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CHAPTER 1: PROFILE

Introduction

Although sparsely populated with approximately 5 million inhabitants, Turkmenistan was the fourth-largest state to be established after the demise of the Soviet Union (U.S.S.R.) in 1991.1, 2 Turkmenistan is a relatively new country, yet it has one of the world’s oldest cultures.3, 4 This strategic area has long tempted world powers including the Persians, Greeks, Mongols, Muslims, and Russians. Turkmen have proved resilient, maintaining tribal and clan loyalties and keeping cultural traditions largely intact despite frequent occupation and domination by foreign influences. Closely related to other Turkic peoples, the Turkmen have maintained a distinct identity.5

Shaped from the rugged deserts of Central Asia, life in Turkmenistan remains largely unchanged from centuries past. Essentially unknown to much of the world, the country remains isolated and poor.6, 7

Area

Turkmenistan is the southernmost of the Central Asian Republics. It borders the Caspian Sea 1,786 km (1,109 mi), Iran 992 km (616 mi), Afghanistan 744 km (462 mi), Uzbekistan 1,621 km (1,007 mi), and Kazakhstan 379 km (235 mi).8

Turkmenistan has a total land area of 488,100 sq km (188,456 sq mi), slightly larger than California and a bit smaller than Spain.9 It mostly comprises desert and steppe lands.10, 11 The Karakum desert occupies over 350,000 sq km (135,135 sq mi) or nearly 80% of the nation.12

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Central Asia’s Pamir-Alay mountain chain, where peaks reach up to 3,000 m (9,842 ft), extends into the far eastern part of the country. Dry and sandy slopes, plateaus, and sharply descending ravines characterize the Kopet-Dag range, nestled along Turkmenistan’s border with Iran.\(^{13}\)

**Climate**

The climate of Turkmenistan is classified as subtropical desert. Average annual precipitation is approximately 191 mm (7.5 in), but varies substantially within the country. The northeast typically receives less than 80 mm (3 in), while the Kopet-Dag mountains in the southwest can receive as much as 400 mm (15.7 in) annually. Precipitation occurs mainly from October through April, and little rain falls during the summer.\(^{14, 15}\)

Temperatures throughout the year range from 14–16°C (57–61°F), with wide variations across the country. Summers are dry and hot: temperatures below 35°C (95°F) are rare. Desert temperatures can soar to extremes of 50°C (122°F). Winter temperatures are much cooler. In the far southern regions near the Afghanistan border, temperatures can fall to −33°C (−27°F). Near Ashgabat, it rarely dips below freezing (0°C or 32°F). Summer temperatures in the north rarely rise above 32°C (90°F) and winter temperatures commonly range from −9°C to −7°C (16°F to 20°F).\(^{16, 17}\)

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15 Nicolai Orlovsky and Leah Orlovsky, “Water Resources of Turkmenistan: Use and Conservation” (paper, Jacob Blaustein Institute for Desert Research, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Sede Boker Campus, Israel, n.d.).


Bodies of Water

Amu Darya River

Formed by the convergence of the Pyandzh and Vakhsh rivers along the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border, the Amu Darya flows along the nation’s northeastern border. It is the longest river in Central Asia and primary source of water for Turkmenistan.\(^{18,19}\)

Filled with sediment and navigable by only small boats, this river has been heavily dammed. The water level is declining and is one factor related to the drastic shrinking of the Aral Sea.\(^{20,21}\)

Tejen River

Known as the Harīrūd in Afghanistan where it originates, the Tejen follows a 1,130 km (702 mi) course and marks part of the Turkmenistan-Iran border before flowing into the steppes south of the Karakum desert.\(^{22}\) Fed by mountain snowmelt, the primary flow is between March and May. During the summer months, the river bed is frequently dry.\(^{23}\)

Murgab River

The headwaters of the 978 km (608 mi) Murgab River are in the western Hindu Kush. From its origin it flows west and then north through Afghanistan before crossing the Turkmenistan border, where it ultimately is absorbed into the sands of the Karakum desert\(^{24,25}\). Increased concerns have been raised recently regarding the safety of the water drawn from the river. Because of its heavy concentrations of salt, the water has become undrinkable.\(^{26}\)

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Atrek

Originating in the Kopet-Dag mountains, the Atrek River becomes one segment of the border between Turkmenistan and Iran before flowing into the Caspian Sea, where it terminates in a boggy river delta. Since the end of the Cold War, the river valley has become of great interest to archaeologists, who have found connections between Middle Eastern and Central Asian cultures.

Karakum Canal

The rapid expansion of cultivation in the 1960s, coupled with scarce precipitation, leaves farmers heavily dependent upon irrigation to cultivate crops. The most important waterway is the Karakum Canal. Begun in the 1950s, construction was completed in the 1970s. It measures 1,400 km (870 mi) and traverses the length of the country. It is among the largest irrigation canals in the world.

Caspian Sea

Scholars disagree over whether the completely landlocked Caspian is a lake or a sea. Because it is landlocked, the law of the sea (which extends navigation rights to all states) does not govern its waters. Traditionally, it has been used only by the nations that border it: Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Iran. The Caspian has substantial proved oil reserves, although there is debate about exactly how much. The division of oil rights has proved contentious among border countries, and an agreement on seabed and maritime boundaries has

References:

29 Igor S. Zonn et al., The Caspian Sea Encyclopedia (New York: Springer, 2010), 43–44.
not been reached. This has stalled exploration. The Turkmenistan government has moved ahead on a multimillion dollar resort project on the shores of the Caspian, to attract tourism.

Having built a number of artificial lakes, Turkmenistan has started to build another in the Karakum desert. Known as Altyn Asyr, the first stage of the lake was completed in the summer of 2009. The new lake will supply necessary water and will feed into Ashgabat via a man-made river. The estimated time to completion is 20 years, and the ecological impact of this project has generated controversy.

Major Cities

Ashgabat

The capital, Ashgabat, has an estimated population of 637,000 and lies in the foothills of the Kopet-Dag. The city developed as a military fortress. A railway reached the area in 1885, leading to the growth of a town in which residents did not rely on agriculture for their livelihood.

The city was devastated by an earthquake in 1948 in which nearly two-thirds of the population perished. The Karakum Canal passes just north of the city and has been responsible for much of its prosperity. The canal forms a lake, which provides transportation, hydroelectric power, and recreational opportunities. The city is home to the Turkmen History Museum, with thousands of artifacts. Several important

schools are in the city, including the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan as well as agricultural, medical, and technical institutes.47, 48

Turkmenbashi

Turkmenbashi, formerly known as Krasnovodsk, is west of Ashgabat on the shores of the Caspian Sea. It was renamed in honor of the late President Saparmurat Niyazov, who bestowed the title Turkmenbashi (leader of all the Turkmen) upon himself.49 Built as a bridgehead for the Russian campaign to pacify Central Asia in a race against the British, it became the last stop for the Trans-Caspian Railway in the late 19th century.50, 51 The city has 16 km (10 mi) of shoreline on the Caspian Sea and is home to the largest port in Central Asia.52 It is the site of Turkmenistan’s largest refinery.53 Today, this cosmopolitan city is home to an estimated population of 86,800.54, 55

Dashoguz (Dashowuz)

Located at the northern end of the Karakum desert and on the oasis of Khiva, Dashoguz is the northernmost point of Turkmenistan near the Uzbek border. It was once a major stop along the Silk Road.56, 57 In modern times, the city has become an important agricultural and industrial center, housing 209,000 people.58 The waters of the nearby Amu Darya River, along with some of its tributaries, enable farmers to cultivate cotton and jute intensively.59, 60 The health of residents has been

affected by the drying up of the Aral Sea, which has introduced wind-borne saline debris into the air.61

Dashoguz is the only sizeable city in the northern part of the country. Its location close to the border with Uzbekistan explains its sizeable ethnic Uzbek population. Although it was an urban settlement dating to the Khanate of Khiva, the Soviets made it a modern administrative center. After independence, it assumed border functions that became more pressing because of the likelihood that subsidized Turkmen goods would be smuggled into Uzbekistan.62, 63, 64

Mary

Located on a large oasis in the Karakum desert close to the Murghab River, Mary is Turkmenistan’s most historic city. The city began as a settlement of the Oxus Civilization, as evidenced by Soviet archaeologist Viktor Sarianidi’s excavations of the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex.65, 66 This civilization flourished in Central Asia more than 4,000 years ago.67 Later referred to as Mouru in ancient Persian texts, it was a provincial capital of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. Alexander the Great took control in the third century B.C.E. and renamed it Margiana. After the Arabs gained control of the area in the seventh century C.E., the city was rebuilt as the capital of Khorasan and served as a base for Muslim proselytization.68 In the 11th century, the Seljuk Turks made it their capital, named Merv. Under the Seljuks, Merv became a repository of knowledge and learning, replete with libraries and madrassas.69 Subsequently plundered by the army of Genghis Khan’s son in 1221, residents were forced to

flee. It did not reemerge as an urban center until the Russians annexed it in 1887. In 1937, its name was changed to Mary by the Soviet government.

History
Turkmenistan’s history before the 20th century is that of a people and not a nation, and until 1924, the Turkmen were a nomadic people lacking political unity and national identity. The identity of its peoples was based on tribalism. There was no established nation before the 1920s, and no borders defined the area. What is now Turkmenistan has endured almost continuous invasions by its neighbors. Yet Turkmen culture has survived all attempts at conquest. The harsh geography served the Turkmen well, making the area difficult not only to conquer but to secure.

Scattered across a vast desert plain, the Turkmen depended for much of history on animal herding rather than agriculture. Chieftains established their bases at the local water source, since control of water resources conferred power. Groups frequently fought for control over the oases in an environment without centralized political authority. As nomads, the Turkmen prized mobility and viewed settled farming as an invitation to predatory behavior.

Early History
Disagreement exists about which people first inhabited the area now known as Turkmenistan. Around 6000 B.C.E., early tribes of goat herders occupied the lands near the Kopet-Dag mountains, along the Caspian Sea, or near the oases of the river valleys. The most likely speculation is that these peoples migrated from Mongolia or Siberia. The area fell under the
influence of the various kingdoms of the time including the Oxus civilization (of which little is
known), the Persian Achaemenid Empire, the Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great, the
Parthians of Iran, and the Sassanians from Persia, who ruled for over 400 years.81, 82, 83

Arab traders expanded commerce into Central Asia in the seventh century C.E. By the eighth
century, the Arab caliphate controlled the area between the Aral and Caspian Seas. It introduced
Islam to the inhabitants, who were assimilated into trade and cultural networks based in Arab
lands. Over time, Arab influence waned, but Islamic influence continued. The Oghuz Turks,
forbearers of ethnic Turkmen, had begun to migrate into western Central Asia, northern Persia,
and present-day Turkey.84 They established tribal confederations as well as the Seljuk Empire in
the 11th century.85 The area encompassing modern Turkmenistan, or parts of it, subsequently
came under the control of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane.86, 87 For several centuries, competing
Central Asian tribes exerted nominal control over the area. By the 18th century, the Persians
established authority over the southern half of present-day Turkmenistan, while the khanate of
Khiva controlled the northern half.88

The Russians and Czarist Colonial Rule

In the 19th century, Imperial Russia developed an interest in
Central Asia: specifically Turkmenistan. The Turkmen
established trade relations with the Russians while
simultaneously launching raids into their territory. This
provoked the Russians into a series of military attacks and the
establishment of military fortifications. Although the western
regions of Turkmenistan fell under Russian control by 1868,
tribes in the eastern and southern regions put up fierce
resistance. In 1881, the city of Gök-Tepe fell to the Russians, signaling an end to any meaningful
Turkmen resistance. By 1885, all Turkmen tribes had surrendered, and Turkmenistan became
part of Transcaspia, part of then-Russian Turkestan. Modern Turkmenistan’s southern borders

82 William Mark Habeeb, The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan
(Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 32.
83 Encyclopædia Britannica Online, “Turkmenistan: History,” 2011,
http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/610152/Turkmenistan/214562/History
84 Encyclopædia Britannica Online, “Turkic Peoples,” 2011,
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86 William Mark Habeeb, The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan
(Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 34–35.
88 William Mark Habeeb, The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan
(Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 34–35.
with Afghanistan and Iran were established during that time. For the next century, the fate of Turkmenistan was bound to that of the Russian Czarist government and later the Soviet socialist state.

Following the Russian revolution of 1917, the Transcaspian area witnessed many battles against the Bolsheviks. Ashgabat was captured in 1918, and by the end of 1920 most of Turkmenistan was under Bolshevik rule. The Soviet Union was formally established in 1922, and all Soviet territories were firmly under Communist rule. In 1925, Turkmenistan was formally renamed the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic with national boundaries that exist today. These boundaries were specifically drawn to fragment ethnic groups and to prevent any unification or threats to the Soviet government in Russia.

The Soviet Era

Though most Turkmen were indifferent to Soviet Marxism, some embraced it. This was significant because it signaled that identity was tied to place rather than tribe or clan. This marked the beginning of a new national identity. The unification of tribes through a common language substantially aided the nationalist agenda. Yet the primary legacy of nomad culture—groups based on genealogy—remained.

