistan, including Azerbaijan Airlines, Pamir Airlines, Kam Air, and Ariana, the Afghan national carrier. Its international terminal, funded in major part by Japan, was completed in November 2008. However, air travel remains unreliable, at best. Delays and re-routing are not uncommon. European airports have banned the Afghan flag carrier from flying their routes due to the airline's poor safety record.¹⁶⁹ The U.S. discourages its nationals from flying on Ariana for the same reason. Recent audits by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) permit the use of Safi Airlines, Pakistani International Airlines, Air India, and Eastern Skyjet.¹⁷⁰ Kabul and Herat Airports hope to achieve ICAO compliance by 2010.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ Railway Gazette International. "Afghan Rebuild Underway." 12 July 2007.

<http://www.railwaygazette.com/news/single-view/view//afghan-rebuild-underway.html>

¹⁶⁶ Railway Technology. "Afghanistan to Get ADB Rail Grant." 2 October 2009. <http://www.railway-technology.com/news/news65923.html>

¹⁶⁷ Railway Gazette. "Afghan Railway to Go Ahead with ADB Funding." 30 September 2009.

<http://www.railwaygazette.com/news/single-view/view//afghan-railway-to-go-ahead-with-adb-funding.html>

¹⁶⁸ CIA World Factbook. "Afghanistan: "Transportation." 30 November 2009.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

¹⁶⁹ BBC News (UK Version). "Piloting Afghanistan to a Prosperous Future." 9 February 2008.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/7235212.stm

¹⁷⁰ Overseas Security Advisory Council. "Warden Message: Afghanistan Approved Airlines." 8 June 2009.

<https://www.osac.gov/Reports/report.cfm?contentID=103267>

¹⁷¹ The World Bank. "Afghanistan Transport Sector." No date. <http://go.worldbank.org/3058WF94E0>

Chapter 4 Society

Introduction

Afghanistan lost many of its cultural artifacts in nearly three decades of war and conflict. After the Soviets withdrew in 1989, the *mujahideen* (Afghan rebel fighters) plundered museums, galleries, and theaters. Nearly 70% of the Kabul Museum's holdings—a collection spanning 50,000 years—was sold on the international market.¹⁷² Countless treasures, including statues, paintings, and other priceless works of art, were systematically destroyed during the Taliban regime. The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha statues was one of the most dramatic and most devastating losses during this time, not only to the Afghan people, but also to the world heritage of arts and culture.¹⁷³ At the height of the destruction, both Afghans and foreigners rescued and hid as much as they could. Since then, many artifacts have been returned to the country, or are being safeguarded by museums and organizations outside of Afghanistan.¹⁷⁴

Banned during the Taliban reign, many Afghan traditions have endured the test of time and flourish today as never before. Afghan music, dance, kite fighting, and *buzkashi* tournaments are celebrated events again, reinforcing traditions from the many different tribes and languages throughout the country.

Religion

Islam

Islam is the second largest religion in the world, with over one billion followers. The word “Islam” means “to submit” or “surrender.” Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, is a monotheistic religion and recognizes the validity of the Old and New Testaments. However, Muslims believe that the final and culminating revelations were made to Mohammad, the last prophet. The Quran, the Muslim's sacred text, is considered the record of Allah's revelations made to Mohammad. Muslims worship their God directly without the intermediary of clergy, though there are prayer leaders (*imams*) in mosques. The five pillars of Islam are 1) belief in *Allah* and the prophet Mohammad, 2) praying five set times each day, 3) almsgiving, 4) fasting from sunrise to sunset during the month of Ramadan, and 5) performing the pilgrimage to Mecca. A Muslim is encouraged to lead a healthy life that exemplifies the qualities of kindness, chastity, honesty, mercy, courage, patience, and politeness.



© Steve Evans
Blue Mosque in Mazar-e Sharif

Sunni and Shi'a Islam

Sunni and Shi'a are two major denominations within the Islamic religion. The division

¹⁷² New York Times. Burns, John. “Kabul's Museum: The Past Ruined by the Present,” 30 November 2006. <http://www.pulitzer.org/archives/5971>

¹⁷³ University of Chicago, American Institute of Indian Studies, Center for Art and Archaeology. “Photo Archive: Bamiyan.” No date. <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/images/aiis/bamiyan/>

¹⁷⁴ Visiting Arts Cultural Profiles Project. “Afghanistan.” 11 June 2007. http://www.culturalprofiles.org.uk/Afghanistan/Directories/Afghanistan_Cultural_Profile/-675.html

occurred upon Mohammad's death as the community debated over how to select a new leader. Some believed religious leadership should be based on merit. They saw leadership as an earned trust. Another group believed leadership should descend from Muhammad's lineage. They believed that to live in unity with the truth of Islam, people need the help of divinely chosen individuals, those of the Prophet's lineage. Of the four caliphs who ruled after Mohammad, Ali was the closest relative and the last. Those who believe that Ali should have been the successor are called Shi'a, short for *Shi'a-t-Ali*, or "party of Ali." Shi'as believe in a line of *imams* descended from Mohammad while Sunni Muslims have no such hierarchy in their leadership. The Hazara ethnic group, which resides mainly in central Afghanistan, are the largest Shi'a group. They suffered extensively under Sunni Taliban rule.

Islam in Afghanistan

About 99% of Afghans are Muslim. Sunni Muslims make up 80%, Shi'a Muslims 19% percent, and Jews, Christians, Hindus, and others, the remaining 1%. Islam arrived in Afghanistan in the 7th century, eventually becoming a strong cultural and social bond between the various ethnic groups. After the monarchy (established upon the country's founding in 1874) was overthrown by the communists in 1973, the opposition was united by their strong faith. It declared a *jihad* (an armed struggle in defense of Islam) to drive the occupying atheist Soviet forces out of the country. When the Soviets were ousted, an Islamic state was declared in 1992. However, the struggle for power divided the country along both ethnic and sectarian lines with different sides being funded by Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and Saudi Arabia.¹⁷⁵



Photo by ISAF Public Affairs
Man praying, Helmand Province

The Taliban's hard-line interpretation of Islam, stemming from the Wahabism¹⁷⁶ of Islamist Osama Bin Laden's native country, Saudi Arabia, brought some peace and security to the land, but they are now wanted for supporting and committing acts of terrorism. The term "Islamist," not to be confused with "Islamic," refers to a practitioner of political Islam who seeks to end the secular state and replace it with religious control. It evolved from the term "Islamic fundamentalism," or using Islamic ideas in the political realm by creating a theocratic Islamic state in which Shari'a or Islamic law is the law of the land. The Taliban issued a code of conduct in July 2009, in which winning the hearts of locals is cited as the duty of every fighter.¹⁷⁷ However, U.S. intelligence reports suggest that religion is not the motivating factor for the insurgency. They report that

¹⁷⁵ Institute for the Study of War. "Themes: Iran and Afghanistan." No date.
<http://www.understandingwar.org/themenode/iran-and-afghanistan>

¹⁷⁶ Wahabism is a movement in Islam which stresses literal belief in the Qu'ran. Wahabists call for the establishment of a strictly Muslim state that is governed by Islamic law alone.

¹⁷⁷ Al Jazeera. "Taliban Issues Code of Conduct." 27 July 2009.
<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia/2009/07/20097278348124813.html>

control over territory, natural resources, and smuggling routes are main reasons, and that the majority is opposed the Taliban's rule in Afghanistan.¹⁷⁸

The Pashtun Code

Pashtunwali, or the code of the Pashtun, is a set of traditional rules Pashto tribes have lived by for a thousand years.

Pashtunwali is significant in that nearly 40% of the Afghan population is Pashtun. Their code of conduct continues to influence legal and social decisions throughout Afghanistan today.

The four basic tenets of the Pashtun code of honor are 1) hospitality; 2) justice; 3) protection of women, family, and property; 4) personal independence. The value of personal independence in particular is very much an Afghan trait.



©Abdurahman Warsame
Elderly man in Kabul

When there is a dispute, the local *jirga*, or group of elected elders, will use the customary *Pashtunwali* codes of conduct as its guide in passing judgment, and its decisions are widely respected.¹⁷⁹

Local rulers, who oversee *Pashtunwali* in their area, consider it more important than laws codified by any national government.¹⁸⁰ The development of a centralized Afghan state may have been impeded throughout the centuries by the traditional authority wielded by local *jirgas*, who did not want any higher authority interfering in their local way of life. *Pashtunwali* will continue to be a significant factor as the Afghan state works to define a judicial system.

The rules listed below have guided Pashtun tribesmen for centuries.

Badal refers to the right to retaliate if insulted.

Badragha is the safe escort of a fugitive or a visitor to his destination.

Balandra is the act of providing help to someone who is unable to complete his own work, such as a harvest. Repayment is usually a lavish dinner.

Baramta is the holding of hostages until claimed property is returned. Service industry workers (tailors, barbers, etc.) cannot be taken hostage.

Bota is the seizing of property to ensure repayment of debt.

Ghundi is an alliance against a common enemy.

Hamsaya refers to a man who has given his valuables to someone (usually an elder of another village) who can protect him from insult or injury.

Itbar is the trust in one's word or promise as a legally binding contract.

¹⁷⁸ The Boston Globe. Bender, Bryan. "Taliban Not Main Afghan Enemy." 9 October 2009. http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2009/10/09/most_insurgents_in_afghanistan_not_elligiously_motivated_military_reports_say/

¹⁷⁹ Afghanland.com. "Pashtunwali." 2000. <http://www.afghanland.com/culture/pashtunwali.html>;
KhyberGateway Pashto Resources. "Pashtoonwali." No date. <http://www.khyber.org/culture/pashtunwali.shtml>

¹⁸⁰ KhyberGateway Pashto Resources. "Pashtoonwali." No date. <http://www.khyber.org/culture/pashtunwali.shtml>

Lashkar is a large group of armed men who enforce the ruling of a *jirga*, much like a police and military force.

Lokhay Warkawal is the acceptance of an alliance to gain protection from enemies.

Meerata is the murder of one male member of a family by another in order to ensure inheritance. This is a criminal act, and the *jirga* punishes the culprit.

Melmastia is generous hospitality, and Pashtuns consider it one of their finest virtues.

Mla Tarr is the provision of armed protection to help a family member or a close friend.

Nanewatei is the act of forgiveness or the grant of asylum, even to enemies. It is not accepted where the honor of a woman is involved.

Saz is “blood money” or other compensation (such as a daughter in marriage) given to appease a family after a murder.

Tarr is an agreement that gives protection to the involved parties.

Teega means literally “putting down the stone” and stands for ending the fighting between two feuding parties.

Tor is disgrace through extramarital or premarital sex (or rape) and is punishable by death.

The Status of Women

Since the fall of the Taliban, the international community has supported Afghan women’s rights. This has proven difficult, however. Gender equity is a controversial issue in Afghanistan, and politicians avoid taking a firm position on women’s issues for fear of backlash from conservative groups.¹⁸¹ While some progress has been made in recent years at the policy level, the emphasis has been on urban and educated women, who were most affected by the Taliban’s practices. For uneducated and rural Afghan women, little has changed. Afghanistan ranks second from last in the world in the Gender Development Index.^{182, 183}



© Munir Squires
Children in Kunduz

Fathers, husbands, village elders, and local *jirgas* have absolute authority over women’s lives in Afghanistan. And while Afghan men increasingly use the language of democracy when talking with outsiders, this generally does not apply to women. For centuries, the conduct of women (and men) has been strictly governed by the traditional *Pashtunwali* codes of behavior, as much as Islamic law. In particular, *pardah* (Urdu for “veil”) establishes the physical boundaries between men and women. In Afghanistan, female seclusion is considered necessary for the protection of family honor. The most visible display of *pardah* is the *burqa*, which women in rural areas still overwhelmingly don

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Watch. “Afghanistan: Women Under Attack for Asserting Rights,” 4 October 2004. <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2004/10/04/afghan9436.htm>

¹⁸² UNIFEM. “Afghanistan Fact Sheet 2008.” 2008. <http://afghanistan.unifem.org/media/pubs/08/factsheet.html>

¹⁸³ The Gender Development Index is an indication of standard of living. It shows inequalities between men and women in terms of life expectancy, education, and living standards.

when going out in public.¹⁸⁴ For the one million Afghan widows (average age 35) and for the 2% of female heads of household, *purdah* makes it particularly hard to provide for themselves and their families.¹⁸⁵ One successful NGO project, RAMP, supported by the Afghan government, teaches marketable skills to widows, including chicken farming.

