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Chapter 1 Profile

Introduction

Afghanistan—an extremely poor, landlocked country in South Central Asia—is a tribal nation. The rugged physical environment has had the effect of isolating communities, resulting in a great variety of customs and traditions, not only between but within tribal groups.¹ Ethnically, the country is home to Pashtuns, who are predominant in the south and southeast, and Dari-speaking ethnic Tajiks, Hazara, and Uzbeks, as well as other cultural minorities. Thus, Pashtun is an ethnicity with its own language, Pashto, while Dari is a common language spoken by multiple ethnicities, including Pashtuns who interact with other groups. For the most part, Pashtuns controlled power after Afghanistan assumed a form of statehood. Their culture, therefore, became synonymous with Afghani culture. Yet Dari is the language of administration and therefore Dari speakers have historically been well represented within the ranks of government.²



© Michael Foley
Hindu Kush mountains

Area

Afghanistan occupies a landlocked position in South Central Asia. Its northern border abuts the Central Asian countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. A large section of this border is formed by the Amu Darya River and its tributary, the Panj. At its far northeastern edge, at the eastern end of the Wakhan Corridor, Afghanistan shares a short border with China. The country shares its eastern and southern borders with Pakistan. On its western edge, Afghanistan borders Iran. As the country has no direct access to the ocean, the nearest coast lies on the Arabian Sea, about 480 km (300 mi) to the south.

Afghanistan extends approximately 1,230 km (770 mi) from west to east, and 1,000 km (630 mi) from north to south. Overall, the country is shaped roughly like a leaf, with the Wakhan Corridor in the country's far northeast forming the stem. In terms of total land area, Afghanistan is about the size of Texas. The country contains desert plains, rocky ranges, and snow-covered peaks that are a continuation of the western Himalayas.

¹ Government Publications Access, Paul V. Gavin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. "Afghanistan Country Study: Ethnicity and Tribe." 14 January 2002.

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

² International Crisis Group. "Afghanistan: The Problem of Pashtun Alienation." 5 January 2003.

<http://merln.ndu.edu/archive/icg/afghanistanpashtunalienation.pdf>

Geographic Divisions

Afghanistan can be divided into three distinct geographic regions: the Central Highlands, the Southern Plateau, and the Northern Plains.³ The Central Highlands include the Hindu Kush Range, which is the country's dominant mountain system. This mountain range extends in a southwestern direction from the Wakhan Corridor toward the center of the country. Spreading out from the Hindu Kush, a number of mountain chains extend throughout the country's eastern and central regions, with some ranges stretching westward to the Iranian border. High mountain passes are of great strategic value in the Central Highlands; they include the Shebar Pass and the renowned Khyber Pass, the gateway to the Indian subcontinent. The country's highest point, Nushaq Peak, is found in the Hindu Kush, at 24,577 ft (7,485 m).⁴

To the north of the Central Highlands lie the Northern Plains. Extending into Central Asia, this expanse of foothills and fertile plains is the site of heavy agricultural activity. There are also abundant mineral resources and natural gas deposits in this region. The country's low point 846 ft (258 m) is found in the Amu Darya Basin of this region.⁵ South of the Central Highlands, the Southern Plateau consists of varied desert and semi-desert terrain, including salt flats and dry, stony expanses. The soil of much of this region is infertile. The southeastern section of this region, known as Registan, is a sandy plain scattered with sand dunes and ridges.⁶

Climate

Afghanistan's climate is typical of a semi-arid steppe climate. In general, the country experiences extremely cold winters and hot summers.⁷ For example, summer temperatures can reach as high as 49° C (120° F), while temperatures in the dead of winter can descend to -9° C (15° F) and well below. There are, of course, regional variations, and temperatures may vary greatly over the course of a day. The northeastern mountain regions, for example, have an almost sub-



© Fired / flickr.com
Kabul in winter

arctic climate with dry, cold winters, whereas the regions on the Pakistani border may experience maritime tropical air masses with humidity and rain. In mountainous areas with high levels of snowfall, the valleys below have the potential to become snow traps as high winds carry much of the snow downward from the higher elevations. Strong

³ Cool Planet, Oxfam. "Afghanistan – Geography & Environment." 2007.

<http://www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/kidsweb/world/afghan/afghangeog.htm>

⁴ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Afghanistan." 9 October 2008.

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

⁵ Central Intelligence Agency. *The World Factbook*. "Afghanistan." 9 October 2008.

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

⁶ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. "Afghanistan: Land: Relief." 2008.

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/7798/Afghanistan#>

⁷ Windows on Asia, Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University. "Geography of Afghanistan." No date. <http://asia.msu.edu/centralasia/Afghanistan/geography.html>

winds, referred to as the “winds of the 120 days,” are a near daily occurrence in the southwest during the summer.⁸ Such winds may create dust storms.

Rivers

Although Afghanistan is located in an arid region, it still has abundant water resources owing to the region’s high mountain ranges. Over 80% of the country’s river water originates in the Hindu Kush Mountains, which collect significant snow fall.⁹



© Domingos Fernandes
River valley in Afghanistan

Amu Darya

The Amu Darya is the country’s only navigable waterway, traversing 1415 km (879 mi) in Afghanistan.¹⁰ It forms part of the Afghan border with neighboring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan before ultimately emptying into the Aral Sea, in Turkmenistan.

Kabul

The Kabul River, which covers a distance of 644 km (400 mi), rises to the east of the capital city and flows into Pakistan, where it joins the Indus River, a historic trade artery.

Helmand

The Helmand, Afghanistan’s longest river, flows 1,400 km (870 mi) before ultimately emptying into Lake Helmand, located in a swampy region near the border with Iran. The river’s tributaries are a major source of water for irrigation.

Hari Rud

The Hari Rud, measuring 1,127 km (700 mi), winds its way through the fertile valley of Herat, and eventually charts a northerly course, forming part of Afghanistan’s border with Iran.¹¹

⁸ Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. *A Country Study: Afghanistan*. “Chapter 2: The Society and Environment: The Natural Environment: Climate.” 1997. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+af0034\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+af0034))

⁹ Asian Development Bank. “Afghanistan: Issues, Constraints and Objectives.” 2005. <http://www.adb.org/Water/NARBO/2005/Training-Program/pres-AFG-grp1-NARBO-training.pdf>

¹⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online. “Amu Daryu.” 2008. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/21934/Amu-Darya>

¹¹ *Afghanistan in Pictures*. Bernke, Alison. “The Land: Rivers [p. 12].” 2003. Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Company.

Major Cities

Kabul

Situated at 1,800 meters (5,900 ft) above sea level, Kabul is one of the highest capitals in the world. Historically, its location within the strategic Khyber Pass made the city the object of invading forces. The local population is largely composed of Tajiks, who fill posts in the government and dominate the capital's commercial sector.



© Zane Edwards
Kabul hillside

Herat

Located less than 80 km (50 mi) from the Iranian border, the city of Herat was a point of conflict between Turkic and Persian empires for centuries. It was likely founded in 330 B.C.E. by Greeks who had come to the area under the rule of Alexander the Great. Its grid-like layout reflects its Greek origins.¹² Historically, Herat had strong ties to Persia and served as a stop on the Silk Road trade route.¹³

Mazar e-Sharif

Mazar e-Sharif was left relatively untouched by the warfare that engulfed Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion in 1980. It is home to the Shrine of Hazrat Ali, which occupies a large square in the center of town. The son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet Mohammed, Hazrat Ali, established the Shi'a branch of Islam before he was assassinated in 661 C.E. Whether his remains are housed in the shrine is a matter of dispute, but the site remains a significant draw for Shi'a Muslims.

History

Ancient and Colonial History

Humans have lived in the Afghan region for several thousand years. Historically, the area served as a crossroads for traffic between the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, and East Asia. Accordingly, various waves of migrating peoples and invading armies passed through the region, bringing trade and war. Many of these peoples followed an important trade route that cut through the Hindu Kush Mountains of modern-day Afghanistan. This route formed a section of what would later be known as the Silk Road.

The Persians were one of the first major powers to control the region. Later, in the 4th century B.C.E., Alexander the Great and his forces conquered the area for the Greeks. After several centuries during which various powers fought for control of the area, the Arab Muslims swept into the region in the 7th century C.E. They spread the practice of

¹² *World and Its Peoples*. Marshall Cavendish Corporation. "Afghanistan: Art and Architecture [p. 344]." 2006. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish.

¹³ Center for Contemporary Conflict, Naval Postgraduate School. *Strategic Insights*, Vol. III, No. 7. Johnson, Thomas H. "Ismail Khan, Herat, and Iranian Influence." July 2004. <http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/2004/jul/johnsonJul04.asp>

Islam, which remains prevalent in the area today. Several centuries of power struggles and turmoil followed, including a Mongol invasion led by Genghis Khan. Overall, throughout both the ancient and medieval eras, the Afghanistan region was subject to frequent incursions and conflict, as well as influxes of diverse cultures. Rulers often relied on Pashtun tribal militia for security while Tajiks dominated commerce and government administration.

In 1747, Afghanistan was created from a loose group of states when Ahmad Shah Durrani was elected to be *shah* (king) by an assembly (*loya jirga*) of Pashtun tribal leaders. Pashtun monarchs ruled Afghanistan more or less continuously from 1780. In the 19th century, the British, who were at the time based in their colonies in India, fought three Anglo-Afghan Wars. They were unable to completely subdue the country, although they exerted various levels of control on Afghan leaders.

Independence

Afghanistan became an independent state in 1919. Later, a Dari-speaking Tajik, who called himself Habibullah Khan, briefly assumed power. He came to the throne in 1929 with the backing of some Pashtun tribal leaders who were dissatisfied with the current king. The Pashtun tribes quickly rebelled under his rule, which lasted less than a year.¹⁴



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Habibullah Khan

The reign of the final king, Zahir Shah, lasted from 1933 to 1973. During a period of economic hardship, Zahir Shah was overthrown by a former prime minister, Sardar Mohammad Daoud. Upon taking power, Daoud abolished the monarchy, nullified the 1964 constitution which had allowed the establishment of political parties, and declared himself President of the new Republic of Afghanistan. His subsequent efforts to address economic problems failed to quell political instability. The People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a communist political party established under the 1964 constitution, reorganized with Soviet backing.

The Soviet Era

In April 1978, the PDPA overthrew the Daoud government in a bloody coup and established the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. Its Marxist agenda, which included the introduction of secular education for both boys and girls, quickly drew opposition from powerful families and clans due to its violation of Islamic norms.¹⁵ A friendship treaty with the U.S.S.R. provided the government with enough material support to stave off collapse. The PDPA government ceased following Moscow's advice, however, as the security situation continued to deteriorate. In December 1979, the Soviets dispatched large numbers of airborne troops to Kabul on the pretext of a training exercise. The

¹⁴ Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. *A Country Study: Afghanistan*. "Chapter 1: Historical Setting: Tajik Rule, January–October 1929." 1997. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+af0019\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+af0019))

¹⁵ The Virginia Quarterly Review. Brody, Alan. "Revisiting Afghanistan: A Conversation with Najibullah." January 2008. <http://www.vqronline.org/webexclusive/2008/01/02/brody-revisiting-afghanistan/>

existing head of state was killed and the Soviets installed a rival, Babrak Karmal. The Karmal government was unable to exercise its power beyond Kabul, and more Soviet Red Army troops were dispatched to maintain order.

The Pashtun tribes mobilized into multiple groups of resistance against this U.S.S.R.-backed government. The Soviet invasion also spawned a power vacuum that enabled non-Pashtun ethnic groups to assert their autonomy to a degree that was unprecedented in Afghan history. The Uzbeks reached accord with the Kabul regime, which allowed them a measure of independence in exchange for their support. The Hazaras, who occupy central Afghanistan, were largely left alone as long as they abstained from resistance activities.¹⁶ The Tajiks resisted Soviet occupation.

The number of resistance groups (*mujahideen*), however, stymied collective action, which was also undermined by competitive rivalry for international support from such countries as the U.S. and Pakistan.¹⁷ U.S.-administered support had the unintended effect of strengthening warlordism, as support went to regional commanders, who had their own militias, rather than to a centralized political authority.¹⁸

A 1988 agreement between the Afghan and Pakistani governments called for U.S. and Soviet non-interference in Afghan affairs, which led to a total Red Army troop withdrawal by 1989. The *mujahideen* were not involved in the agreement, which was known as the Geneva Accords, and they did not accept its terms.¹⁹ The Afghan communist government remained in power, and the civil war, waged with armaments that had been supplied by outside powers, continued in the absence of an occupying foreign power. The communist government finally fell in 1992, and from 1992 until 1996, the ethnic Tajik-led *Jamaiat-i Islami* party controlled the central government in Kabul. This elicited a Pashtun backlash that received support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the latter driven by a desire to curb Iranian influence.²⁰



© Mikhail Evstafiev
Soviet special forces in Afghanistan, 1988

¹⁶ International Center for Ethnic Studies. Ethnic Studies Report. Rais, Rasul Bakhsh. "Conflict in Afghanistan: Ethnicity, Religion and Neighbours." January 1999.

http://www.ices.lk/publications/esr/articles_jan99/Afghanistan-%20Rais,ESR,Jan%201999.pdf

¹⁷ The Heritage Foundation. Phillips, James A. "Afghanistan Three Years Later: More U.S. Help Needed." 27 December 1982. <http://www.heritage.org/research/MiddleEast/bg236.cfm>

¹⁸ U.S. Institute of Peace. Ollapally, Deepa. "Unfinished Business in Afghanistan: Warlordism, Reconstruction, and Ethnic Harmony." April 2003. <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr105.html>

¹⁹ Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan." October 2008. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

²⁰ Human Rights Watch. *Crisis of Impunity: The Role of Pakistan, Russia, and Iran in Fueling the Civil War*. "Chapter 3: Pakistan's Support of the Taliban." July 2001. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/afghan2/Afghan0701-02.htm>

The Taliban Regime

Throughout much of the 1990s, Afghanistan was consumed by turf wars. These conflicts brought the fighting to Kabul, which had been spared from such onslaughts during Soviet rule. In 1994, for example, an estimated 25,000 residents of the capital city lost their lives as a result of rocket fire and military assault.²¹ By 1996, the ultra-conservative Taliban were in control of most of the country, including Kabul. The group benefited from assistance from Pakistan's military and financial support from the Gulf States.