The Soviets set up collective farms on which everyone was expected to work, and those who resisted were often jailed or killed. Many Turkmen moved to the cities to work in state factories. This caused the demise of the traditional lifestyle of these once nomadic peoples. But many others fled into the Karakum desert or into neighboring Iran and Afghanistan. More than 1 million Turkmen became refugees.

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Workers from other Soviet republics and Russia were transferred into Turkmenistan. Although Turkmen were allowed to still practice Islam, the government established practices designed to limit religious influence and to promote the official atheist position of the Soviet Union. This angered the Turkmen, who staged a revolt in 1927 that was not fully defeated until 1932. Thousands of Turkmen were executed in the aftermath, and Turkmen communist leaders were installed. Many ethnic Russians were given government positions in the hope that Moscow could command their complete loyalty. The strategy was effective, and by the 1950s, an isolated Turkmenistan had become one of the most stable of the Soviet republics.98, 99

**Independence**


In 1992, the country adopted a constitution giving most power to the president. Niyazov was elected president and focused on creating the infrastructure for a new state, including a currency and a series of other economic reforms. Although the economy remained centralized, the new president courted international investment, particularly in the areas of oil and gas. Private property was once again made legal in 1997.102

Planned elections in 1994 were postponed, and Niyazov had his term as president extended until 2002. In 1999, the parliament declared him “President for Life,” and he held that position until he died of heart failure in 2006. During his tenure, Niyazov actively promoted a personality cult, even renaming the days and months, a moon crater, a horse breed, a canal, a city, and much more after himself and his family members. He chose to be known as “Turkmenbashi,” meaning “leader of all Turkmen.”103, 104, 105

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Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov was inaugurated as the new president in 2007. He has taken some steps to dismantle the cult of “Turkmenbashi,” but much of the former president’s influence remains.\textsuperscript{106, 107}

Recent Events

Turkmenistan has proceeded slowly on its path of reform since the death of Niyazov. Historically isolated from the rest of the world, even the former Soviet republics, Turkmenistan has begun to establish ties with the world community.\textsuperscript{108}

In 2008, the country approved a new constitution overhauling the government. The constitution gives greater powers to the president and the parliament, and introduces other democratic reforms.\textsuperscript{109} In 2011, further changes were adopted regarding who may run for president. Prospective candidates no longer need the approval of an advisory board established by then-President Niyazov. Instead, they must have either the backing of a political party or 50,000 signatures.\textsuperscript{110}

Breaking the virtual stranglehold of Russia on gas exports, Turkmenistan opened a pipeline to China through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Turkmenistan also rebuilt the East-West pipeline designed to provide even more gas to the Caspian Coastal Pipeline.\textsuperscript{111, 112} Later in 2010, the country opened a second pipeline to Iran, and expects to double annual exports to that country. The European Union is also considering building a gas link that will allow it to bypass Russia.\textsuperscript{113, 114}

Turkmenistan was alone among Central Asian republics when it did not offer airspace or facilities to the United States and coalition troops engaged in operations in Afghanistan in the


\textsuperscript{114} “Turkmenistan and Iran Open Second Phase of Key Gas Pipeline,” Energy Global, 29 November 2011, http://www.energyglobal.com/sectors/pipelines/articles/Turkmenistan_and_Iran_open_second_phase_of_key_gas_pipeline.aspx
wake of the 9/11 attacks. Citing its status as a permanently neutral country, the Turkmen government initially steered clear of any involvement. It gradually altered its position, allowing U.S. and NATO forces to use facilities in the country to conduct refueling and supply operations for the Afghanistan campaign.115, 116

Government

The government of Turkmenistan seems to be a secular democracy and a presidential republic; however, it functions without many checks on the president’s power. All formal opposition parties are banned. There are three branches: the legislative, judicial, and executive. But the parliament and the judiciary are largely under control of the president. The president is directly elected to a term of 5 years, and each president is limited to two consecutive terms. The president has the power to appoint governors, mayors, and Supreme Court justices. He can dissolve the parliament only if the 125-member body is unable to select a speaker. The parliament consists of a single house, the Mejlis, and members are elected to 5-year terms.117, 118, 119

Media

There is no freedom of the press in Turkmenistan. Governmental authorities monitor media outlets, run printing presses, and set editorial policies.120, 121 Although Turkmen were allowed internet access for the first time in 2008, all foreign-based opposition websites, as well as those containing any content critical of the government, are blocked. YouTube has been blocked since 2009. Most Turkmen connect to the internet at cyber cafes, where the fee for an ADSL subscription is an astronomical USD 7,000 a month for unlimited access and USD 25 for 1 MB of information.122

Turkmenistan has several radio and television stations.123, 124 State control over these broadcast media is nearly complete, and even Russian broadcasts are highly censored.125 Although

Berdimuhamedov promised reform regarding the press and freedom of expression, little has happened since he took office. Reporters without Borders has no hard data on the number of journalists in jail or in psychiatric hospitals, but it has documented some cases. At least one reporter was killed after being tortured in prison, and several others have been blacklisted after being detained.126

**Economy**

*Traditional Economy*

Traditionally nomadic, Turkmen were herders moving from one grazing site to another. Animals were the source of their food, clothing, materials for tents, and other necessities. Those tribes living near the sea were able to supplement their diets with fish. Though the tribes occasionally bartered with each other, they formed no organized economic system.127

Some tribes became more sedentary as they settled around the fertile oases or in the foothills, where rivers provided water for cultivating crops. This access to water allowed other basic industries and services to develop, including pottery and shopkeeping. Around 500 B.C.E., the Turkmen cities were part of the larger economy that flourished along the Silk Road. The majority of the people still depended on their traditional nomadic ways. Economic exchanges were confined mostly within tribes or clans. This system remained largely intact until the 20th century.128

The Russians sought to change the entire structure of the nation, investing in huge collective farms and a few state-owned factories. Many nomads were forced to work on these collectives or to move to the cities and work in the factories. Most farming focused on cotton, which was shipped to Moscow. When oil and gas were discovered, the Russians built pipelines to transport the resources to other parts of the Soviet Union. But few of the revenues from agriculture or oil and gas stayed in Turkmenistan, leaving it the poorest of all the Soviet republics. The demise of...
the Soviet Union was less disruptive to the Turkmen economy because of its heavy reliance on agriculture.\textsuperscript{129}

\textit{The Current Economy}

Today, nearly half of Turkmen are employed in agriculture, even though it accounts for only 8\% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).\textsuperscript{130} The most significant crop remains cotton, which is grown on nearly 50\% of all irrigated land. This makes Turkmenistan one of the top 15 cotton producers in the world.\textsuperscript{131}, \textsuperscript{132}

Although most of Turkmenistan is covered with desert, areas around the oases are intensively cultivated. The government is involved in efforts to diversify the agricultural sector, and wheat, fruits, and vegetables are becoming important crops.\textsuperscript{133}, \textsuperscript{134} Turkmen farms are no longer state-owned but are often collective. Most crops must be sold at prices designated by the state.\textsuperscript{135}

Only about 15\% of the nation is employed in industry, with oil and gas being the most important source of revenue for the nation. Turkmenistan is already one of the most important producers of natural gas in the world.\textsuperscript{136} New pipelines to China and Iran are increasing the nation’s export routes as well as raising revenues.\textsuperscript{137}

\begin{thebibliography}{999}
\item Economy Watch, “Turkmenistan Economy,” n.d., \url{http://www.economywatch.com/world_economy/turkmenistan/}
\end{thebibliography}
Ethnic Groups and Languages

Turkmenistan is largely homogenous, with 85% of the population classified as Turkmen. Other groups include Uzbeks (5%) and Russians (4%), and another 6% are Armenian, Kazakh, Tatar, and Ukrainian.138, 139

Turkmen

Ethnic Turkmen trace their origin to the mythical warrior Oghuz Khan, and are descendants of the Oghuz tribe.140 They are subdivided into tribes, and the two largest are further subdivided into regional branches that have little in common. The largest of these is the Teke. The Akhal Teke inhabit the Akhal region. This populous southern region of the country includes Ashgabat, the capital. The Mary Teke, traditional rivals of the Akhal, occupy the Mary region, which borders Iran and Afghanistan. The Yomut are similarly divided; the Western Yomut inhabit the Balkan region, bordering the Caspian Sea and Iran. By contrast, the northern Yomut predominate in the Dashoguz region bordering Uzbekistan.141, 142

The Turkmen largely follow the Sunni branch of Islam.143 They do not require women to wear a veil or to be secluded. Because of the economic structure, women were central players and, therefore, enjoyed more benefits. This tradition made the Soviet imposition of gender equality less radical and more easily adaptable to Turkmen society.144

Russians

Thousands of Russians relocated to Turkmenistan during the years of Soviet control. Many of them were brought in to fill administrative and other government positions. They became the upper class of the nation. But following independence, Turkmen regarded them as outsiders. Many held dual citizenship and were not welcomed by the new government. In 2003, President Niyazov eliminated dual citizenship, and many ethnic Russians returned to Russia. Turkmenistan has increased its animosity to ethnic Russians by banning Russian media, removing Russian

142 MaryLee Knowlton, Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 68.
144 MaryLee Knowlton, Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 69–70.
studies and Russian language from its educational system, and refusing to recognize degrees from Russian universities or institutions.145

Kazaks

The Kazaks are also a Turkic-language Muslim group. Formerly nomadic like the Turkmen, about 30,000 remain in the country. They live primarily in the areas bordering Kazakhstan. Their population is dwindling, by as much as two-thirds in recent years. Some villages that once housed many ethnic Kazaks now have few to none. Many ethnic Kazaks are choosing to emigrate to Kazakhstan. Recent estimates are that the population of Kazakhstan has swollen by nearly 700,000 from the migration. The Kazak language, like Russian, has been banished from Turkmenistan’s schools, which now teach only in Turkmen.146, 147 During recent years, non-Turkmen have been pushed out of power positions and have felt the sting of a hostile society.148

Uzbeks

Ethnic Uzbeks primarily occupy the region near the border with Uzbekistan. Relations between the majority Turkmen and Uzbeks have been strained. In 2006, the government closed all Uzbek-language schools and shut down the only Uzbek-language newspaper. In 2008, many ethnic Uzbeks were deported, which divided some families because not all members could obtain passports. A large number of Uzbeks still have only temporary residence and are at constant risk of deportation. They also bridle at the requirement that they must give up their native dress in favor of the Turkmen costume. Uzbeks feel there is a systematic attempt to destroy their language and culture.149

149 Institute for War and Peace Reporting, “Uzbek-Turkmen Talks Disappoint Both Ethnic Minorities,” Refworld, 21 October 2010, http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/topic,4565c2258,4565c25fe0e,4ee6731a1e0.html
Chapter 1 Assessment

1. The Amu Darya River flows out of the shrinking Aral Sea.
   False
   The Amu Darya River ultimately empties into the Aral Sea, although dams have diminished the amount reaching it.

2. The tribal nature of the economic activities of Turkmen culture remained largely unchanged until the 20th century.
   True
   Most economic exchanges were confined within tribes or clans. No general economic structure emerged between the groups, and this was practically unchanged until the 20th century.

3. The Turkmen government guarantees freedom of press.
   False
   There is no freedom of the press in Turkmenistan. Authorities monitor media outlets, censor websites, and have full control over editorial policies.

4. Nearly 50% of Turkmen are employed in the agricultural sector.
   True
   Nearly half of Turkmen are employed in agriculture, although this sector accounts for less than 10% of GDP. The nation is one of the top 15 cotton producers in the world.