At its most extreme, *purdah* bars women from education, health care, and more. Eighty-seven percent of Afghan women are illiterate. Seventy percent of tuberculosis cases in the country occur in women, who spend much of their lives sequestered in their homes with no access to health care. Moreover, violence is used to enforce female adherence to *purdah* norms.¹⁸⁶ Honor killings, arranged marriages, and spousal abuse are not uncommon.¹⁸⁷ While the actual number of incidents is unknown, more than 1,650 cases of violence against women and 550 severe beatings were reported to the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission. Between 70 and 80% of Afghan women are forced into marriage and over half of married girls were married before the legal age of 16.¹⁸⁸ Since the fall of the Taliban, hundreds of women have resorted to self-immolation, or burning themselves to death, to dramatize their plight.¹⁸⁹



© United Nations Photo
Afghan women in literacy class

Political development has ushered in the prospect of societal change, but not everyone in the government believes in women's progress. The Afghan constitution, ratified in early 2004, established equal rights for women and equal protection before the law. However, in July 2009, Karzai signed the Shi'a Personal Status Law designed by Shi'a leaders to regulate marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Although contrary to the constitution, this law formalizes discrimination and affects the personal lives of Shi'a Muslims who make up 10–20% of the Afghan population. Under the Personal Status Law, underage girls can be forced into marriage, and women must ask permission to leave the house or to work, may not inherit land from their husband, and lose guardianship of their children upon

¹⁸⁴ Rand Corporation. Rand Review. Godges, John. "Afghanistan on the Edge: A World at Risk of Winning the Urban Battle, Losing the Rural War, Abandoning the Regional Solution." Summer 2007.

<http://www.rand.org/publications/randreview/issues/summer2007/afghan2.html>

¹⁸⁵ UNIFEM. "Afghanistan Fact Sheet 2008." 2008.

<http://afghanistan.unifem.org/media/pubs/08/factsheet.html>

¹⁸⁶ BBC News, UK Version. North, Andrew. "Silence over Afghan Women's Rights." 7 October 2004.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/3721932.stm

¹⁸⁷ Radio Free Europe. Esfandiari, Golnaz. "Afghanistan: Interview with UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women." 26 July 2005. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/07/99775c66-b885-4308-a3dc-16f9051643a9.html>

¹⁸⁸ IRIN News. "Afghanistan: Women's Hopes for Equality Fade." 8 March 2007.

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=70569>

¹⁸⁹ Council for Foreign Relations. Goodlander, Maggie. "Scant Progress for Afghan Women." 21 August 2007. http://www.cfr.org/publication/14059/scant_progress_for_afghan_women.html

divorce.¹⁹⁰ A month earlier, the U.S. announced a 3-year, USD 26.3-million grant program to support and increase gender equality in Afghanistan.¹⁹¹

The number of women in roles of leadership is growing. Twenty-seven percent of the current Afghan National Assembly is made up of women, but there is only 1 woman in President Karzai's 30-member cabinet. The current Minister of Women's Affairs is Dr. Husn Banu Ghazanfar. In 2005, Karzai appointed the former Minister, Habiba Sorabi, Governor of Bamiyan Province. As Afghanistan's first female governor, her appointment generated controversy within more conservative segments of society. But Sorabi acts as a role model for women around the country who are defying tradition by joining the growing number of women's rights organizations, the media, police force, and government departments. Others run in local and national elections to bring an end to the climate of oppression. But such change will come slowly. A month after Sorabi took her post, a 29-year-old woman accused of adultery was stoned to death in the northeastern province of Badakhshan.¹⁹²

Health Care

While there are signs of general economic improvement in Afghanistan, the standard of health care remains among the worst in the developing world. The country's historically poor health indicators worsened after the Soviets withdrew in 1989. During the years of conflict and Taliban rule, an estimated 75% of trained doctors fled the war-ravaged country. By 2001, only 8% of Afghans had access to basic health services and only 6 midwifery schools existed in 2002.¹⁹³ Even today, rural residents, women in particular, have the least access to medical care. The health centers are usually far from people, poorly equipped, understaffed, lack running water or electricity, and are unsanitary. Not enough technical and administrative staff, a lack of funding, insecurity, and inadequate public services make matters even worse.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Afghans have among the shortest life expectancies in the entire world: 43 years on average, with the healthy life expectancy being as low as 35 years.¹⁹⁴



Photo by ISAF Public Affairs
Burned boy caused
by explosives

Nevertheless, the health sector has improved significantly. The Afghan Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) offers the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) and the Essential Package of Hospital Services (EPHS) programs in 13 provinces at a total of

¹⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch. "Afghanistan: Law Curbing Women's Rights Takes Effect." 13 August 2009. <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/08/13/afghanistan-law-curbing-women-s-rights-takes-effect>

¹⁹¹ USAID. "U.S. Government Announces \$26.3 Million Small Grants Fund to Support Afghan Women." 26 June 2009. <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/Article.687.aspx>

¹⁹² BBC News. "Afghanistan Woman Stoned to Death." 23 April 2005. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4477003.stm

¹⁹³ U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan." November 2008. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm#people>

¹⁹⁴ The healthy life expectancy means the years of life in which a person can expect to be free of disease. It is generally lower than the average life expectancy.

1429 health facilities¹⁹⁵ including sub-centers and mobile centers. Thus, nearly 50% of the country and 80% of the rural population has access to basic health care.¹⁹⁶ Significant progress has been made in training new medical personnel and creating more facilities with major reductions in disease and deaths. A total of 670 health facilities have been constructed or renovated, where hundreds of female doctors, nurses, and midwives and nearly 20,000 community health workers are trained. Immunization efforts have steadily improved over the years. Eighty-three percent of children under the age of one are immunized, and routine immunizations for all under way. Measles vaccine coverage is at 75%, Hepatitis B is at 85%, and DPT at 85%.

Humanitarian Assistance

U.S. intervention in Afghanistan in late 2001 brought renewed attention to a country that had received little since the end of the Soviet occupation. This led to a massive increase in the number of relief organizations as well as the scope of projects implemented. Moreover, organizations already present in the country expanded the geographical scope of their work.¹⁹⁷ The health sector gets significant contributions from USAID, the World Bank, and the European Commission, as well as UNICEF, the WHO, and UNFPA. Over the last five years, nearly USD 1 billion in aid has been spent on the health sector,¹⁹⁸ with mixed results. Some think the MoPH has become too dependent on foreign aid, while others point out that not all NGOs meet their own goals or objectives in their health projects.¹⁹⁹ Security is an obstacle to medical care. Insurgent attacks on aid workers affect millions who lack health care throughout the country.

Disease

Cholera, tuberculosis, polio, malaria, and typhoid are endemic to Afghanistan, owing mostly to a lack of proper healthcare, a poor waste management system, and environmental factors such as floods. Only 23% of the Afghan population has access to safe drinking water and only 12% to adequate sanitation. As a result, the mortality rate due to water-borne disease is one of the highest in the world. Untreated sewage and flashfloods contaminate fresh water sources. Diarrhea is the leading cause of death for minors, claiming approximately 55,000 children per year.²⁰⁰ Tuberculosis (TB) also remains a deadly threat. Of the estimated 46,000 Afghans who die from the disease annually, nearly two-thirds are women.²⁰¹ The WHO believes women's confinement to

¹⁹⁵ Afghan Ministry of Public Health. "USAID Provides Millions to Strengthen Hospital Care in Kabul and Badakhshan." 21 December 2008. <http://www.moph.gov.af/en/news.php?id=34>

¹⁹⁶ Afghan Ministry of Public Health. "USAID Provides Millions to Strengthen Hospital Care in Kabul and Badakhshan." 21 December 2008. <http://www.moph.gov.af/en/news.php?id=34>

¹⁹⁷ Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute. Savage, Kevin and Lorenzo Delesgues, Ellen Martin, Gul Pacha Ulfat. "Corruption Perceptions and Risks in Humanitarian Assistance: An Afghanistan Case Study." July 2007. <http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/3180.pdf>

¹⁹⁸ IRIN News. "Analysis: Afghan Health NGOs—A Mixed Blessing?" 12 October 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=86542>

¹⁹⁹ IRIN News. "Analysis: Afghan Health NGOs—A Mixed Blessing?" 12 October 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=86542>

²⁰⁰ IRIN News. "Afghanistan: Health Ministry Reports Cholera Deaths." 14 September 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=86130>

²⁰¹ USAID. "Afghanistan Celebrates World TB Day." 15 April 2009. <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/Article.608.aspx>

the house, frequent child births, undernourishment, and living in close quarters are contributing factors. TB has a shameful stigma and often results in infected women being shut out of families. However, death or sickness from TB has been reduced by more than 50% in the past 5 years. 97% of the population has either been vaccinated or treated.

Afghanistan is only one of four countries in the world with a polio epidemic. Distribution of the polio vaccine to 7.5 million people through August 2009 reduced the number of children who contracted the crippling disease to 20 cases in that year.²⁰² Volatile security has hindered efforts to eradicate the disease, however. The last stages of eradication are the most difficult, as families are sometimes unable to continue to participate in the final rounds of immunization. For some diseases, such as malaria, there are no vaccines, and drugs are expensive and difficult to administer. Relief agencies distribute bed nets as a more cost-effective preventive measure. Over half of Afghanistan's population is at risk of contracting malaria, with 14 provinces identified as "high risk" areas.²⁰³ Children and pregnant women are especially at risk. Malaria is spread through mosquitoes that thrive in Afghanistan's tropical climate, poor sanitation, and stagnant pools from flash floods.

Two other concerns are AIDS and Leishmaniasis. Afghanistan is at high risk for the spread of HIV/AIDS among drug users and also the general public—due to unscreened blood transfusions. Lack of prevention services and information, poverty, and illiteracy contribute to its spread. USAID and the WHO estimate at least 1,000 to 2,000 HIV-positive cases in Afghanistan.²⁰⁴ In 2007, the World Bank approved a 3-year USD 10-million project to strengthen the HIV/AIDS program while the epidemic is in its early stages. Leishmaniasis is a disease caused by the infected bite of a sand fly and produces lesions on exposed areas of the skin, most often the face. Women are particularly susceptible to the lesions that eventually heal if left untreated but can cause disfiguring scars. The WHO reports that there are up to 200,000 cases a year in Kabul, the highest incidence in the world.²⁰⁵ Misinformed Afghans who believe the disease is transmitted from person to person exclude sufferers from communal life and restrict them to the home.