Taliban leaders were groomed in religious schools (*madrassah*) in Pakistan during the Soviet occupation. Their education occurred in an all-male environment removed from family life.²² Instruction was led by *mullahs* who often had minimal religious training.²³ (A *mullah* is a Muslim man educated in the religion of Islam and can be considered clergy as they can also lead community prayers.) While the leadership was Pashtun-dominated, the Taliban considered themselves above tribal politics, and viewed some tribal traditions as unacceptable deviations from Shari'a law while using others to recruit Pashtuns to their ranks.^{24, 25} The Taliban had three goals: 1) the establishment of an Islamic state; 2) the reunification of the country; and 3) the elimination of communist collaborators.



© Fired / flickr.com
Destroyed statues in Bamiyan

The society created under Taliban leadership denied Afghans their basic rights. Men and women who violated the strict code of behavior could be publicly flogged or subject to limb amputation. Schools for girls were closed, and women were banned from engaging in any type of work outside the home or even venturing out without a male escort. Many families, left without a male breadwinner, were forced into exile or complete dependence on charity.

In addition, the country's non-Islamic cultural heritage was destroyed. Afghanistan was home to the world's tallest Buddha statues (located in Bamiyan), but the Taliban regarded the spectacular statues as a form of idolatry implying that Buddha was equal to Allah. Despite international outcry, in 2001, the 1500-year-old archeological treasures were destroyed with explosives.²⁶

²¹ Human Rights News, Human Rights Watch. "Military Assistance to the Afghan Opposition." October 2001. <http://www.hrw.org/background/asia/afghan-bck1005.htm>

²² National Geographic Adventure Magazine Online. Junger, Sebastian. "The Lion in Winter." March/April 2001. <http://www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/0103/story.html>

²³ The Guardian UK. World News. Burke, Jason. "The New Taliban." 14 October 2007. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/oct/14/pakistan.afghanistan>

²⁴ Economist. "Afghanistan's Tribal Complexity: In the Dark." 31 January 2008. http://www.economist.com/world/asia/displaystory.cfm?story_id=10608929

²⁵ Military Review. Afsar, Shahid and Chris Samples, Thomas Wood. "The Taliban: an organizational analysis." May 2008.

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0PBZ/is_3_88/ai_n26671988/pg_1?tag=artBody;coll

²⁶ UNESCO World Heritage Center. "Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley." c.1992–2008. <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/208>

Mullah Mohammed Omar (Clerical Leader Umar) associated his Taliban movement with other radical Islamists, such as Osama bin Laden, and he invited thousands of terrorists and foreign Islamic fighters into the country. Only some mountainous enclaves controlled by the Northern Alliance, a resistance group largely comprised of Dari-speaking Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazara Shi'ites, remained outside Taliban control.²⁷ The Northern Alliance was led by Ahmad Shah Masoud, also referred to as "The Lion of Panjshir." By the summer of 2001, however, Taliban forces were poised to wipe out the Northern Alliance.²⁸

Osama bin Laden, a source of support for the Taliban, utilized Afghanistan as a headquarters for his Al Qaeda movement. During this time, he organized attacks on American targets all over the world, including the destruction of U.S. embassies in East Africa and the attack on the USS Cole in Yemen. U.S. efforts prompting the Taliban government to hand over bin Laden were unsuccessful. Moreover, it was unclear if bin Laden's activities could be effectively hampered by targeting his non-state actor sources of support.²⁹ The terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 changed Washington's position regarding Al Qaeda. They provoked widespread agreement on the need to destroy Al Qaeda's sanctuary in Afghanistan. Accordingly, Congress authorized President George W. Bush to launch Operation Enduring Freedom in order to remove the terrorist threat.



Courtesy of Wikipedia
Taliban border guard in Torkham

A Democracy Emerges

Operation Enduring Freedom began with air attacks on Taliban fighters and Al Qaeda camps throughout Afghanistan. The Taliban regime quickly collapsed, and many Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders were either killed or went into hiding. Afghan opposition groups assumed power and formed a transitional government. Under the tutelage of outside advisors, a new constitution was drawn up as part of the country's transition to democracy. On 9 October 2004, Hamid Karzai, head of the interim government, won the first democratic presidential election in Afghan history.

It was recognized early on that outside funding was crucial to rebuilding Afghanistan.³⁰ However, ongoing instability has made it hard to invest in communities that need it the most. That instability, moreover, has driven up the costs for aid donors, so less money is

²⁷ Council on Foreign Relations. Kaplan, Eben and Greg Bruno. "The Taliban in Afghanistan." 2 July 2008. http://www.cfr.org/publication/10551/taliban_in_afghanistan.html

²⁸ Program for Culture and Conflict Studies, Naval Postgraduate School. Johnson, Thomas H. and M. Chris Mason. "Understanding the Taliban and Insurgency in Afghanistan [p. 4]." Winter 2007. <http://www.nps.edu/Programs/CCS/Docs/Pubs/Understanding%20the%20Taliban%20and%20Insurgency%20in%20Afghanistan.pdf>

²⁹ Congressional Research Service, U.S. Library of Congress. Katzman, Kenneth. "CRS Report for Congress: Afghanistan: Current Issues and U.S. Policy Concerns." 15 November 2001. <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/7654.pdf>

³⁰ Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Afghanistan." No date. <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/ci/af/>

available for public health programs and other projects that would benefit the Afghan people.³¹

The resurgence of the Taliban has been an extremely troubling development, particularly since the group's downfall was widely celebrated in 2001.³² The extremist group has even been able to establish a presence in some areas in the north, where its support was never strong, even when it ruled the country.³³ This has been attributed to central governance failure.³⁴ As someone who spent time in the field observed, "much of what drives support for the Taliban is not support for their agenda or support for their objectives. It is grievance driven. It is grievances with a local government. It is grievances with the international community that is often perceived as supporting a corrupt or illegitimate provincial government."³⁵

Government

Over the past half century, the central government of Afghanistan has taken a variety of forms. These include a monarchy, various socialist systems, a communist regime dependent on outside support, and a theocracy.³⁶ Yet national leaders have never exercised much power outside the capital. As a scholar observed, "Despite all the efforts of twentieth century Afghan leaders ... the average Afghan paid far less attention to edicts from Kabul than to the words of his local mullah or tribal chief."³⁷



© John Asselin
Town elders in Kandahar

After a post-Taliban interim government had been in charge of the country for almost three years, Hamid Karzai was elected president of an Islamic Republic in October 2004. By the end of December 2004, President Karzai had selected the cabinet members for his government. Elections for Parliament were held in 2005. These democratic elections, unprecedented in the nation's history, occurred under relatively peaceful conditions since the Taliban opted not to oppose a process that had widespread public support.

³¹ The Virginia Quarterly Review. Garcia, J. Malcolm. "All The Country Will Be Shaking." Winter 2008. <http://www.vqronline.org/articles/2008/winter/garcia-country-shaking/>

³² U.S. Institute of Peace. Steele, Rachel Ray and Alexander Thier. "Hearts and Minds: Afghan Opinion on the Taliban, the Government and the International Forces." 16 August 2007. http://www.usip.org/pubs/usipeace_briefings/2007/0816_afghan_opinion.html

³³ National Public Radio. Nelson, Soraya Sarhaddi. "Attacks Spark Fears of Taliban Defeating NATO." 25 April 2007. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=9833660>

³⁴ MIT Press Journals. *International Security*, Vol 32, No. 4. Jones, Seth G. "The Rise of Afghanistan's Insurgency: State Failure and Jihad [p. 26]." Spring 2008. <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1162/isec.2008.32.4.7>

³⁵ Afgha.com. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. "Mistakes by Afghan Translators Endanger Lives, Hamper Antiterrorism Effort." 9 February 2008. <http://www.afgha.com/?q=node/8789>

³⁶ U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute. Metrinko, Michael J. "Elections in Afghanistan: Looking to the Future." January 2008. <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usacsl/publications/ElectionsInAfghanistan.pdf>

³⁷ *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Fall of the Taliban*. Tanner, Stephen. "Chapter Nine: The Soviets [p. 238]." 2002. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.

Yet the Karzai government has proved disappointing to many Afghans. Given the prominent role patronage has traditionally played in Afghan governance, the assumption is that any official will disproportionately support his own clan or tribe. Indeed, rampant corruption is cited as a reason for the breakdown in central authority that is imperiling the nation's future.³⁸

The August 2009 re-election of Karzai was riddled with allegations of massive voter fraud. The results were allowed to stand after his primary challenger, Abdullah Abdullah, pulled out of a special run-off election several months later. While Western critics of the Karzai administration focus on spiraling corruption, Afghans are more concerned with the government's inability to provide services.³⁹ Despite the flow of USD 35 billion in aid between 2002 and 2009, the majority of Afghans continue to live in poverty.⁴⁰ Parliamentary elections, originally slated for May 2010, have been postponed to September 2010. Far more powerful than parliament, which has limited constitutional authority to oppose the president, are the governorships that are filled by presidential appointment.⁴¹

Media

In stark contrast to the days of Taliban rule when television was banned as immoral, Afghanistan has a flourishing media. There are now more than a dozen independent television stations, about a hundred newspapers and scores of radio stations from which the majority of Afghans can get their news.⁴² These media outlets could be owned by foreign sponsors, private companies, provincial military forces, or by the government. Television programming consists mainly of shows and serials imported from India and other programming modeled after Western shows. Radio broadcast of foreign stations are aired from Kabul, including Deutsche Welle, BBC, Voice of America, and Radio France Internationale. Internet access, however, is scarce as is computer literacy.

Afghanistan has better media freedom than some other Central Asian or Middle Eastern countries. Freedom of speech and expression is guaranteed by the constitution and a 2005 law guarantees access to information from the government and prohibits censorship. Nevertheless, censorship exists due to broad restrictions placed on content that is deemed to be un-Islamic. Reporters continue to face



© Keith Stanski
Town elders in Kandahar

³⁸ The New York Times. Mazzetti, Mark and Eric Schmitt. "U.S. Study is Said to Warn of Crisis in Afghanistan." 8 October 2008.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/09/world/asia/09afghan.html?ref=todayspaper>

³⁹ Foreign Policy. Gedmin, Jeffrey. "Karzai Unhinged?" 9 April 2010.

http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/04/08/karzai_unhinged?page=0,0

⁴⁰ BBC News. "Corruption Contributes to Poverty-UN." 30 March 2010.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8595258.stm>

⁴¹ Congressional Research Service. Katzman, Kenneth. "Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Appointment." 11 January 2010. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS21922.pdf>

⁴² BBC News. South Asia. "Afghanistan Country Profile." 7 May 2010.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/country_profiles/1162668.stm#media

intimidation, harassment, threats, arrests, and even kidnapping by the government as well as the Taliban.⁴³ Media outlets may be fined or warned for violating regulations against un-Islamic content.⁴⁴ Journalists who run afoul of this regulation cannot rely on an independent judiciary for support.

In March 2010, the National Directorate of Security (the country's domestic intelligence agency) imposed a complete ban on local and international broadcast of live insurgent attacks, but lifted some of the restrictions in a resolution days later.⁴⁵

Economy

In terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world. Economic activity ground to a halt under the Taliban owing to road blocks and recurrent fighting. Although Afghanistan is rich in natural resources, such as fossil fuels and valuable minerals, these resources remain unexploited. Industrial production in Afghanistan is insignificant. Agriculture and animal husbandry constitute the bulk of the nation's economy. The country is famous for its exquisite hand-made rugs and carpets as well as for the production of *karakul*—silky wool produced from the pelts of Karakul lambs—which has received international promotion by President Karzai on his overseas trips.

In the 1960s and 1970s, attempts to modernize the Afghan economy resulted in a number of achievements. A number of countries, including the United States, the former Soviet Union, Germany, France, and Japan, provided financial, technological, and educational support to develop Afghanistan's infrastructure. As a result, a good road network, hydraulic power plants, sophisticated hospitals, and modern educational institutions were built. In the late 1970s, under the leadership of the country's communist party, Afghanistan attempted to develop a planned economy. Land was redistributed and people lost control over productive assets such as farms and factories.

Although Afghanistan was once self-sufficient in terms of agriculture production, over the last 50 years the country has suffered several devastating famines resulting from severe droughts. Furthermore, during decades of military conflict, much of Afghanistan's economic infrastructure has been destroyed. Millions of anti-personnel mines and other ammunition are buried throughout the country, making agricultural activities extremely dangerous. The majority of irrigation canals have been destroyed. With more than five million rural Afghans fleeing to neighboring countries, much of the country's arable land has fallen into a state of extreme disrepair.