5. Turkmen women are required to wear a veil.
   False
   Because of their essential participation in the economic endeavors of the tribes or clans, women were not secluded nor are they required to veil.
CHAPTER 2: RELIGION

Introduction

Islam came to Turkmenistan around the seventh century C.E. via Arab traders and traveling Sufi mystics. Because the Sufis allowed for a more personal form of Islam, local beliefs were more easily assimilated into the faith. The effect was that Islam developed as a more individual expression in Turkmenistan than in many other Islamic countries.150

Today nearly 90% of Turkmen identify as Sunni Muslim.151 A certain amount of religious intolerance exists within the country. But this stems less from religious beliefs than the legacy of Soviet atheism and the current government’s desire to strictly control expression. Turkmen have a history of tolerance and do not strive to regulate religious beliefs. Tribal affiliations still rule the nation more than religion. Unlike many countries, religious oppression does not arise from differences of religious beliefs but the government’s fear that Islamist groups may represent opposition.152

Religion has never occupied a central role in Turkmen culture, and people are much more flexible about appropriate behavior and modes of worship. Nor do Turkmen adhere to a strict Muslim doctrine or rely on formal observances and prayers. They practice a kind of folk Islam, based on the veneration of saints and infused with Sufi mysticism. Shari’a (Islamic) law often takes a backseat to the customary law of the Turkmen. Adapting their religion to include Soviet doctrine and the teachings of former President Niyazov has allowed them to successfully thwart attempts to eradicate Islam from the country.153, 154, 155

Pre-Islamic Religion

Little is known about the earliest indigenous religion of the Turkmen tribes. But as Persians expanded into the region, they brought another religion, Zoroastrianism, which became the official religion of the Sassanian Empire, including Turkmenistan. This religious influence waned as Arabs and Turkic tribes encroached, around the seventh century C.E. The Turkic tribes

were worshipping multiple deities when the Arabs introduced the monotheistic religion of Islam.\footnote{William Mark Habeeb, \textit{The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan} (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 70–72.}

Much of early Islam was spread by traveling Sufi mystics, and their practices relied more on an internal understanding of God and less on dogmatic interpretation of scripture. Sufism was more accommodating to local beliefs, and incorporating those into Islam’s religious practices allowed the tribes to more readily adopt it. Therefore, Turkmenistan’s Islam today has influences of Sufi mysticism not seen among more traditional followers.\footnote{Rafis Abazov, \textit{Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan} (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), 142–143.}, \footnote{David Tyson, “Shrine Pilgrimage in Turkmenistan as a Means to Understand Islam Among the Turkmen,” \textit{Central Asia Monitor—Online Supplement} 1 (1997), \url{http://www.uga.edu/islam/turkmen.html}}\footnote{MaryLee Knowlton, \textit{Turkmenistan}, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 91.}

**Sunni Islam**

Islamic faithful believe that the religion has existed eternally but has been revealed over time by a series of prophets—including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus—culminating with the Prophet Muhammad (570–632 C.E.). For Muslims, Muhammad’s message is the final and definitive revelation of the faith. The literal meanings of the Arabic term “islam” are “to submit” or “to surrender.” A Muslim, therefore, is one who submits to the will of Allah, or God, the sole creator of the universe. Allah’s message is contained in the Quran, the sacred scriptures of Islam, which were revealed to Muhammad and subsequently recorded and compiled in written form. The essence of this message is found in the shahada, the Islamic creed and the first of the faith’s “Five Pillars,” or fundamental duties: “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah.” Islam’s remaining obligatory deeds include the performance of daily ritual prayers (salat); the payment of a tax to support the Muslim community, particularly the poor and needy (zakat); fasting during the holy month of Ramadan (sawm); and undertaking a pilgrimage to the Islamic holy city of Mecca (hajj).\footnote{Encyclopædia Britannica Online, “Islam,” 2011, \url{http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/295507/Islam}}\footnote{BBC News, “Religions: Prophet Muhammad (570–632),” 7 August 2011, \url{http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/history/muhammad_1.shtml}}
**Islam in Turkmenistan**

Some have claimed that the Turkmen are not true adherents to the faith, despite Turkmen protestations. Some have even called the Turkmen form of Islam “a primitive pre-Islamic tradition dressed over in Islamic garb.”

But it is a blend of Sufi mysticism, early shamanism, and Zoroastrianism. Turkmen tradition included the concept of ancestor worship. Therefore, those who brought Islam to a community came to be thought of by Turkmen tribes as “community fathers.” Their burial sites became a place for the faithful to honor these Islamic founders, and the sites were soon regarded as shrines with sacred powers. Turkmen also believed that certain people had magical powers and would become saints. Their burial sites became sacred also. In modern Turkmenistan, these shrines retain great importance, and people often make pilgrimages in hopes of communicating with the departed spirits. Many of the shrines are for local saints who may be unknown outside a particular village. Pilgrims may come for any number of reasons: to ask for divine intervention to resolve problems, to ask for advice, or simply to pay homage.

A variety of ritual practices have emerged around visitations to these holy sites. One, the memorial meal known as *sadaka* and *kurban* (offering and sacrifice), underscores the importance of these two values to Islam. The concept of *hudaiyoli* refers to giving a meal at a shrine. Since most important shrines are equipped with cooking utensils and hearths, the meal is prepared and eaten at the shrine. Usually an animal is slaughtered, and family, guests, and other visitors share the meal. Leftover food is often given to the poor when pilgrims return to their homes. This giving of alms is also an important value of Islam and signifies that those who ate the meal made a symbolic pilgrimage.

**Other Religions**

Approximately 11% of the population adhere to religions other than Islam. Most of this segment is ethnic Russians who belong to the Russian Orthodox Church. A small Jewish community of approximately 2,000 people is concentrated in Ashgabat. In addition, there are

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also Armenian Apostolic Church followers, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Pentecostals, and other Protestant groups.\textsuperscript{169}

**Religion and Government**

The constitution guarantees freedom of religion. But in practice, this freedom is not fully realized. Religious groups must register with the government. Only Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodox groups have been accepted. Members of unregistered religions are not allowed to practice their faith in public, are forbidden to disseminate religious materials, and cannot recruit members.\textsuperscript{170, 171}

Tight controls on religious schools and institutions originate from the fear that religion will become politicized and threaten the government.\textsuperscript{172} It is this fear of Islam that has led to government support of the Turkmen version of Islam.\textsuperscript{173} Officials have tried to encourage Sufi traditions and blend them with the government’s ideas of nation building. President Niyazov, for example, reconstructed the mausoleum complex of Hoja Yusup Hamadani, a 12th-century Sufi scholar. This site is one of the important pilgrimage sites in the nation. In 2009, the government banned any Turkmen from making the hajj to Mecca, and asked them instead to go to one of the nation’s shrines—even paying for pilgrims’ accommodations.\textsuperscript{174} In 2010, the government reinstated its policy of approving 188 pilgrims to make the hajj to Saudi Arabia, despite being allowed 5,000 slots by the Saudi government.\textsuperscript{175, 176}

President Niyazov defined the national heritage of the country as Islamic.\textsuperscript{177} His successor Berdymuhamedov has not altered this stance and continues to refer to religious freedoms gained

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{169} United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, “USCIRF Annual Report 2011: Countries of Particular Concern: Turkmenistan,” Refworld, 28 April 2011, \url{http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,USCIRF,,TKM,4562d8cf2,4dbe90bec,0.html}
  \item \textsuperscript{170} MaryLee Knowlton, *Turkmenistan*, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 89.
  \item \textsuperscript{171} William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 75.
  \item \textsuperscript{174} The American Foreign Policy Council, “Turkmenistan,” *World Almanac of Islamism*, 14 July 2011, \url{http://almanac.afpc.org/Turkmenistan}
  \item \textsuperscript{175} Felix Corley, “Turkmenistan: Exit Bans, Haj Ban, Visa Denials Part of State Religious Isolation Policy,” *Forum 18 News Service*, 2 February 2010, \url{http://www.rn.org/articles/32575/?&place=russia-cis}
  \item \textsuperscript{176} United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, “USCIRF Annual Report 2011: Countries of Particular Concern: Turkmenistan,” Refworld, 28 April 2011, \url{http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,USCIRF,,TKM,4562d8cf2,4dbe90bec,0.html}
  \item \textsuperscript{177} William Mark Habeeb, *The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia and Central Asia: Turkmenistan* (Broomall, PA: Mason Crest Publishers, 2005), 73–75.
\end{itemize}
following independence. To support his claims, the President can point to the construction of 398 mosques since 1991. Nonetheless, the fear of radical or political Islam has driven the government to establish the Council of Religious Affairs, which reports directly to the President. The government bans the teaching of religion. Religious instruction may be offered, provided that the instructors are graduates of higher education institutions approved by the government. Religious instruction is restricted to officially approved institutions, although some unofficial religious education takes place. Even mosques can offer religious education only after school and for no more than 4 hours a week.

Religion in Daily Life

In the 70 years of Soviet rule, the focus of religious activity shifted from the mosque to the home. Although Islam is an integral part of their cultural heritage, few Turkmen are fully aware of the elements of their faith. Some are even atheists who support religious revival only as a part of national revival. The impressive mosques that have been built since independence have come about through government endowments and not through the financing of local worshippers.

Most Turkmen do not regularly attend prayer services at mosques. The faithful perform the five pillars of Islam: the declaration of faith (shahada), prayer five times daily (salat), charity (zakat), fasting during the month of Ramadan (sawm), and pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca (hajj).

Interactions Between Males and Females

Muslim women in Turkmenistan have enjoyed more freedom than those in other societies, and never conformed to stereotypes about Muslims. Turkmen women are neither required to wear the veil nor be secluded. Because of their highly prized skills, they are visible and active members of Turkmen life. Yet one should not expect gender equality within the nation. Women are often forbidden to travel without a male companion. Women who go out alone risk the label

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“prostitute,” especially in the rural areas.\footnote{International Women’s Rights Action Watch, “Turkmenistan” (paper, UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 35th session, May 2006), 
\url{http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm}} Forcible marriages are a problem, particularly in rural areas. Although polygamy is illegal, there is evidence that it is practiced with impunity, and a woman has no recourse if her husband takes another wife.\footnote{OECD Development Centre, “Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Turkmenistan,” \textit{Social Institutions and Gender Index}, n.d., \url{http://genderindex.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/TKM.pdf}}

Following independence, there has been a move away from the Soviet-inspired notion of equality between the sexes. President Niyazov’s famed book \textit{Ruhnama} suggests that a man should be the head of the family, while a woman should strive to increase her husband’s social position. Women should also keep the house clean and provide hospitality to visitors. Such notions reinforce traditional stereotypes that women are responsible for the home and taking care of the family. Education for women has fallen behind that of men because of the high costs, and families generally choose to educate boys over girls.\footnote{International Women’s Rights Action Watch, “Turkmenistan” (paper, UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 35th session, May 2006), 
\url{http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm}}

Especially in rural areas, women have almost exclusive responsibility for the home. A new bride moving into her husband’s extended household has low status within the family.\footnote{International Women’s Rights Action Watch, “Turkmenistan” (paper, UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 35th session, May 2006), 
\url{http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm}} Domestic abuse against women appears to be high, but the government releases no statistics. While the government frequently enforces criminal penalties against abusers, few cases are actually brought to the courts.\footnote{OECD Development Centre, “Gender Equality and Social Institutions in Turkmenistan,” \textit{Social Institutions and Gender Index}, n.d., \url{http://genderindex.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/TKM.pdf}}

Whether personal faith is weak or strong, Islamic traditions still shape Turkmen social interaction and family life. In terms of male and female interactions, this means a girl guards her virginity and remains with her family until she marries. There is no dating before marriage, and unmarried females avoid being seen in the company of males outside their families, to prevent their honor being questioned.\footnote{Carole Blackwell, \textit{Tradition and Society in Turkmenistan: Gender, Oral Culture, and Song} (Richmond, Surrey: Routledge Curzon, 2001), 39.}
Religious Events and Holidays

Turkmen observe Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting. During this time they refrain from eating, smoking, or drinking from dawn to dusk. After dark, Turkmen families and friends get together to pray and celebrate the end of the day’s fast.190

There are two religious holidays celebrated by the Turkmen: Kurban Bayramy (also called Gurbanlyk) and Oraza Bayramy. Kurban Bayramy is a 3-day holiday.191 It is celebrated with the sacrifice of a sheep and preparation of traditional foods shared with friends and family. This day, equivalent to Eid al-Adha in other Islamic cultures, commemorates the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son. People also play on huge swings especially built for this day, believing that they can cleanse their souls by sailing through the air.192

Oraza Bayramy corresponds to Eid al-Fitr in the Arabic-speaking world and marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan. Beginning at midnight on this day, Turkmen dress is their finest clothes and go out to celebrate at parties and feasts with family and friends. The celebrations are accompanied with music and dance.193 On this day, the president announces the decree of amnesty for those who repent for their crimes. Thousands of prisoners are pardoned and return home to celebrate with their families.194, 195

Exchange 1: Will you be celebrating Gurbanlyk?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Will you be celebrating Gurbanlyk?</th>
<th>thiZ gurwanlik belleyangizmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes!</td>
<td>howa!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Places of Worship

Religious buildings for Turkmen Muslims may be mosques or mausoleums and shrines associated with venerated saints. Among the most famous mosques is the Kipchak Mosque, reported to be the largest in Central Asia. It was built in 2004 in the hometown of then-President Niyazov. Other mosques include the Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque near Ashgabat, built to commemorate the victims of a 1948 earthquake; Geokdepe Saparmurat Haji Mosque west of Ashgabat; and the 15th-century Seyit Jemaletdin Mosque in Anau. The first two may be visited by non-Muslims. Among the more notable shrines are the mausoleum of the 13th-century mystic Najmeddin Kubra, which has become a destination for pilgrims and is the holiest shrine in Kunya Urgench; the Mausoleum of Mane Baba in Mane, built in the 11th and 12th centuries; and the Mausoleum of Turabek-Khanym, the daughter of the Uzbek Khan who brought Islam to the area of Kunya-Urgench.

In 2004, the government destroyed at least seven mosques, causing a climate of fear. None has been rebuilt. Other oppressive acts appear to be aimed at discouraging active participation in mosques. In 2005, imams were instructed to hang a list of mosque attendees above the doors, and only those on the list could visit that mosque. This resulted in some arrests. The president clearly stated the government position: “[W]e have one religion and unique traditions and customs, and there is no need for people to look beyond these.”