²⁰² UNICEF. Walther, Cornelia. "Eradicating Polio in Afghanistan Takes Persuasion, Participation and Peace." 17 September 2009. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_51171.html

²⁰³ Payvand. "Afghanistan: Over Half the Population at Risk of Malaria—Health Ministry." 28 April 2008. <http://www.payvand.com/news/08/apr/1287.html>

²⁰⁴ The World Bank. "Afghanistan: World Bank Supports Efforts to Curb the Spread of HIV/AIDS." 31 July 2007.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/PROJECTS/0,,contentMDK:21426828~menuPK:64282137~pagePK:41367~piPK:279616~theSitePK:40941,00.html>

²⁰⁵ Centers for Disease Control. Reithinger, Richard and Khoksar Aadil, Jan Kolaczinski, Mohammad Mohsen, Samad Hami. "Social Impact of Leishmaniasis, Afghanistan." 4 April 2005. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/EID/vol11no04/04-0945.htm>

Women's Health

When the Taliban took over in 1996, women were banned from education and training. When the regime fell in 2001, there were fewer than 500 trained midwives and only a handful of female doctors left in the country. Consequently, Afghanistan had one of the world's highest maternal and infant mortality rates. Approximately 65 out of 1,000 women died from pregnancy-related causes,²⁰⁶ mainly because only 12% of women have access to any type of medical care during pregnancy. Yet 90% of deaths among women of childbearing age are caused by preventable complications related to childbirth. Today, at least one female provider is available in 70% of health facilities.²⁰⁷ Thirty-one midwifery schools²⁰⁸ have graduated more than 2,400 trained midwives.²⁰⁹ Infant and maternal mortality rates have thus been reduced since 2001. At the political level, in the summer of 2009, President Karzai passed a bill that would make it a crime for a husband to prevent his wife from seeking health care.²¹⁰



Photo by ISAF Public Affairs
Women's health care

Infant and Child Health

According to UNICEF, Afghanistan ranks as the fourth-worst country in terms of under-five mortality. Roughly one quarter of young children die before they reach their fifth birthday. The causes are preventable and treatable: malnutrition, diarrhea, malaria, measles, and respiratory infections. Infant mortality is the highest in the world, third only to Angola and Sierra Leone: 151.95 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2009 (as compared to the United States rate of 6.37 deaths per 100,000).²¹¹ Organizations involved in disease control have reported that more than one in five Afghan children does not survive beyond the age of five.²¹² Poor sanitation is the cause of diseases affecting 25% of children under five.²¹³ Chronic malnutrition afflicts nearly 60% of Afghan children under five. More

²⁰⁶ UN Development Programme. "Afghanistan: Improve Mental Health." No date.

<http://www.undp.org.af/MDGs/goal5.htm>

²⁰⁷ U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan." November 2008.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm#people>

²⁰⁸ IRIN News. "Afghanistan: Midwives Defy Tradition and Save Lives." 12 August 2009.

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=85680>

²⁰⁹ VOA News. "Women's Health at Center of Development, Security Goals in Afghanistan." 14 July 2009.

[http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2009-07/2009-07-14-](http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2009-07/2009-07-14-voa61.cfm?CFID=318584085&CFTOKEN=34384871&jsessionid=6630a6e69e26b62f09b7491633911571e66a)

[voa61.cfm?CFID=318584085&CFTOKEN=34384871&jsessionid=6630a6e69e26b62f09b7491633911571e66a](http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2009-07/2009-07-14-voa61.cfm?CFID=318584085&CFTOKEN=34384871&jsessionid=6630a6e69e26b62f09b7491633911571e66a)

²¹⁰ VOA News. "Women's Health at Center of Development, Security Goals in Afghanistan." 14 July 2009.

[http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2009-07/2009-07-14-](http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2009-07/2009-07-14-voa61.cfm?CFID=318584085&CFTOKEN=34384871&jsessionid=6630a6e69e26b62f09b7491633911571e66a)

[voa61.cfm?CFID=318584085&CFTOKEN=34384871&jsessionid=6630a6e69e26b62f09b7491633911571e66a](http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2009-07/2009-07-14-voa61.cfm?CFID=318584085&CFTOKEN=34384871&jsessionid=6630a6e69e26b62f09b7491633911571e66a)

²¹¹ CIA World Factbook. Infant Mortality Rate Rank Order. 2009.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2091rank.html>

²¹² Oxfam. "Afghanistan: Development and Humanitarian Priorities." January 2008.

http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/policy/conflict_disasters/downloads/afghanistan_priorities.pdf

²¹³ IRIN. "Afghanistan: Poor Sanitation, Bad Toilets Cause Deaths, Misery." 5 March 2008.

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=77122>

than half suffer from stunted growth. According to UNICEF, iodine deficiencies in pregnant women result in 500,000 babies born each year with mental impairment. Approximately 4,700 children are treated at 44 therapeutic feeding centers throughout the country.²¹⁴

Mental Health

Twenty-three years of war and strife have left more than physical scars on the people of Afghanistan. There are deep and untreated psychological wounds in both adults and children due to the violence, torture, poverty, unemployment, and every-day stresses of life in a war. In 2001, the WHO considered mental illness to be the biggest health problem in the country, yet mental health issues continue to take a backseat to physical health care needs.



© Michael Foley
Beggar girl

Currently, only few mental health professionals in Afghanistan have the proper experience and tools to deal with this phenomenon.²¹⁵ To address mental health issues, the Afghan Ministry of Public Health has created a mental health unit and developed a strategy for including mental health as part of primary health care. A national mental health taskforce and a standard treatment protocol has also been established. There are now 16 mental health centers in Kabul and Herat combined.²¹⁶

Landmines and Unexploded Ordnance

Mines or explosive devices planted during the Soviet war and its aftermath have killed or injured at least 150,000 people since 1989.²¹⁷ Approximately two thirds of all hazards have been cleared,²¹⁸ but over 640 square km (247 square mi) of land is still contaminated due to conflict and inaccessibility. Despite a very effective mine action program, the number of casualties in Afghanistan remains elevated.²¹⁹ It is primarily Afghans in rural areas who are the innocent victims of these remainders of war. Fifty-five to sixty people, more than half of them children, die or are injured by mines and other explosive remnants of war every month.²²⁰ The few who survive are maimed for life.²²¹

²¹⁴ Afghan Ministry of Public Health. "Annual Report: HNSS-Report-ENG-v4-1." No date. <http://www.moph.gov.af/en/reports/HNSS-Report-ENG-v4-1.pdf>

²¹⁵ Lemar-Aftaab, AfghanMagazine.com. Azimi, Amin. "The Mental Health Crisis in Afghanistan." March 2004. http://www.afghanmagazine.com/2004_03/articles/mentalhealth.shtml

²¹⁶ Afghan Ministry of Education. "World Mental Health Celebration..." 11 October 2009. <http://moph.gov.af/en/events.php?id=21>

²¹⁷ Reuters. "More Funds Needed to Rid Afghanistan of Mines-UN." 12 January 2009. <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSISL43003>

²¹⁸ VOA News. "De-Mining Program in Afghanistan." 17 July 2009. <http://www.voanews.com/uspolicy/2009-07-17-voa3.cfm>

²¹⁹ International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL). Landmine Monitor. "Mine Action: Lessons from the Best Decade of Mine Action." 2007.

http://lm.icbl.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/2007/es/mine_action.html

²²⁰ IRIN News. "Afghanistan: The Perils of Mine Clearance." 22 July 2009.

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=85382>

²²¹ BBC News, UK Version. Jackson, Melissa. "Healing the Wounds of Afghan War." 25 October 2004. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3946245.stm>

Ninety-five percent of landmine and unexploded ordinance victims are disabled.²²² In 2003, Afghanistan signed the Mine Ban Treaty, committing itself to destroying all mines by March 2013. Demining is a dangerous task that involves great security risks and possibly attacks by criminals, including abduction and death.

Literature

Poetry is a major part of Afghan culture. One of the most famous poets is Rumi of Balkh, also known as Maulana Jalaluddin Mohammad Balkhi Rumi. (In Afghan culture, it is customary to include the name of the city of origin in one's name, especially that of a famous artist.) Rumi was born in 1207 and died in 1273 at the age of 66. He combined poetry, music, and dance into a sophisticated spiritual art form. Sufism, as Rumi approached it, represents the idea that God is in our hearts and not in churches, temples, or mosques. His religious dances were the roots of the dancing, or "whirling," dervishes. The tradition of these dancing dervishes has survived throughout the centuries and is still practiced by followers of Rumi today. The dervish ceremonies are not legal in Afghanistan, although they are tolerated as long as they are kept very private. Lately, this ecstatic dance and the corresponding poetry have gained much admiration in Western cultures.



Dari literature can be traced back to the ancient Persian poets, of whom Omar Khayyam is the most famous. His quatrains (four-line rhyming verses) created the basis of poetic works in the Dari language for most Afghan poets. The 17th-century warrior-poet Kushal Khan Khattak is regarded as the national poet of modern Afghanistan. His poems, written in Pashto, are full of energy and power. He established the Pashto *landay* form, a 2-line verse with 9 and 13 syllables, respectively, using internal rhymes.

Modern Dari and Pashto writings have thrived since the fall of the Taliban and they represent all literary forms. Poems, short stories, novels, and dramas have emerged as many repressed poets and writers have come to express their feelings through their literary creations.²²³

Music

Traditional Music

Afghanistan's musical traditions, as well as its traditional instruments, share similarities with those of neighboring countries.²²⁴ (The *rebab*, for example, sometimes considered the national instrument of Afghanistan, is the forerunner of the Indian *sarod*.) Afghan

²²² Reuters. "More Funds Needed to Rid Afghanistan of Mines-UN." 12 January 2009. <http://www.reuters.com/article/featuredCrisis/idUSISL43003>

⁶² VisitingArts.org. Afghanistan Cultural Profile. "Early Afghan Literature." 13 August 2004. http://www.culturalprofiles.org.uk/Afghanistan/Directories/Afghanistan_Cultural_Profile/-770.html

²²⁴ Afghan Network. "Afghan Musical Instruments." 2002. <http://www.afghan-network.net/Culture/instruments.html>

classical music, like that of Central Asia, has a tradition of sung poetry (*ghazals*) as well as instrumental music (*ragas, naghmehs*). Although similar to Indian *ragas*, Afghan *ragas* are more rhythmic and are played with percussion instruments like the *daira, dohl* or *zerbaghali*.²²⁵ What follows is a rundown of the most common instruments used in traditional Afghan music today.

The *daira* (or *doira*) is a flat hand drum shaped somewhat like a tambourine and is used mostly by dancing women. Even during the Taliban era, women were allowed to dance at weddings using *dairas*. The *dohl* is a round, medium-size drum made out of wood. The *zerbaghali* is a goblet-shaped drum with a tight skin glued to the widened top part of the instrument. The *tula* is a flute similar to a recorder, and the *tambur* is shaped like a sitar. The *rebab* is a 14-string instrument, whereas the similar *richak* has only two strings. Even a can may be used for the resonance box of a *richak* in an emergency.

Popular Music

Popular music rose in Afghanistan during the 1950s when radio broadcasting began to reach most of the country. The King of Afghan popular music is the legendary singer, songwriter, and composer Ahmad Zahir. Ahmad Zahir was born in 1946 to an Afghan prime minister and showed both interest and talent in music at a very young age. He came onto the scene when Afghanistan was entering a new phase of Western-influenced music. He had a style all his own—passionate, poetic, and patriotic. In all, he recorded 22 albums and toured internationally, inspiring and appealing to people through his charismatic and free-spirited personality. As his lyrics started to reflect the political times in Afghanistan, the communist party assassinated him. He died in 1979 on the day his daughter was born. Today, Ahmad Zahir's fame continues to grow, and he remains popular with Afghans everywhere across generations.

Other popular singers include Sarban, Nashenaz, Ahmad Wali, Hangama, Mahwash, and Haidara Salim. One of the most famous Afghan contemporary musicians is Farhad Darya. Darya left Afghanistan about the time the Taliban came to power, but he has never stopped writing and performing music from and about his native country. His compositions are well known in Afghanistan, and his song entitled “*Kabul Jaan*” (“Beloved Kabul”) was the first song played on Kabul Radio after the Taliban's defeat. Darya sings in Dari, Pashto, Panjshiri, Hazaragi, and Uzbek. His music uses many of the traditional instruments as well as modern ones. Many other Afghan musicians have also found their way to fame since the fall of the Taliban. Today, hundreds of songs are available on the internet for people all over the world to download and enjoy. Below are the lyrics of one of Darya's songs.