⁴³ Reuters. "Afghanistan Eases Ban on News Coverage of Raids." 13 March 2010. <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE62C16M20100314>

⁴⁴ Freedom House. Freedom of the Press. "Map of Press Freedom." 2009 Edition. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&year=2009>

⁴⁵ Reuters. "Afghanistan Eases Ban on News Coverage of Raids." 13 March 2010. <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE62C16M20100314>

No reliable data exist on urban unemployment. Those who work in the informal economy, where many jobs are short-term, may be counted as either employed or unemployed. Construction is an area of growth that fuels a market for day laborers.⁴⁶

The most troubling economic development has been the resurgence of opium poppy cultivation, which had been effectively eradicated under Taliban rule.⁴⁷ After being toppled from power, the Taliban looked to poppy cultivation as another means to finance their insurgency.⁴⁸ Fighters sometimes lay down their weapons during April to assist in the harvest. Opium poppies proved to be the ideal cash crop for impoverished Afghan subsistence farmers, with successively larger harvests recorded until 2009. Eradication efforts by Coalition troops and the Afghan government have helped to reduce opium poppy cultivation and promote alternatives. Higher-than-average wheat prices and government initiatives in recent years led many Afghan farmers to devote more of their fields to planting wheat, but concerns remain about its lower relative profitability and the risks of focusing on a single alternative crop. Poppies remain highly profitable in many areas of southern Afghanistan, despite excess supply leading to lower prices. Poppy farmers still claim to earn 2-5 times as much profit from poppies as they do from wheat, despite the risk of losing their crops and the increased difficulty of finding buyers.⁴⁹ The aim of ongoing eradication efforts is to diversify and improve employment opportunities through alternative crops, better farming practices and infrastructure projects.⁵⁰



© Chuck Holton
Opium poppies in Hindu Kush

⁴⁶ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. "Afghanistan: World Bank Director Sees 'Staggering' Changes." 7 May 2007. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/05/deea145a-41b7-4151-a0f7-337ae314889c.html>

⁴⁷ BBC News (International Edition). "Record for Afghan Poppy Planting." 29 February 2008. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7271654.stm

⁴⁸ The New York Times. Times Topics. "Taliban." 19 October 2009. <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/organizations/t/taliban/index.html>

⁴⁹ BBC News. "Poppy Link to Afghan Bumper Crop." 5 June 2009. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/8084867.stm

⁵⁰ Christian Science Monitor. Arnoldy, Ben. "How US is Tackling Opium Trade Afghanistan Poppy Heartland." 12 January 2010. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2010/0112/How-US-is-tackling-opium-trade-in-Afghanistan-popy-heartland>

Ethnic Groups

The inhabitants of Afghanistan form a mosaic of different tribes and ethnic groups. The south of the country is mainly populated by the Pashtun tribes who speak Pashto, an Indo-European language. Pashtuns are divided into many subgroups, but there are two major tribes: the Ghilzai and the Abdali, who later renamed themselves the Durrani.⁵¹ Additionally, large populations of Pashtuns live across the border in Pakistan, where they constitute a majority in the North–West Frontier Province. A number of Pashtun tribes are nomadic. They engage in a continuous migration among the tribal areas that straddle the Afghan–Pakistani border. These distinctions notwithstanding, the Pashtun retain a strong sense of common identity which is bound by tribal law (*Pashtunwali*), a moral code that promotes honor and its defense.

In the eastern mountains live different ethnic groups with their own dialects. The Pashai are a group whose 2,000-year-old language was rendered in written form for the first time in 2003.⁵² The inhabitants of what was known as Kafiristan, “Land of the Infidels,” found their homeland incorporated into Afghanistan late in the 19th century when they were converted to Islam. The area was renamed Nuristan and its residents are referred to as Nuristanis.⁵³

In contrast to the Pashtun, tribal identities have largely broken down among Dari speakers, due to a variety of social processes.⁵⁴ The Tajiks, for example, live mainly in the mountains of the northeast and in bigger cities such as Herat, Kabul, and Mazar-e-Sharif. They organize themselves by lineage, ancestral region, and occupational group for those who have migrated to a city.⁵⁵ Within Afghanistan, there is a tendency to assume that all Dari speakers are Tajiks.⁵⁶ Often referred to as *Farsiwans*, (Persian-Farsi speaking), Tajiks are heavily represented in the ranks of the government, including the democratically elected Karzai government.⁵⁷

⁵¹ *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*. Rashid, Ahmed. “Introduction: Afghanistan’s Holy Warriors [p. 10].” 2002. United Kingdom: I.B. Tauris.

⁵² SERVE International. Yun, Ju-Hong. “Pashai Language Development Project: Promoting Pashai, Language, Literacy, and Community Development.” 2003. http://www.sil.org/asia/ldc/parallel_papers/ju-hong_yun.pdf

⁵³ *Our Women are Free: Gender and Ethnicity in the Hindu Kush*. Maggi, Wayne. “Chapter One: Getting There [p. 20].” 2001. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

⁵⁴ International Crisis Group. “Afghanistan: The Problem of Pashtun Alienation [p. 6].” 5 August 2003. <http://merln.ndu.edu/archive/icg/afghanistanpashtunalienation.pdf>

⁵⁵ *Afghan Women: Identity and Invasion*. Povey-Rostami, Elaheh. “Introduction [p. 5].” 2007. Zed Books.

⁵⁶ Government Publications Access, Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. “Afghanistan Country Study: Ethnicity and Tribe.” 14 January 2002.

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

⁵⁷ Center for Contemporary Conflict, Naval Postgraduate School. *Strategic Insights*, Vol 1, No 6. Johnson, Thomas H. “The Loyal Jirga, Ethnic Rivalries and Future Afghan Stability.” August 2002.

<http://www.ccc.nps.navy.mil/si/aug02/southAsia.asp>

The mountainous region of central Afghanistan is home to another Dari-speaking ethnic group, the Hazara. Most Afghan Shi'a belong to the Hazara group, who were treated particularly harshly under Taliban rule.⁵⁸ Bamiyan Province is the center of the Hazara region, an area that does not produce discernible amounts of opium.⁵⁹ The Uzbeks are another large ethnic group, living mainly in the north.



© www.vonbergen.net
Hazara men near Band-e Amir lake

They share the great plains of the north with the Tajiks, Turkmen, Aimak, Kyrgyz, and many other ethnic groups who have immigrated to Afghanistan from Central Asia. The Uzbeks and Turkmen speak Turkic languages.

Languages

Among the country's many ethnic groups (which are known collectively as Afghans), Dari and Pashto are the dominant and official languages.⁶⁰ Pashto speakers are found in large numbers in Afghanistan and northern Pakistan, and the use of the language is generally limited to these regions. Dari, by contrast, can be understood by anyone proficient in Persian-Farsi, which, historically, was spoken in an area that extended from the Middle East to India.⁶¹ The name Dari, in fact, dates back only to 1964, when King Zahir Shah, a Pashtun, grew concerned about the political and cultural ascendancy of neighboring Iran. In an effort to assert autonomy, he renamed Persian-Farsi "Dari," which is a "medieval literary synonym for Persian meaning 'the language of Court.'"⁶² The difference between spoken Persian-Farsi and Dari has been described as akin to the difference between European and Canadian French.⁶³

In the north, ethnic groups are fluent Dari speakers while the native tongue of those found in the south and southeast is Pashto. Although Pashto is the language of the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, Dari, the mother tongue of the second largest ethnic group, is the lingua franca of the majority of Afghans. It is generally necessary to speak Dari to communicate with others from different groups.

Dari's status has been reinforced by the fact that Afghanistan's literary heritage is primarily preserved in the Dari language. The 13th century epic "Mathnawi," which has been referred to as the "Persian Quran," was written in a language that is thought to be the linguistic forbearer of contemporary Dari. By contrast, Pashto speakers, who lived largely in isolation from outside influences, lack a literary tradition that is as extensive as

⁵⁸ BBC News (World Edition). Lak, Daniel. "Analysis: Afghanistan's Tribal Groups." 15 November 2001. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1658073.stm

⁵⁹ National Geographic Magazine Online. Zabriskie, Phil. "Hazaras: Afghanistan's Outsiders." February 2008. <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/02/afghanistan-hazara/phil-zabriskie-text.html>

⁶⁰ Cultural Orientation Project, Center for Applied Linguistics. "Afghans: Their History and Culture: The People." 30 June 2002. <http://www.cal.org/co/afghan/apeop.html>

⁶¹ The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research. Beeman, William O. "Persian, Dari and Tajik in Central Asia." November 2005. http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/nceer/2005_817_17g_Beeman.pdf

⁶² Tajikstanweb.com. "The Axed Persian Identity: Part III: Pashtunisation, a Stalinist Method." No date. http://tajikstanweb.com/280308_axed3.html

⁶³ Language Materials Project, Center for World Languages, UCLA International Institute. "Language Profile: Dari." No date. <http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/Profile.aspx?LangID=191&menu=004>

that of Dari. Nonetheless, Pashto literary tradition is rich in both oral and written forms, which began in the 16th century. “Wearana,” a famous Pashtun poem written in the 9th century, is an epic tale of honor and defense of the home.⁶⁴ The national poet of Afghanistan is Khushhal Khan Khatak, a Pashtun poet who lived during the 17th century.

The Taliban introduced the use of Pashto as the language of government administration.⁶⁵ While Pashto was quickly discarded after the regime was toppled, language remains a divisive issue in multi-ethnic Afghanistan. In February 2008, a reporter was terminated for using the Iranian Persian-Farsi word for “university” (*daneshgah*) rather than the Pashto term, *pohantun*. The latter term is engraved in the seal of Afghanistan’s oldest and most renowned institution of higher learning, Kabul University, where Dari is nonetheless the medium of instruction.⁶⁶ Those defending the journalist claim that Dari and Persian-Farsi are the same language and therefore he was not guilty of using a foreign word.⁶⁷ The problem was subsequently taken up by the parliament, which could not reach a determination and decided to convene a committee for further investigation.⁶⁸



© Keith Stanski
Pashtun man from Gardez

Language, in short, is at once a unifying but potentially divisive issue within the population of Afghanistan. In response to a proposal to create separate schools, a legislator voiced concern that creating separate classes for children according to mother tongue would only serve to deepen the divisions in Afghan society.⁶⁹ It is tempting to conclude that the controversies surrounding which language to use encapsulate the issues confronting the country as a whole.

⁶⁴ Christian Science Monitor. Prusher, Ilene R. “Language Also Shifts for Afghans.” 11 January 2002. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0111/p1s4-wosc.html>

⁶⁵ Eurasianet.org. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Alexe, Dan. “Taliban Forced Rift Between Country’s Two Main Languages.” 27 January 2002. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/culture/articles/pp012702.shtml>

⁶⁶ GlobalSecurity.org. Najibullah, Farangis. “Afghanistan: Status of Dari, Pashtu Languages a Sensitive Topic.” November 2003. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2003/11/mil-031103-rferl-154117.htm>

⁶⁷ Asia Media, UCLA Asia Institute. Arbabzadah, Nushin. “From Minor Spat to Cultural War.” 29 February 2008. <http://www.asiamedia.ucla.edu/article.asp?parentid=88221>

⁶⁸ News Blog, Chronicle of Higher Education. “What’s the Word for ‘University’ in Afghanistan? Parliament Can’t Decide.” 11 August 2008. <http://chronicle.com/news/article/4976/whats-the-word-for-university-in-afghanistan-parliament-cant-decide>

⁶⁹ Institute for War and Peace Keeping. “Politicians Argue Over Language Schooling in Kabul.” 22 November 2007. <http://www.iwpr.net/report-news/politicians-argue-over-language-schooling-kabul>

Chapter 2 Religion

Introduction

Religion is an important part of daily life for all Afghans, the vast majority of whom must pray five times a day. It is also one of the few unifying forces in this multi-ethnic nation, as most Afghans adhere to the Islamic faith.⁷⁰ The word “Islam” means “to submit” or “surrender.” Islam, like Judaism and Christianity before it, 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 God’s revelations made to Mohammad. Muslims worship their God (called *Allah* in Arabic) directly without the intermediary of clergy. In Afghanistan, the Sunni branch of Islam is the state religion.



© Luke Powell
Kabul man praying

The origins of the Sunni–Shi’a split lie in conflicting views as to how the successor to the Prophet Muhammad was to be chosen. Upon the Prophet’s death, Sunnis felt that leadership should pass to the person deemed by the community to be the best man for the position. Shi’a, by contrast, felt it should remain within the family. They believed Ali, Muhammad’s son-in-law and cousin, was his rightful successor. The Sunnis prevailed and chose the first successor (*caliph*) in accordance with their meritocratic criteria. While Ali became the fourth *caliph*, his succession followed violence that broke out between the disputants.⁷¹ Those who believe that Ali should have been the immediate successor are called Shi’a, short for *Shi’a-t-Ali*, or “party of Ali.” The issue continues to divide the two schools of Islam and remains a source of theological tension.

In general, conflicts between Afghan adherents of Sunni and Shi’a Islam have not proved destabilizing in recent times. However, an exception to this trend occurred under the Taliban when the Shi’a were treated very harshly. The Shi’a Hazara minority lives predominantly in Afghanistan’s central provinces, an area known as Hazarajat. Traditionally relegated to menial jobs, Hazara who move outside their historic homeland frequently complain of discrimination within the Sunni majority society.⁷²

⁷⁰ Government Publications Access, Paul V. Gavin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. “Afghanistan Country Study: Religion.” 14 January 2002. <http://www.gl.iit.edu/govdocs/afghanistan/Religion.html>

⁷¹ National Public Radio. Shuster, Mike. “The Origins of the Shia-Sunni Split.” 12 February 2007. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=7332087>

⁷² National Geographic Magazine Online. Zabriskie, Phil. “Hazaras: Afghanistan’s Outsiders.” February 2008. <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2008/02/afghanistan-hazara/phil-zabriskie-text/1>

Five Pillars of Islam

The five pillars of Islam provide the basis of Muslim life. They include faith in the oneness of God and the message of his prophet, Muhammad; daily prayer; almsgiving (*zakah*) to the less fortunate; self-purification through daylight fasting, especially during the month of Ramadan; and a trip to Mecca at least once in a lifetime for those who are able to afford it. Having become a Muslim, one cannot leave the religion.