Behavior in Places of Worship

Some places of worship in Turkmenistan may be visited by non-Muslims. Islamic shrines, often found inside cemeteries, may be off-limits to non-Muslim travelers. Those wanting to visit a mosque or shrine should inquire in advance if and when it may be visited.

Exchange 2: May I enter the mosque?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>May I enter the mosque?</th>
<th>manga metjide girmek mUmkinmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following general rules concern etiquette for visiting mosques. Be sure to ask a local if there are any specific requirements besides these. It is not acceptable to enter the mosque when others are conducting prayers. Once inside, as with most religious or sacred institutions, speak softly and respectfully, and do not disturb those at prayer.²⁰¹

Exchange 3: Do I need to cover my head?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do I need to cover my head?</th>
<th>men bashimi ErtmElimi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dress conservatively. For men this means clean, pressed trousers and long-sleeve shirts; for women, long skirts and long-sleeve blouses with a head cover or scarf. When entering a mosque, shoes should be removed, but not socks.²⁰² Inside a mosque, visitors should not touch any ceremonial objects or copies of the Quran.

Exchange 4: Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?</th>
<th>men icherde kEwshUmi chikarmalimi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Policies prohibit photography in the Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque.²⁰³ Loud talking, laughing, eating, or smoking are not acceptable in any place of worship. Finally, never walk in front of someone who is praying, because it invalidates their prayer.²⁰⁴

Exchange 5: When do you pray?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>When do you pray?</th>
<th>thiZ hachan namaZ okayarsingiZ?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>We pray at noon.</td>
<td>biZ gUnortan namaZ okoyari</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 2 Assessment

1. Islam among the Turkmen incorporates elements of mysticism and traditional folk religion.
   **True**
   Traditional Turkmen religious beliefs include ancestor worship, which is seen in their present-day practices. The Sufi mystic form of Islam is also strongly interwoven among Turkmen religion.

2. The Turkmen constitution does not call for an Islamic state.
   **True**
   The constitution of Turkmenistan identifies the country as a secular state, but the national heritage has been defined as Islamic.

3. The Council of Religious Affairs grew out of a worry about radical or political Islam.
   **True**
   The fear of radical or political Islam has driven the government to establish a Council of Religious Affairs, which reports directly to the president.

4. The focus of religious activity is the mosque.
   **False**
   The focus of religious activity shifted from the mosque to the home. Most Turkmen do not attend mosque regularly for prayers.

5. Islamic shrines found in public places, such as cemeteries, may be visited without permission.
   **False**
   Islamic shrines, often found inside cemeteries, are among places that might be off-limits to non-Muslim travelers.
CHAPTER 3: TRADITIONS

Introduction

Although home to a number of nomadic peoples, the land that is now Turkmenistan has been mostly a Turkmen nation since the eighth century C.E.205 Throughout their history, Turkmen survival has rested squarely with the clan and extended family. The Turkmen’s sense of identity still comes from tribal ties. These ancient tribal loyalties proved strong enough to withstand Soviet attempts to destroy them, and the strong commitments to and value for family remain firmly entrenched.206, 207

Turkmen, like other Central Asian peoples, have a strong tradition of hospitality. Guests and even strangers may be invited to share a meal with a family.208 The Turkmen are gracious, modest, and hospitable people who respect others. They value community and family before the individual. 209

Greetings

Although generally hospitable, Turkmen may at first be cautious about communicating with foreigners. Local police are attentive to such contact, and residents may find themselves receiving unwanted attention.210

Exchange 6: Good morning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Good morning.</th>
<th>ertiringiZ hayirli bolthun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Good morning.</td>
<td>ertiringiZ hayirli bolthun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Government officials usually require permission from authorities before agreeing to meet with foreign nationals. This includes business appointments and meetings.211

**Exchange 7: Good afternoon.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Good afternoon.</th>
<th>EylaningiZ hayirli bolthuru</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Good afternoon.</td>
<td>EylaningiZ hayirli bolthuru</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When meeting, males will generally shake hands and say “Asalaam Aleikum.” Women will generally shake hands with other women but not with men.212 Direct eye contact is expected, but men should avoid too much direct eye contact with women lest it be mistaken for inappropriate advances or attention.213

**Exchange 8: Good evening!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Good evening!</th>
<th>gichi yaghshi!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Good evening!</td>
<td>gichi yaghshi!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A woman may politely acknowledge a social greeting from a male with a nod. She will never initiate a greeting or handshake with a male outside her family. A foreign male should not greet or make overtures to Turkmen women.214

**Exchange 9: Good night!**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Good night!</th>
<th>gijangiZ rahat bolthuru!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Good night!</td>
<td>gijangiZ rahat bolthuru!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exchange 10: How are you?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>How are you?</th>
<th>yaghdaylaringiZ nahili?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Fine, very well.</td>
<td>gowi, gati gowi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the aftermath of the Soviet era, Turkmen were quick to drop the use of *yoldash*, or comrade, when addressing each other. People have returned to traditional forms that predate communism. In formal and official situations, it is customary to address a man as *Jenap*, meaning “mister,” plus the surname (e.g., *Jenap* Rejepow or Mr. Rejepow).\(^\text{215}\)

**Exchange 11: Hi, Mr. Rejepow.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Hi, Mr. Rejepow.</th>
<th>thalam jenap rejepov</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Hello!</td>
<td>thalam!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Are you doing well?</th>
<th>gowumi yaghdaylaringiZ?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is still acceptable to refer to a woman as *khanym* or “madam” (e.g., *Khanym* Rejepow or Mrs. Rejepow). In less formal social settings, visitors will hear younger members of society referring to older and senior members as *yashuly*, meaning “respected one.” Occasionally elders will address younger or junior members as *jigi*, or in some dialects as *ini*.\(^\text{216}\)

**Hospitality and Gift Giving**

Turkmen are quite a hospitable people and believe that guests should be warmly received. Turning a guest away is shameful even if they arrive unannounced.\(^\text{217}\)

**Exchange 12: How is your family?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>How is your family?</th>
<th>mashgalangyZ gowumi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>They are doing fine, thank you.</td>
<td>olaram gowi, kEp thagh bolung</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If invited to a home, it is customary to take a gift.\(^\text{218}\) Turkmen do not usually open gifts in public, so your gift may remain unopened in your presence. It is appropriate to wrap gifts and make sure they are not too expensive. Chocolates or other sweets make a nice gift.\(^\text{219}\) Food made from wheat is also appreciated because wheat represents the source of life.\(^\text{220}\) Flowers are always

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\(^\text{218}\) Bradley Mayhew et al., *Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2007), 87.


acceptable, but bring an odd number of them because even numbers are used in funerals.\textsuperscript{221} Alcohol is not advisable, but gifts from a home country are enthusiastically received.\textsuperscript{222}

**Exchange 13: This gift is for you.**

| Soldier: | This gift is for you. | bu thiZe thowghat |
| Local:   | I cannot accept this. | men oni kawul edip biljek dal |

At the door, one should remove one’s shoes, but leave socks on, taking care to point the shoes toward the interior of the house.\textsuperscript{223, 224}

**Eating Habits**

When dining, Turkmen usually sit on the floor, and food is spread on a cloth called a *sachak*.\textsuperscript{225} Guests should be particularly careful not to step on this cloth because it is considered sacred.\textsuperscript{226} According to Islamic tradition, only the right hand is used for dining. Although some may eat with their hands, other Turkmen use utensils. Even utensils should be used only with the right hand.\textsuperscript{227}

Turkmen eat *chorek* (bread) at every meal. Never cut bread with a knife or tear it with only one hand because *chorek* represents the source of life. Break bread with two hands and eat every piece.\textsuperscript{228} It is taboo to place *chorek* on the ground or to put it face down.\textsuperscript{229}

In some rural regions, Turkmen eat at a low circular wooden table around which cushions are arranged for guests to recline. Because people use their hands to eat and passing food by hand is appropriate table etiquette, guests are usually given the opportunity to wash their hands in a wash basin near the dining area or, in rural settings, at a tap outside in the courtyard. Food such as bread, meat, or fruit is always passed around the table with the right hand. The left hand is

\textsuperscript{229} Bradley Mayhew et al., *Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan* (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2007), 87.
considered unclean, and food passed with the left hand is considered defiled.\textsuperscript{230} When a meal is finished, guests are once again expected to wash their hands before coffee or tea is served.

**Exchange 14: I really appreciate your hospitality.**

| Soldier: | I really appreciate your hospitality. | thiZing mihmanthEyelighingiZe Eran minetdar |
| Local: | It is nothing. | ol hich |

In some regions of the country, Turkmen avoid eating when on the streets. Such public eating may be regarded by locals as strange behavior.\textsuperscript{231}

**Types of Food**

According to tradition, guests should be served more food than they can eat. Large arrays of salads, fruits, breads, sausages, meat and chicken dishes, and sweets are offered.\textsuperscript{232}

**Exchange 15: This food is very good.**

| Soldier: | This food is very good. | bu nahar Eran gowi |
| Local: | It’s palow. | bu palou |

Frequently, the first course will be a *chorba*, a rich meat and vegetable soup.\textsuperscript{233} This may be supplanted by a thick stew made from meat (often mutton) and onions called *dograma*.\textsuperscript{234}

**Exchange 16: What ingredients are used to make dograma?**

| Soldier: | What ingredients are used to make dograma? | doghramaning ichinde nameler bar? |
| Local: | Bread, meat, onion and soup. | chErEk, et, thoghan we chorba |


The highlights of any meal are the main courses such as *manty* (large ravioli-like dumplings stuffed with ground meat and onion), *shashlik* (grilled, spicy kebabs of meat or fish), or the Central Asian rice favorite, *plov* (*palow*), a mix of rice and meat.235, 236

**Exchange 17: What is the name of this dish?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>What is the name of this dish?</th>
<th>bu naharing adi name?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>This is <em>manty</em>.</td>
<td>bu manti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exchange 18: The food tastes so good.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>The food tastes so good.</th>
<th>naharing taghami Eran thUji</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Thank you.</td>
<td>thagh bolung</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Dress Code**

Like other Central Asians, Turkmen are conservative when it comes to dress. The wearing of shorts by men is inappropriate.237 Women do not wear shorts, and are advised to wear long dresses or skirts and to cover their arms.238

**Exchange 19: How should I dress?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>How should I dress?</th>
<th>men name geymeli?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Wear loose fitting clothes which cover your body.</td>
<td>enaminiZi doli yayan rahat eshik geying</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Traditional dress is common in the country and not worn only for tourists or festivals. Typical attire for a woman is a long dress known as a *koynek*. Nearly floor-length, the dress is embroidered around the neck. Under the *koynek* are worn *balak* (pants). Only the bottom border of the *balak* shows under the *koynek*. Men wear loose-fitting blue trousers and a white shirt covered with a heavy silk jacket adorned with red and gold stripes.239

Exchange 20: Is this acceptable to wear?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is this acceptable to wear?</th>
<th>shu geyinshim bolyami?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Men and women wear headgear. Women typically wear their hair away from the face, often in braids or under a scarf. Headgear for special occasions can be elaborate and shows the family’s jewelry and wealth. Men wear fluffy wool hats, telpek (sometimes called borek), that denote the tribe they belong to.\(^{240, 241, 242, 243}\)

Inside homes, people cover their feet with knitted slippers or socks called joraps. Made of wool, silk, or cotton, their geometric or floral designs denote a region.\(^{244}\)

Although younger Turkmen have an affinity for Western dress, they have been encouraged to return to the more traditional dress. Many people consider Western clothes to be inappropriate. Traditional clothing is still common, especially among women but less so among men. Often, some element of traditional-style clothing is worn with Western-style clothing.\(^{245, 246, 247}\)

Non-Religious Holidays

The country follows a Western calendar to mark their 10 secular holidays.

**New Year’s Day**

The first national holiday is 1 January, New Year’s Day. New Year’s Eve is arguably the most popular holiday in the nation. For a week prior, people attend special concerts, and go to circuses, ballets, and other parties. On New Year’s Eve, families


gather for meals, and at midnight, people flock to the streets drinking champagne and shouting slogans to welcome the new year. Decorated fir trees fill homes, and children receive presents on New Year’s morning.  

Novruz

The ancient Persian spring festival, Novruz, is celebrated in Turkmenistan for two days on 21 and 22 March. It is the most ancient of Central Asian festivals and a time for festive meals, music, and regional fairs. It is important to have a good Novruz day because it is believed that this day sets the tone for the rest of the year. People buy or make new clothes, and families devote much effort and expense in preparation for it. In many parts of the country, yurts are set up in the main squares or in parks as ad-hoc shops and eateries. Horse races and rooster fights have become popular.

Victory Day

Victory Day, 9 May, was added by the Soviets following the Second World War. It memorializes those killed in the fight against Hitler. It also is a time to commemorate those who died in all conflicts. The day is filled with commemoration events and parades. It is common for multiple generations to gather for large dinners, sometimes at restaurants rather than home.

Independence Day

Although true independence came after the fall of the Soviet Union and the ratification of the constitution, 27 October is remembered as the day in 1991 when Turkmenistan declared itself a republic. Independence day celebrations are large and elaborate affairs with parades, speeches, concerts, and fireworks.