²²⁵ NationMaster.com. “Music of Afghanistan.” No date.
<http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Music-of-Afghanistan>

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is my native soil,
The fate has taken me to strange estates,
O my ladylove!

Take me once to my own home
In a strange earth one's dignity is decreased.

O people!
I am not afraid of death!
Provided I am buried
...and turned to dust in my own soil

*Darya wrote this song in 1993 in Germany.
Translated by: Prof. M. I. Negargar*

Cuisine

Culinary traditions in Afghanistan reflect the country's ethnic and cultural diversity, drawing from all along the Silk Road. Afghan dishes share similarities with Greek, Turkish, Middle Eastern, Persian, Central Asian, and Indian foods and dishes, from baklava to Indian-style ice creams.



© Munir Squires
Afghan kebab meal

The everyday diet of Afghans is partially determined by the wide variety of crops in the region, chief among them wheat, corn, barley, and rice. Other staples include beef, lamb, chicken, cheese, *chai* (tea), *naan* (flatbread), fruits such as grapes, melons, and apricots, and vegetables such as eggplant, leeks, carrots.²²⁶ Pistachios and almonds are favorite snacks. A wide range of spices are used in Afghan cooking: anise, cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, cumin, dill seed, black pepper, poppy seeds, ginger, sesame seeds, green and red chilies, cilantro seeds, and saffron.

On religious days, festivals, and celebrations, a large number of dishes and specialties are prepared such as *aush* (noodle soup with meat, peas, beans, and yogurt), *aushak* (ravioli stuffed with leeks and topped with yogurt and meat), *boulanee* (potato and meat turnovers), kebabs, *qabili pilau* (traditional dish of brown rice with lamb, carrots, and raisins), *firni* (milk custard topped with pistachios), *bouranee kadu* (sweet pumpkin), pastries, and fruit. Some foods and desserts are prepared only in certain seasons. Typical for spring is homemade ice cream like *sheer yakh* and *faluda* (rice, shaved ice, and ice cream), and *kishmish panir*, a white uncured cheese served with red raisins. During winter, it is common to see street vendors selling such snacks as *shor nakhod* (naan

²²⁶ South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). "Food in Afghanistan." 2009. <http://afghanistan.saarctourism.org/food.html>

stuffed with cooked chickpeas, mint sauce, samosas, falafel, and salad) and deep-fried *mahi* (fish).²²⁷

Food is an important part of Afghan hospitality. After being seated in a place of honor, guests are served *chai* and the best food the family has to offer. Traditionally, Afghans share food from a common dish, eating with their right hand (the left hand is considered unclean) from dishes placed on a mat, called a *disterkhan*, spread on the floor. Everyone sits on large colorful cushions, called *toshak*, which are usually placed on carpets. While it is less traditional to use forks, spoons are used for custards and tea. (In the cities today, tables, chairs, and cutlery are more common.) When sharing meals, Afghans carefully wash their hands before eating in a ceremony called *haftawa-wa-lagan*. Chutneys, pickles, and fresh *naan* usually accompany the food. Sharing food with guests not only allows the host to show his generosity, but it is also a way to build relationships.

Sports and Recreation

Afghans are very fond of modern sports such as cricket, chess, soccer, and basketball, while traditional players still play the games of Buzkashi and Gudiparan Bazi. Afghanistan's sports associations and federations help players compete internationally as well. Afghanistan's cricket team made it to the 2009 World Cup Qualifier and defeated Scotland. Kabul's golf course, opened in 1993 but shut down during the Taliban era, reopened in 2004. Many gyms have opened, particularly in Kabul, where men pursue bodybuilding. A bodybuilding club for women was opened in Parwan Province in December 2007. Women participated in the Olympics for the first time in 2004. The Afghan Women's Boxing Federation trains young women in boxing and 25 women are training to compete at the 2012 Olympics.²²⁸ Afghanistan competed in the Asian Winter Games in 2007 and in the 2008 Winter Olympics where it received its first gold medal.²²⁹

Buzkashi

Buzkashi is the Afghan national sport. *Buzkashi* literally means "goat grabbing" in Dari. This game originated in the era of the Mongol conquest, when the Mongol riders would hunt, kill, and pick up goats without dismounting from their horses. Afghan horsemen learned to fight back and took back their animals from the Mongolians who wanted to ride away with their prey.

Today *buzkashi* is an organized field game of 10–12 players per team. The teams must transport the headless carcass of a calf or goat, weighing up to 60 kg (130 lbs), the length of a football field and back, and then over a goal line, without dropping it or allowing someone from the other team to wrestle it from them. In bigger cities, tournaments are played in stadiums. The rules forbid the use of knives or any direct physical attack of the person carrying the carcass. It is a rough sport that requires exceptional riding skills and well-trained horses. Many riders leave the game with broken ribs and other injuries.

²²⁷ *Lonely Planet Afghanistan*. Clammer, Paul. "Food & Drink: Staples and Specialties. [p. 60]" 15 August 2007. Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet.

²²⁸ The Glowing Edge. Bledsoe, Lisa Crech. "Afghan Women to Train for Olympic Boxing." 5 October 2009. <http://www.theglowingedge.com/afghan-women-train-olympic-boxing-hijab/>

²²⁹ Afghan-Web. Abdullah Qazi. "Afghan Sports History: A Chronological History of Sports in Afghanistan from 1900s–2009" 19 April 2008. http://www.afghan-web.com/sports/sports_history.html

Buzkashi is typically played on special occasions, such as the Afghan New Year (*Nowruz*), Eid, and weddings, though typically women are not allowed to watch. The game of polo developed from the *buzkashi* competitions British soldiers observed in India during the 19th century.^{230,231}

Gudiparan Bazi—Kite Fighting

Kite fighting is a national pastime in Afghanistan. It was very popular before the Taliban stopped all activities deemed anti-Islamic, including kite fighting. With new freedom, old customs like kite fighting have returned and have become a big business. Winners on the kite flying contest circuit, which has reemerged since the fall of the Taliban, can earn good money.²³² The beautifully colored kites, called *gudiparan* or “flying dolls,” take different shapes and forms. The average wingspan is approximately 1 m (3.5 ft), but some can be as wide as 1.5 m (5 ft). These kites are built by stretching thin paper over a light bamboo frame.²³³



© Michael Foley
Kite Fighting

The *gudiparan* are unique because of the string by which they are held. Preparation of these special kite strings may take hours. The goal is to have a string that is light, strong, and has an outside surface that can cut like a razor blade. To achieve this, a special coating of ground glass is applied to the surface of the string with adhesive. Leather gloves or finger protectors are worn to protect the flyers’ hands from getting injured when working with these “cutter” strings. The kite fight itself starts with flying two kites in close proximity. The goal is to cut the string of the other kite. The kite that remains on a string is the winner. Usually the winner gets the loser’s kite and whatever else is at stake. If the losing kite is carried away by the wind, it will belong to whoever finds it when it falls to the ground.

²³⁰ USA Today. Memmott, Mark. “Afghans Revive ‘Buzkashi’.” 9 December 2002.

http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2002-12-09-goat-game-usat_x.htm

²³¹ Time. Robinson, Simon. “Afghanistan: By Their Sports, Ye Shall Know Them.” 22 March 2002.

<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,219661,00.html>

²³² Time. “The Kite Maker.” 22 February 2007.

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1592857,00.html>

²³³ CSU, Northridge. Personal Website. Hsiung, Gina. “Afghan Fighters.” 7 February 2005.

<http://www.csun.edu/~ghsiung/fighters3.html>

Chapter 5 Security

The Making of a Nation-State

Europe and the Middle East established connections to India and East Asia through present-day Afghanistan via routes traveled by merchant traders. This destined it to become a place where imperial ambitions would clash. Indeed, Persia and India sparred over control of Afghanistan in the 16th and 17th centuries, while the British and Russian Empires fought for dominance during the 19th century until the country gained independence in 1919. Afghanistan's borders were drawn by European colonists who primarily wanted to create a stable buffer zone between British India and Russian territory. In 1893, a British commission drew the Durand Line as boundary between India and Afghanistan. The boundary was drawn with an eye toward creating the most defensible border for the British *Raj* (kingdom) and dividing the Pashtun tribe into two countries. That border is the current hiding place of the Taliban and possibly Al-Qaeda.



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Children playing on tank

After the Russian invasion and occupation of 1979–1989 and the years of civil war and Taliban rule, building a viable government has proven a challenging task. After the fall of the Taliban, prominent leaders and members of the Afghan diaspora reached an agreement in Bonn that laid out the country's current political system.²³⁴ Hamid Karzai was elected chairman of the interim government and in October 2004, became Afghanistan's first democratically elected president. In 2006, the elected Afghan government and the international community reached an agreement on the Afghanistan Compact, a framework for national reconciliation and stability. It addressed the following critical areas: security, governance, rule of law and human rights, and social and economic development. After three years, not enough has been done and President Karzai, whose re-election in November 2009 was seen as illegitimate by some, will need to change the way he and his officials govern in order to regain international legitimacy.

Progress toward achieving security and development goals has been stymied by deteriorating security in the south and east in particular. The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which expanded its mission to most of Afghanistan in 2003, has had limited success extending Kabul's authority beyond the capital. Future development depends on securing the country for reconstruction and effective governance. Spiraling violence, corruption, and opium trade have made progress difficult. More than 1,000 Afghans died during the first 6 months of 2009, a 24% increase over the previous year.²³⁵ And 508 coalition deaths have been recorded so far for 2009, the

²³⁴ Foreign Policy in Focus. Sedra, Mark and Peter Middlebrook. "Revisioning the International Compact for Afghanistan." November 2005. As cited on Global Facilitation Network for Security Sector Reform. http://www.ssrnetwork.net/document_library/detail/3480/revisioning-the-international-compact-for-afghanistan

²³⁵ International Crisis Group, Policy Briefing. "Afghanistan's Endangered Compact [p. 8]." 29 January 2007 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=4631> - 24k

highest since Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) began.²³⁶ Regions that lack security have a limited capacity to absorb foreign aid.²³⁷ This makes it hard for local inhabitants to believe that change for the better will come.²³⁸ Criminal activity remains particularly high in the capital where foreigners and Afghans working with Westerners are the primary targets. It is often difficult to determine whether the crimes are motivated by terrorism, drug use, or poverty.²³⁹

U.S.–Afghan Relations

A tribally-based country without a strong sense of nationhood, Afghanistan had been deemed strategically insignificant by successive administrations in Washington throughout most of the 20th century. This changed abruptly in 1979 after the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in what was “the bloodiest and most costly superpower proxy war” in the final decade of the Cold War.²⁴⁰ The Soviet Union spent 10 years, the equivalent of billions of dollars, and lost nearly 20,000 soldiers in a vain attempt to create a viable government, friendly to its own interests. The U.S. backed the Northern Alliance, a resistance, also known as the *mujahideen*. The U.S. also provided cross-border humanitarian aid to the millions of Afghans who sought shelter in Pakistani refugee camps. In all, the U.S. contributed about USD 3 billion in military and economic aid to the Afghan war effort during the Soviet occupation, which ended in 1989.