Gender and Religion

Under the Taliban, women were banned from entering mosques, Islamic places of worship called *masjid* in Dari). After the Taliban government was overthrown in 2001, a request was made to allow women to worship in separate mosques. This presented difficulties from a theological perspective, because females are not allowed to assume the role of *mullah*.⁷³ Only in 2008 were females permitted to enter mosques in Kabul, and then only a select few, after separate worship facilities for women had been allocated.⁷⁴ Mosques in rural communities have yet to open their doors to female worshippers.

Places of Worship

Mosques play an important role in Afghan society. Every village in Afghanistan has at least one mosque. Friday is the one-day weekend and holiday for Afghans. Like Sundays for Christians, Fridays have an important religious significance. Muslim males are expected to participate in the Friday prayer and listen to special sermons from the *mullahs*. Foreigners should not interrupt the sacred Friday prayer (which takes place at midday), and they should, if possible, avoid entering mosques altogether during this time.



© Luke Powell
Mosque in Balkh

In Afghanistan, the village mosque is much more than a house of prayer. It is usually used as a school room for traditional Islamic education. Muslim boys typically attend a Quranic school (*madrassa*) prior to their formal education. In many villages, the local mosque is also used for community meetings and sometimes as a guest house. Travelers often stay overnight in mosques, and villagers provide them with food and drink. Foreign males may be invited into a mosque to meet with local leaders. Visitors should respect mosque etiquette and refrain from using bad language or smoking in the vicinity of the mosque.

Shrines

There are many sacred places and shrines throughout the country. The most important are the tombs of venerated holy figures, which are called *ziarat*. People believe that the *ziarat*

⁷³ IPS. "Afghan Elections: Women Get to Sing and Want a Place in Mosques." 29 October 2004. <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=26062>

⁷⁴ Asia Calling. Babakarkhail, Zubair. "Afghan Women Return to the Mosques." 27 September 2008. <http://asiacalling.kbr68h.com/index.php/archives/2001>

of a pious saint or martyr is a channel of communication with Allah, and they usually go to these places to pray for help. Foreigners may enter the *ziarat*, but they should be aware of the sacred and sensitive nature of these places. Mosque etiquette applies under these circumstances, as well.

Cemeteries

In both Islamic and Afghan traditions, a *shahid* (martyr) has special importance. When crossing cemeteries anywhere in Afghanistan, visitors will encounter many tombs that are distinguished with red or green flags. These are the final resting places of Afghan *shahid* who died defending their country and their beliefs.

Cemeteries are, of course, considered sacred places. Afghans do not walk over tombs, and visitors should follow this practice.

Behavior in Places of Worship

When foreigners visit a mosque, they should ask for permission to enter. They should also be aware of the dress code and other rules for entering a mosque.

Exchange 1: May I enter the mosque?

Visitor:	May I enter the mosque?	metawaanam dar masjid daaKhil shawam?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

Before entering the building under normal circumstances, visitors should remove their shoes at the doorway and place them in the designated area.

Exchange 2: Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?

Visitor:	Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?	metawaanam botahaayim raa dar daaKhil masjid az pahaayam beekasham?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

In Afghanistan, women traditionally do not visit mosques. Occasionally they may go to one of the larger mosques in certain cities to say prayers in a special women's section. If a woman does enter a mosque, she can have only her face, hands, and feet showing; her hair must be completely covered. Females should cover their heads with scarves before entering a mosque.



© Luke Powell
Afghan men at a mosque in Herat

Exchange 3: Do I need to cover my head?

Visitor:	Do I need to cover my head?	baayad saram raa beposhaanam?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

Muslims regard mosques as sacred spaces and they should be respected as such. Visitors should speak quietly and take care to not interrupt people who are praying. The space immediately in front of a person who is praying is considered sacred. Therefore persons should walk around rather than in front of people who are praying. Walking in front of them may invalidate their prayers.

Prayers

Muslims are obligated to pray at certain hours of the day, and congregational prayer for men in the mosque is encouraged. Foreigners should respect these needs, particularly during the Friday mid-day service, which is the most important one for Muslims.

Exchange 4: When do you pray?

Visitor:	When do you pray?	cheh waqt shumaa namaaz meeKhaneed?
Local:	We pray at noon.	dar waqt chaasht

Whether a man folds his hands during prayer or drops them to his side identifies him as either a Sunni or a Shi'a, respectively.

Religious Holidays

Islamic events and festivals are observed according to the Islamic lunar calendar, which is shorter than the standard Gregorian calendar that is used in the U.S. and internationally. The dates of these events on the standard calendar thus change from year to year.

Ramadan

Ramadan (or *Ramazan*) is the ninth and holiest month of the Islamic calendar. It is during this time that observant Muslims fulfill the third pillar of Islam, the undertaking of a fast. This period is an opportunity for Muslims to demonstrate their piety and devotion to the Islamic faith. Tradition requires that adults abstain from eating, drinking, and smoking, and sexual intercourse during daylight hours. Only after sunset are great feasts served. These fast breaking meals are called *iftar*. Only the young, the sick, pregnant women, and the elderly are exempt from fasting. All Muslims must avoid any wrongdoing during this time.



© Hamed Saber
Breaking fast after sundown

During Ramadan, many people spend their time performing extra prayer. This is also a time for giving charitable contributions to the homeless or to an established organization like a mosque or the Red Crescent Society, which is similar to the Red Cross. The majority of eating establishments are closed during the day, and work schedules are altered to enable workers to go home early.

The fasting period may affect some people more than others. They may become more irritable or fatigued. Foreigners should be aware of this and be prepared to show patience.

It is also important for foreigners to avoid causing embarrassment during Ramadan. They should not smoke, eat, drink, or chew gum in public during daylight hours.

Eid

Muslims celebrate Eid on two different occasions. *Eid al-Fitr* (“The End of the Fast,” sometimes called *Eid Ramazan*) is observed at the end of Ramadan. *Eid Qorban* (also called Eid al-Adha, “The Feast of Sacrifice”) is held at the end of the Mecca pilgrimage, or *hajj*. People celebrate their happiness and show forgiveness during the two Eid periods.

People throughout Afghanistan spend the three-day Eid holidays calling on their close friends and relatives. Each of these events is a time to put on new clothes and prepare large feasts. The extent to which Afghans are able to do this depends on their wealth. People go from house to house for short or long visits. To visit someone during Eid is to pay a great compliment, and the same goes for inviting someone to visit. These two Eid celebrations are considered holy and sacred.

Ashura

Ashura commemorates the martyrdom of Hussein ibn Ali, the son of Ali and grandson of Muhammad, who was killed in the Battle of Karbala in 680 C.E. amid power struggles for the caliphate. This day is recognized by all Muslims, but it is especially important to the Shi’a community, which views Hussein as the rightful successor to the caliphate. Ashura occurs on the 10th day of the Islamic month of Muharram, a period of mourning for Shi’a Muslims. During this time, Shi’a Muslim men may scourge themselves with various instruments until their backs bleed. Such acts of self-flagellation demonstrate the Shi’a belief that only physical pain can truly reflect the grief felt by the Muslim world when Hussein died. In Afghanistan, the celebration of Ashura is generally limited to areas with large Shi’a populations. In recent years, Ashura festivals in Afghanistan have been marred by conflicts between Sunni and Shi’a factions.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ CNN. “Violence Mars Ashura Festival.” 10 February 2006.
<http://www.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/asiapcf/02/09/ashura.wrap/index.html>

Chapter 3 Traditions

Introduction

Afghan society is deeply rooted in Islamic and tribal customs, many of which have been practiced for centuries. Ranging from basic manners of interaction to codes of honor and responsibility, these customs make Afghanistan a conservative, traditional society. Various attempts at social reform have been made in Afghanistan in the modern era. In many cases, such reforms were overturned following fierce resistance from the nation's tribal and Islamic fundamentalist factions.⁷⁶ During the Taliban's time in power, strict Islamic fundamentalism served as the basis for Afghan law and social behavior.



© Rob Bakker
Going to the market in Kabul

After the fall of the Taliban, social reforms have once again been implemented, but traditional and fundamentalist practices remain prevalent. Although attitudes vary throughout the country, such resistance to change demonstrates the strength of Afghan traditions. 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.

Greetings and Interactions

Afghans of the same sex hug and kiss each other on the cheek as a sign of affection. Hugging generally demonstrates concern and sympathy toward the other person. It is common to see Afghan men walking hand in hand; this is simply an act of friendship.

Exchange 5: Good morning.

Soldier:	Good morning.	sob baKhayr
Local:	Good morning.	sob baKhayr

If an Afghan places his right hand over his heart after greeting someone, that person should reciprocate the gesture.⁷⁷

Exchange 6: How are you?

Soldier:	How are you?	cheetoor asteed?
Local:	Thanks, very well.	tashakur, besyaar Khoob

Handshakes are also sometimes used as a greeting between Afghan men.

⁷⁶ Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State. "Background Note: Afghanistan." March 2010. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm>

⁷⁷ Communicaid. "Doing Business in Afghanistan: Afghan Social and Business Culture." 2007. [http://www.communicaid.com/access/pdf/library/culture/doing-business-in/Doing Business in Afghanistan.pdf](http://www.communicaid.com/access/pdf/library/culture/doing-business-in/Doing%20Business%20in%20Afghanistan.pdf)

Exchange 7: Good evening!

Soldier:	Good evening!	shabetaan Khosh!
Local:	Good evening!	shabetaan Khosh!

An Afghan's sense of personal space is different from that of most Westerners. Foreign visitors should not be surprised if someone of the same sex stands very close to them in a professional context. By contrast, distance should be maintained between unrelated people of the opposite sex.



© Munir Squires
Consultation over tea

Exchange 8: Hi, Mr. Hamidi.

Soldier:	Hi, Mr. Hamidi.	salaam aqaayeh hameedee
Local:	Hello!	salaam!
Soldier:	Are you doing well?	Khoob asteed?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

In Afghanistan, breaking eye contact is not seen as impolite or as indicative of dishonesty or ill will—it is a function of modesty. Afghans consider the act of looking someone straight in the eye as a sign of aggression. It may also be interpreted as an “evil eye,” which is considered extremely offensive. Members of the opposite sex do not look each other in the eye, including in some cases within the extended family.⁷⁸ Male foreigners should avoid making eye contact with Afghan women, since it will give serious offense.

Interacting with Women



© Wendy Tanner
Women in Kandahar market

Shaking hands with women is prohibited. Such an act will likely be considered offensive to them and their family members, especially those who live in rural areas. Usually Afghans politely say “*salaam*” to women with a small gesture or nod. Afghans generally call women “*syassar*.” An unfamiliar male should avoid addressing women directly. Instead he should communicate with them through their husbands or close male relatives.

It is a grave taboo for men to compliment women on their beauty, attire, or other related topics. Male foreigners need to be aware that this type of compliment to a female may offend her and her family unless the person voicing such sentiments is also female. By the same token, Afghan men do not like outsiders asking about their families, especially their wives and daughters. When socializing with Afghan colleagues, one should not ask detailed questions about their private lives, unless one is asking about the family as a whole.

⁷⁸ Centre for Intercultural Learning, Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Canada. Country Insights: Cultural Information. “Afghanistan: Communication Styles.” 14 June 2006. http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/intercultural_issues-en.asp?lvl=8&ISO=AF&SubjectID=2

Exchange 9: How is your family?

Soldier:	How is your family?	faameel taan cheetor ast?
Local:	They are doing fine, thank you.	Khoob astand, tashakur

Dress Codes

Afghans are a modest people. Women in rural areas still don a *burqa* or *chadri* when going out in public. Underneath, female attire includes a long dress, which may be exquisitely embroidered with different colored thread and fabrics, along with trousers. Shawls, made from sheep's wool, may be worn as the outer garment in cold weather.

Exchange 10: What type of head garb is that?

Visitor:	What type of head garb is that?	ee che qesem kolaa as?
Local:	It is a pakol.	yak pakol as

Men's everyday attire consists of a tunic-shirt, pants, and a turban head cover. These items are made from materials with solid, dull colors. To keep the turban in place, a cap is worn underneath. Young boys are socialized to wear the cap first, which they are allowed to personalize with items such as reflective mirror chips sewn into the design (*aiyna dozi*).⁷⁹



© Munir Squires
Different head coverings

Distinct from the turban, a *pakol* is a wool hat with a

thick band that rests on the head like a beret. Yet

another type of head covering is the Karakul hat, made from newborn sheepskin and popular with wealthier Afghan males; President Karzai wears one on a regular basis.

Male visitors are advised not to wear shorts in public nor take their shirts off, regardless of the temperature. Females are advised to wear attire that covers their arms and legs below the knee. It is also advisable to avoid wearing T-shirts with graphics or text that can be construed as offensive.

Exchange 11: Is this acceptable to wear?

Visitor:	Is this acceptable to wear?	posheeden een leebaas qaabele qabool ast?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

Hospitality and Gift Giving

It is very important for Afghans, regardless of their wealth, to show hospitality to all visitors. In rural Afghanistan, families of means build additional rooms with direct access from the outside. These rooms are called *hujra* (in the south of the country) or *qoshkhana* (in the north), and traditionally they are open to friends as well as strangers. In many villages, a stranger or a traveler could go to any of these houses and would be given

⁷⁹ Afghan Ethnic Dolls. "Traditional Clothes of Afghanistan." No date. [http://www.afghanethnicdolls.com/description pages/clothesofafghanistan.htm](http://www.afghanethnicdolls.com/description%20pages/clothesofafghanistan.htm)

shelter and food. A *hujra* more commonly serves as a meeting room for male members of the family to receive male friends.⁸⁰

Exchange 12: I really appreciate your hospitality.