Neutrality Day

The last official bank holiday of the year, Neutrality Day on 12 December reaffirms Turkmenistan’s decision to remain neutral in regional and global conflicts. The United Nations officially recognized this status in 1995.257, 258, 259

Other Holidays

There are several other holidays celebrated throughout the country. On 12 January the nation observes a Memorial Day as a day of solemnity. Flag Day is 19 February, a day for parades and nationalistic speeches by politicians. On this day in 1992 the country’s new flag was adopted.260 On 8 March, the country honors women by observing International Women’s Day.261, 262

Constitution Day (sometimes referred to as Revival and Unity Day) on 18 May is when Turkmen observe the ratification of their post-independence constitution in 1992. Earthquake Remembrance day, 6 October, is a time to remember those victims of the huge earthquake in Ashgabat in 1948. Families also use this time to commemorate relatives by visiting gravesites or going to mosques to pray for the victims of wars.263

Finally, some celebrations are not official holidays but are important to the nation. Recognizing the cultural importance of the carpet, Turkmen Carpet Day is celebrated on the last Sunday in May. The third Sunday of July, Galla Bayramy Festival, wheat harvest day, was introduced during the Soviet era to recognize record wheat production.264, 265 Melon Day is a farmer’s festival celebrated on the second Sunday in August. Although it is still celebrated, it has become less popular since the death of President Niyazov.266, 267 The second Sunday in September, Singers’ Day, is when the poets and singers of Turkmenistan are honored.268

Dos and Don’ts

**Do** remove your shoes when entering a mosque, holy site, or a private home. Shoes are dirty and require that the area be washed.

**Do** bring a small hospitality gift when invited to a Turkmen home. It says “thank you” and shows that you are gracious.

**Do** praise the quality of the food. It is a compliment to the husband of the house and to those in the kitchen.

**Don’t** walk in front of a person who is praying. It invalidates the prayer.

**Don’t** sit next to a member of the other gender in a public place unless they are your spouse or child. Doing so implies intimacy between the two parties.

**Don’t** point a finger at anyone. It is an accusatory gesture.

**Don’t** bring search dogs into a holy place or a home. Muslims consider dogs (like pigs) to be dirty animals that defile a place and require that it be cleansed.

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Chapter 3 Assessment

1. A man may initiate a greeting with a Turkmen woman with a head nod.
   **False**
   Women may shake hands with other women, but foreign males should not greet or make overtures to Turkmen women.

2. When entering a house, one must remove shoes and socks.
   **False**
   At the door, one should remove one’s shoes, but leave socks on.

3. Turkmen may be cautious and appear unwelcoming when meeting foreigners.
   **True**
   Although a warm and hospitable people, Turkmen are often cautious when meeting with foreigners. Local police often watch the interactions of locals, and meeting with foreigners may draw unwanted attention.

4. When presenting a gift to someone, be sure to offer an even number of flowers.
   **False**
   Make sure to bring an odd number of flowers, because even numbers are given to people at funerals and may signify bad luck.

5. Turkmen do not use utensils when eating meals.
   **False**
   Although some prefer to eat with their hands, Turkmen commonly use utensils when eating. Be sure to use only the right hand when eating, even with utensils.
CHAPTER 4: URBAN LIFE

Introduction
Today half of Turkmenistan’s population lives in cities. The nation is becoming urban quite slowly, at just over 2% per year, but by 2030, 59% of Turkmen are projected to be urban dwellers. The national urbanization pattern reflects the impact of Soviet policies that organized collectives. Before that time, urban settlements were small, and most urban residents were Russians, Uzbeks, Armenians, and Persians. These groups were largely skilled workers and administrators who relocated from Russia and its republics during the early years of Soviet rule. A second wave of migration came when the Soviets moved their factories and the entire workforces to Turkmenistan during World War II. These non-Turkmen migrants relocated primarily to the cities while the urban migration of Turkmen progressed more slowly.

Turkmen remained in rural areas where they worked in agriculture. But as the agricultural sector weakened, many moved to the cities in the 1980s and 1990s trying to find work. The fragile urban infrastructure could not accommodate the overflow of arrivals. Their numbers strained housing and employment. This led to interethnic conflict in the cities.

Today the government has pledged to develop the urban infrastructure. New hospitals, schools, high rise apartments, and highways are being built. Unfortunately, the results have been uneven.

Urban Issues
A major problem facing the country is rampant unemployment. Although the government provides no data, estimates are that 70% of all Turkmen are unemployed and nearly 50% of the

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urban population was unemployed in 2003.\textsuperscript{275, 276} A recent Gallup survey suggests that nearly 47% of urban Turkmen are employed in the formal sector.\textsuperscript{277}

Pollution poses a problem, although Turkmenistan is less severely affected than other former republics in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{278, 279} Coal-fired factories in cities release waste into the environment. Ammonia, benzene, carbon dioxide, chlorine, lead, and sulfur dioxide released into the air pose health risks. Automobiles also contribute significantly to air pollution.\textsuperscript{280} One of the most common causes of death is respiratory disease related to pollution.\textsuperscript{281}

### Healthcare

The standard of healthcare in Turkmenistan is well below Western standards.\textsuperscript{282} The system has come under indictment from the international community including Doctors without Borders, which recently withdrew all its operations in the country. There are hospitals, health centers, and other health facilities, but access is severely restricted. Current practices make people afraid to seek medical attention.\textsuperscript{283} Basic standards of cleanliness and sanitation are lacking. Most clinics do not have even basic supplies such as syringes, anesthetics, and medicines.\textsuperscript{284}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{275} Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Background Note: Turkmenistan,” 31 October 2010, \url{http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35884.htm}
\textsuperscript{277} Steve Crabtree and Neli Esipova, “Gallup Presents…Inside Turkmenistan: A Glimpse at the Central Asian Country,” \textit{Harvard International Review} (Summer 2011), \url{http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb137/is_2_33/ai_n57856899/}
\textsuperscript{283} Médecins Sans Frontières, “Turkmenistan’s Opaque Health System,” April 2010, 1, 8, 13, \url{https://www.msf.org.br/arquivos/Doc/Publicacoes/82.pdf}
\textsuperscript{284} Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “Turkmenistan: Country Specific Information: Medical Facilities and Health Information,” 14 April 2011, \url{http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1047.html#medical}
Urban health centers, *sakher saglyk oyu*, are outpatient facilities, and normal staffing includes a family physician, several specialists, and surgeons. Diagnostic and testing services are performed in Ashgabat, Mary, and Nebitdag.\(^{285}\) Because the state monopolizes healthcare, few private facilities exist.\(^{286}\)

In 2004, President Niyazov ordered all hospitals outside Ashgabat to be closed and 15,000 trained doctors and healthcare professionals to be fired. They were replaced by military medical personnel who were alleged to be untrained.\(^{287,288}\) Upon Niyazov’s death, the hospitals were reopened.\(^{289}\) Although there have been several new hospitals built and proposals to finance the health sector, no significant health reforms have yet been realized. Some have speculated that current practices have actually put the population at more risk of serious disease and even death.\(^{290}\)

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The state of healthcare declined significantly between 1994 and 2004, leading to higher infant mortality levels—as much as double those of some Central Asian countries. Women’s healthcare is the worst of all the Central Asian republics. Official and reliable statistics are not available, but the last data available shows high maternal mortality rates, especially outside the capital.

**Exchange 24: Do you know what is wrong?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you know what is wrong?</th>
<th>name boZulandighini bilyangiZmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>yok</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Education**

Substantial changes to the education system followed independence. The Russian language and textbooks were replaced by Turkmen language curricula and instruction. Many universities were shut down and state spending reduced. Textbooks in all schools were replaced with the *Ruknama*, President Niyazov’s book of moral principles and propaganda (according to the International Helsinki Federation report). In May 2005, the president announced that foreign academic degrees would no longer be recognized. As a result, foreign professionals working or teaching in the country were dismissed. Turkmen studying abroad were advised to return without a degree and work for the welfare of the nation, or search for employment abroad.

In 2009, education reform permitted state universities to charge tuition to those students admitted besides those that the state paid for. In practice, only wealthy Turkmen can access higher education at the 18 institutions of higher learning, as well as professional schools.

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Bribes up to USD 30,000 are reportedly necessary to enter universities.\textsuperscript{300, 301, 302} Time spent in primary and secondary school has been extended from 9 to 10 years, and at university level from 4 years to 5 or 6 years, in an attempt to reverse a decline in quality.\textsuperscript{303, 304, 305, 306} Recent innovations in the education system now allow for private schools with tuition fees.\textsuperscript{307}

Compulsory education beginning at age 7 follows a 10-year curriculum.\textsuperscript{308, 309} The primary system (grades 1–3) centers on reading, grammar, and Turkmen language and literature. Secondary schools (grades 4–10) emphasize scientific knowledge, cultural attainment, and physical education.\textsuperscript{310} Most students are not computer literate because of a shortage of computers in the schools.\textsuperscript{311, 312} About 16\% of students fail to complete secondary education.\textsuperscript{313} After finishing grade 10, students may continue their education in technical or professional programs

\textsuperscript{300} Turkmen Initiative of Human Rights, “Entrance Exams to Turkmenistan’s Universities are Completed,” \textit{Chronicles of Turkmenistan}, 4 August 2006, \texttt{http://archive.chrono-tm.org/en/?id=791}
\textsuperscript{302} EurasiaNet, “Kyrgyzstan: Turkmen Student-Visa Controversy Creates Void at One Bishkek University,” 16 September 2009, \texttt{http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/publisher,EURASIANET,,4ac62c395,0.html}
\textsuperscript{303} International Women’s Rights Action Watch, “Turkmenistan” (report prepared for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 35th Session, May 2006), \texttt{http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm}
\textsuperscript{304} Rafis Abazov, \textit{Historical Dictionary of Turkmenistan} (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2005), 56.
\textsuperscript{308} International Women’s Rights Action Watch, “Turkmenistan” (report prepared for the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 35th Session, May 2006), \texttt{http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/iwraw/publications/countries/turkmenistan.htm}
\textsuperscript{309} President Niyazov reduced the required number of years of education to 9 years. But in 2009, the New Law on Education raised the requirements of compulsory education to 10 years. Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation for Humans Rights, “Private Schools in Turkmenistan,” 8 March 2008, \texttt{http://www.tmhelsinki.org/en/modules/news/print.php?storyid=3317}
\textsuperscript{311} American Councils for International Education, “Turkmenistan Education System,” n.d., \texttt{americancouncilstcm.org/filez/FactSheetTurkmenistan.doc}
or enter a university for a study program lasting 5 or 6 years, including 2 in a professional work setting.\textsuperscript{314,315}

The schools suffer from shortages of teachers and supplies, and buildings are often in a state of disrepair. Even in the cities, schools are overcrowded: in Ashgabat, overcrowding is so severe that the students must attend in shifts.\textsuperscript{316} Nevertheless, access to schools is greater and enrollment is higher in urban areas.\textsuperscript{317} In an effort to recruit and retain qualified teachers, the government raised teacher salaries by 40\% in 2007.\textsuperscript{318}

**Restaurants**

Turkmen rarely eat out except for weddings and celebratory events. Consequently, most restaurants cater to foreigners.\textsuperscript{319}

**Exchange 25: Put this all in one bill.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Put this all in one bill.</th>
<th>bularing hemethini bir hathawa goshaying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Okay.</td>
<td>bolyar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Restaurants in the largest cities feature national dishes as well as Chinese, Indian, and Middle Eastern cuisine.\textsuperscript{320}

**Exchange 26: I’d like some hot soup.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>I’d like some hot soup.</th>
<th>men gi\textgreek{z}ghin chorwa ithleyarin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Sure.</td>
<td>bolyar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Quick snacks or the Turkmen version of fast food can be found at the food stalls around the bazaars, and truck/bus stops offer vegetarian *somsas* (deep-fried stuffed pastry), *fitchi* (*somsa* stuffed with lamb or camel meat), and *shashliks* (meat kabobs).\(^{321, 322, 323}\)

**Exchange 27: What type of meat is this?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>What type of meat is this?</th>
<th>bu nahili et?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Lamb.</td>
<td>goyun eti</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dessert at Turkmen restaurants usually consists of some fruit. Seasonal fruits such as grapes, pomegranates, or melons are good choices.\(^{324}\)

**Exchange 28: Do you have a dessert?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you have a dessert?</th>
<th>thiZde desertler barmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, we have shek-sheki.</td>
<td>howa, biZde sheksheki bar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exchange 29: I would like coffee or tea.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>I would like coffee or tea.</th>
<th>men kofe yada chay ithleyarin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Sure.</td>
<td>bolyar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The person who issues the invitation is expected to pay. Women rarely pay, even if they make the invitation.\(^{325}\)

**Exchange 30: Can I have my total bill, please?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Can I have my total bill, please?</th>
<th>mening hathawiming jemini getirip bilerthingiZmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, of course.</td>
<td>howa, elwetde</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exchange 31: Are you still serving breakfast?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Are you still serving breakfast?</th>
<th>thiZ shu wagtarmertirlik beryangiZmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Turkmen wash their hands before and after meals. Restaurants usually have a washing area adjacent to restroom facilities.