Afghan President Hamid Karzai, U.S. commanders

By the beginning of the 21st century, Afghanistan, which had previously slipped back into geopolitical irrelevance, regained its strategic importance. This had less to do with the country itself than the fact that the U.S. suffered the greatest attack in its history on September 11, 2001. Members of the radical Islamists group Al-Qaeda hijacked passenger planes and flew them into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, killing nearly 3,000 people. The attack was launched not by a hostile nation with a state-of-the-art weapons arsenal at its disposal, but by a group based in impoverished Afghanistan, under the leadership of a government that resolutely opposed modernity. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the official name of the country under the Taliban government, was established in 1996. The Taliban-led government occurred after the Taliban gained power over competing warlords during the country’s civil war. It did not even have a

²³⁶ iCasualties. “Operation Enduring Freedom.” 2009. <http://icasualties.org/oef/>

²³⁷ United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA), Human Rights Unit. “Afghanistan: Midyear Bulletin on Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, 2009.” July 2009. <http://unama.unmissions.org/Portals/UNAMA/human%20rights/09july31-UNAMA-HUMAN-RIGHTS-CIVILIAN-CASUALTIES-Mid-Year-2009-Bulletin.pdf>

²³⁸ BBC News, International Version. “UK’s Afghan Gains ‘Could Be Lost.’” 28 September 2007. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/7017450.stm

²³⁹ Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC). “Afghanistan 2009 Crime and Safety Report.” 10 February 2009. <https://www.osac.gov/Reports/report.cfm?contentID=97134>

²⁴⁰ George Washington University, National Security Archives. “Afghanistan 1973–1990.” March 1991. <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nsa/publications/afghanistan/afghanistan.html>

national military. Rather, its security forces consisted of militia formations made up of different armed groups.

From the perspective of American military planners, few countries offered less favorable targets than landlocked Afghanistan, halfway around the world and far from any American military base.²⁴¹ Nonetheless, the Taliban government, which had harbored Al Qaeda operatives, was quickly toppled by coalition forces during OEF in 2001. After eight years, Afghanistan continues to be of vital national security interest to the U.S. due to the continued security threats posed by the Taliban and the insurgency. The Obama administration announced a new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan (Af-Pak) in March 2009.²⁴² Using a regional approach and with international assistance, the U.S. aims to defeat Al-Qaeda and its havens in Pakistan and prevent them from returning to Afghanistan.²⁴³ The U.S. also works closely with President Karzai in its long-term commitment to rebuilding Afghanistan into a stable and democratic country.

Foreign Relations with Neighboring Countries

Pakistan

When the eastern border was drawn in the 1890s, no one envisioned an independent India or the creation of Pakistan. Nor was there concern over dividing Pashtun tribal lands along the Northwestern Frontier Province (NWFP), Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and Balochistan. Pashtuns and Pakistanis lived side by side without major conflict. During Taliban rule, Pakistan even accepted approximately two million Afghanistan refugees.²⁴⁴



© Talk Radio News Service
Pakistan border

However, the prospect of greater numbers of refugees posed a security risk; it also represented an economic burden and caused Pakistan to officially close the border. After 2001, while the Pakistani government sided with Karzai, some Pashtuns on the Pakistani side of the border found common political cause with the Taliban, whose ranks are also largely ethnic Pashtun. They are united in their opposition to U.S. forces in Afghanistan.²⁴⁵

Since the overthrow of the Taliban, insurgents identifying themselves as “Taliban” have turned up in Pakistan, although they are not believed to be members of the Taliban that

²⁴¹ *Regime Change: U.S. Strategy through the Prism of 9/11*. Litwak, Robert. 2007. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Press.

²⁴² Whitehouse Press Office. “Remarks by the President on a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.” 27 March 2009. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Remarks-by-the-President-on-a-New-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/

²⁴³ The Whitehouse. “What’s New in the Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.” 27 March 2009. http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Whats-New-in-the-Strategy-for-Afghanistan-and-Pakistan/

²⁴⁴ Yale Law School, Avalon Project. “Congressional Testimony of Acting Assistant Secretary Alan Kreczko, Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, Department of State.” 1 November 2001. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/testimony_019.asp

²⁴⁵ Yale Global Online. Rashid, Ahmed. “Who’s Winning the War on Terror?” 5 September 2003. <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/whos-winning-war-terror>

was ousted from leadership in Kabul in 2001. The turn of events inspired militant tribesmen in northern Pakistan's North and South Waziristan regions to take up the name.²⁴⁶ Communities outside of effective Pakistani government control have provided Afghan national militants with a safe haven from which to launch attacks on Afghan and international forces.²⁴⁷ Foreign Pakistani nationals must first secure what is known as a tribal visa from a local tribal leader to visit these areas.²⁴⁸ Taliban resurgence in the border region and renewed violence have generated tension between Kabul and Islamabad. The two governments have accused each other of interfering in their respective internal affairs.²⁴⁹

Iran

Afghanistan's connections to Iran go back to when western Afghanistan and Iran were part of the greater Persian Empire during the 18th century. Relations have fluctuated, but Iran has historically been active in Afghanistan, with strong cultural and linguistic ties particularly in Herat, the former capital of the Persian Empire. During the Afghan-Soviet War, Iran provided refuge within its borders to Afghan immigrants and worked with *mujahideen* groups to oust the Soviets. Iran also provided limited financial and military aid to the Northern Alliance in their fight against the Taliban.²⁵⁰ Iran opposed Taliban rule and sheltered approximately 1.5 million Afghan refugees who fled their homeland during this time. Although tens of thousands of Afghans have been deported, about one million registered and another one million unregistered Afghans remain in Iran. The situation for unregistered Afghans is especially dire as they are not allowed to work or attend schools.²⁵¹

Owing to its increasingly tense relationship with Pakistan, Afghanistan has become increasingly reliant on its border with Iran, through which it receives critical imports. More importantly, Iran has contributed greatly to the security and development of Afghanistan through joint cultural, trade, investment, and energy projects. Iran has strengthened Afghanistan's economy and infrastructure by building roads, bridges, power transmission lines, and border stations. Figures for last year's trade were at nearly USD 1 billion and are expected to grow once Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan are connected via

²⁴⁶ The term 'Taliban' means student. Those who use this name consider themselves to be religious students who are imposing religious law. Council on Foreign Relations. Kaplan, Eben. "The Taliban Resurgence." 31 May 2006. <http://www.cfr.org/publication/10551/>

²⁴⁷ U.S. Institute of Peace. Fair, Christine and Nicholas Howenstein, J. Alexander Thier. "Troubles on the Pakistan-Afghanistan Border." December 2006. http://www.usip.org/files/resources/Fair_Howenstein_Thier_PB_Pakistan-Afghanistan%20Border.pdf

²⁴⁸ John Kiriakou, Interview by Bernard Gwertzman. "Afghanistan 'A Mess.'" 9 October 2007. Council on Foreign Relations.

<http://www.cfr.org/publication/14418/kiriakou.html?breadcrumb=%2Fregion%2F280%2Fafghanistan>

²⁴⁹ Carnegie Endowment of International Affairs. Grare, Frederic. "Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations in the Post-9/11 Era." October 2006.

<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=18740&prog=zgp&proj=zsa>

²⁵⁰ Council on Foreign Relations. Bruno, Greg and Lionel Beeher. "Iran and the Future of Afghanistan." 30 March 2009. http://www.cfr.org/publication/13578/iran_and_the_future_of_afghanistan.html

²⁵¹ Radio Free Europe. Najibullah, Farangis. "Afghanistan/Iran: Kabul Pleads with Tehran to Delay Refugee Expulsions." 8 January 2008. <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1079328.html>

rail and electricity.²⁵² If the transit route were closed, it could throw the Afghan economy into a tailspin. This may account for Kabul's reluctance to criticize Tehran even though Iran forms tactical alliances with any insurgent group opposing the U.S. presence, including the Taliban.²⁵³ The historical dispute over water rights from the Helmand River is a primary source of contention between the two countries.²⁵⁴

China

China shares the shortest land border with Afghanistan. China also has the smallest Muslim population of any of Afghanistan's neighbors. Only 2–3% of China's 1.2 billion citizens are Muslims. Yet the Turkic Muslim Uighur minority inhabits Xinjiang, an autonomous region that borders Afghanistan. The Uighurs complain of discrimination and marginalization due to their ethnicity and religion. Their frustrations sparked a city riot in July 2009, forcing a government crackdown that left more than 150 people dead. More than 1,400 people were arrested and some say it was one of the deadliest riots since 1949.²⁵⁵ Limiting the spread of fundamentalist Islam into Xinjiang and reducing secessionist sentiment among the Turkic-descended Uighurs is high priority for Beijing. While Afghanistan is not identified with either, this is the most likely cause of friction in its relations with China.



www.kremlin.ru
President of the People's
Republic of China Hu Jintao

Despite a small contribution to rebuilding Afghanistan in comparison to other countries', China has provided humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan since 2001. On 19 June 2006, Chinese President Hu Jintao and President Karzai signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighborly Relations, which went into effect 18 August 2008. Under this treaty, both countries would work together to combat terrorism and drug crimes and expand two-way trade. The treaty will be mutually beneficial in the maintenance of peace and stability in the region and in the cooperation for economic development and investment.²⁵⁶ In 2007, the Chinese Metallurgical Construction Corp. outbid other international companies in developing Afghanistan's largest copper mine in Logar, in a USD 3.5-billion contract that was awarded a year later. This is the largest investment in the history of Afghanistan and includes the construction

²⁵² The Boston Globe. Mojtahedzadeh, Pirouz and Kaveh L. Afrasiabi. "A New Season in Iran Relations." 29 March 2009.

http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2009/03/29/a_new_season_in_iran_relations/

²⁵³ Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor. Tahir, Muhammad. "Iranian Involvement in Afghanistan." 21 February 2007

[http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=1004&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=182&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=1004&tx_ttnews[backPid]=182&no_cache=1)

²⁵⁴ U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan: Foreign Relations." November 2008.

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

²⁵⁵ BBC News. "Troops Flood into China Riot City." 8 July 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8139065.stm>

²⁵⁶ Xinhua News Agency. "China Ratifies Pacts with Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Australia, Azerbaijan." 1 November 2006. <http://japanese.china.org.cn/english/international/187172.htm>

of an electrical plant and railway from Tajikistan to Pakistan. Construction may begin in 2010.²⁵⁷

Tajikistan

Cultural and ethnic ties bind Afghanistan to its northern neighbor, Tajikistan. Afghanistan's relations with Tajikistan were complicated by political instability experienced when it gained independence from the Soviet Union.

Approximately 100,000 refugees from Tajikistan flowed into Afghanistan and Tajik insurgents set up bases inside the country.²⁵⁸ The UN brokered a peace agreement in 1997. Since then, irritants have mainly included the thriving narcotics trade. Armed drug smugglers cross the rugged, but porous, border illegally from Afghanistan, since Tajikistan lies on the route to the Russian and Western European markets.²⁵⁹ Tajikistan is the only Central Asian republic that, after the USSR was disbanded in 1991, still maintains a significant Russian military presence.²⁶⁰ Trade between the two countries has tripled since the opening of a U.S.-funded bridge constructed over the Panj River in August 2007. In July 2009, Tajikistan agreed to open a corridor through which humanitarian aid can be sent to Badakhshan Province.