Visitor:	I really appreciate your hospitality.	az mehmaan navaazee taan waaq'an tashakoR maykonam
Local:	It is nothing.	cheezee nees

Afghans try to show respect and sympathy for those who find themselves far away from home. Inviting someone for a cup of tea is the least an Afghan will do to show hospitality to a visitor. If visitors are offered a cup of tea when meeting Afghans, they should accept it. If they do not want to drink it, they may leave it without causing offense. However, it is customary for Afghans to drink three cups of tea at one sitting.

Exchange 13: This food is very good.

Visitor:	This food is very good.	een gheeza besyaar Khoob ast
Local:	It's Qorma-e Morgh.	qoormeh murgh ast

Afghans eat from a single big plate, and they use their right hand to take food from the dish, as well as to eat. The left hand is considered unclean and is reserved for activities associated with the bathroom. Therefore, even if guests are left-handed, they should not take food from the common plate with their left hand or use it to consume food. In general, Afghans do not use utensils, but they may offer foreigners a knife and fork. Eating with the utensils will not offend the host. It is also not considered offensive to ask if you may eat from a separate plate.



© Munir Squires
Afghan food

Exchange 14: What is the name of this dish?

Visitor:	What is the name of this dish?	naam een gheezaa cheest?
Local:	This is Qabili Palau.	een qaabelee palaw ast

The country's signature dish is steamed rice with raisins and carrots (*palau*). This dish is typically served with a side of meat, vegetables, or beans. A popular variant of this dish is *qabili palau*, which is served with lamb.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Pro-Quest K-12. "CulturGrams Regional Quiz." 2008.
http://www.proquestk12.com/bulletins/07NOV/CG_RegQ.shtml

⁸¹ iExplore.com. "Afghanistan Destination Guide." c.1999–2008.
http://www.iexplore.co.uk/res/dest_print.jhtml?destination=Afghanistan

Exchange 15: What ingredients are used?

Visitor:	What ingredients are used to make Qorma-e Morgh?	een qorma az cheh mowaadee saaKhta shoda?
Local:	It is the chicken “meat” sautéed in onions. Spices, tomato sauce and a little water are added to it.	gosht murgaha ast keh dar peyaaz sorKh shoda. masaale jaat, baadinjaan roomee wa kamee aab beh aan izaafa shoda ast

For Tajiks, hosting guests is considered an honor and necessitates a fine meal. One prominent dish (*osh*), is prepared by the male members of the household. It consists of rice, spiced lamb, and vegetables. It may also be served with flat bread that has been baked with a blend of several flours, accompanied by fruit, yogurt, and tea.

If a foreign visitor becomes friends with locals, they may offer that person a gift. It is important to accept the gift, but it is not mandatory to respond with a gift in return. When an Afghan offers a gift, it is to show his friendship.

Exchange 16: This gift is for you.

Local:	This gift is for you.	een toofa barayee shomaast
Visitor:	Thank you, but I cannot accept this.	tashakur, walee man een raa qabool kardan nameetowaanam

In any case, the presentation of a gift should be performed in a discreet and modest manner. Likewise, in Afghanistan, a gift is generally not opened in the presence of the person who offered it.

Weddings

In Afghanistan, marriages represent a merger between families, not a private union between individuals. As a result, parents choose their children’s partners. The groom’s family will pay a bride price, and the bride will bring a dowry of greater monetary value.⁸²



© Riffat / flickr.com
Putting henna on groom in Kabul

Under Taliban rule, the marriage ceremony was austere. Nowadays, these celebrations are full of color and as lavish as budgets permit. In the cities, they have become big financial burdens on the groom’s family, who pays for the often-lengthy celebration. Guests often bring their entire families.⁸³ In villages, it is necessary to invite everyone or risk losing face in the community.⁸⁴ Weddings reflect the specific characteristics of different Dari-speaking groups. For example, Tajik and Uzbek women wear embroidered dresses with distinctive designs. In the case of Uzbeks, the dress is

⁸² Matson Museum of Anthropology, College of the Liberal Arts, Pennsylvania State University. “Afghanistan: Land of Discord.” 2007.

http://www.anthro.psu.edu/matson_museum/afghanistan/afghanistan.shtml

⁸³ The Guardian. Walsh, Declan. “Afghan Weddings Bring Limos and Bling.” 20 August 2007.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/aug/20/afghanistan.declanwalsh>

⁸⁴ David Robinson. Save the Children in Afghanistan. “Day 3 - Belcheragh to Maimana.” 2005.

<http://www.robinsonville.net/Afghanistan/DayThree.htm>

made by members of the groom’s family and typically has a discernible human-face-pattern in the center.⁸⁵

Exchange 17: Congratulations on your wedding!

Visitor:	Congratulations on your wedding!	'arooseetaan tabreek!
Local:	We are honored you could attend.	baa mushaarakat taan ba maa ifteeKhaar baKhsheedid

The Hazaras also enter into a type of union known as temporary marriage (*seegha*), a practice that is banned by the Sunnis. Afghan refugees returning from Iran are said to have introduced the practice in their homeland, where it was formerly rare.⁸⁶ The ceremony is simple; one need only stand before a mullah, who pronounces the couple man and wife for a fixed duration. These unions may last anywhere from a few hours to many years. Not only is it an attractive alternative for men too poor to afford a traditional wedding, it enables war widows with children to create a household in the absence of any means to earn a living on their own.⁸⁷

Exchange 18: I wish you both happiness.

Visitor:	I wish you both happiness.	baraayee har doyeetaan KhoshbaKhtee aarozoo meekunam
Local:	We are honored.	baraayee maa ifteeKhaar ast

Funerals

In essence, Muslim burial rites are universal, regardless of ethnic affiliation. The deceased must be buried within 24 hours, and cremation is not an option. Bodies must be washed first, and in Afghanistan this is done by close relatives of the same sex. Burial takes place within 24 hours of death, but never at night. Corpses are positioned in the coffin so that the head faces Mecca. For some Shi’ites, graveside prayers include repeating the names of the twelve Imams.

Exchange 19: I would like to give my condolences to you

Visitor:	I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.	meeKhom ba shuma wa faameeltaan tasaleeyat begoyam
Local:	Thank you.	tashakur

Among the funeral customs specific to Afghanistan is the belief that no one should precede the corpse when it is carried to the burial ground. The funeral procession is

⁸⁵ Embassy of Afghanistan, Tokyo. “Life and Culture: Textile Handicrafts of Afghanistan.” No date. <http://www.afghanembassyjp.com/en/life/?pn=31>

⁸⁶ Institute for War and Peace Reporting. “Wife for a Night.” 20 November 2005. <http://www.iwpr.net/report-news/wife-night>

⁸⁷ Daily Times, Agence France-Presse. Najafizada, Shoib. “Temporary marriage catches on in Afghanistan.” 22 April 2006. http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2006%5C04%5C22%5Cstory_22-4-2006_pg4_24

simple; four men selected from among close family members carry the *bier* upon which the coffin has been placed. This is considered an honor and a meritorious act. It is also hard work owing to the Afghan belief that the body must be carried at a brisk pace to the grave so that the deceased may arrive quickly at a state of righteous happiness.⁸⁸

Exchange 20: Please be strong.

Visitor:	Please be strong.	lutfan Khood raa qawee nagahdaareed?
Local:	We will try.	maa kosheesh meekuneem

Celebrating with Guns

During celebrations it is not uncommon for Afghans to fire guns, especially in rural areas. For example, gunshots might be fired to mark the beginning or end of Ramadan, the first day of Eid, a marriage, or the birth of a child.

Many people have been killed or seriously injured by falling bullets, so onlookers should keep a safe distance. It is crucial to distinguish friendly celebration fire from hostile fire. If unsure, foreigners should ask a local about the reason for rifle fire.



© Vern Jenkins
Gun dealer in Kabul

⁸⁸ *A Dictionary of Islam*. Hughes, Thomas Patrick. "Burial [p. 44]." 1996. Laurier Books.

Non-Religious Holidays

The most important non-religious holiday in Afghanistan is *Nowroz*, or New Year. It is a celebration of the spring equinox, and it often lasts for more than a week. The major public celebration is held in Mazar-e Sharif. The holiday begins when the religious banner (*janda*) is raised in the courtyard of the city's famous blue-domed shrine, thereby signaling the beginning of spring. For two weeks, until the *janda* is taken down in a closing ceremony on the 13th day of the New Year, tens of thousands of visitors, including Pashtuns from southern Afghanistan, descend on the city.



© Malthe Sigurdsson
New Year celebration

Exchange 21: Will you be celebrating the festival?

Soldier:	Will you be celebrating New Year.	shuma nawrooz raa jashin meegeereed?
Local:	Yes!	baleh!

The draw of celebrants is mixed. Shi'a pilgrims come to pay their respects to what is a holy place for them. Others make the journey purely to enjoy the merriment. Legend draws those desperately seeking disability cures to a makeshift structure located at the shrine's western wall, known as the House of Forty (*Chiba Khana*). They will sleep there every night of the holiday to be cured of whatever ails them or their children.⁸⁹

Buzkashi matches are also held during *Nowroz*. This is a game said to have originated with Genghis Khan, and it is played all over Central Asia. Within their country, Afghans regard Mazar-e Sharif as its true home.⁹⁰ The game is akin to rugby played on horseback; hundreds of riders (*chapandaz*) race each other while fighting for possession of a headless goat carcass. Announcers call out the name of the player judged to have obtained the carcass (something not necessarily obvious to the spectators), and this player receives a cash prize.

⁸⁹ Washington Post. Aizenman, N.C. "Persian New Year Celebrations Unite Afghans." 4 April 2005. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A23647-2005Apr3.html>

⁹⁰ Ground Report, IWPR. Ibrahimi, Sayed Yaqub. "Afghan Riders Saddle Up for Buzkashi Season." 28 April 2008. <http://www.groundreport.com/World/Afghan-Riders-Saddle-Up-for-Buzkashi-Season>

Do's and Don'ts

Do use your whole hand and motion inwards to summon someone.

Do keep the soles of your shoes hidden from public view when seated.

Do place your right hand briefly on your chest when greeting people; this gesture conveys humility and respect.

Don't use the OK sign, as it will be taken by some people as an obscene gesture.

Don't summon people by using a crooked finger.

Don't sit on a floor with your legs stretched out in front of you.

Don't point directly at Afghans; they consider this a rude gesture.

Don't wag your finger at somebody; this is perceived as threatening.

Chapter 4 Urban Life

Introduction

City populations in Afghanistan are a mosaic of people from different ethnic and tribal groups, many of whom fled the violence that engulfed rural Afghanistan under Taliban rule. With the return of millions of refugees since the fall of the Taliban, Afghan cities are experiencing a growth rate that is significantly higher than that of the country as a whole.⁹¹ For example, Kabul, which has no public sewage system, had a population of about one million in 2001. It is now home to an estimated five million people, a population that has severely strained the city's infrastructure and services.⁹² Already heavily burdened and short of resources, municipal governments often do not provide services to squatter settlements, as they lack legal status. However, a large percentage of city residents live in such makeshift communities.⁹³

Telecommunications

In 2001, Afghanistan had one of the lowest per capita telephone line installation rates in the world. The country lacked cellular phone service, and fewer than 40,000 land-line telephones were available to its population of about 26 million. Given that it was impossible to call between some provinces or even outside the country, the government moved quickly to facilitate a modernization program. This process involved making the Afghan market attractive to foreign investors, whose investment has topped USD one billion.



© Malthe Sigurdsson
Phone service in Kabul

Exchange 22: What is your telephone number?

Visitor:	What is your telephone number?	numreh teelifontaan cheest?
Local:	My phone number is 144-356-9573.	numreh teelifonam yak sado chiloo chaar sey sadoo penjo shash nawado panj haftaadoo se ast

By late 2009, however, Afghanistan had more than 12 million telephone subscribers, nearly all of whom used cellular phones.⁹⁴ Prices are continuously decreasing, and, as of 2008, more than 50% of Afghans had mobile coverage.⁹⁵ The five telecom networks

⁹¹ Global Security. "Afghanistan-Urban Areas." 25 February 2007. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/afghanistan/urban.htm>

⁹² IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Afghanistan: Unsafe Housing Puts Kabul Residents at Risk." 15 July 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=85286>

⁹³ Relief Web. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. "Urban Livelihoods in Afghanistan: Executive Summary." 4 October 2006. <http://reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/TKAE-6V63LH?OpenDocument>

⁹⁴ The Wall Street Journal. Trofimov, Yaroslav. "Cell Carriers Bow to Taliban Threat." 22 March 2010. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704117304575137541465235972.html>

⁹⁵ Bloomberg Businessweek. Lakshmanan, Indira A. R. "Mobile Phones Combat Taliban's Afghan 'Information Wastelands.'" 22 March 2010. <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-03-22/mobile-phones-combat-taliban-s-afghan-information-wastelands-.html>

operating in Afghanistan have even recently established their own trade association called the Afghan Telecommunication Operators' Social Association. Yet service has been targeted by Taliban insurgents in the south, where some providers turn off service at night so as not to risk destruction of their transmission towers. The Taliban's goal is to prevent villagers from receiving information that contradicts militant propaganda or transmitting tips to coalition forces. In short, control of cell phone service, one of the country's great success stories, has become part of the war.⁹⁶

Exchange 23: May I use your phone?

Visitor:	May I use your phone?	metawaanam az teelifontaan isteefaada kunam?
Local:	Sure.	baleh

Education

The 1964 Afghan constitution provided for free and compulsory education. However, a comprehensive level of enrollment has never been achieved, even when schools were open. This remains true today for urban residents, as the educational opportunities for children in cities depend on the financial status of their families. Children who live in squatter settlements are far less likely to be enrolled in school than those from families of means. Children from squatter families often times must work to provide for their family.