Exchange 32: May I have a glass of water?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>May I have a glass of water?</th>
<th>bir stakan thu thoramak mUmkinmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, right away.</td>
<td>howa, haZir</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exchange 33: Where is your restroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Where is your restroom?</th>
<th>tualet nirede?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>That room to your left, over there.</td>
<td>shol yerde chepdaki otogh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Market Place

Shops and Bazaars

There are bazaars in every town where virtually anything can be purchased, including food. They are open daily from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Larger markets that are outside of town, such as Tolkuchka (near Ashgabat), the largest open-air market in Central Asia, are open in the mornings on two or three days. Most markets outside of Ashgabat close during the daylight hours during cotton harvest. Government shops often close for lunch and on Sundays.

Exchange 34: Is the bazaar nearby?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is the bazaar nearby?</th>
<th>golayda baZar barmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, over there on the right.</td>
<td>howa, ol yerde thagh tarapda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Shopping malls in some major cities feature Western brands such as Nike. A new shopping mall is planned on the Caspian Sea near Turkmenbashi. Ashgabat has a shopping mall with what is said to be the biggest fountain in the world.

**Exchange 35: Do you sell alaja?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you sell alaja?</th>
<th>thiZ alaja thatyangiZmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the variety of goods sold at markets and bazaars are famous Turkmen carpets and silver jewelry. Bargaining is expected at the Tolkuchka market. Visitors can freely ask the merchants if they have additional varieties, sizes, or colors available for each item.

**Exchange 36: Do you have any more of these?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you have any more of these?</th>
<th>shulardan bashgha yene barmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>yok</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exchange 37: May I examine this close up?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>May I examine this close up?</th>
<th>men shunga gowuja therethem bolyarmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Sure.</td>
<td>bolya</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


Carpets of historical value (older than 1984) may not be taken out of the country and all carpets must be certified by experts from the Carpet Museum, who charge for this service. Carpet dealers can assist in obtaining documents and the required certificate.334

**Exchange 38: Can I buy a carpet with this much money?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Can I buy a carpet with this much money?</th>
<th>men shu pula hali thatin alip bilerinmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>yok</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exchange 39: How much longer will you be here?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>How much longer will you be here?</th>
<th>thiZ shu yerde yene nache waght bolarthingiZ?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Three more hours.</td>
<td>yene Uch thaghat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Money and Credit Cards**

Purchases must be made using cash. Credit cards are uncommon outside the capital of Ashgabat, and there are no ATMs outside Ashgabat. It is nearly impossible to use traveler’s checks.335 International hotels or vendors at the airport are authorized to accept the U.S. dollar.336 Payments for hotels, travel agency services, and admission to museums are generally expected to be in U.S dollars. When using U.S. dollars, make sure that they were issued after 1996, are not torn, and are otherwise in good condition, or they will not be accepted.337

Although illegal, the black market is used by many people to exchange money because official exchange houses give 75% less.338 Authorities often ignore such transactions.339, 340 Black market exchanges do not come with receipts.341

---


Exchange 40: Can you give me change for this?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Can you give me change for this?</th>
<th>thiZ shUni bEldUriq bilyangiZmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>yok</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Purchases made in the local bazaar must be made using the local currency. The only legal tender for the country is the Turkmen manat (TMM), which is divided into 100 tenge.342, 343

Exchange 41: Do you accept U.S. currency?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you accept U.S. currency?</th>
<th>thiZ amerikan dolarini kawul edyangiZmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No we only accept manat.</td>
<td>yok, biZ dinge manat kawul edyari</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The manat is not traded on foreign markets and cannot be bought or sold outside the country. Once exchanged, the manat cannot be converted back into a Western currency at a reasonable rate of exchange.344

Transportation

Transportation in urban areas such as Ashgabat is plentiful. But avoid all public transportation after dark.345, 346

Exchange 42: Will the bus be here soon?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Will the bus be here soon?</th>
<th>avtobus bathim gelermi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


Trolley and Buses

In the major cities it is possible to get around using inexpensive trolleys or buses, which run from 6 a.m. to 1 a.m. The routes are marked in either Turkmen or Russian.347

Taxis

Taxis are available and are metered. But foreign nationals are generally asked to pay a flat fee. Few drivers speak English. Private vehicles may be hired as taxis with a negotiated fee, but the practice is not advised. Such vehicles are frequently uninsured, may be in poor repair, and often lack seatbelts.348 Travelers should use only official government taxis. Shared taxis should be avoided when possible.349

Exchange 43: Where can I get a cab?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Where can I get a cab?</th>
<th>men nirede taksi tutup bilerin?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Over there.</td>
<td>shol yerde</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cars

Driving in Turkmenistan can be treacherous. City roads are generally paved but marred with potholes and uncovered manholes, and are poorly lit. Many roads lack road signs. Pedestrian traffic is often heavy, causing potential hazards for motorists. Drivers routinely ignore the rules of the road, often going the wrong way on a one-way road.350 Drivers in Mary are notoriously bad, even among Turkmen.351 Drivers may be fined if they enter a city with a dirty car.352

Exchange 44: Where can I rent a car?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Where can I rent a car?</th>
<th>men nirede mashin prokada alip bilyan?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Downtown.</td>
<td>shaherde</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Trains

Train travel may be unsafe because of criminal activity. Night trains are particularly vulnerable to theft, so passengers should not leave their compartments unattended. Doors should always be secured and locked from the inside.353

Airplanes

Airline safety can be an issue. The safety standards on the aircraft and safety procedures may not always be observed. Airline insurance for passengers may not be valid in Turkmenistan.354 Be aware that airlines usually do not accept credit cards. Airlines do accept U.S. dollars and Turkmen manat. Transit passengers who miss connections must wait in the arrival area until a ticket out of Turkmenistan is purchased.355

Exchange 45: Which road leads to the airport?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Which road leads to the airport?</th>
<th>haythi yol aeraporda akidyar?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>The road heading east.</td>
<td>gUndoghara tarap gidyan akidyar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Street Crimes and Solicitations

Violent crime in the country is low but pick-pocketing is relatively common, particularly on trains and in the markets. Robberies have also been reported in unofficial taxis.356, 357 Police and military are common throughout the nation, and visitors are frequently asked for their ID papers. Carry a color copy of a passport at all times. Curfews may be imposed suddenly, and everyone must follow curfew regulations or risk deportation. Women should not travel alone, especially in isolated areas or after dark.358, 359

Prostitution is illegal in Turkmenistan. It has been reported that prostitutes sometimes accompany men to their hotel room to rob them. Sometimes, prostitutes have an accomplice. Any woman leaving a discotheque with a foreign man is regarded as a prostitute by the police,

who may detain the man. Finally, gangs of bandits have been reported in the southeast area of Turkmenistan.

Areas surrounding public markets and bazaars are havens for beggars and petty thieves, who prey on visitors and people who look as if they are lost. Persistent beggars have started to create problems in the cities and provinces. To protect yourself, walk with purpose and never show valuables like expensive jewelry, watches, or large amounts of currency in public places.

**Exchange 46: Please, buy something from me.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local:</th>
<th>Please, buy something from me.</th>
<th>gayrat eding menden bir Zat thatin aling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>Sorry, I have no money left.</td>
<td>baghishlang, mende bashgha pul yok</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Keep valuable documents like passports in deep pockets or security pouches where they cannot be easily lifted by a pickpocket.

**Exchange 47: Give me money.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local:</th>
<th>Give me money.</th>
<th>manga pulingiZi bering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soldier:</td>
<td>I don’t have any.</td>
<td>mende pul yok</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


Chapter 4 Assessment

1. The urban population has grown rapidly since independence.
   **False**
   The urban population rate has been fairly constant for the last 50 years and is growing at a rate of about 2% per year.

2. Turkmen do not commonly eat out at restaurants.
   **True**
   Because of the expense, most Turkmen reserve eating at restaurants for important events such as weddings.

3. Industrial air pollution is a major cause of respiratory problems in the cities.
   **True**
   Coal-fired factories and chemical pollutants pose severe health risks and contribute to respiratory disease, one of the most common causes of death in Turkmenistan.

4. There are specific requirements for taking a carpet out of the country.
   **True**
   Carpets more than 27 years old cannot be exported from the country. All carpets must be certified by experts from the Carpet Museum.

5. Purchasing an item at shops using U.S. dollars is legal and acceptable.
   **False**
   It is illegal for the merchant and the customer to use foreign currency except at travel agencies, hotels, the airport, and some museums.
CHAPTER 5: RURAL LIFE

Introduction

Approximately 50% of Turkmen live in rural areas. In line with a traditional division of gender roles, men are the breadwinners and wield the most authority in the household. Women are homemakers with primary responsibility for childcare. Villages often are made of members of a single extended family or clan that is largely self-sufficient. Rural life remains much the same as it has for years.

One significant change has occurred. After Soviet rule and the collectivization of lands, the Turkmen surrendered their nomadic lifestyle. Yet the newly settled Turkmen people still hold fast to many nomadic traditions and customs.

Land Ownership

When Turkmenistan was a Soviet republic, all land was owned and controlled by the state in the form of huge collective farms. Since independence, the Turkmen government has begun a number of reforms aimed at breaking up the collectives. Most reform has occurred in the form of lease-hold arrangements. Most land is still owned by the state, but individuals or groups are allowed to lease the land. In 1997–98, most farmers were designated “lease holders,” eligible for ownership of plots of land of less than 50 hectares (123.5 acres) (usually marginal land). But outright ownership could only take place under strict conditions. The farmer had to demonstrate that he could transform the land into commercially productive plots within 24 months without government subsidies for earth moving and irrigation. Many have failed to meet these criteria.

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366 Bradley Mayhew et al., Central Asia (Oakland, CA: Lonely Planet Publications, 2010), 428.
Exchange 48: Do you own this land?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you own this land?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are three forms of leasehold arrangements under the most current regulations. First, Farmers’ Associations that grow key crops receive credit from the state-controlled Daikhan Bank. Second, Farmers’ Unions comprised of family farms operate outside the state-order system that sets the prices farmers get for their crops. Third, backyard farmers grow crops on land attached to houses; although the individual plots are small, they represent nearly 7% of all the agricultural land in the country.  

Under the state-order system, the government decides what crop each leaseholder must grow and sets targets for product delivery. Crops are sold at prices set by the state that are usually much below fair market value. Most leasehold land farmers are required to raise cotton, and the rest are mostly required to grow wheat.

**Rural Economy**

Agriculture dominates the economy in rural Turkmenistan, accounting for 8% to 11% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Nearly half of all Turkmen depend on farming for their livelihood. Still, reforms have been slow in coming and the lives of farmers have changed little since independence.

Although known for its cotton, Turkmenistan is Central Asia’s largest producer of silkworm cocoons. Other crops include alfalfa, beans, grapes, vegetables, and melons. In the western part of the country, people keep sheep, goats, and camels. Pistachios are grown in the southern regions. Cotton has diminished in importance over recent years; its share of export revenue is

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a mere 1%. Instead, the government has promoted food grains such as wheat, and there have been dramatic spikes in wheat production since independence. But the policy of paying 20% over the state price and distorted reporting make true growth difficult to determine.

**Gender Issues**

Turkmen law guarantees the equality of men and women, yet women have restricted civil rights. Persistent patriarchal views continue to define women’s positions in terms of traditional roles as homemakers and mothers. Although males and females have equal responsibilities in child rearing, women perform most of the work while men are heads of households. Polygamy is illegal but still practiced in rural areas. If a man marries another woman, the first wife can do nothing. Forced marriages are an ongoing problem in rural areas.

There are a number of issues surrounding sex roles and stereotyping in Turkmenistan. Data are hard to obtain and difficult to confirm. Yet women are facing greater discrimination as Turkmen values become stronger and the enforced egalitarianism of the Soviet system falls away. The decline in educational attainment for women, especially among the poorest families, may be an effect. Boys are given a higher priority for education. Many young girls are obligated to stay at home and care for younger siblings, further strengthening stereotypes. Women are expected to

---

be reserved and non-confrontational, but have never been subjected to seclusion or required to wear face veils.  

**Transportation**

The country is developing a better infrastructure for its transportation network. Urgent priorities are railroads and interstate gas pipelines. Turkmenistan’s roads has been upgraded since independence, and currently there are 47,277 km (29,376 mi) of paved roads.

**Exchange 49: Is there a train station nearby?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is there a train station nearby?</th>
<th>golayda vokZal barmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>yok</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trains**

More than 2,980 km (1,852 mi) of Soviet-era rail lines crisscross the country. Though train service is inexpensive, it is limited and tends to be slow. Train travel can be dangerous because criminals are common. Valuables should be stored in a safe place if traveling overnight. Never leave a train compartment open without someone in it. Always close and lock doors from the inside.