© Ground Report
Tajikistan border crossing

Turkmenistan

Under the Taliban, Turkmenistan attracted Afghan refugees, given its relative wealth and close proximity to northern communities. Turkmenistan maintained diplomatic relations with Afghanistan throughout Taliban rule enabling Afghans to obtain visas.²⁶¹ Despite its neutrality, Turkmenistan was the first among the Central Asian states to become part of NATO's Partnership for Peace program in 1994. During the assault on the Taliban, Turkmenistan leased the former Soviet base at Kuska to the United States. Turkmenistan announced plans in August 2009 to build a naval base of its own on the Caspian Sea coast.²⁶²

Turkmenistan has oil and natural gas fields that are among the largest in the world. After a relative peace in Afghanistan, talks of a Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) natural gas pipeline were revived in 2007. The 1,680-km (1,043-mi), U.S.-backed

²⁵⁷ Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst. Norling, Nicklas. "The Emerging China-Afghan Relationship." 14 May 2008. <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4858>

²⁵⁸ Institute for Afghan Studies. "Foreign Relations." No date. http://www.institute-for-afghan-studies.org/ForeignAffairs/overview_0.htm

²⁵⁹ BBC News, UK Version. "Country Profile: Tajikistan." 21 October 2009. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/country_profiles/1296639.stm

²⁶⁰ Monterey Institute International Studies, James Martin Center for Non-Proliferation Studies. Jasinski, Michael. "Russian Military Capabilities in Central Asia." 17 September 2001. <http://cns.miis.edu/archive/wtc01/rusmil.htm>

²⁶¹ IRIN. "Turkmenistan: Afghan Refugees Want Third-Country Resettlement." 30 July 2003. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=20566>

²⁶² Radio Free Europe. Radio Liberty. "Turkmenistan Plans Caspian Naval Base." 31 August 2009. http://www.rferl.org/content/Turkmenistan_Plans_Caspian_Naval_Base/1811441.html

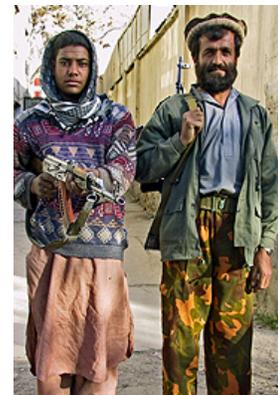
pipeline could bring an annual supply of up to 50 billion cubic meters of gas to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India if constructed. It could also bring thousands of jobs to Afghanistan and an estimated USD 200 million in revenue annually. Construction is set to begin in 2010 and to finish in 2015, at a cost of USD 7.6 billion.²⁶³ However, insecurity, tensions between India and Pakistan, and issues with financing have been road blocks in this project. In 2008, President Karzai met with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov and signed agreements on enhancing political, economic, and cultural cooperation. The main points of agreement were cooperation in fighting terrorism and narcotics, reconstruction projects, a rail link extension between the two countries, and Turkmenistan's electricity exports.²⁶⁴

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan became part of the Partnership for Peace program in 1995. Since then, it has supported Allied operations in Afghanistan by permitting fly-overs and transit by road and rail of non-military supplies such as humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials. Uzbekistan leased Termez Air Base, a former Soviet installation, to the U.S. prior to the 2001 military campaign in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan also supports international efforts to fight terrorism and the narcotics trade. Uzbekistan joined Afghanistan and Iran to build a road that will link these two landlocked countries, through Iran, to the Persian Gulf. Instability in Afghanistan, however, is seen as the primary obstacle to full use of this transportation link. Uzbekistan's large population and its proximity to Afghanistan mean it has a pivotal role in the geopolitics and energy development of the region.

Law Enforcement

Over the course of the 20th century, Afghan state-society relations reflected the evolution from a loose conglomerate of tribes and ethnic communities over which the central government had different degrees of control at different times, to a nation-state.²⁶⁵ Until the middle of the 20th century, an Afghan central government was not even strong enough to create a set of institutions through which governance could be carried out. This lack of national cohesion traditionally left defense to communities that relied on militias made up of tribal recruits. To build an army to replace the tribal militias, transferring the intense loyalty men felt for their tribe to the more-removed concept of nation-state has proved problematic, though there has been progress. Currently, the Afghan National Police (ANP) has been established, and the Afghan military consists of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Army Air Corps (ANAAC).



© Michael Foley
Security guards

²⁶³ Institute for the Study of War. "Themes: Turkmenistan and Afghanistan." 2009.

<http://www.understandingwar.org/themenode/turkmenistan-and-afghanistan>

²⁶⁴ Jamestown Foundation. *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 5, No. 103. Daly, John C.K. "Afghan-Turkmen Relations Improve." 29 May 2008.

[http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=33678&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=166&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=33678&tx_ttnews[backPid]=166&no_cache=1)

²⁶⁵ Parameters. Jalali, Ali. "Rebuilding Afghanistan's National Army." Autumn 2002. [http://carlisle-](http://carlisle-http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/02autumn/jalali.pdf)

Afghan National Police

The Afghan National Police currently has a force of about 80,000, with plans to increase it to 140,000.²⁶⁶ The ANP is divided into Afghan Uniformed Police, the Afghan Border Police, and the Afghan Highway Police. The U.S. and ISAF train and mentor police units and provide the necessary equipment and infrastructure. ANP quality, however, is questioned by its quick hiring and training process (eight weeks) due to high demand.²⁶⁷ The ANP is, thus, less capable than the ANA in mission readiness. Corruption, disloyalty, and a lack of trainers along with institutional reform are additional causes for concern.²⁶⁸ Police Mentor Teams are needed in approximately three quarters of the National Police organizations and units throughout the country.²⁶⁹ There are also reports that members of the ANP help the Taliban and warlords smuggle opium and heroin out of Afghanistan. Many are drug users themselves and there are reports of sexual abuse.²⁷⁰ Efforts to curb corruption include registering police members, issuing identification cards, and using an electronic pay system.

Military

The Afghan National Army (ANA) was created by the U.S. and NATO allies after the overthrow of the Taliban. It operates from five regional commands, or corps, located in Kabul, Kandahar, Herat, Gardez, and Mazar-e Sharif. It is divided into battalions called *kandak* (singular), usually infantry, as its basic unit.²⁷¹ Keeping the desertion rate low and recruiting an ethnically diverse army was a major challenge in the beginning. While the desertion rate has dropped to less than 20% over the years, owing mainly to wage increases and the growing popularity of the army, the number of troops is still low, at 90,000 as of March 2009. The goal is to train 134,000 troops by 2012 to take over the defense of the country and fight the Taliban.²⁷² Over half of the operations were led by the ANA in the spring



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Afghan military

²⁶⁶ The Telegraph. Harding, Thomas and James Kirkup. “Afghan National Police Penetrated by Taliban at ‘Every Level’.” 4 November 2009.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/6502175/Afghan-National-Police-penetrated-by-Taliban-at-every-level.html>

²⁶⁷ The Telegraph. Harding, Thomas and James Kirkup. “Afghan National Police Penetrated by Taliban at ‘Every Level’.” 4 November 2009.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/6502175/Afghan-National-Police-penetrated-by-Taliban-at-every-level.html>

²⁶⁸ The Long War Journal. “Afghan Police Update: February 2009.” 26 February 2009.

http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/02/afghan_police_update.php

²⁶⁹ The Long War Journal. “Afghan Police Update: February 2009.” 26 February 2009.

http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/02/afghan_police_update.php

²⁷⁰ The Telegraph. Harding, Thomas and James Kirkup. “Afghan National Police Penetrated by Taliban at Every Level.” 4 November 2009.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/6502175/Afghan-National-Police-penetrated-by-Taliban-at-every-level.html>

²⁷¹ Institute for the Study of War. “Themes: Afghanistan National Army (ANA).” 2010.

<http://www.understandingwar.org/themenode/afghanistan-national-army-ana>

²⁷² The New York Times. Shanker, Thom and Eric Schmitt. “U.S. Plans Vastly Expanded Afghan Security Force.” 18 March 2009.

and summer of 2008.²⁷³ The ANA is considered superior to the police force in terms of professional capability; however, illiteracy, homesickness, new equipment, and the reluctance in some to fight other Muslims are still obstacles that need to be overcome.²⁷⁴

The Afghan National Army Air Corps (ANAAC) operates out of airfields in Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar, Herat, and Gardez.²⁷⁵ They engage primarily in support missions to escort and transport passengers, supplies, and humanitarian assistance.²⁷⁶ It has made significant progress in organizational effectiveness, due to training and donations from the international community. Training and equipment is provided partly by ISAF under the Combined Security Transition Command Afghanistan.²⁷⁷ With 60 pilots in language and flight training in the U.S. at present, the goal is to reach full operational capacity by 2016 with 7,000 personnel and 120 aircraft.²⁷⁸ The ANAAC led 90% of its support missions in February 2009. It is divided into two detachments, two wings, and three regional squadrons.²⁷⁹

Issues Affecting Stability

Terrorism

The Taliban, a multi-ethnic but predominantly Pashtun Islamist group headed by Mullah Omar, ruled Afghanistan for five years until it was ousted by the U.S. invasion in 2001. Initially the international community and Afghans hoped it would restore order in Afghanistan after decades of war and civil strife. In a country weary of violence and brutality, their promise of a return to Islamic values appealed to the Afghan people. However, their extreme fundamentalist interpretation of Islam alienated Afghans and caused even more suffering through human rights abuses, particularly against women and girls. Most of the Taliban followers were guerrilla fighters from the Soviet and civil wars who trained in the religious schools, or *madrassas*, of Pakistan with an agenda of spreading



Photo by ISAF Public Affairs
Shoe left over from a suicide bomber

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/19/us/politics/19military.html?scp=1&sq=U.S.%20Plans%20Vastly%20Expanded%20Afghan%20Security%20Force&st=cse>

²⁷³ The Long War Journal. Radin, CJ. "Afghan National Army: February 2009 Update." 24 February 2009. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/02/afghan_national_army_1.php

²⁷⁴ The Washington Post. Constable, Pamela. "'You Have to Learn This Now'." 2 August 2009.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/08/01/AR2009080101923.html?sid=ST2009080101925>

²⁷⁵ The Long War Journal. Radin, CJ. "Afghan National Army Air Corps: February 2009 Update." 20 February 2009. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/02/afghan_national_army.php

²⁷⁶ International Security Assistance Force, NATO. Kapinos, Sgt. Joseph. "Afghan National Army Air Corps Stands Up New Wing at Kandahar." 8 October 2009.

<http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/pressreleases/2009/10-october/pr091008-xyy.html>

²⁷⁷ International Security Assistance Force, NATO. "ISAF's Support to the Afghan National Army Air Corps." 29 April 2009. <http://www.nato.int/isaf/topics/anaac/index.html>

²⁷⁸ USAF. Kapinos, Sgt. Joseph. "Afghanistan National Army Air Corps Stands up New Wing at Kandahar." 8 October 2009. <http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123171866>

²⁷⁹ The Long War Journal. Radin, CJ. "Afghan National Army Air Corps: February 2009 Update." 20 February 2009. http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/02/afghan_national_army.php

their version of Islam. Their human rights violations, the sheltering of Al-Qaeda's leader, Osama Bin Laden, and support of international terrorism made them targets in the "war against terror."

Since their ouster in 2001, the Taliban continues guerrilla fighting in the mountainous regions along the Afghanistan–Pakistan border. They are active in eastern and southern Afghanistan; specifically, Helmand, Kandahar, and Uruzgan Provinces are effectively controlled by the Taliban. However, through 2008 and 2009, they encroached upon Pakistan, controlling the Swat Valley and Buner district.²⁸⁰ There are independent branches of the Taliban in North and South Waziristan, and militants in the northwestern Punjab area of Pakistan.²⁸¹ Pakistan, which provides money and supplies to the Taliban, has also been the target of Taliban attacks. Large-scale attacks and suicide bombings hit cities in both Afghanistan and Pakistan throughout 2009. Initially, Afghan insurgents did not carry out suicide bombings as a means to advance their agenda as they preferred to fight. Over time, however, the number of suicide bombings has increased, heightening concerns that insurgent tactics common in Iraq have taken hold in Afghanistan.²⁸²

Opium Production

Shortly before it was overthrown, the Taliban government outlawed poppy cultivation and threatened those who violated this prohibition with harsh consequences.²⁸³ This was seen by some experts as a marketing strategy. By keeping production low, the Taliban kept the international price of their stockpile supply high.²⁸⁴ After the regime was ousted from power, however, Taliban sympathizers and Al Qaeda adherents actively encouraged farmers to plant poppy, a cash crop, as a means to finance their own activities. The ethical concerns of farmers have been allayed on the grounds that the end users are non-Muslims. President Hamid Karzai acknowledged the magnitude of the problem and declared *jihad* on poppy cultivation, opium production, and drug trafficking.²⁸⁵ This had little effect, however. Although 20 provinces were opium free, and opium cultivation and production was down 22% and 10%, respectively, from 2008,



© Doug20022/flickr.com
Opium Production

²⁸⁰ New York Times. "Taliban." 19 October 2009.