© The Children of War / flick.com
Kabul girls' school

Kabul University, Afghanistan's premiere institution of higher learning, sustained serious damage during the 1990s. As the frontlines of the civil war shifted toward the city, the campus was closed in 1992 and heavily mined.⁹⁷ The university reopened after the Taliban came to power, but classes were taught only in Pashto. When Afghanistan was liberated in 2001, the faculty resumed using Dari as the primary (and traditional) medium of instruction.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ *Wall Street Journal*. Yaroslav, Trofimov. "Cell Carriers Bow to Taliban Threat." 22 March 2010.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704117304575137541465235972.html>

⁹⁷ Times Higher Education. Aziz, Christine. "Kabul Campus Countdown." 12 April 1996.

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=93235§ioncode=26>

⁹⁸ Eurasianet.org. Alexe, Dan. "Taliban Forced Rift Between Country's Two Main Language." 27 January 2002. <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/culture/articles/pp012702.shtml>

Health Care

Health care resources are easier to deliver to urban residents than to Afghans who live in villages.

Exchange 24: Is there a hospital nearby?

Soldier:	Is there a hospital nearby?	dar een nazdeekee haa shafaKhaana wujood daarad?
Local:	Yes, in the center of town.	baleh, dar markaz shahr

However, the nation's health care system, which was destroyed by decades of conflict, needed to be almost entirely rebuilt after the overthrow of the Taliban government. Under that regime, medical services for the female residents of Kabul were severely curtailed.⁹⁹ In 2005, the entire country had only three teaching hospitals and eight professors to educate and train approximately 10,500 medical students.¹⁰⁰

Exchange 25: Is the doctor in?

Visitor:	Is Dr. Azizi in?	aqay, doktor 'azeezee tashreef daarand?
Local:	No.	neh

There is a particular need to train female doctors due to the cultural taboos associated with male doctors treating female patients. While many residents now have access to primary health care (including vaccinations), they lack access to most forms of costly secondary care, such as surgery or emergency treatment. These forms of treatment are often only available at private hospitals, which are too expensive for most Afghans.¹⁰¹

Exchange 26: Do you know what is wrong?

Visitor:	Do you know what is wrong?	meefahmeed keh pas cheeh qaraar ast?
Local:	No.	neh

Traffic and Transportation

Many countries, including the U.S., prohibit their nationals traveling on official business from flying Ariana, Afghanistan's state-owned airline, due to its poor safety record.

Exchange 27: Which road leads to the airport?

Soldier:	Which road leads to the airport?	kudaam sarak ba maydaan huwaay meerawad?
Local:	The road heading east.	sarakee keh be taraf sharq meerawad

⁹⁹ The Nation. Block, Max. "Kabul's Health Apartheid." 4 October 2001.
<http://www.thenation.com/doc/19971124/19971124block>

¹⁰⁰ Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. "Afghanistan's Emerging Health Portrait: A Dialogue with Afghanistan's Minister of Public Health." 30 August 2005.
http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=events.event_summary&event_id=140391

¹⁰¹ Reuters. Lyn, Tan Ee. "Afghanistan Struggles to Provide Decent Healthcare." 21 April 2008.
<http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSISL20255320080421>

Afghanistan has no rail service, although there are plans to construct short rail systems in certain parts of the country to connect with lines in neighboring countries like Iran and Turkmenistan.¹⁰² Construction of a 75 km (46 mi) railway from Uzbekistan to Mazar-e-Sharif began in January with a late 2010 completion date.¹⁰³ The railway, which passes through Hayratan, is of significant economic importance because nearly half of Afghanistan's imports pass through the city as well as humanitarian aid.¹⁰⁴ Afghanistan may soon become a regional trade and commerce hub.¹⁰⁵

Exchange 28: Is there another road we can take?

Soldier:	Is there another road we can take?	kodaam saRake dega as ke maa begeeReem ?
Local:	Yes, there is an alternative route.	baleh, eenja yak saRake degaam as

Since the fall of the Taliban, a tremendous surge in auto traffic has also posed safety concerns. During the Taliban era, only bicycles, taxis, and pick-up trucks were evident in Kabul's desolate streets.¹⁰⁶



© Malthe Sigurdsson
Bus in Kabul

Exchange 29: What street is this?

Visitor:	What street is this?	ee kodaam saRak as?
Local:	Dar ul Aman Street	saRake daaR lamaan

By 2005, an automotive census revealed that there were a total of 341,047 registered vehicles in Kabul, approximately two-thirds of which were small cars. Both males and females are now allowed to get a driver's license.

¹⁰² Railways of Afghanistan. "Tajik Rail Link Feasibility Study." 15 March 2010.

<http://www.andrewgrantham.co.uk/afghanistan/2490/tajik-links/>

¹⁰³ Asian Development Bank. Media Center. Wood, Philip. "Railway to Regional Integration." No date.

<http://www.adb.org/documents/feature-stories/2010/afg-railway.asp>

¹⁰⁴ Railway Gazette. News. "Construction of Afghan Railway Launched." 27 January 2010.

<http://www.railwaygazette.com/news/single-view/view/10/construction-of-afghan-railway-launched.html>

¹⁰⁵ Asian Development Bank. Media Center. Wood, Philip. "Railway to Regional Integration." No date.

<http://www.adb.org/documents/feature-stories/2010/afg-railway.asp>

¹⁰⁶ Washington Post. Associated Press. Gannon, Kathy. "Post-Taliban Kabul Blossoms for the Rich." 11

November 2006. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/11/AR2006111100615.html>

Exchange 30: Can you take me there?

Visitor:	Can you take me there?	metawaaned maraa ba aanja bebareed?
Local:	Yes, I can.	baleh metawaanam

In 2006, the country had an estimated 300,000 unregistered vehicles, almost all of which were located in the capital. The number of vehicles in the country continues to grow as an influx of foreign cash has fueled a thriving import business. Most imported cars are used and salvaged vehicles that often do not meet basic safety and emissions standards, thereby contributing to pollution. The high volume of vehicles and continuous road work have created immense traffic jams in the city.

Exchange 31: Where can I rent a car?

Visitor:	Where can I rent a car?	az kujaa metawaanam yek motar keraaya kumam?
Local:	Downtown.	dar markaze shaher

It can take several hours to drive across Kabul, especially as there are no more than a handful of working traffic lights.

Exchange 32: Is there another way to get to Jalalabad from Kabul?

Visitor:	Is there another way to get to Jalalabad from Kabul?	az Kabol kudam raa ba tarafe Jelaal abaad mera?
Local:	Jalalabad is east of Kabul.	jelaal abaad ba taRafe shaRqe kaabol as

Accidents are very common as many Afghan drivers are unlicensed and traffic rules are often neither obeyed nor enforced. The mixture of right- and left-hand-drive vehicles, pedestrians, cyclists, and military vehicles means that driving, or even walking, in the streets of Kabul can be very dangerous. Traffic in other Afghan cities is equally erratic.

Exchange 33: Where can I get a cab?

Visitor:	Where can I get a cab?	az kujaa metawaanam yek taksee begeram?
Local:	Over there.	az aanja

A new and unwelcome phenomenon has also become common in city streets: violent crime. Incidents of kidnapping, vehicle theft, highway robbery, and drug-related violence have been widely reported. In some cases, these acts have been carried out by persons masquerading as law enforcement officers. This onslaught of criminal activity has affected truck and bus routes and forced automobile drivers to take unprecedented security precautions.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Washington Post. Constable, Pamela. "As Crime Increases in Kabul, So Does Nostalgia for Taliban." 25 September 2008. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/09/24/AR2008092403339.html>

Exchange 34: Will the bus be here soon?

Visitor:	Will the bus be here soon?	sarwees be zoodee be eenjaa Khaahad reseed?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

Accidents involving foreign nationals may quickly escalate into confrontations. A deadly accident in 2006 in which a U.S. military convoy killed Afghan civilians sparked riots that quickly spread throughout Kabul.¹⁰⁸



© Malthe Sigurdsson
Kabul traffic jam

Restaurants and Dining

In Afghanistan, cutlery is not typically used for dining. Instead, food is taken exclusively with the right hand, and bread is often used as a scooping implement.

Exchange 35: Are you still serving breakfast?

Visitor:	Are you still serving breakfast?	hanooz ham naashta meedeeheed?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

Afghans eat three types of bread: *naan*, *obi naan*, and *lavash*. *Naan* is made from wheat and is generally an oval shape and baked. *Obi naan* is shaped more like a disk and has a thicker texture than *naan*. *Lavash* is distinguished by its thinness.¹⁰⁹

Afghan cuisine is noted for its moderate spiciness.

Exchange 36: May I have a glass of water?

Visitor:	May I have a glass of water?	metawaaneed yek geelaas aab be man beedaheed?
Local:	Yes, right away.	baleh, hameen haala

Soup (*shorwa*), made from a variety of ingredients, is a common accompaniment to a meal.

Exchange 37: I'd like some hot soup.

Visitor:	I'd like some hot soup.	kamee shorbaay garm meeKhaaham
Local:	Very well.	besyaar Khoob

Kebabs are also popular, with lamb the preferred meat. Kebabs are generally served with *naan*, not rice.

¹⁰⁸ International Herald Tribune. Gall, Carlotta. "Convoy Crash Sparks Riots." 31 May 2006. <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2006/05/29/news/afghan.php>

¹⁰⁹ South Asia Tourism Society. "Afghanistan: Food in Afghanistan." No date. <http://afghanistan.saarctourism.org/food.html>

Exchange 38: What type of meat is this?

Visitor:	What type of meat is this?	een cheh naw'a gosht ast?
Local:	Lamb.	goosfand

Afghans enjoy a variety of seasonal fruit, including melons from Mazar-e Sharif, grapes and pomegranates from Kandahar, and oranges from Jalalabad. They appear on menus according to availability.



© nabard19 / flickr.com
Ripe and juicy plums

Exchange 39: Do you have dessert?

Visitor:	Do you have dessert?	cheezee baraay pas az gheeza daareed?
Local:	Yes, we have <i>ferni</i> .	baleh, farnee daareem

As Muslims, Afghans do not consume alcohol or pork. The most common drink is tea (*chai*).

Exchange 40: I would like coffee or tea.

Visitor:	I would like coffee or tea.	man qahwa yaa chaay meeKhaaham
Local:	Very well.	besyaar Khoob

The custom in Afghanistan is for one person to pay the bill.

Exchange 41: Could you put this all in one bill?

Visitor:	Could you put this all in one bill?	hamee een haa raa dar yak soorat hesaab bigzaareed?
Local:	Okay.	baleh

This is traditionally done by the person who organized the meal. Paying individually is unheard of and could cause offense.

Exchange 42: Can I have my total bill, please?

Visitor:	Can I have my total bill, please?	metawaanam sorate hesaab kaamil raa daashte baasham?
Local:	Yes, of course.	baleh, yaqeenan

Exchange 43: Where is your restroom?

Visitor:	Where is your restroom?	tashnaabtaan kujaast?
Local:	That room to your left, over there.	aan utaaq dar daste chapetaan, aanjaa

Markets

Most city residents do their shopping at open-air bazaars.

Exchange 44: Is the bazaar nearby?

Visitor:	Is the bazaar nearby?	baazaar be eejaa nazdeek ast?
Local:	Yes, over there on the right.	baleh, anja dast raast

These markets are traditionally located in communities of craftsmen and skilled artisans.

Exchange 45: How much longer will you be here?

Visitor:	How much longer will you be here?	baraay cheh madatee dar eenjaa Khaaheed bood?
Local:	Three more hours.	seh saa'at deegar

In Kabul, the bazaar district sustained serious damage during the mid 1990s, when the historic center of the city served as a battleground for various *mujahideen* militias seeking control of the capital. During this time, the famous *Shor-e* (Noisy) Bazaar fell silent. It is now under restoration.¹¹⁰



© Munir Squires
Shor-e Bazaar in Kabul

Exchange 46: Can you give me change for this?

Visitor:	Can you give me change for this?	metawaaned een raa baraayam poole seeya beedaheed?
Local:	No.	neh

One of the main shopping areas in Kabul is *Kocha-e-Murgha* (Chicken Street).¹¹¹

Exchange 47: Do you accept U.S. currency?

Visitor:	Do you accept U.S. currency?	shuma daalar aamreekaayee raa qabool meekened?
Local:	No we only accept Afghanis.	neh maa faqat poole afghaanee raa qabool meekeeneem

¹¹⁰ BBC News (International Version). Dummet, Mark. "Restoring Kabul's Lost Beauty." 30 August 2006. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/5262142.stm

¹¹¹ The Embassy of Afghanistan. "About Afghanistan: Travel Information: Shopping: Handicrafts and Shopping." c.2006. <http://www.embassyofafghanistan.org/travel/travel8.html>

Bargaining is the norm for shoppers buying from merchants. It is not advisable to engage anyone in successive rounds of bargaining unless you intend to buy the item.

Exchange 48: Can I buy a carpet with this much money?

Visitor:	Can I buy a carpet with this much money?	ba een maqdaar pool metawaanam yek qaleen beKharam?
Local:	No.	neh

Vendors sell almost every conceivable item, including fur coats, carpets, jewelry, semi-precious stones, and dyes.¹¹²

Exchange 49: Do you sell shawls?

Visitor:	Do you sell shawls?	shuma shaal sarshaaneh meefroosheed?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

There is a smaller selection of imported consumer goods here than elsewhere in the region because few residents can afford the pricier items.

Exchange 50: Do you have any more of these?

Visitor:	Do you have any more of these?	az eenhaa deegar ham daareed?
Local:	No.	neh

Vendors and Beggars

Given the fact that many migrants from the countryside have been unable to find jobs, international visitors can expect to be approached by Afghans trying to sell them various items. These street vendors can be quite persistent salesmen, especially the young boys.

Exchange 51: Please, buy something from me.