**Exchange 50: Is there lodging nearby?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is there lodging nearby?</th>
<th>golayda mihmanhana barmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


**Ferries**

Ferries leave from Turkmenbashi to cross the Caspian Sea. These are actually cargo ships that take on passengers who must bring food and water because none is provided; facilities are basic. Once a ship arrives in port, it can wait up to a week before docking. Travelers need to have enough food and water and be sure that their Turkmenistan visa does not expire while they wait to dock.\(^{396}\)

**Taxis**

Taxis are available and metered. But foreign nationals are commonly asked to pay a flat fee. Few drivers speak English. It is possible to use private vehicles as taxis and to negotiate a fee, but this is not a good idea. Private vehicles generally are not insured, may be in poor repair, and often lack seatbelts.\(^{397}\) Shared taxis should be avoided when possible.\(^{398}\)

**Bus**

Bus service connecting the major cities of Turkmenistan is inexpensive, reliable, and regular.\(^{399}\) Avoid traveling on public transportation after dark.\(^{400}\) There is no international bus service to or from Turkmenistan at the present time.\(^{401}\)

**Exchange 51: Can you take me there?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Can you take me there?</th>
<th>thiZ meni shol yere akidip bilyangiZmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, I can.</td>
<td>howa, bilyan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


Cars

Road conditions in Turkmenistan make driving difficult and sometimes dangerous.

Long stretches of highway are often unmarked. Driving at night should be avoided because roads are poorly maintained, not lighted, and construction sites are not well demarcated. Also, many vehicles travel at night with defective lighting. Roadside assistance is not available, and there are few gas stations.402, 403

Exchange 52: Is there a gas station nearby?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is there a gas station nearby?</th>
<th>golayda benZapravka barmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exchange 53: Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?</th>
<th>golayda gowi mehanik barmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Health Issues

Healthcare facilities are sparse in rural areas.404 Their quality is judged deplorable and they should be avoided by Western visitors altogether. Inadequately trained staff, limited facilities, and scarce drugs complicate healthcare in rural Turkmenistan.405, 406 Rural healers or traditional herbalists are often consulted, and some resort to prayer. In many cases, those are the only options available to many rural residents.407


404 MaryLee Knowlton, Turkmenistan, Cultures of the World (Tarrytown, NY: Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2006), 84.


Exchange 54: Is there a medical clinic nearby?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is there a medical clinic nearby?</th>
<th>golayda klinika barmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, over there.</td>
<td>howa, o tayda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Ministry of Health has divided care in rural areas into several levels. Primary care facilities, *oba saglyk oyu*, serve a population of around 1,500 people each. A midwife and a *feldsher* or military medic deliver primary care and refer serious cases to regional or town clinics.\(^{408}\) Primary healthcare has not been a priority and remains critically undeveloped.\(^{409}\)

Level 2 care is hospital care at the district level, similar to urban clinics (*saker saglyk oyu*), including specialists such as pediatricians, obstetricians, and other professionals.\(^{410}\) Numerous new hospitals have been built in rural areas, but a lack of adequately trained specialists remains a severe challenge.\(^{411}\) A culture of fear operates in hospitals, often resulting in substandard care. Not only are medical staff operating under fear of punitive sanctions (including imprisonment), but patients feel ashamed and stigmatized enough to avoid treatment at hospitals, even for serious diseases.\(^{412}\)

Exchange 55: My arm is broken, can you help me?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>My arm is broken, can you help me?</th>
<th>mening elim dEwUldi, thiZ manga kEmEk edip bilerthingiZmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes, I can help you.</td>
<td>howa, men thiZe kEmEk edip biler</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most hospitals have fewer than 25 beds and little or no medicine and equipment. There is a critical shortage of all medicines and antibiotics, and anesthetics in particular.\(^{413}\) Many medical facilities in rural areas lack piped water and adequate sanitation.\(^{414}\)


\(^{412}\) Médecins Sans Frontières, “Turkmenistan’s Opaque Health System,” April 2010, 8–9, [https://www.msf.org.br/arquivos/Doc/Publicacoes/82.pdf](https://www.msf.org.br/arquivos/Doc/Publicacoes/82.pdf)


Education

Compulsory education begins at age 7 and follows a 10-year curriculum. Most education is provided by the state, and there are no religious schools. With education reform in 2009, public universities and some private schools charge tuition. The quality of rural schooling remains low. Classrooms are likely to be in disrepair, to have few textbooks, poor facilities, and a limited number of teachers.

Exchange 56: Is there a school nearby?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is there a school nearby?</th>
<th>golayda mekdep barmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is nearly universal enrollment at the primary school level in rural and urban areas. Access to secondary education is more haphazard. Overall, 84% of students continue their secondary education, but the rates of enrollment are uneven across the nation. For example, some rural secondary schools have enrollments as low as 11% compared to 67% for Ashgabat. All the nation’s 4-year institutions are in the capital except one each in Mary and Turkmenabat.

The primary system (grades 1–3) centers on reading, grammar, and cultural discourse. Secondary schools emphasize scientific knowledge, Turkmen language and literature, and physical

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Most Turkmen students are not computer literate because of a shortage of computers in the schools.424, 425

**Exchange 57: Do your children go to school?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do your children go to school?</th>
<th>mekdebe okuwchilar gatnayarlarmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exchange 58: Do you know this area very well?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you know this area very well?</th>
<th>thiZ shu yerlere beletmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Who Is in Charge?**

A representative council of the people acts as the local government. Each member of this village council (gengesh) is elected for a 3-year term. The elected elder in a rural district is the mayor (archyn) who presides over the gengesh.426, 427 A gengesh can represent more than a single village.428

**Exchange 59: Does your mayor live here?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Does your mayor live here?</th>
<th>thiZing hakimingiZ shu yerde yashayami?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

The archyn is responsible for several functions, including regulation of all public and private enterprises in the area; maintenance of the area’s economic, social, and cultural relations; and management of human resources. Any irregularities or negligence are the responsibility of the archyn.429, 430

Exchange 60: Can you take me to your mayor?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Can you take me to your mayor?</th>
<th>thiZ meni hakiming yanina akidip bilerthingiZmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Police and security officials operating in a rural area are likely to coordinate with the office of the archyn (mayor). Likewise, a stranger looking for assistance is likely to be referred to this elected official for help.

Exchange 61: Respected mayor, we need your help / advice / opinion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Respected mayor, we need your help / advice / opinion.</th>
<th>hormatli hakim, biZe thiZing kEmEghingiZ / tekilibingiZ / pikiringiZ gerek</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Border Crossings and Checkpoints

Border Crossings

It is possible to enter Turkmenistan from all the neighboring countries, but there are no international train or bus services. Crossing Turkmenistan’s land borders requires travelers to take public transportation to the border, walk across, and secure a taxi once across.431, 432 Crossings can take up to 3 hours. Land border crossings are open daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. It is also possible to enter by boat from Azerbaijan.433

It is strongly recommended to avoid travel along the Afghan-Turkmen border, because the border area is a hub for smuggling illicit drugs and security is tenuous.434, 435

All border areas with Afghanistan, Iran, and Uzbekistan are closed to foreign travel without prior permission from the Turkmen government. The areas around the Caspian Sea coast and Dashoguz are included in the restricted travel zone.436, 437

**Checkpoints**

The relative high frequency of checkpoints outside cities and along the highways of Turkmenistan signals the state’s concern for internal security. Anti-state groups such as al-Qaeda, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement continue to operate in Central Asia.438

**Exchange 62: Where is the nearest checkpoint?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Where is the nearest checkpoint?</th>
<th>ing golay barlagh nokadi nirede?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>It’s two kilometers.</td>
<td>iki kilometrden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a result, surveillance of foreigners is quite common. Authorities can and do monitor communications and sometimes conduct hotel searches. Border regions are often designated “restricted zones” that foreigners are excluded from.439, 440

**Exchange 63: Did these people threaten you?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Did these people threaten you?</th>
<th>shu adamlar thiZe aZar berdilermi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>yok</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


This is particularly true of the border regions near Afghanistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, and the region in and around Dashoguz city, as well as areas of the Caspian coast. One may not travel to these areas without special permission from the Turkmen government. It takes at least 10 working days to secure permission for travel in these areas.\(^{441}\)

**Exchange 64: Is this all the ID you have?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is this all the ID you have?</th>
<th>shu thiZing bar dokumentleringizmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both uniformed and plainclothes police and military officials regularly stop cars and ask to see passports and travel documents. These checks, which increase in frequency after sunset, may entail vehicle searches.\(^{442}\)

**Exchange 65: Show us the car registration.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Show us the car registration.</th>
<th>mashining shahadatnamathini gErKEzing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>OK.</td>
<td>bolya</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exchange 66: Please get out of the car.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Please get out of the car.</th>
<th>mashindan dUshengiZlang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>OK.</td>
<td>bolya</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Impatience at a checkpoint or during a search seldom pays because police can issue a bad conduct citation, which must be paid within 12 hours and can eventually result in seizure of the vehicle.\(^{443}\)

**Exchange 67: Are you carrying any guns?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Are you carrying any guns?</th>
<th>thiZing yaningiZda yaraghlar barmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Land Mines

Although it has not passed any national legislation or implemented measures required by Article 9 of the Land Mine Treaty of 1997, Turkmenistan is a signatory to the Treaty. The measure forbids the purchase, sale of, transfer, or manufacture of land mines.444

Exchange 68: Is this area mined?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is this area mined?</th>
<th>shu tErEk minalananmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On 6 April 2005, the government did submit documentation stating that old stocks, including 6,631,771 landmines inherited from the Soviet Union, had been completely destroyed and that the nation was in full compliance with the Treaty. Furthermore, the government states that no border regions are mined and that there have been no known casualties as a result of land mines.445

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Chapter 5 Assessment

1. Economic reforms have changed the lives of rural farmers since independence.  
   **True**  
   Land reform has created some options for farmers. Although the state holds most land  
   through lease agreements, there are some family farms and independent farms outside the  
   state system.

2. To own land rather than lease it, farmers have to meet strict criteria.  
   **True**  
   Outright ownership can only take place under strict conditions, and many have failed to  
   meet this. Currently, land is distributed according to a leasehold arrangement.

3. Turkmenistan’s primary cash crop is poppies.  
   **False**  
   Turkmenistan’s primary cash crop is cotton. Most leasehold farmers are required to raise  
   cotton. Other crops include alfalfa, beans, grapes, vegetables, and melons.

4. Surveillance of foreigners is rare.  
   **False**  
   Surveillance of foreigners is quite common. Authorities monitor communications and  
   may conduct hotel searches.

5. Few Turkmen children enroll in primary schools.  
   **False**  
   There is nearly universal enrollment at the primary level throughout the nation. Access to  
   secondary school is more uneven, and in some rural areas as few as 11% of children are  
   enrolled.
CHAPTER 6: FAMILY LIFE

Introduction

The Turkmen were traditionally a nomadic people centered around ancestral tribal membership. These kinship groups exerted the greatest political and economic influence on daily lives. Family groups followed collective principles in which money and resources were pooled to manage virtually all the daily needs of the group. Even as these nomads became more sedentary at the beginning of the 20th century, family was central to ownership of land, economic transactions, political unity, and managing social conflict. Today the family remains significant in the lives of most Turkmen.

The Typical Household

The extended family is the central unit of Turkmen society. Households combine generations of grandparents, parents, sons and their families, and unmarried daughters. Apartments in the cities are too small to house a typical extended family, but city relatives maintain strong ties with their rural kin. In Ashgabat, 73% of respondents who had been married more than 30 years reported that they lived in a nuclear family. They also reported living closer to and making more visits to the husband’s family, indicating that traditional values still underpin modern life.