<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/t/taliban/index.html>

²⁸¹ New York Times. "Taliban." 19 October 2009.

<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/t/taliban/index.html>

²⁸² The Century Foundation. Robichaud, Carl. "The Proliferation of Suicide Bombings." 10 June 2005.

<http://www.tcf.org/list.asp?type=NC&pubid=1028>

²⁸³ Opioids.com. "Afghanistan, Opium and the Taliban." 15 February 2001.

<http://opioids.com/afghanistan/index.html>

²⁸⁴ Lemar-Aftaab. Sadat, Mir Hekmatullah. "Chasing the Dragon in the Golden Crescent: Story of Afghan Opium." August 2004. http://www.afghanmagazine.com/2004_08/articles/hsadat.shtml

²⁸⁵ NATO Review. Mikhos, Alexia. "Analysis: Afghanistan's Drugs Challenge." Spring 2006.

<http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2006/issue1/english/analysis.html>

production continues to surge in seven southern and western provinces: Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Day Kundi, Zabul, Farah, and Badghis.²⁸⁶

Afghanistan is the world's leading producer of opium. According to the Pentagon and U.S. officials, the Taliban makes an annual revenue of USD 70–400 million from every stage of the drug trade.²⁸⁷ However, officials also state that donations are the single greatest source of cash for Taliban activity²⁸⁸ and that cutting off the Taliban financially will not destroy the 12,000 tons of unaccounted-for opium stockpile.²⁸⁹ In addition to destroying crops on the ground, donor countries are promoting alternative crops and deploying Drug Enforcement Agents to target drug networks.²⁹⁰ Afghanistan's justice system is also being developed to punish drug traffickers within the rule of law.²⁹¹ Currently, the market will pay USD 65 billion for the 375 tons of heroin and 900 tons of opium that leaves Afghanistan. World-wide, it creates 15 million addicts, causes 100,000 deaths per year, and leads to the spread of HIV.²⁹² Nearly 40% of the heroin from Afghanistan is trafficked through the porous border into Pakistan, approximately 30% into Iran, and 25% into Central Asia.²⁹³

Poverty

Afghanistan has the world's lowest human poverty index rating among reported countries in the UN's 2009 Human Development Report, ranking below Niger and Mali at 135.²⁹⁴ According to the Independent Human Rights Commission, 37% of Afghans live in severe poverty.²⁹⁵ Despite the historic wheat harvest in 2009, some 6.5 million Afghans are chronically or seasonally lacking in



DoD image: SGT Jennifer Cohen
Elderly Afghan woman

²⁸⁶ UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009. Summary Findings." September 2009. http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_opium_survey_2009_summary.pdf

²⁸⁷ The New York Times. "Taliban." 19 October 2009.

<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/t/taliban/index.html>

²⁸⁸ The New York Times. "Taliban." 19 October 2009.

<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/t/taliban/index.html>

²⁸⁹ UNDOC. "UNODC Reveals Devastating Impact of Afghan Opium." 21 October 2009.

<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2009/October/unodc-reveals-devastating-impact-of-afghan-opium.html>

²⁹⁰ The Los Angeles Times. Meyer, Josh. "US Increasing Counter-Narcotics Efforts in Afghanistan." 20 July 2009. <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jul/20/world/fg-dea-afghan20>

²⁹¹ National Public Radio. "US Targets Taliban-Drug Trade Link in Afghanistan." 21 August 2009.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=111790387>

²⁹² UNDOC. "UNODC Reveals Devastating Impact of Afghan Opium." 21 October 2009.

<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2009/October/unodc-reveals-devastating-impact-of-afghan-opium.html>

²⁹³ UNDOC. "UNODC Reveals Devastating Impact of Afghan Opium." 21 October 2009.

<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2009/October/unodc-reveals-devastating-impact-of-afghan-opium.html>

²⁹⁴ Human Development Reports, UNDP. "Human Development Report 2009." 2009.

http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_AFG.html

²⁹⁵ Radio France Internationale. Cross, Tony. "The Big Issues: Security, Corruption and Poverty." 8 August 2009. http://www.rfi.fr/actuen/articles/116/article_4695.asp

food, with 2.5 million facing “imminent food crisis.”²⁹⁶ Unemployment was at 40% in 2008.²⁹⁷ Frustration is high for returning refugees, some deported, because of the difficulty finding a job in their homeland. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced due to a food and water shortage. Poverty and unemployment drives many to join the Taliban in exchange for sustenance, and many resort to poppy cultivation.²⁹⁸ According to the World Bank, less than 15% of Afghans have access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation, while only 6% have access to dependable electricity.²⁹⁹ A recent increase in Pakistani imports and sales taxes on Afghan fruits and vegetables will further reduce the income of farmers.

Devastated by years of war, drought, and flood, the country is, in effect, dependent on foreign aid. Ninety percent of government expenditure is from international assistance. However, reconstruction aid is only a fraction of the military spending in Afghanistan. Direct international investment in Afghanistan was USD 288 million in 2007,³⁰⁰ compared to more than USD 35 billion in military spending by the U.S. in the same year.³⁰¹ Reconstruction aid, in turn, is only a fraction of total commitments. Billions of dollars that have been allocated are also “lost” due to a lack of communication and coordination between government agencies as to how it was spent. Aid is also sometimes delayed due to procurement of goods and services to complete projects.³⁰² As of July 2009, the United Nations Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA) is working to improve aid effectiveness between the Afghan government and its donors, as well as between donors.³⁰³ An increase of aid and transparency in aid without duplication of effort is recommended.³⁰⁴

²⁹⁶ IRIN News. “Afghanistan: Water Crisis a Growing Human Tragedy.” 4 November 2009.

<http://www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?InDepthId=13&ReportId=60533&Country=Yes>

²⁹⁷ CIA World Factbook. “Afghanistan.” 30 November 2009. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/af.html>

²⁹⁸ IRIN News. “Afghanistan: Poverty Pushing Youth into Arms of Taliban?” 27 February 2008.

<http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=76986>

²⁹⁹ The World Bank. “Afghanistan Country Overview.” October 2009.

http://www.worldbank.org.af/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/SOUTHASIAEXT/AFGHANISTANE_XTN/0,,contentMDK:20154015~menuPK:305990~pagePK:1497618~piPK:217854~theSitePK:305985,00.html

³⁰⁰ Reuters. “Factbox—Key Facts and Figures about Afghanistan.” 3 November 2009.

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/ISL399330.htm>

³⁰¹ ACBAR Advocacy Series, Oxfam. Waldman, Matt. “Falling Short: Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan.”

March 2008. http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/ACBAR_aid_effectiveness_paper_0803.pdf

³⁰² ACBAR Advocacy Series, Oxfam. Waldman, Matt. “Falling Short: Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan.”

March 2008. http://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/ACBAR_aid_effectiveness_paper_0803.pdf

³⁰³ UN News Centre. “UN Mission Helping to Boost Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan.” 6 July 2009.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=31368&Cr=Afghan&Cr1=>

³⁰⁴ UN News Centre. “UN Mission Helping to Boost Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan.” 6 July 2009.

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=31368&Cr=Afghan&Cr1=>

Water Security

There are four hydrographic zones in Afghanistan: the northern basin including the Amu Darya area; the western region, which includes the Hari Rud and Murgab river basins; the southwestern area irrigated by the Helmand River, which flows into the Sistan swamps into Iran; and the eastern Kabul basin, which flows into Pakistan.³⁰⁵ Decades of war and internal conflict, however, have destroyed much of the irrigation system and infrastructure and



© Munir Squires
Warning sign at lake

weakened institutions that manage water resources. Additionally, Afghanistan suffers from regular, and long, periods of drought. The last drought lasted from 1997 to 2009, and was due to diminished snow packs, warmer temperatures, and low precipitation. Today, surface water in Afghanistan is reduced by 70%, causing a reduction of 60% of irrigated land. Floods, which are very common, cause damage to irrigation systems and destroy agricultural land and infrastructure. Afghanistan's water shortage is also due to inefficient and inappropriate use of basins, watersheds, and aquifers,³⁰⁶ as a result of poverty-related issues and tribal territorial conflicts.³⁰⁷

Afghanistan cannot meet its domestic, industrial, and agricultural water needs at current water levels. Water security is essential for the stability and prosperity of the nation, long-term sustainable development, and growth of the agricultural sector, which is almost entirely dependent on irrigation from rivers, canals, and wells. Water shortage is related to other larger concerns such as poverty, unemployment, economic development, food security, health, and limited energy (hydroelectricity) capacity. Agriculture employs about 80% of the population and accounts for more than half of the GDP.³⁰⁸ Ground water is also used for drinking, and contaminated water from floods causes serious health problems to millions. Infrastructure developments such as irrigation systems and dams also increase demand for water. Low water levels do account for lower poppy production this year. In addition, improved irrigation and drought-resistant seeds can increase alternative high value crop production and reduce the need to grow poppies.

Unfortunately, there are no comprehensive regional projects, hydrological data is limited or outdated, and the focus of the international community is not on water-related issues in Afghanistan.³⁰⁹ The return of millions of Afghans, increased agricultural production, and

³⁰⁵ The Encyclopedia of Earth. "Water Profile of Afghanistan." Jim Kundell, Ed. 28 June 2007. http://www.eoearth.org/article/Water_profile_of_Afghanistan

³⁰⁶ USAID. "Afghanistan Water, Agriculture, and Technology Transfer Project." No date. <http://afghanistan.usaid.gov/en/Activity.110.aspx>

³⁰⁷ Environment News Service. "Water Management Key to Lifting Afghanistan Out of Poverty." 8 July 2009. <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/jul2009/2009-07-08-02.asp>

³⁰⁸ Environment News Service. "Water Management Key to Lifting Afghanistan Out of Poverty." 8 July 2009. <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/jul2009/2009-07-08-02.asp>

³⁰⁹ East West Institute. Sturtewagen, Benjamin. "Improving Regional Cooperation on Water: The Helmand, Harirud, and Murghab River Basins." 28 June 2009. <http://www.ewi.info/improving-regional-cooperation-water-helmand-harirud-and-murghab-river-basins>

expanding industries have aggravated the water shortage during the period of drought. Afghanistan even recently reduced the water flow of the Helmand River into Iran, a country that is still recovering from the same reduction during the Taliban period.³¹⁰ The Afghan Ministry of Water and Power estimates hundreds of millions of dollars are needed to rebuild irrigation systems and provide flood protection. With international help, crop yields have increased (2009 saw historic wheat yields), irrigation systems and the six river basins have been rehabilitated, and hydrostations have been installed.³¹¹ A new Water Law, signed in April 2009, provides the basis for best practices for integrated water resource management.³¹²

Human Trafficking

Afghanistan is a source, transit, and destination country for human trafficking,³¹³ with well established links beyond Afghanistan that are also tied to the drug trade. Victims include men, women, and children who are trafficked in three main routes: to Afghanistan from Iran, Tajikistan, and China; from Afghanistan to Iran and Pakistan; and through Afghanistan from Iran and Tajikistan. However, over the past 10 years, Afghans have died en route to seeking jobs and security in countries all over the world. Men are trafficked mainly for forced labor and debt bondage. Women and girls are kidnapped or sold for commercial sex, forced marriage, or to settle debts or disputes. Young girls are also trafficked for carpet-weaving and domestic servitude. Young boys are kidnapped and sold for forced begging, commercial sex, debt bondage, terrorist activity, and domestic servitude. Children are also trafficked internally for bonded labor and forced begging. Reported child trafficking cases number over a hundred, but actual numbers may be higher.³¹⁴



© WFP/Nina Bergman
Afghan girl

Poverty, insecurity, a lack of social and economic opportunity, and high unemployment due to three decades of conflict and displacement are contributing factors to human trafficking in Afghanistan. Victims who are lucky enough to escape are ostracized and

³¹⁰ Press TV. “Afghanistan Stems River Vital to Iran.” 14 August 2009.