Local:	Please, buy something from me.	lutfan, yek cheezee az man beKhareed
Visitor:	Sorry, I have no money left.	muta-asif hastam, pool peysham neest

Visitors may also encounter beggars, many of whom are women (likely widows) and small children.

Exchange 52: Give me money

Local:	Give me money.	beh man pool beedaheed
Visitor:	I don't have any.	man heech pool nadaaram

In November 2008, the Afghan government banned the practice of street-begging in Kabul, citing its ties to child abuse and prostitution. Among those who have since been arrested for begging are male drug addicts who have been deported from Iran and

¹¹² National Public Radio. Santamaria, Nathan. "Seeking Rare Dyes in a Kabul Bazaar." 13 June 2006. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5482955>

Pakistan. Despite the government's efforts to crackdown on begging, it remains widespread.¹¹³

¹¹³ IRIN, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Afghanistan: Crackdown on Kabul Beggars Continues." 10 September 2009. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=86089>

Chapter 5 Rural Life

Introduction

In Afghanistan, only 12% of the land is arable. Approximately 45% of the country consists of pasture land, which supports livestock owned by both settled farmers and nomadic herders.¹¹⁴ Historically, the primary obstacle faced by Afghan farmers was a shortage of water. In response, they developed a variety of techniques to capture and channel water to their crops. In the northern plains, dams were built in order to divert water into irrigation schemes.



© www.vonbergen.net
Farms in Bamiyan

Throughout much of the rest of the country, Afghans used a Persian irrigation technique known as *karez*, which involves an underground tunnel intersected by numerous vertical shafts running to the surface. Fed by the shafts, the underground canal collects runoff from the hillside and carries it toward the agricultural fields below. Both the dams and the *karez* demanded constant, laborious maintenance in order to function.¹¹⁵

War and prolonged civil conflict have left the Afghan irrigation infrastructure in total disrepair. Compounding the nation's problems, severe drought has hampered agricultural production for much of the last decade. After the Taliban was overthrown, the top priority was to reduce crop vulnerability to drought.¹¹⁶ This was done by introducing drought-resistant seeds and making efforts to repair the irrigation system. Further development of the agricultural sector must make conventional crop farming financially attractive. As an expert observed, "To stop poppy production [requires] more than just law enforcement. It's a complex [mix] of establishing the rule of law, building alternative livelihoods, building access to markets, education—and all of these things are very difficult to deliver in an unstable environment."¹¹⁷

Land Ownership

Afghanistan lacks a clear and consistent national policy for registering and validating land ownership claims. This is due in large part to the population's historical reliance on informal customs and local legal systems. However, a history of unjust land distribution policies—many of which benefited the Pashtun majority—has also complicated

¹¹⁴ Relief Web. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. Wiley, Liz Alden. "Land Rights in Crisis: Restoring Tenure Security in Afghanistan." 31 March 2003.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AllDocsByUNID/4aecf9d78aaba09cc1256d270042cf16>

¹¹⁵ Government Publications Access, Paul V. Galvin Library, Illinois Institute of Technology. "Afghanistan Country Study: Agriculture." 26 October 2006. <http://www.gl.iit.edu/govdocs/afghanistan/Agriculture.html>

¹¹⁶ South Asia Department, Asian Development Bank. "Rebuilding Afghanistan's Agricultural Sector." April 2003.

http://www.adb.org/Documents/Reports/Afghanistan/Agriculture/Rebuilding_Agriculture_Sector_AFG.pdf

¹¹⁷ BBC News (International Version). Leithead, Alastair. "Poverty Feeds Afghan Drugs Trade." 22 January 2008. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7201085.stm

matters.¹¹⁸ Due to the limited availability of land, property disputes have been a common cause of conflict within or between families, villages, and tribes. Such conflicts have often stoked ethnic or tribal tensions.

In the last three decades, this situation has worsened due to successive wars and frequent changes in government.¹¹⁹ Political and social upheaval led to large-scale migration and routine changes in official land tenure policy. Foremost, as many Afghans were forced to flee their lands, the status of their property often became unclear. In many cases, refugees have returned to Afghanistan to find their property inhabited or redistributed without their permission, typically by those who assumed “squatter’s rights” in the owner’s absence.

Stability is crucial to improving the situation of farmers. However, land disputes within villages are an ongoing issue. One complicating factor is that land tenure is subject to four distinct legal conventions that range from customary to civil law.¹²⁰ Over a quarter of rural households are made up of landless, disadvantaged people.

Exchange 53: Where do you work, sir?

Soldier:	Where do you work, sir?	saahib, dar kujaa kaar meekeneed?
Local:	I am a farmer.	man yek dehqaan astam

The legal support system of pasture ownership is not clear, and landlords have used this situation to secure claims on lands. Communal field and pasture disputes have often led to violent clashes as demand is usually greater than supply.

Exchange 54: Do you own this land?

Soldier:	Do you own this land?	shuma sahib een zaymeen asteen?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

¹¹⁸ Relief Web. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. Wiley, Liz Alden. “Land Rights in Crisis: Restoring Tenure Security in Afghanistan.” 31 March 2003.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/AllDocsByUNID/4aecf9d78aaba09cc1256d270042cf16>

¹¹⁹ IRIN News, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Afghanistan: New Report Identifies Land Disputes as a Major Source of Conflict.” 12 May 2003.

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=19920>

¹²⁰ IRIN News, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Afghanistan: New Report Identifies Land Disputes As a Major Source of Conflict.” 12 May 2003.

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=19920>

Self-Protection and Gun Ownership

Centuries of inter-tribal strife and conflict have left Afghanistan with a culture that is based on personal protection. At the same time, because the country lacks well-developed public transportation networks, it is not uncommon to find people walking between villages (*qaria*) at any time of day or night. During these treks, Afghans typically carry AK-47 assault rifles or other weapons.

Exchange 55: Are you carrying any guns?

Soldier:	Are you carrying any guns?	shuma tufangee baaKhood daareed?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

Most Afghan men in small towns and villages carry firearms throughout their daily routine, which includes working in the fields, herding sheep, or performing other farm-related chores. Most of these weapons are old and of Soviet-era origin, but an increasing amount of sophisticated modern weaponry, such as automatic weapons and mortars, can also be found. Most of these weapons are used for self-defense. Afghan militia men like to show their guns to other soldiers and will want to talk about guns. Soldiers should not be surprised if they are asked about their weapons or asked to comment on weapons that other men are carrying.

Gender Roles in Rural Areas

Women in rural areas typically have a limited public role in the various aspects of agricultural production, although their participation in such activities may vary according to family and region. They often tend the family livestock. They also engage in other activities that take place inside the household compound, such as washing and preparing seeds. In some cases, those who participate in outdoor work, such as planting and harvesting, may be stigmatized within the community. Men typically handle all matters involving money, including selling crops at the market, buying essential goods, and holding legal ownership to the family's assets.¹²¹ As a result, female-headed households are at much greater risk of falling below the poverty line.¹²² Thus, when presented with the opportunity, most rural women are eager to learn a skill, such as embroidery, that can provide a domestic-based income in the absence of a male breadwinner.¹²³



© Victoria Villalobos
Village women and girls

¹²¹ Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. Grace, Jo. "Gender Roles in Agriculture: Case Studies of Five Villages in Northern Afghanistan." March 2004.

http://www.areu.org.af/index2.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=100&Itemid=99999999

¹²² Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. Grace, Jo and Adam Pain. "Rethinking Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan." June 2004. <http://www.microfinancegateway.org/redirect.php?mode=link&id=22549>

¹²³ IRIN News, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Afghanistan: Rural Women Benefit from WFP's Food-for-training." 21 April 2004. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=24205>

Rural Health Care

After decades of conflict, the Afghan health care system was left in a state of disrepair, with poor national health care indicators in 2001.



© Michael Smith
Lab at a health clinic

Exchange 56: Please help me!

Local:	Please help me!	lotfan komakom koneen
Soldier:	Hold on. You will soon be seen by a doctor.	sabR ko ba zoodee daaktaR too Ra meebeena

Afghan maternal and infant mortality rates remain extremely high despite marked improvement. After the fall of the Taliban, addressing the lack of reproductive health care (most notably by training midwives) was a priority because almost all Afghan women give birth, usually multiple times. As a result of such efforts, the percentage of rural Afghan women who received professional medical care during pregnancy rose from an estimated 4.6% in 2003 to 32.2% in 2006.¹²⁴

Exchange 57: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a medical clinic nearby?	dar een nezeekahaa yek kleeneek tibe wujood daarad?
Local:	Yes, over there.	baleh, dar aanjaa

The majority of Afghans are served by small healthcare facilities that provide primary care and mobile health clinics. While the number of minors receiving vital childhood immunizations has increased, further progress has been stymied by continuing political instability in rural areas, among other factors.¹²⁵

Exchange 58: My arm is broken, can you help me?

Visitor:	My arm is broken, can you help me?	baazeeyam shikasta, metawaaned komakam kuneed?
Local:	Yes, I can help you.	baleh, man metawaanam shuma raa kumaka kunam

¹²⁴ Public Health News Center, Bloomberg School of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University. "Substantial Improvements Achieved in Afghanistan's Health Sector." 5 July 2007.

http://www.jhsph.edu/publichealthnews/press_releases/2007/Burnham_afghanistan.html

¹²⁵ International Development Association, The World Bank. "Millions Gain Access to Health Care in Rural Afghanistan." June 2007. <http://go.worldbank.org/9B2MX9BKU0>

Rural Education

Approximately one of every five Afghan women is literate. Opening schools for girls in rural Afghanistan was supposed to provide them with the education necessary to play a major role in the social and economic rebuilding of their country. While many regions of Afghanistan still have low female enrollment, there are areas that have seen notable improvement. For example, in Tajik-populated Badakhshan province, two thirds of girls now attend primary school.¹²⁶ As of early 2010, an estimated seven million Afghan children—including 2.6 million girls—were attending school. While this figure represented a huge increase from 2001, some five million children remained without access to education.¹²⁷

Exchange 59: Is there a school nearby?

Visitor:	Is there a school nearby?	dare een nazeekheehaa maktabee wujood daarad?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

Such social change threatens conservative interests, however, as Islamic fundamentalists such as the Taliban have sought to limit public education, especially for girls. Schools, some of which are housed in tents, have become a target for insurgents, and both teachers and students have been killed. Consequently, some parents keep their children at home due to safety concerns. This situation is especially relevant for girls, since female education is perceived as particularly reprehensible by those carrying out the attacks.



© jaxo2 / flickr.com
Girls attending classes in a tent

Exchange 60: Do your children go to school?

Visitor:	Do your children go to school?	atfaaletaan maktab meerawand?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

¹²⁶ IRIN News, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Afghanistan: Losing Hope - Women in Afghanistan.” 18 June 2007. <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=72775>

¹²⁷ RAWA News. “No School for Almost Half of Afghan Children.” 6 March 2010. <http://www.rawa.org/temp/runews/2010/03/06/no-school-for-almost-half-of-afghan-children.html>

Rural Transportation

Afghanistan has no rail system, and its road network is considered to be one of the worst in the world.¹²⁸ Decades of war, floods, and lack of proper maintenance have destroyed many roads and bridges, leaving large sections of the country physically isolated. Furthermore, many roads are not completely cleared of land mines and the risk of newly planted IEDs poses a continual danger to people, animals, and vehicles.



© Jeff / flickr.com
Horse-drawn cart

In terms of navigation, accurate maps have been published since the fall of the Taliban, and many topographical maps have been updated. It may be difficult to find an Afghan who can read a map, however. Most Afghans use rivers, creeks, mountains, deserts, and the directions of sunrise and sunset for reference when they travel. Distance is measured in travel time rather than in kilometers or miles.

Exchange 61: Do you know this area very well?

Visitor:	Do you know this area very well?	baa een atraaf be Khobee aashnaa asteed?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

Rural Markets

An important tradition in Afghanistan is the *roz-e-bazar*, or market day. At these regular gatherings, farmers can sell their marketable surplus and buy whatever resources or goods that they cannot produce themselves.¹²⁹ The *roz-e-bazar* usually takes place in the largest town or village in the region, typically either on Thursdays or Fridays, depending on locality. The regional *roz-e-bazar* is a market and meeting place, as well as a venue for the exchange of information between those who have few other opportunities to meet.

Market day typically draws large crowds. Those living in more remote villages must leave home very early in the morning, often in the dark, in order to reach the market before it opens, which usually occurs shortly after daybreak. Thus, the movement of large numbers of people and goods on market day is common.

¹²⁸ The World Bank. "Transport in South Asia: Afghanistan Transport Sector." c.2008. <http://go.worldbank.org/3058WF94E0>

¹²⁹ International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas. Fazl, Fazluddin. "The Dynamics of Agricultural Traditional Markets in Afghanistan." No date. <http://www.icarda.org/RALFweb/SSLPWF/RalfPresentations/2006/2nd RALF Workshop/3.ppt>

Who's in Charge?

In rural areas, local leaders may include tribal chiefs (*khans*), warlords, groups of village elders, or prominent religious figures, such as mullahs.

Exchange 62: Does your elder live here?

Soldier:	Does your elder live here?	reesh safeed yaa ra-eese qaryataan dar eejaa zendagee meekunad?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

Within the village, elders and/or mullahs are in charge of daily life.¹³⁰

Exchange 63: Can you take me to your elder?

Soldier:	Can you take me to your elder?	metawaaned maraa peeshee ra-aese qaryataan bebareed?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

Mullahs give sermons on Fridays, lead daily prayers, and officiate at rites of passage (marriages, funerals, etc.). Mullahs and elders also settle disputes within the community. It is always a good idea to first speak with the elder, or whoever the local leader may be. Asking for his assistance is best done by explaining your presence in the village.



© Ian Guest
Photographer speaking with a mullah

Exchange 64: Respected elder, we need your help.