Turkmen historically had large families with an average of five to seven children, but tough economic times and other changes have steadily reduced family size to just over two children. Government concern about smaller families prompted plans to provide incentives to

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families with more than eight children. These include a one-time payment of USD 250, free
dental care for life, and free public transportation. 454

Exchange 69: How many people live in this house?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>How many people live in this house?</th>
<th>shu Eyde nache adam yashayar?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Ten.</td>
<td>on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exchange 70: Does your family live here?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Does your family live here?</th>
<th>thiZing mashgalangiZ shu yerde yashayami?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Typically, newlyweds are expected to live with the husband’s family for a few years before moving out to their own household. 455

Exchange 71: Is this your entire family?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is this your entire family?</th>
<th>shu thiZing tutush mashgalangiZmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When a man is in his 30s, he leaves his father’s household with his wife and children and forms a household of his own. He takes part of his father’s wealth and establishes his own independent livelihood. 456 If he is the youngest male in his family, he will have the honor and responsibility for taking care of his parents when they are elderly. 457, 458 Because the youngest son takes care of his parents until their death, tradition dictates that the parents’ possessions, including the house and its furnishings, are given to the youngest son. 459

Exchange 72: Where do you work, sir?

| Soldier: | Where do you work, sir? | jenap, thiZ ishleyangiZmi? |
| Local: | I am a farmer, sir. | jenap, men fermer |

Exchange 73: Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

| Soldier: | Are you the only person in your family who has a job? | thiZing mashgalangiZda dinge thiZ ishlimi? |
| Local: | No. | yok |

Gender Issues

Turkmen culture is traditionally patriarchal.460 Men are the authority in families and women are expected to support their husbands. Women normally enjoy significant influence on issues related to children and the home.461 Women and girls are socialized to take control of household chores, including cooking, cleaning, and caring for young children.462 It is not uncommon in rural areas for older females to stay at home to look after the younger children.463 But during the nation’s annual cotton harvest, women work alongside men on the collective farms.464

Male children are welcomed into the family with great fanfare. They will be who the parents rely on for support after they are too old to work.465, 466 Girls are viewed as temporary members of the family whose permanent place will be the household they marry into.467, 468 Parents, particularly

fathers, are likely to express emotional attachment to young sons but not to daughters. Girls learn that their role is to serve other members of the family, especially males.\textsuperscript{469}

Male children have greater freedom to move about the community as they grow up; girls must stick close to their mothers. As girls mature sexually, they are expected to guard their virginity.\textsuperscript{470, 471} They are assisted by the family, which shelters them from conduct with males outside the family that might compromise their honor.\textsuperscript{472, 473}

**Exchange 74: Did you grow up here?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier: Did you grow up here?</th>
<th>thiZ shu yerde EsdUngiZmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Soviets attempted to introduce greater gender equality, but policies proved difficult to implement. Although there were some gains in literacy and legal reforms, gender equality was not achieved because Turkmen continued to practice Islamic traditions. Following independence, new constitutional guarantees of equality were made but remain unrealized. The patriarchal culture is particularly strong in rural areas and, as a result, customary law plays a much more significant role than written law or constitutional guarantees.\textsuperscript{474}

In rural areas, gender segregation is strictly practiced.\textsuperscript{475} Although there is gender balance in education, the genders choose different programs and careers. Men choose science, technical, math, and government professions, while women tend to business administration, law, humanities, and the arts.\textsuperscript{476, 477}


Marriage

The single most important event in Turkmen family life is marriage. The legal age to marry is 16 years, and many Turkmen marry in their teenage years. To ensure clan unity, many marriages in rural areas are still arranged. A prospective groom pays a bride price (qalin) to the family of the bride. Some of these arranged marriages, especially in rural areas, are forced marriages.

Exchange 75: Are you married?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Are you married?</th>
<th>thiZ EylEnenmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>yok</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exchange 76: Is this your wife?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Is this your wife?</th>
<th>bu thiZing ayalingiZmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When a woman marries she becomes part of her mother-in-law’s household. The relationship between the two can be contentious, and success depends on the deference of the daughter-in-law. The young wife is expected to take over all household duties in her new home. A woman may not speak to her mother-in-law until given permission. Tradition also dictates that such permission be given to speak to the father-in-law. A woman should cover her

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mouth with a scarf in the presence of her in-laws, including her brothers-in-law and any elders in the household of either gender.  

A wife’s status within the household may increase if she bears a son or if a younger son brings his wife into the home. A woman is expected to work to repay the *qalin* and the cost of the gifts given to her or her family before the wedding.

**Exchange 77: Are these people part of your family?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Are these people part of your family?</th>
<th>shu adamlar thiZing mashgalangiZdanmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>yok</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although a married woman becomes a member of her husband’s family, she generally maintains strong relations with her brothers. Brothers help a woman to retain ties to her birth family. It is common for brothers to be the only family members who visit a married woman because they are responsible for the safety of their sister.

**Exchange 78: Do you have any brothers?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Do you have any brothers?</th>
<th>thiZing doghanlaringiZ barmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


Families traditionally insisted upon a bride price, *qalin*, which can put economic stress on the groom’s family. This may limit a man’s choice of a spouse. More traditional families may use the *qalin* to limit the woman’s choice by charging a high bride price from young men considered undesirable. The government continues to tacitly support this custom because it is so deeply entrenched that it is hard to eradicate.\(^{\text{490}}\)

A secondary effect of the *qalin* is that poor families often force their daughters to marry at a young age. Also, parents may allow daughters to receive only a minimal education in the fear that too much education may render their daughters unacceptable. The *qalin* could also have the effects of keeping women in unwanted marriages as well as confining them to their homes and dependent upon males for financial support.\(^{\text{491}}\)

**Divorce**

Although divorce is rare in Turkmenistan, the constitution does guarantee the right of divorce to men and women.\(^{\text{492}}\) This is often not a realistic recourse for women simply because they usually depend economically on their husbands. A woman could allege spousal abuse, but she would do so only if she were well educated and could support herself and her minor children. Two grounds for a divorce initiated by the husband would be infertility or infidelity on the part of the wife. In a divorce of this sort, the husband would retain custody of the children. Divorce proceedings brought by either partner are permissible under Islamic tradition and old Turkmen tribal law. There are no reliable judicial statistics on the number of or nature of divorces in Turkmenistan.\(^{\text{493}}\)

Women have a right to spousal support when divorced. All issues related to custody, child support, and alimony are determined by the court. Yet a lack of reliable statistics makes it difficult to know how these determinations are implemented.\(^{\text{494}}\)

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Status of the Elderly and Children

In Turkmenistan, as in other Central Asian countries, respect for elder persons in or outside the family is profound. The constitution requires adult children to take care of their parents. Elder care facilities do exist in Turkmenistan, but Turkmen are conspicuously absent from them. It would be disgraceful to a Turkmen family to commit its elders to a nursing or elder home. Grandparents are considered integral family members and sources of wisdom and spirituality. Turkmen children are expected to show unconditional obedience to their parents who are presumed to know best. Unruly or disobedient children bring shame to the family.496, 497

Social Events

Weddings

Weddings are significant social events. Because many marriages still are arranged, it is common for a bride and groom to first meet at their wedding. Young people may arrange their own matches, but parental approval is still crucial. Although dating before marriage is still considered unacceptable, in the main cities such as the capital of Ashgabat, it is becoming more popular.498, 499

It is customary for a boy’s parents to visit the home of a potential bride to make certain that she is of good character and capable of bearing children. They must also convince the girl’s parents that their son will provide for their daughter. A bride-price (qalin) is negotiated; these days, it is often given to the couple to help them establish their own household.500

Exchange 79: Congratulations on your wedding!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Congratulations on your wedding!</th>
<th>toyungiZ bilen gutlayarin!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>We are honored you could attend.</td>
<td>thilap geleniZ UchUn thagh bolung</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weddings have both a civil and a religious ceremony. Following these, a large celebration (toi) is held with dancing and food. The size of the wedding is dictated by what the groom’s family can afford; for many, it will be a substantial portion of their life savings.\(^{501}\)

**Exchange 80: I wish you both happiness.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>I wish you both happiness.</th>
<th>men thiZing ikingiZe baght arZu edyarin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>We are honored.</td>
<td>thilaningiZ UchUn minetdar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The clothes of Turkmen brides are more than just beautiful attire. They act as charms to ward off evil spirits. The bride often covers her traditional red wedding dress with a cape covered in amulets and charms. A pocket sewn into the cape contains coal and salt to guard against bad luck and evil spirits.\(^ {502}\)

The bashsalma is a ceremonial changing of the headdress, marking a woman’s transition to a married woman. The ceremony involves a symbolic “fight” for the bride’s maiden headdress (takhya), which is replaced with a white scarf and given to the groom’s youngest sister. The ritual is to ensure the happy marriage of the sister, reinforcing her role of a woman as a wife and mother.\(^ {503}\)

**Funerals**

Turkmen practice Islam and follow Islamic law regarding specific rituals surrounding death and dying.\(^ {504}\) When a person has died, the body is washed by someone of the same gender. Traditionally there are three washings of the corpse, and the last typically contains some kind of perfume. Afterwards, the body is wrapped in a white shroud.\(^ {505}\)

**Exchange 81: I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>I would like to give my condolences to you and your family.</th>
<th>men thiZe we thiZing mashghalangiZa ginanch bildiryarin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Thank you.</td>
<td>thagh bolung</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Women normally do not attend funerals, although they may visit the gravesites. But they do participate in the ritual feasts commemorating the death. These feasts are held on the 7th day after, the 40th day, and at 1 year later.

Exchange 82: Please be strong.

| Soldier: | Please be strong. | mert bolung |
| Local: | We will try. | thinanshar |

A *janazah*, or funeral prayer, is recited at the grave site; the body is removed from the wooden coffin and placed in the tomb with the head pointing in the direction of Mecca. Turkmen prefer to say that someone has “passed on” rather than “died.”

Turkmen do not leave the home for 7 days following the death of a loved one. They believe that it takes that long for the spirit to depart the house. Family members do not shower or change clothes during the week. Women cover themselves fully with a long scarf and men wear traditional skullcaps.

**Family Celebrations**

The *sunnet* is the ceremony of circumcision for male children at age 5 or 7 (odd-numbered ages). Men and women who have reached age 63 are treated to a special birthday celebration. The number 63 is significant because it is the age at which the Prophet Muhammad died.

**Naming Conventions**

The standard form of the Turkmen name is the family name first followed by the given name. It is common for people to refer to each other by their given or first name followed by the father’s name.

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Exchange 83: Are these your children?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Soldier:</th>
<th>Are these your children?</th>
<th>bular thi’Zing chaghalariańgiZmi?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local:</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>howa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Soviet rule also influenced the form of Turkmen names, often putting -vich after a father’s name for men, or -ovna for women. Either -ov or -ev was often added to the family names for men, and -ova or -eva for women. For example, if a family name was Kurban, it would often become Kurbanov for a man or Kurbanova for a women. Following independence and the Russian departure, people returned to the more traditional renditions of family names. The Russian suffixes were replaced with -ogly or -gyzy so that Kurbanova became Kurbanogly or Kubangyzy.515

Turkmen are sensitive to and often use titles when addressing each other. Titles are used with first names. Younger people use yashuly when speaking to an older person, while jigi or ini is used when referring to a younger person. In a recent trend, young people are using the more formal jenap and jenaplar for mister; siziñ alyhezrentiniz and onyñ alyhezretiniz in official situations; and agam as a polite title for a client.516

Chapter 6 Assessment

1. The extended family is the central unit of Turkmen society.
   True
   Households combine generations of grandparents, parents, sons and their families, and unmarried daughters. Apartments in the cities are too small to house a typical extended family, but city relatives maintain strong ties with their rural kin.

2. Girls are regarded as temporary members of their father’s household.
   True
   Girls are regarded as temporary members of the household, because upon marriage they will leave to join their husband’s family.

3. Few marriages are arranged in modern Turkmenistan.
   False
   Many marriages are still arranged, especially in rural areas.

4. Following the death of a family member, Turkmen do not leave home for 40 days.
   False
   Turkmen do not leave the home for 7 days after a loved one has passed on. They believe that it takes that long for the spirit to depart the house. Family members do not shower or change clothes during the week.

5. Weddings have both a civil and a religious ceremony.
   True
   Weddings have both a civil ceremony and a religious one.
FINAL ASSESSMENT

1. The city of Turkmenbashi is the seat of the government.  
   True / False

2. The Amu Darya River is the primary water source for Turkmenistan.  
   True / False

   True / False

4. The Atrek River forms part of the border between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan.  
   True / False

5. Turkmenistan is the northernmost of the Central Asian Republics.  
   True / False

6. Since independence, Turkmen have returned to the mosques.  
   True / False

7. Eating, drinking, or smoking in public during the month of Ramadan is forbidden even for non-Muslim visitors.  
   True / False

8. Kurban Bayramy is Turkmenistan’s independence day.  
   True / False

9. Religious schools are strictly regulated in Turkmenistan.  
   True / False

10. Few Turkmen make the hajj to Mecca or Medina.  
    True / False

11. Elderly Turkmen often live in elder-care facilities.  
    True / False

12. Islamic dining etiquette includes washing the hands before a meal.  
    True / False

13. It is unacceptable to use the term khanym when addressing a woman.  
    True / False

14. Chorek, or bread, has a highly symbolic value in Turkmen culture.  
    True / False
15. A *sachak* is a low table around which guests dine in Turkmen homes.  
   **True / False**

16. Most medical clinics lack basic supplies.  
   **True / False**

17. When eating out at restaurants, it is customary for the person issuing the invitation to pay.  
   **True / False**

18. Police and military often ask to see a foreigner’s ID papers.  
   **True / False**

19. Trains are an inexpensive and safe means of transportation.  
   **True / False**

20. A foreign man leaving a discotheque with a woman can be arrested.  
   **True / False**

21. Approximately half the urban population is unemployed.  
   **True / False**

22. The *gengesh* is the person in charge in rural areas.  
   **True / False**

23. There is no international train service for Turkmenistan.  
   **True / False**

24. Compulsory education lasts for 9 years.  
   **True / False**

25. About 25% of all Turkmen depend on agriculture for their livelihoods.  
   **True / False**

26. Members of the Farmers’ Unions are allowed more discretion to determine what crops they will grow as well as the production levels.  
   **True / False**

27. Divorce is rare in Turkmenistan.  
   **True / False**

28. Traditionally, the oldest son inherits the house and all its furnishings upon the death of his parents.  
   **True / False**

29. The legal age for marriage for both males and females is 18.  
   **True / False**
30. A *qalin* is the amount of money the groom and his family must pay to a bride.

*True / False*
FURTHER READING