<http://www.presstv.com/detail.aspx?id=103501§ionid=3510212>

³¹¹ The World Bank. IDA at Work: Afghanistan. “New Irrigation Jumpstarts Farming... and Incomes.” September 2009.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTABOUTUS/IDA/0,,contentMDK:22311335~pagePK:51236175~piPK:437394~theSitePK:73154,00.html?cid=3001>

³¹² Asian Development Bank. “Water Resources Development Investment Program.” No date.

<http://pid.adb.org/pid/LoanView.htm?projNo=42091&seqNo=03&typeCd=2&projType=GRNT>

³¹³ Human trafficking is “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.” UN Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking. “What is Human Trafficking?” No date.

<http://www.ungift.org/ungift/en/humantrafficking/index.html>

³¹⁴ International Organization for Migration. Kaya, Katsui. “Child Marriage, Drug Smuggling and Forced Prostitution – An Afghan Trafficking Experience.” 12 April 2008.

<http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/media/feature-stories/featureArticleAS/cache/offonce/lang/en?entryId=20387>

find it difficult to reintegrate into society. To combat human trafficking, the Afghan government, working together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), passed legislation against human trafficking in July 2008. The Law on Combating Kidnapping and Human Trafficking includes identifying criminals and victims and provides reintegration assistance to victims.³¹⁵ However, progress is slow in preventing human trafficking, and cultural traditions surrounding modern-day slavery³¹⁶ makes it difficult to eliminate trafficking. Increased law enforcement, public awareness campaigns, victim protection services, and domestic socioeconomic opportunities are the recommendations for Afghanistan.³¹⁷ The head of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes recommends regional cooperation as well as more transparent border controls in the fight against trafficking.³¹⁸

Looking Forward

The situation has been complicated by the breakdown in law enforcement that has extended into the North. Taliban attacks are on the rise this year and more U.S. and international troops died in 2009 than in any other year. Civilian deaths, too, have seen a sharp increase in both Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2009. The Taliban are revising and improving their tactics and find new targets in recently constructed schools, roads, buildings, etc.³¹⁹ So far, the counterinsurgency strategy of the international community remains primarily military in nature. This has been criticized in some quarters.³²⁰ Only about one fifth of the 65,000 US forces in Afghanistan are engaged in Operation Enduring Freedom missions of securing reconstruction through Provincial Reconstruction Teams and training the army and the police.³²¹ Yet the goal of creating a stable society through investment in education and welfare, requires a degree of security that is absent in Afghanistan. In October 2009, the UN Security Council extended the NATO mandate for



Photo by ISAF Public Affairs
Young boys

³¹⁵ International Organization for Migration. Kaya, Katsui. "Child Marriage, Drug Smuggling and Forced Prostitution – An Afghan Trafficking Experience." 12 April 2008.

<http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/media/feature-stories/featureArticleAS/cache/offonce/lang/en?entryId=20387>

³¹⁶ Change.org. Kloer, Amanda. "Bacha Bazi: Afghan Tradition Exploits Young Boys." 2 November 2009.

http://humantrafficking.change.org/blog/view/bacha_bazi_afghan_tradition_expolits_young_boys

³¹⁷ U.S. Department of State. "Trafficking in Persons Report 2009: Afghanistan." 2009.

<http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2009/123135.htm>

³¹⁸ Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty. Siddique, Abubakar. "Afghan Container Deaths Reflect Wider Human-Trafficking Problem." 11 April 2009.

http://www.rferl.org/content/Afghan_Container_Deaths_Reflect_Wider_Human_Trafficking_Problem/1606823.html

³¹⁹ The Washington Post. DeYoung, Karen. "Taliban Surprising U.S. Forces with Improved Tactics." 2

September 2009. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/01/AR2009090103908.html>

³²⁰ The International Council on Security Development. "Countering the Insurgency in Afghanistan: Losing Friends and Making Enemies." February 2007. http://www.icosgroup.net/documents/Full_CI_Report.pdf

³²¹ Congressional Research Service. Katzman, Kenneth. "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy." 30 December 2009. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL30588.pdf>

Afghanistan to October 13, 2010. An additional 30,000 troops were ordered to Afghanistan by President Obama in December 2009.³²²

³²² BBC News. "Barack Obama Orders 30,000 More Troops to Afghanistan." 2 December 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8389778.stm>

Afghanistan in Fact and Figures³²³

Area:

total: 647,500 sq km (250,001 sq mi)

water: 0 sq km

land: 647,500 sq km (250,001) sq mi)

Border:

5,529 km (3,436 mi): (China 76 km (47 mi), Iran 936 km (582 mi), Pakistan 2,430 km (1,510 mi), Tajikistan 1,206 km (749 mi), Turkmenistan 744 km (462 mi), Uzbekistan 137 km (85 mi).



© CIA
Map of Afghanistan

Population:

31,889,923 (July 2007 est.)

Population growth rate: 2.625%

Infant Mortality Rate:

total: 157.43 deaths/1,000 live births

male: 161.81 deaths/1,000 live births

female: 152.83 deaths/1,000 live births (2007 est.)

Age distribution: (2007 est.)

0 – 14 years: 44.6% (male 7,282,600/female 6,940,378)

15 – 64 years: 53% (male 8,668,170/female 8,227,387)

65 years and over: 2.4% (male 374,426/female 396,962)

Population growth rate: 2.625% (2007 est.)

Fertility rate: 6.64 children born/woman (2007 est.)

Life expectancy: (2007 est.)

total population: 43.77 years

male: 43.6 years

female: 43.96 years

³²³ Information in this section is compiled from the CIA World Factbook.

(<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/af.html>), U.S. Department of State Country Guide on Afghanistan (<http://www.state.gov/countries>), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (<http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/climate/afghan>). All figures are 2007 estimates unless otherwise noted.

Ethnic groups: Pashtun 42%, Tajik 27%, Hazara 9%, Uzbek 9%, Aimak 4%, Turkmen 3%, Baloch 2%; Nuristani, Kirghiz, Pamiri and other 4%

Languages: Dari (official) 50%, Pashto (official) 35%, Turkic languages (primarily Uzbek and Turkmen) 11%, 30 minor languages (primarily Balochi and Pashai) 4%

Religions: Sunni Muslim 80%, Shi'a Muslim 19%, Hindu, Sikh, and other 1%

Literacy: (2000 est.)

total population: 28.1%

male: 43.1%

female: 12.6%

Country name:

conventional short form: Afghanistan

conventional long form: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

local long form: Jomhuri-ye Eslami-ye Afghanistan

Government type: Islamic republic

Capital: Kabul

Administrative divisions:

34 provinces: Badakhshan, Badghis, Baghlan, Balkh, Bamian, Daykondi, Farah, Faryab, Ghazni, Ghowr, Helmand, Herat, Jowzjan, Kabul, Kandahar, Kapisa, Khowst, Konar, Kondoz, Laghman, Lowgar, Nangarhar, Nimruz, Nurestan, Oruzgan, Paktia, Paktika, Panjshir, Parvan, Samangan, Sar-e Pol, Takhar, Vardak, Zabol



© CIA
Flag of Afghanistan

Independence: (national holiday)

19 August 1919 (from UK control over Afghan foreign affairs)

Constitution:

A new constitution was drafted between 14 December 2003 and 4 January 2004 and signed 16 January 2004.

Legal system:

According to the new constitution, no law should be "contrary to Islam;" the state is obliged to create a prosperous and progressive society based on social justice, protection of human dignity, protection of human rights, realization of democracy, and to ensure national unity and equality among all ethnic groups and tribes; the state shall abide by the UN charter, international treaties, international conventions that Afghanistan signed, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Suffrage:

18 years of age; universal

Executive branch:

head of government: President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is Hamid Karzai (since 7 December 2004). The president is both the chief of state and head of government. Former King Zahir Shah holds the honorific, "Father of the Country," and presides symbolically over certain occasions, but lacks any governing authority. The honorific is not hereditary.

cabinet: There are 27 ministers appointed by the president and approved by the National Assembly under the new constitution.

elections: The president and two vice presidents are elected by direct vote for a five-year term. If no candidate receives more than 50% of the vote in the first round of voting, the two candidates who received the largest number of votes will face a run-off. There's a two-term limit on the presidency. The last election was held in August 2009 and the next one is scheduled for 2014.

Legislative branch:

The bicameral National Assembly includes a House of People (*Wolesi Jirga*), with a maximum of 249 seats filled by direct election for five-year terms, and a House of Elders (*Meshrano Jirga*) with 102 seats. One-third of the seats are filled by provincial councils for four-year terms, another third is filled by local district councils for three-year terms and the remaining one-third is filled by presidential appointment for five-year terms. The first election was held in September 2005. The single non-transferable vote system did not make use of political party slates. Instead most candidates ran as independents. The next elections were held in September 2009 with a multi-party system in development.

Judicial branch:

The new constitution established a nine-member Supreme Court (*Stera Mahkama*). The justices are appointed for 10-year terms by the president with approval from the *Wolesi Jirga* and 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 has responsibility for investigating human rights abuses and war crimes.

Insurgent groups and leaders:

Jamiat-e Islami (Society of Islam), led by former President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

Ittihad-e Islami (Islamic Union for the Liberation of Afghanistan), led by Abdul Rasul Sayyaf. There are also small monarchist and communist groups.

International organization participation:

AsDB, CP, ECO, FAO, G-77, GUUAM, IAEA, IBRD, ICAO, ICCt, ICRM, IDA, IDB, IFAD, IFC, IFRCS, ILO, IMF, Interpol, IOC, IOM, ITU, MIGA, NAM, NATO, OIC, OPCW, OSCE, SACEP, UN, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, UPU, WCO, WFTU, WHO, WMO, WTO (observer), WTOO

Diplomatic representation from the U.S.:

Embassy: The Great Masood Road, Kabul

Mailing address: U.S. Embassy Kabul, APO, AE 09806

telephone: [93] 700 108 001

FAX: [00 93] (20) 230-1364

Natural resources:

Natural gas, petroleum, coal, copper, chromite, talc, barites, sulfur, lead, zinc, iron ore, salt, precious and semiprecious stones.

Agricultural products:

Opium, wheat, fruits, nuts, sheep and sheep derivatives

Industries:

Small-scale production of textiles, soap, furniture, shoes, fertilizer, cement; hand-woven carpets; natural gas, coal, copper

Exports:

\$274 million; note - not including illicit exports or re-exports (2006 est.)

Export partners: India 22.8%, Pakistan 21.8%, US 15.2%, UK 6.5%, Finland 4.4% (2006 est.)

Imports: \$3.823 billion (2006 est.)

Import partners:

Pakistan 38.8%, U.S. 12.3%, Germany 7.4%, India 5.2%, Turkmenistan 4% (2006 est.)

Airports: 46 (2007 est.)

paved runways: 12

unpaved runways: 34

Telephones - main lines in use: 280,000 (2005 est.)

Telephones - mobile cellular: 2.52 million (2006 est.)

Internet hosts: 21 (2007 est.)

Internet users: 535,000 (2006 est.)

Military branches: Afghan National Army (includes Afghan Air Force) (2006 est.)

Military service age and obligation: 22 years of age; inductees are contracted into service for a 4-year term (2005 est.)

Manpower available for military service:

males age 22-49: 4,952,812

females age 22-49: 4,663,963 (2005 est.)

Environment - current issues:

Limited natural fresh-water resources; inadequate supplies of potable water; soil degradation; overgrazing; deforestation (much of the remaining forests are being cut down for fuel and building materials); desertification; air and water pollution

Environment - international agreements:

Party to: Biodiversity, Desertification, Endangered Species, Environmental Modification, Marine Dumping. Signed, but not ratified: Climate Change, Hazardous Wastes, Law of the Sea, Marine Life Conservation