Soldier:	Respected elder, we need your help / advice / opinion.	jinaab ra-eeseb, maa beh kumak / nasyhat / 'aqeeda shuma zaroorat daareem
Local:	Yes.	baleh

Checkpoints

Checkpoints are common in Afghanistan, and Afghans who travel are familiar with them. In fact, many of them may have encountered checkpoints administered by different regional leaders within close proximity of each other—the result of unclear jurisdictional boundaries.¹³¹

Exchange 65: Where is the nearest checkpoint?

Visitor:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	nazdeektareen nuqtay taftesh kujaast?
Local:	It's two kilometers.	doo keelo meter az eenjaa

¹³⁰ The Nation. Peer, Basharat. "The Long Life of the Frontier Mullah." 11 June 2008. <http://www.thenation.com/doc/20080630/peer>

¹³¹ The New York Times. Gall, Carlotta and Craig S. Smith. "A Nation Challenged: Warlords; Checkpoints as Flash Points: Rival Flags Stir Afghan Fear." 4 February 2002. <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9401E2DD133DF937A35751C0A9649C8B63>

In general, Afghans will anticipate the need to step out of the vehicle and show identification.

Exchange 66: Please get out of the car.

Soldier:	Please get out of the car.	lutfan az motor paa-een shaweed
Local:	OK.	Khoob

It may be necessary to ask for the car registration.

Exchange 67: Show us the car registration.

Soldier:	Show us the car registration.	waraqahaay jawaaz sa ray motor taan raa beh ma neshaan beedaheed
Local:	OK.	Khoob

Unrelated males and females need to be kept separate for body searches, which must be conducted by a person of the same sex.

Exchange 68: Is this all the ID you have?

Soldier:	Is this all the ID you have?	eenhaa hama waraqahaay haweet shumaast?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

Checkpoints are a target of insurgents, and Afghans tend to be intimidated by local enforcement agents of a different ethnic background.

Exchange 69: Why is traffic being stopped here?

Visitor:	Why is traffic being stopped here?	motaRaa cheRaa da eenja estaada meeshan?
Soldier:	This is a checkpoint.	ee jaaye talaashee amneeyatees

In military parlance, “escalation of force” refers to lethal checkpoint or convoy shootings in which targets are sometimes found, posthumously, to have posed no hostile intent. The inability of coalition forces to reduce such episodes remains a sensitive issue.¹³² Along with humanitarian considerations raised by non-combatant deaths, civilian loss of life can be used by militants to undermine support for the coalition’s mission in Afghanistan.

¹³² New York Times. Oppel, Richard. “Tighter Rules Fail to Stem Checkpoint Deaths.” 26 March 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/27/world/asia/27afghan.html>

Landmines

From the Soviets to the Taliban, numerous warring factions have made extensive use of land mines in Afghanistan. High estimates have placed the number of landmines scattered throughout the country in the millions, although more conservative estimates limit this figure to several hundred thousand.¹³³ There is also widespread abandoned and unexploded ordinance. At the present rate of demining, it will take decades before the roads and fields of Afghanistan can be considered safe. There are very few accurate mine field maps for the country. In many cases, only the locals know where the mine fields are located. In some places, these areas are marked with red-painted rocks, although many potentially dangerous areas remain unmarked.¹³⁴ Even in marked areas, floods and other climatic factors can change the location of land mines, making it difficult to pinpoint their exact location over time. Finally, not only open areas but entire abandoned villages and other structures may be mined. As of 2008, an estimated 70,000 Afghans had been injured or killed by land mines since 1990.¹³⁵



© Paul J. Warner
Landmine warning

Exchange 70: Is this area mined?

Soldier:	Is this area mined?	een saaha mayn daarad?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

¹³³ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Recknagel, Charles. "Afghanistan: Land Mines From Afghan-Soviet War Leave Bitter Legacy (Part 2)." 13 February 2004. <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1051546.html>

¹³⁴ Landmine Monitor, International Campaign to Ban Landmines. "Landmine Monitor Report 2007: Afghanistan." 6 November 2007. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2007/afghanistan>

¹³⁵ IRIN News, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Afghanistan: Mine Clearance Making Good Progress – UN Agency." 21 July 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=79351>

Chapter 6 Family Life

Introduction

The family is the essential unit in Afghan society, and its welfare and propagation are the central concerns of its members. As Afghanistan has historically lacked comprehensive public welfare, security, and education systems, the family has long served as the primary social support network for the Afghan people. As a result, extensive family networks are common. These networks serve the economic and social interests of the extended family or tribe, and they are often integral to political or commercial affairs. Nepotism, or the patronage of family members, is commonly practiced, and marriage is used as a means to build further alliances.¹³⁶



© Michael Foley
Afghan family on a bicycle

Because personal and familial honor are intertwined in Afghan culture, an individual's identity is closely tied to those of his or her family members. The reputation and actions of each family member reflect upon the family as a whole. Ideally, this creates a tight bond between relatives, but it can also have negative consequences, such as in the case of honor killings. Overall, the Western notion of individual self-sufficiency is neither practical nor socially acceptable in Afghan society. Living in a poor and conflict-ridden country, most Afghan families need the assets, labor, and support of all of their members. In many regions of the country, it is simply not possible to subsist on one's own.

The Typical Household

Afghans in rural areas live in extended-family, household compounds. Polygamy is permissible for Muslims, and some Afghan men have up to four legal wives, although such an arrangement is beyond the means of most men. With the exception of married daughters, who leave the home of their parents to take up residence with their husbands, children live in the same household as their parents. The family is usually headed by a senior male.

Exchange 71: Does your family live here?

Soldier:	Does your family live here?	faameel shama dar eenjaa zandagee meekunad?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

¹³⁶ *Culture and Customs of Afghanistan*. Emadi, Hafizullah. "Chapter 6: Family, Women, and Gender Issues: Concept of the Family [pp. 165-166]." 2005. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

While families in cities live in apartments, rural houses traditionally consist of a series of rooms built around an open courtyard. This is where children play, women cook, and family members socialize.

Exchange 72: Is this your entire family?

Soldier:	Is this your entire family?	een hama faameeltaan ast?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

Exchange 73: How many people live in this house?

Soldier:	How many people live in this house?	dar een Khaana chand nafar zandagee meekunad?
Local:	Ten.	dah

Status of Women

In rural areas, where conservative attitudes have held sway for centuries, females continue to endure harsh rules and restrictions. Historically, they were denied the opportunity to get an education, seek employment, or even leave the house without being accompanied by a close male relative. All of these practices were reinforced under Taliban rule. In some cases, the windows in their homes have been painted black to prevent strangers from catching sight of them. Many women still wear a *burqa*, called *chadri* in Afghanistan, when venturing out of the home. The *burqa* is an all enveloping ankle length cloak with a small mesh area covering the face. This reflects an ingrained sense of modesty as well as a fear of possible violent retribution for showing their faces in public.



© Barbara Millucci
Woman in Kabul

In the absence of any way to earn a living, many widows have no recourse but to beg in order to keep from starving. Estimates place the number of war widows in Afghanistan as high as 1.5 million. Western aid organizations have established initiatives to help these women become productive citizens by offering literacy classes and job skills training.¹³⁷ Others have been able to take initiative on their own. Within the ethnic Hazara community, for example, it has become relatively socially acceptable for women to work outside the home in order to help support the family. In Bamiyan, the capital city of Bamiyan province, where Afghanistan’s Shi’a Hazara minority predominates, there were 14 women on the police force in October 2008.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Christian Science Monitor. Montero, David. “Afghan Women Start Businesses, Help Reconstruct a Torn Nation.” 8 May 2006. <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0508/p04s01-wosc.html>

¹³⁸ The New York Times. Gall, Carlotta. “In Poverty and Strife, Women Test Limits.” 5 October 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/06/world/asia/06bamian.html?scp=1&sq=women%20afghanistan&st=cs>
e

Marriage & Divorce

Arranged marriages involving minors remain common, and early parenthood is the norm, despite laws that prohibit girls younger than 16 from marrying.¹³⁹ Islamic law grants men the right to a divorce by simply declaring their intent to dissolve the union three times.

Exchange 75: Are you married?

Soldier:	Are you married?	izdewaaj kardeheed?
Local:	No.	neh

More likely, an Afghan man will take a second wife, particularly if the first one is unable to bear children. The rights of women to end an unhappy marriage, often due to physical abuse, are less clear. For those who find their situation intolerable, suicide is often seen as the only way out, usually through self-immolation.¹⁴⁰

Should her husband die, a woman is expected to marry one of his relatives, such as a brother. If there is no available male to marry, the widow is left to her own resources. As an expert observed, “In Afghanistan’s patriarchal society, the death of a husband not only diminishes a woman’s economic independence but also damages her sense of social protection.”¹⁴¹

The Elderly

In Afghanistan, children are expected to look after their elderly parents, who usually live with their sons. Given that most families have lost various members throughout nearly three decades of warfare, some flexibility is necessary.

Exchange 76: Do you have any brothers?

Soldier:	Do you have any brothers?	shuma baraadar daareed?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

While men can retire from farm labor and be cared for, women continue to assist in running the house. Foremost, their duties include looking after and raising their grandchildren, and cooking. Furthermore, they are often responsible for the important task of ensuring that food staples are apportioned correctly in order that they last from harvest to harvest.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ BBC News (International Edition). Biswas, Soutik. “Women Under Siege in Afghanistan.” 20 June 2007. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6755799.stm

¹⁴⁰ BBC News (International Edition). Sargand, Payenda. “Pain of Afghan Suicide Women.” 7 December 2006. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/6196716.stm

¹⁴¹ Afghanistan Online. IRIN News, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. “Bleak Prospects for Country’s Estimated 1.5 Million Widows.” 30 January 2008. <http://www.afghan-web.com/woman/widows.html>

¹⁴² Federal Research Division, U.S. Library of Congress. Blood, Peter R., Ed. *Afghanistan: A Country Study*. “The Society and Its Environment: Family.” 2001. <http://countrystudies.us/afghanistan/57.htm>

Children

Afghanistan has some of the highest maternal and infant mortality rates in the world.¹⁴³ Cultural taboos and a lack of resources often prevent pregnant women from seeking medical attention outside the village. Roughly nine out of ten Afghan women give birth without professional assistance. Births often occur at home, where women in labor are frequently attended to only by female family members, who are unlikely to have had any formal training in midwifery.¹⁴⁴

Nearly one in five Afghan children will die before the age of five, with infants accounting for the majority of those deaths.¹⁴⁵



© Barbara Millucci
Afghan child with grandfather

While children are doted upon by family elders, misbehavior is often met with corporal punishment, with the goal of instilling respect for authority.¹⁴⁶ Mothers may be more indulgent toward boys in order to cultivate their loyalty, which will be tested upon the son's marriage. Both boys and girls contribute to the household from a young age. Boys, in addition to collecting firewood and watching livestock, may seek paid employment outside the home, while girls typically help their female elders in cooking, washing, and caring for younger family members.

Exchange 77: Are these your children?

Soldier:	Are these your children?	eenhaa atfaal shumaast?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

Parents generally recognize the value of education, and girls now have the opportunity to go to school. However, families remain reluctant to allow their daughters to continue their education beyond primary school if it necessitates leaving their village home.

Exchange 78: Did you grow up here?

Soldier:	Did you grow up here?	shuma dar eenjaa kalaan shodeheed?
Local:	Yes.	baleh

¹⁴³ Oxfam International. "Afghanistan: The Worst Place in the World to Give Birth – Photo Gallery." c.2008. <http://www.oxfam.org/en/campaigns/health-education/afghanistan-worst-place-world-give-birth>

¹⁴⁴ National Public Radio. Nelson, Soraya Sarhaddi. "Afghan Midwives Target High Infant Mortality." 10 June 2007. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=10919673>

¹⁴⁵ Washington Post. Associated Press. Straziuso, Jason. "Death Rate for Afghan Kids Drops." 4 November 2007. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/04/AR2007110400564.html>

¹⁴⁶ IRIN News, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Afghanistan: Domestic Violence Against Children Widespread – Study." 26 February 2008. <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportID=76949>

Naming Conventions

In everyday life, Afghans usually use only their first name. In formal situations, they are identified by both their first name and their father's name. Even if the first name has two or more parts, it is considered to be one first name. (Afghans do not use middle names.) For example, *Ahmad Youness walade Muhammad Moqim* translates to Ahmad Youness son of Muhammad Moqim. *Ahmad Youness* is the first name, and *walade* means "son of." The common pre-name, Abdul (and sometimes also Mohammad) is used before the first name and does not constitute a first name in and of itself.

Within the family and larger community, family members, particularly women, are sometimes referred to using a kinship name. For example, a woman has a son named Youness. Instead of using her first name, which would be impolite and disrespectful, she would be referred to, and even addressed as, "mother of Youness." It is also considered polite to address older men as *baaba* (father) or *kakaa* (uncle). Honorific titles are given to those who have earned it and it is important to address such men with their titles, such as *Haji Mustafa* or *Mullah Ali*.

Exchange 79: Are these people related to you?

Soldier:	Are these people related to you?	ee maRdom ba shomaa Raabeta e daaRa?
Local:	These people are my family.	yaa faameelem as



© Keith Stanski
Teatime in Gardez

Nowadays, the practice of using a family name is becoming more popular among Afghans who have traveled abroad or have had contact with international visitors.¹⁴⁷ Some are using their tribe's name as their family name. Foreigners should be aware of possible spelling variations when transliterating names from Dari to the English alphabet. A name spelled differently on two documents may nonetheless refer to the same person.

¹⁴⁷ Center for Applied Linguistics, The Cultural Orientation Resource Center. Robson, Barbara, et al. *The Afghans: Their History and Culture*. "Language and Literacy." 2002.
<http://www.cal.org/co/afghan/alang.html>